Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

Interviewee: Delilah Poupore (DP)

Date: Thursday, December 5, 2024

Location: JR Martin Community Center, Biddeford Maine

Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

NMS: Today is Thursday, December 5th, 2024. My name is Nicole Morin-Scribner. I am the interviewer and a volunteer with the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center. Today I have the honor of interviewing Delilah Poupore. We are conducting this interview at the JR Martin Community Center in Biddeford, Maine.

Thank you, Delilah, for agreeing to do this and my first question is, "Did I pronounce your name correctly?"

DP: You pronounced my name so well. Very few people do that, so, thank you (laughter).

NMS: On that topic, I always find that there is usually a story behind people's names.

DP: Right

NMS: So, what is your story?

DP: The Pouparts, P O U P A R T, were in Quebec, Canada. When my grandpa, he was 14, left and came to Minnesota, it got anglicized to Poupore. So, it had been Poupart, P A R T a few generations back and when they came here it got anglicized.

NMS: Huh. That's part of the question that I ask as well. What is your family's story about coming and I guess I need to ask you, "Can you tell me, if you are willing, what year and where were you born?"

DP: Sure. Of course, 1967 in Duluth Minnesota.

NMS: Duluth Minnesota. Then, your grandfather came from Quebec and went to Minnesota?

DP: Yes. I think there may have been a stop through Michigan but then they were in Minnesota. My dad's side.

NMS: Did they share anything about, and you said he was 14, did they ever share the story about why Minnesota? And what did they do when they got there?

DP: What I've gleaned from some of the pictures that we have, which are amazing, was that they had been loggers up in Canada. Then they came through the north woods of the US and came here. There are pictures on the logging roads and pretty big French Canadians, the horse crews and logging.

NMS: Wow. I hope you'll share some of those pictures with us. We will definitely add them to our collection.

DP: Yeah.

NMS: Great. Do you know where in Canada they were?

DP: You know. It's been a while since I've seen it, so I'll have to look again but I'm pretty sure they were in Montreal. Before that, more rural. Something islands?

NMS: Ok. Then they stayed in Minnesota. So that is your father's side of the family. What is your father's name?

DP: Lincoln Antoine.

NMS: Well, Lincoln's not a very French-Canadian name. That's interesting that this is the name they gave him.

DP: Yeah. Maybe after Abraham Lincoln? You know, coming to the US.

NMS: So, your paternal grandfather, if he was 14 when he came to the US, he married when he was in the United States. Do you know anything about your paternal grandmother?

DP: Yes. Trepanier is her last name. She was already in the US when they met each other. I think I have seen that she also is from French Canada.

NMS: That definitely is a French name. Was there in that area of Minnesota, is there a French-Canadian community?

DP: Not huge. In fact, they were in a town when we'd go visit my great-uncle, Wilfred, he was in Poupore Minnesota. It was just a little tiny stop on a railroad track. I think they had done the logging there and then had a little stop.

NMS: Any information about if your maternal, no let me see now, your paternal grandmother if she was of French-Canadian descent any details about how they ended up there?

DP: No, I don't. My dad's parents both died when he was just 18-19 from different illnesses that they had. I never got to meet them. It doesn't sound like my dad had a whole lot of stories that he told us when he was alive.

NMS: So, probably the connection to Canada was not very strong.

DP: No. They did not go back. I know my dad was proud to be from Quebec, but I think his generation was supposed to assimilate. I think you weren't supposed to go back and dig into your history.

NMS: It wasn't the thing to do back then.

Tell me about your mom.

DP: On my mom's side, one of her grandparents came from Hungary when she was just 12 years old, Mary Glasser. She came from Hungary and landed in New Orleans but ended up at the other end of the Mississippi River up in Biwabik Minnesota. My mom's grandfather came from Ireland. So, Hungarian Irish family up in the Iron Range of Minnesota. Her heritage was Hungarian, Irish and then also German.

NMS: Tell me about when you were growing up with the French-Canadian, Hungarian, German, Irish background, how did any of that manifest in your experience growing up?

DP: I think I got a lot more of the cultural heritage from my mom's side because her parents and grandmother were still alive when I was growing up. My great grandma, the Hungarian one, lived until she was 99. I don't really remember her speaking English though I'm sure she did. She had 10 kids who got every need that she had taken care of. We would go, I remember her 90th and her 99th birthday parties and she was kind of like the matriarch of this giant brood. She had 10 kids and all of them had 6 kids (laughter).

We got a lot from her and then from the Irish side too. My Irish grandpa loved to sing the Americanized versions like "When Irish eyes are smiling." and "My wild Irish rose", songs like that.

NMS: If your, now let's see that would be your great-grandmother or your grandmother who was Hungarian?

DP: Great grandmother.

NMS: You said that she didn't speak English much, were you able to communicate with her?

DP: I think mostly we just came up and we kissed her. It was like a receiving line. You'd come up and kiss her on the cheek. There were probably 100 or more kids around at birthday parties and weddings. They were giant gatherings.

NMS: Any special traditions in your family when you were growing up?

DP: Food was a big way that tradition was passed, particularly bread. My mom learned a lot of the cultural traditions of bread making. Hungarian potica. My great-grandma and the ladies from the Range would come over to my mom's house. Do you know potica? You have a large table, like 6 feet by 9 feet. You spread the dough out across the whole thing. They have to stand at each corner, and each stretch it until it gets that wide. Then, there are rows of brown sugar and walnuts and probably raisins (I'm not sure). They roll it up altogether along the table and slice it into rolls that were baked. That was a good tradition (laughter).

NMS: That sounds like a really yummy tradition.

DP: German spaetzle comes to mind. It's a little dumpling. My mom did a lot of different things with dumplings. I don't know so much about Irish food. She was not making bread pudding, thank God (laughter). My mom did love to learn about somebody's culture and what their bread is then learn how to make it.

NMS: That's interesting. Any traditions around the holidays or special holidays?

DP: Good question. I'm just trying to think about the cultural piece of it. I have a feeling if it was, it was in the food more. We had a generic Christmas tree. We loved singing around the piano. I don't think so much. It's a good question.

NMS: Taking a little step back, I just remembered that you told us about your last name. Where does Delilah come from?

DP: (laughter) OK. I was the 6th of 6 children. My mom was a little tired (laughter). At first, in the hospital, she named me after the nun, Marybelle. Then, she named me after my dad's mom, Lavurne. So, I was Marybellle Luverne. It says it on my birth certificate, Marybelle Luverne. When I was 3 days old, my grandma talked to my mom and said, "That's not a very good name." (laughter)

NMS: That's not a very good name? (laughter)

DP: She did. Apparently, she wasn't afraid to give her opinion. There had been a relative in 1850, right around there, Delilah Arabella Bradley on my grandma's side. She said, "How about naming her Delilah Arabella instead?"

NMS: They had to go and change the birth certificate?

DP: It is crossed out.

NMS: It is crossed out?

DP: It is crossed out! They just hand wrote it in. When I got my first passport, I was pretty worried that they would say, “This is not a real birth certificate.”

NMS: I’ve got to tell you; this is a first.

DP: Is it? (laughter)

NMS: I have not talked to anybody yet who had their name crossed out on their birth certificate (laughter)

DP: Maybe my mom was still in the hospital or something and they are just, “That’s fine.” Yeah. My birth certificate is crossed out.

NMS: Wow. Ok. Well, do you approve of your final name?

DP: I do. It’s been fun being Delilah other than being in high school or growing up in school and all of the teachers singing, “My, my, my Delilah”. Too many times. [NOTE: song recorded by Tom Jones released in 1968]. But it's fun to have a different name and have people ask you about it. I didn’t usually tell people about my middle name because nobody would believe you had that many vowels in your name, Delilah Arabella.

NMS: Again, see. That’s why I like to ask the question and yours was particularly interesting.

Tell me about Minnesota. I have to tell you, I really don’t know a whole lot about Minnesota.

DP: We were in the northern part of Minnesota, in Duluth, which is on the west tip of Lake Superior which is the largest Great Lake. It’s a very, very cold place. In fact, usually when they say, “The coldest place in the nation”, it was Duluth or north of us. It’s really close to Manitoba, Winnipeg. That’s about 3 hours away. We had a lot of Canadian influence there as well. They would come down and play hockey and go up there to Winnipeg.

Cold and because it was such a cold and snowy place, most of the immigrants there in the northern part of Minnesota were Scandinavians. It’s a really strong Scandinavian culture. The north is Finns, Swedes, Norwegians, a lot of that.

There is lots of skiing, especially cross-country skiing. In our town, as many baseball parks that were there, there were that many cross-country ski trails.

Actually, because of northern Minnesota, a lot of Eastern Europeans had come to work in the Iron Range. There was a lot of mining up there. It really influenced the politics of Minnesota, much closer to socialism from the Eastern Europeans and the Scandinavians. I grew up in a really more like a safety net political environment. People believed in taking care of each other, that the government could do good things for people. We help our neighbors. That was a really

strong ethic. Get everybody educated. Make sure everybody can go to school. Make sure everybody has the food they need and a place to stay. A lot of the liberal policies that may be spread to different parts of the country over time started in Minnesota. That's kind of the culture.

NMS: Interesting. Do you know how your parents met?

DP: They grew up in Floodwood, Minnesota which was 600 people. He was a year ahead. He was a very tall basketball player. She was on the baton twirling; what do you call that?

NMS: Majorette?

DP: Majorette. She also played the drum too, in the marching band. It's a small town; you've got to do both (laughter). I think that's probably how they paired up.

NMS: They ended up living in that general area pretty much the whole time?

DP: My dad's parents died when he was 18. Right after high school, I think the second parent died during that year. He had been working in the Diamond Match factory, which we also have out here. There are so many similarities between Duluth and Biddeford. His high school basketball coach got a job down in DC. He said, "Let me get you a scholarship and you should come to DC." Before he and my mom were married or engaged, he had gone down to DC. He started college at George Washington. He played basketball there. Then, I'm not sure of the order but she moved down, they got married. They had their first kid, my oldest brother, there. Before he finished college, they moved back to Duluth. He finished college up there.

NMS: I wonder if he ever shared whether that was a big transition from a community of 600 people to Washington DC?

DP: Yeah. They did talk about how that coach was the most influential person during their time there. Even though my dad was in college, that coach had gotten him a job living in a house where he took care of a guy who was in a wheelchair. My dad would carry him up and down stairs to class and stuff. That's how he could afford to live there. Then when my mom came down, they lived in an apartment but were taken care of by this coach and his wife. It seems like they got to have a sweet, caring neighborhood to live in. But I think they wanted to get back home as their family grew.

NMS: Tell me about what your dad did for work.

DP: When he went to DC he got his degree in Physical Education. He came back and immediately started teaching Phy Ed as we called it back then. He was a coach of a lot of sports. Eventually, he was the Athletic Director too. Other than a little stint as a Driver's Education

Teacher too. He was a mellow enough person to teach driver's ed (laughter). But he finished up being a teacher of Physical Education.

NMS: Did your mother work outside the home?

DP: She worked a lot inside the home. When I was growing up there were always 3 or 4 other kids there. She was doing a daycare in the house. She sewed clothes for people. She could make bridesmaid dresses. Before I was born, apparently, she did housekeeping, cleaning at peoples' houses. When I was 10 or 11, she started a catering business. She had that all the way until she retired. She built that up.

NMS: I was going to say, lots of bread?

DP: Yes. Bread was really the specialty that she was known for.

NMS: Did you help her out?

DP: Yeah. You were not allowed to be sitting still at our house. She did a lot of the cooking in our kitchen. If there was a watermelon that needed to be scooped out or little, tiny carrots to be cut, we got to work. I would also be a waitress in the summer for catering jobs.

NMS: What was school like for you?

DP: Let's see. Starting at the beginning, it was a pretty normal elementary school. We had a lot of time to play out in the playground. That was very important to me. I liked doing plays. I really liked to be very interactive in school, right from the start. I know I probably did behave and sit with my hands crossed, but that wasn't my favorite part of school at all. I liked gym, being outside, doing plays, starting up something with my friends. Those are most of my memories of school. When we got to record a commercial that we made together or something like that.

Through junior high and high school, that's when I was a cross-country ski racer. I really loved it and focused a lot on being a skier. Even though I went to school and paid attention to certain things that I cared about, I really couldn't wait until after school and get out on the ski trail.

NMS: Were these small schools? Big schools?

DP: Duluth was 100,000 people then. Our neighborhood elementary, this big historic old building, we usually had 2 kindergartens of 30 kids or something like that. So, kind of big. The town had 4 junior highs. By the time of high school that was very large, 300 or 400 people in my class. Pretty big. That was 1 of 3 high schools in town.

NMS: There were 3 high schools in town so that was pretty good size.

DP: Yeah

NMS: What did you guys do for fun?

DP: All of my ski friends loved skiing (laughter) We would travel around to different meets, whether it was for school or on the weekends for training. This sounds very Scandinavian, but we would travel to Wisconsin, Michigan and around Minnesota to ski. I did love to be outside all of the time.

Minnesota is the land of 10,000 lakes they say. There are actually 13,000 lakes. We were all of the time in water, or waterfalls. We were walking on trails to find a river to swim in or climb through. I loved being outside all of the time.

NMS: Is that what you did for family vacations?

DP: Yup, pretty much. People would have cabins on lakes. We didn't have one but apparently my parents managed to pick friends by their good cabins (laughter). Again, a lot of swimming in lakes and playing with friends.

We did do one vacation where we drove down to Florida. That's almost all of the kids in the station wagon, all the way from Minnesota to Florida and to Disneyland, of course.

NMS: That must have been a big deal.

DP: Yeah. We loved that. Some of the times they said that my mom put a crib in the back of the station wagon, and I was in it. (laughter). The lack of safety back then you know? (laughter) I think they would keep me in the back, maybe with my sister, Anne. Then there were a few kids in the middle and probably one sitting in the front seat too because you could do that back then.

NMS: When they did the trip to Disney, were you old enough to remember it?

DP: Yeah. That one was a little bit later. I was like 10 then. But we did a few other trips. This is so funny, like driving to Chicago. I remember we toured a cigarette factory and beer factory (laughter). Why is that a fun family trip? I don't know. I guess learning about the industrial revolution or something. I don't know (laughter)

NMS: Wow. Then it was decision time, in terms of after high school. Tell me about what that thought process was like.

DP: That was really around being a cross-country skier. I wanted to go somewhere I could cross-country ski. Middlebury, Vermont was one of the best places for skiers and also the University of Colorado and Utah. I looked at some other schools, but I just really wanted to go

where I was going to be on a great ski team and get a good education. It came through for Middlebury, so I spent 4 years in Vermont for my college.

NMS: What was it like leaving home? It's not exactly like you can go visit mom and dad on the weekends.

DP: Right. It's kind of amazing to remember getting on the plane. I had probably 2 suitcases and some other stuff being mailed out. I got there early because the ski team got there early. I didn't even have a light for my room for the first several days. I had to get somebody to drive me to the Walgreens or whatever to get a lamp for my room. I think I was so excited after having been the youngest of 6 and being "Oh, your Anne's little sister ...and John's little sister." to just get to be. It was like going to camp. I get to be my own personality and my own direction. I made good friends at Middlebury. A lot of them were either skiers or singers. I did a lot of singing in college too.

But it was pretty weird leaving a Catholic background, Midwest kind of town and joining a college. Half of the kids there had gone to private schools. I didn't even know to wonder about that. There were all of these cultural things I probably didn't get while I was at college that it would have been great if there had been a handbook (laughter). If you feel like you don't understand... Like I didn't understand how some of my friends would go to the Bahamas for Thanksgiving, not Thanksgiving but Spring Break. I just couldn't figure out, "How do you have enough money to go to college AND have enough money to go to a place I can't even imagine ever having enough money to go to?" That sort of class dynamics.

I made it through. I made my dear friends. It was good to go to a school like that which had a lot of kids who had big goals for their lives. I think I found a nice balance of doing what is really important.

NMS: How did you stay connected with your family?

DP: I wouldn't go home for Thanksgiving because that was too far to go for that. I went home every Christmas. I went home for 3 of the summers. Then, my mom, I don't know if it was every year, but she would come out. I don't know if she and my dad both ever or if she would just come out for a little bit. She loved traveling. She loved to see Vermont.

NMS: Did you call? Write letters? There was no texting or email then.

DP: Right. Right. I did find a whole bunch of letters that my mom kept. She passed away a couple of years ago. Going through her belongings I found a bunch of letters that I wrote. I used to love writing letters, putting a stamp on the envelope and putting it in the mail. I would

talk to her about the day-to-day things, what I'd learned in a class, what my friends were doing and things like that. She wrote as well.

There was one phone in the hallway. You could go use the pay phone and make a collect call. That was a special occasion, to make a phone call. Isn't that funny? We text 200 times a day now. (laughter)

NMS: Yeah. Different time, but I like capturing it. In one interview that I did, someone was talking about using a phone booth. What is a phone booth?

DP: Right.

NMS: You were on a ski team. Any highlights from that experience?

DP: Yes. Then I ended up not being on the ski team after that. I guess the highlight is it was part of a group of people at a college who had a lot in common with you. The skiers, we really couldn't be out partying. We were the kind of kids sitting around, maybe eating ice cream, giggling and then everybody went to bed at 10 o'clock (laughter). Pretty innocent I guess you might say.

NMS: What are the highlights from being on the ski team?

DP: Oh yeah, yeah. I was just remembering that probably not everything that I was doing in college was all innocent (laughter). Having a good group of people and then being challenged to do a very hard sport. Cross-country skiing is about the most physically challenging sport for all muscle groups and oxygen. I did get to go to the Nationals that were in Colorado. I remember trying to breathe when you are up thousands of feet higher up in elevation. Needing to race at that was really challenging. I guess, just the challenge of it. I loved being able to have my body work that hard and see if I can achieve my goal. I loved doing that through high school.

Then I ended up getting this injury in my sophomore year. It was kind of a fluke. A cyst was in my femur. I didn't know this but as I was training, I kept having pain. When they did an x-ray, they realized I'd had a fracture in the cyst. They said, "You've got to be in a body cast for like 3 weeks, then crutches." I ended up not needing surgery but I kind of liked getting a winter where I wasn't an athlete. I decided not to go back to it and focus more on music and other parts of my college that I was interested in. I still love cross-country skiing, but that had been my whole identity that got me to college and then to kind of get a chance to drop it.

NMS: I'm glad you brought up music because I have seen in some of my research that this has been a "little" part of your life too?

DP: Yes, for sure. Like I said, when I was young, we sang around the piano in the living room. I had a guitar from a really young age. I loved writing songs. I was in choir. Then at college, we had an acapella singing group. I was on that all 4 years and directed it. I had friends who played guitar too. That was another part of my friend's base.

After college, I went to New York City for a year and studied jazz music at the New School for Social Research. I had taken some jazz music classes in college and really loved learning that music. I thought I'd go live in the city for a year. I did NOT like living in the city, but I kept playing music.

When I eventually moved out to California, I formed a band with another woman. We were a duo for 10 years, both playing guitar and writing songs, touring and recording albums and stuff.

NMS: Wow. I'm sure there were a lot of memorable experiences from that but is there one in particular that really stands out?

DP: Yes. We loved meeting people at the Folks Alliance Conference that we'd go to. We would play our music but then we'd get to hear other people. Then, back when we were back home in Santa Barbara, we'd invite them to come and do a show. We would get to open for our favorite musicians a lot. Just remembering those concerts, there's a great venue there in town that could seat maybe 120 people. We would get to perform to a really good audience and then we'd get to hear our favorite people. We'd often get to sing along with them. We ended up making relationships with some of the sort of retired famous people of the 60's who moved to Santa Barbara, to that area: Michael McDonald from the Doobie Brothers; Jackson Browne; Loggins and Messina. We'd get to sing with them. We ended up touring with Jimmy Messina for quite a few years. It was usually a pretty small group, sometimes as a trio even. That's a whole different kind of audience. I remember one that was 5,000 people and all of these people who knew all of his songs. That's a whole different kind of musical experience. That's a different kind of show.

NMS: Wow. That must have been a great experience.

DP: That was, getting to tour with a professional with a following like that. I remember us staying at a hotel in Dallas. I remember the hotel more than the music. (laughter) When we came in, they checked us in. The next morning when we got up, the hotel said, "Good morning, Miss Blasius. Good morning, Miss Poupore." Like they studied the names of the people staying there. Once you had a certain coffee drink, they always brought you that coffee drink again (laughter). I thought, "Oh, I could get used to being with a rock star" (laughter). That was my short run of being with Jim Messina.

NMS: Wow. I'm going to dial back a little bit and go back to your college years. What did you study?

DP: I was a Philosophy major. I really liked logic. My first semester I took a Logic class. I had always liked math growing up. I wasn't inspired by what you solved through math, but I was inspired by what you could solve through philosophy and thinking logically. I loved exercising that muscle. A lot of philosophers are maybe hard to read. They are complex. They are full of a lot of depth. I loved the project of trying to figure out what they were trying to say? How do you compare them to another philosopher? Really developing what is the good life and getting to think about that. Those kinds of questions.

NMS: Talking about questions, one of the questions that comes to me is what was your parents' reaction to you getting a degree in Philosophy?

DP: (laughter) Philosophy... Yes. You know, my mom was a rebel. My mom was a rebellious person. She didn't have a college degree, and I think she would have liked to but wasn't treated like college material. Back then I think to be a woman who was encouraged to go to college was pretty rare. Oh yeah, and I think her mom had told her she would only pay for her to go to a Catholic all female college. My mom wouldn't agree to that (laughter). I think my mom would tell her friends when they'd say, "What is she going to do with that?" My mom would say, "Anything she wants to." She had confidence that I would do something interesting with it. That I would be able to pay my student loans back. I think she probably liked philosophical questions too. She just hadn't called them philosophy. You know, practicing Catholic, it was important for her to think about how people are treated. How things are set up in the world. That's kind of philosophy.

NMS: College comes to an end. You said you went to New York City to study jazz. Had you thought you'd pursue a career in music at that point?

DP: Yeah. I wondered how I could take music to the next level. I wasn't really kind of understanding where I could have taken pop music even though I was writing songs and playing guitar. I was more involved in shows that had jazz music. I tried it for a year but when I was in New York, that's when I just couldn't stand seeing the effects of racism like I did. Having lived in Minnesota and then Vermont, here I was in New York walking over black peoples' bodies. They were on the street, staying warm and I felt like the problem was so much, I couldn't make music at that point. I said, "I have to do something that is more directly about making the world better." I wish somebody had said to me, "You know you can do music too. You don't have to drop that."

At 21ish, I went back to Vermont where I had gone to college and worked there for a year. I looked into how you go into working at a college. I thought I would develop leaders at college. I got a master's degree at the University of Vermont in Higher Ed Administration.

NMS: Where did that take you after you got your Masters?

DP: I got that master's at the University of Vermont and worked at St. Michael's College there. I knew I wanted to work at colleges. My first job was at the University of New Hampshire. Then I ended up having a partner who wanted to live in California, and I applied for a job in Los Angeles. I got a job in LA for 3 years working at a small college that apparently Obama went to, Occidental College. Boy, did I learn so much more about oppression, racism and how groups can work together to address social problems working there.

NMS: What was a big "Aha" that you had with that respect?

DP: Oh my gosh, we got to go to this one trainer, that was 3 days long. It was really about listening to one another and being listened to. Until you've had a chance to really think about your life story, like you are doing right now, it's hard to listen to somebody else's life story. Once you do, you can never forget their lives and the impact. You can never settle for things being how they were before you knew. It was really a lot about how you get connected to other people, hear about their life story as well and then say, "Ok."

I remember hearing from this one student whose family had illegally migrated to California. Here he was a college student. He shared how his parents had to work in the fields to make money, bent over picking strawberries all day long and the kids had to make do. Your mind is blown. There's an image you hear about illegal immigrants. Here is this guy who is about the most lovely person in the room. I can't believe he went from making his way through the fields with his mom as a youngster to getting into college. He's going to make the world a better place and we are worried about calling him an illegal. There were a lot of those kinds of experiences that weren't the same experience as me. Once I heard it, now I have a bigger picture of the world.

NMS: At that point, what did you envision that you could do with that knowledge?

DP: Mostly what I ended up doing on college campuses is just making sure that the environment that the students were in, the residence halls, were welcoming to all the students of all different backgrounds. And, if you needed something, if you were from a religion that needed to be able to have a place for honoring your religion, that we'd figure out a space for it. We didn't really have to worry about or weren't really thinking about gendered bathrooms at that time but if you were on a college campus now, that's the kind of thing you would think through. Making sure that people of similar backgrounds are able to connect like I didn't have when I was in

college. Not knowing what is going on that these students are going to the Bahamas. How does this happen? There wasn't a place for you to get together with people of more similar backgrounds to validate your experience and help you understand what was happening. I guess I did a lot more of that on college campuses through the residential life work for years.

NMS: You lived in California for how long?

DP: 3 years in LA and 9 years in Santa Barbara for a total of 12 years out there.

NMS: Did you find a big difference between LA, New York and Minnesota and Vermont?

DP: (laughter) Yes. LA was all about being in cars all of the time. That was a terrible thing about Los Angeles. Any party you get to, they say, "Hi. How are you? Good. How did you get here?" Then you spend the first 10 minutes of the party talking about what route you took and how bad the traffic was. It was terrible, terrible. Any 10-minute trip could take you 45 minutes. Of course, it was sunny every day and it almost never rained. Boy, it was fun to be outside all of the time. You could go running February 2nd. Thanksgiving Day, you are on the beach. That was lovely about California. Certainly, the environment of being welcoming to people from lots of different backgrounds was awesome. Minnesota is a pretty darn homogenous, Scandinavian culture. A lot of Vermont was that way. New York certainly wasn't but California was a great way to get to be part of a more of a world community, I think.

NMS: When did you make a decision to move from there?

DP: About a couple of years before we left, I met my husband. I was 36 when I met him.

NMS: Where did you meet?

DP: It was totally a fluke thing. I was driving up the coast to a meeting up in San Francisco. I stopped over at this place called Esalen, which is like a retreat center on a cliff in Big Sur. I stopped there for a night. He was working there. We ended up sitting next to each other at dinner. On my drive back south again, we had talked about that I would come and visit him again. Then, we just started a driving, long distance relationship for maybe less than a year. From there we were like, "I think we ought to get married." We wanted to start a family, and it felt to us like...He is from here. He grew up in Sanford. Both of us felt like California was this wonderful place to be but we felt like potted plants that really couldn't find soil to root in. We thought especially for starting a family it would be great to be around either my parents in Minnesota or his family here in Maine. I think being near the ocean weighted the scales, closer to Maine.

NMS: Had you been to Maine before?

DP: A little bit, yeah. As a Vermonter, we'd come over a few times. Then, once I started dating him, I got out here and visited his family.

NMS: When you did make the decision to come to Maine what was that process like, trying to decide where in Maine you were going and what you were going to do?

DP: First of all, we did kind of a crazy fun thing. We took 2 months to drive across the country. We didn't have to be here by any time. We didn't have jobs in place (laughter), but we had his family. We took a long route through amazing Death Valley, Yosemite, up through the Oregon coast, Vancouver and parts of Canada. Amazing things as you can imagine all along the way.

Then, we stayed with his parents in Kennebunkport from January through June while we were visiting different places. We thought it would be great to be able to live somewhere near the ocean because that was why we moved out here. Of course, we understood how expensive it can be in Maine to be anywhere near the ocean. We were even considering finding places where they have co-housing kind of communities where there are multiple houses but a community space where people are helping each other either with farming or child rearing and things like that. But nothing quite hit the spot that way.

We both really liked Biddeford and Saco, the two communities. I think because Duluth being such an industrial city, I probably didn't mention that at the beginning, I just related to the industrial, brick city of Biddeford. We were looking for houses to move into in either town. Everything in Biddeford was a duplex or multi-family which meant a higher investment. You had to pay more. We also weren't really sure we were going to be great landlords, because we had never done it before. So, we did find a place in Saco but totally from the start considered ourselves Biddeford-Saco residents.

NMS: First of all, let me ask you what is your husband's name?

DP: Jonathan Drummy.

NMS: What is his profession or his background?

DP: His background is he went to an engineering school, WPI [NOTE: Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts] But, I think he always liked more creative bents on things. He's been working in various parts of the tech industry and data industry. Now, he is a data visualization expert. Whenever you see, like in the New York Times, where there is some kind of a picture of a graph, dot map or things like that, there is a science to all of that. That's data science and that's what he does. He likes to help tell stories about data through pictures.

NMS: Does he do that independently?

DP: He worked for a while at Southern Maine Healthcare, the hospital here, to help them do that. There would be problems that you could see because of data visualization that you couldn't figure out without it. This is not exactly the story, but this would be an example of how data analysis works. He found out that there's a higher rate of falls that patients have, this is just for example, on Friday afternoons. Once they saw that, they realized there was a trend. They needed to make sure when people were leaving for the weekend, they had as many staff as needed to make sure this was safe. That's a little bit of a hypothetical example. I don't think that is exactly what he did. But it's the kind of thing that you might say, "We've got to address falls." But until you see there is actually this trend over the last year and a half of this has been happening on Friday afternoons. He helped with that kind of solutioning. I remember him figuring out something with data that ended up saving the hospital $100,000. If you hadn't been able to see it visually, you wouldn't have caught the problem. He likes that kind of thing. Now he works for a consulting company. They work for large companies doing data solutions.

NMS: One of the things that I wonder about is, especially where he grew up in the area and Sanford, had he shared anything with you beforehand about his perception of Biddeford at one point?

DP: Yeah. We knew that Biddeford was in competition with Sanford. They were both big schools when he was growing up here. Big football playing schools and things like that. He also knew that they were both, he would talk about both of them being mill towns. Also, both were really struggling as the mill era wound down. He was here as a teenager in the late 80s. Biddeford and Sanford had like a stigma about them. That it wasn't a valuable place, or it was poor and therefore bad. I think his general sense, probably from being a Sanford guy, is to not knock something like that. He did not knock Biddeford or Sanford. He values both places. I'm glad to say that is partly what brought him back here.

Me too, coming from Duluth, that had its heyday then struggled with various industrial changes too. I just got very interested in this place, as we are sitting here in a room full of history, as a place of pride, and the people who built this who obviously came from lots of places and gave up a lot to be here. [NOTE: Interview took place in the room that houses the La Kermesse and Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center archives/historical collection] It certainly wasn't their fault that the mill era wound down and ended. I think both of us came here interested in valuing the people who've been here and wanting to be part of it.

NMS: When you came here and you were looking for work, how did that develop?

DP: We had our child in September of the year that we moved here. For the first 3 years, I only did a little bit of consulting. I don't mean to say a little bit, but I worked with universities and non-profits helping them with strategic planning, mission development and things like that so

that I could primarily be parenting. We didn't put Sam into any daycare because I was able to be home or Jonathan's schedule was flexible enough. We also had grandparents here, so it was amazing to have 3 years because most people are lucky if they get a few months. I did a lot of parenting and then the job at Heart of Biddeford opened up. That was the first thing that I applied for in Maine. They had just lost the director of it. They needed to re-assess so it was a part-time job. It was interim, for 3 months. I thought this is kind of a perfect way for a mom with a 3-year-old to figure out what's my path back in. I had no idea when I got pregnant that I would just want to hold my child all day long (laughter). It's kind of what we were talking about earlier, just how much my priorities shifted. I just wanted my baby to have a good life and see what interested him on his path. Then, this job came up and it was part-time. I knew a lot about community development from all of that work on college campuses. I didn't know so much about economic development, but they hired me assuming I could learn I guess (laughter). Now, I've been doing it for 14 years.

NMS: Yes. If you can dial back to those early years, what was your perception of where things stood and what was your approach that you were looking at?

DP: Happily, when I joined Heart of Biddeford, they were already in this process of community Heart and Soul, it was called. This foundation had given Heart of Biddeford funding to do a whole lot of community engagement. What I loved and why I became interested in the job is at the La Kermesse Festival, they had a tent. It was a story-telling tent. People would sit in circles and tell what they loved about this place and never wanted to lose about this place. It was so fun hearing the immigrant stories, how people were so proud of their work in the mills and their grandmother's immigration here and things like that.

Also, a bunch of the mill workers were starting to form together to hold a tour or two. At the same time, the high school students were working with them. There were some tours in the mills before anything was filling these million square feet right around 2009. The students dressed up in costumes or clothing from different countries that were represented in the mills. They did some skits about youth and children working in the mills. I loved the history. I loved the worker history.

I loved how Biddeford was claiming and not wanting to lose its pride in its mill history and the workers and immigration stories here. That's the place I was coming into, knowing there were 27 vacancies on Main Street and only a few places had been able to survive at all. Then there were creative people. People who had been working at it for a long time. People who were new to town who wanted to be part of seeing if they could spark interest back in this downtown.

NMS: What do you think, especially near the beginning, was there one thing in particular that you think started, you mentioned the word spark, to turn things around?

DP: I think it's a couple of things. One, I really think the community Heart and Soul process was really important. I had learned transformative mediation before coming into this kind of work. I did a lot of mediation before this. They say in mediation, "Before somebody can understand the other point of view, they have to be empathized with first." What I found was happening in Biddeford was there was a lot of interest in empathizing with the people who had built this place, the people who had lost this place, had lost their jobs, who had brought so much culture and family and tradition here but didn't know if it was still valued. All of that energy and attention listening to people, valuing people.

Before I got to Heart of Biddeford, there were phone numbers placed in all of these vacancies around the downtown, called Heart Spots. They were big, giant hearts that said, "Call this number if you have a story that you remember coming here." I remember hearing the stories of first dates at the Woolworths. Or where this dance hall was or bowling with their families. All of that I think was really important. Before you try to build something, you build it with the people who are there. You don't build it around them or in spite of them. You include them. I think that was really key.

I think the Heart and Soul process also enabled people to create a vision for what the future could be. People did a lot of exercises again, at La Kermesse Festival or other activities where people could paint their picture of the future.

I remember when and this is the 3rd part, there were discussions from the City of finally closing MERC, the Maine Energy Recovery Company, Mike Reilly, from Reilly's Bakery, was a 3rd generation owner. He came up to the microphone. There was a forum at City Theater, and he said, "I'm having trouble selling donuts because it smells like trash in this downtown. Everybody likes Mike. Everybody likes donuts and Reillys. They didn't like hearing that their economic decision of the 80s was making it impossible in 2011 to run a donut business, a bakery. I think that he had felt involved and included. He said, "It's time we have a bigger vision for the downtown again that is family friendly, that honors the history and that lets us have a comeback." I think his voice and many others helped the City Council decide to buy out and close MERC. It was an extraordinarily difficult thing to do when it was your highest or second highest taxpayer in the city. I understand there were about 80 jobs there, many of them with good pay and benefits. So, you are going to say to the community, "OK, our downtown is empty. It's going nowhere. Malls are where it's at. Let's shut down our biggest taxpayer and 80 employees and hope that this cockamamie scheme to have a new vision for the future happens." Very challenging to do. But they invested, I think it took like $5 million dollars, to

make that deal happen. As soon as MERC closed, then development in the mills, the restaurant scene, all of it came. You weren't working within a smelly downtown. Little explosions were happening here and there because people put a propane tank in their trash. That was not an environment if you ever expected the downtown to come back either economically or as a community hub.

NMS: MERC goes away, do you remember what was the first wave of "OK, they are gone now." It doesn't happen automatically that somebody rushes in.

DP: Right. I think what I love about that period is it was a lot of (I'm so happy about this), it was a lot of local people. People who already cared about Biddeford or had been part of Biddeford, taking incremental steps. We at Heart of Biddeford held a Main Street Challenge business competition. We got help from property owners who would give away 6 months of free rent. A lawyer would donate some legal help along with an architect, a website designer and all this. We put together these $20,000 incentive packages for 3 downtown businesses to win. Elements- Books, Coffee, Beer, was one of those winners. Now they have been here for 13 years. Nobody had proven that you could do a retail shop in downtown Biddeford. That you could make a coffee shop last. This was done with help from a whole bunch, probably 10 different entities, who got together to make those first 3 businesses that came in, possible.

At the same time, Doug Sanford was able to buy the mill buildings at $1 per square foot. Yup. Even then, people called him crazy. "You are never going to be able to develop these million square feet. What a waste of money." But he would take 200 square feet and build that out for somebody. He'd take that money to build 400 square feet for somebody else. He'd take both of those and be able to get a loan to build out the next section.

It was very incremental. It wasn't the trash incinerator closed and all of a sudden, the cost of living shot up for everybody. It was really internally created development. The spaces on Main Street went up incrementally as more customers came to the downtown. I loved that. For every good thing that happened, one loss would happen. We'd gain a business; we'd lose a business. For a good 5 years there was no sense that we were catching hold. It was very gritty. We were working together. It was a "Let's see what we can do" that I think happened during that period.

NMS: When I think about it, again, when you started with Heart of Biddeford, it was interim. It was part-time. Where did the money come from to provide some financial support to even keep Heart of Biddeford going?

DP: Right. It is a nationally designated Main Street Program. Main Street America helps communities start these up. They each run differently but they do have some things in

common. One of them is your funding from a three-legged stool: one third from your municipality; one from residents (through fundraising events or donations; one from the business community. When I joined the Heart of Biddeford, the budget was $60,000. That paid for my salary and all of our programs (laughter). Not a huge budget for an organization. I think we actually had that $60,000 budget for quite a few years.

Then a fourth leg started getting added. Grants. We were part of other grants that were won by the Main Downtown Center and that would give us some funding too. We started applying for operating grants or for projects. We've been up to more like $170,000 to $200,000 for the last 8 years or so.

NMS: I want to take a second to, people hear the words, "We got a grant."

DP: (laughter)

NMS: I don't think that unless you are a grant writer or a grant administrator, you have a clue exactly what it means to have a grant. Is it possible to do a Reader's Digest version of what goes into writing a grant and administering a grant? Can you give people a sense of what that means?

DP: Sure. The shortest version is that there are sources of funds out there, either private funders or like the state government or federal government. They either have a fairly easy or very complicated process where they say, "Here's what we are about and here's the kind of things we fund. Here are the questions you have to answer." You can't just tell them what you do. You have to tell them EXACTLY how what you do matches EXACTLY what they want to fund. That is a very tricky thing to do. It can be very laborious because 3 different grantors may ask the question in an entirely different way. You can't even cut and paste between them. Then as a new organization, you have to win some $1000 or $2500 grants and show that you know how to apply for a grant. You know how to spend it exactly on what you said you would spend it on. Then when you write the report, you show that not only did you spend it on what you said you would, but you achieved the outcomes that you did and how did you measure those achievements, those outcomes. Once you've done that, then now, OK...now you can try for a $10,000 grant or something like that. You build it up over time.

I will say that the exciting thing is as you build that up over time, this last year, my contact at the University of New England, somebody I had worked with over the years, contacted me and said, "Delilah, we want to apply for an EPA grant around climate. We know you do a lot about sustaining community. We need a CBO, a Community Based Organization, to partner with us. Do you want to meet?" I said, "Sure, I'll meet." It turns out it is a $20 million dollar climate grant. We spent from March until September of this year putting that grant together. It is by far

the most complex grant I've ever done. We will be finding out in the next week if we get that. This is really going from $500 grants, $1000-$2000 grants to the possibility of a $20 million dollar grant.

NMS: Wow.

DP: Yeah, yeah.

NMS: We will stay tuned to see how that turns out.

DP: I'm only checking my email, like...constantly. (laughter)

NMS: Heart of Biddeford has sponsored or participated in lots of events through the years. Is there one of your favorites? Or one that you are particularly proud of?

DP: Yeah. We just had our 10th anniversary of the River Jam Festival. I love it because it started behind the mills in a little space on Laconia Street. We brought the La Kermesse stage back there. It was about 95 degrees on the pavement. Not the best location for it but we wanted to bring a music festival to town. Over the 10 years it has grown. Sometimes it's been in partnership with Saco. We had it for a few years in the big parking lot behind Run of the Mill. For about the last 6 years it's been in Mechanics Park. We've been able to draw bigger and bigger musicians over the course of the day. We always have fun stuff for kids and families to do. The Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center has participated at least 4 years now, hosting Cultural Cuisine which is a huge highlight. I love that the whole festival is free. You can actually come and meet people from all kinds of countries and cultures and then taste their foods, just like my mother would have you do (laughter). They get to do that during the festival. Then, it ends the night with fireworks.

There are so many things that are complex and stressful and hard that people deal with every day. Here they can come for a day, bring their kids. It's free. Or don't bring your kids. Sit in a lawn chair and listen to music for a few hours. I really see it happen that those kinds of events help people heal a little bit. Slow down, enjoy, feel some joy, know their neighbors. Be less frightened of differences among their neighbors. It seems like it's a fun music festival, but it really does so much more than that.

NMS: That's obviously a big success. Can you share a challenge that you've experienced when maybe things didn't turn out as you had expected?

DP: I'll knock on wood as I say this, the weather has worked every year for 10 years (laughter). Let's see. I will say that this is a challenge that we are dealing with right now that we really weren't as aware of even 3-4 years ago is the stress that people are experiencing in their lives is showing up around the country at public events. You hear about somebody driving into a

parade or festival. Or being armed like they were in Lewiston a year ago. When we had our 5K race last year, the Lewiston shooting was the night before. So, we cancelled our race and took the $2500 of proceeds and sent it to the Lewiston Fund. That is part of our planning now in a way that it certainly wasn't 4-5 years ago. We've always had to have safety in mind, security people related to alcohol and drinking age, things like that. But now we have to have various meetings on what's the safety... what are we doing to put up barricades so that nobody could drive into a crowd. Who do we have watching on the perimeter for behavior that would be worrisome. Having close relationships with people from the police department who know everybody is who causes high stress in the downtown, things like that. I would say that is the current stress. We'd love people at the festival to have no idea we are doing that work and they don't feel it. But it's one of the things that we need to be doing in the background.

NMS: A lot of the work that you do with Heart of Biddeford is obviously people gathering, getting together and connecting. What did you do during the pandemic? What impact did COVID have on your work? [NOTE: The **COVID-19 pandemic** caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus began with an outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, spread worldwide and declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) on January 30, 2020. Common mitigation measures during the public health emergency included travel restrictions, lockdowns, business restrictions and closures, workplace hazard controls, mask mandates, quarantines, testing systems, and contact tracing of the infected. The pandemic caused severe social and economic disruption around the world. The WHO ended the PHEIC for COVID-19 on 5 May 2023.]

DP: It had a lot of impact but I'm so glad that I had the job that I did during the pandemic because the need was so high for people to have ways to stay connected. The first thing I did in late March was send out an email. I said, "We are all crew. None of us are passengers. We are all crew." I was putting out communication in the community that this is a stressful thing. I think I said, "It's only going to last a couple of weeks (laughter). But we've got to pull together." We did a big banner over Main Street with a mask on it, with Rosie the Riveter wearing a mask. I think it said, "Moving at the speed of safety." Communicating that we are going to be able to keep moving but we need to have safety as the guiding value that we have. One morning at the beginning of April, I had an idea. I put a Facebook post up with a little fundraiser. It was called Share the Love. I said, "I want to raise $2000 so that we can buy some food from a downtown restaurant and bring it to front line workers at the hospital." By the end of the day, we had $14,000. People were just, "That's brilliant." We were able through that fundraiser to buy meals every day for 5 weeks. I would put on my double mask and pick up the food. I would bring it to a different department at the hospital or the police station, fire station or grocery store. The businesses made some money. Some of them, unless they were open a certain

amount, they couldn't even qualify for some of those loans and grants that were out there. This enabled them to be able to make at least some money. They were able to keep their employees so they could then apply for those grant funds. The businesses were able to stay open. The front-line workers sure appreciated Reilly's. I remember one day I brought like 100 loaves of Reilly's bread to the hospital for different departments to hand out. I brought some pizza from somewhere to the Hannaford grocery store. They felt great. The businesses were staying open. The front-line workers were feeling appreciated. At that point, I think people who were affected in our homes, everybody was feeling that they got to help, to make a little difference, too.

NMS: Wow

DP: So, we got to do that kind of thing. We definitely used social media a lot more. We had all kinds of things like each day had a different theme. You could interact through social media. Our Halloween event became a drive through. Our downtown Christmas event was a drive through. You could drive past Santa and real reindeer. We had a gift bag for every car, their household, with little treats in it. The mayor was there waving at every car. People were invited to drop off food goods or clothing. I remember we collected 60 boxes of food and giveaways. We were able to help. We were trying to make this a community of care. We were going to get through this together. We are still celebrating but we are doing it in a different way.

NMS: That was quite an experience. It certainly required thinking; how do you deliver this in a different way? It sounds like you definitely came up with some options.

When you look at where downtown Biddeford is and the work that Heart of Biddeford is doing, what is something that exists today that when you first took that interim job you never dreamt that it would be like.

DP: It's hard to pick. There are a lot of things (laughter). One of them is that our downtown map has 56 food related businesses on it, and I think 25 retail type businesses on it. Really, it was mostly vacancies except for Reilly's, Youlands, Pizza by Alex, Happy Dragon. There really wasn't much in between those businesses in the downtown. The fact that there's so much activity. When we lose a business, a lot of times it's not because the business couldn't make it. It's just that they wanted to take care of their family or aging parent or moved to a place that wasn't so cold or something like that. We are not just having closures because the downtown is not making it. And when it closes, something else comes into the space, appreciative of it having been built out more than it was, certainly 15-17 years ago. The fact of how much is going on, for sure.

Also, I don't think anybody could have imagined the Lincoln Hotel (laughter). Even people who have been involved in everything about the downtown development or people who come here

from out of the state say, “This is the nicest hotel I’ve ever stayed in.” People who travel for a living can’t believe this place. It is pretty remarkable. A lot of people love to be somewhere where the past is being honored. I think that this happens there. You certainly know you are in a former mill building and the mill's history.

NMS: As a result of this work, Heart of Biddeford has received some awards and some recognition.

DP: That’s right. The Great American Main Street Award.

NMS: So, tell us about the Great American Main Street Award.

DP: Every year at the national conference that we go to, they announce 3 winners of that. For my first 5 years, I’m like, “Wow. We are never going to get that. That’s neat.” The next year I thought, “Maybe someday we could.” Then I told myself, “When the Lincoln Mill is renovated, then we should apply for that.” It was in 2021 when the Lincoln Hotel and the Lofts were launched, I thought, “Ok. Let’s apply for this.” Usually, you don’t win the first time you apply. You usually have to go back a few times. They were just so impressed with the amount of community involvement in the change and the amount of diversity of people involved in it. Then some incredible wins over time of not only of closing MERC but making sure that a lot of industry did come to the mills and a lot of other kinds of businesses. Plus, building community while we do it.

Up until then, I was more pleased with what I was talking to you about, like 2012-2013, when it was locally sponsored growth. Since then, which happens during growth of a community, more people from the outside start to see the economic opportunity.

There are some challenges that have just been coming up through the pandemic and after that, just like the cost of living being so expensive. For example, we have a whole new challenge that we have to create a goal for 2030. What is our vision for that? We have achieved a lot of that vision from the Heart and Soul process in 2011 but now that we are at a different phase, we need to not lose the community created goal.

NMS: Because of the accomplishments, you’ve been asked to share. I wonder if people are aware that, you just mentioned people on the outside, people on the outside want to hear Biddeford’s story. You’ve had a chance to share that with others.

DP: Yeah. I’ve gotten invited to Connecticut. Rhode Island was thinking about adding a statewide Main Street Program. They had me come to speak about Biddeford’s story. I’ve gone to Pennsylvania as they have been increasing their Main Streets. I talk at the national

conference just about every year on some topic of what we've been up to. People really like the Biddeford story.

NMS: Who would have thought that we'd be the role model?

DP: (laughter) We are. Biddeford is!

NMS: You've had some personal recognition as well in terms of awards for the role that you have played?

DP: Yeah. I don't like to remember those (laughter)

NMS: OK

DP: But I do appreciate it. Yes. I lose my voice when I talk about that.

NMS: I'm sure that your family recognizes the contribution that you've made here and that it's appreciated.

Is there something about Heart of Biddeford that you think maybe people aren't aware of, something that you are doing?

DP: One thing I would want people to make sure that they did know about is how much of this work is volunteer driven. It's kind of the whole point of a Main Street Program. We've got a lot of sub committees of the board that are just interested residents who have found us one way or the other. They were introduced to us by somebody else or signed up on our little form about volunteerism where they say, "I'm really good at this." Then, I say, "Would you like to be on this committee?" You don't have to be on a committee. You can just help out for 2 hours each year at the Merry and Bright Night. You can be behind a table helping kids decorate cookies.

We have this one committee called the Strategic Communications Committee that didn't even exist a few years ago. One of the downtown business owners used to work in social media marketing for a Fortune 500 company, when she lived in New York. Now she has a Coffee Shop. She was giving us advice here and there on our social media and campaigns. Over time, she had more suggestions. Our board president met with her and said, "Would you like to be in charge of that?" It's a volunteer committee and they helped us do a 20th year anniversary brand update. They documented all of our standard operating procedures. That's just an example of a group of people who had a set of skills willing to meet as a group and help the organization rise to the next level.

NMS: I've seen that you involve all kinds of ages as well?

DP: Yeah. The schools have been amazing. Maybe that's the best thing to know about Heart of Biddeford. We love to say, l "Yes." When the Center of Technology Business Program teacher contacts us and says, "The students want to be more involved in the community. Do you have ideas?" Then we have a meeting right away and figure out what that is. We did some tours of downtown businesses. Then, the students made contact with those businesses. They did interviews and then made PowerPoint presentations based on what they were learning about marketing in their classes. They said, "This is where we think you could improve your website, Facebook or Instagram." "We think you should be on Tik-Tok." They made suggestions and I know of 2 cases where the business owners took the feedback and made changes. One business even changed the name of their business because of feedback that had come through the students.

NMS: That really sounds like a win-win, the definition of a win-win.

DP: Right. The students love having that and they can say on their resumes that part of their business class was doing marketing research and presentation for a small business.

NMS: Not to mention connecting with their community and really having an appreciation for it.

DP: Right

NMS: Now appreciating communities, there has been some history in terms of Biddeford-Saco. Tell me about your perspective on the whole Biddeford-Saco thing.

DP: Right. Everybody who talks about the two cities, it really has to be based on knowing that primarily the mill workers lived in mill housing around the downtown in Biddeford and the managers tended to live in Saco. That's a class divide. Lots of cities in Maine have that. If you just say, "Oh, it's one city, one Main Street", you are ignoring the history and the impact of what that does. It's really normal in class divides for there to be one that thinks they are above the other and one that feels below the other. In the Biddeford-Saco case there was a battle of the bridge each year where they beat each other up, I believe, over this (laughter). I think it's important to acknowledge the history and while that's sad, I think that it's almost to the point of people being able to laugh about that history now. You know like, "Can you believe we used to do this?" Now, you might have gone to Thornton Academy but now you are a teacher at Biddeford High School and your kid has a job on Saco Main Street. The blending of the two towns is much more part of life now.

Saco Main Street and Heart of Biddeford do a lot of partnering together, clearly the Chamber too. We do Restaurant Week together, Wellness Month together. We have a two-city podcast together, Saco Main Street and Heart of Biddeford called Two Cities, One Main Street. The days

of needing to compete against each other are pretty much over, but you never want to forget them. The opportunities for building on each other, that's where we are right now, I think.

NMS: That's a really interesting transition as well. So, we've talked a lot about your work. What do you do outside of work now in terms of...are you involved in any community organizations?

DP: I still do play my guitar quite a bit. Unlike when I had a band and I was playing all of the time, it's situational now. Sam had gone to the School Around Us in Arundel. They just had a little showcase this last week, a fundraiser, and they asked me if I'd come play three songs. Got it. There's a church in Biddeford Pool that asked me to play a couple of songs next Sunday. So, very intermittent. But it's also a great way to keep in touch with other musicians and communities.

I'm part of a group called Showing Up for Racial Justice, SURJ. That organization started in 2020 after George Floyd was murdered and the social unrest that happened after that. Three of us started learning about SURJ and gathered some people. We've done different educational programs. We've gotten people together like at one point during the pandemic we were researching how much of the city budget goes to policing vs social services. Looking at that issue of how much communities help people in need vs just police them when their need leads to troubles.

We were part of two different history tours. One was a black history walking tour in April of 2024 and this fall we joined with another organization. It was an indigenous and black history recovery tour. Learning about the connection between this area and indigenous history and the connection to the Atlantic slave trade and everything. Really, really interesting.

NMS: You said at the beginning that you and Jonathan decided to come back to this area to raise your family. Now, Sam, I understand, is a senior in high school. So, was it a good decision? As a parent, what was it like to raise Sam here?

DP: Oh, yeah. I think it was a great decision. Like I said, we couldn't afford a house in Biddeford, so we ended up living in Saco for most of the first years. Being able to walk to the downtown and those little events like the Pumpkin Harvest Festival really do make a difference to make you feel like you have neighbors and people you can meet. We spent so much time at the library when Sam was a little kid. That was all of Sam's first friends. They were from the library and the other moms became my friends too. The little coffee shop that was downtown in Saco at that time, having a small town to gather around us was a really good way to make friends and make a community.

I found all the time that I was walking Sam in the stroller, we'd always do the loop through downtown Saco into downtown Biddeford. I loved meeting people over in Biddeford. There

were the music friends I met first then all of the people through Heart of Biddeford. The phone book on my phone is so full of names of everybody that I know from work. But there are also people who I'll go Christmas caroling with in a couple of weeks and have fun with too.

We did a pretty unusual school method because Sam went to the School Around Us, which was in Arundel. It was a parent-led school. It was a little bit closer to homeschooling but doing it all together. That was a pretty wonderful version of school. There were no grades and no tests. By the time high school came around, Sam really wanted some structure. He found that Thornton Academy had the most. He wanted to take honors classes, AP classes and really get structured. I think in all of that unstructured and untested time, his mind was learning and open and was a sponge for high school. I think that worked out pretty well.

NMS: And prepared him for his next big step?

DP: Maybe he'll get his early decision choice. Otherwise, there's going to be a lot of work over Christmas vacation (laughter). Writing applications.

NMS: As I start to wrap this up, one of the questions that I like to ask is, "What is it that you'd want to make sure that people take away from hearing your interview."

DP: Hmm. I would want people to hear that Delilah came here wanting to know this place for what it is and what it has been. From that base and through connections help Biddeford move itself forward in the most inclusive way possible. Not only the people who built this place but the people who are new here, people who are asylum seekers, people who might be on the outside as well as the people who fit in this room with maybe 150 years of history too.

NMS: I've asked you a lot of questions. Is there anything you had thought you wanted to make sure to share with people but maybe didn't come up because it didn't come up in the questions that I've asked?

DP: The first flash thought that came to me was about the natural environment here. How awesome it is that the river runs through the middle of this city and that it has this fascinating role of having powered the mills. Now, it's more and more cleaned up and people can be on it. My family owns paddleboards, and we go paddling up to the waterfall, turn around and go down. Clifford Park is only 6 blocks maybe from where we live in the mills. We live in the North End Mill. The fact that nature is so accessible is really a huge part of why I love this place.

NMS: We've kind of had it so it's important not to take it for granted. It needs our love and care to keep it that way.

DP: Agreed. Yes.

NMS: Ok. That's all I have for you today. I want to thank you, Delilah. This has been so fascinating. I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule to share your story with us.

DP: Thank you so much, Nicole. It was great.