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Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

Interviewee: Samuel Smithwick (SS)

Date: Thursday, April 18, 2024

Location: Richard Martin Community Center, Biddeford Maine

Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

NMS: Just to check the audio levels. I think you are on vacation this week. Do you have any special plans for what to do with your time?

SS: No. I used it to catch up on some student needs. My son, Shay, needed to get some driving hours in. I had him chauffeur me around a bit. We had lunch out a few times. Every week I take my mother-in-law out to dinner. We are going to Chez Rosa, a little bistro in Kennebunkport, this evening.

NMS: Oh nice. I'll have to check that out as I always take my mom out to eat and we ended up going to Federal Jack's last night. I'm always looking for different places to go. I'll have to check that out as an option.

OK. Today is Thursday, April 18th, 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 Samuel Smithwick. Is it ok if I call you Sam?

SS: Absolutely.

NMS: Alright. Very good. We are conducting this interview at the Richard Martin Community Center in Biddeford. I usually like to start these interviews right at the beginning by asking you what year and where were you born?

SS: I was born in 1968 in Huntsville, Alabama.

NMS: In Huntsville, Alabama. You did provide me with some information before our interview. I thought that I would start by asking you to share some information about your family. Maybe you can start with your father's side of the family.

SS: My father's side of the family, the Smithwick side, migrated from England in the early 1600s to the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina and sort of migrated west. Tennessee at that time was still frontier and was part of North Carolina's territory. Basically, the Smithwick family just continued to sort of head west from the Albemarle Sound across North Carolina, Tennessee.

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I've driven that drive and even by car, we don't think about how wide Tennessee and North Carolina are as states. My great grandfather came from Tennessee where he had been working for the railroad, into north Mississippi. He cut trees for cross ties and cleared land for the railroad. The rest of my family settled from there.

Also on my dad's side, my great grandparents on my grandmother's side were McCalls. We actually were doing some genealogy work not too long ago with an aunt and we have a grandfather connected with George Washington. That's on the Ball side.

On my mother's side. We are Irish Clarks that came over in the 1800s.

NMS: Wow. You also mention that you have some Native American heritage. Can you tell me some more about that?

SS: On the McCall side, I have a great-great-grandmother that was Cherokee. Her grandfather, we believe, was a scout for Washington. Then on the Clark side, Mississippi is an interesting state because most of the Native American tribes, the Chickasaw and the Choctaw, were farmers. It was easier, from what I know about life in frontier Mississippi days, for any settlers or travelers and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Indians to marry and create homesteads. There is still a huge population there with those three, the Cherokee, Chickasaw and Choctaw. Ancestry has been pretty important in our family.

NMS: With that kind of interesting diverse background, what was growing up like?

SS: We grew up in northwestern Mississippi which is called Hill Country. It's geographically different from the rest of the Delta and has a little bit of a different culture. I grew up working the farm. Typically, we had 30 plus head of cattle. We also ran a sawmill for years and years. We lived a pretty hard-working rural life. It was interesting, my dad and a generation of uncles at that time were all in the Korean War. They came back and took advantage of the GI Bill, and all became engineers. That's how I ended up being born in Huntsville. My dad had worked for Brown Engineering which became part of Teledyne Brown. The family had moved to Huntsville, I guess, for the majority of the 1960s and then by the 70s we had moved back to Mississippi. It was sort of a second home for us, so we were continually back and forth across the cotton belt that runs from north Mississippi through Alabama and into Georgia.

NMS: Did your father happen to share with you any information about his experience in the Korean War?

SS: He didn't. He was pretty silent about it for years. That's an interesting question. We traveled a lot. We have relatives from both the McCall side and the Smithwick side that had migrated to Louisiana and Texas. It was common for us to make one trip during the summer.

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From time-to-time Dad would tell me about being stationed for basic training in San Diego. If he had a few days off, he would hitchhike back to Mississippi, which today we don't think of that being possible and/or safe. The way he described it, it was pretty commonplace back then. He'd jump in a truck with a driver that was crossing the country and could use some company. It was a cheap way to travel back and forth on short notice.

When we did travel if there was a drawbridge, we would go out of the way to stop and wait for it. If we were traveling, anytime we were around a port, a river port, lake port up in the Midwest or on the coast, we always made sure that we got some time in and around ships. I can remember once in the port of Mobile in Alabama, my Dad taking me on a German cargo ship. It seemed like we were really in the belly of the whale. I didn't know where I was, what time of day it was. Like I said, any time we could be in a naval or nautical surrounding, my Dad wanted to be. But he really didn't talk much about it.

It was interesting we had taken a trip to Norfolk Virginia. My Dad was stationed or served on the Princeton Aircraft Carrier in Korea. There was a reunion for that carrier. We took a long trip, driving a few days. We stopped and saw friends and family along the way. By the time we got to our destination, we didn't last long. I think it was really emotional for him.

I think he kept so many things bottled up inside even if I'd asked him. I remember once I wanted a pea coat. I said, "Dad. Where is your pea coat from the Navy? I'd appreciate that." He said, "Son, I put everything in a duffle bag and asked your grandmother to take care of it for me. I just wanted to put it behind me and get on with life."

Once, I stopped in to visit on the farm. This would have been about 20 years ago. I think it was the American Legion Magazine sitting on my space on the couch. When I came in and sat down, I asked Dad what it was. He said, "Just pick it up and read it son." My Dad had been the mechanic for the only Fighting Ace in the Korean War, Lt. Guy Bordelon who was still flying a prop plane, a Corsair. There was an article about him. Of course, it was the first time I ever heard much about it. I'm a history major and thought about writing and being a journalist myself so I'm just busy soaking all of this in. I looked over and my Dad was very emotional and in tears. He had just never taken the time to reflect. When he was forced that day to think back, it was an emotional experience for him.

NMS: Wow. It must have been emotional for you too.

SS: Yeah.

NMS: Powerful stuff. In addition to taking trips as a family, can you think of any other memories or traditions that were part of your childhood?

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SS: Growing up, the farming family, just like here in Maine, you are pretty conservative about the way you live life. For example, you never throw a gallon jug away because it's got some use to it. My Dad was an amazing cook and joked sometimes that he wished he had been a short order cook. Breakfast was his favorite meal of the day. Sometimes I felt like I was the only kid, or we were the only kids who showed up at school with a full belly. It was common for Dad to make sausage, bacon, gravy, biscuits, eggs. Just a full table in the morning. But then it was time to go to work. I can remember once, I think I was in the third grade, it was a Saturday morning, and I was excited about the weekend. Dad walked in and turned the television off. I said, "Dad, I was just about to watch a wrestling program." He said, "No. It's time to go to work, son." That was definitely the tradition in our family. Study hard through the week.

My Dad, being an engineer, was quite astute at mathematics and wanted to make sure that all of his children got a good education. My great grandmother was a teacher that had graduated from Blue Mountain Women's College. I actually was initially working for my great grandfather. His wife had passed away and he needed a teacher for his three daughters. She took that position, and they were later married. So, education played a big role in my family.

My grandmother, we called her Mother Sally, was not a historian but loved history. She loved to travel. Any time my family traveled, aside from the drawbridges and the boats, we had to stop at the local library. We'd get out the microfiche and do some family history. We'd look at the phone books to see if there were any other relatives that we may not have known about that lived in the town. As we were traveling through, we did that. That was a big part of our life up until the internet, DNA swabs and Ancestry.com.

Once I got frustrated with the dead end that we kept running into. The Smithwick ancestor that everyone (most everyone in the country and there are a whole lot of Smithwicks) connected to came from England around 1624. His name is Hugh Smithwick. We couldn't get any further back than that. Of course, down south when you try to start doing genealogy work you run into a lot of town halls and libraries that before or after the Civil War had burned down. You'd run into a lot of strange situations trying to do that work. This Hugh Smithwick, I always felt like with the research that I had learned at university that I should have been able to crack the code. One day I got frustrated on April break like it is here, I mis-spelled my last name just to see if maybe Google correct would straighten things out. I called my Dad and told him what I was doing. Within a few days I had gone from 1624 back to the late 1300s. Once in Elizabethton North Carolina I was at the cemetery where Hugh was buried and I didn't know that his father, Charles, was in the same cemetery. He spelled his name with an "e" instead of an "i". It's sort of amazing how you can spend so much time and technology takes over. It answers all of those

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questions much faster than you can do it driving town to town, visiting libraries all over the place.

NMS: It must have been really fascinating to finally find it.

SS: Yes. To share that with my Dad, his two sisters and other relatives who had been in the same situation for years and years. To sort of finally be able to crack the code and be able to look on paper and see who you were and where you came from.

NMS: Before we move on, I want to make sure I get it on record. Can you tell me your father's name?

SS: My father is Walter Robert Smithwick.

NMS: Tell me about the community where you grew up

SS: The town that I grew up in is called Potts Camp. Potts, I think, was a colonel in the Confederate army. He had stopped there to set up a camp. In my elementary classes, if I remember, there were 2 classrooms in each grade and maybe 18 or 20 kids. So, we are talking about maybe 500 or so that live in Potts Camp and a few hundred that live around. It was a really small community. We had one or two banks, two general stores, a post office and full of churches. We had a red light or stoplight up until the highway, 78, was expanded into the interstate. We then lost our red light (laughter) which didn't help the economy any. Really small town. It was impactful in my life, being in a small community like that where you know everybody. There was a railroad running south to north came through town. It would stop to load up with grain. It was hilly country so there was a lot of timber products but not as much agriculture as the rest of what the delta is known for.

The train would stop a few times a day and load up either going north or coming south. I remember seeing young men jump on the train to take it up north to find work. As you know, the 70s was a rough economy. The price of fuel had gone up. There was a lot of unemployment.

There was a lot of music, a lot of gospel music, a lot of blues music, a lot of country music in our area and in our lives. That certainly had an impact on my interest in music. I started playing at a young age and continue to be involved in music now. As soon as I got an opportunity, traveling was in my blood. I remember meeting my Dad in Memphis one night for dinner before I was headed out west. Somebody asked me recently how my Dad handled me traveling like that. I remember before I left him that night he said, "Son, I don't know why you have to do this, but I'll support you. It's obvious it's something that you are going to have to finish." He was always

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very supportive. I'm sure it wasn't easy having a kid traveling around the United States in a van, before cellphones, not hearing from me for weeks and weeks.

NMS: I definitely want to pursue a little bit more as we go along for sure as that is obviously a fascinating part of your life experience.

Any special memories of what it was like going to school when you were in that small community?

SS: It was interesting in that geographically, our Hill Country in Mississippi has a unique, separate culture from the rest of the area. I don't want to whitewash it by any means because there were certainly plenty of things that I saw and plenty of things I heard of that are disturbing.

I remember the first day I went to school back in Potts Camp after my Dad had moved back after having been in Huntsville maybe 2 years. I had gone to school there and he picked me up one day and said we were moving back to the farm. I was really excited about that. But that first day at school was eye opening. I didn't think that being from Huntsville Alabama, granted at the time because of the Space and Rocket Center there's an army base that was built out at the same time RedStone Arsenal where there's been a lot of cutting-edge technology developed. But it was still a small town. I'm sure there were some relations between Huntsville and Maine. Because it was a cotton town, a lot of textile I'm sure from there would have made its way into New England mills. I didn't think of it necessarily as being a big city or myself being a city boy. But when I went back to Potts Camp, I certainly was perceived that way. It was a rainy day and we had gone out for recess. Again, I was in the 2nd grade. For some reason I remember being dressed in all white. I was on a merry go round and just hanging on for dear life. Two or three kids off the merry go round were spinning it around. All of a sudden, I was flying through the air. I wiped the mud out of my face. I looked up and this boy named Casey Jones was standing up really tall with a big bright smile on his face, his hands on his hips. I guess that was my initiation. Quickly I made friends and had a really amazing group of friends.

I think probably the common denominator wasn't race, it was probably economics. We were all poor kids. We all had fairly smart parents. You probably wouldn't have been able to pick us out of a crowd based on what we looked like, but our test scores were pretty good. That opened a lot of doors. I've seen that in rural Mississippi. I've seen it in Maine. The power that a good education can have on a family that may not have had the most going for it for years and years, sometimes for generations. A good education can definitely change things for a family.

NMS: So, was it a pretty mixed community?

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SS: I'd say mixed in our little town but a lot of towns that you would visit in that area even today. I find it interesting for me to find myself in Maine because I was used to being in communities where white Americans were in the extreme minority sometimes. That becomes normal for you. Then when you're not there in those demographic situations, you don't feel normal. Being in a state that oftentimes is as predominantly white as Maine, I guess I would say sometimes it feels like the opposite of claustrophobic. I wonder where all of the diversity is. Even going back to Mississippi now, because of the economy there, it's a really fast growing Hispanic and Asian population. If you travel the Gulf Coast especially, the number of fishermen and fishing families from Southeast Asia has had a really positive impact on communities there. It was a very diverse area of growing up and diverse economically. There was a lot of poverty, and some families that trace their roots back to plantation owning families and still have a lot of land in their families. Growing up in a poor farming family, we never did without but sometimes it meant taking a .22 out and finding a squirrel for breakfast, but it kept us fed.

NMS: Wow. Before I move on to what high school was like, it just dawned on me that I didn't provide you with a chance to tell me about your mom.

SS: My mom's family, the Clarks, were from not too far away from us. Maybe 45 minutes or an hour away, a community called Ingomar. The country singer Ray Price is from there. I actually took my Dad years ago to see Ray Price. It was not at a concert hall but at an agricultural center. They were Irish and Native American. They were really tall. I've had some friends from Ireland and it's interesting the genetics of our Ireland. I don't know scientifically why this occurs but my grandmother, Ella Mae Robinson, was really short in stature. My grandfather, Jessie _____ Clark was about 6 feet 7. His nickname was "High Pockets". Endearingly, he was often referred to as "Pocket Clark". Pocket and Ella Mae moved to the area and my grandfather was a sawmill operator. I'm sure that's how my Dad got involved in that. He was also a bootlegger. A lot of the state and region was dry at the time, and we had a general store. It was just a little cinder block building with a basement for storing whiskey and beer. Pocket was a domineering figure in the family. Of course, being of that stature. My grandfather on my father's side had died really young. He had a genetic heart condition, I think. In some ways, my mother's father became sort of a surrogate father for my Dad. They had a really close relationship on the farm they would have bought together. We still have that in the family.

NMS: Is that the connection of how mother and father met?

SS: My mother, Sylvia Jean Clark, was a really beautiful woman. There were five girls in the family. They were all really tall and you can see in the cheekbones the Native American in them. I think my Dad had certainly known the family before he left for the Korean War. When he came

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back, I think he already had his mind made up that he was going to court my mother and marry into the family. Again, he had a lot of respect for my grandfather Pocket. I know that this had a lot to do with their relationship.

They were a really interesting family. There were a lot of musical members on that side of the family. Pocket had one brother that worked for the railroad. He had several sisters, as far as I remember, all of them were nurses in Memphis. They were all tall, dark haired, high cheek boned women that were a big part of our family growing up.

NMS: Now if I switch back into your education, you were at that small elementary school and then where did you go from there?

SS: I started 9th grade at Potts Camp High School. Again, a really rural 9th grade. The girls had to take Home Ec. The boys had to take Shop where you learned how to do a little of everything: wiring; plumbing; welding any skills you would need to have some experience with working on a farm or in a farming community. Mechanics and the like. One afternoon Tim, my Ag instructor, held me back and said, “You know. You are a pretty smart kid. Farmers around here are just going to inherit bank loans from their parents. I know your mom still lives in Huntsville. You might want to consider the option of moving to Huntsville and finish high school.” A few things about that were exciting. I was a small kid and had my fair share of bullying. I think in a bigger city you can get away from the bullies or at least find new ones. You don’t have to keep dealing with the same ones. Then, moving from a small town to a bigger city. Huntsville at the time I think was about 150-175,000, a fair size town. I told my Dad one day I wanted to move to Huntsville and see what potential improvements in my education I might find there. I guess it's no surprise now to say that I moved there, this would have been the early 80s, and was able to take computer classes. At the time you couldn’t do that everywhere. I remember a little perplexed the first day in class we go into, I think there were 10 or 12 of us, we go into the computer class. We all sat down, really excited about the computers on the desk. We turn them on and there is a green light blinking. Somebody asked the instructor what we were going to do that semester and he said, “You are going to take that green light and make it go from one side of the screen to the other and back.” That was the semester plan. We did that. That wasn’t the kind of technology I thought I was going to be exposed to. But the technology changed pretty quickly over the next few years.

I remember about the time I got to college, I remember the first time I needed the help of the internet with a research paper. I remember typing on an IBM electronic typewriter. I remember not too long after being able to use I think it was maybe Texas Instruments had a word processor. I think my IBM typewriter weighed about 50 pounds and the processor fit in a

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satchel. I had a Commodore 64 computer at home. When I used up all of the data, I went to the store to see if I could buy more. They said, "Yeah. You can actually get an outboard drive." It was a cassette player. It was interesting seeing the changes in technology at that time.

I did finish up school in Huntsville. I went to college on a scholarship at Calhoun Community College my first two years. I had some really amazing professors there. They had a Communications program there. So, I got to explore a little bit of studio recording there. I then transferred to the University of Auburn, which was a pretty big shift. Auburn was actually a bigger university than the more popular University of Alabama. I studied History and Literature there for four years and had a really amazing experience. I'm still friends with one or two of my professors from History and the Religion program.

After graduating, I think that was 1992, with degrees in History and Literature, some friends wanted to take some time off. I was already accepted into the Master's Program in History. I sort of fell under pressure I guess or maybe I didn't know exactly what I was going to do once I got into the Master's Program. I agreed to take a year off with the rest of my friends. By the end of that year, I took the job teaching high school. At the first semester that year, at an inner-city school in Huntsville. The second semester, I was on the road full time traveling with a band. It was a pretty quick shift. Once the bills started racking up, we were making decent money but it's hard to keep an outfit on the road with hotels, motels, feeding a band.

NMS: OK. So, it is time to talk about music. How did you get into music? Tell me about the name of the band.

SS: I had a cousin in Memphis about 1976, I think it was, which was a big spirit of '76 celebration that year. For Christmas he gave me a stack of his records. His choice in music had changed or maybe music wasn't so important to him. I went back home with a stack of rock'n roll records. I remember at the time I could stay up late and watch Don Kirschner's Rock Concerts on the weekends. I had this stack of records. I'd put the records on, and my two older brothers had started playing guitar. We had a few guitars around. They'd show me a few chords. They taught me a little bit. I taught myself a little bit. A friend of my family taught me a Merle Haggard song, Today I Started Loving You Again. I remember I was trying to play all of these rock songs with these open chords that I knew and a friend of mine, by the time I got into high school, came over and showed me some bar chords which extended my vocabulary a lot. I started playing lead a little bit. Again, having grown up in a southern Methodist family, there was a lot of singing going on. I was really close with a lot of my African American friends. I had gone to church with them a few times. I definitely had an ear for gospel music. Being that close to Memphis, there was the influence of Booker T and the MGs, Otis Redding. It was common to

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hear people in little towns playing blues on the street corner. In Memphis, Beale Street in Memphis is sort of like Bourbon Street in New Orleans. There's always a lot of music up and down the street. So, I had a lot of music in my head already. My Dad was a huge Hank Williams fan. He never admitted to it, but he had a pretty good voice. He knew the songs so well. I had a head start when it came to teaching myself how to play and play by ear. I think my aptitude for learning music was prominent. By the time I got to college, I was a solid enough player and anything I didn't know, I could at least learn the foundations quick enough.

A friend asked me to sing at a show in Auburn one weekend. I was really shy still at that point. When I asked what he wanted me to sing, the guys in the band wanted me to sing a Led Zeppelin song. I thought, "I'm an OK guitar player and I played base a little bit back then, but I hadn't really pictured myself as a singer." Again, I was really, really shy. One of my middle school teachers, when she found out that I was a teacher, couldn't believe it. She said I was so shy in the 5th grade that I wouldn't even speak up in class. I said, "Which song do they want to sing by Led Zeppelin?" He said, "Do you know The Ocean?" I thought, "You don't sing a Robert Plante song if you aren't a singer, and you certainly don't sing a song like that if you are not a singer." He said, (The guitar player's name was Maz) "Maz knows what he's talking about, and he thinks you can pull it off." I really did. For me, it seemed to be a big crowd on a big stage. I think it was a fraternity party at Auburn. There were several hundred people there. Another friend of ours from our high school band that had never really gotten off the ground was there, and he said, "I didn't know you could sing." I said, "I really didn't know I could sing either. But I didn't want to disappoint my friends."

After that, another band asked me if I would join and sing. Quickly, I found that I really wasn't interested in just covering other material. If I was going to be in a band. By then, this was the late 80's and it was really popular to start a band. Bands like the Black Crowes and REM were playing in clubs in the area or college towns. You could see a lot of bands that were on TV come through in college towns and play. It was really part of the time that if you were going to play it was acceptable and encouraged to write your own music. I made friends that were interested in exploring music and exploring writing music.

We quickly became one of the more popular Indie bands in town. Then there were a few other places like Montgomery Alabama and Tuskaloosa. Huntsville Alabama actually had a really cool scene. There was a tiny little cafe there called the TipTop. I knew about it growing up because it was a popular place to go get a burger. The son of the family that owned it, once he was old enough and out of college, decided to start having bands play there on weekends. Some pretty popular bands that you would have...at that point there wasn't any radio that played that music unless you were in a college town. But you could hear on weekends, there was an MTV

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program called 120 Minutes. That's what you watched to find out who the up-and-coming college bands were.

Most of those bands would find their way through the southeast like bands had always done. Even here in Maine, it surprised me how many growing up or getting older in my later teens and 20s, we'd hear about bands that were playing as far north as Portland. I can remember the first time I played in New York thinking about the Mideast Cafe in Boston that I'd heard of. I can't remember the name of a club or two in Portland from that era, but I remember how far I drove to get to New York City and looking at the map how much further I'd drive 6 or 7 more hours to get to Boston and then another hour or two to get to Portland. I was thinking how distant that landscape was.

That got me started in the music there in the late 80s, early 90s. By the time I got into 1993, it was easy at that time to start a band. We were playing 4-5-6 nights a week, making a few hundred dollars a night. I think I booked a job opening up for the Ramones in San Francisco. I remember getting off the phone and thinking, "Now I've got to get to San Francisco." That was sort of how touring bands operate. You get a gig somewhere and then try to fill in as many spots as you can on the way.

NMS: You had no manager. You had to do it yourself.

SS: No. I was sort of the lead singer/songwriter/tour guide/manager. I sort of did everything. Not that I was the best at it because it was all new territory. It was just exciting to be able to do something like that, to travel. Just the traveling alone, having a way to pay to tour the United States. Even if you weren't playing music, sometimes the detours were the greatest experiences. I remember I wasn't prepared for crossing the Mississippi River and finding out how few and far between gas stations were. A friend of mine, a drummer who didn't play in the band but wanted to be part of the outfit and was really good at merchandise, came along with us. We called him Robbie Knieval. [Note: Robbie Knieval was the son of Evel Knieval, both of whom were motorcyclist stunt performers. One of Robbie's most famous stunts was to jump the Grand Canyon in 1999]. When we were mapping out the leg of the tour, he said, "Can we go to the Grand Canyon?" I said, "Well, we've got time. We might as well." I was driving that night in an old Ford van. At about 4 o'clock in the morning, the engine started to chug. I realized we were out of gas. I just put it in neutral and coasted into what I think was the only gas station outside the Grand Canyon National Park. When the guys woke up they said, "What are we going to do?" I said, "We are going to go back to sleep and wait for the gas station to open." My Dad had taught me how to cut it to the last few ounces of gasoline and how to maneuver in neutral (laughter). To do that wasn't the first experience or the last. That got me into traveling.

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I started a band called Smithwick Machine. That was sort of a joke of a name. I didn't plan on starting a band at that point. I wanted to get together with some friends back in Auburn. There was a pretty cool rock outfit called the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. I thought I'll just play off of that. We just wanted to get together, some guys that I'd played with in college. I wanted to get back together and have a reunion, not re-create what we had done. We threw a couple of songs together that we could just jam on. When I realized it had sparked something musically and stylistically, I just shortened the named to Smithwick Machine. I continued traveling under that moniker for years and years full time and part time.

Up until at least until 2002, during that time I'd taken work with a small concert promoter, pretty substantial but regional. We were bought out by a company I think called Big Fish Audio, something like that. We were later bought out by SFX and then bought out by Clear Channel which would later become Live Nation when Clear Channel radio or media and concerts had to split up. That was a great experience, to be in a band and not that I took advantage of my position, but I did get a few calls because of those connections to play with, open up or tour with some of my favorite acts. Obviously, working in the music business at that level, at the high point we were doing 6 or 7 festivals in the Southeast a year. We were doing everything from new independent bands that were just coming up. The first time I promoted a Train show, they pulled up in a van and were the opening act. I didn't even pay them. Then, I remember the next time paying them \$500. The next time paying them a few thousand. By that time, they had a hit record and a friend of mine, Johnny Colt from the Black Crowes actually ended up playing bass for them.

I got to see Merle Haggard on a few occasions. I opened up for him once. I got to sit on the stage with him while he was playing because the flashes from the cameras were bothering him. That was I thought, "I've got the best job in the world." All this was a way, again, I wasn't necessarily looking for connections in music, I was really just doing something that had some experience with and pay for my music, at that time my music habit, being a traveling musician.

I did have some interesting experiences. I was asked one night by Willie Nelson's manager to put off my accounting business and stand next to Willie Nelson. That's not the kind of opportunity anybody would want to turn down. His manager, he was sort of a daunting figure by the nickname of "Poodie" [Note: his real name Randall Locke], which you wouldn't think was anyone to be that worried about. But he was a pretty controlling individual and not the kind of person you said "No". I said, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "Last night we were in Charlestown Virginia. (if I'm not mistaken) An overzealous fan was shaking Willie's hand so hard

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that he almost broke it.” I said, “So, what do you want me to do?” He said, “You are going to stand with him and make sure nobody breaks his hand. Nobody touches Willie Nelson.” I said, “I’ve got a security guy that can do that for us.” He said, “No. I want somebody I can trust so you are going to do that.” I said, “Really. So, you are going to put off all of this business and how long am I going to stay next to Willie Nelson?” He said, “Willie will stand there until the last person is satisfied. You might be standing out by the bus until the sun comes up.” I don’t think we stood out there that long, but I got to stand for a few hours with Willie Nelson. That certainly is a memory that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

I had some amazing opportunities meeting people in towns that I was playing in or just stopped in. As a literature fan, knowing how a lot of storytelling and narrative begins that way, just by getting out and exploring America. I had my fair share of experiences of close calls and special moments over the years.

NMS: One of the things that you alluded to a little bit earlier is what kind of a reaction you got from your family. It’s like, “Hey, my son just graduated from college and now what’s he going to do?”

SS: My Dad just knew that from the time that we spent together how important music was to me. He had done a great deal of traveling himself. I think he was at a point in his life. I was the baby in the family. My mom and dad both had already gone through the routine with 3 children where you try to control everything and realize you can’t. I certainly had special treatment, being the baby in the family. It was easier for me growing up than my siblings had it. They too treated me like baby brother. The parents and the siblings took it easier on me than I know they bullied each other a lot more than they did me. I got tickled a lot (laughter). That was the extent of most of it. I also had 3 watchful babysitters.

My mom was a big music fan as well. I think they knew that it was very natural for me and a natural progression for me. If I needed help, they were happy to help me out. I think they also knew that growing up in our family we are all positive individuals and pretty levelheaded. Although, I can make a list of things I wish I wouldn’t have done that luckily turned out ok. It could have turned out wrong, in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the right place at the right time as well.

They knew that everybody in our family were hard workers. That’s something that I tried to instill in my children, my students. If you have a positive attitude and ability, I do see it as a gift. If you are humble enough to take the next job available and hard working enough to earn your way. For me, I was able if I did get in a fix, I was able to work my way out of it. I think my

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parents knew that I was the kind of individual that could take care of business and could take care of myself, take care of others. That they could have confidence that I was going to be OK.

NMS: Speaking about being in a fix, when I do these interviews, I like to shed some light on some of the things we take for granted today that didn't exist back then which added some additional challenges. You alluded to, it's not like you had a cell phone so your parents could say, "Where are you?"

SS: Yeah. I remember after my first big trip or two, I needed to have more reliable financial means on the road. I applied for a BP credit card because we were using a lot of gasoline. We had enough cash on hand typically to make it from town to town and not have to worry too much about it. I remember that was a big step, getting a credit card and being able to keep the tank full.

I did run up a phone bill with South Central Bell. I called my brother once. My middle brother was in the Air Force and had just returned back from the Iraq War. He was stationed at Eglin Air Force Base in Panama City Florida. I got to see him a few times as our tour would take us down to Mobile Alabama and across the panhandle then over to Tallahassee and back up through Georgia. I remember calling my brother, Clark, and telling him I had a few hundred dollars that I owed South Central Bell. I asked if he would write a check for them, and I would pay him back when I got home.

Having to do business like that, outside of a restaurant or diner or a gas station. I created a relationship with this woman named Louisa, who was the booking agent at the famous club CBGB's in New York. It was almost like an online relationship I guess (laughter) that I had to build up to the point where she and I knew each other on a first name basis before she would actually take a chance on giving us a gig. I did that. I built that relationship 25 cents at a time.

NMS: 25 cents is...what is the reference to the 25 cents?

SS: A pay phone. I don't know if you got 5 minutes on the phone for 25 cents. You'd need a bag of coins and keep feeding it to keep the conversation going. I remember how excited I was when once I called Louisa and I said, "I'm hoping to be in New York on this future date." She said, "I've got a place for you." But it took a long time to break through.

Thinking about how difficult it was to pull that off. If you were at a friend's house or a fan oftentimes would invite us back to stay at their house after a show, another band that you were friends with if you were driving through the town they lived in. I had a few friends in Chapel Hill North Carolina, if they were on tour, they would leave their keys for us if they knew we were coming through town. I'm sure other friends as well. You would take full advantage of having a

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telephone, that you didn't have to pay 25 cents for 5 minutes. Sometimes I would get up, get a cup of coffee. The rest of the guys maybe were still sleeping. I'd take advantage of that phone. I'd pull the calendar out and try to fill up as many dates as we could.

Then, I remember, I wanted to be on the road more in 2000 and turned in my notice with the entertainment company I was working for. I took a job that year with the Census Bureau and was really happy I did it. That ran for 4-5 months which gave me a cushion where I was working a lot during that time. Part of that job in 2000 was to get a cellphone. So, I had an IRS cellphone and that was the first cellphone I had. I realized immediately, "Ok. This is going to change things." Being able to do business wherever you were or at least if you were near an Interstate in the United States, you could do business whenever you wanted to. A friend of mine in college did have a mobile phone but I think it weighed about 8 or 10 pounds, all battery. It wasn't very convenient. It wasn't very functional. It was more her dad got it for her in case of emergency. If her car broke down and she was driving home from college, she'd be able to call for help. The technology really did start to change things. Once the internet was readily available and started doing business online, it definitely changed the music industry and traveling/touring industry. All of that became a lot more efficient and effective.

NMS: When did you decide to come off the road?

SS: That was 2000 when I thought I needed to push a little bit harder. By then I'm in my young 30s. In the music business, you start thinking about your longevity and viability. If you haven't made it by then, at what point do you need to realize you're not going to make it? A good friend of mine is Austin Hanks. He's a songwriter out in California. I had gone out to visit him at one point and we were talking about that. He said, "We just need to write music that we can play when we are 60 and 70, like Willie Nelson." That made me start thinking more about transitioning from rock and roll into more singer-songwriter music.

Probably by 2002, I was playing bass and/or guitar for a couple of friends that were songwriters that I admired. It was a way to help them out. I think I was a positive influence on stage and in rehearsals. I've always felt that I was a pretty good cheerleader for individuals that I'm involved with. They got a solid guitar/bass player out of the deal, and I got to watch two guys that were several years more advanced than I was in the songwriting aspect. I'd written enough rock and roll songs, but I knew that I wanted to do something more authentic and meaningful. It was something that I could play with an acoustic guitar on a street corner or in a living room as well as in a studio or onstage.

About 2002, I started to take that more seriously. I had a couple of cool experiences. I opened up for an artist, Jonathan Richman, that I had been a fan of. I got to open up for Merle Haggard

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at a festival. I got a call from a promoter about opening for a band that I was really fond of from Boston called Morphine. I had gotten to know them as the music promoter. They were a really cool, eclectic Indie band from Boston. The lead singer, Mark, had passed away a year or so earlier. The band went out as one last tour to honor the work that they had done. The promoter called and asked if I would open for them. I had a friend, Jack Massey, who's an amazing drummer and a friend, Kevin Morrisson, that's an amazing guitar player/instrumentalist. We had a really cool three-piece band. Working with those two guys, it really allowed me to get a footing in writing songs.

You really make it when it's just you and a solitary instrument. As a performer, especially if you were from my background, I was used to being the dominant figure on a bill. I could easily be the loudest person in the room, either vocally or on guitar. I had height advantage (laughter) oftentimes. So, a lot of things worked my way.

Not to brag too much because of what I did on the other side. My humble roots were also important because a lot of the time, I'd pull up to a club, grab a mop and start mopping the bathrooms. I was on my way into a gig once and a fan that I recognized was in the alleyway. Her mother was dropping her off at the show. She was a photographer in Charlotte, North Carolina. Her mom had a flat tire. I had time before getting on stage to change a flat tire, wash the grease off my hands and get on stage and play. I think I was very well rounded. As big as my ego was in some way, I still had even better than Clark Kent in Superman sometimes. I was a lot more mechanically inclined than Clark Kent.

Having had those two friends, I would play acoustic guitar or just sing. My friend Jack Massey, a really amazing drummer/percussionist, could fill up a lot of space. He was really ambient when needed. Then my friend, Kevin, played baritone guitar or electric lap steel. That was just enough for me to fill up the space and allow me not to feel so isolated in writing that could be more emotional, more emotive, more storytelling, narrative-based and bare your soul a little bit more. I remember for years when that series of albums that Johnny Cash came out with where Nashville had all sort of dropped him. He regrouped and a producer had invited him to come out to Hollywood and just make acoustic music, for the first part by himself. I think Tom Petty's band and some other players ended up providing some other instruments but the majority of it was just acoustic guitar and Johnny Cash singing. I was Johnny Cash, but I knew that it was the way to authentically channel the feelings that you had and tell the stories that you were lucky enough to experience. That's an interesting aspect of song writing. When there's a story there, whether it's your story or the story that you can at least retell, I think it's really important to think about that. How to be as humble, honest and as authentic as you can in that process.

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NMS: Well, I feel like I'm going to jump over a couple of really important chapters but the question I've been dying to ask you is so how to end up in Biddeford with all of that?

SS: Well, this is also like a song lyric. In my travels, I was able to meet a lot of amazing people, some amazing friends. I mentioned Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson. I got to hang out with Johnnie Johnson, the piano player who played with Chuck Berry. We talked about how much he loved onions and soul food. I thought I'm spending time with the guy that played piano for Chuck Berry, the king of rock and roll. I made a lot of lifelong friends. I met some really amazing women.

In Charlotte, I met a beautiful girl who is actually in Charlotte because her family had migrated down from Montreal, following the textile industry. The narrative is already leaning to Maine. We met each other a few times at shows and parties. We certainly didn't have a relationship. We never really got past conversations. Several years passed by. We ran into each other in South Carolina at a mutual friend's wedding. She walked in, an absolutely gorgeous girl. She made me a little bit nervous. Over the course of that weekend, we really connected.

She at that point, had graduated from college, had moved to San Francisco and then moved to Kennebunk because of her older sister. Her older sister was also from Montreal, had graduated school in Charlotte North Carolina, went to college in Massachusetts and then got married. As her younger sister, she was going to go help her with, at that point, three babies. We see each other. A few weeks go by, and we are on the phone a lot.

I was traveling a lot. I wasn't happy living out of a suitcase. By that point, I wasn't playing as much live music as I had before. There wasn't that level of excitement. Even if I knew what I was doing one week in Orlando, Florida or New Orleans, Louisiana, or Birmingham, Alabama or Atlanta, Georgia or Nashville, Tennessee, I knew that what I was doing there was just helping to pay for my music habit back on stage or in the studio somewhere. I'd sort of lost that excitement and enthusiasm. Instead of traveling back to Mississippi to see my parents or friends in Atlanta, I started traveling to Maine. I would go back to work for a week or two weeks and then come back for a few days or a few weeks.

Once we were on the way down to Ogunquit for lunch. It was a rainy day. We'd pulled over on the side of the road. The waves were lapping up over the seawall. I just thought, "You know what, instead of trying to figure out where we could relocate, maybe this is where we are supposed to be." I moved up here around 2004, roughly 20 years ago. After traveling and living here for a while, I decided I'll cut the traveling out.

I thought about staying in the entertainment business. The House of Blues in Boston was hiring a manager. I think by that time, they were owned by the same company, Live Nation, that I'd

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worked for. Little Miss Saigon was playing in Portland. I called the union up and actually went to Portland and worked as a stagehand on Little Miss Saigon and maybe one or two other shows there. A friend of mine said, "You've got a degree in history and literature and did some teaching. Have you thought about teaching again?" I signed up to be a substitute teacher. I was really excited about that. I love kids. I love learning. I love talking about learning, talking about history and literature. I think I quickly became a favorite substitute in the Kennebunk system. I then got my Masters in Education at the University of Southern Maine. I've been teaching in the area ever since.

NMS: You were substitute teaching in the Kennebunk area. At some point you were in the Biddeford system?

SS: Yes. I taught in the Kennebunks. I was doing my student teaching there and then teaching afterwards.

We did take two years and moved to Mississippi to make sure we spent some time with my family and especially my Dad while the kids were small enough. I wanted to make sure that they had more memories about their grandparents than I had about my grandparents. Again, my father's father had died before I was born, when he was very young. My mother's father died when I was very young. That had a huge impact on the rest of my life. He was a daunting, overpowering figure. The kind of person when you are small you think is always going to be there before you know what it means to lose someone. So, we had gone back there for two years.

We came back and I was really interested in some of the more progressive programs that were going on in the area. Noble High School, at the time, was a really progressive school, especially for a public school. I taught a little bit in private schools.

At one point, we had to hire a nanny that was living here in Biddeford to take care of the children because I was getting up so early and the children were starting later. My wife and I were both teaching. She was amazing, really an integral part of our family at that time. At whatever point, we switched to her mother-in-law, who was nannying for us for a while but then I think was called away on family business. I realized that no matter how great somebody was at taking care of your kids, they still want mom or dad. It was also expensive. I thought, "You know what, I could diversify my employment a bit and be there in the morning and the afternoon for the kids, even if that meant working in the evenings a little bit."

That's what led me to adult education. There were one or two classes here in Biddeford. I think a Literature class and a history class. I was teaching a Music class at York Adult Education. That was really good for me as a musician. It's one thing to teach yourself how to play, just close

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your eyes and work your way through it. When you have to explain it to somebody else, it's different, especially if it wasn't all that you had learned in books. That was really cool.

At about the same time, an acquaintance was going through a difficult time with her husband and asked if I would take over some nights playing live music for her. That was really good timing. Again, really good time as a musician. I had this new schedule that allowed me to be there and be more present with my kids when they were in elementary school.

As they grew, schedules start to evolve. I could take on more responsibility. As someone was retiring here at Biddeford Adult Education with the English Language Program, the Student Advisor and the Director asked me if I would consider taking over the English Language Program. I already knew some of the students in the program. I knew how much I would love it. How much love there would be in a program like this, and there is. It's an amazing program for learning about other people and other cultures. Meeting other people, being exposed to their cultures. A lot of times I would tell people who would ask me about my teaching in middle schools or high schools that... A Superintendent asked me, "How are you going to know if you are successful?" I said, "When that kid graduates from college." He said, "I don't think anybody else is going to want to wait that long to find out if your methods are that successful." I said, "That's OK. That's where I'm grounded."

In Adult Education, you see things happen a lot more immediately. You don't have to wait so long. Whether you are working with individuals who have had a difficult time in the public school system for a million different reasons, the possibility is they need that one extra person. Or, in our case, we are lucky to provide a handful of people that give a lot of positive support and can be patient enough to wait for that person and all of the different factors in their life to come together for that just right moment when they can take advantage of that extra class or extra few classes or extra support or extra guidance to make a big step. Or, when you have a new family arrive and they just need help navigating general assistance, getting their children enrolled in school, how to access social services, where they can expect to start working once they get their work authorization, what kind of language assistance do they need and what do they need to know about the American system to get them to that point. Maintaining those relationships through the years where they move from their short-term goals to long term goals and are buying a house and applying for citizenship. You just create these amazing relationships.

NMS: Is there anything in particular that when you think of, "I wish the community realized this about either the ESL [Note: English as a Second Language] or Adult Education Program]

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SS: Adult Education, I think anywhere we go, is not only seen as the last line, the last stop available with a big gap in between. We don't think of schools as pre-K through Adult Ed, we think about Pre-K through K (and think about it, it wasn't too long ago that we didn't have Pre-K in public schools) until we realized how necessary and empowering that was for individuals and our economy. Then it wasn't too long before that that kindergarten was private. We really expanded the range to the younger individuals, younger children/students. I would be very proud for communities to have a better understanding about the impact that Adult Education provides not just for students. We also provide numerous opportunities for enrichment. We have amazing art programs, history, music and financial literacy programs. It really is a way, in education, we talk about the need to develop and nurture a sense of lifelong learning. As we grow and develop, we never reach the end point because that means there is no more progress. There is no more learning to do. To what extent does that mean there is no more living to do? I think that aspect of Adult Education is really important in this community or any community.

Certainly, the English Language Program that we and other communities have in Maine, Lewiston, Portland, Westbrook are all really big programs. When I started working here, we had a small but really impactful, positive program. It was about that time that the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the Biddeford area started to increase. We started to see available housing, where Portland was often short on housing. The housing prices were more affordable at that time, certainly not where we are today. Then I started to see that because of some of the services, access to available housing and good jobs I think Biddeford actually started attracting individuals that maybe had been in Portland for a while. They heard about opportunities here, so I think that's what drove our numbers. Now, we are one of the larger Adult Educations in the state. The overwhelming majority of that is based on the asylum seeker and refugee population that we have. I know that this is a benefit to our community.

Being a historian, one of the advantages of moving to a place like Maine is if I want to know something, I can just teach it. I had a couple of classes on Maine history which really helped me figure it out myself. When you start looking at the history of Maine, in a couple of different ways, you start to realize how important it is to understand the time that we are in now embracing a new wave of New Mainers into our community. The way that that can help accentuate and maybe even shore up some of our French speaking heritage in a mill town that relied completely, at least initially, on workers coming down from Quebec. Later on, when workers arrived from Ireland. As that population grows older and we know that our children and grandchildren aren't always going to maintain our traditions that we have new families from Burundi and Rwanda and Congo DRC and Brazzaville, even more recently, students coming from Haiti speaking French.

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Also, unfortunately coming from a history where economically we didn't have much diversity, if you ran a clothing shop or a food truck, your clientele was all working at the mill. So, the disaster that took place economically and again a lot of that because we didn't have a diverse economy when the mills started to close down, there weren't other industries to absorb those workers, nor the size of government to support that. Now we have a really diverse workforce and not only because we have people that may have been engineers for Chevron in Angola or doctors and lawyers from other countries, Afghanistan or Iraq. We've also created a name for ourselves as a younger city in an aging state. When people decide to come to Biddeford to eat dinner because of our booming restaurant scene, that's pretty impactful. I think a lot of that goes hand in hand with a community that is really rebranding itself, revitalizing itself, redesigning itself. Younger people from New York and Boston moved here and are embracing the diversity our community has and the opportunity that that diversity provides. The number of restaurants and shops that we have opening up. The number knowing of restaurants and shops that we are going to have open up because we have such a diverse population now. Not just a labor pool for the textile industry.

NMS: I thought it was interesting that, I believe you live in the Kennebunk area, despite that (I shouldn't say despite that) I think it's noteworthy that in light of that you choose to do so much volunteer work in Biddeford. One thing that struck me when I was reading a description of your being on the board for the Heart of Biddeford, that you talked about Biddeford as a "magical city". What is your perception of Biddeford? What would lead you to want to invest your personal volunteer time in this community?

SS: When I first moved to Kennebunk, which is a lovely town and a great community on its own, I had been used to traveling and living in the South where there was diversity in food culture. We've got some great restaurants in Kennebunk but when I found out that there was an Indian restaurant in Biddeford, I knew that at least once every few weeks I'd want to be there. I found out that there was a Vietnamese restaurant in Biddeford, and I wanted to be there.

I started to explore Biddeford more and became fascinated with its history and culture. When you see the kind of devastation economically there you see, if you are a feeling, sensitive individual, that sort of love that you create and hope you create for the underdog becomes a power in itself.

I remember looking back 20 years ago at the mill building and that beautiful architecture and how empty it was. I remember thinking at the time, standing back behind where one of the mills was, there were just a few county offices back there. I was waiting for my stepson to come

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out of an appointment and just looking across the river and thinking, “How can this amazing structure not be full of industry and creativity and life?” Now it is!

Over the years, working with people who in their own family narrative had suffered a loss. Had suffered a loss and you had seen them due to a lot of patience and perseverance and determination and luck and maybe some support at just the right time were able to start to transcend some of that legacy that they had inherited, going back to their parents and great grandparents. To see a community start to grow and strengthen itself, unify itself. To see support services and organizations start to network and create a web that allowed positive things to happen. Not happen and fail but happen and take root. And City Government that is willing to try new things and work with outside organizations and outside communities here to develop more programs and systems that provide development and sustainability once we have those programs in place. Just all of these people and organizations and entities working together have been inspiring. It’s hard not to fall in love and be willing to invest your time and devote yourself to such a powerful community with this much potential.

I have the opportunity to work in Biddeford High School a few afternoons a week. We have 10 or more Central African custodians working there. As part of a way to make this a successful venture, the Superintendent and District realized that we need another layer of language support to help along with this. It’s great to work with those individuals and they are doing great work. They are hardworking. They are extremely industrious and dependable individuals. Also, I get to see the sort of panoply of kids from different cultures in the hallways. It’s a different climate in the hallway now than it was 10 or 20 years ago. It’s positive. It’s exciting. It’s hopeful.

I think that’s what we see in our business community. There are people willing to take chances because they know this is the kind of community where you can take a chance on something new. The community will support you. My son, once on the way to dinner, said, “Dad, you are the only person who chooses the restaurant by which one needs help.” Of course, I get the reward of amazing food. I think it’s important for us to think about our community that way and I know we do. We realize what this city has been through, where we are and now, where we can go. I think that’s because of the value of the community that was here before. The kind of work and community ethic that comes, in our case, of Franco-Irish-Greek community and the way that people have to learn to work together and support each other for the common good. I think that’s what has made it such a special city to work in.

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NMS: As you went through that, what came back to me is something you said earlier. Someone had asked you the question, “How will you know if you’ve succeeded, and can you wait that long?” You have seen with your own eyes some of that evolution.

SS: Yeah. Thinking back to that time when I was staring at the mill complex and just dreaming about how amazing, how beautiful it would be for it to be bustling again with new life and new activity. Once again, it’s a centerpiece to our community here. It is really an amazing story.

NMS: There’s so much else I would love to ask you, but I want to be sensitive to your time too. I often like to kind of try to wrap this up and pull it together by asking you, “What is something that you want to make sure that people take away from hearing your story?”

SS: I think probably the most important things that I try to instill to my children, students and colleagues that it’s really important to, it goes back to storytelling and songwriting to some extent, to be authentic. To be genuine. When you are listening, when you have the opportunity to listen, to really put yourself in the moment. Be the best listener possible. When it’s time to speak, to be as authentic and genuine and positive so that not only what you are saying but how you are saying it can help propel someone or something, some group to do what needs to be done to move them as individuals or a group or our community to the next level. I think that we in Biddeford have developed that and it’s an organic thing. It’s a living thing. Like learning, you are never there. You are at the next point. Then you have to re-evaluate, re-assess and see where you need to go next. Again, as an individual, organization or a community, I know that through the work that we’ve done as a community, that’s the way that we operate here in Adult Education. I know that the work that I’ve been gifted with in the Heart of Biddeford when we are growing, developing and changing. But there’s not a finish line. It’s just what is the next point in our journey. What can we do now that we’ve made these gains? What can we do to take it to the next level? I think it comes down to being open enough and authentic enough and aware enough that you can communicate honestly and openly. Then, allow yourself to just embrace what happens when you wake up and say, “It’s important to be positive today.” Then, go out and be positive.

NMS: I’ve asked you a lot of questions. Is there anything that you had been thinking to make sure to share that maybe hasn’t come up in our interview so far? I wanted to give you that opportunity.

SS: If I added anything I think it would just be anecdotal. I think whether we are talking about travel or making a home, I hope the storyline all comes down to just being appreciative of what you have and where you are and the people that you are lucky enough to be surrounded by. The community that you are lucky enough to be a part of. It certainly has been that life in

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Maine, life in Kennebunk, the work that I do in Biddeford has certainly been on a positive trajectory for some time now.

NMS: Well, Sam, I want to thank you on behalf of our community. I'm so glad that you chose us because you are obviously making some very meaningful contributions. I also want to thank you for taking time today, on your vacation time, to share your very important story with us. So, thank you, Sam.

SS: You are more than welcome. It's been wonderful sharing.