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Interviewer: Nicole Morin-Scribner (NMS)

Interviewee: Susan Deschambault (SD)

Date: Thursday, June 15, 2023

Location: JR Martin Community Center, Biddeford, Maine

Transcriber: Nicole Morin-Scribner

NMS: Just to get us started and see how the voice levels are recording I'm going to ask you what you like the best about summer.

SD: What I like best about summer. Well, right now I'm retired so I'm going to enjoy summer. I like going to my sister-in-law's camp at Kennebunk Pond. Just sitting there on the Adirondack chair, just going out in the water. It's calm, it's relaxing, something I've not been able to do for a long time.

NMS: Thank you for sharing that with us.

My name is Nicole Morin-Scribner. I'm a volunteer with the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center. Today is Thursday, June 15th, 2023. Today I have the honor of interviewing Senator Susan Deschambault. We are conducting this interview at the JR Martin Community Center in Biddeford, Maine.

Thank you, Susan, for agreeing to do this. I usually start these interviews right at the beginning by asking you what year, if you are willing to share, and where were you born?

SD: Well, when you are a Senator (and I'm all termed out so I'm no longer a Senator) but when you are a politician, everybody knows your date of birth because it's in the paper. I was born November 25th, 1947. I was born at Mercy Hospital in Portland. My mother at the time was living in Bayview.

NMS: That's interesting. In Bayview, the community?

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SD: This is after her husband died and she recently married my dad. She lived at Bayview in a nice little home there. I wish she still had it (laughter). After that they moved in with *Pepère* [note: French word for grandfather]

NMS: Let's start with your father. What's his name and tell me a little bit about your father.

SD: Dad was born in 1917. He is one, one of the youngest ones, of I count 12 but they all say there were 16 children. *Memère* [note; French word for grandmother] would take in a lot of children who for some reason, they'd raise them. "What's one more, right?" So, we never really know although I know his blood siblings. As I said, he is one of the youngest ones. He shares a personality with my uncle Clement. They were best friends. They were probably six years apart. My dad always lived in Biddeford. He was mostly a car salesman. He also owned not a drugstore, it's like a CVS without the pharmacy. It is located where the City Clerk's office is. Right next to the City Clerk, on the corner, was a bank. When you go pay, you see the vault there. It had a soda fountain. People would come for an ice cream soda and a sandwich. He did that. He worked at a gas station.

NMS: What was the name of the store?

SD: D & H Sundries. D was for Deschambault. H was for his friend Henaire, Red Henaire. I worked there. An interesting part about those days was (I was 15, so it's 60 years ago) for some reason, and people will probably chuckle and remember this, at noontime men would come in and ask for a bromo. Bromo Seltzer calmed the stomach. I never could understand that. There was a little contraption that you just turned the wheel and the right amount of bromo, which is an Alka seltzer, would go in the water. It just seems that in those days a lot of men had upset stomachs at noontime. It's the weirdest thing. I'll never forget that. "Give me a bromo." In French and in English, "*Je veux un bromo.*" That was it. That's what I remember about that store.

Where the parking lot is across from Reilly's Bakery was a building. My father had a luncheonette there too. He liked to do that. I don't think my father stayed too long in a job because he just liked to talk and meet people. But he was always a car salesman. Everybody

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would go to him for that. He was jovial. Everybody liked him. He sang in the church choir, Minuit Chretien. I was one who was in the choir with him. He would put us kids in the backseat of the car. There were three of us then. Sundays, he would go up country and say to us, "Ok. which road do you want me to take?" It was just exploring like that. He was kind of an easy-going guy.

NMS: First of all, I don't know if I caught it. Obviously, it's Deschambault, but what is his first name?

SD: Oh, excuse me. Paul André Deschambault. He was Paul.

NMS: Do you know the story of how his family ended up in Biddeford?

SD: My grandfather was born in Canada. I think he did farming. He worked at the Saco Lowell. They did just like a lot of people who came. Memère Lea was a Leblanc. I think she was born in Biddeford. They'd lived on upper Main Street, right across from the high school. It seems there were three houses. My father was born in a house maybe a quarter of a mile up the road, on the River Road. I remember he used to point to this pink house, and he was born upstairs. Memère had a lot of kids. It seemed they all got along. They were still friends until they died. It was a really close family, the Deschambaults.

NMS: Tell us about your mother. What was her name?

SD: C'était Laurence Annette but my brother said that's not what it says on the birth certificate. Everybody changed their name. Laurence, they called her Larry. I never knew that was a man's name because my mother was Larry. That's what people referred to her as. She is the youngest of three children. The only daughter of Marie Ange and Pierre Larochelle, who started the laundry. She lived her whole life at 9 Porter Street, right next to the laundry. There are pictures of her, she first learned how to drive a truck, a stick shift. My brother and I like to say, she was spoiled. She could take the car out any time and had friends. There are pictures of her at the beach, going to New York with her friends. To know her later in life, she was very quiet, very mild mannered. To think that my mother took chances. She worked in the laundry until 1970

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or late 60s. That's around the time my grandfather let the business be run by his son, Uncle Renald. It was best. My mother wanted to be her own person. God love her, at the Webber Hospital she was, quote, the Executive Housekeeper. That's where I saw my mother really bloom. She was a good boss. The women loved her. I know that. They told me. She knew about laundry, keeping the laundry going and the housekeeping. Until they all passed away, everybody referred to her as Madame Deschambault, Madame Deschambault. She would give parties once a year to thank them. I was very proud of my mom.

NMS: I am going to ask about how your mother and father met, but before we do that, in some of the research that I've done, I found out that your mother also had a very sad but interesting story in terms of her first marriage. Can you tell us about that?

SD: Yeah. It's hard to think because I know how much it hurt my mom. My mom, like I said, would go to the beach in Old Orchard. She met probably the most handsome man I've ever seen a picture of, Donald Baker from Sanford. She married in 1936 in a dress that my grandmother made. My grandmother made all of the clothes. It was a light pink; I remember she told me. She had my sister. I have a half-brother and a half sister, ten years older than I am. My sister was born the following year and 18 months later my brother, Normand was born. So, Caroline and Normand are my half siblings. Her husband worked in the laundry. He helped my grandfather, his father-in-law. He had great possibilities.

What happened, of course, was World War II. He joined. He was trained in Fort Benning, Georgia. My mother went down there in an Airstream with two children, at age 28, so she could be with her husband. The south was pretty strange for my mother. After that, she brought the kids back and went to see him off in New York. On Christmas Eve 1944, the soldiers were on their way. He was in the Army. He was a Second Lieutenant. They embarked on a ship. I'm talking hundreds and hundreds of men on the bottom of the ship, crossing the English Channel. It was hit by a German U boat. There was a storm at the time. It was late at night. Survivors said you could hear people in Calais singing Christmas carols as they were approaching. They were escorted by two ships. Because it was such turbulent waters, soldiers

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were jumping off the Leopoldville, the name of the ship where all the military was in. They jumped the Leopoldville to jump onto these other two big ships. Many were crushed between the two because of the turbulence.

That happened and my mother told me she knew nothing. Everything was top secret. They had to write in code to let them know where they were. She knew he was in England somewhere. She did not know they were crossing the English Channel or on their way. It was right before the Battle of the Bulge, I guess. Military people know what the dates are. She did not know anything until March of the following year, when she got the Western Union telegram that he was missing in action.

If I may, I'm going to jump from that because it reminds me. My mom suffered from dementia when she was 85. She was at St. Andre's for about 5-6 years, longer than that probably. One night I got a phone call from the nurse. It was 10 o'clock at night. My mother didn't recognize us. She couldn't communicate well. But the nurses called me because they asked if I would speak to my mom, that it would calm her down. I said, "What's going on?" She said, "Your mom is reliving the day she got the Western Union telegram. I was shocked. I was stunned. You talk about PTSD or anything like that when something tragic just goes in a piece of your brain that you can't get rid of. I thought, "What am I going to do?" She got on the phone. I said, "Man [note: short for maman, French for mom], what is going on?" "Oh, hi Sue." She calmed right down, and they said she went to bed. As you well know, they had to distract her, and I never forgot that. I even told that story in the Senate when we were honoring Memorial Day. You could have heard a pin drop. You never forget that pain. She had that. Never again. But I'm so glad those nurses asked me to call. She was for me, the best mom.

NMS: That must have been quite an adjustment for her to make at that point, when that happened, and she was the single mother of two?

SD: She was 29. Caroline would have been 7 or 8. Normand was 2 years younger. That's about the time she left Bayview. She talks about the war and having black shades and all that because they were on the water. She came back home. I'm sure Memère and Pepère took care of her.

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But she's strong. It was not knowing and missing in action, what does that mean? Prisoner of war? What does it mean?

There's something, and anybody can read it. The Leopoldville was controversial. They did not release any information. At the height of the war, you don't know what is going on and who is the enemy. She lived with that. I don't think we ever talked about it until the late 70s because we really didn't know. There were rumors. Until my brother, that was his dad, he researched it in Washington DC and found out more about it and knows that his name is on a monument in Normandy.

My mother, I don't think it was a bad idea that she married my dad, who was probably the life of the party kind of guy. My parents had very good friends. People will recognize the names: Leo Drapeau; Joe Gagne; Ray Gagnon. These were individual businessmen who all got together. So, she had good friends.

When my brother went to Europe to see the monument, he told my mother about it. My father was feeling poorly at the time. He had a heart condition. It was 1980 and he said, "Why don't you and Sue go?" She got the strength. She had retired by then. She said, "Yeah. We'll go." My father died in March, and we had tickets to leave in June. We had planned it for a whole year. So, we went there. The story is if you want to go to D-day celebration in Europe, it's a week-long of festivities. You get to see the places where they bombed, especially the name Mère Sainte Église. We went there. We did that but we couldn't get tickets from the United States because they were sold out. At the last minute, Canada gave us tickets which allowed us to go to discussion groups. That was a relief for my mom.

I will follow that by telling you that my brother went back home, and I knew about taking the Eurail train and going through Europe. I brought my mother to Munich, Germany. My mother was always afraid of Germans. She never would admit it. but it still stayed with her. I was wondering how she was going to react. We went to this little hotel. The man behind the counter was about her age. The next day I came down with my mother and asked him which bus to take to go visit Dachau, the concentration camp. He said, "No. Nichts Dachau. Don't go

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there.” I said, “You don’t understand. My mother’s husband died in the war.” He proceeded to tell my mother. Later that night, she came down and had a conversation with him. This gentleman was an officer in the German army. He was captured as a prisoner of war. If you are an officer, they didn’t keep you in Germany. He was transferred to Huntsville, Texas where he was a prisoner of war until the end of the war. Then I came in the conversation and said, “What happened after the war? Did you come back home?” He said, “Why? My home was bombed. I had nothing here.” This gentleman said that he spent his career as a jazz pianist in San Francisco. Here is a German officer released who left and came back to Munich and that’s where we met him. My mother that night looked at me and said, “You know, Sue. We thought what we were doing was right. They thought what they were doing was right.” It was very calming for her to hear that story. I’m glad we did it. I’m glad I witnessed it.

NMS: That’s very powerful.

SD: It took all of that time. It was 1981, she was born in 1915 so 66-67. While we were there, my nephew was born. Paul’s son was born. She had two grandsons born by the time we came back. That was fun for her.

NMS: Let’s move to your father and mother, how did they meet?

SD: They never told us. I don’t know! I can see maybe my mother probably went through a couple of years that were tough. Her family was supportive, and she had her children. They must have met at some social. My father could not go to the war. He had a ruptured ear drum. He was even hospitalized for many months because of surgeries in those years. I can just see him go after her. I mean really (laughter). He would make my grandfather laugh. My father is a jokester. I’m sure that they just ...or else they wanted me, I don’t know? (laughter). I was born afterwards. Then my brother, Dicky, was born two years later, and my brother Paul was born two years later. I was six years old, and I can still hear my Memère Larochelle say, “OK, la. Est tu fini?” Are you all done? No more kids. (laughter) As I said, I was born, and my sister was 10. When she was 18, I was 8. It was two families, really that always under Memère and Pepère. I’m the only one that kept the French language a little bit with them.

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NMS: I am going to talk about the French language but obviously your Memère and Pepère Larochelle, your mother's parents were a big part of your life. Talk to me about them.

SD: I didn't realize until years and years later that it's their house. (laughter) I thought everybody lives like this. It was always three generations in the house. I was very proud of that. Even when my son was born, it was three generations. Memère raised him too. They lived downstairs. It's an old New England house where there really is no bedroom. There were two parlors, the front parlor and the other parlor. So, they turned the parlor into a bedroom. Memère and Pepère always lived down there. You could go down the stairs and in the hallway. You were always welcomed but you had to knock on the door first. You walked into the living room. It was out of respect. I think we all knew you just don't open Memère and Pepère's. That's their place so we did that.

We didn't eat with Memère much because she's a lousy cook. I hated the sight of boudin cooking for Pepère, blood sausage (laughter). The story is that they both worked in the laundry. My grandmother was in charge of the very delicate linens. If you didn't dry them correctly, they would dry crooked or what have you. I can still see her run in the house, start lunch or supper and then leave to go in the laundry. You would think the house was on fire. I mean everything was smoking. She was a lousy, she was not a cook. She was a baker. She made the best pies and would teach me how to bake pies. I made little pies. That's the kind of relationship it was. Boy (laughter) we never ate with Memère. We had a lot of cereal (laughter). That was it. And Pepère loved everything she made. (laughter) Poor Pepère!

That was a family business. I mention to people, I did not realize the impact the laundry had on our family. I did, personally, but when it finally closed after 101 years (it was in operation from 1912 to 2013) my son at the time was 29. He was born in 1984 and grew up there. He experienced what I experienced. There are 4 steps from the kitchen to the laundry. There are 4 steps in terms of going down the stairs and the laundry is not air conditioned, so the big doors were open. These ladies are pretty much extended family. They would say to me, "Suzie, have good time in school there. Be a good girl." I'd wave to them. The names, Simone, Julie, Tida,

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Maggie, you knew them all. When the laundry closed, my son wrote a letter to the Editor and said, "Someone in my family died today." He was talking about the laundry. He experienced the same things. He said, "I remember going to school and they are asking me how I did in school. When I'm going to play football." That's what White Star means to us. That's how we grew up. It was nice to see that. My son experienced the same thing I did with Memère.

When my son was growing up, my mother said, "I don't do babysitting." I paid for childcare. She did not. She did that out of love. This is your child. Of course, she told me at the time I was very involved not in politics but in the union at work. I had meetings. When he was born, she said, "No more meetings for you." I did that until he went to school at six years old. I told her that I wanted to be a Police Commissioner or do something. She said, "Well, get him ready for bed and I'll take care of him." So, we had that working. That's when I got back involved in the city. I wasn't going to wait until he's 18! (laughter) He came with me. He went to Democratic Conventions and everything. I made sure they had childcare for not only me but every woman who wanted to go to the Democratic Conventions and stuff.

NMS: I'm definitely going to spend some time on your career for sure. But turning back a little bit, did you spend some time working at White Star Laundry?

SD: Oh my God! They couldn't get rid of me. My Uncle Reynald was sometimes more upset that I would make them laugh. He didn't like people having too much fun. You know, you aren't tending to business. We all folded towels that were 2000 degrees hot from the dryers. I started doing that. I bagged. I remember how much 25 sheets all hot and folded nicely weigh because I had to wrap them up.

Even when I was in college and at night, I would work until 8 o'clock. I would be the only one there. God, until I found out there were mice in the laundry (laughter). Ironically, the boys at St. Francis College sent their laundry. That was part of going to college. You sent it to White Star in a net. I had to catalog all of them. Then they'd be washed, and we'd be able to say who it belonged to. I did that.

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In high school, I had the biggest thrill. I was a big St. Louis fan. I loved the guys! I had crushes on them. I was a freshman, I had crushes on these big football players. They would play Friday night. The next day, all of the woolen uniforms would come to the laundry. They would wash them the first thing in the morning. You can't put that in the dryer. So, my job was in the afternoon I had to take them out of the basket, and we had to spread them out over the mangle that wasn't working or any table so they could dry. Sunday night we'd fold them up. Just to say, "Oh my God, that is so-and-so's shirt!" It was just like; I'm privileged to do this. I would chuckle. No one is going to understand that. It's something that who else did that? Me. I'll never forget stretching out those uniforms. Woolen uniforms, in the rain, in the mud.

NMS: That's so funny that you bring that up because I was going to ask you what is the contribution to the community that you feel that White Star Laundry made, that maybe people wouldn't think about. That's such an interesting story.

SD: When I campaigned, I wouldn't recognize the last name and I'd knock on the door and they'd say, "Oh Suzie! It's Suzie!" It was like I came back in their lives, and they are in their 80s. We'd talk. Anybody who worked in that commercial laundry, when I tell people in Augusta that my grandparents owned the laundry, they think of a laundromat. You have to describe commercial laundry. We had hotels from Kittery to Brunswick. We had hospitals until the hospitals realized they have to do their own wash because of everything. The people who worked in the laundry don't forget it. I think they are a little clique because it was hot. But Pepère Larochelle if it was hot, you would work until midnight. At 9 o'clock he'd come in with probably 50 sundaes from the Dairy Joy and we'd all sit outside, and we had our sundae. He would surprise us with stuff like that. That's why all of the windows and everything, the people who live around Prospect and Porter, they were used to that. It was like if you lived next to the mill, you would hear the machinery. They would complain when the kids went home at midnight, and they are all screaming on the streets.

What we did, it bothers me to sleep on a sheet that's not ironed (laughter). We never knew about wash and wear. (laughter) I was spoiled in that respect. I mean we had ironed sheets. I

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respect that. Whoever worked on the mangle knew how to iron them. They were perfect. There was not a crease in them. Then the state police would come because all of their uniforms were cleaned. You had to iron them in a special way. The ladies of Hills Beach, Biddeford Pool, Kennebunkport had their hand crocheted tablecloths that are very valued. My grandmother had this machinery, this contraption that is the size of a wall in your bedroom with all pins. She had to stretch the crocheted tablecloths and it had to be perfect, so it would dry. That was her job. Uncle Renald's wife, Matante Leona, that was her job afterwards. So, there was quality work.

Then wash and wear. Then we had a dry-cleaning business. I think we were above board. We had a lot of protection not to have any of the solvent go in the ground and all that. Other big commercial laundries outside of Biddeford, DEP came down and so it got very expensive to do dry cleaning.

Again, the people that worked there, Simone Lavoie, Maurice Dion, Bob Cote (whose son is Adrien Cote, was well known in high school band). Bob would have the truck and deliver. That's a big family. I went to school with their kids.

My grandfather, can I tell you how it started? I often wondered about that. Why didn't he work in the mill? I found out that my grandmother's family, the Morins, helped him financially at the beginning. He had the idea to just do laundry, just to help. When I tell the story to people who are familiar with Pepperell, they say, "He met a need." Large families, especially on Hill Street and the tenement buildings on Cleaves Street. You had memère and pepère and mom and dad and 10 kids. They all worked in the mill, most of them. So, mom had to come back and cook meals. The luxury, they were making good money, was "Ugh! I've got to wash the sheets. I've got to wash this." So, my grandparents had a horse and buggy and they would go (I had a picture of that) and it said White Star Laundry. He said that he bought the name from a laundry in Lewiston. He would go to those streets. It was wet wash, 5 cents. They had wicker baskets and go like at 5:30-6 o'clock in the morning before they left for work. He would take all of their linens and put them in the basket. Memère and him would wash them and just put them in the

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basket with the name, wet. It was a wet wash. Then at 6 o'clock at night when they came home, they delivered the basket, collected their 5 cents and the lady just hung them up. That was a luxury. It just evolved from there. It was located on Granite Street once. There were a couple of places. My brother knows better than I do. I don't know when they moved to Porter Street. By then, he owned it outright. I've got a certificate of him earning a certificate from some school about textiles. We wanted to learn about fabric and textiles. A self-made man and Memère too. So, it was generation and generation. When it was passed down to my Uncle Renald, he passed it down to his boys, David and Kevin. It never was us afterwards.

NMS: It just dawns on me, as you say that they brought the laundry back and the women only had to hang it up. I wonder if this generation listening to this interview knows what we are talking about?

SD: And the clothesline, yeah. Hang them up on the clothesline outside. They were frozen some of them. That was a luxury. I mean you had to wash the sheets, and can you imagine, the long dresses they had. I never could figure out. And their blouses were so white and crisp. Who did that?

Yeah, I was spoiled. I like my sheets ironed. You can't compare taking an ironing board and an iron than that mangle. That mangle was twice the width of the sheets, and it just was hot rolls. You put the sheet in there and it comes out nice and you fold it. It took 2 girls to fold it, right?

NMS: Yes. I have to admit that this was my first job, working at White Star Laundry. I know exactly how hot it was in there and I know exactly what a mangle is and how hot those towels are when they come out of the dryer (laughter). But it was nice to have, I bet a lot of...

SD: I could have a society of White Star Laundry workers. I think it was a nice place to work. It was money. You won't be working in the mill. It would be hot there too. It had to be precision. You had to do it right and you had to do it clean whatever you produced as a product, or you wouldn't have a customer come back. They did wedding dresses. They did heirlooms and wrapped them up real nice.

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NMS: You happened to mention the mills. Obviously, the mills are an important part of Biddeford as well. Earlier you and I had an opportunity to speak, and you shared with me a story of probably not a unique happening at the mills that in your family, I think this is on the Deschambault side, is quote/unquote a bit of a scandal.

SD: Well, it was a quiet scandal. Yes. The Deschambaults, many of them worked at the mill or Saco Lowell Shops. The men worked at the Saco Lowell Shops. There was a relative, a young lady. The people who want to know how the mill started; it wasn't just Biddeford people. No. The Canadians came down. Quebec people came down. I also learned that young women on the farms in Massachusetts were leaving their families because they could make a lot of money. With a lot of money, you dressed nice. That was a big reason at the turn of the 19th century, they would do that. There was a female in my family who worked there with her sisters and others. We had Italians, Irish, Greek, Albanians. I guess she had a relationship, or something happened, and she was pregnant and not married. She was not a slender lady and I guess hid the pregnancy with their long dresses and still worked. Her parents knew about it but when the child was born, the child was raised as her brother. It was not her child. She was not married, and you never spoke of it. I think I was an adult before my father told me the rest of the story. My grandmother raised it as her own. I didn't know him any different as a young boy. What happened, as my father tells me, is the country that this young man was from put him back on a boat and kicked his butt back because they were embarrassed. This is their new country, and he is bringing shame upon a whole nationality. That's how he was treated.

Biddeford was booming. They had dances. They had money. They could buy nice dresses. It was up and coming. I think it must have been turbulent times as far as raising families. I often think of the moms and dads of those farms in Massachusetts losing their daughter to Biddeford, Maine because they could get a nice apartment. Buy a different hat every year.

Then it was us in the 30s. I remember asking my grandfather if he suffered during the Depression. He said, "No. Never put the money in the bank." (laughter) I'll never forget that. He did OK, but of course the business suffered, I'm sure. But he weathered that storm. That

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makes me think, we are all human. We are all human. We all have stories. In those days, you didn't have an abortion and you didn't go around saying, "I'm not married." So, the family took care of him.

NMS: Did either you experience or did of your family ever share, as you were saying that there were people of different national origins in the Biddeford area. How did those different cultures and nationalities get along?

SD: Well, you know that I belong to the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center. Out of that, I've developed respect for archiving, and we have Saint Jean Baptiste. I always knew about Saint Jean Baptiste. My father was in it. I didn't know it was an all-men's thing. I didn't know it was to preserve the French language. Everything was in French. All the ledgers are in French. We talk about diversity and trying to mix the cultures. I think I give respect to the ones that want to stay together. The French had their own societies, their own organizations. It's not because they didn't like someone of a darker skin from a Mediterranean country. They kept to themselves. I think the more we learn is there was a Muslim church. That was kept quiet, but that was their church. The Greeks had their church on Adams Street. Look at the French churches. I don't call it prejudice but it was the way things were in those times.

I tell the story of I had a crush on a boy who went to St. Mary's Church. I thought I'd go there. I was probably 12 or 13. I lied to my grandparents. I told them I wasn't going to St. Joseph's at 11 because I was going to go at 10 o'clock. Instead, I went to St. Mary's Church. I came home and Memère said, "Who was the priest that spoke at St. Joseph's?" "Oh, C'était Père Carrier. [translation: It was Father Carrier] "Oh, vraiment? Il a dit la Messe à 11 heures." He did the mass at 11 not at 10. So, she found out I went to St. Mary's. She basically told me that's not our church. That's the Irish church. I don't think she said it out of disdain. She just said it like, "You stick with your own." But that was, I don't know, we just didn't talk about prejudice. I'm sure we lived it, but it was just the way things were.

My mother's side of the family were all businesspeople. My grandfather Pierre's sister, Marie Ange was married to a Labonte. She owned Elm's Laundry. Uncle Ralph had a meat store.

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Uncle Fred, at Halfway in Old Orchard, had a motel and gas station. That was the Larochelles. The Deschambaults worked at Saco Lowell. It was a completely different family. There were always a lot of people in the house. It was just different. But we were raised by the Larochelles. We lived there together. We often went to my Uncle Clement's house. I have two cousins. Out of 47 girls that graduated from St. Joseph's, 3 of us are Deschambaults. We were all born in 1947 and we are still close. I would go to their house. That's the way it was. So far, I haven't been to Saco, have I? (laughter) Everything is Biddeford.

NMS: Did you go to Saco?

SD: I don't know. The only time I went to Saco is when we used to take the bus and go to Ocean Park and swim. It's disgusting. It wasn't in the ocean. It was like a pool, a homemade pool. I don't know if you ever saw that. It's on the main drag in Ocean Park. You had to wear a tag. You went swimming there. I remember the bottom of the pool was murky, but a bunch of us went. We all got into a special camp bus and went swimming all day. But no, everything was Biddeford. As you well know, the downtown and the movies. You always went to peoples' houses.

NMS: Any significant recollections of when you were in school? First of all, where did you go to school?

SD: One significant, when you mentioned that, I didn't mention what everybody does, le Réveillon. That was the best. That was the best. When we were too little to go to midnight mass, you had to go to sleep. They promised us when they came home at 1:30 (am) that they would wake us up and they did. Oh my God, the food, the drinking, the singing, the gifts. I remember my Betty Crocker box. I baked everything that was in that box in an hour and a half. There were all kinds of stuff. Those were fun times.

I remember sitting on the linoleum floor in the living room, mind you, watching TV. Pepère had one of the first TVs. On Friday nights, to watch the fights. I was the only one sitting on the floor, all men with their cigars watching the fights. I got really good watching the fights.

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NMS: When you say the fights, are you talking about wrestling?

SD: Boxing. Boxing. Ingemar Johansson and all the ones that were good. The men loved it, just loved it. Memère wasn't there, my mother but no, no, Suzie whenever where the men were and Pepère. It's like I never left his side. It was fun watching the men cuss (laughter). My grandmother would never have allowed that. Just watching the Friday night fights in black and white. That was that.

About school. I went to St. Joseph's Grammar School. It was a block from my house. I could not walk those four flights of stairs now. That was fun. Nuns from Quebec taught us. Then, St. Louis/St. Joseph. You know where that's located. Now it's St. James. The St. Joseph part, if you had a drone and looked on top of the St. Louis building, it's shaped like a capital I. There was the middle part and two ends. The boys had the middle part and the end to the left. The girls had the end where Birch Street is. Like I said, there were 47 girls in my class.

My cousin talks about the "A" group and the "B" group. That still affects a lot of people. If you were put on the "B" group, that means they did not think you were college material. People don't realize when they do things like that. Otherwise, it was a lot of fun.

My cousin was a big football star at the time, Spike Cote. So, I was little Suzie. If he knew me, I was OK with everybody else. That was a big family. We knew everybody. We'd go to the football games. As other people have mentioned after the game. I told my son, who was a football player and the captain. I told him, you are missing out on what we went through. If you won a game, you guys go to the high school and ring the bell. We would just go down to the Puritan. We'd walk from St. Louis field down Alfred Street and run to the Puritan to get a booth. The boys would go to the Parish Hall, take off their uniforms, take a shower, get dressed and show up in about a half hour to an hour. By then, we are all having strawberry smash and vanilla cokes. That's what we'd have. I told Dom, "Can you imagine the place being packed." (Its where Happy Dragon is now.) Everybody's chatting and of course we were big winners then. When the quarterback walked in, everybody's screaming and applauding. Just, just enough to

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have fun. On the way home, you'd stop at Alex Pizza." (laughing). I told my son, "You missed out on those things."

Another thing that kids nowadays miss out on is if you look at a newspaper in the 60s and 70s, the Journal Tribune, inevitably you would see a picture of ...here's the freshman class at Biddeford High School. The President, the Vice President. We knew the kids. They had football pictures. If you won an award, your picture was there. It was a good time for teenagers and children. We don't do that anymore. I don't know who the valedictorian is at the high school. They would publish it. Everybody was proud. You got married, there's a picture. Just you, not your husband. A picture of you in your gown. The article would describe your wedding dress, what your trousseau looked like and where you were going for your honeymoon. Really, you knew everything. I like to share that with my son. He thinks it's crazy. What do you do in social media? You say everything, right? Well, we had the newspapers. And you are nodding because you know.

NMS: I do some research and I kind of chuckle because they have in there, who went to the hospital and for what. Who had a party and who showed up and who was invited and didn't go. I was thinking, "Oh my goodness, we talk about what's on Facebook. It was the Facebook of the time to some extent."

SD: You are right about that. Trull Hospital. He is there for appendicitis. Then HIPAA came about.

NMS: When you were in school, was it in French or English?

SD: I like to say math was taught in French. I just felt English was taught in French. The nuns taught algebra, geometry and they were English, but it's like everything was French. You can hear it. Less so, maybe my junior and senior year but a lot of French.

I was Vice-Prefect of the Sodality [Note: Catholic association promoting devotion and community service] my junior year and then the senior year, those kinds of things. Every holy day, you would walk from St. Joseph/St. Louis to St. Joseph Church. You'd go down Graham

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Street, cut down to Center Street and go to church. Then you'd go to confession in the basement of the church. I thought that was a foolish thing to do (laughter). Everybody's lying in confession. We are making up sins because we didn't know what a sin was (laughter). I guess that's when I started saying, "I don't like this Catholic religion." (laughter) I thought it was hilarious. Everybody was sitting there waiting next, "I don't know what I'm going to say. What are you going to say?" (laughter) But we did it.

I remember, was it Monday night or Wednesday night, going to the basement of the church and WIDE had the rosary. We said the rosary. We said it on the radio. I think it was Monday or Wednesday nights. Anyone who wanted to come, it was high school kids. It usually was about the same 6 of us. I just thought it was cool. Yeah, we said the rosary. You think about it, it would be nice to do that now for old people who live in the nursing home to listen. I miss that.

They want to televise everything but there was nothing better than to have WIDE do the play-by-play basketball or football games. It was on the radio. I think about that now. There are elderly people in nursing homes and their grandson is playing against Thornton. You would want to hear the game. It's too bad that we can't do that.

NMS: Then you decided or how did you decide what to do after high school?

SD: That's one thing I didn't like. We had no guidance counselors. The nuns from Canada were telling you how to get into college. This is my prejudice, they only spent time if you were the valedictorian and were one of the top 4. My class, wow, there must have been 20% who all became nurses. Everybody went to nursing school. I thought I wanted to be a nurse. I was a candy striper and after some of that I said, "No. I don't want to be a nurse." I had written down not Peace Corps but Vista, Volunteers in Service to America. I wanted to go to the Appalachian and teach kids how to read or something. It was going to be the War on Poverty kind of stuff. No one helped me. No one in my family went to college. No one helped me figure out how to get that.

I went back to work at Components, third shift. I'll say her name, Pearl Lessard, Pearl Lajeunesse sat next to me. We worked together making little parts for transistor radios. I did

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that for a year and a half. I remember coming home at 7:30-8:00 o'clock and telling my father, "I'm tired." He said, "You've got 50 more years of this crap (laughter)". I read in the paper that St. Francis College is going coed. This was in August. School starts in September. I felt like saying, "How did they decide this?" The next day I walked into St. Francis College. I was lost. I didn't know. It was all in Decary Hall. It was funny, they sent me to the Registrar and the Registrar looked at me and said, "Are you here to sign up?" It was just like signing up for the army. I said, "Yes." I didn't know how to get into college. I don't think he ever asked for a transcript. I was signed up, that's it.

My freshman year, in 1967, there were hundreds of guys. I keep saying 600 or close to that, and there were 20 girls. My friend was from Jackman. My other friend was from New York City. It was us and the boys. That was a turning point for me. If it wasn't for St. Francis, I don't know where I'd be. I got accepted at a couple of great big schools. I don't know if it was Ohio State or Michigan State. Stupid to do that. And Boston University. It's not that it was public, but the church paid for it. When I got accepted to college and they said, "You're accepted." It would cost \$4,000. I'd go, "Are they crazy?" My parents didn't know. I didn't know. That's how naïve I was.

I don't know why I wanted to go. Well, I do. There's a story. So, I went to St. Francis, and I want you to know this story. When I was 12 years old, I don't like to read books. I cannot read a novel. I will read it until the last chapter, and I don't even finish a novel. It just does not keep me going. At McArthur Library, I didn't like being in the teenage section, so I snuck up to the adult section to see what they've got. I wish I had this book. It was called, "Our Rejected Children." The author was Deutsch. It's an expose of how children are treated in reform schools. It told different stories and had statistics. Now, this was 1959. I was moved by this book because when I ended it, I said, "When I grow up, I am going to do this and I'm not going to take a hose on kids to discipline them." You know when you are 12 years old and you find out another 12-year-old is being beaten, I wanted to just do something. It's funny, I don't know why that stuck with me so much. It was only years later that I saw the book and it was written in 1942. Here it was 1959. But that was a motivating factor when I went to St. Francis, I took

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every sociology and philosophy class. In those days, there were very few colleges that offered social work. That was not a term. But if you majored in Sociology, which was a liberal arts way of thinking, you could be a social worker. So, I did that.

I had work study, and this is where I fell in love with the Beaudry family. I worked with Mr. Beaudry for 3 years [Note: Jim Beaudry was coach and Athletic Director at St. Francis College/UNE]. He never had a secretary because guys aren't secretaries. He had guys working for him that handled the equipment. He needed someone to do the typing and just clean his office (laughter). So that's what I did. It got me close with the students and all of the guys that played sports. I even kept statistics. I even drafted if you took a shot, if you made it so that the coach could... Mr. Descoteaux was a coach. I'm easy with males, I guess. It's easy for me.

Then I went to Europe. I thought I was going to go to grad school there. Instead, I just traveled around Europe and came back a couple of months later. My mother said, "You need to get a job." I wasn't even home. I didn't even unpack. Ma said, "You've got to get a job."

You know when you go down 295 and you see big castle, the Boy's Training Center, Long Creek. It's a castle. My father was a truant officer. He used to tell my brothers, if you don't go to school, that's where you are going to end up. I didn't know there was a female counterpart called Stevens School for Girls in Hallowell. I wrote a letter to Augusta. Corrections was not a department. It was under Mental Health. The lady that was the director, she could have thrown my letter away. All I did was say "I'm applying for a job." Instead, she gave it to Stevens School. I was called. I went for an interview on Wednesday. They called me on Friday. "You've got the job and start Sunday." That's how quick. I was a Training School Counselor, which is a nice long title for being a House Mother. I was all of 24-25, taking care of 16- and 17-year-olds from Portland and Bangor who did some bad things. I'm going, "What am I supposed to do here." It was very populated because in those days kids could be sent away for status offenses such as being truant. You were removed from your family. Being a runaway. If you ran away, they took you and put you in lockup. Danger of falling into habits of vice and immorality. That was usually if you were a young girl downtown Machias smoking a cigarette, you were in danger

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of falling into vice and immorality. They would put them away. The last one was incorrigible. That was the saddest reason why kids were removed. Incorrigible for the Department of Human Services was if they had placed you in 3 foster homes and they failed. No, the family didn't fail, you failed. Little did they know in those days what happened. They were sexually abused, and they would run away. But no one would believe that. You don't talk about that.

Those are the kinds of places, the Boy's Training Center had 300-400 kids. We had for girls, about 140. In 1974, the legislature passed the law that you can only be sending a child away if they committed a crime punishable as an adult, like assault, robbery, burglary. Not truancy or you are incorrigible. I remember by then I was a social worker. In six months, I was a social worker. The Superintendent said, "Everybody that's here for one of those status offenses, I want them home." So, the population went from like 150 to 40. I was in charge of that.

In 1974 because the population was down, we had empty dormitories. God, what a story. The Woman's Prison was in Skowhegan. The Woman's Prison only had maybe 30 women. So, there were 40 juvenile girls in Hallowell in a couple of buildings. There were 2 buildings that we put 30 women. I then became the social worker for adult women. They asked me, "Do you want to stay with juveniles or do you want to go with adults." I thought juveniles would run away. Many times, I had to go to Logan Airport and pick up a girl that they found in Philadelphia or something. I said, "I'm too young to have this worry like a mom." I went with adults.

In 1976, they closed all of the female prisons. It was stupid. It was only a cost thing. They took the juvenile girls and put them at the Boy's Training Center and called it, because the population went down too, and called it the Maine Youth Center. They took the adult women, women prisoners from the Skowhegan Women's Prison who were there for murder and other things and brought them to the Men's Reformatory in Windham. They called it the Maine Correctional Center. I thought I lost my job because they are shipping them to another place where no woman has ever worked in. Well, one of them was. She was a guard. But thank God for unions, they said, "No. You are going and you are in charge." That's how I stayed there.

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My career ended after 43 years in the prison. I had men and women. I had 200 as my caseload until they decided they needed another one. Men never had social workers. Women had social workers. I think I must have done a good job because now there are probably 25-30 social workers. In those days, it was a reformatory, like a penitentiary and the chaplains were social workers. That's how... and all because of a book. All because of a book that I had that career and It's the career of my life. It's the dream come true. I was on the ground floor. That's why when I became a Senator, I was Chair of Criminal Justice and Public Safety. It's easy for me. It is.

NMS: Out of that career, what do you find was the most rewarding thing for you?

SD: With juveniles, because I worked with women when I first started, as I said I was 24-25, the women I worked with were divorcees or widows. They were house mothers. I was the college kid, the young kid. I think the rewarding part was in one situation, we knew about this young girl. She exhibited signs that now, you could say she's an abused child, sexually abused child. In those days, you didn't talk about that. I guess I'm happiest because of my education and I was young, I brought that forward for discussion. I can tell this story because it's not going to be names. This young girl came in and it was truancy, she didn't go to school. She was from a rural area, but she was different. She was very coquettish. One night, she had a nightmare and screamed. She told me something that her dad may have committed. So, this psychologist would come about every two months and talk to us staff. What's going on? I mentioned it. He said, "Do you believe her?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "If dad did that, he would be at the prison, wouldn't he?" I said, "Gee. You are right." He said, "Can you find out if this happened?" I called the prison and yes, he was there, but he was gone. He served one year. That victim, his daughter, served two years. So, I think I'm most proud that we started talking about that and changing the thinking. We didn't do that on purpose. She had no place to go. That is one thing.

Adults also. The first person I brought before the Parole Board committed her murder in Biddeford, not far from my house, when I was in the 8th grade. I didn't know who she was. Thank goodness she didn't know I lived in Biddeford. Here I was bringing her before the Parole

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Board. That was shocking. In those days, New Hampshire and Vermont didn't have a state prison for women. If you committed a capital offense in New Hampshire, you came to Maine. I had Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. You do good things. They are a large group, a captive audience.

I think the most rewarding is when you have, for me, I would interview a man who is a businessman, owns a construction company or paving company or is popular and maybe he is there for fraud. When I ask him to fill out a form he said, "I don't have my glasses." This is code for I can't read. But I know that the first 2 months for us, for incarceration, we have to watch you and gather information. You didn't go into the general population where there's like 100 men. You spend a lot of time in your cell. The other guys would read books. Well, this man couldn't. So, I had this bright idea, "Do you like search a word?" He said, "I love those things." I went to Mardens and bought a dozen of them and people like him had that. Those are things that go on. No one had to write a policy to do that. It's not just me but I was happy to train other social workers to think outside the box. Do something. They didn't harm us. That was the best thing. They are here as punishment, not to be punished. You don't have to be mean to them. It's bad enough that they are away from their families and the judge made the decision. This is the punishment. Those are the things you don't forget.

NMS: I can't help but think that from the way that you relate what your childhood and family life was like, big, close, cohesive and then the extended family with all of the work family at White Star Laundry and all that quote, unquote ideal family life should be like, to go from that environment to...

SD: I didn't know what I was getting myself into. They don't teach you that in college.

NMS: It must have been a tough transition to be open to that slice of life.

SD: I made it myself. I just knew the right way to do it. I guess, yeah, what I learned at home. Oh, that's the other thing. When I had juveniles, if they behaved that week, we had popcorn night and got VHS tapes that they could choose. They'd come out in their bathrobes, and we'd

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sit on the couch, and it was like one big family. That never was done. I got away with a lot. It was something.

Then men, I can relate very easily. I guess I made them laugh. Let me just say to you what it's like. You could go home tonight, watch channel 6 and they report that they finally arrested someone who had shot their cousin or something or had stolen something at a store. You see their face, and they look like they belong locked up. I smile and say, "I'm going to see him in a year." Sure enough, they come through the door. Now, most people who are charged don't go and testify in their defense. All you know is what the papers report. I guess the biggest thrill for me was my job was to find out the story behind the story. They have to trust you. Then you get their life story. I'm telling you tricks of the trade, I guess. It was a joy to go to work every day.

NMS: How did your family look at your career?

SD: I don't think it surprised anybody. I did things unconventionally in high school too. I wrote a paper, we had to do a commandment. My title was "Why do you have to get married to have a baby?" Wow! (laughter) I was brought in the principal's office for that.

NMS: In a Catholic school.

SD: Oh yeah. "Why can't you date a black person?" Oh God. I was even thinking like that. I was just thinking like, how come? Can you give me a good answer? No. I had 2 cousins who would go, "Oh! Scary!"

My Pepère, God love him, he died my sophomore year in college. He would say to me in French, "What are you learning?" I would talk to him. I know it went over his head. But he'd listen intently. I'd say, "Look at the term paper I wrote." He'd read it and say, "Fait une bonne fille." (You are making a good ...) I'm sure he didn't understand it. But that's the kind of love he gave everybody. So, I gave it back. I would go back to work in a second, I'm telling you. I love it.

NMS: Then you had this whole other track going on. Simultaneously in some cases, in terms of your political activity or, was that afterwards?

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SD: My uncle was mayor. I was always with my dad. He would always put me in the car at 8 o'clock at night. He'd go visit his friend. My mother would say, "Where are you taking her?" "No, no. I'm just going to go get an ice cream." I would hear them talk about politics. It was always stuff like that.

When I was a state employee, there was no union. It was an association. The unions did not come into play until the late 70s for collective bargaining. By then, I was very much...My take home pay, my first year, was \$65 a week. I guess that's political. I was on the Board of Directors of the union, the state union.

Then, when Dominic went to school, I read where they were going to suspend a kid because he was smoking marijuana. I thought, "If his father was smoking marijuana on the job, they would send him to rehab. They wouldn't fire him. That's the kind of thinking we had for adults.

They've got a substance abuse issue. For juveniles, if they did that in school, they were suspended or expelled. It just so happened there was a board and I joined it. It took 2 years to review every policy in the school department and re-write them, modernize them. I was with Bob Melville, who was the editor of the Journal. I've been very lucky to meet some intelligent people and learn from them.

We did that and after that, I wanted to run for Police Commission. There's an article in the paper that someone said, "She can't run, she's a state employee." It was the Hatch Act. I said, "Really? Well, we are going to change that." If I was in Lewiston I could run because when you ran for an office in Lewiston, you didn't have to put a "D" or an "R" next to your name [Note: Democrat or Republican]. In Biddeford, you had to put "D" or "R". So, we had to get rid of the "D" or "R" and then I could run. We did. After, I learned a lot from Chief [note: Roger] Beaupre. It was difficult getting to know him and his style, but I respected him. He is a terrific law enforcement officer. After that, I ran for City Council.

NMS: There's a question that hits me. You articulated having some insight with regards to offenders. What's the real story? What brought them here? What's really going on? What is the real issue? Then you were Police Commissioner, where my perception is the expectation is

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you are really holding people accountable and you're sensitive to those who have been the victims of crimes.

SD: It was the opposite.

NMS: It was the opposite?

SD: With the police, it was the more I learned about police, the more I said, "Lighten up." Some of them took it too...Really think it through. Don't be a robot. I don't mean that about Biddeford PD. Roger is head and shoulders about any law enforcement officer I've worked with. That was more, I put my spin on it. Somethings are very offensive but bottom line, you are not put on this earth to be mean, intentionally mean. It's your job, do it. Do it exactly the way the policy is written. Don't go out arresting people just because you want to. It was just one thing after another.

When I was a senator, every year we would have 12 bills about gun safety and Second Amendment and all that. I always said to a police office, "The moment you reach for your gun is that you've lost the argument." If you can't calm them down. I know I don't want to sound naïve, but I also taught at the Academy [Note: Maine Criminal Justice Academy]. I taught correctional officers at the county jail. I was 17 years on a committee called Maine Criminal Justice Commission. Through three governors, I was one of 3 of the longest serving. What that was in 1990, was to break down the silos. The silos were, I remember seeing a State Police Officer on Main Street in the State Police car and asking the Chief, "What's he doing here?" He goes, "I don't know. They didn't tell us." That was insulting. There was no communication. Maine Correctional Center wasn't talking to Maine State Prison. Everybody had compartmentalized things. This commission was set up by Governor McKernan to just break that down. Start talking to each other. It took 17 years plus. I was glad to be part of that.

The same thing, I remember in criminal justice, on one side of the room were organizations about gun safety and registering guns. The other side was, "Don't touch my Second Amendment." After both of them testified, I looked at them and I go, "You guys are not too far apart, you know. You don't like the bill because of this, and you don't like the bill because of

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this.” And they acknowledged that they are not too far apart. Let’s you know... The last bill, I can’t claim. My name was on it but the Director of the Sportsman’s Alliance. Everybody thinks that they are Second Amendment people. They are good people. The Director said, “I’ve got an idea for a bill.” So, I got a Republican to come in, who is an ex-State Police, ex-Sheriff, very law and order and myself and Sportsman’s Alliance and we wrote a bill. It was called Safe Storage for Guns. Not only guns, but also weapons and medicine. If you buy something to store your gun, you don’t have to pay taxes at Cabela. Right now, the Commissioner of Public Safety is in charge of that. It passed unanimously. There would be grants so if you want to buy a nice big, (gee I feel like I’m doing a commercial) a big rifle storage unit and it’s a \$1000, we’ll have funding grants to deduct maybe a couple of hundred dollars off that. We even got Jared Golden from Washington to put it in a budget to do it nationally. That’s still up in the air. We are working on that. Those are collaboration things. My path is not different. It’s juveniles, its adults. I’ve worked with prisoners. I love my prisoners. I call them my boys. I know if you are a victim of crime, you think I’m crazy. That’s not my job. I’m not a Suzie Social Worker. I’m firm and fair...and fun. That’ the 3 F’s.

NMS: One of the things that comes to mind too, so you’ve done at least a little bit of traveling. You’ve been exposed to...

SD: I feel like I’m 102 years old! (laughter).

NMS: You’ve been exposed to a lot of different things, and you are still...Biddeford. Why have you, what has Biddeford meant to you?

SD: It’s comfortable. It’s a known entity. I’ve grown up with it. I did that with the school department, just to learn. I do things not for myself so much as to learn. It’s the best college there is. Then, I don’t know why I became a City Councilor. My best committee is the Planning Board and I’m back on the Planning Board. I could get a PhD. I’m not terrific at that. I mean I’m just a civilian that wants to see and learn. I always have been on a committee with great people. We feed off each other. We learn. I’m glad I’m back.

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Here it is, I'm all done the Senate December of 2022. I didn't know what to do and I said, "Biddeford Cultural. Maybe I can help them." All I wanted to do was put my name as a volunteer. If you need something. Now I'm on the board. Someone said, "Would you archive Saint Jean Baptiste?" I go, "I want to learn archives." I feel like I'm in senior college, learning more and learning more. I'm very happy about that.

My son has been elected charter revision, he's Chair of Biddeford Housing. I never talk to him about politics like that. I ask his opinion, because we are a generation apart, but he just ate it up the way I ate it up with my father, I guess. He's on his own.

NMS: I don't know if we mentioned his name. I think you mentioned it in passing, what his name is. He lives in Biddeford?

SD: Yes. We live in the mills, in 2 different buildings but side by side. Dominic Joel. He's got a great sense of humor and dedication. He's not overboard. I think that generation is, "Mom. I'm just on this committee and I'll do the best." If it's between that and going kayaking, I think he'll go kayaking that afternoon. Whereas, we would say well, we can go Saturday. We can go kayaking Saturday.

NMS: You've seen Biddeford go through a lot of changes.

SD: Yeah. And I respect that.

NMS: What's your perspective on that?

SD: First, I want to thank every City Council and mayor since 1960. That's how I look at it. What was I, a sophomore? I lost my best friend because her family went to Napa Valley California to make money. Because they had worked in the mills. I still think of her. She was a really good friend. People went down south. Downtown was dark. Things weren't fixed. The stores closed. The Maine Mall opened. We survived. The worst part, of course, is MERC came in [Note: Maine Energy Recovery Co, a controversial waste-to-energy plant]. I don't have any animosity towards the Council at that time. They were under the gun by the State to do something or else you are going to pay. When your downtown is dark, your thinking is dark.

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Maybe that's what Donna Dion [note: Biddeford mayor from 1997-2003] was thinking about when she put in the lights. I remember thinking, "I don't know if she's got guts, or she is crazy. Why are we putting lights when there's no stores." She was right. Because lights started lighting up the place. Someone else put flowers. It just changed. I thank the taxpayers for voting to pay \$6 million dollars to get rid of that stink. Look what's happening now. It's unbelievable. Enjoy it while it lasts. We'll have to plan ahead. The bubble is going to burst somehow. How many people can afford \$2200 a month of rent? You pay that for a year, and you don't own it. We want to own things so we can turn it into an investment. There's a generation they work, and they live well. Nothing against that but I don't know how further it's going to go. I love where I live.

I live by the waterfall, and I never knew there was a waterfall. If you remember when the Pepperell was in operation, everything was boarded up. You were not allowed to go inside unless you worked there. Even if you worked there in Building 17 and your husband was in Building 15, you could not go and say hi to him. Those doors locked. They were like sally ports. It was like a prison, one after another. I was on the Planning Board when they started making apartments. We had to approve those. We had a site walk. The whole Planning Board from City Hall and we went down where I live now. It was boarded up, but I kept hearing this noise. I go, "What that?" The Planning Director said, "That's the waterfall." I said, "You are full of...crap. There's no waterfall." I remember turning and seeing the waterfall. I go, "This is the best kept secret in Biddeford. The view!" That's where you get the feeling the Saco River is alive. The Saco River fed us. The Saco River made Biddeford. You just can't get over it. We never knew it.

We had a tour of the mill, before they fixed it all up, by Pete Lamontagne. Dom and I both went. He brought us to the catacombs or whatever in the basement. You saw the water come in and that's what powered everything. You just can't get over that. So, yeah, why would I want to move to the country right now? It's alive.

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I see the people who really sacrificed. People who contributed with their tax dollars, I know it's hard. I hope you benefit. I hope anyone can sell their house at a great value. So, we are doing apartments because that is what people want. They want amenities.

I know we are going to get hit with what happens with the unhoused and the homeless and stuff like that. Yeah. OK. What are we going to do? You ask me why? Where else would I go?

I never retired. I miss the Senate. I never, never thought I'd be in the Senate. It just so happened. It's like the stars were all aligned. I just replaced someone who resigned, that's all. I was a good cheerleader for Biddeford in the Senate. They always said, "What the heck is going on?" (laughter) It was fun.

I have such an appreciation, I always did, of the whole state. The people who are very religious. There's a lot of people, we are more than just York County. There's Piscataquis County, Washington County, Aroostook County. Once you meet them, you understand why they think. I hope they understand why we think the way we do and yes, all the money is down here.

NMS: You've been presented with a number of awards throughout your career. Is there one in particular that comes to mind that's really meaningful for you?

SD: I like my Sportsman of the Year Award (laughter) The Presidential Award, that was cool. I don't think they ever gave it to a female or a Democrat. So, that was funny.

The one that shocked me the most is people know how Speaker John Martin from the Allagash, Eagle Lake (he was the Speaker for many years and of French heritage) started the Franco-American Day. It's held every two years in the State House. There's a committee. I was on the committee. They asked me to be on the committee for two years or so. It's beautiful. You ask legislators, "Who in your community could benefit?" We'd look and pick maybe 6 names. They are in the Maine Franco-American Hall of Fame. A very good nurse or benefactor or someone. They are just great stories. It was my last year, and I was on the committee. It was during COVID, so a lot of things were on ZOOM. They wanted to give one to Mr. Beaudry. His family recommended that I give it because I knew them and I knew Mr. Beaudry, who had

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passed by then. I was honored to do that. I wrote a speech. It's all pomp and circumstance. It's a big thing. At this time, because of COVID, it was held in the House. There weren't any meetings going on. It was well attended, but not as big as it used to be. The Governor came down. The President of the Senate and Ryan Fecteau was the Speaker. They all tried to speak French. The Governor speaks French well. I went by myself. My best friend, Pat Boston, called me and said, "I want to go because I know Mr. Beaudry and it's nice that you are doing that." Right before it started, I looked and I saw my nephew, my sister-in-law and my brother. The first thing I thought of was, "Isn't that nice. They are here because I'm giving an award to Mr. Beaudry's family." Then I was going to sit where everybody else was sitting. They said, "No. You sit up front." I go, "No, no. That's for the awardees." They said, "You are getting an award." That was how I found out. I'm on the freaking committee (laughter) and I was getting an award for the Franco-American Hall of Fame. Jeepers!

I think it's because the year before or the time before President Thibodeau, who has a French name and says he's French, he doesn't even know how to say "Oui". He is from Winterport. He had me do the whole meeting in French. Standing at the podium where the Senate President is. I did it. I survived it. A lot of it was written for me but I was able to do it. I honored all of the guests. From that, I think Ryan had a lot to do with it. That was nice but I never thought of it. In my life everything I've gotten; it's not even been a dream. So, yeah, I've got that.

I started attending the veterans' program on Elm Street. They have great lunches on Saturday. That's when I was running for the Senate, to meet the veterans and get to know their stories. You know, I'm a storyteller. I like to hear that. Conrad Letellier, who was President then and Membership Officer asked me about Vietnam. He served. He's got 2 Purple Hearts. I said, "I didn't really protest Vietnam. It was a tumultuous time in the 60s. Kent State happened. That's when I completely lost it. I was really angry. I wanted us to get out of the war. Even though you are 21-22, you don't know the political decision making. You just react." He said, "Well, why don't you become a member?" I said, "Of what?" He said, "the Organization of Associates of the Vietnam War." I go, "There is such a thing?" So, I've got this big thing, Honorary member. It cost me money. But I said, "It's a donation to the Vietnam Vets." I just got in the mail an

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invitation to attend their annual meeting. I don't know, anybody who is a member. I said, "Oh my God. This is a real thing." But that's cool. That's cool. I did that for the right reason anyways. That's part of the community.

NMS: I've asked you a lot of questions. Was there anything in particular that you had definitely planned on sharing that maybe hasn't come up because I didn't prompt it with the right question?

SD: No. I mean, when I die and go to Heaven, I'm going to tell God, "Geez, thanks." It was a good ride. That's about right.

Frankly, I go back, don't underestimate an 8-10-12 year old. That changed my life completely. Reading that book all by myself. If your son wants to be a chef, then let him go and you'll know if that's what they want to do. Or, if your daughter be a welder or what have you. I think I've raised my son that way.

My mother did. There was a time in high school when I was very discouraged. Something happened. I came home. I think it was my senior year. I said I was going to quit school. I loved my mother's response. "Ok." She knew damn well I wasn't going to quit school. But with my mother, the rope was never tight. It was always loose. I have thought of raising my child like that. I'm firm, the rope is there but it's loose. Don't make me tighten it. I think I treated prisoners like that. You can't call them prisoners. Call them offenders, I don't know. I really think I was lucky to have met even convicted murderers and sex offenders. I impart something, there is respect there. Like I said, they are not there for punishment, it's as punishment. They're already being punished. Just follow the rules and smile. Always smile.

NMS: Ok. Thank you so much for taking the time to share. There are a million other questions I would have loved to ask but I think that this gives some very interesting insights into some aspects of Biddeford and some of your experiences that we were not aware of. So, thank you for taking the time to share your story.

SD: Thank you.

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