

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SALLY STENTON

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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and

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HIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an oral history interview with Lieutenant Colonel Sally Stenton, on March 30, 2021. I am Shaun Illingworth, and I am in Hightstown, New Jersey. I am joined by Maria. Can you say your name and where you are located today?

Maria Marin: Yes, my name is Maria Marin, and I am in my house in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

SI: Lieutenant Colonel Stenton, where are you today?

Sally Stenton: I'm in Winslow Township, New Jersey, in my house.

SI: Great. Thank you for joining us. To begin, can you tell us where and when you were born?

SS: I was born November 21, 1959, at Cooper Hospital, in Camden, New Jersey.

SI: Now, for the record, what were your parents' names?

SS: My mom was Dolores Stenton, Dolores--her maiden name was Katz--Stenton, and my father was George Stenton.

SI: Beginning with your mother's side of the family, can you tell us a little bit about her family background and anything you know about the family history?

SS: Yes, my grandparents were--I don't think they were first generation--but my grandmother, Elsie Parker Katz, [was] Irish. My grandfather, William Katz, was a German Jew. I know that he fought in World War I. He's actually buried in Beverly National Cemetery, which is where, actually, several members of my family are buried because they're veterans. My mom grew up in Audubon; that's where they settled. My grandfather, when I say he put sound in movie theaters, he worked in movie theaters and ran the sound. My grandmother was the typical woman of that era. She was born in the 1890s, as was my grandfather, and she was a housewife. My grandmother and grandfather had four children. My mom was the oldest, and she had two sisters, Alma and Peggy, and then one brother, Dewey. [Editor's Note: Beverly National Cemetery is a cemetery operated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in Beverly, Burlington County, New Jersey. Audubon is a borough in Camden County, New Jersey.]

SI: Now, what about your father's side of the family?

SS: My father, his mother, who I'm actually named after, her name was Sarah. My real name is Sarajane, one word, and my nickname is Sally. I never knew my biological grandfather. They were from Camden. My understanding is that my biological grandfather, when my father was about seventeen, he actually committed suicide. He, I believe, jumped off the Ben Franklin Bridge. My grandmother remarried, and the only grandfather I knew was her husband, Bill Heward. My father had one sister, Mary, who was, I think, two years older than him.

SI: Are you aware, on either side of the family, of what drew them to the Camden area in South Jersey?

SS: Like I said, my mom was raised in Audubon. My grandfather that I knew on my dad's side was a barber, and he owned a barbershop in Camden that was attached to their house. At the time, in the '30s, '40s, '50s, Camden was a very prosperous area, very well to do. I don't think it was until probably the late '50s, early '60s that Camden went downhill.

SI: Maria, just jump in whenever you feel comfortable. Do you have any questions so far?

MM: Yes. Speaking about your childhood and where you were raised, how would you describe your childhood? What is a memory that you are most fond of?

SS: [laughter] Well, I am the youngest of seven children. My parents married, I think, in 1950. I always say I come from the typical dysfunctional American family. Although my parents were married twenty-five years, it was not a happy marriage for like twenty-four of it.

You asked me about a happy childhood memory, and I will give you some happy childhood memories. I grew up in Cherry Hill, in Woodcrest, and we belonged to the Woodcrest pool. We all swam on the swim team. We're right around the corner from Easter today. I mean, we just had Palm Sunday. Every year at Easter, for our Easter break, we would drive to West Palm Beach, Florida, where we had family friends. We'd spend the week there, and that was always a really good time and a good memory.

My childhood was very fraught. Both my parents were World War II veterans. My father was a Seabee, and my mom was a WAAC, which stands for Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, and she was still in when it became the Women's Army Corps. So, she was an Army veteran, and he was a Navy veteran. When I say my family was dysfunctional, my father was a wife beater and a child beater, and I probably got the least of it, being the youngest. My oldest sister is actually my half-sister, although I never think of her that way. She was my mom's child from another man, although my father adopted her when they got married. My father, I don't really know much about his war experiences. I believe he was in the Pacific. He was an alcoholic. I had a brother, my brother George; when I was five, George was twelve, and he passed away from leukemia. It was obviously a very difficult time on my family and my parents. That was February 16, 1965. Then, on February 18, 1967, which was two years to the day from George's viewing, my brother James was hit by a car on Berlin Road, which is the road I grew up on. He was critically injured. He was in the hospital for two months. He was ten years old. He was in a coma for a week, and the first twenty-four hours, they didn't know if he was going to live or not. So, these were very traumatic events in my family. My father stopped drinking after James was hit, but he was, I guess, what you'd call a dry drunk, and it did not stop his abusive behavior, unfortunately. I guess my parents got divorced, or my father left the house per the judge's order, when I was in high school. Things got much better after that. [Editor's Note: A Seabee is a member of a U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (CB).]

MM: I was actually reading through your biography, and I saw how you got right into criminal justice when you got into undergrad. During high school or during middle school, what were some of your hobbies or activities?

SS: Well, we were always involved in swimming, my whole family. I did hockey and track, and I was always, I would say, a very mediocre athlete. [laughter] Some of my siblings were better athletes than I was, but we always participated in sports. I did drama. I was in a couple plays in middle school and high school. I always said if I could sing and dance, I'd be an actress, but since I can't, I'm a lawyer because there's a lot of drama and acting in the courtroom. I grew up in a real neighborhood. I mean, I'm friends with the people that I grew up with, to this day, a lot of them. Three of my best friends I've been friends with since high school. Like I said, just always very involved in school activities.

SI: Could you describe what your street and the neighborhood were like?

SS: Like I said, I grew up in Cherry Hill, in the subdivision called Woodcrest, and I grew up on Berlin Road. It started out as two lanes, and it's now a four-lane highway. It's Route 561. So, it's very busy, very heavily traveled. When my parents moved in, it was called Delaware Township, and it became Cherry Hill. Of course, this was before I was born. It was a neighborhood. I started out in Holy Rosary, and I went to Holy Rosary--I went to kindergarten at Woodcrest--and I went to Holy Rosary Catholic School first through fourth grade, and then transferred to Woodcrest Elementary School, fifth and sixth grade. I actually still have friends from elementary school. Then, I went to Heritage Junior High, and then I went to Cherry Hill High School East for high school. I played with the neighborhood kids. This was well before the internet and computers and cell phones. We would play handball. We would play dark hide-and-go-seek. It was a really very different time. When I was in kindergarten, I was walking to school by myself, and it was a half a mile away and you had the crossing guards. In fifth and sixth grade, my mom was a school bus driver. So, I would come home for lunch. The neighborhood kids, we all went to the same schools, we swam on the same swim teams, we participated in the same sports, over each other's house all the time. There was no such thing as a playdate. [laughter] You just went over and knocked on the door and hung out and played with each other.

SI: You mentioned you went to a Catholic school. Did church or faith generally play a role in your life growing up?

SS: Church on Sundays, and when I was in Catholic school, we'd go to church during the week. Yes, I had Holy Communion and Confirmation. My older sister, Terri, went to Catholic school through high school, and then some of my older siblings went through eighth grade. My sister, Trish, and I, like I said, only went partly through elementary school, and I think that was more a financial reason. My mom was actually raised Protestant, and my parents always told the story of how they had to get married in a rectory because my mom wasn't Catholic. So, they couldn't be married in the church, and my mom had to sign the form that said she would raise her children Catholic. She eventually converted to Catholicism, and so we all went to church on Sundays.

So, it played some part in my life. I'm a non-practicing Catholic right now, because I don't believe in a lot of the--although I really like Pope Francis. I am very much a pro-choice advocate, and I'm very much a feminist. So, there's things about the Catholic Church that I'm not in line with.

SI: Tell us a little bit more about those early schooling years. What did you enjoy the most? Did you think you had good teachers, that sort of thing?

SS: Yes, I loved school, and I did really well in school. I was a very good student. In high school, I was National Honor Society. Yes, Cherry Hill was a very good school system in the public schools, and I think I had very good teachers, for the most part. I think I really excelled in school because my home life wasn't good. I wanted to be at school as much as possible, and that's why I was always involved in afterschool activities. School was a safe place for me. I had some teachers that really stood out and some classes that really stood out.

I knew from probably early on--like I said, I'm a feminist, and I just remember my career choices, I worked in law enforcement, and then I had a full career in the military. I remember holidays, when you'd have a lot of the family over, whether it was Thanksgiving or Easter or Christmas, the boys were always out watching the football games or TV or doing something, and the girls were always in the kitchen cooking or doing the dishes. I always thought, "Man, what the boys got to do was a lot more fun than what the girls got to do." I think that really had an impact. It seemed like there was law enforcement in the men in my family and nurses in the females in my family, or homemakers. I think that's why I was drawn to law enforcement and male-dominated professions.

With my mom, she started driving the school bus after my brother George passed away. She didn't start out as a feminist, but as time went on and things with my father got bad and she needed her own source of income to take care of us kids, she became very much a feminist. I think that even comes prior to that, when she served in the military. I think my mom probably was always a closet feminist. She was born in 1919. She was born before suffrage, and she took very [seriously] a woman's right to vote, everyone's right to vote. She didn't care if it was an election for dogcatcher, she always voted, and she always made sure that all of her children voted. She was very active in the Democratic Party in our county. It wasn't whether you were Democrat or Republican, but you voted. All the time while I was in the military--no matter where I was stationed--she'd always say, "Do you have your absentee ballot?" [laughter] Oh, yes, I have never not voted. My mom was raised that the man is the king of the castle, and you are there to serve him. When my parents got married and they started having children--well, she already had my sister--they started having children, they were married in, I think, June of '50 or '51, and my brother George was born in June of '52, regardless of what happened with my father, she used to think it was her fault and that she could change it. So, there was a lot of years in there that she just kept trying to make things better, but we know now a lot more about domestic violence and domestic abuse and it's not the victim's fault. As she got older and we kids got older, her feminist side came more out of the closet. She inspired me in many, many ways.

SI: I am curious, when you were growing up, would she tell you a lot of stories about her time in the Army or talk about it at all?

SS: Yes, yes, yes. Recently, friends of mine are members of the DAR, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and March is Women's History Month, and they gave her [my mother] an award and I got it in her honor because my mom has passed away. The thing she was most proud of in her life--and she is proud of all her children--was her time in the service. She made lifelong friends in the service. In fact, my sister, Terri--her name is Terrell, and she's named after my mom's sergeant, who helped my mom out when she was nearing the end of her time in the service, and her name was Betty Terrell. She said whether she had a boy or girl, she was going to name the baby Terrell after her, and Betty Terrell was my sister's godmother. I remember--I'm so sorry about my cat. [laughter]

SI: That is okay. [Editor's Note: Sally Stenton's cat is meowing in the background.]

SS: She had friends from the local area. I remember as a kid we would go to visit her girlfriends that had been in the service with her, and they always called each other by their last names. My mom's last name when she was in the service was Katz, so she was Katzie, and her friend's name, her last name was Good, and she was Goodie. This is my mom's shadowbox. This is not my shadowbox. I know you can't really see it, but there was pictures of my mom in there in her uniform, which I still have, and my mom could actually fit into her uniform. My mom ... [Editor's Note: Sally Stenton begins to cry.]

SI: Take your time. Do you want to pause?

SS: My mom died at ninety-two, and she could fit into her uniform until the day she died. She loved her time in the service, and she was very, very proud of her time in the military. She was actually part of a top-secret experiment. Women in World War II were not allowed [to] not only obviously not serve in combat, but they weren't allowed to carry any weapons or anything. My mom was stationed at Fort Myer in Washington, D.C., which is by Arlington National Cemetery. They were worried about an attack on the home front, and they had women timing the anti-aircraft guns. I'm not telling it very well, but the women in this experiment--and my mom was part of it--her unit far exceeded the men in this. It went up through General Marshall and General Eisenhower, and they wanted the women to do this. They wanted to bring more women in. It went through Congress, and Congress turned it down because they just thought the public would not be able to deal with women in the military doing this kind of job. There's actually been a couple of books written on it, which reminds me, I have to find the book for the DAR. My mom used to talk about how it was so hot in the summer that they used to go out to Arlington and sit by the tombstones, because they were so cool, and eat their lunch. Yes, she said it was the proudest thing she ever did in her life was serving her country. I know, for me, she was proud of all of her children, but for me joining the military and making it a career, she was so proud of me for that. [Editor's Note: George C. Marshall was a general and Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1939 to 1945. Dwight D. Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe during World War II.]

MM: I know that you had aunts and uncles and cousins and nephews in the Army.

SS: Well, in the military, yes.

MM: Yes, in the military.

SS: Yes.

MM: I know that Terrell was fifteen years in difference to your age.

SS: Yes, Terri, my sister Terri, is the oldest, and I'm the youngest.

MM: Okay. Nobody else out of all your siblings joined the military.

SS: Correct, correct. In World War II, pretty much everybody was in. My mom was in. My Uncle Dewey, her brother, served. My Aunt Peggy, who turned ninety-seven in December--she's the only one of that generation that's still alive--she was a WAVE, so she was in the Navy. All the men served. My Aunt Alma's husband, my Uncle Bill, was a Navy fighter pilot. My Uncle Dick, my Aunt Peggy's husband--she's a widow--was in the Army. My father was in the Navy. So, that generation, the Greatest Generation, all the men served if they could. My cousin Paul, my Aunt Peggy's son, served in Vietnam. My cousin Rick, who is also my Aunt Peggy's son, he and I actually served together a couple times. He's retired Air Force. My cousin Brad, who is my Aunt Peggy's grandson, served in the Army, and he and I actually were in Afghanistan at the same time. We got to see each other once. My nephew Christopher was in the Navy. My Aunt Peggy's family did a lot in the military. I'm the Stentons; that's the Shores. The Talaricos and the Parkers didn't actually have anybody else who served, so the Stentons and the Shores. [Editor's Note: Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES, was the women's branch of the U.S. Navy during World War II.]

MM: Why do you think you were the only one out of all your siblings who decided to join?

SS: My sister Trisha had wanted to go into the military. She wanted to be a nurse in the military, but then she ended up getting married while she was in nursing school. My brothers--well, my one brother passed away, and then my brothers John and James actually had draft numbers for Vietnam. My mother was very, very opposed to the Vietnam War, and luckily, both my brothers had very high draft numbers. Maria, you're very young, and, Shaun, you're young as well. [laughter] Well, I'm sure you're both younger than I am. [laughter] I was actually young during the Vietnam War. I don't know if you understand or know how draft numbers work. Shaun, do you know how they work?

SI: Yes, it was a lottery, and it depended on your birthday.

SS: Right. Maria, do you know how they work?

MM: Based on lotteries, yes.

SS: Yes. How it works is, if you're born in 1955--there are 365 draft numbers, one for every day of the year, and if your lottery number is number one for 1955, you're going. If your lottery number is 360 and they only go through 250 for 1955, then 1956 starts over. If you're lucky enough that your draft number in 1955 is number 360, you're not going. They don't go through all the draft numbers every year. So, if you're born in 1955 and you got draft number 365, good on you, and then, you're born in 1956, and your draft number two, you're going. So, they don't go through all the draft numbers every year. [Editor's Note: The first Vietnam draft lottery took place on December 1, 1969. The U.S. Selective Service held the lottery to select birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970 during the Vietnam War.]

My brothers both got high draft numbers, and they didn't get drafted. My mom didn't want them to join because she didn't want them going to Vietnam. Even if they had gotten low draft numbers, my brother John went to college, so you're exempt until you finish college or you fail out, which he didn't. Like I said, James had a high draft number, even though he didn't go to college. By the time they were done with college, Vietnam was such a terrible experience, neither of them had any desire. John went into law enforcement, and James ended up in the produce business. So, that's why I think no one else [joined].

Then, when I was in college, I had a professor, a criminal justice professor, who was in the National Guard. I'd always thought a little bit about it, and I thought, "Well, that's sort of the best of both worlds. You're not active duty, but you still get the military experience." He got me involved, so I joined the Army National Guard. I went through active-duty basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and then I did four years of Army National Guard as an MP [military police]. Well, I started as an MP, and then I went through Officer Candidate School and then I got commissioned as a second lieutenant. Then, I started going to law school at night, so I got out of the Guard. But while I was in the Guard--and this is a true story and I've told it about a million times--while I was in the Guard, I got to see how the Air Force lived and ate, which was better than any other branch of the service. [laughter] So, when I got out, when I was in law school and I was interviewing, I decided to interview with the military due to something that we can get to that happened while I was working for the prosecutor's office, and I thought, "Well, plan B, I'll go into the JAG Corps," but I only interviewed with the Air Force. By that time, I'm like, "Well, I know I like the military." Can you hold on for one second? I'm so sorry. [Editor's Note: The Judge Advocate General's Corps, or JAG Corps, is the military justice branch or specialty of each branch of the U.S. military.]

[TAPE PAUSED]

SS: Okay.



SI: We are back on. We have been talking about your early education, in addition to your family's military heritage.

SS: Right.

SI: You would have been coming of age just as we were getting out of Vietnam and transitioning to a volunteer Army.

SS: Right. Yes, we got out of Vietnam in 1975. That's the date they use. I think it's May 1, 1975, is the cutoff date, and I would have been fifteen. [Editor's Note: The last U.S. military unit withdrew from South Vietnam in 1973. On May 1, 1975, Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, fell to North Vietnamese forces.]

SI: By the time you started thinking about going into the military yourself with the National Guard, was there still these negative associations?

SS: It wasn't as bad as it had been. I think people were coming around to the fact that the soldiers, the service members, were doing their duty that they were required to do. Now, of course, there were the My Lai massacre and a lot of issues with service members that had raped and pillaged and committed atrocities, but I think they were getting past the point where they were blaming everybody for that. I think there were movies coming out then like *Deer Hunter*, *Born on the Fourth of July* was later than that, but showing the troops' side of the Vietnam War and how horrible it was. I think the country wanted to move on from that really painful time getting past, "This is the first war we ever lost." [Editor's Note: The My Lai Massacre refers to the massacre of unarmed Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers under the command of Lieutenant William Calley in the hamlet of My Lai on March 16, 1968.]

SI: You did your undergraduate education at West Chester State College. Why did you decide to go to West Chester?

SS: I wanted to major in criminal justice, and I literally only applied to one college, West Chester State in Pennsylvania. Well, it's West Chester University now. It had a good reputation for criminal justice. [Editor's Note: Sally Stenton's cat is meowing.] I start talking, and it's like she needs to be the center of attention. There wasn't a college in New Jersey--I can't think of--at the time that had that program that I wanted. Glassboro maybe, but my brother had gone there and my sister had gone there and I just didn't think it had what I wanted. At the time my sister went there, it was Glassboro State Teachers College. I wanted to go away. I didn't want to be too far away, but I didn't want to be a commuter. I really, like I said, only applied to one college because it was all that I could afford. My parents were divorced by that time. I was the only one at home. It was my mom and I, because my sister was in nursing school. It was going to be really tough. I was going to have to take out student loans. In fact, the first two years, I got what was called BEOG, Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, because we were so poor. [laughter] One of my best friends was also going to West Chester. In fact, I'm going to spend Easter with her and her family. She was going to West Chester, so we were going to be roommates. That's

how I ended up at West Chester, which I loved. I always say it was four of the fastest, funnest years of my life. [laughter] If I had college to do over again, I'd be like a lot of kids today and make it a five or six or seven-year program. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Glassboro State College is now called Rowan University.]

SI: Well, tell us a little bit about what it was like in the late '70s, early '80s there, both in your classes in criminal justice and also maybe a little about if you were involved in student life, that sort of thing?

SS: I started it in the fall of '78. I graduated in the spring of '82. It was funny because, at the time, the drinking age was eighteen in most states, and when I was a senior in high school in New Jersey, I was cocktail waitressing. I turned eighteen in November of my senior year. But Pennsylvania was one of the few states, maybe the only state, that never changed its drinking age. It was always twenty-one. So, it was quite a change going to a school where I couldn't [drink], well, unless I borrowed somebody's ID, which I did on many an occasion. I did really well academically there too. I loved it. It was a fun school. It was a commuter school. There was a lot of us that lived in the dorm, but a lot of the student body went home on Thursday nights, and those of us that didn't, Thursday night was a big party night, Friday night, Saturday night. [laughter] I make it sound like my whole college career was partying.

I carried the typical course load. I took my required classes. I lived in the dorm freshman year. My friend, Kathy, was my roommate. Big football fans, we'd go to football games. Just had college friends. I don't think Kathy and I had any classes together. My sophomore and junior years, I was a resident assistant. Well, my freshman year, because I was on a grant, I had a work-study. So, I worked in the library, and I also worked in the cafeteria. Then, my sophomore and junior year, I was a resident assistant. I had my own room and ran my floor, and that was great. That was great. I had a couple different boyfriends in college.

Second semester, junior year, I did an exchange program to Boise State in Idaho. A lot of kids do exchange programs to Europe, but we had an exchange program in the United States and I went out to Boise State, which was beautiful. It's really beautiful. I was going to go back for my first semester senior year because I was dating a guy, and that fell apart over the summer. So, I just had a room in somebody's house for a semester, and then my last semester, senior year, I lived in a house with Kathy and a couple other girls.

For, I think, sophomore, junior, and senior year, I was the manager for the football team. A friend of mine from elementary school--her name was Karen Kancher--she and I were the managers, and I got that job--oddly enough, my Uncle Bill was a big football player in college. Actually, he had been recruited by the Buffalo Bills, and then World War II broke out. After the war, he and his partner invented the football sled. You know that piece of equipment? He was always very, very close friends with Joe Paterno and Ara Parseghian. The guy that was the football coach at West Chester at the time--I just had his name. I can't think of it; it'll come to me. I had been a trainer, in high school, for football, soccer, basketball, for the boy's teams. I told you I was always a feminist. [laughter] Always going where the girls weren't supposed to

go. You know what? Come to think of it, that was another reason I went to West Chester. I wanted to be a trainer, and I was going to double major. West Chester had a really good program for trainers, and that never ended up panning out. So, I talked to my uncle and he talked to the football coach at West Chester, and I got to be the manager of the team. So, that was a lot of fun. I got to go to all the football games and be out on the field. [Editor's Note: Joe Paterno served as the head coach of the Penn State Football Team from 1966 until 2011. Ara Raoul Parseghian was head coach of the Notre Dame Football Team from 1964 to 1974. Otto Kneidinger served as the head football coach at West Chester University from 1979 to 1983.] [Note added by Sally Stenton: Joe Paterno did not cover up sexual abuse by Jerry Sandusky! He did exactly what he was supposed to do and reported to his superiors the allegation. It was his superiors who did the covering up!]

Ironically enough, fast forward many years--well, our quarterback, the last two years, was a guy named Mike Horrocks. Mike Horrocks, when I was a junior, he was a freshman, and when I was a senior, he was a sophomore. So, he was the backup quarterback. Then, he graduated, and he was a Marine for ten years. I lost track of him. You know, I still keep in touch with some of them. Then, fast forward to 9/11, and Mike Horrocks was the co-pilot on the second plane into the towers. Then, fast forward to September 11, 2010 and I was in Afghanistan. There're only two statues in all of West Chester University. One is the Golden Ram, which is our mascot, and the other is Mike Horrocks. That year, September 11, 2010, they were dedicating his football statue down at the football field. I was over in Afghanistan, and a good friend of both Mike and mine, Rich, had told me about this whole thing they were doing. They had t-shirts made up. I had Rich send a bunch over, and we flew a flight for Mike. I flew a flag on this flight on September 11, and we're, bizarrely, eight-and-a-half hours ahead in Afghanistan. So, we flew the flight from Kabul to Shindand, and the whole crew wore the t-shirts. I wore the t-shirt, we flew the flag, and took all these pictures, held the flag out, and due to the internet, I was able to send all these pictures back to Rich, so they would have them before the game to show. There's a long story about what happened in Afghanistan on April 27, 2011, nine of my friends and fellow advisors were massacred on that day, but there's a direct line from September 11, 2001 to April 27, 2011. [Editor's Note: Michael Horrocks was the first officer (co-pilot) of United Airlines Flight 175, which, after being hijacked by five terrorists on September 11, 2001, struck Tower 2 of the World Trade Center at 9:03 AM. On April 27, 2011, Col. Ahmed Gul, an Afghan air force officer, entered the Afghan Command and Control Center (ACCC) in the Afghanistan air force headquarters, North Kabul International Airport, and shot and killed eight U.S. Air Force Airmen and one civilian contractor. Ahmed Gul died of wounds sustained in the incident.]

Anyway, getting back to happier times. In college, I had great criminal justice classes. In fact, that's how I ended up [in the National Guard]. One of my criminal justice classes, Bob Holhouser was my professor, and my best friend in college--her name was Sally, and we're still friends to this day--she was a criminal justice major as well. We had Bob together, and that's how I ended up going into the National Guard because he was in the National Guard. He was a major in the Pennsylvania National Guard, and I had him for a few classes. After I graduated, I was in touch with him, and he helped me join the Guard. West Chester, I thought it was a very

good school. I thought it really prepared me well. Besides football, [I'm] trying to think what else I participated in.

SI: Do any stories stand out or memories of what you would do as the team manager, or if you went with the team anywhere, that sort of thing?

SS: Well, it's funny because I remember going to Millersville because Sally, my friend, that's where she met her husband Phil. He went to Millersville. I remember Three Mile Island. I don't know if you're familiar with Three Mile Island; it's history, Maria. They were afraid it was going to explode--and that's near Millersville--and they shut that college down for like a week, and I remember Phil came and stayed. [Editor's Note: Millersville University is a public university in Millersville, Pennsylvania. On March 28, 1979, a partial meltdown of Reactor 2 occurred at Three Mile Island Nuclear Generating Station in Londonderry Township, Pennsylvania.]

The games were great. I just remember all the home games. We'd go, we'd be on the sidelines and the parties afterwards, always having to borrow somebody's ID and sneak in to--we had what was called the Rat, the Rathskeller, which was our on-campus bar. Always having crushes on the players. It's funny, I just came back from Florida, and I was in Fort Lauderdale. When I was in college, that was where you went for spring break, and I remember going my freshman year with my friend Sally and our friend Linda. My Aunt Peggy and Uncle Dick lived in Orlando at the time, and my cousin, Rick, who I served with, actually worked at Disney World [at] the time. We went to Disney for a few days, and then we went to Fort Lauderdale for a few days. So, I went there my freshman year and my senior year. Man, from what I remember, they were really fun times. Then, in my senior year, when I was the manager, I started dating a guy who had graduated from there, but he worked for the local newspaper. I would always give him some inside scoops on the team. We're talking a long time ago. [laughter] I do have what they call a mild TBI [traumatic brain injury] from my time in the military, which does affect my memory. College was great. It was a lot of fun. I came home at Thanksgiving, I came home at Christmas, and then I came home for the summer because for spring breaks I always went away. So, I really didn't come home a lot.

SI: As you got further in your major, did you do any outside work related to law enforcement?

SS: I did an internship with ATF. I guess it was the summer between my junior and senior year. They had an office at Lindenwold maybe, because I remember I used to take the high-speed line to it, and that was interesting. I got to work with those guys, which definitely made me want to continue in law enforcement, and I got to see my first and only autopsy. They took me down to Atlantic City. A guy had shot himself in the head with a .22, so the bullet didn't even come out the other side. It was very, very interesting. We did some stuff down at the casinos, went on some undercover gun buys. It was really interesting. I mean, I learned the paperwork. They didn't have me running around getting them coffee or anything like that. I learned from them. I learned from them, and that was really interesting, learning about ATF. It was an unpaid internship. The guy I worked with the most was a guy named Tom Krolicki, who several years

ago--probably back in the '90s--he passed away from I forget what kind of cancer. [Editor's Note: ATF is the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.]

An odd story, I forget the guy's name, but this guy drank coffee and smoked unfiltered Camels all day long, from the minute we got in the office to the minute we left. That's when you still smoked in the office, in the car, everywhere. [laughter] One weekend, I was going to visit a friend that I had met when I had done my exchange to Boise State. She went to Towson. So, I was going down to Ocean City, Maryland, and he was going to give me a ride, he and his girlfriend. It's a several-hour drive. So, [we] went down Friday after work and came back Sunday evening, and he didn't have one cigarette or one cup of coffee. I think his name was Danny. I never said a word because I thought, "Maybe his girlfriend doesn't know." I ask him on Monday, I said, "I can't believe you didn't have one cigarette or one cup of coffee the three hours down and the three hours back." He said, "I don't smoke or drink coffee on the weekends," and I'm like, "Why?" He said, "Because I'm not stressed on the weekends." [laughter] It was a great internship, and like I said, those guys really treated me wonderfully. There weren't any women in the office, but I remember they treated me really wonderfully. They really taught me a lot, and they did not treat me like I was there to be their secretary.

SI: Maria, do you have questions about this period, college or early career?

MM: Yes. You graduated in '82 from undergrad, and then it took you a couple of years to go to graduate school.

SS: Yes.

MM: What did you do in between that?

SS: I worked in law enforcement. I was a plain-clothes investigator for the Camden County Prosecutor's Office. I graduated in May of '82, and I started working there in October of '82. I started in what's called the case prep unit, burglaries, robberies, bad checks, simple assaults, and those are all the cases that go before the grand jury. So, local police departments will arrest somebody, and you go out and follow up the investigation, interview witnesses, bring them in, maybe do a photo lineup or whatever, and then you write up the cases, and you take those cases to the grand jury. I did that for probably like two years. Then, I went and worked undercover narcotics for a couple years. In the interim, I worked with organized crime here and there, when they needed a female to pose as an escort/hooker. Then, my last couple years was in child abuse and sex crimes.

I loved being in law enforcement, but that is a very male-dominated job. There was--and this was in the '80s--a great amount of sexism, sexual harassment, sexual discrimination. I was a very, very good cop, and I ended up getting fired. I ended up suing for sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. I started there in '82, and I started law school at night in '86. I got fired in '87, and I was actually in the Air Force by the time my lawsuit settled. So, it was a very interesting number of years, but I did, I loved law enforcement.

SI: I do not know if you can talk about it at all, but do you want to share anything about the case?

SS: I can share about it. I can share the amount of money I got because that's public record. I ended up suing the prosecutor's office, specifically Sam Asbell, who was the prosecutor at the time, and Dennis Wixted. He was the first assistant. I sued Dennis for sexual harassment and I sued Sam for sexual discrimination, and they settled for fifty thousand dollars. Well, I settled for fifty thousand dollars, and I really did settle, to be honest with you. Like I said, by that time, I was done with law school, I was in the Air Force, and I wanted to put it behind me.

My five years there, like I said, I loved it, and I was very good at my job. It was very dangerous at times, especially working undercover narcotics. There was a time that they sent me into--we had an informant who, his cellmate, I got introduced through his wife, and I went there pretending to be his girlfriend for several months. That led to a really big bust, but it was very dangerous. That was a very dangerous part of my job, and when things went bad--I mean, you have to depend on these people for your life, especially when you're working undercover. I worked with some really, really good people, and I worked with some people who were not good. I faced discrimination and harassment inside my office more than outside of it. It was ugly. It was in the newspapers, and I was far from the only woman that this was happening to. I mean, when I was there, we had sergeants, lieutenants, and captains, we had the investigators, and then we had the prosecutors, and there was no woman of rank among the investigators. [Editor's Note: Sam Asbell resigned as Camden County prosecutor in 1990, after fabricating a story that he was involved in a shootout with drug dealers in the City of Camden. He had served as the Camden County prosecutor since 1984. Dennis Wixted worked at the Camden County Prosecutor's Office as an assistant prosecutor for over sixteen years as the head of the Organized Crime Unit and Homicide Unit and as First Assistant Prosecutor.]

It started from the day I got hired, which I didn't know. I got hired, and I had a college degree in criminal justice and no law enforcement background, and I got hired at thirteen thousand dollars. Six months later, a guy got hired--a degree in criminal justice, from an equivalent school, and no background in law enforcement--he got hired at fourteen thousand dollars. The only reason we knew this was because it was an election year, and all these are public salaries. They put out everybody's salary. We all worked in case prep, and there were two women that had been working there a year. So, all our salaries are out there. No, I'm sorry, he and I started working within a week of each other. These women had been there six months longer. So, I got hired at thirteen thousand; he got hired at fourteen thousand. They had gotten a raise, because now we had all been there a year, and they had been there eighteen months. I was making thirteen thousand, he was making fourteen thousand, and they were making thirteen-five. When that came out, I remember asking for a raise, and I'm like, "How is it that he is making a thousand dollars more and we're the exact same unit, exact same experience, exact same degree?" They said, "Well, he's a better negotiator than you are." [laughter] That was just the start. That was just the start, but yes. Our raises were percentage based, so the more you made, the more your raise would be.

As interesting and exciting and scary as narcotics was, undercover narcotics, I loved child abuse and sex crimes, because there was no better feeling than helping a child and getting a child out of danger. We had six full-time investigators in child abuse and sex crimes. So, that was a really, really rewarding time working there.

When I graduated college and went into law enforcement, I knew even then that I probably wanted to go on and be a lawyer. My plan was to go at night and come back and be a prosecutor, and then I ended up getting fired. When I say when I was interviewing in law school that I interviewed with the Air Force and that was plan B--because I'd still hoped to get out--I loved criminal law. That's what I took most of [in law school]. You have required classes in law school, but most of the classes that weren't required, I took a lot of criminal law classes. I thought I would be able to get a job as a prosecutor or a public defender. The woman I had worked for, who was the prosecutor for the child abuse and sex crimes unit, she told me I could use her as my reference, but whenever anybody would call about [me]--I'd sent my resume out--they never got to her. They always ended up getting sent directly to Sam Asbell, who, needless to say, badmouthed me. But what goes around comes around because Same Asbell went down in flames a few years later. Well, actually, I think that's why my suit settled. He went off the deep end and shot up his own car and said that he was attacked and shot and killed some guy. My time in law enforcement was really educational, beneficial, and it helped me when I became a prosecutor and a defense counsel in the Air Force.

SI: Were you the only person that brought a lawsuit? What motivated you to do that?

SS: Yes. People tell me now, "Oh, gosh, you're so courageous." I was #MeToo long before there was a hashtag. I'm like, "You know, I really wasn't courageous because I was putting up with all of this for the whole time I was in the office." I didn't do anything until after I got fired, and the reason why I brought the suit was because I got fired and I didn't have anything left to lose at that point. So, that's why I brought the suit. I was like, "Well, now I'm fired. I need to bring the suit." I would have people come to me on the downlow and say, "This happened to so and so," or, "This happened to me." I'm like, "Well, you've got to come forward, and I'm going to subpoena you." They were just petrified, and I understood it. I was one of those. I loved my job. I was with my soon-to-be husband. We had kids. These were other women that had husbands, had families, or they were single parents and they could not afford to lose their jobs. I got it. I completely understood their reticence and not wanting to say anything because until I got fired, I didn't say anything. In this era of MeToo, or maybe that was two years ago, I look at these women going after people like Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein and these women who went after Donald Trump, I'm like, "Oh, you go." These are the most powerful men and have all the money, all the power. For them to come out, I completely get it. I didn't do it, like I said, and I wouldn't have done it. I would've just kept going because I loved my job, and I needed my job. Of course, they completely denied everything.

SI: You went into law school in '86 and '87.

SS: Yes.

SI: How long were you carrying on the case and going through law school?

SS: I got fired in '87. I brought the suit, I think, in '89, '88 or '89. Like I said, we're at the interrogatory stage, getting ready to do depositions, and then it settled pretty suddenly because, like I said, I think it was January 1, 1991--you can look it up, because I was in the Air Force. It must have been '91 because there was an election, Florio had won governor, and the prosecutor is a political position. So, the governor gets to appoint the prosecutor. Sam was a Republican, Florio was a Democrat, and Sam loved being the prosecutor. They used to call him Yosemite Sam because he had this moustache, and even though he could make more money as a trial attorney, a defense attorney, he loved the power. He thought if he made it look like he was so important that these drug dealers would try and kill him, that Florio would keep him. On New Year's Day that year, he said he was in the office, he left the office, and instead of carrying his handheld radio, he carried a shotgun. He said he was driving along the waterfront in Camden when he saw this green Vega following him. I mean, the story got bigger and bigger, but the last story he told was he saw this green Vega following him. He drives by the Camden City Police Department, ends up at the waterfront. It's two Black guys. He shoots the one Black guy in the head and then takes off. He eventually said he thought it was the Ku Klux Klan who hired [them], because Sam's Jewish. I'm like, "I have never known the Ku Klux Klan to hire Black people to kill a Jewish guy." State police were investigating, the FBI. Finally, like a week into it, he admitted he made the whole thing up and checked himself into a mental hospital. They never prosecuted him, which in my opinion they should have, but they suspended his license to practice law for a couple of years. The other thing they did was they offered me a settlement, and I was ready to get it done. So, that's what happened. You could probably Google it, the story.

SI: Yes, I kind of remember the story.

SS: Yes, Sam's story, not mine.

SI: Yes, that is really interesting. Now, at the same time, you were in the National Guard. Do any memories stand out?

SS: No, actually, I was out of the National Guard by that time.

SI: Oh, okay.

SS: I joined the Guard in '82 and got out in '86. That was because I was with my ex-husband. We had his two daughters. I was going to law school at night. I was working full time. Something had to give, and that was it. I had four years in the Guard, which actually worked out great, because I came into the active-duty Air Force, instead of coming in as a--JAGs come in as first lieutenants instead of second lieutenants, so I came in as a first lieutenant for pay purposes, a first lieutenant over four years for pay.



[TAPE PAUSED]

SS: Back to the Guard and my time in law enforcement.

SI: You were telling us a little bit about when you were in the Guard for four years and being at a higher level in Air Force.

SS: Yes. I was in the Guard for four years. For pay purposes, when I came into the Air Force, you get paid as if you've been in the military for four years. Unlike my fellow JAGs who had just come into the military, they were paid what they call under two years. So, I was fortunate enough that I came in getting paid as a first lieutenant over four years, which makes a very big difference. Even though it was my first year in the Air Force, I was getting paid as if I'd been in four years because of my Guard time, which was great.

SI: Now, you joined the Air Force after law school?

SS: Yes, I graduated law school in May of '90, and I joined the Air Force in March of '91.

SI: Okay, all right. Before we get deeper into your time in the Air Force, let us talk a little bit about Rutgers Law.

SS: Okay, yes.

SI: Tell us, you were going at night ...

SS: If this is a Rutgers Oral History project, I think I want to talk about my time at Rutgers.  
[laughter]

SI: Yes, might as well throw some in.

SS: Yes.

SI: Do any professors stand out in your memory as being helpful?

SS: Roger Clark, yes. Roger was great. In fact, I came back as an adjunct. Professor [Allan] Stein, Jay Feinman, this is like their first couple years--not Roger. Roger--is that his last name?

SI: Yes, Roger Clark, yes.

SS: Yes. I had him more than any other [professor]. I think I had him for five classes because he did the criminal justice and he did insurance law and international law, which I told him, when I came back teaching, I didn't understand international law to save my life. God knows how I passed the class. Years later, in the military, one of my assignments, I was what they

called dual-hatted in the Air Force, but I was at a NATO base in Turkey. The lightbulb went on. [laughter] It took me all those years, but I finally understood international law.

Yes, Roger was great. Like I said, Jay Feinman, Allan Stein. Jonathan Malamud, not for a good reason. Oh, my God, he was so strict. I was a night student, and again, to this day, there's a group of us that are still very good friends from the night class. In fact, my friend, John Dell'Aquilo, was a Cherry Hill cop. He and his wife Lori and I, we've been to Europe together, we've been to Africa together, just in the last few years. Well, not since the pandemic, it's like 2020 didn't happen. Let's see, John, John, Joe, Joe, Yolanda, and myself, there's like six or seven of us--Mel--that will get together, go to dinner or lunch, still. Malamud did not like night students. He thought if your whole focus wasn't law, there was something wrong with you. [laughter] Because we went at night, we had some adjuncts.

I remember one of my classes, it was "Casino Law" and this was the first time they ever had it. It was last semester of my fourth year, and we were just trying to get through. We had two professors. One was an attorney for the Division of Gaming Enforcement, the DGE, and the other was one of Trump's lawyers for the Taj Mahal. This is when the whole Marla Maples thing was going on, but it was a really fun class. They tag-teamed. People made fun of us because everybody's getting ready for the bar. There was a particular case--I'm telling you, don't ask me what I had for breakfast yesterday, but things stick in your mind--and it had to do with a search and seizure Fifth Amendment-Sixth Amendment issue that we went over. They did this case. I remember so many of the day students and other night students that didn't take this class made such fun of us, like, "You need to get ready for the bar. I can't believe you're taking 'Casino Law'. It's a throwaway class." We did a lot of different cases in this class and a lot of talking about Donald Trump and Marla Maples and what went on behind the scenes. [laughter] It was a fun class.

Come the bar, the New Jersey State Bar, I think there [are] five essay questions, and you can get from zero to three points. To pass the bar, you had to get nine points, and you couldn't get like three points on three questions. You couldn't get three, six, nine. You had to get at least one point on each question. I'll never forget, in this big giant room, we're reading the questions, and the constitutional law question was on that case. [laughter] I'll never forget, ten heads popped up, and we all knew the answer. If I didn't get a three on any other question, which I probably didn't, I know I got a three on that question because we knew the answer to it. It was hilarious. Of course, we were all up at the bar afterwards. [laughter] We're telling our other friends. They're like, "That constitution law question was so bizarre." We're like, "No, we knew exactly what it was." That was a good class.

I do remember for Pennsylvania, to be admitted to the bar, you have to have an attorney there that will sign that you're of good character, and I was brand new. So, that particular attorney practiced in Pennsylvania. For all of us, he signed all of our statements that we were of good character.

I'm trying to think what other law professors I can remember--oh, Neil. I can't remember Neil's last name right now. He was one of my professors. There were a couple females that I had. I'm telling you, Maria, when you get older--I can picture them; I just can't think of their names. I know who I had in kindergarten. My long-term memory is much better. I really had good law professors.

SI: Would you say the classes were balanced gender-wise or race-wise?

SS: I'm sorry, gender-wise?

SI: Gender-wise, were there like fifty-fifty at that point?

SS: No, no. They weren't fifty-fifty women, but there were probably a third woman. I don't think there was ever half women, but a third or more. Maybe in the women's classes--"Women in the Law"--we might have had half women, but in the regular--I hate to say the regular classes--but in the criminal classes, seminars, employment law, civil procedure, contracts, they were more male. But I don't think there was ever a class where there was just one or two women. Did you ask race-wise?

SI: Yes, not necessarily fifty-fifty, but proportional.

SS: No, I don't really remember there being much diversity at that time, to be honest with you. There was probably some but not in the night school. I don't really know about the day program. Not that this is diversity, we did have one female who was deaf. In our first year and a half, we all had pretty much the same classes, and she had somebody in there signing for her. Honestly, I don't really remember much diversity. Now, as time went on and we got into the electives, a little more diversity. Well, my best friend Yolanda, she's Hispanic, so she fills two, woman and Hispanic. I honestly can't think of one Black person that we had in my class, in the night class. Now, that's not to say that there wasn't, I just don't remember, and when I say the night class, obviously, I didn't have everybody in my class. I mean, it wasn't just fifty people. The night class was bigger. You may have had three classes of civil procedure. I had the early class; there was two other later classes. When I went back to teach, definitely a lot more diversity. My first class wasn't very big, but I taught four or five semesters. Each time, my classes got bigger, and I always had women and students of color in every one of my classes.

SI: Do you think your interest in law changed during the course of law school?

SS: Yes and no. I took a course in worker's comp, which I loved. We had a female judge. She was a worker's comp judge. She was great. I took a summer class in patent and copyright, and oh my God, I wanted to be a patent law attorney, which is very, very specialized, and I could never do it. That professor was so great. I never got a "D" in law school, and I only got one "A+". I didn't even get an "A". I got an "A+" in that class. [laughter] In fact, there were three "A+'s", and I went to the professor and asked if I actually had the highest grade because I wanted to put that on something at the time. I didn't. Like I said, I had no "D". I was all "B's", "B+",

"C+", "C". My whole law school career was "B's" and "C's" and one "A+". [laughter] I found that I did, I loved worker's comp. I loved patent and copyright. I really loved criminal law. Having been in law enforcement, I really enjoyed that. I did find that I didn't like, not because of the professors, but I wasn't interested in contract law. I wasn't interested in insurance law or corporate law, tax law. Good God, to this day, I don't do my own taxes. If there hadn't been accountants in my study group, I'm sure I would've failed that class. [laughter] Thank God you only had to take one. Yes, definitely types of law that I have no aptitude for whatsoever, and types of law that I would have never thought that I would have enjoyed at all that I really enjoyed a lot.

MM: In terms of your night classes, how did you start building your routine around that?

SS: That was interesting because I'm a terrible procrastinator, and I find that the more that I have to do, the better I am. If I have five exams in three days, I am on it. If I have one exam in five days, I'm going to do terrible on it. [laughter] At the time I was in night school, I was working full time. I was with my now ex deceased husband, and we had custody of his two girls. They were little. They were like six and eight, seven and nine. In the beginning, I was in the Guard, but I got out of that, so working full time, husband, little kids, school at night.

We had school Monday through Thursday, and it went from like six to ten at night. So, I got done working at 4:30. I worked in Camden at the prosecutor's office, and the school was like two blocks away. So, I'd just drive my car from work and park at school, and I'd go to the law library. I didn't usually finish work at four. I'd get done [at] five or whatever, but I'd go over to the law library, try and read some cases, and take some notes. Class was like 6:10 to 8:15 or whatever, and then 8:20 to ten o'clock. You'd get like a ten-minute break between classes and get home at like 10:30. When they say youth is wasted on the young, I'm like, "No, it's not." I could never do it today. After I didn't get grants after the first two years, I'd take student loans, and I paid them back. Then, I paid for law school. I did it all backwards. But in 2016, I finally used part of my GI Bill, and I went and got what's called my LLM. It's your post-doctoral degree in law, like a master's of law, and it was a one-year program. I'm single now, no kids. I wasn't the oldest person in the class, which was amazing, but younger people [were] in the class. I'm like, "If I had now what I had then, I would never have been able to do it," and this is a one-year program. So, I had to be very organized and very judicious with my time when I was in law school and work.

At the time, I will say this--you're going to laugh--I had a pager because, again, we didn't have cell phones. I was on call about every fifth week. This was one of the great things about law school, night school. You would hear this, the people in the day school were very competitive, and they would hide books in the library. The night school, we all worked. We all had families. There were things that were more important in our life than law school. If somebody was out because their kid was sick, or they had something to do at work, we had folders. Outside in the hallway, they had this big rack of folders, and if the school had something they needed to get to you or a note or whatever, you'd just go look in your folder every night. If one of our friends missed class, the next time you came in, three people would have put their notes in your folder.

If I was on call and I had to leave--I couldn't make my eight o'clock class--when I came in the next night, three people would have photocopied their notes and stuck them in my folder for me. That's what I would do if my friend John, his kid had a concert that night. When you're a parent, "Okay, somebody'll give me notes from class. I'm a smart person." So, that's what I really liked about the night class. We helped each other. We weren't competitive like the day students.

It was hard. It was a really hard four years. The first year, I went August to May, I took the summer off, and then, for the next three years, I went year round. I went August to May, took a summer class, then August to May, and then I took a summer class, and then, the fourth year, the summer after that, I studied for the bar and took the bar. Luckily, I took Pennsylvania and New Jersey. I'm fortunate--I know I'm a smart person and I studied hard, I worked hard--that I passed both of them on the first try.

SI: After you were fired from the prosecutor's office, did you work somewhere else?

SS: Yes, I did. What did I do? I waitressed for a little bit. I clerked for a firm called LaBrum and Doak. They're out of Philly, but I worked in their satellite office in Woodbury. I think they might be the oldest firm in the United States. I clerked there. Like I said, I waitressed a little bit because I needed to work. I wasn't taking any loans at the time because I was working full time. I took out a big student loan and put it in the bank and used it like a monthly paycheck. What else did I do? Oh, I think I also worked a little bit as a civilian for the National Guard because I got fired in '87, and I didn't go into the Air Force until '91. Yes, so, I did a bunch of stuff.  
[laughter]

MM: Fast forwarding to your active duty, you started in Kansas.

SS: Yes.

MM: Where did you go from there?

SS: Okay. When you come in as a JAG, you go to--it's called Medina Annex. It's by Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. At the time, it was called AFOOC, Air Force Officer Orientation Course. Then, my first duty station was McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas, and I was there about a month. I got out there first, and then my family followed. We had just moved into our townhouse, and we had a tornado rip through our base and do millions and millions of dollars' worth of damage and took out what we call our MWR stuff, our Morale, Welfare, and Readiness, including our bowling alley, our gym. It took the roof off of the legal office. It was funny, right across the street from our legal office was our movie theater, and they only played Friday and Saturday nights. This was a Friday night that it hit at like 6:25. The movie that night was *Dawn of Destruction*, and the movie Saturday night was *Awakenings*. *Dawn of Destruction* was blown off the marquee, and *Awakenings* was not. [laughter] Our bowling alley was totaled. Our hospital was totaled. Amazingly enough, 110 houses were destroyed, but nobody on our base was injured. Our officer's club was destroyed. Our NCO club was destroyed. Our gym was destroyed. So, that was in like May of '91, and I left there in July of '94. All the new stuff,

they called it Emerald City Mall after *The Wizard of Oz*. [laughter] Everything opened back up in like August of '94, so I worked out in a hanger.

My first duty station, Colonel Roberts was my first SJA [Staff Judge Advocate], great guy. I started out in civil law, and I had additional duty as a prosecutor. So, I did our rapid discharge program. If an airman gets in trouble, in the military, the Air Force wants to put him out of the military--at the time, we still weren't allowing homosexuals to serve--I ran that program, and we did things where people can come in, get wills done, get free legal advice. So, I was in the legal office for the first eighteen months. Then, I went to become the Area Defense Counsel. So, I did some court-martials, where I was the prosecutor. Then, I went to the other side of base, and I was the Area Defense Counsel, so I was the defense counsel for the base. So, I got there like April, March or April, of '91, and I left in June or July. I took a little time, but I went from there to Korea. I was there with my husband and stepdaughter, and I got divorced when I was at McConnell.

I actually liked all of my duty stations. I really did. As my first duty station and my first foray into the Air Force, it was good. It was good. I met a lot of great people, people I'm still friends with to this day. [laughter] It was called a SAC base, Strategic Air Command. We had KC-135 [Strato]tankers that were fuelers, and we had B-1 bombers. We were still standing alert at the time, meaning every so often, you'd hear the klaxons, the bells, go off, and guys, no matter where they were or what they were doing, they'd go running because there was nuclear capability on these B-1 bombers. When they stood alert, they were seven days on base, and they lived on base, and wherever they were on base, they had ten minutes to get to their planes. If those bells went off, if you were in your car, you just pulled over. It was really interesting. It was a lot of fun.

SI: Do any experiences stand out as a defense attorney? What kind of cases were you working on?

SS: Yes, as a defense counsel, you handled everything from letters of reprimand, what they call Article 15s, which are non-judicial punishment, up to--I think the most serious case I had were the child molestation cases. I never tried a murder case at any base. I did prosecute attempted murder. I think the one that stands out for me as a defense counsel was my client pled guilty, and in the military, it's like a plea bargain in civilian. We call it a pre-trial agreement, and he pled guilty. He had been--it was awful--sexually molesting his stepdaughter for many years, and he had raped her. He had anally sodomized her. This was over a course of many years. He was Security Forces, which is law enforcement in the Air Force. His wife was Security Forces. These were her three daughters. It was the oldest daughter. She was probably, I think, [in] her junior or senior year in high school by this time, and he'd probably been doing it since she was like thirteen, fourteen. He had started on the middle daughter, and that's what made her tell. Just really horrific circumstances. We had a deal, I think, for fifteen years. How it works in the Air Force, or the military, is you get the better deal. We have what's called panels. We don't have juries; we have panels. If the panel came back and gave him thirty years, he would get the fifteen years. If the panel came back and gave him ten years, he would get the ten years.

Because he had raped her, at the time, he could have gotten life for rape. In the military, he had many, many counts against him. He was looking at life or hundreds of years. So, I think we had a pre-trial agreement for fifteen years, and they had a son together who was eight, and I argued for ten years, so that he would be done in high school. The prosecution argued for life, and you put on witnesses--it's a full trial, but it's just the sentencing phase--put on witnesses, and I didn't have him testify. Another interesting thing, in the military, they can do what's called an unsworn statement in sentencing. So, he read a statement, how sorry he was and all that, and they came back with twelve years. That's the longest sentence any of my defense clients ever got, and that man turned around and hugged me. He was so happy, and he should have been. That was an amazing sentence for what he had done. She testified, and she was a very good witness. It was very difficult for me to cross-examine her. She was a lovely, lovely young lady. I had a job to do; I'm there to defend my client, but I was very gentle with her. I had to point out things, like she was a straight "A" student, she had a boyfriend, she was in counseling, just try and be able to say to the jury, "Yes, what happened to her was horrible, but she's doing good." That case definitely stands out in my mind.

I had another case--as a defense counsel, this was a highlight and was talked about for a very, very long time. I had a client who was deployed to Iraq, his wife was cheating on him, he came back, and he inadvertently--and it really was inadvertent--ended up with a pair of night vision goggles, which are very expensive pieces of equipment. When he realized he didn't turn them in--I can't even remember the whole thing, but he ended up taking them to his family's home in Kentucky or something, and his wife reported him for stealing them. This guy, he's like a true American hero. He defused bombs, a stellar troop, never any trouble. Instead of giving him this non-judicial punishment, for whatever reason, they decided to court-martial him to this one minor offense of misappropriation of government property. He pled guilty. He was the only defense client I ever had testify under oath at his sentencing. In the military, there is a legal punishment of no punishment. So, I remember a judge told me one time, "Argue for what you want." You can get no punishment, a letter of reprimand, all the way up to the death penalty. I was going to argue for like a verbal reprimand or a letter of reprimand, but I remember that judge telling me, "Argue for what you want." Everybody came in to testify for him, including his commander, who said that he wanted him back the next day and was going to put him in charge of his financial accounts. The government, they had nothing. I got up, and I argued for no punishment. The government, to their disgrace, asked for the maximum punishment, which was six months in jail, forfeiture of his pay, he was like an E-7, they wanted to take him down to E-1, and a punitive discharge. It was ridiculous. They asked for the max, I asked for the no punishment, and they came back and they gave him no punishment. It was really amazing--and the government, they were mad at me--but everybody talked about that for a really long time. At conferences, they talked about that. [laughter] It was very exciting. I know there are other people who have gotten no punishment, but at the time, I didn't know anybody else. That was great. You can ask for clemency to the commander, and the only thing I could ask for was that he overturn his conviction. The commander, I went and spoke with him, and I asked him if he would overturn his conviction. He said he really wanted to, but he pled guilty, so that was the only thing. They were two of my best cases as a defense counsel.

The only other thing is, as a defense counsel, I had very few people plead not guilty, but every person that pled not guilty was acquitted. So, I batted .1000. I did get to other bases and do cases. There's usually only one defense counsel at a base. If there was more than one person that was being court-martialed for the same offense, there was a conflict of interest. So, I'd get to travel around and do cases at other bases, so that was fun.

MM: Speaking of other bases, which one has been your favorite in terms of going to, like Germany or Turkey?

SS: I was stationed in Germany twice. My favorite assignment probably would have to be Davis-Monthan in Tucson, my favorite base. I loved Tucson. My favorite overseas assignment would probably have to be Turkey, and I didn't live on base there. I didn't live on base in Tucson either, but I always said with Tucson, when I retired, if I could have transplanted my whole family out there, I would have retired out there. I love Tucson. I love the weather. I'm a hot-weather person. Turkey and Germany both, I love Europe, but Turkey, I love the food, the weather, the people, the shopping. It's very different, very different. When I was in Europe, I got to travel so much, which was great. I liked my jobs everywhere I went. When I was in Turkey, I was working, like I said, with NATO, and that was really interesting. The first time I was in Germany, I was what they called the Chief Circuit Trial Counsel. So, I was the head prosecutor for the Air Force for all of Europe, and that was probably my favorite job. It's funny because I was like, "Oh, man, this is great. I'm going to get to go all over Europe," and when I got there--and I loved the job--but I got to see the courtroom and my hotel room. [laughter] That was about all I got to see when I was doing trials because they were a lot of work.

MM: In terms of other countries, which do you think needs the most work on women's issues or women's health?

SS: Oh, Afghanistan, without a doubt, yes. Actually, you'd be surprised at how woman progressive Turkey is--at least it was when I was there--and that was in 2006 to 2008--because Ataturk was secular. Women were not allowed to wear the abayas or the head scarves, even though it's a mostly Muslim country. In public, the women did not--like I said, it was a law--they were not allowed to wear the abayas or the head scarves. To my knowledge, they had women in their government.

I think Europe is very progressive as far as women's rights, and certainly, I think as far as like day care and maternity leave, they are way ahead of the United States in Europe, the Northern European countries. I think the United States lags behind on that. I think the military is actually better. They give maternity leave. They give paternity leave. If you adopt a child. I haven't been in the civilian workforce in so many years and I didn't have a child when I was in the civilian workforce, I don't know, really, how it is right now, in either government jobs or the private sector. I guess the private sector can pretty much do what it wants. In the Air Force--well, all branches of the military--you don't have sick leave. If you get sick, they treat you. If you need to be out for two months because you broke your leg, you're out for two months. [laughter] There's no long-term disability or short-term disability; you come back when you're



better and you get paid. In that respect, I think the military is better. From the day you join the military, you get thirty days leave a year, but that is seven days a week. It's not weekends. [laughter] It's not holidays. If you're on leave over Thanksgiving, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday count as leave days. It's not like I can take leave on Wednesday and take leave on Monday, and the rest of the days are vacation days.

As far as women's issues, I was deployed to Kuwait. Now, that was a long time ago, but I don't think they've changed much. They definitely need to make progress in the Middle East, all of the Middle East, as far as women are concerned, although I think in Saudi Arabia women are in their government, if I'm not mistaken. I know when I was in Kuwait, we went to the camel races. Camel races are like their form of Little League, but they're actual camel races and the kids race them. There are stands. There's the enclosed stands, and then there's the outside stands. It's hot in Kuwait, and the men get to sit in the enclosed stands, the women don't. At least that's how it was back in '99 when I was there. Women, I can't remember, I know in Saudi Arabia women aren't allowed to drive. I think they are in Kuwait because I remember driving, but that may have just been because I was in the military. I do remember a friend of mine was deployed to Saudi Arabia, and she wasn't allowed to drive, even though she was U.S. military, which I have a problem with. If I'm in your country as a visitor, as a guest, I'm more than happy to follow your rules. But when I'm there because of a war, all bets are off, which is one of the issues I had when I was in Afghanistan with what happened with the massacre. When I was in the military, I never really felt a lot of harassment or discrimination, and it was interesting that the most discrimination I felt was when I was deployed. [Editor's Note: Kuwait has allowed women, locals and foreigners, to drive since 1979. In 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted the ban on women driving, but there are restrictive guardianship laws that prohibit women from making many basic decisions without the permission of a male relative.]

SI: Was it from the local environment or from military personnel overseas?

SS: It was interesting. I didn't really feel much discrimination from the Afghan men, and I met very, very few Afghan women because they just don't have women in their military. They were starting to, and any women that were in the military were really from the Russian time. I mean, they weren't Russians. But, no, more from the United States military.

SI: Oh, go ahead.

SS: I know we're past our time.

SI: Yes, I had one more question, and maybe Maria has one more.

SS: Sure.

SI: But we could come back for another session.

SS: Yes, because I would like to talk more about Rutgers ...

SI: Yes, absolutely.

SS: ... And my time in the military. [laughter]

SI: Yes, we definitely want to do another session.

SS: Sure.

SI: My question was, you mentioned how when you first joined, there were still criminal prosecutions for gay and lesbian airmen, but then "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" came in, I think, when you were at McConnell.

SS: Yes.

SI: How did that change how things were done the military?

SS: Yes. I'm sorry, I can't remember if there was prosecutions so much as discharges. When I first came in, it was prior to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Then, when I was at McConnell, [President Bill] Clinton came down with "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Then, interestingly, when I was in Afghanistan, they got rid of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." The only time I think someone would have been prosecuted for homosexual conduct is if they had sexually assaulted someone. I certainly didn't prosecute anybody for homosexual conduct or defend anybody specifically being charged with homosexual conduct, although I did have a discharge board and certainly discharges based on somebody told--whether somebody asked, somebody told. We can get into this next time about the specific board that I did. I did have a court-martial that I was prosecuting--this was the most serious prosecution I ever had--where it was actually called the "Lesbian Love Triangle Case." I think that was the title in *Stars and Stripes*. I think that was the title of the article. The one victim and the perpetrator had been girlfriends, and they had broken up. Now, the initial victim and the other victim were seeing each other when the whole thing happened, and the perpetrator ended up getting shot and almost dying. It was really hard to get to a lot of the facts, because the two victims were afraid to tell the truth because of the whole relationship, which was really a shame. I worked very hard to protect them from any adverse action against them after the court-martial--not their court-martial, the court-martial of the perpetrator--because I'm like, "They were victims of a very serious crime, and I don't want to see them punished or lose their careers in the military because they told the truth in order to make sure that this criminal got prosecuted for trying to kill them." Obviously, that was before the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Yes, that was another really interesting case that I had. Like I said, I was prosecuting that case and tried to protect my victims at the same time. [Editor's Note: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) refers to the former U.S. policy (1993-2011) regarding the service of homosexuals in the military. While the policy intended to allow gay and lesbian service members to continue to serve in the military as long as they did not openly declare their sexuality, in practice the policy led to many gay and lesbian service members to be discharged from the service. In 2011, during

the Barack Obama Administration, DADT was formally repealed, allowing gay and lesbian service members to serve openly in the armed forces.]

SI: Maria, do you have another question before we end?

MM: Yes. What is your life like now? I know that you are back in New Jersey, after you traveled for so many years, but what is your routine like? What do you like to do? You say that you have a very busy schedule.

SS: I do. It's interesting. I retired in 2012, and next time, I'll go [into] what I did. Now, what I do is I represent veterans in their appeals and claims against the Veterans Benefit Administration. I represent veterans in their appeals and claims against the Veterans Benefit Administration, which I have started to call the Anti-Veterans Administration, sadly. I help them if they don't have what's called a full honorable discharge. There's a couple types of discharge. Obviously, the best is an honorable. You can get an honorable, an honorable under general conditions, an under other than honorable conditions discharge--they're administrative--or you can get punitive discharge if you've been court-martialed, and that's actually considered a punishment. That's bad conduct or dishonorable discharge. I try and help them get them upgraded, if possible, because if you have something less than a full honorable, there are certain benefits that you are not entitled to. For one example, if you have a general under honorable conditions, you are not entitled to your GI Bill benefits, which are really great benefits. I bought my house with the VA home loan, an amazing benefit that saved me thousands of dollars when I went to buy it. If you have what's called an under other than honorable conditions discharge, you're not entitled to the VA home loan. You're not entitled to the GI Bill. You're not entitled to VA medical care. If possible, I try and help people upgrade them. I represent active-duty members if they get letters of reprimand, non-judicial punishment, I haven't done a court-martial in a long time, but any type of administrative issue.

My main focus is on the claims and appeals. A veteran, when you get out of the military, you put in for compensation for anything that may have happened to you while you were in the service. If you have an injury or an illness that developed while you were on active duty, you can claim compensation for it when you get out. I'll just give you a simple thing. I have tinnitus, ringing in the ears. Well, that came from being on the firing range, flying in aircraft, being in Afghanistan around very loud noises. I didn't have it when I went in the Air Force, so it's considered an injury that was incurred in service. So, I put in a claim for that. I get what's called a ten percent rating that equates to a certain amount of money. So, if a lot of people put in for tinnitus, sometimes they deny it, and I help them appeal it. That's a great simplification of what I do. In fact, when I took that phone call, that is a client of mine who I have what's called an informal hearing. [I] put in a claim for her, some of it got denied, I've appealed it, now I have an informal hearing to discuss what they got wrong, which was a lot, in hopes that they will go back and change their decision. So, I do that.

I used to like to travel, and then COVID hit. I have great neighbors, and we're really good friends, who I don't get to see them much. I'm trying to think what else I do. I worked out a lot

with a trainer that my neighbors went to. You know, everything that you did before COVID, now I'm hoping to get back to doing. Did I answer your question, or is there something else?

MM: Yes, I just wanted to know what your routine was like after being active duty for so long.

SS: Oh, yes. Well, when I first got out--and we'll talk about this next time--I was in a very, very bad place for a long time. I'm part owner of a winery and a vineyard out in Arizona. So, I went out to Arizona for a little over half a year, and I was a manager of one of our wine-tasting rooms. So, I call myself a wine-ista, like a barista but with wine. [laughter] That was good. I was semi-retired. Now, I'm back to working a lot, but I love it. It's truly my passion.

SI: Very good.

SS: Do we want to schedule it now?

SI: Sure. We will just conclude this session. Thank you very much, and I will turn off the recorder.

SS: Okay.

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