

Summary

Early years	
	Family, Italian descent
	Childhood in Cheshire
College at WestConn	
	Dr. Haas, president, 1963
	Enrollment, 1200 students
	Downtown campus
	Fairfield Hall, only dorm
	Traditions, Dr. Haas' teas, beanies, Christmas dinner
	Osborne St., student off-campus rental community
	A commuter school
	Fashions and dress code
	Admission Requirements
Danbury, first impressions of city	
	Church locations, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox, St. Joseph's. The Mennonites
Church	
	Public transportation, minimal
	Local stores, Genung's, Feinsen's
	Interstate 84 not finished
Teaching Certification	
	Liberal Arts curriculum, 2 years
	Observations, junior year
	Speech class required
	student teaching, senior year
Laboratory Schools	
	Roberts Avenue, Locust Avenue Elementary
	"Double vision" windows at Roberts Ave.
	Model teachers, state paid stipends
First Years of Teaching	
	Local salaries, 1967, Ridgefield, Danbury, Wilton
	teaching pay vs industry pay
	Certification, additional Requirements
	Teacher's union strengthened, pay increases
Teaching in Ridgefield	
	Semidepartmentalized in upper Elementary grades
	Ability grouped classes
	"New math"
	School configuration, K6, 7 and 8, 912
Tape 1, side B	
ESL in Danbury, the start	
	Began in 1967, one teacher, Marie Toscano

	Mentions Claire Geddes, Dr. Theodore Topperoski, Mr. Wittman, key people involved with Sharon's transition to Danbury/ESL
	Very early rationale teach adults who must work, children will "catch on"
	No ESL training, Certification, or support
	early materials Teacher developed, nothing available
	early thinking submersion, sink or swim
	Sharon was the only ESL teacher districtwide, 1969-73
	TEOSL began in the 1970's
	1975, Sharon taught in 6 elementary schools
	Used "pull out" method, children grouped by age and ability
	ESL in Elementary schools only, program expanded later
ESL transitions in district	
	1960-1980 Spanish language dominates
	Late 1970's influx of Asians; Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Mung
	1990's-2004 shift to Portuguese and Brazilians
	2004, 45 languages served by ESL
Danbury immigration trends	
	Spanish people came for jobs; hatting, construction, landscaping
	Brought Family, housing available
	Asians, next wave, Brought by religious groups as refugees
	Brazilian and Portuguese, seek to start own business
ESL today	
	All ESL teachers certified
	Full time director, assistants, teachers, paraprofessionals
	Sharon helped establish ESL certification Requirements, statewide
	Bilingual education explained, compared to ESL
	2004, Bilingual classes in Portuguese and Spanish only
Tape 2, side A	
Educational institutions and associations	
	WestConn, undergraduate
	UConn, master's degree
	Southern CT, 6th year certificate
	WestConn alumni association and abroad involvement
	Scholarship Chairperson, 2004
	Connecticut education association
	Danbury education association

	Sharon is the founder of the CT ESL association
	National TOESL association
Hobbies	
	Old movies, (1930's40's) westerns
	Reading, music from the '60's, needlework
Travel	
	All of East Coast, some of the West, Hawaii and Canada
	No international travel
Most memorable	
	teaching the children of Danbury for so many years
	People she's met and worked with
	Love of being an ESL educator

January 8, 2004

BH: Today is Thursday, January 8th, 2004. This is Beatrice Hermann and I'm interviewing Sharon Fusco as part of the Danbury Oral History Project. We are conducting the interview in the library of Western Connecticut State University. Sharon, thank you very much for taking time to meet with me today. Sharon let's talk a little bit about your early years. Where and when were you born?

SF: Okay, I was born actually in Meriden, Connecticut, on March 2nd, 1945. When I was about three months old, we moved from Meriden to Cheshire. Cheshire at that time was, more or less, uh, a farming community. My father, my grandparents had lived in Cheshire. My father and mother bought us a farm there and I lived there until I was about six years old and then we, actually seven, the day before my seventh birthday. We moved to a house that my parents had built on property owned by my grandparents. So it's still in Cheshire, still attended Cheshire Elementary Schools, attended Cheshire Middle School and Cheshire High School, graduated from Cheshire High School in, um, 1963. I came to Danbury as a freshman in the fall of '63, in September of '63, so I started my freshman year here, attended WestConn for four years, graduated in '67. During that time I majored in Elementary Education and did my student teaching at Locust Avenue School, which is part of the WestConn, was at that time part of the WestConn campus, both Locust Avenue and Robert's Avenue. I did my student teaching there. And also in, at that time, the city had bought, or the state actually had bought, White Hall, which was then Danbury High School. And so they had, were starting to renovate some of the, uh, buildings for WestConn use and I did my student teaching in the front half of the building, which was the middle school. They were waiting for the middle school to be built, for Broadview to be built. So I did student teaching there and history for six weeks and up at Locust Avenue in grade 5 for six weeks, in 1966, the fall of '66, graduated in '67, stayed on in Danbury, actually taught in Ridgefield for two years, but lived in Danbury. I was assistant house director at Fairfield Hall, which was one of the oldest dorms at WestConn, and was assistant house director until 1977, stayed in Ridgefield for two years and then moved to Danbury to teach in Danbury. And I taught, I was actually the second person to teach ESL, English as a Second Language Classes in the Danbury Public Schools. And so I was responsible for, I think it was six of the elementary schools. And I was an itinerant teacher. And I used to say, I used to have this little index card in my bathroom mirror, so as I was brushing my teeth, I would be looking to see where I was going that day. And I used to joke about it. At the time there was a movie I think it was like, "*If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium*," or something. I can't remember the title, but it's similar to that.

BH: Uh, I remember that...

SF: I used to look at that thing and I used to go, "Let's see, today is Tuesday, where am I going?" (Laughs) or whatever! (Laughs)

BH: (Laughs) Ah...

SF: But, you know, and, and I did that, I was itinerate from, I actually, I taught two years in Ridgefield. I came to Danbury in '69, was an itinerate ESL teacher, basically hitting anywhere from two schools to six schools per week depending upon what the load was, the last, until the fall of '80 [pause] '89. I, in the fall of '89, I was appointed coordinator of the English as a Second Language Department for the Danbury Public Schools.

BH: Hmm, um, Sharon, I'd like to back up a little bit.

SF: Sure.

BH: I'd like to go back to a little more on the early years before we ...

SF: Ok, ok.

BH: ...really move into the educational realm, which I know you're uh...

SF: (Laughs)

BH: ...very, very good.

SF: Um...

BH: Could you tell me a little bit about your childhood and, um where did your parents come from?

SF: Ok. All right. My parents, my mother is uh ...well they're both of Italian descent and I like to say that I'm one, I'm one of few born and raised American citizens who are 100% Italian. Both my parents, (laughs) both of my parents are of Italian background. On my mother's side, her father actually came here when he was seven years old, came to this country. And my mother had, my grandmother's parents were from Italy, but they lived in Bangor, Maine and uh...

BH: Wow.

SF: ...they immigrated down here to Connecticut when she was young, but she was born here. My grandfather was born in Italy and came to this country when he was seven years old and they both happened to live in Branford. My, both grandparents happened to end up in Branford on my mother's side, so that my, they come. My mother is the fourth of five children, the first girl. Uh, her father died when she was like seven years old and her younger sister, who was my godmother, who happens to be exactly twenty years older than I am. My birthday is the second, hers is the fourth, she was born when my sister, when my mother was seven years old, so there was, there was an age difference. And my grandmother had to go to work because, after the baby was born, because her husband had, her husband died when the baby was like three months old.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Got food poisoning. Uh, my mother was, my grandmother was sick with the, as a result of the baby.

BH: Um hum.

SF: And so he, as she used to tell the story, he went to the delicatessen and got some cold cuts to make his lunch to go to work, and he got the ham called mortadella, and I don't know what happened.

BH: I know.

SF: Sixty, seventy years ago...

BH: I know.

SF: The refrigeration wasn't what it is today and, and he got some kind of food poisoning and he died. So my grandmother had to go to work. And she was a seamstress, so she could work out of her house, but it was easier, better for her to make more money if she worked as a seamstress in a shop.

BH: Um, hmm.

SF: So my mother was left to pretty much take care of her little sister, her baby sister and help get, prepare the food for her three older brothers and you know for dinner when grandma came home and stuff like that. So, my mother had a pretty hard life as a girl.

BH: Um, hmm.

SF: My father... both of his parents came from Italy. They come from neighboring villages in northern Italy. They actually didn't meet until they got here. And they both were in Waterbury at the time.

And they got married here. My father is the oldest of eight surviving children. There actually were ten, but two of them died and one in infancy and one got run over by a trolley car. So...

BH: Uh, wow...

SF: So he was the oldest of the eight surviving and they lived in, they moved from, Waterbury to Cheshire when they were young and my grandparents bought a farm. And they you know, grew...it was a truck farm, so it was all vegetables except they had a couple of cows and a horse and stuff, four chickens, but the primary thing was to raise vegetables to sell.

BH: Um hmm...to sell and to eat?

SF: And to eat, and to eat, absolutely, yes. And so ...

BH: Sounds like you know a lot (Sharon laughs) about your family's background.

SF: Yeah, I ...

BH: I think that's wonderful.

SF: Yeah, I know a certain amount, but it's um...there, my father... I've kind of lost contact with my mother's side of the family now. Most of, well the aunts and uncles have all passed away. And I, we were never really close with the cousins, but my father's family is a very close-knit family. And we've always lived in Cheshire, and they've lived in Cheshire or in Waterbury, you know, close by. And you get together for holidays, and you get together for birthdays and, you know...just you know. When both my parents were alive we had, we lived in a little ranch, ranch-style house, but we lived on, it was two acres of property. And so, every summer, at least twice during the summer, there'd be, we'd have this big picnic kind of thing. And all the aunts and uncles and all the cousins and everybody in my grandfather, because my grandmother had passed away when I was seven years old, they would all get together. And they'd all talk, play, you know, tell jokes, and play bocce and ...

BH: Um hmm...

SF: ...the kids you know, horsed around. So...

BH: That gave you quite a family feeling.

SF: Yeah. That gave you a family feeling, exactly.

BH: Yeah, yes.

SF: Exactly. So...

BH: Very interesting.

SF: That's kind of, I guess...

BH: ...the background.

SF: my background. As I said, I have, I didn't say this, my sister...I have a sister.

BH: I was just going to ask, do you have any brothers and sisters?

SF: I have one sister. Actually, I had a brother, but he was older than me. I'm actually the middle child. My brother was um, was stillborn when he was born. And then there was me, and then my sister. Her birthday's in October. She was born in October of '47. I was born in '45.

BH: Hmm. Ok.

SF: So she's, she's...my mother used to always say cause my sister and I ...my sister was very petite. She was a preemie. She only weighed like...well, she was a seventh-month baby who weighed 7lbs, 6lbs. And if she had grown, you know, had gone full term, she would have been a large baby. I was a 7 lb, a 7th month baby who weighed 7 lbs. And I also would have been a large baby if I had gone till full term.

BH: Both preemies, wow!

SF: Both preemies. My sister, she was more of a preemie than me because she was like only about six months. She didn't have any fingernails. She didn't have any voice.

BH: Wow!

SF: She was in the hospital in the incubator for almost a month before they could take her home.

BH: And she made it.

SF: And she made it.

BH: That's wonderful.

SF: That's, yes, that's a little miracle because fifty years ago...

BH: For that time frame, right.

SF: Babies that, that were like that, didn't make it. Today, it's (snaps her finger) you know, that's nothing. A 6lb. baby's born all the time! Even at seventh months! It's the miracles...

BH: Right.

SF: ...today are those little babies born at a pound and a half, (both laugh) that survive!

BH: So times have changed!

SF: I can't figure ... I can't conceive of...

BH: I know!

SF: ...a baby that small! I mean, a Cornish hen is a pound and a half! (Both laugh) I can't conceive of a baby...I've never seen a baby that tiny. But anyway, I know it happens. But, miracles of modern science... so, my sister and I lived in Cheshire, lived on a farm. Neither one of us are tremendous green thumbs. (Laughter) Which is probably every time...

BH: The farming didn't rub off? (Laughs)

SF: It didn't really rub off! (Laughs) I'm sure every time my sister and I go to grow something, my father probably turns over in his grave. (Laughs) Thinking, you know, where did I go wrong here! (Both laugh) But anyway, we attended public school in Cheshire, we had no... I can't recall any terribly exciting things happening. My sister, when she was ten years old, I remember, I don't know what she was doing...she was playing and she was...the school had like a sub-basement and they had little windows and some of the kids were like looking into the windows to see what was going on. And somebody banged her, pushed her and anyway, she chipped her tooth.

BH: Oh, no...

SF: So, she had to go to the dentist and of course the dentist was off that day, cause in those days everybody took Wednesday off. So he wasn't there. So my mother had to find another dentist to take her to. And, and...getting her tooth, it was a running joke for years, even when she was a young adult, to get the tooth to match...the piece to make, without having a capped. She would have, she'd go to the dentist and he'd make a mold, and the mold would come back and she, she says, she had one that she could wear for 4th of July, she said, because it had blue stripes on it! (Laughs) (Both laugh) So finally she ended up having...

BH: Oh, no!

SF: ...a cap. She had it drilled down and you know, the dentist said, you know, I ...because every time they put a cap on, after a year or two it would start to change the color.

BH: Uh huh.

SF: And it wouldn't match. Again, you know, you're dealing with...

BH: It didn't hold.

SF: It didn't hold. The enamel color didn't hold.

BH: Um hum, yep.

SF: The match...and of course...

BH: Changes, change...

SF: Everything has changed. You don't think about it because you lived through it. But, ya know, I'm gonna be 59 in a couple of months. My sister's gonna be 50...57 or something in ...next October. She just turned 56. So that it's a long time.

BH: Yes.

SF: And when you think about, you look at the chronology of what's happening in science and in medicine...and stuff like that...

BH: Yeah.

SF: You don't realize it until you sit down and look at it and a lot of things have happened that, you know...we've experienced the bad part and if it happened today, it would have been the good part. You know.

BH: Right. Right.

SF: You wouldn't have had all those things happen.

BH: It wouldn't have been uh, something...oh my goodness, this terrible thing has happened!

SF: Right.

BH: Today we can do more with it.

SF: Right. Exactly.

BH: Um, I'm interested to know since you were a child in Connecticut growing up, um, at times did you ever come to Danbury for any reason or did you come to Danbury for the Fair?

SF: Um, no. I don't recall ever coming to Danbury until I was in high school and you had to start preparing, you know, for colleges.

BH: Ok.

SF: And I wanted to go to a college that would allow me to stay at the college. I wanted to get the experience of not being home.

BH: Ok.

SF: My mother was great. She's very... my parents were very nurturing and, you know, gave us everything that they could possibly afford to give us. They weren't wealthy, they weren't. They were middle class people and gave us everything that they could possibly, you know, afford to give us.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: However, I wanted the experience of being on my own. I didn't, I had spent all my life in a very close-knit family and I wanted to do something. I wanted develop my personality. I wanted to find out what kind of personality I had.

BH: Who are you?

SF: Who am I?

BH: Who are you?

SF: Who am I? I wanted to know. (Both laugh.) Although in high school, I started to develop my personality in that I spent a lot of time, I was involved in a lot of clubs and activities.

You know, I'm not an athlete. I never...athletics was never one of my things. But, I would, you know, if there was a dance or any kind of a social event going on, I was always involved with doing that. I was in the Latin club and I was in the French club and I was home...ya know, young homemakers and future teachers...all of those.

BH: You were a joiner.

SF: All of those kind(s) of things. Yeah, I was a joiner. Not necessarily a leader, I didn't think at the time...although I did manage to become president of a couple of the clubs and hold offices in a couple.

BH: Good.

SF: And, but it was just like, I just figured that was what was supposed to be. It was never something that I took for granted or that I knew that, you know, people are gonna follow me.

BH: Yes.

SF: As I think back upon it, a lot of people did follow me or did, ya know, I was a leader, but not in the same terms that I think I expected or I looked at what a leader should be.

BH: It just sort of evolved.

SF: Yeah, it just sort of evolved. Exactly.

BH: Hmm...

SF: So when I was looking for colleges...I said, "Ok." I wanted a teacher education college. And I didn't want one that was gonna be next door that I would have to be forced to drive back and forth every day.

BH: Ok.

SF: I did apply to New Britain, Central Connecticut. New Britain...or what was it called then? Maybe it was still called Central Connecticut then. And...but, I really wasn't keen on it because it was still close to where I lived. It was only...it was less than a half an hour away. I could commute back and forth.

BH: Too close.

SF: Yeah, a little too close!

BH: A little too close. (Laughs)

SF: A little too close.

BH: Okay.

SF: And so I...actually only looked at Central and I looked at WestConn, cause I figured if...well at the time it was Danbury State College. And I figured, you know, Danbury State really was where I wanted to go, because at the time, it was far enough away. It was over an hour away, because they didn't have I84 finished or any of that stuff yet.

BH: Okay.

SF: So, my parents wouldn't let me drive back and forth everyday an hour. Maybe 20-25 minutes...a half- hour if I stretched it, they might do it.

BH: That was a lot in the winter.

SF: But in the winter, ya know,

BH: Oh, yeah...

SF: But in the winter, an hour everyday in the winter, they would never allow that. And I wasn't keen on doing it. So I was really opting for WestConn. Plus, WestConn was a little smaller school.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Um, Southern was the largest, New Britain was next and WestConn and then Eastern.

BH: Wow, okay. It wasn't as big as...

SF: Okay, I'm not sure which one. It was either Southern or Central. It was one or the other. They were one and two. WestConn was like the third. And Eastern was the fourth smallest. And it was really small.

BH: Okay.

SF: When I came to WestConn in 1963, I remember Dr. Haas was the president at the time. All the freshmen were sitting in Berkshire Hall and I remember her saying, "Look to your left, look to your right, because in four years one of you is not gonna be here." Ok. (Laughs)

BH: That speech sounds very familiar! (Laughs)

SF: And I'm sure it's probably said by every president of every university...

BH: I heard that one.

SF: to every freshman class coming into their institution. But it's just, ya know, it just kinda like stuck with me. And as the four years went by a lot of my friends transferred to other schools, got married, left school, ya know, dropped out of school for whatever. So that it, ya know, however trite it is, it is a true statement. And when I came to WestConn, I think my class...I wanna say my class was really small. I don't think there were more than ...1200 people in the whole school.

BH: Wow. Ok.

SF: I think it was probably really small. My class was probably 250-300 kids in the class.

BH: What was your first impression coming to Danbury?

SF: Laughs.

BH: Coming to the campus?

SF: Well, the first time I came here...

BH: How did you feel?

SF: I came as a, as a prospective student to take a tour.

BH: Ok.

SF: Took a tour...and then I had to come for some, you know, pre-testing stuff.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And, you know, it was likeit's nothing like it is now. Nothing. Nothing like it is now.

BH: Wow, ok.

SF: Hmm, it was... there was a street running down this middle of town where the quad is. That was...5th Avenue? I think it was 5th Avenue.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Hmm...and you had Fairfield Hall was on one side. There was Fairfield Hall and Old Main and then there was the student union, which was like a quarter of the size that it is now.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Umm...the church on the corner was St. Nicholas Church and it was a church we actually would go to church there. It was a...

BH: St. Nicholas...

SF: St. Nicholas was a Scandinavian uh...

BH: Catholic?

SF: It was a Catholic...

BH: Christian?

SF: It was an orthodox.

BH: Orthodox...

SF: Orthodox...Catholic Church.

BH: Um...There's Orthodox Greek.

SF: Yeah, um...

BH: Which is also a Catholic...

SF: The Greek Church was up the street.

BH: Ok.

SF: Ok...which is the church, actually is built now over on Clapboard Ridge, but the minister ...

BH: Oh, ok.

SF: is, you know, where Locust Avenue is...the school Locust Avenue?

BH: Yes.

SF: Ok. Across from Locust Avenue on that corner there's that big house, that big white house, kind of...

BH: Ok.

SF: That's where the minister for the Greek Orthodox Church lived.

BH: Hmm. Ok.

SF: He lived there. That was his rectory. And I'm not exactly sure where his church was, but that's where he lived. And then the other one was orthodox, uh...Catholic.

BH: Catholic.

SF: Catholic.

BH: Ok...that's very different.

SF: And most of us attended either that church or we attended the Marionite Church on Granville Ave. because they were easy walking distance. Going to St. Joseph's or St Peter's required either a car or strong legs and a lot of time.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: And a lot of time...

BH: (Continues to laugh) Ok.

SF: Because they're both on Main St...opposite ends of Main St.

BH: Ok.

SF: Um...

BH: And everybody didn't have a car...

SF: Right.

BH: to drive around.

SF: No. Not everybody had a car.

BH: Ok. Right. Public transportation, umm...

SF: Public transportation was iffy.

BH: Iffy. Ok.

SF: There wasn't a whole lot of public transportation. You know, there were cabs and stuff, but, and at that time Dan... WestConn was, was ...there was a lot of commuters coming in.

BH: Ok.

SF: So there weren't a lot of people here on the weekend. There was a percentage of people who lived in the dorm. The only dorm when I first came was Fairfield Hall.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Ok. And...

BH: So you were in the minority as a ...

SF: As a student living on campus, you were in a minority. There was another set of people who lived in the community. They rented rooms in Osborne St.

BH: Ok.

SF: On Osborne St and within the walking distance.

BH: Ok.

SF: For the most case, walking distance...some of those and then there were a lot of people who lived around... Bethel, Brookfield, you know, other towns.

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: And those kids had cars. But also, those kids, most of them had jobs. So they didn't hang out at college very much.

BH: All right.

SF: So they would come in for their classes, you know if they needed to use the library or whatever, they do what they had to do or if they were participating in a music function or something, they did what they had to do and then they left. And we didn't always see the commuters.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Uh, those of us who lived on campus got to see ourselves; we were like a little group.

BH: You probably got very close.

SF: Got close, yea.

BH: Like a family, like your little family grouping.

SF: Family kind of thing, and especially those who stayed on the weekend. I also told my mother that I wasn't coming home every weekend.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: And I didn't come home. The first I was there, I didn't come home for the first month. They...

BH: Ok.

SF: They dropped me off. And then the following weekend was like a parents' weekend and the parents came and we had tea, Dr Haas' famous tea with the little white gloves. And um...

BH: Oh my!

SF: Yes.

BH: You had to dress up?

SF: Yeah, you had to dress up.

BH: In white gloves?

SF: You had to wear gloves. You had to wear gloves, little white gloves. And gentlemen had to wear jackets and ties. And the girls all had, freshman girls all had to wear white gloves. And on Main St. is, well where the Rehab Center is now...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: 235 Main St. is the hospital rehab, that used to be Genungs, was a department store.

BH: Oh, a department store?

SF: And um...what's the other one?

BH: How do you spell, do you know how to spell that, Genungs?

SF: Uh, J, G e n u n g s, I think it was.

BH: Genungs.

SF: Genungs. And then what was the other one, the one on the corner? There was Feinsons is the men's store.

BH: Yes.

SF: And then there was another, was another small department store. Basically it was more of a clothing store. Well, every summer or at the end of the summer both of those two stores, Genungs and the other one, I can't remember what the other one was called right now, begins with an L, it will come to me in my dreams sometime.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: But anyway, they would stock up on gloves.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: You know, and so you get there as a freshman and you go to your first orientation meeting. You get your little beanie, wear it two fingers above the eyebrows and you're told that this is what you're doing.

BH: (Laughs).

SF: Next Sunday is tea and every, all freshman and their families, their parents are invited to tea. And the guys had to wear jackets and ties and the girls had to wear church, you know, your church attire, your Easter suit, whatever.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And white gloves. So we all marched down. The upper classmen...

BH: To the store?

SF: The upperclassmen who were our...

BH: (Laughs)

SF: Our...

BH: Shopping trip!

SF: Ya know, who were doing the orientation, they would, ya know, show us where Genungs was and where the other store was and we'd go in there and we'd find our gloves. Of course some of us, my best friend came to school the first day, that first Sunday, she came to school dressed in a, a little um, little, well it was called a sheath then. It was just a plain dress with little, short sleeves and straight. No, no uh...

BH: Oh um, a shift?

SF: Like a shift.

BH: Or a sheath?

SF: No, it was more like a ...

BH: Sheath is fitted.

SF: Yeah, this was, this was...

BH: Shift?

SF: This was, this was, hers was...

BH: I remember that style.

SF: Hers was fitted. Hers was fitted.

BH: Fitted.

SF: She had little heels, stockings and white gloves.

BH: Uh hmm.

SF: We all looked at her going, "Where in God's name did this girl come from?"

BH: (Laughs heartily)

SF: She happened to become my best friend and she's still my best friend. (Laughs) Even though she lives, she's married now, lives in Texas, has a couple of grandchildren, whatever. But...we still communicate. Uh, but...

BH: So first impressions are not always right!

SF: (Laughs)

BH: Or correct! She's your best friend.

SF: Right! (Laughs heartily)

BH: Ok. Ok.

SF: Um, but, those of us who didn't have the white gloves, we had to call home and say, "Ma, when you come on Sunday, bring my white gloves." Well, at the time, I didn't, I don't think I had white gloves. So I had to go down and I had to buy my white gloves and, ya know. But I did have to have my mother bring me my clothes because I didn't bring my dressy clothes.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Ya know, of course going to college then was not like it is today. You didn't wear, when you went to Old Main, you did not wear pants if you were a girl. No pants, no slacks, no shorts.

BH: There was a dress code.

SF: There was a dress code and the dress code basically...

BH: Was it, was it stated or was it assumed?

SF: It was more understood.

BH: Understood.

SF: It was more understood.

BH: Ok.

SF: Dr Haas did not approve of women wearing pants. And so she did not like to see them in Old Main. So if you were going into Old Main for anything, to see the admissions officer or to go to the library or to pay a bill or something, you made sure. You checked to see that her car wasn't here. If her car was...

BH: (Lengthy laugh)

SF: ...there, then you went back to the dorm and you put a skirt on before you went into Old Main.

BH: Would that be the same if you went to the dining, did you have a dining hall?

SF: Yes, we had a dining hall. The dining hall was on the first floor in the student union.

BH: And you had to dress appropriately for dinner?

SF: No we didn't. No we didn't really have to dress appropriately for dinner. We could wear street clothes, whatever we were wearing. There were certain functions that we had, like at Thanksgiving time they had a big dinner. And Christmas time, just before Christmas there would be a big...another dinner with uh, steamship roast beef and...

BH: Hmm, very nice.

SF: And nice, very nicely, and those they requested that you, you know, you didn't have to wear a shirt, a jacket and a tie, but they didn't want you to come in, ya know, cutoffs and blue jeans and ya know, they wanted you to dress, look presentable.

BH: Presentable

SF: Like you were gonna have dinner, Sunday dinner, at your families, with your family, not necessarily your Mom and Dad, but maybe grandma and grandpa were comin. So you're gonna dress a little bit better than you what you might normally wear.

BH: Ok.

SF: Or your gonna have dinner after you go to church, so you're still dressed from going to church.

BH: Ok.

SF: And everybody went to church. So...

BH: Really?

SF: Well, most everybody went.

BH: Most everybody.

SF: Not everybody, but most everybody.

BH: But, you'd say about 90%?

SF: Ah yeah, I guess so, yeah. I mean it's, it's a different time.

BH: Yes, it was.

SF: A different time, a different place, ya know, back in the '60's.

BH: Um, question, um, you wanted to come here to um, to become a teacher.

SF: Right.

BH: What were the requirements at that time? How did you become a teacher? Uh, how did you get to become licensed? Did you have to student teach?

SF: Ok.

BH: Uh, did you have directive courses or did you have a general curriculum and then very specific education courses?

SF: Gen...general...

BH: What was required?

SF: Ok, generally, to get into WestConn, they had the standard procedures that all the universities had. You had to fill out the application. You had to meet...

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: You had to be successful in you college endeavor. You had to take the SAT's. And you know, pass at a certain level. And then there were certain testing here that you had to take. You could take... if you wanted to get exempt from foreign language, you could take the exam, language testing.

BH: Ok.

SF: That kind of thing. And then once you got here, once you were accepted and I was fortunate cause I applied early cause I wanted to come here, so I applied early. And I was accepted here in like February or March, early acceptance.

BH: Very good.

SF: So I got in.

BH: You got in.

SF: And actually, I got accepted before Central notified me. And, when Central called me, I just said, "All right, I got the letter." I said, "No, I don't think I'm interested right now, thank you." But then when you got here, generally speaking, the first two years were more or less like a language...liberal arts program.

BH: Ok.

SF: You took sciences. You took math. You took a little history. You took a little of everything, nothing really pertaining to education per se.

BH: You didn't go into a class.

SF: You didn't go into a classroom. No, no, we didn't go into classrooms. Actually...

BH: Even for observations?

SF: Actually, we were deprived of that until like our junior year.

BH: Really?

SF: We did observations in our junior year. In our sophomore year if like, if you belonged to like the Future Teachers Club, one of the activities that they offered you was the opportunity, gave you the

opportunity, to do some volunteer work. And I remember I worked at St. Peter's Church, at St. Peter's School with some little children doing reading with them.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: In the elementary, in the primary grades...

BH: That's down on Main St.?

SF: That's on Main St. Yeah. Yeah. St. Peter's is at the far end of...

BH: Where it is now?

SF: Yes.

BH: Ok. Ok.

SF: The churches are still in the same place.

BH: Ok.

SF: Probably, the only things that are in the same place. (Laughter)

BH: I know. I was just checking. I wanted to make sure that the school was where it is now.

SF: Yeah. Right. The school...

BH: The school is across the street on Main St?

SF: Yeah.

BH: Yep.

SF: Hmm, so I did that. I did, ya know, Liberal Arts, you had to take a class in Speech. Everybody had to take a Speech class. You had to take at the time, I guess it would be a humanities' class, it was called *The Nature of Man*. And that was a requirement. You had to have that. And, ya had to have math, and ya had to have some history and, and basic, basic Liberal Arts kinds of classes. Took an art class as an elective. You, you know, or a music class, whatever, I happened to take art, with Mr. Alberetti.. And then in your junior year, then you really started getting into early childhood development classes that were gonna deal with more in terms of teaching. You got to do observation.

BH: Ok.

SF: You got to go out on observation. You go into the classroom and you observe in a classroom for an hour, take notes, go back and you know talk about, write up your reflections, what you thought about, you know, what you observed that day, what you did.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And then, at the end of your junior year, then you were given your student teaching assignment.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And a lot of kids would opt to live home for first semester, cause we did, most of us did our student teaching the first semester...of our senior year.

BH: Senior year. Ok.

SF: And so we had the option to stay in town and be assigned to a local school or to go home and be assigned to a school in our neighborhood. It was frowned upon to request placement in a school you attended. So if I went back to Cheshire, I would not...

BH: Oh...

SF: they wouldn't necessarily place me in Cheshire High School or Darcy School, which was one of the elementary schools that I went to.

BH: Ok.

SF: They'd put me probably in Southington or in Meriden, one of the surrounding towns.

BH: Ok.

SF: And over here, a lot of us, because... for whatever reason, my particular reason was... I didn't want to go home. I didn't want to student teach at home. And I didn't have a car. So I figured if I could get located here, in one of the two what they call "lab schools..."

BH: Ok.

SF: Locust Avenue and Roberts Avenue were lab schools. And what that meant was...actually, just before I got my student teaching, I started student teaching, the city took over those two schools and they became city schools again. But, for a long time, they were considered lab schools and all the teachers in the school were paid by the state because their responsibility was to, to be demonstration teachers or model teachers...

BH: Oh...

SF: For the college. So that's where you ended up doing a lot of your observation.

BH: All right.

SF: In fact, in Roberts Avenue they had, the lower section, if you ever go into Roberts, down...

BH: I've been in Roberts Avenue School.

SF: Um, they, the far end, the piece that hits the back of the uh, playground,

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: You know if you go thru the front door, you go all the way down to the back.

BH: Yes.

SF: To, you go towards the right and keep following the hall to the end.

BH: Yes.

SF: There's, there's a glass window on one of the rooms. That's a double vision window. You can see in, but they can't see you.

BH: Ah...wow!

SF: So we used to do some observation out there. You know, like having, the police department has those. I don't know if it's still there or not? They may have closed it up when they've done some renovation on it, but it used to be there. And we used to...

BH: It's interesting that Roberts Avenue was part of this lab situation.

SF: Yeah.

BH: Then went to the city.

SF: Yeah.

BH: And now is about to be...

SF: And it's about to become, go back to the state again!

BH: Right. It's come back. Uh, we used to have campus school.

SF: Um hmm.

BH: Uh, I went to the State University of New York at Potsdam.

SF: Ok, uh huh.

BH: And we had campus school. I would say, would that be similar to what you were...

SF: Yeah. I would think so.

BH: Ok.

SF: Yeah. Yeah. And as I said, the state paid. So, when I got to do my student teaching, most of the teachers were being paid by the city. But there were a few. There were two or three veterans in each of the buildings.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So, one of the perks that I had, as, as doing my student teaching in the lab schools was on pay day, when they got paid, whatever day of the week that was, I got an extra half hour for lunch cause I could walk over to the college and pick the checks for the teachers and bring the checks back!

BH: (Laughs) Ok.

SF: (Laughs) So I go extra time.

BH: Little perk!

SF: Little perk, little perk. I got a little extra lunch that day!

BH: So was it the only place you could be placed?

SF: No. You could be placed in any of the schools.

BH: In any of the public schools?

SF: Any of the public schools.

BH: Ok. Ok.

SF: And the teachers got... they got a stipend. The regular classroom teacher got a small stipend for having a student teacher. Because, there's paperwork and there's observations,

BH: Right.

SF: And there's stuff that has to be done. So it was above and beyond their regular teaching assignment.

BH: Ok.

SF: So they got a stipend from the state.

BH: Did you feel that was um to your advantage to be at the lab school or one of the local schools in securing a job after graduation?

SF: Um...

BH: Because you said you...

SF: I taught in Ridgefield when I first...

BH: Ok, went to Ridgefield...

SF: When I first, the first two years that I was out, and I'm not sure, I was thinking about this the other day, why did I go to Ridgefield? And I think it simply was because Ridgefield offered me the job first.

BH: Ok.

SF: But at time, at the time, in 19...excuse me, when I did my interviews in '67, in the spring of '67, I was gonna be working in '60...in the Fall, Ridgefield was the second highest paid community in the state. And it, I got \$5,900 a year for teaching in Ridgefield. My girlfriend, miss white gloves, she got...

BH: (Laughs)

SF: She got, she's from Fairfield originally, and she got, her first assignment was in Wilton, which was THE highest paid community with \$6,100.

BH: Wow.

SF: Danbury...that same year was getting like \$4,800.

BH: \$4,800 for starting teachers?

SF: For starting teachers...

BH: In 1967?

SF: '67, right.

BH: Hmm.

SF: And then I left Ridgefield in 2 years and I came back to Danbury in '69 and at that time, I don't know what happened, but something happened, and Danbury's salary was more comparable to Ridgefield and to the other towns around here.

BH: Hmm.

SF: So it wasn't this...

BH: Was there a, a growth need, or the do you think the unions were strong?

SF: I think the unions got stronger. I think that people just got tired of being, you know, teachers are traditionally have always been, felt traditionally the "low man on the totem pole" when it comes to teaching.

BH: Yeah.

SF: And um...

BH: You mean the pay?

SF: As far as the pay, right.

BH: Pay for the amount of education...

SF: Pay for the amount of education that you have to have.

BH: Yeah.

SF: And you have to maintain your education.

BH: Right.

SF: It's not like you can get a job and...

BH: You have to go on.

SF: You have to go on. You've gotta continue.

BH: Yeah.

SF: And especially now, you know, now currently, we have to accumulate CEU's, Continuing Education Credits.

BH: Right.

SF: And you're encouraged...you basically, you graduate from college. You get a job and then within a couple years, you, you're basically are forced to start working toward your Master's.

BH: Right.

SF: And while you're working toward, even after you finish your Master's, you're not, it's not, there's not this big push to go into you know, a PhD, or a sixth year, but you still have to do those continuing education courses.

BH: Right.

SF: And unless you take, if you take only what your district offers, then it doesn't cost you anything. But if you go to workshops, or you go to other universities, or other places, other things that interest you that are more in your field, you're paying for them.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And the district doesn't necessarily pay for you to go to these things. Not now with the economy that it is.

BH: Hmm.

SF: I mean you pay...a lot stuff comes out of your pocket. So you spend a lot of money to maintain your credentials, you know.

BH: Yes.

SF: But that's what you gotta do.

BH: You're supposed to be reimbursed for that, but...

SF: Yeah, yeah. In industry you get reimbursed for that

BH: Yeah.

SF: Ya know. I mean in industry if you get, every time you get a, well we get pay hikes, too, with our different degrees. But, a lot of, a lot of industries...

BH: It's by level. Each time you go to the next level.

SF: But in a lot of private industry, you know, every time you take a class, they pay for your class.

BH: Right.

SF: And you get an increment,

BH: Right.

SF: You get some kind of little perk for getting that.

BH: Right.

SF: Doing that little thing, you know. Our little perk comes from basically a self-motivating kind of thing, cause you wanna do better with the kids that you have.

BH: Hmm.

SF: You, ya know, ultimately when you get your ten credits you get another, you know, a little pay increase.

BH: Right.

SF: But the pay increase never equals the amount of money that you spent to get there.

BH: I fully understand what you're telling me. (Laughs)

SF: (Laughs) I mean I don't know how much of this you want to put in here.

BH: I know.

SF: I hope you edit out a lot. (Laughs)

BH: No, no, no, no. This is all what you're telling me. It's straight away. So um, no this is fine. It's absolutely fine.

SF: Oh.

BH: Um, so your first job experience was teaching in Ridgefield. Um, what grade level?

SF: I taught fifth grade.

BH: Good...uh hmm.

SF: I taught semi-departmentalized fifth grade class.

BH: Uh hmm.

SF: And what it means is I taught reading and math to the highest level group of kids. There were like, I wanna say there were 4 fifth grade classes, 3-4 fifth grade classes. And each, the class as a whole was divided into 3 sections, your upper level, higher achievers, more brighter kids, average and less um, bright or less...

BH: Children who needed more help.

SF: Children...more help.

BH: More help. Ok.

SF: And each of the teachers was assigned a group. I, being the newest teacher,

BH: Yes.

SF: got the highest math group, because I had all the new math.

BH: Right.

SF: At the time the math, the term was "new math".

BH: Wasn't it in transition at that time?

SF: Yes, it was in transition.

BH: Yes. Definitely.

SF: But new math was the thing.

BH: Yes.

SF: And all new math was, was a whole lot of new terms for the same old stuff. But,

BH: Yes I understand that very well.

SF: But, but that was my responsibility.

BH: I taught at that time as well. (Laughs) Yes.

SF: So I had the high fifth grade math class.

BH: Yep, um hmm.

SF: And then I had the high fifth grade reading group. And my kids were reading like on a 7th and 8th grade and middle school reading level.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Which was difficult because you didn't want to give them the 7th and 8th grade reading material that they were gonna get when they got into middle school.

BH: Oh...

SF: But you had to find something that was gonna be of interest to them.

BH: So it was a bit more structured?

SF: Structured, a little bit more structured.

BH: Um, you mentioned something, you said, "in the middle school" now today, the way the schools are grouped, uh, the grades are grouped, wouldn't you say middle school would be grade 5?

SF: Grade 5, but in that time...

BH: How was it configured at that time?

SF: In that time it was K-6, 7-8, and then 9-12.

BH: 9-12.

SF: Ok.

BH: Ok.

SF: So now 5th grade, in some schools 5th grade is the beginning of middle school.

BH: Yes.

SF: In some towns, I think Brookfield, 5th grade is the beginning of middle school.

BH: Yes.

SF: Cause my goddaughter and her sister go to school there. So they went to, actually in Brookfield they, they divide schools. They have a K-2...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: One building for all the K-2 kids and they have another building for all the 3-4 kids.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And then they have the Whisconier, which is the middle school for 5-8...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And then Brookfield High for ya know.

BH: Right.

SF: So they have four school buildings that house all of their students.

BH: Now here in Danbury, though,

SF: In Danbury we have one high school, two middle schools and...15... 13-15 elementary schools.

BH: Elementary schools.

SF: And by that I say, King Street and Mill Ridge have two separate buildings.

BH: Divided.

SF: They're divided.

BH: The early primary grades...

SF: There's a primary, K-2 is in one building and then 3-5 is in the other building. So you can look at them as one campus and say there are 13 elementary schools, K-5 or you can say there are 13 elementary schools K-5 and 2 double campuses K-2, 3-5.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So this, ya know...

BH: Different configurations. I also taught when it was K-6.

SF: Yeah.

BH: And that's what the certification used to be.

SF: My certification is 1-8.

BH: Yeah? 1-8?

SF: I never did Kindergarten.

BH: Ok.

SF: And at that time in order to get a K certification, you had to student teach in Kindergarten.

BH: Ok.

SF: I didn't. In fact, the lowest grade I student taught in was 5th grade.

BH: Ok.

SF: And then I have an endorsement in history for middle school.

BH: Ok.

SF: So at that time I could get, I have a K-8 with a history endorsement.

BH: Um hmm. Ok.

SF: Ok. But I just filled out my renewal for my license, my certification, and so I had to look at all of that stuff. (Laughs)

BH: (Laughs)

SF: I'm still in that today.

BH: I'm very interested, um to know, what kind of, what brought you to the ESL area? How did you, how did you get to ESL?

SF: (Laughs) Ok.

BH: How did you get into the development of the ESL program?

SF: Um, when I was senior in the fall, in the spring of um, '67, as they still do now I'm sure, we had representatives, personnel directors coming from all different communities and towns.

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: And so I, I'm not sure why I went to the Ridgefield interview, but I went to the Ridgefield interview. And I went to the Danbury interview and I probably went to a couple of others. And when I filled out my application, I had stated that ya know, my background was from an Italian family. And then when I did my student teaching, when I actually did my 5th grade student teaching, I had in my class an Italian little boy.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: From Italy.

BH: Interesting.

SF: And although I'm Italian by heritage, I don't speak the language very well.

BH: Ok.

SF: Cause my parents were of the belief that you always spoke English. You only used the native language or the parent language when you didn't want the children to know what was going on.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: So we didn't. And then when I went to high school...

BH: Your family was just like my family!

SF: (Laughs)

BH: Exactly.

SF: And when I was in high school...

BH: Oh my goodness!

SF: Italian wasn't one of the languages that was offered.

BH: No,

SF: And it was frowned upon to take Spanish. You generally took either German or French.

BH: French.

SF: Because French was the diplomats' language and German was the science language. So if you were going into the sciences, you took German. If, otherwise, you were just gonna go to the university, you took French.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And nobody ever really took Spanish.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Mistake! Coming to Danbury everybody speaks Spanish!

BH: (Laughs)

SF: Nobody speaks French! I think I taught 3 kids my whole life who were French speakers. But, anyway...um...

BH: (Laughs)

SF: So...

BH: Ok, Sharon, you were telling me about how became involved in the ESL program, so please continue.

SF: Ok. Well, when I was in college, I, most of my activity was similar to the kinds of activities that I did in high school. Social functions, I worked with the spring production and those kinds of things. But I also, a big part of my time was spent between, I was an officer in the, and a duty girl at Fairfield Hall,

which meant I was the greeter and signed girls in and out and the gentlemen visitors at Fairfield Hall. And then, I was also very much involved with the uh, education association, both at the state, at the local student education association both at WestConn locally and at the state department in Hartford.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And the advisor at the local level here was Dr. Theodore Topperoski, who passed away many years ago, but he was a big influence. He was my advisor for my, leader for my student teaching.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: But I became involved here just as again, just going into to see what was going on in the club and decided that I'd hang out there. And I ended up spending 3 years there, made it up thru president of the local chapter, and was an officer at the state level also.

BH: Hmm. Ok.

SF: I attended conferences in Philadelphia and New York and Boston representing Connecticut and Danbury. Also, I went to a conference with a whole group of students from the state, from all over the state, Fairfield University and whatever, attending a conference, a student education association conference, similar to the NEA conferences that they have today or the CEA conferences.

BH: Ok.

SF: But this one was for students, and for students from all over the country. And it was interesting to see, ya know, that everybody's doing the same kind of thing. I think we all kind of like think about what we do things in a vacuum, but we don't really do them in a vacuum. There's always somebody out there who's doing the thing you're doing. And I think that when you find somebody who's doing the same thing you're doing, it validates what you're doing and it encourages you to go on.

BH: Yes.

SF: To continue.

BH: Yes. Right.

SF: Because I'm not doing this all by myself.

BH: Right.

SF: There are other people out there.

BH: Right.

SF: We're all doing the same thing.

BH: And you can share your experience.

SF: And you can share, exactly! So, from working closely with the student education association I went into my student teaching experience with, ya know, some ideas and things that I had developed with my time both in Hartford and here. And I got my first student teaching assignment. It was a 5th grade over at Locust Avenue School with Mrs. Luchner was the teacher's name.

BH: Ok.

SF: And she, she had a student in her class...now you have to remember that Danbury had, was a developing ESL program, in terms of it had a lot of students coming in from other countries. Not so much from Italy, more from Portugal.

BH: Ok.

SF: We had a large Portuguese population in Danbury. It was developing at that time. And there wasn't...

BH: That was 19...?

SF: This was 1966.

BH: '66.

SF: And up to that point there were kids scattered throughout most of the schools. In 19... actually in 1966, they, my predecessor, Marie Saviono was beginning to develop an ESL program. She had done some ESL teaching at, at night with adults...

BH: Ok.

SF: ...with the parents.

BH: Ok.

SF: And she talked Hollis Wittman and other administrators, school administrators into developing something to help the children, so that they would...

BH: So you mean they began first with adults?

SF: Yes.

BH: With adult education?

SF: Yes, yes, adult education. It was offered, it was offered as for adults.

BH: Interesting.

SF: Because they needed to work. It was felt that children were young and they were adaptable, their minds were adaptable and they would learn the language.

BH: Hmm. Ok.

SF: Which is true. I mean they do. But, but, they don't learn the kind of language that they need for school. It's not the academic kind of learning that takes place.

BH: All right.

SF: So, she had, she was developing this program and she had worked in the program for about a year or so and she kept harping at Mr. Wittman, who was personnel director, "I need some help here. I'm only one person. I can't go to 10 or 12 schools here every day!"

BH: (Laughs) Uh huh.

SF: Or every week. And I had been teaching in Ridgefield for 2 years, 1967-69 I was in Ridgefield.

BH: She was the only ESL teacher?

SF: She was the only ESL person, yes.

BH: Ooh! Ok.

SF: Ok. And, I ... Mr. Wittman's secretary was Miss Geddes and she was the sister-in law of Claire Geddes who was the Dean of Women at WestConn and her husband was the Dean of Men.

BH: Hmm, hmm.

SF: Alfred Geddes. And Alfred's sister was, was Hollis Wittman's secretary.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And she, I guess she kept hearing about Marie complaining that she needed help. And so she mentioned, I guess in the course of conversation with her sister-in law and her brother, she kept saying, ya know, "I have to, we need to find somebody to give this poor woman a break, " or whatever.

BH: Uh huh.

SF: And so, Mrs. Geddes, cause I was close to Mrs. Geddes, I still lived in the dorm. I was a house director from 1967 to 1977 at Fairfield Hall. So, that, I would go in to see her every week and we'd talk about the dorm, we'd talk about other stuff. And so one day, ya know, in the course of conversation...

BH: So you remained involved.

SF: Involved.

BH: With this university after you left.

SF: Right. Exactly.

BH: And you were hearing that more and more needed to be done with the ESL program. Ok.

SF: With the ESL kids, exactly. And so one day I mentioned that I really wasn't excited about Ridgefield. I'm not sure why exactly. I think maybe because it was a more affluent community than I was used to. My home, Cheshire's not a particularly affluent community.

BH: I see.

SF: Danbury at that time wasn't and still isn't. It's still basically a blue-collar community. And Ridgefield was a little more...affluent, a little more, I don't know, something about it just didn't rub me right.

BH: There was a definite difference between Ridgefield as a community and Danbury as a city.

SF: Danbury as a city, right. And I...

BH: And right there I said community and city.

SF: City, yea.

BH: A city...

SF: Danbury, at the time, Danbury was divided into two. There was Danbury proper which was the city and then there was the outskirts, which was the town.

BH: Right.

SF: And then at one point it became one whole unit.

BH: Ok.

SF: But I was...

BH: People needing ESL...

SF: Lived in the city.

BH: Were gravitating to...?

SF: The city.

BH: Danbury.

SF: Danbury city...yes.

BH: Ok.

SF: So she mentioned to me, she said, "Why don't you...why don't you just apply, or call Mr. Wittman and see what he has to say? If you're not happy in Ridgefield, maybe this will give you an opportunity to, you know, to come back to Danbury." And so I called his office and asked for an appointment. I went to see him. And he pulled out my record, cause he had a record, cause he had interviewed me before. And he said, "You know, well, why didn't you come to Danbury originally?"

BH: (Laughs)

SF: And I said, "I don't know. Probably because you didn't ask me first!" And so we chuckled about that. And then after the talk, he found out that during my student teaching experience, when I was in 5th grade there, I had an Italian boy that pretty much was mine for the whole 6 weeks.

BH: Ok.

SF: When I wasn't doing my student-teaching activities, he was my shadow. And we...we played games and I was helping him with his English and he liked, I remember he liked Christopher Columbus. So we used to read about Christopher Columbus and stuff.

BH: Ok.

SF: Then when I went and did my history assignment...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: at the middle school or the junior high school, which was White Hall, which is now White Hall, I had a boy from Belgium in one of my classes. And again, he was mine because I was a student teacher,

excuse me, and I had more time than the teacher, cause I didn't have to do... I was there for 6 weeks, but I wasn't independent until the last 2 weeks. So I had 4 weeks of observation time. So during the observation time in each setting, I could work with the boy for, tutor him and help him.

BH: Ok. You gave more tutoring to these children who were in need...

SF: Right.

BH: ...Of English language development.

SF: Exactly.

BH: Ok.

SF: And so Mr. Whitman liked that idea. And for whatever reason he said, and I'll never forget this, he said, "If you take this job as an ESL teacher in the elementary school and help Marie and help me out for one year," he said, "at the end of that year," this was 1969, he said, "at the end of the year, next year, I will give you the opportunity to pick any job that's available, that you're qualified for, that you have certification for."

BH: Wow!

SF: "If you don't like this particular job,

BH: That's quite an offer!

SF: But I just, I need somebody to help Marie."

BH: (Laughs)

SF: And I said, "Well, ya know, this is a little challenge. I'll give it a try!"

BH: Ok.

SF: So but first of all, I had gone over to see Marie and talked to her to find out what she was doing and what was expected, et cetera.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And so I said, "Ok, I'll give it a shot!" And that's what I did. And when he retired, he retired like, 10, 12 years later, I remember saying at one of the little functions that, that they had for him that, "I guess I must have liked my position. I must have liked this job, because it's been 10 years and I never went back to him and asked him for a different job!"

BH: Different...(Laughs heartily)

SF: (Also laughs heartily!)

BH: You never left, ESL!

SF: I never left ESL. I've been doing it ever since.

BH: But at that time you didn't have specific ESL training.

SF: No, I didn't.

BH: You were just learning yourself.

SF: I didn't have ESL training. At the time, to be, to teach ESL, you didn't really need any training.

BH: Hmm.

SF: What you needed was to be certified as an elementary education major. If you were gonna ...

BH: I see.

SF: If you were gonna teach in the elementary level, you had to be certified elementary. If you were gonna teach at the high school level, or the secondary level...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: You had to be certified as either an English teacher or Foreign Language teacher.

BH: Ok, that was the requirement.

SF: That was the requirement.

BH: Ok.

SF: There was no certification. There was no endorsement. It was just that the district needed somebody to teach the assignment and that's what you got. It was like giving somebody, um, a coaching position. You don't necessarily have to know how to coach football. You don't necessarily have to have been a football coach, or trained as a football coach, to coach football.

BH: All right.

SF: And maybe now you do, but then you didn't.

BH: Ok. All right.

SF: You like the sport and you did it.

BH: All right.

SF: So that's basically what was happening.

BH: Interest was like 95%.

SF: Percent, that's right.

BH: All right.

SF: Because I guess the feeling was if you have an interest, then you're gonna work at it.

BH: Ok.

SF: However, I took it a little step further. Once I got the job and I started taking graduate courses, every course that I took, I geared it to ESL.

BH: Right.

SF: If I had to do a paper, you know, if I possibly could, I would deal with the history of the Portuguese people in Danbury, or you know something like that.

BH: Hmm.

SF: To, so, that I would learn more about the people that I was teaching.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And I would learn a little more about what to do with them, because there were people out there, there were books being written out there, but Danbury just hadn't gotten to that point yet.

BH: Hmm.

SF: We didn't have a staff. We didn't have people that were gonna go out and do workshops and take workshops and stuff.

BH: Hmm.

SF: So it was basically, you know, you learn as you go. It was a learning as you go situation. And there were not a great abundance of materials out there.

BH: Hmm, I've been there before.

SF: So I couldn't go into a catalogue and say, "Ok, I want this and I want this and I want that!"

BH: (Laughs) It wasn't there!

SF: It wasn't there. And I ended up spending hours and lots of my own money making flash cards and getting old, used, semi-used workbooks from the primary grades.

BH: For pictures...

SF: For pictures...

BH: And identification, hmm...

SF: And identification and using those same kind of activities, even though they're designed for 1st graders, you had to use them with 5th graders. So you had to, you know, because you're teaching vocabulary, you're teaching colors, you're teaching...

BH: Right.

SF: Prepositions, ya know, and you're playing games and you're sitting under the table and you're standing on the chair and you're doing all of these other things.

BH: You're doing everything that needs to be done to teach language.

SF: Right. Exactly! So...

BH: To someone who doesn't understand that language...

SF: Exactly.

BH: (laughs)

SF: And you didn't have any training. And you were never sure if you were doing the right thing. You were just going by your gut reaction and is the kid responding to you. Is he learning? Is he retaining? Is he, ya know, and that opened up a whole other kettle of fish.

BH: His ability...

SF: When, ya know, when the kid wasn't responding and you've been doing the same thing with him, ya know, how do I know if this is learning disabled?

BH: Right.

SF: Ya, know. There weren't again, no tests or no bi-lingual psychologists and stuff. (Laughs)

BH: Um, I'm going to stop for a little while.

SF: Ok.

BH: And um, we'll take a break.

SF: Ok.

(Interview resumes)

BH: Ok, Sharon. I know that you talked about learning as you go along and that you had to make a lot of your own materials. Um, let's recap a little bit. Um, exactly what year did you begin teaching in the ESL program in Danbury? And then, how has it evolved?

SF: Ok. I actually started teaching in the ESL program in September of 1969. However, the ESL program in Danbury had started a couple of years prior to that. I believe the actual program for, starting with children started in the fall of 1967 with a friend of mine, Marie Toscano, who is also a WestConn alum. But she was the only person responsible for all of the ESL students in the Danbury Public Schools. At that time there were, I think there were like 10 elementary schools, a middle school and a high school. And she did all the servicing. She rotated amongst the schools. She...

BH: So there was one person for all the elementary schools?

SF: One person, all, right. Uh, yep.

BH: And high school and junior high school?

SF: Uh, she didn't do too much in the high school area or the middle school. She primarily spent her time in the elementary schools. But at the time, there only approximately 100-110 students which is a lot, but it's not that many when you consider how many there are today...1200.

BH: Whoa!

SF: Uh, so she started and in the spring of 1967, she would, she was complaining to the Director of Personnel that she needed help, that is was too much to get to all the kids. The kids weren't getting enough service. She was only spending, ya know, half hour with each child, averaging out and in

groups per week with these students who needed more time, more individualized time, more time geared specifically to language learning. And ya know, as...the phrase at the time was that it was a submersion kind of program. The kid just sat there and he learned or he didn't learn. It was sink or swim and that wasn't what she wanted to give. She wanted to give them specific time.

BH: Hmm.

SF: So, that's when I got interviewed and got involved with the program. She, uh, at the time, I had been teaching in Ridgefield for 2 years. At the end of the second year, in the spring of 1969, I decided that I didn't think I really liked traveling Route 7 to Ridgefield every day.

BH: Hmm.

SF: In the winter and traffic I'd have to get up an hour early just to get there on time. So, at the time, the Dean of Women, who was a friend of mine, her sister-in-law was secretary to the Director of Personnel in the Danbury Public Schools. So she had mentioned to me that there was an opening in Danbury for some teachers and maybe I would like to consider having an interview. So I called Mr. Wittman, the Director of Personnel, and had an interview with him. And he had noticed on my application form that I had been, I had applied to Danbury earlier when I was a senior. And umm, he was funny. He wanted to know why I didn't accept the Danbury position. And I said, "Well, probably because you didn't give me one until after I had gotten other applications, uh, other offers!"

BH: Hmm.

SF: And uh, he liked the idea that I had worked with ESL students when I was doing my student teaching. So even though it wasn't formal training, I wasn't a novice to working with ESL students.

BH: Ok.

SF: And so he said, he made a joke out of it and he said Marie was giving him a real hard time, that ya know, if he would, if I would just do him this one favor and take this job, help her out in the elementary school for just one year, that at the end of that year in Spring of '97, in the Spring of '70, 1970, if there was any position that was available that I wanted more than I wanted this job, if I didn't like this job, all I had to do was let him know and I would be offered any position that he had that was available that I qualified for. So, I did it. I took the, I said, "Well, ya know, why not give it a try?" So I did it. I worked with Marie closely. She gave me some hints and some ideas. Again, no formal training on her part nor on my part.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Umm, just ya know, word of mouth and talking to each and what seems to work and what doesn't work. And she actually became pregnant in that fall and she left mid-way through the year. So I was the sole teacher again, until they got somebody to replace her.

BH: Wow!

SF: But...

BH: Were there a lot of books that you could reference, or uh, written on the subject?

SF: There were a couple of books written. One, by Mary Finocchiaro, *Teaching ESL... Teaching English as a Second Language* actually is the title of it. But there weren't too many books out there. There were, the area as a discipline, as an educational discipline was just beginning to, ya know, it was being born.

BH: Hmm.

SF: More or less.

BH: Ok.

SF: And there weren't any national organizations or local chapters. There wasn't an equivalent of the NEA or the CEA.

BH: Ok.

SF: Or the Danbury Education Association. There were, none of those things were available yet. They were still being thought about and discussed.

BH: This is the very early effort.

SF: So this was like the very beginning, grass roots kind of thing.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And so, for a lot of us, myself, and others around the state and around the country, we were all in the same boat. We were all, most of us were elementary trained teachers who had gone and gotten our degrees in elementary education and taught in the elementary school for a number of years. And from there, ya know, branched off into what became our little specialty, English as a Second Language. And for a number of years, even after that, colleges and universities offered very little in terms of educational preparation.

BH: Really?

SF: For that, for us.

BH: Hmm. Was WestConn one of the first or did you go elsewhere?

SF: No actually. Actually I ended...I took... I took classes at Central CT after to get, towards my masters with Dr John Leach who was an adjunct at Central and at UCONN.

BH: Hmm.

SF: And I ended up getting my masters at UCONN with Dr Leach as my primary advisor, but even at that there weren't any, there were very few, there was no degree or no major in English as a Second Language. He offered class like: Transformational Grammar, Materials and Methods of Teaching ESL, different classes, but nothing that would give a degree in it.

BH: Ok.

SF: So when I actually got my masters,

BH: There's no curriculum. There's no...

SF: There was no formal curriculum.

BH: Ok.

SF: So when I finally got my masters from UCONN, it was in education, but I designed my own major. And so my major was, multi-culture, ESL multi-cultural major cause I took all the classes that I could that involved, ya know, after I got my requirements out of the way, I took all the extra things. And other courses that I had taken prior to going to UCONN, I took some graduate classes here and some at Central, and whenever I had to write a paper, I geared the paper to the population of students that I was teaching at the time.

BH: Wow.

SF: So, I could learn more about their culture or whatever, where they came from. Whatever the topic of the project was...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: I geared it towards working with ESL kids. So in that, that gave me a lot of instruction, interest, knowledge, background into the basically into the cultures of the students that I was working with.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: What they were like, where they lived.

BH: I'm sure that had to be very useful and very important.

SF: Right, and interesting... really, really interesting.

BH: I understand. Hmm.

SF: So, but...

BH: So you're involved in the beginning, the very start of it all. How did it evolve? Uh, did it evolve from elementary school to middle school, to high school? When did you start getting materials and more personnel involved?

SF: Ok. It actually, uh, let me see. I was the sole ESL teacher till, from 1969 on the elementary level it was me only until around 1970...2,'73.

BH: Wow!

SF: Then there was another teacher who came on board.

BH: Whew.

SF: We worked together. We split the elementary. I did most of the elementary. He did the elementary and the middle school. And then another person came on shortly after that. But even at that, in 1975 I was out for um about 3 months. I had a gall bladder attack and subsequent operation.

BH: Um.

SF: And so they had to get a substitute for me. At the time, I was teaching in 6 schools.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Each week.

BH: Wow!

SF: And I used to have a little index card on my mirror while I was brushing my teeth. It would tell me which day it was and what school I was gonna go to!

BH: (Laughs) Uh!

SF: And I used to joke about it. And I used to say, there's a movie, I think it's, *If It's Wednesday, This Must Be Belgium*, or something, I can't remember the title...

BH: Uh huh, yes.

SF: But something along those lines. And I used to say, ya know, "Well this is it. Let's see, it's Wednesday and I have to go to 3 schools today." Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I used to go to 3 schools.

BH: Wow!

SF: Tuesday and Thursday I'd go to 2 schools. So that when I, when they had to get a substitute for me, they ended up getting one person to sub in the 2 largest schools and then the other 2 people split my other schools.

BH: (Laughs.) They needed 4 substitutes, (continues laughing hard)

SF: (Laughs) Yeah, it took 3 people to cover my schools!

BH: (Continues laughing.) To cover one of you!

SF: To cover one of me.

BH: That's pretty funny!

SF: Right, but that's just what happened. And uh...

BH: Now did you work directly with the students by pulling them out, or did you work in the classroom itself? Did you work with the teachers?

SF: Ok. I worked primarily with the students, pulling them out...the pull out program.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Taking them and trying to group them within a certain age range and a certain grade level range.

BH: Ability.

SF: And language ability range, so that you didn't have 6th graders with 1st graders. Or you didn't have students who were very knowledgeable in the language working with kids who, who uh were less knowledgeable. You tried to group them as best you could, given the amount of time you had to work with in the school.

BH: Ok.

SF: I worked... we didn't... in the beginning there was no ESL Department, so we worked under the assistant superintendent of schools. And he was very good about if there was any kind of materials or

anything that we had seen or we heard about, he was good about getting us whatever he could get us. He allowed us to attend conferences and workshops.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Because we were beginning to develop... the National TESOL Association was developing, Teachers of English to other languages.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Connecticut, which I was one of the founding members, had their own group or we would have our own conference.

BH: Hmm. Wow.

SF: Every year. So that, it was becoming, it was an up and coming discipline. And especially in certain parts of the country, in the East coast, on the West coast, the Southwest, where you had, East coast seemed to draw a lot of Puerto Rican speakers.

BH: Ok.

SF: Spanish speakers. And the Southwest and California seemed to draw lots of the Mexican population. And then there were others spread out throughout the country, but those were the dominant areas.

BH: This was during the '60's or the '70's?

SF: This was in the sixties and early seventies, exactly.

BH: Ok, so Spanish speakers...predominately.

SF: Spanish speakers was the predominant group and in Danbury for many years, for uh, gosh... uh... for...probably a good 20... for at least 20 years, Spanish was the dominant language in Danbury.

BH: Of the ESL population.

SF: Of the ESL population.

BH: Ok, ok.

SF: Ok. The last 10 or so years...10, 12 years, the switch has gradually moved to Brazilian and Portuguese speakers.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: It was, Danbury had a population of...ESL population of Spanish speakers and then a large Portuguese population, Portuguese coming from continental Portugal.

BH: Ok.

SF: Then about maybe 10, 12 years ago that Portuguese population began to shift from continental Portugal to South America to Brazil. Which Brazil is the only country in South America that is Portuguese speaking. It's not Spanish speaking like the rest of South America is.

BH: Hmm, interesting.

SF: So and that Brazilian population is growing and growing. So that the Brazilian population actually I think right now outnumbers the Spanish population, Spanish speakers.

BH: Really?

SF: Yeah.

BH: In Danbury schools throughout?

SF: In Danbury schools, yeah.

BH: Hmm. Uh, what would be the second uh, highest group of people who influenced Danbury's ESL program?

SF: Ok. Well the Spanish and Portuguese originated and then in the late '70's when the Viet Nam war ended, you had the Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian population coming in. So those were the three, you had your Spanish speakers, your Portuguese speakers, and then people tend to couple the Asian speakers as one group.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Although you're dealing with distinct languages.

BH: Yes.

SF: Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian,

BH: Yes.

SF: And a few Mung. We didn't get too many Mungs in Danbury. But, if you wanted to couple that, the third group would be the Asian speakers, which were, as I said, the Vietnamese, the Cambodian, and the Laotian.

BH: Ok, are we still seeing that group?

SF: Ok. We're seeing less, but there's still some around.

BH: Uh hmm.

SF: But what's happening is that many of them are like, it's a second migration. We're not getting as many coming directly from Viet Nam or, or Cambodia. We get a few, but not as many. The rest of the population...the ESL population which covers currently approximately 45 different language groups...Spanish and Portuguese are the two dominants. They're like way up in the hundreds.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: The others are scattered. We have Chinese. We have a considerable number of Chinese speakers. We have Asian speakers. We have...Albanian, Macedonian, Cosovo...that group is another group that's coming in.

BH: Ok, ok.

SF: So as the...as the fighting and destruction going on around the world occurs, we seem to be getting more people coming from those areas that are being disrupted. We...I have not seen too many coming from the Middle East. We have a few. Most of them have been here for a couple of years. A group, a large group coming from various parts of India...

BH: Ok.

SF: So there's like people coming from all over the world.

BH: From all over the world.

SF: The United States really, truly is a melting pot. Except today, we ...we used to use the term "melting pot"...everybody blended together, and now the term is more like a "salad bowl", where we get everybody in, (Interviewer laughs) but everybody keeps their own culture and their own activity like in a salad. You know you need tomatoes and your lettuce and your peppers and your cucumbers.

BH: And they stay lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers.

SF: And they stay lettuce, tomatoes and cucumbers...right! They don't change.

BH: Um... this is very, very interesting because as each group has come, why do you think they have chosen to come to Danbury?

SF: Ok.

BH: What's your opinion on that?

SF: Ok. I know that in the beginning when there were pockets of Spanish-speakers here and Portuguese-speakers here...many of them brought their families and their relatives here.

BH: Ok.

SF: Plus at the time, at the time...the hat industry was still big in Danbury. So there was a lot of opportunity for them to get jobs.

BH: Ok.

SF: And the construction, construction workers and also gardeners and landscape people...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Those kinds of jobs were readily available and still are in many cases. The hat factory, the hat industry is no longer prominent in Danbury, but there are other kinds of industry that takes over. Also, in terms of bringing families over, Danbury has a large number of older, large homes that have been sub-divided into apartments and they're fairly reasonably priced as far rental goes.

BH; Ok, so people could find a job. People could find housing.

SF: Job...housing...right. And they had family here to help them.

BH: Ok.

SF: Ok. Now that basically dealt with the Spanish and Portuguese, but then in the late seventies and early eighties when things were happening in the Middle East...in...Viet Nam...

BH: In the Asian countries...

SF: In the Asian countries...many of the Vietnamese and the other populations came through various organizations.

BH: Ah...ok.

SF: In Connecticut, the primary organization that shuffled people to the Danbury area was the Catholic charities...in Hartford and Bridgeport.

BH: Ok.

SF: And so initially they would set up several families to form like a little colony.

BH: Ok.

SF: And then as more families came, they would send them here, where they have a group of people already established in Danbury, or a group of people already established in Hartford or in Bridgeport...where they could be like the leaders and help them get along and get around, and help them find housing.

BH: So they came through the charitable efforts of others?

SF: Yes, yeah.

BH: Not because they would have thought of coming to Danbury on they're own...

SF: Not particularly. I don't think so. I think this is...

BH: Not particularly.

SF: I think for that group, for the Asians, because there weren't that many Asians here except for a group of ya know, the Chinese people...

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: That were here and are still here.

BH: Ok.

SF: But they didn't have relatives here to bring them. Now they've got relatives.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: But when they first started coming back in early 80's, they didn't have anybody. They were just... here.

BH: Ok.

SF: It made it difficult for them and for everybody. Ya know, being uprooted from one location into another location where there's, you don't really know anybody and you don't know the language. You don't know the customs and the other people around you don't know you. And we're all a little afraid of change and somebody who's different...

BH: Right.

SF: Looks different, acts different, behaves differently than we're used to. So it was, it was quite a change...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Quite an experience for everybody.

BH: It seems like Danbury though, has drawn people from everywhere, more so than the surrounding towns, but has it spilled over also into the surrounding towns, where uh, the Asian population would be, where the Spanish population would be?

SF: There is some spillover. Each of the towns around us all has, all have an ESL population.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: None as large as Danbury. Danbury has in this area probably the largest population.

BH: Yeah, that's what I thought.

SF: But there are some in each of the towns, in Bethel, Brookfield, uh, Danbury has a very large population as I said. Probably close to 1200 kids currently enrolled in the ESL program.

BH: Hmm, and how many people are directing that program today?

SF: Ok. Today we have, we have a full-time director, who has...well, several secretaries, a couple of secretaries.

BH: Uh hmm.

SF: And people in his office to help translate. And there are in terms of teachers probably...close to 30, 25 to 30 teachers, K through 12 including...there are paraprofessionals also in there.

BH: Hmm.

SF: So it's a far cry from what it was 25 years ago, 30 years ago.

BH: Thirty-five ESL personnel.

SF: Right! Oh yeah...all certified.

BH: Teachers?

SF: All the teachers are certified...all of us. All the teachers are certified, that Connecticut has certification. It's one of the certifications that you can get. You have to be certified to teach history, or to teach math or to teach ya know, foreign language.

BH: In the subject area...

SF: You have to be certified in that particular subject area. So we are certified, we're certified teachers and also certified in teaching ESL. Or if you're a bilingual teacher, you're certified in bilingual education.

BH: Hmm...have you always worked with children or have you also worked with adult education?

SF: I did a little in adult education...not on a regular basis. Basically it was substituting for friends who extended medical leaves or whatever. And I would go in for a few weeks or a couple of months...whatever the thing was. I never really taught full time as an adult, with adults.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Taught primarily with elementary children from 1969 through 1986. Then I was a coordinator from, I'm sorry, '89...through '89 and then in '89, from '89 to '97, I was coordinator. And then when I went back into the classroom in '97, I went to the high school. And so I've worked with high school...so I've worked with, and in between...I did do some not full time, but again subbing on the middle school level. So I've worked with all age levels.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: But my primary emphasis has always been elementary and now it's back up at the high school.

BH: Hmm...um, you said that you got your master's degree. Did you continue on beyond that and get your doctorate?

SF: Right...no, I don't have a doctorate. I have a 6th year certificate.

BH: Ok.

SF: That allowed me to be coordinator.

BH: Ok.

SF: I used to joke with a friend of mine who...well he teaches at the university level in Massachusetts and he wanted to get his doctorate and I was part of his doctoral thesis...my class, what he was doing. And I joked, ya know, at the time I said, " Ya know, I don't really need a doctorate to teach a child to say, 'may I go to the bathroom please'."

BH: (Laughs heartily)

SF: I can do that without getting a doctorate and it saves me a lot of headaches...and a lot of time at the computer writing my dissertation! (Laughs)

BH: Ok...you've come through from the beginning. You've worked with just about every kind of student. You've worked about every kind of age level, so in other words, you have the capability, without having to go and get a piece of paper that says you're capable.

SF: Right.

BH: You're capable! (Laughs)

SF: Right. Actually, that's what happened. When Connecticut, cause again I worked on the certification, the regulations for certification and we put a grandfather clause in.

BH: All right.

SF: So that I don't have to, ya know...if you had been teaching for x number of years and successfully were teaching and the board of education vouches for that, you were grand fathered into it. If not, you had to take certain classes and things like that.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And so it was designed for all of us who had been teaching for 20 years before certification came into effect.

BH: Ok.

SF: And rather than making us go out and take more course work...cause most of us had the courses anyway...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Cause as we did our post graduate work, we got...

BH: You took...

SF: You took the classes, but...in the event that you didn't get a class, you didn't have to go out and spend the, ya know several hundred dollars to take the class.

BH: You knew it.

SF: You were grand fathered in as long as you had been teaching for a certain number of years and were successful at it.

BH: Hmm, hmm...uh, today we hear a lot about a bilingual education program. How is that different from ESL?

SF: Ok...ESL is English as a Second Language. Every student whose language is not English takes an English as a Second Language class.

BH: Ok.

SF: Some students take, get involved in what's called a bilingual program and in that, their content, the subjects are taught in their native language and they also receive English. Bi, meaning two...so it's English plus whatever the native language is.

BH: Ok.

SF: In Danbury we have bilingual programs for Portuguese speakers and for Spanish speakers.

BH: Hmm...just the two languages?

SF: Just those two languages...

BH: Because they...?

SF: Because those are the dominant numbers.

BH: Ok.

SF: Where again, numbers rule the, ya know, what happens.

BH: Ok.

SF: So...

BH: So, have you ever taught in a bilingual area or have you really stayed with the ESL?

SF: I've really stayed primarily with ESL. At the high school I teach ESL students and most, I teach the ESL component of a bilingual program.

BH: Ok.

SF: And so many of my students are either in the Spanish or Portuguese bilingual programs.

BH: Hmm...

SF: But I'm only doing the, I do just the English part.

BH: Ok...um, the approaches have to be different, but the goal is learning English as well as learning subject matter.

SF: Right, right...

BH: Uh, just the approach...

SF: Right.

BH: is different.

SF: Yeah, the ...yeah the goal is to learn English. And the goal is to keep students ...keep them learning the content.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So that there's not too much of a lag. And so, because of the high numbers of Spanish and Portuguese students, the bilingual program was designed. It's not a large program, but it does cover classes for science, history, and math classes. At the high school, we have been bilingual. The elementary schools do it through...more like a tutorial, I believe.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Where the students will go to the bilingual teacher and she helps them with their science or their math or their history.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: There are a couple of schools I think on the elementary level that do have regular bilingual classes.

BH: Ok.

SF: It's a conglomerate. Whatever the best approach is to meet the needs of the students in the individual settings, in the individual schools...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Because some schools have more kids than others. Some schools require the bilingual program. Others require more of an ESL approach. So...

BH: One other question along the lines of the bilingual, uh, is that for children who speak English and want to learn a second language...

SF: No.

BH: even from the younger grades?

SF: Ok...in Danbury we don't have that.

BH: Ok.

SF: That's usually referred to as a two-way bilingual program. And what that means is that a group of children who are English speaking who want to learn Spanish...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: are taught in a bilingual fashion, taught both in Spanish and in English. And coupled with a group of students who are Spanish speakers who are leaning English and the two groups often work together.

BH: Ok.

SF: And work apart. We haven't got to that point yet. We're looking at it, but we haven't quite got there yet.

BH: But that's gonna likely to be a very interesting cultural exchange.

SF: It will be, it will be very interesting, very cultural. I think in...I want to say New Haven has a two-way Japanese program.

BH: Hmm?

SF: And I think Willimantic, Willimantic has the two-way Spanish program.

BH: Wow!

SF: And New London also I think...somewhere in the New London area. There are several places that do have it. We haven't quite got there yet.

BH: Ok.

SF: Maybe...

We are at the end of side B of tape one. Beginning tape two, side A

BH: You mentioned that you got your master's degree here at uh, in Connecticut...

SF: Actually...in Connecticut...actually at Southern Connecticut...

BH: At Southern Connecticut...

SF: I mean sorry, UCONN... UCONN.

BH: UCONN? Ok.

SF: Attended Southern...

BH: Uh, are you still involved with activities here in WestConn or with UCONN...uh, are you still involved in the higher levels of education? Have you ever taught at university level?

SF: No...ok...I'm more involved with WestConn now and have always been really involved with WestConn since I graduated, even though I went to Southern and Central and finally got my masters at UCONN. And my 6th year is out of Southern. But I did...I've been always involved with WestConn. I like WestConn. It's, it's...I just liked the school right from the very first time that I came here. And it just amazes me, every time I come here now at how much it's changed in the last 40 years since I was a student.

(Laughs)

BH: Well, it's grown! (Laughs)

SF: It's grown. It's grown in size. It's grown...

BH: Two campuses

SF: Two campuses. Just the landscaping, just the landscaping on this campus alone...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: is tremendous. We actually look like all the other little state colleges. We used to, you know, we just looked like a bunch of buildings before...

BH: (Laughs)

SF: and now we're pulled together with the gate and everything in the front.

BH: (Continues to laugh.) Ah...

SF: So...really tremendous. But I started, when I graduated in '67 I became involved within a year or so after that with the alumni association, and I was a board member and I held all the offices including president, vice president and all of those offices, and stayed on the board for about 20 years. And for most of those years, it was a small group of us who were doing whatever, whatever the alumni association did. It was just a small group.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And it was...

BH: Of how many people?

SF: Probably about 4 or 5 of us.

BH: Hmm.

SF: We would hold, ya know, we'd hold annual meetings and we'd invite back graduates of various 5-year anniversary people...graduation classes. We always got a large turn out. But the actual nitty-gritty stuff that had to be done, getting the newsletter out, collecting ya know, the dues and publicity and stuff like that was really only done by 3 or 4, 5 people and a part-time director who was actually involved with something else and the alumni association was just kind of like given to them as an extra...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: To do. We...I was on the board for about 20 years. Then I went off for a number of years. I decided it was better to go off and let some new people come on...

BH: Hmm...

SF: and get more younger blood involved.

BH: Ok.

SF: And then about, actually in 1997, I was voted on, back on the board as a lifetime member.

BH: Wow! They can't keep you off! (Laughs)

SF: (Laughs) So I came back on the board without voting rights the first year, but then after that, they changed the constitution and gave us voting rights. So...I still attend the meetings and I'm currently chairperson of the scholarship committee.

BH: Oh, wow!

SF: And we give out several thousand dollars every year to graduates, undergraduate students for academic and, primarily academic...

BH: Wonderful!

SF: responses, reasons. And I enjoy that! And then I try to be, I've tried to be as involved in the other activities that the alumni association sponsors...homecoming, and...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: picnic and theater parties and whatever kinds of things...

BH: So you're still very active.

SF: Right...and I'm a promoter. I think I got a good education here. And I think that anyone who comes here is going to get a really good education. State school or not, it gives you a good education...good background. And from there, many of us have gone on to ya know much bigger and better things.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And I...either this, my undergraduate work here allowed me to attend the other state colleges, get my master's degree from UCONN, from uh, UCONN, yes and my sixth year from Southern.

BH: Wow!

SF: So that I could ya know, I can do as much with my education, my foundation that I got here as anybody could do with, with an education that got any place else.

BH: That's great...that's great. It's good that you're still involved and I'm sure people appreciate your input. (Laughs)

SF: (Laughs)

BH: Don't you think? (Continues to laugh.)

SF: I hope! (Laughs)

BH: I'm sure. I'm sure. Um, are you a member of any other organizations locally?

SF: (Sighs) Locally, not. Not locally in Danbury. I, my involvement is more with Connecticut education, well Connecticut Education Association and Danbury Education Association, national education. As a teacher in the Danbury Public Schools, you automatically become involved with those.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: I never, ya know, I've never been overly active in any of those. However, I have, I was part of the ground, developing group that started the Connecticut teachers of English to speakers of other languages' group.

BH: Oh, you were the founder?

SF: I was one of the founding, one of the group, one of the founding members.

BH: Wow!

SF: And so I've maintained an affiliation with them over the years. I also have an affiliation with the national Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages. I've been involved with those two groups for a number of years.

BH: At the...at the national level?

SF: That's at the national level and at the state level.

BH: And the state level...

SF: Right.

BH: Wow!

SF: And then most of my involvement actually is involved with what I do with the ESL. When I was the coordinator of the program in Danbury, I was also chairperson of the bilingual, ESL bilingual, bilingual education coordinators around the state. We had, as the principles have their group, and teachers have their group, the coordinators of English as a Second Language had their little group. And for a couple, two years I was president to that group, met in Hartford and helped to set some policy at the state level.

BH: Hmm, are you a member of any of the local churches?

SF: Uh, the, no, not really.

BH: Ok.

SF: I...

BH: Um, also we haven't, I haven't asked you this, but Sharon, are you married?

SF: No, no I'm not married, have no children. I joke with my class that my children are them. (Laughs) My students are my children! (Continues to laugh.)

BH: Ah, I'm sure and they're, and I'm sure they feel that very special connection to you.

SF: Yeah, yeah.

BH: Um, have you any other hobbies? You talk so impassion, so passionately about education, but um, I don't know. I think there's more here.

SF: (Laughs) Well I do. Well education, ESL and education has been ya know, I've done that for a number of years.

BH: Uh huh. (Laughs)

SF: But I, my, my pleasure time, my free time, I like to watch old movies.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Movies of the '40's and '50's. I'm a western fan.

BH: Oh my. (Laughs)

SF: So I like the old cowboy movies.

BH: Uh huh.

SF: Since I was a kid I've always enjoyed those. I like reading romance novels.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Period pieces, not modern, period pieces...

BH: Uh, the historical?

SF: I tend, I tend to be, historical, historical romance...

BH: Hmm.

SF: and British romance. I tend to be more of a traditional romantic as opposed to a more modern day person. (Laughs)

BH: (Laughs)

SF: I like, again I like music from the '60's. It's the era when I was younger.

BH: Hmm, so do I.

SF: And I enjoy, when I have the time and when I'm able to do it, I enjoy doing embroidery, cross-stitching, counter cross-stitch.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So I used to do that a great deal, getting back to it now, but took a little time off.

BH: Um, how's the uh movies, movie theaters locally changed over the years here in Danbury? You said you, you like old movies, so you went a lot, right?

SF: I used to go. I used to go to the movies at the theaters. The, in Danbury, in the center of Danbury we used to, we had the Palace Theater, which is....

BH: What year was this?

SF: this was, well when I was in college.

BH: It's closed now.

SF: It's closed now, right. When I was in college...

BH: Uh huh.

SF: And, and then over on North St., there was a movie complex on North St...

BH: Hmm.

SF: but that's been, that's been taken down, too.

BH: Ok.

SF: The new Foodmart is where the old movie theater used to be.

BH: Oh, Super Foodmart?

SF: Yeah right.

BH: North St. Shopping Center...

SF: North St. Shopping Center, right.

BH: Oh, ok.

SF: Ok. And...

BH: Well, so there was another theater?

SF: Yeah, but then with the SONY complex or whatever it is now, was it Lewis complex over on route 7? That kind of like, has monopolized everything in the area.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Cause it's a multi-complex. There're five, what five or six, eight theaters I think, eight or nine theaters in there.

BH: Quite a few.

SF: So you can...

BH: Uh, maybe 10...

SF: Maybe 10 even, right...

BH: Hmm.

SF: So...

BH: I know. And now, that seems to be the only place to go in Danbury.

SF: Yeah, that's, that's, in the Danbury area to see, to yeah, uh, in Bethel, New Milford, they have small theaters that cater to some of the more art, art movie, artsy movies. And they also do like second and second run movies as opposed ...

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: to the big glitzy movies that come to the SONY...

BH: Would you like to see them show the old movies on the big screen again?

SF: Yeah, I would love...

BH: Is that the kind of movies...

SF: Yeah, I would love to see some of these old movies, cause I do watch, watch them on TV.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And I rent videos when I ya know, when I'm in the mood for something different. And you know, put it on. And I just have a normal size TV.

BH: Uh huh.

SF: I don't have a big...

BH: Not the big one...

SF: Big one, and so I, it would be interesting to see some of these old movies cause I've never, the movies of the '40's and '50's that I particularly like, I never actually on the screen.

BH: Ah.

SF: Because...

BH: Because...

SF: Because I was a little too young.

BH: You were too young.

SF: I was born in '45, so I didn't get to see those.

BH: Ok, ok.

SF: I actually got to see them more when they started coming on TV.

BH: Hmm.

SF: When I was a teenager, on the weekends when they used to have baseball games, and if it was, if it rained wherever the baseball game was being held they'd have what they would call "rain-out theater". And on TV...

BH: Ah.

SF: And they would show old movies. And that's when I first got involved with watching the old movies.

BH: Hmm.

SF: And on Saturday morning on TV they always had it, when I was a kid, Westerns. Saturday morning there was always a Western every morning, every Saturday morning.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So I just, I kind of like just fell in love with the old West.

BH: Hmm.

SF: And again, ya know, it's traditional. It's romantic. It's...

BH: Well...

SF: (Laughs heartily)

BH: Now that you say that you love the old West, I'm gonna ask, have you traveled out West? Have you traveled within the United States?

SF: Yes, I've done some traveling in the United States. Almost all of the East coast I've traveled to. I've, I've done Texas and California and Washington and Michigan.

BH: Hmm.

SF: And various places around...

BH: Uh huh.

SF: I like, I've done Hawaii. I like Hawaii.

BH: Wow.

SF: I haven't gone to Alaska. Alaska is someplace that I've always wanted to go to and maybe I'll get to do that in a couple of years after I retire. (Laughs)

BH: Actually that's a place that I'd like to go, too.

SF: Canada, too, I've been to Canada, Puerto Rico...

BH: Hmm, uh how about international travel since you're an ESL teacher? (Laughs)

SF: No, actually, I've not done that and I've always said I wanted to that. I wanted to go to Portugal when I was teaching Portuguese, dominant Portuguese families, cause I wanted to see the towns that they come from.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: Cause Danbury has a sister city in Portugal.

BH: Oh, interesting!

SF: And I can't remember the name of it now. But a lot of the, a lot of the old Portuguese families that are here come from that particular town.

BH: Ok.

SF: And of course I've always wanted to go to Italy to see where my family, my great-grandparents came from.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: But I've never had the opportunity. So maybe, maybe when I retire in a couple of years I'll have more opportunity. (Laughs)

BH: (Laughs, too) Usually it's, you have more time and opportunity and less money!

SF: Yeah, right, exactly!

BH: Is that it? (Laughs)

SF: (Laughs again)

BH: Yeah, we've already been discussing that at home, too. (Laughs) So um, I hope you get to do the international travel as well. It's pretty exciting. Um, have you ever been tempted, since you've seen a lot of the United States, to move away from Danbury?

SF: Well, as I think I may have said earlier, I'm not originally from Danbury. Cheshire is where I was born and raised.

BH: Right, but you've lived here awhile.

SF: But Danbury, but I've lived in Danbury since 1963 when I came here as a student.

BH: Right.

SF: Maybe move away from Danbury yeah, but not necessarily move away from New England or from this area. I like the, I like winters. As cold as they are....

BH: Wow.

SF: or as snowy as they are... I like, being a teacher, I can say that, because I don't have to go to work on days when it's snowy.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: Or when the weather is bad, or the roads are bad or I get a 90-minute delay, so I don't have to worry about that.

BH: Yes.

SF: But I do like winters. I don't think I could live some place where I couldn't see the four seasons change.

BH: Um hmm, um hmm.

SF: I like to see the winter. I like to see spring come. I like the colored leaves in the fall. You know, I'm not wild about the hot humidity of the summers so maybe if I could go someplace that didn't have the humidity...

BH: Hmm, ok.

SF: that the New England summers have. That probably would be the only thing that I would change.

BH: Hmm.

SF: Go someplace, you know to Hawaii or someplace where there's ocean breezes all the time, so you don't feel the humidity. But, but other than that, I like living in New England. I like the change here. I like the seasons. I like the people, old New Englanders that take a little time to get to know, but then...

BH: But once you get to know them...

SF: Once you get to know them, they're really ya know, they're nice.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: It's a nice area.

BH: And I'm sure you still have many friends ...

SF: Oh yeah.

BH: And people that you work with, that you're close to...

SF: Yeah.

BH: To continue to live here, but...

SF: Right.

BH: So you haven't been tempted away from this area?

SF: No, no, not yet...

BH: Not yet...

SF: I mean, that's not to say that I wouldn't move away for a while, but I would always come back here.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: I would not move away on a permanent basis. I would go away for maybe a few months and then come back.

BH: Ok.

SF: Dual residency, or something...(Laughs)

BH: I guess, uh, kind of in closing, um, if you could pick one of your most memorable days here in Danbury, what might that be?

SF: (Soft laughter)

BH: I know. It's a hard question. Or, it might not be a day. It might just be an event that's happened here that you just really, that's really impressed you, uh, and been important in your life. Um...

SF: Oh gosh, so many different things...uh...

BH: One or two, if you can't decide...

SF: I think, I think one of the things that continues to amaze me even after all these years that I've been teaching ESL is working with the children, the students. Whether they're six years old or sixteen years old, they all have their own little personalities and they rub off on you in one way or another.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And you have, I have those students that I can remember very fondly as being really great kids and kids that I would love to have as my own.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: And then there are another little group of little darlings that you know, used to drive me crazy and probably gave me half the gray hairs that I have.

BH: (Laughs)

SF: But they're all really you know, lovable, nice children. They impressed me, and...

BH: The children...

SF: The children and...

BH: The people...

SF: The people. And I think that they are what motivated me. I used to say that I liked what I do, and I still say it. I like what I do because when I teach, when I work with these kids, you can see, you can see the little light going on.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: You can see them actually learning and picking up and absorbing. And I did teach regular class for two years when I first started teaching...

BH: Um hmm.

SF: In Ridgefield and the Ridgefield kids are great kids and I enjoyed the 2 years that I was there, but it was a different feeling when I left there and I came to Danbury and worked with these children. These children were so appreciative of what you were trying to teach them, what you were trying to do with them, that they were like a motivation to keep, to make me want to go on and to do more and to find out more and to see how I can help them to learn more.

BH: Ok.

SF: A different feeling than when I was teaching regular class.

BH: Um hmm.

SF: So...

BH: So it's really the children that have kept you going...

SF: Right.

BH: and staying here and really devoting your time and energies to teaching in Danbury.

SF: Right, yes, that's it.

BH: Well Sharon, um, I want to thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today and to share a little bit about yourself and your time here in Danbury.

SF: My pleasure...

BH: Thank you very much.