

Sara Schlosser Transcript

Ann Buffum: This is Sandy Gartner and Ann Buffum, meeting with Sara Schlosser to conduct a life history interview as part of the Vermont Jewish Women's History Project. Today is Saturday, January 19, 2008. We are at Sara's home, Sandiwood Farms in Wolcott, Vermont. Sara, do we have your permission to record this interview?

Sara Schlosser: Yes.

AB: Very good, Sara. It's really nice to be up here. It was exciting for us to find out that there really was a woman Jewish farmer in Vermont. So we'd like to start this interview by asking what led you to become a grower and a farmer.

SS: When I was a teenager and became a vegetarian and wanted to eat better, it was more stemming from wanting to grow my own food [and] to be healthier at that point. We started doing some bits of market gardening with certain crops and getting more into growing flowers for market and doing just our own food for ourselves and family and extended family. Maybe it was about thirteen or fourteen years ago, at this point. I had heard of the Community Supported Agriculture framework, which is CSA. It's like subscription farming. We started getting off into doing more of that, which was cutting back on flowers and growing more produce. So with all of our different market gardening, farming – I mean, we've grown, we've expanded, we've changed a whole lot. But the core was to grow healthy food for ourselves and then our community and extended family.

AB: Have you stayed vegetarians? Have you branched out to chickens or animals?

SS: Well, my husband and I are vegetarian. Our youngest, who's now fifteen, my son Kyle, almost as soon as he could express himself in words, wanted to eat meat and not

be a vegetarian. We had a pond dug and stocked that with fish. Maybe when he was five, he started fishing. We fed them a few years, and they got to be a good size. So he actually fished out his own first meat. From there, we said, "Oh, boy, we better get some chickens." So we have raised meat birds and pork for the children here, so we would know where the meat was coming from, and they could be part of that process and talk to them all the time about where food comes from and how animals are raised. They make their own choices when they were at friends' houses when they were younger, but certainly, now they do.

AB: Was this land to farm before, or did you turn it into a farm?

SS: It was. We have seventy acres. Initially, it was, I think, a hundred and something; it was one farm that was subdivided. Initially, it was dairies, and I think it was mostly hayfield and way back, potato land, which – amazing how after sixty years or so of no potatoes growing here and we planted some, the bugs came.

Sandy Gartner: You're kidding.

SS: They'd be dormant forever, but no, here they come. Those critters are pretty hardy. So when we got to this land, it was getting pretty overgrown, and we brush hogged and have been trying to keep up the fields being hayed organically. So we've had various animals over the years. Horses, we have only just one right now. We've raised replacement heifers for a local organic farm and then have raised meat not just for our children, but we've sold – they couldn't even butcher the pig down to small pieces that they'd eat it – so we sold the meat to the Community Supported Agriculture program, but as far as it staying in farmland was pretty important to us and still is – with the sugar bush. We've had different opportunities to plow up the back forty and make it all crops and have had actual – we knew that we could sell certain crops before we grow them. So that was almost like a dream come true. "Okay, let's do it. Bigger tractor, bigger crew." But we've gone different directions slowly and have decided to consciously stay

more small and sustainable in growing under five acres of produce and keeping the rest in hay land. Right now, we have a really great arrangement, and we have had really good arrangements in the past with a local dairy farmer, bringing us lots of manure, spreading manure on our field, manure for our garden. They come with these huge John Deere tractors and, in a matter of hours, can hay forty acres, and it's baled or chopped. We get what we need for our animals as well as fertilized, and they take the rest and keep it up nicely.

AB: Would you say that perhaps you were part of the early back to the land movement here in Vermont?

SS: Well, maybe not as early, but definitely in that thought and frame of mind.

AB: How did the local farmers accept – or how did they feel about you as a newcomer to farming in this area?

SS: Yes, that's a good question. I remember especially talking to the older gentleman we bought the farm from about organics and things like that and not spraying the potato bugs or doing these other things. It was very – they were all very, very curious – “Oh, look at them plowing away out there, working hard or trying” – with these different ideas that they weren't used to, but always checking in and coming down the road and talking to us and getting these ideas. I think it's really hard for older people in agriculture and farming to change their ways. But we've had many people just curious checking in, looking, getting plants from us. I definitely think this area of Vermont in general and the Northeast Kingdom is so full of diverse agriculture. There's incredible gourmet cheese that people are making from sheep and goat milk. It's more and more happening. I think the “back-to-the-landers” and organic agriculture, in many ways, is here, and it's not so unheard of or different anymore in this area, as it was twenty years ago when we first started in this area.

AB: Are you ever involved in helping young people learn about these new forms of agriculture?

SS: Absolutely. It's a huge part of our mission. We have interns every summer for the past fifteen summers. It's very, very important to me to find the right match with interns and make sure they know what they're getting into and I know what they want to learn. But we take a lot of time in field discussion and just explaining the why's and how's and what we're doing here to excited young folks in college or just out of college who want to either grow their own food or start market gardening or farming. Oftentimes, we've gotten people who've come from other farms, different years, and maybe want to learn something else from someone else, or the same thing in another way. So having apprentices is very important to us in many ways. We definitely feel like it's a valued learning exchange. We spend a lot of time – we welcome them into our family, and they live with us for the summer. We get very close with the people who work with us.

AB: That's very exciting. Where do you find that you're mostly marketing your products?

SS: Well, we've marketed in many different ways and places. What we're gearing toward right now is the Stowe farmers market, where I've kind of been an anchor and a fixture for the past fifteen years. We've done many farmers' markets a week and went that route. Then we did the community-supported agriculture and took out a few farmers' markets. So that was getting checks throughout the winter and knowing these folks were going to get twenty weeks of produce starting at this date and that date, and it was more fixed and secure and not as weather-dependent as far as standing out markets or the competition of farmers markets. With our maple syrup, we ship that nationwide, and that's advertised through our website. We have had many offers of shipping produce and this overnight shipping and the cold packs and just have not wanted to go that route. We've done quite a bit of wholesaling in the Stowe area as well to chefs and restaurants. That's been just a really exciting exchange for them to be getting local produce and

putting that on their menus and some people saying, "Oh, I saw our salad greens came from your farm at such and such a restaurant," and things like that. So very, very locally. It's so nice to connect directly with the people that are getting our food.

AB: It sounds like you're really in the forefront of this whole new movement that's starting to spread nationwide, this idea of eating locally and having your food come from the local area. We can get back to more about farming later, but let's back up a bit and let's start way back at the beginning of your life to talk about your family. How about starting back when your ancestors came to the United States? I don't remember where you said they came from, so you'll have to tell us, and if you know some stories from the old days that you could share with us. So think about grandparents or great grandparents.

SS: On a boat to Ellis Island. [laughter]

AB: Sounds familiar.

SS: Right. And very much city dwellers – Bronx, New York. This is my parents' upbringing. Their parents were in these Jewish communities there. I was recently watching some of the PBS.

SG: I didn't see that.

SS: It was so great to see that footage and connect more because it's so rich, and we're so curious of how it was. But I feel like, in my particular family, there wasn't a lot of real in touch with growing your food, with just my parents. They moved to the suburbs right outside of New York City in New Jersey when they got married. So I was brought up in the suburbs, and we had marigolds in the front flower bed and things like that. It wasn't really until I came to Vermont as a teenager for boarding school and my mind was expanded beyond the New Jersey horizons, for sure, to vegetarianism and new ways and ideas and thinking about where our food comes from. I know a lot of my relatives and cousins are all like, "Somebody did it. You're our only grower or someone working

the land from our family,” particular cousins and so forth. But there are so many Jewish people in agriculture up here, I'm finding, which is really neat and amazing. I don't know as many women, but lots of really great guys. So, I don't know if it's coincidence.

AB: That will be another book some other time.

SS: Yes, yes.

SB: So, how did you come to go to boarding school here in Vermont? What school was that?

SS: Well, unfortunately, it's not open anymore. But it was right over in the shadow of Mount Mansfield, and it was called the Stowe Prep School. I think it existed maybe thirty or thirty-five years or so from the mid-'60s through the mid-'90s. For me, at the time, it was ... a perfect place to expand my horizons and get out of New Jersey. I wasn't actually necessarily, at the time, looking to leave New Jersey and all that I knew and comforted in my friends [in those] very vulnerable teenage years. For me, I feel like I started to grow up when I came here to Vermont as a teenager and do these different projects and plant bulbs at the school that I saw would come up the next year and just really get more connected to agriculture.

AB: The tape stopped.

SS: Is that because I put my hand right by the –

[Recording paused.]

AB: Tell us some more about the high school. Did the school have anything to do with the ski areas? Was that its reason?

SS: We did ski daily if we wanted to. We all had passes and went up there in the afternoon for a few rounds, especially choice days. At that time, it wasn't its main focus;

it was more of an outward-bound type of school. It evolved more into a ski school after I had left, which I think was good for it for a while being in the location that it was at.

AB: When you were growing up in New Jersey, did you have any connection with a synagogue or religious education at that time in your life.

SS: Yes. We were part of the Glen Rock Jewish Community Center. My sister was bat mitzvahed there, and I attended a few early years of Hebrew school. I remember just feeling like I didn't love it, and it was extra, and it was draining. I kind of wish I had stuck with it. So I never had a bat mitzvah. My sister did and, of course, it was a big event. She's older than me. I really kind of got away from it a bit. When I was in high school, I definitely connected with some Jewish people and a Jewish teacher, and she would have me over for holidays and Passover –

AB: That's up here?

SS: – and things like that once I came up here.

SG: That's interesting.

SS: Yes. And definitely, when I went to college in Ohio and met some – wherever you go, you connect and meet. It was more, I think, stemming from my own self and interest when I got on my own when I went to boarding school and didn't have more of the pressure, like, "You need to go to Hebrew school" from my parents. Then my interest really was like, "Okay, look at all these really wonderful people I'm meeting, and we all have this great connection and know some of the same songs and prayers," and really seeing more of the whole global Jewishness traditions.

AB: Did your family celebrate holidays at home? So you had some background, I'm guessing?

SS: Yes, we did. We also, oftentimes for Passover, would go to our relatives' house and have a Seder there. They were very much more so religious. My cousin is a cantor, so they were very much steeped in religion. After my cousin's mitzvahs, [they] stayed in with Jewish youth organizations and onward like that. So, yes, through my relatives, more so. Since I've been here in Wolcott, Vermont, for the past eighteen years – this is pretty exciting to say – there's been a core group of people. It's expanded, and it's changed, but there's always been this core group of people. We've had a Seder together every year since our oldest children were babies. We modified and made our own *Haggadah*. We grew out of our homes where, one year, we had tables right down – so this was fun. We had about thirty-five people just right here for a Seder. But now, we have been going up to The People Barn in Greensboro, Vermont. It's a really beautiful space. It has a kitchen and everything there, so we're able – because all of us meet other Jewish people who want to attend the Seder every year. That way, we're able to open it up more [inaudible]

AB: Is there an organized Jewish synagogue around here?

SS: Yes. We have one built in Stowe. It took quite a long time, but it's called the Jewish Community of Greater Stowe, JCOGS.

AB: Tell us a little about that. Are you part of it, or do you just know it on the side?

SS: No. So I have my Northeast Kingdom agricultural farming Jewish friends. Then there's this Jewish group in Stowe. When my oldest daughter Sandy was young, and [I was] wanting her to go to Hebrew school, we rented actually a space in a church. So Jesus was on the wall. [laughter]

AB: He was a good Jewish fellow.

SS: Yes. It was confusing for the kids because we were in a church. They had Hebrew school there. My daughter was really the first. There were a lot of people just a bit

younger than her. Then, at some point, there was nobody her age anymore. So maybe when she was eleven, we stopped going, but she knew she wanted to get a bat mitzvah. We had looked into that and then worked with someone on the side [inaudible]; she was tutored for that. I'll share some pictures with you later of their mitzvahs out here.

AB: Why don't you back up a little and tell us how you met your husband. Was he involved in farming to start with, or is that something you did together?

SS: Well, I came back to Vermont after I finished college, which was Antioch College in Ohio, and settled right up the road here in Wolcott, not far, and he lived next door. So it was fate that brought us together. He was by himself, and he had gardens and was raising meat and really building his house and doing his own thing. We just expanded the gardens. I had a lot of experience growing garlic, and he never had, and we planted a lot of garlic together.

AB: How romantic.

SS: Yes. [laughter] The co-op from Burlington – I knew someone, and they came out here and bought our whole crop. We're like, "Wow, that was fun and easy. What other crops can we grow? How exciting." Of course, we've learned to try not to – if we're not going to get really big, wholesaling isn't really the best thing. [laughter] So figuring out how to actually try and make a living at it over the years. He was very much excited about growing our food together and expanding the gardens, and doing some market gardening. We always were discussing getting bigger, getting smaller, keeping your day job, both jumping off the day-job boat and being here. We did have three whole years home here together, where we went from forcing bulbs at this time of year for Valentine's Day, and we do a lot of greenhouse plants in the spring, sugaring, going into the market season, and then dried flowers in the fall. We purposely built our ceilings tall to – all those nails.

AB: To dry [flowers].

SS: I mean, many crops of dried flowers in and out. We were very much doing a couple of acres of flowers for a while. The dry flower business took us right past Thanksgiving, marketing that way and shipping these wreaths. It was very fun and exciting. I knew once I started having children and looking at daycare prices and what I could do to make it work and not wanting to leave the kids that I wanted to have a home enterprise and be with them if I was just an earshot away. So staying home with them was important to me and trying to work on our land. It's so beautiful here. Part of my BS [Bachelor of Science] degree from Antioch is a concentration in agriculture. So when I went to Antioch College, it was a lot of internships built into that curriculum. So I worked on numerous different farms and kinds of farms and had some different backgrounds from school. Garlic was one of them.

AB: Studying garlic at Antioch.

SS: Well, it was one of those internships. Do you know about Antioch?

AB: I do know about Antioch. Anything you say will become part of the record.

SS: Yay, so let's keep Antioch alive.

SG: That's where Sue (Ferrer?) went –

SS: It's going through a hard time right now.

SG: – who's a weaver.

AB: You wrote in the preliminary questionnaire that as you became part of this community here, you really felt that you were returning to Judaism, that your Judaism became more important to you. Can you tell us more about that and what it was like to bring up your children here? You started talking about that a little bit, but more about

what it's like for the children to be in a rural community and be brought up Jewish? Tell us about their bar and bat mitzvahs.

SS: Yes. We used to have kids come once a week in more of an organized fashion in the summer and have somebody come and do activities with them. The children weren't necessarily Jewish – maybe a few. That was random. But as far as being rural, I guess it's been difficult just not having other children close by, nearby. When they were younger, it was easier. We kept thinking when they get older, it would be easier. But actually, just looking back through the albums the other night, we said, “Geez, look at them working and watering the greenhouse,” in all these old pictures. So in a lot of respects, even feelings I felt – learning about Judaism and them saying, “Well, there's not really many Jewish kids that I go to school with” –

SG: Are you saying this –?

SS: They never asked – about my children –

SG: About your children.

SS: – in any way, if it was something to be ashamed of, but I felt like they felt like that, maybe how we all felt like that at one time if we weren't brought up in a big Jewish-populated community. So that is really interesting. My son right now is at boarding school at St. Johnsbury Academy, and he proudly wears the Star of David there. There's thirteen-hundred students, and we haven't connected – well, no, that's not true. He does know one Jewish girl, and they made an effort to light Hanukkah candles in the cafeteria with everyone there this year.

AB: Do you think they ever experience prejudice or just a feeling of differentness?

SS: I think both. A little bit from some people prejudice-ness because just hearing remarks passed – my children I don't think necessarily have your stereotypical Jewish

look with dark hair and curls and things like that. So maybe some people didn't know that they were Jewish and might say things about them, and they didn't speak up for themselves at that time. Or they'd come home and say something that they'd heard, which was hurtful. Even when my daughter just went to Israel on her Birthright trip, people said, "Are you Jewish?" She just doesn't – I don't know – might not have the [inaudible] look. Also, really interesting – when we just registered her for college at the New England Culinary Institute [NECI], big registration process, and it was just the start of Hanukkah. It was early this year, and we were down there on December 6th. I said, "Sweetie, let's pack a menorah. You're moving into this dorm, and maybe they'll let you light a candle." We didn't know. "It's okay." So glad she was close. She didn't want to bring the spare menorah. But I had left her at a table filling out paperwork while I went to the restroom and came back, and she said, "Ma." She whispered to me, "These two guys that are just meeting over there started talking about their rabbis and lighting Hanukkah candles." I said, "Sweetie, come out of your shy shell. It is your time to go say, 'I'm Jewish too, can we like candles together?'" "No, no, don't say anything. Please don't embarrass me. Don't go over there." [laughter] But she was very aware. The whole registration – I was there a lot longer than I thought I'd be. It wound up that there was a reception in the evening for parents. I wound up seeing one of these young men again, who she pointed to earlier. Of course, I couldn't help myself. [laughter]

SG: Of course.

AB: Jewish mother.

SS: Yes. I said, "Hi, my daughter is Sandy over there. She had overheard you earlier talking with another young man about your rabbi. I just wanted you to know we're Jewish too. Maybe you guys can get together and light some candles." He was so nice. He said, "It's taken me so long to get here. I've lived in Israel the past eleven years. This is my dream come true to come to this school." He just started talking to me, this young

man, (Matan?). He was twenty-three and just so charming and nice. At NECI, they get divided up maybe the day or two after registration into their groups that they're going to be with for six months. Ironically, maybe there were sixty-six students only that registered that day, but this young man and [she] were in the same group. Actually, he just came over for the first time last week, and it was nice hearing his stories of his bar mitzvah in Israel and them really making this connection. He went to a Waldorf elementary school, and my daughter as well did. I don't know if you've heard about Waldorf education.

SG: Yes.

AB: Yes.

SS: So just finding – we all find each other. I must have gone off on a lot of tangents there, so bring me back to what we're talking about.

AB: Well, you were going to tell us about your daughter's bat mitzvah and your son's?

SS: So I started saying we got her tutored. At the time of her bat mitzvah, there was no Jewish Community Center to have a bat mitzvah at or bar mitzvah. And here was just ideal for us. We built our farm. We built our house. Just to welcome people here in the middle of the summer – it was more toward the end of summer was hers – really just felt so right for us. It was so much fun and such a memorable time. My son knew from even before that that he too wanted to have a bar mitzvah someday when it was his turn. But over those four years, in between their mitzvahs, we had built a Jewish Community Center in Stowe. We had raised the funds, and there's this physical lovely, beautiful building in Stowe now, proudly, right there on Cape Cod Road. So there have been many bar and bat mitzvahs there, but my son didn't want to have his there. He wanted to have it like his sister's right here. So even though we had the space, we rented the tent, and we did it here again. It felt really equally terrific and right. Of course, they were each

unique in their own way, but very nice for them and us too.

AB: When you do a bar or bat mitzvah here at your home, do you bring a Torah?

SS: Oh, yes.

AB: Who brings it? How did that work?

SS: Yes, really good questions. So the Jewish Community Center, at the time of my daughter's bat mitzvah, had just hired a young man named Brian Besser. He was our spiritual leader. I think, at the time, he wasn't planning on going to rabbinical school. Right now, he's almost done with rabbinical school. But there was a Torah, one Torah at that time, purchased for JCOGS, the Jewish Community of Greater Stowe. He brought the Torah. It was so grand, a grand event. Now JCOGS has two Torahs. So for my son's [bar mitzvah], Brian also facilitated, and he brought the smaller Torah; it was a little lighter. The second time, we had a choice.

AB: It's very unique and very interesting, really.

SS: Especially for my relatives who came from New Jersey – “You're having it at your farm? What? How? I can't picture.” But everyone just was like, “Oh, this is so natural. This is so great.” All the kids want to have their bar and bat mitzvahs here now. Even the ones who were here who aren't Jewish –

AB: They want to have their bar and bat mitzvah.

SS: Yes. It's like, okay, you can go through all this studying.

AB: Well, there's going to be a wedding in our family. Can we borrow your house?

SS: Yes. I'm actually a justice of the peace.

SG: Are you really?

SS: Yes, I've married a few people here, but thought to maybe work into that more in the future, especially with my daughter doing the wedding cakes and collaborating.

AB: I want to stop just a second and check that we're not running out of tape.

[Recording paused.]. Okay, this tape is going now.

SG: Yes, going [inaudible].

AB: So why don't you tell us, Sara, about the work you're doing? I forgot the name of the organization. You tell us, and we'll get it on record, what that's like and the contributions you're making.

SS: Yes. Well, about three years ago, my children were now gone in high school all day. I felt more than all the planning and work I could be doing for myself as I had been in the previous winters with our own business, that I wanted more of a work community in the winter and not to be lonely, always being my own boss, making my own decisions, and what's the next best thing? I had met a young man about twelve years ago. His name's Tom Stearns. He's the owner of the High Mowing Organic Seeds company. We're one of two a hundred percent certified organic seed companies in the country. High Mowing is based in Wolcott, Vermont. How lucky am I? So three years ago, High Mowing was making a big transition and really taking this huge step and was growing in a big way. We are leasing a big warehouse facility – thirty-thousand square feet. Many different departments of High Mowing are all under one roof there now. We have greenhouses, so there's a whole farm component where there is seed production, and so there's some leased certified organic land very near where the warehouses are, also right here in Wolcott, where seed production happens, and also trial and research gardens in the summer. Now, I'm not so much part of that because I am fortunate enough to now work there six months of the year and be able to get off and do my own farming six months of the year. But I'm in very close contact with the research and production fields and go to meetings and seeing things because I'm in the sales department for High

Mowing. So I'm on the phone, selling seeds right now to commercial growers and being customer service, answering questions. Previous to that, I was doing nationwide seed rack sales for them. So, I called every co-op and health food store in the country and made sure they had our information and opened up three hundred and fifty seed rack accounts for High Mowing.

AB: Does High Mowing also sell seeds overseas?

SS: We do ship overseas, and we grow – we, High Mowing – about a third of the seeds we sell. The other is contracted in from certified organic growers. A lot of those seeds are grown in Israel, in Holland, in the Netherlands, and also all around this country. So in different regions, there's different pockets of places where it's just the best place to grow this crop. It happens really well. We couldn't think about doing that here on any good scale. To me, it's so important, this whole seed production. It's our food, and it's being so controlled by genetically modified seeds. To grow a crop of lettuce is one thing, and harvest it in fifty days and sell that. To grow a crop of lettuce for seed is so much more risky for that grower because you have to keep it in much longer until the lettuce never looks like lettuce anymore; it's bolted and gone to flower, and it's five feet tall, and you wouldn't even recognize it as lettuce. It's amazing to see these plants in that state. There's so much more risk involved in keeping the crop in longer. The best optimal time to harvest for the most germination rate and getting that dried and cleaned, so you do have a high germination rate – you can grow this big seed crop and harvest it and get it cleaned and then test it in our lab, which is another facet of High Mowing, and it might not have any germination rate. So this grower has – so it's really educating people about growing seed crops. Of course, most of the people we work with are highly – they know what they're doing, but we all work together. So in High Mowing, there's the sales and marketing, and there's the research and development. There's a lab, so we'll be doing germ testing, vigor, purity. There's a seed mill where we clean all the seeds. There's the packing and shipping. So there's a lot going on there under one roof. For me right now,

it parallels really well with my life having this sort of balance; being able to talk to growers over the phone in the winter and traveling more for High Mowing now, going to growing conferences. I was just in Manchester, New Hampshire, last month at the New England Vegetable and Fruit Growers Conference. That was very exciting because I actually got to meet so many of the people that I speak with over the phone. Next week, I'm going to NOFA New York. NOFA is that Northeast Organic Farming Association; that's what NOFA stands for. There's a chapter in New York, and there's a big conference going on there for three days. So I'll be representing High Mowing at that – selling seeds, giving out catalogs, talking with people.

AB: Are there lots of other organic seed-growing organic offerings other than High Mowing? Or is High Mowing one of the biggest?

SS: Oh, it seems like every company now has some organic offerings. They really try and tout that on their front covers or make it look like they're an organic seed company. But there's few offerings. Those same companies have also continued to sell and have chosen to sell genetically modified varieties. So a lot of seed buyers who are very conscious might have five or six or ten catalogs spread out when they're choosing and looking and realizing, “Wow, this company is selling this from these people, and I don't want to work with them anymore.” So I think High Mowing is really just getting on the radar nationwide with being a viable organic seed company producer. We're about the only company who's actually growing anything we're selling. Most every other seed company buys it in. They might have a segment of research or trial.

AB: But you're really at the forefront of all of these areas – growing, packaging, and selling [inaudible].

SS: This past summer, my husband Bob actually did a lot of work in their production fields. So while I wasn't necessarily on the payroll for them, he was this summer doing stuff, which was really fun because he has so much growing experience from here, and

we live so nearby the fields. So it just seemed to just parallel our beliefs. If I was going to leave the farm to do some work, it just really needed to be meaningful. I seem to have found a very nice fit and balance.

AB: Exactly, right. One complements the other. So you obviously have a terribly busy life. Do you participate in community organizations like volunteer work? Well, you said you are a justice of the peace.

SS: Yes. There's some town-associated work and vote counting and text dispute things. (laughter) I look forward to having more time as I mature to really get involved in more volunteer work, especially right now just learning more about cancer. My mom was recently saying there's some volunteers who came into this Hope Lodge that she was staying at in Burlington because she couldn't travel back and forth, and they made dinner. My husband and I thought, "What a great thing to do for people if you're nearby."

AB: Moving on to something slightly different, we were curious about your life and your relationships with other women? Have you had a lot of close friendships with women? Did you ever have any women in your life who were mentors or influenced you in any special way?

SS: Yes, really good questions. I feel like I just have a wealth of the greatest women friends. I'm always making more, and it's so exciting. Sometimes I am just on the phone too much. Lots of Jewish women friends, too, here. But when I was at Antioch college, one of my internships was at a commune in Northern California. I met a woman there named (Gaba Greenberg?); you actually remind me a little bit of her. It's like we're also familiar. It's easy, you know? But she was a big influence on my life at that time. That's when I was just in my early twenties. She was definitely a "back-to-the-lander" and older than me, and almost like my mother there in some ways. I very much looked up to her. She had taught me a lot about all the flowers in the garden, not so much teaching me, but I just worked with her, and it rubbed off, and just wanting to know everything she

knew about homesteading and canning and gardening. I really wanted to, I guess, at that time, thinking back, be like her. But even previous to that, while I was in high school at boarding school up here in Stowe, Vermont, there was a woman, Adele Noyes, and she was a teacher there – English – and she was Jewish. She was much older than the other teachers at the school at the time. She was the one who would have me over for Passover and so forth and just really had taken me under her wing. So many, many students, not just me, but everybody just felt like she was a mother there. When you first go away, when you're fourteen and fifteen, to boarding school and having these other role models and people, it was very important to feel that love and comfort and look up to somebody in that way. But in my community now, I feel like I am steeped in community here in northern Vermont. Even twenty years ago, and nineteen years ago, after I had my first child, we thought about, "Oh, should we move south, and we could grow all year round, and we can eat cabbage and kale all winter that's still fresh?" Boy, I'm glad that there's this break in the winter, and there's not a weed in sight right now out there. But there was community here. We belong to a co-op in Hardwick, and I just feel that it is so rich in community here, and we do all bond together. If something happens, or if someone's sick, people and neighbors come pitch in, or bring food, or help cut wood or help weed the garden, or whatever needs doing. It's hard to think about leaving that. I mean, traveling and visiting different areas and seeing relatives and other areas. I think about their involvement with other women or friends or having that community, and people do have it and seek it out, but I feel like, in a lot of areas, it's not what we've got going here.

AB: Okay, I hear you. I agree. I think we're going to turn the tape over. So stop that. Let's take two minutes, and I'm going to turn this tape over.

[End of Track One]

AB: – two with Sara Schlosser. Okay. Here's that big word of the '60s and '70s – and the '80s, '90s, and now, too – feminism, right? Could you speak about your views about feminism and whether they are similar to your mother's generation? Also, think about your children, your daughter's generation, and what's her view of feminism? Is that a reasonable question? Let's see.

SG: Do you think of it as feminism?

AB: If it isn't, you don't have to answer.

SS: Oh, feminism. I know I was really adamant when I came back to Vermont twenty years ago and was very self-empowered that I can run a chainsaw and I could do things for myself, that I wanted that very clear when I met Bob and especially when we had children, that he wasn't always going to be doing certain things, and I wasn't always going to be doing the dishes or the laundry. So it is funny because while our daughter was still an infant and couldn't even [inaudible], I'm rototilling in front of her. But as the years progressed, we learned what really goes smoother and functions better, despite our ideals or our goals. So we have veered off into our roles of what goes smoother and better. It's not even just that; it's what I like to do more than what he likes to do. I like seeding in the greenhouse, which is just as well because he has big hands and doesn't want to transplant. We've both done everything and mix and match. But what works smoother and better seems like, for the past number of years – ten, twelve, fifteen – we have gotten into more of our roles. I don't think it's more feminine or not. Bob cooks and does dishes more than I do. But I know earlier on in our relationship, it was very clear that I wanted to make – “you're not always going to do this or that.” I think today, with Hillary Clinton running for president and my daughter being of age to finally vote and being able to have these privileges that were fought so hard for, it's so important for us to tell our young daughters that they need to be involved and you need to take advantage of this. This is so important to have these opportunities that weren't always available. We

worked very hard to get here. I have a lot of very conscious women friends. I'm just feeling really fortunate with a wealth of wonderful women that I'm around.

AB: This stopped. Why? Sorry. [Recording paused.]

SG: That's why we double, so we have it on two places.

AB: Okay, this is hooked up to you. Living in Vermont, has this affected the way you see and experience the world? Do you think you would see the world differently if you lived somewhere else? I mean, how does being a Jewish woman in Vermont affect how you see the world and the contemporary issues of the day?

SS: Well, I have felt like I had done a fair amount of traveling around the country and to some other countries before I resettled in Vermont twenty years ago. Then I was settled, and I haven't gotten back to California in twenty years. But we recently took a trip to Mexico, to Acapulco. It was just such an ordeal to get there. These layovers in Mexico City with the language barriers and tobacco smoke in the airports and getting to Acapulco late at night and there just being so much traffic and the nightlife – it was really refreshing to come back to Vermont and drive home with no cars and no traffic, just more reassuring and reaffirming that, yes, this is where I want to be. It's really overpopulated and over-polluted. There's so much going on with global warming issues and health issues. We try so hard here in our life and here in Vermont to be progressive and aware and keep our lights off and use energy-efficient bulbs. Even when you go to one place or on one cruise ship or one spa resort and see the stacks of plastic cups just being thrown away for every sip of water – I'm going off on a tangent.

AB: That's okay.

SS: We've chosen to live here for many reasons. We're aware of what's going on in the greater world and society for most parts. It's pretty easy to be aware of these days with all the TV and media. So we really like where we live and the fresh air we breathe and

the less amount of traffic that we have to contend with in our daily lives.

AB: We're starting to get to the end here, anyway. But do you have any hopes for the future, for yourself and your family and your children? Any things you're really looking forward to or hoping [for]?

SS: Definitely. Hopes for the future would be – yes, health of ourselves and our family and of the land and the planet and more conscious living and eating. My hopes are for us to live long together and see [inaudible] grandchildren, possibly and to see change happening more amongst everyone, so we can revert back our energy level. I really want to see the earth at a place – we've gotten to this craziness. Now we can see the graphs, the scales going in the other way because we've all worked so hard to reduce our energy needs and our consumption needs and that we are starting to re-heal the planet. We're never assured everything – but that we're not still all going in this other direction and pulling us all together.

AB: Our last question is –

SG: Before you do that –

AB: Did we skip something?

SG: Just the thing she said about her mom.

AB: Yes. Okay. Share any other stories with us that we've forgotten to ask about, especially the one you started to tell us about your mother at your children's bar and bat mitzvahs.

SS: At both Sandy's bar mitzvah and Kyle's bar mitzvah, at the beginning of the ceremony, my mother, their grandmother, presented them – their bar and bat mitzvahs were four years apart – each with their own individual *tallit*, wrapped it around them, and

said a beautiful prayer, which I wish I had in front of me to read. She cloaked them in their prayer shawls. And Sandy's *tallit* came from (Ahava?); it's a beautiful store in Palm Beach, Florida. But it was just funny, as my mother was saying, "This is one-of-a-kind hand-painted silk, made just from you from Palm Beach, Florida," everyone just cracked up because most everybody there knows my mother and her stories and how she speaks and that she bought it from Florida, which is at the time where they were wintering and retired. Since then, my parents are full-time Vermonters – had moved and retired to Vermont to be closer to their children and grandchildren. They don't love the cold. So that's a big testament of family togetherness.

AB: It certainly is. Any other stories or things you want to talk about?

SS: There's probably so many. If we could stop, I could think of a few.

AB: We'll stop for a second.

SS: If I had time to think, then I wouldn't –

AB: Take a minute. [Recording paused.]

SS: Wolcott Pond is just a few miles away from our house. It's many, many acres. It's a giant lake, and we have taught the children to swim there. There's not really beach access or public access, but we have access through a neighbor's yard. It's a very, very special place for us to go see the loons every year and make sure they're back, and we canoe and kayak. We've also ice skated there in the winter when the time is right. So that's always a tradition. Working so hard in the summer – moving back to Vermont, I thought, "Oh, I want to just take advantage of all this great hiking and biking." Farming in the summer is kind of 24/7, and many years had gone by where we never really got out on the trail or hiked or biked. Scaling back and balancing out everything with this winter job, hoping to have less stress in the summer, which has been working the past few years and taking more time to do these fun recreating things – but being able to go to

Wolcott Pond, which is so close to us, even for an hour or two, feels like a huge vacation, just to get away in our canoe and have a little picnic out there. That's been a very special place for us. Yes, a wonderful, eccentric community of great people that we always meet out there on this little dock – tiny little dock, and we're all out there, and there's dogs, and they're shaking, and we're all wet. But yes, it's a special place.

AB: So what's this new hobby or something your husband's telling you to talk about?

SS: My children have played ice hockey. They've learned to skate when they could walk. But I never grew up an ice skater. When my daughter was about thirteen, getting her next-sized pair of skates is when she grew out of the size that I still am now. So I was able to get those hand-me-downs from her and started to skate. I would always be driving her, my husband, or [me], to the different practices. I said to this woman coach at one point, "I'm here. We drive far. So if there's anything I can ever do to help, let me know, but I can't skate. I'm just over here." [laughter] She said, "Oh, well, we have this women's ice hockey league. Why don't you come try it out?" I said, "Well, I don't really skate." "Oh, just come." So we got home from practice that night, and immediately my daughter starts strapping her pads on me and squeezing her helmet on my head. "This doesn't feel right." I had asked the woman, "Can I not commit and just come once and see if I really like this because I don't know about the helmet thing?" But sure enough, I loved it, just that camaraderie with women and learning how to skate. It's very empowering – the locker room and getting dressed up is sometimes equally as fun as being out there skating. But for the past six years or so, I've just done this kind of women's Friday morning pickup league in Stowe. So it's a bit of traveling. Always we've been so busy going to their games and taking them to their practices but knowing there's a whole lot more going on in the hockey world around here – and all the women I skate with were skating numerous times a week in many different leagues and teams, and I could never commit to that. They're like, "Come on, Sunday night. You could do that." And I'm like, "No, no, it's the only night where we're all home." So this winter, I actually

said this is going to be my winter to try and improve and get better. It was hard to really go too far with it, just one morning a week. So I joined this co-ed league, which is pretty above my head. There's supposed to be a certain amount of novice women on each team and some rules to that. But we're having a lot of fun with it. I am getting out at least three times a week playing ice hockey.

AB: That is so exciting.

SG: It's very cool.

SS: Very exciting to just do this other sport. So, it's a lot of exercise and really realizing how sitting on my butt in an office ten hours a day – it's hard to keep up with fitness.

AB: Does your family come and cheer you on?

SS: It's more of a pickup thing. I mean, there's some leagues. Yes, we have league games once a week. When we go into the playoffs in a couple of weeks, I told Bobby he should come watch a game. Earlier on, when we have the women's games and the women's leagues, yes, they definitely come. My daughter and I have been able to play a lot more together since she graduated high school. She was the captain of the Stowe girls varsity ice hockey team, and she didn't even go to that school. So that was a huge testament of her leadership of them voting her and being the outsider. We played a bit together this past year before she went off to school, and that was just so much fun. I'm missing her a lot out there because she's very, very good, and it was great to bring the shining star.

AB: She'll have to start an ice hockey team at NECI.

SG: At NECI, right.

SS: Yes, we talked about that.

AB: Something new for NECI. They can learn how to cater ice hockey events.

SS: Exactly. Homemade pizza at the rink.

AB: I guess that's about it. It's been very, very wonderful. Thank you.

SG: Thanks so much.

SS: Yes, thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]