Susan Maze-Rothstein Transcript

[There are 90 un-transcribed seconds of discussion about the project, with Maze Rothstein asking about the procedure and Rosenbaum clarifying.]

JUDITH ROSENBAUM: – January 25th, 2002. I am in Brookline, Massachusetts, with Susan Maze-Rothstein, and the interview is being conducted by Judith Rosenbaum. Okay, great. So usually, I just start with some questions about family background. You can start by telling me where and when you were born and a bit about your childhood.

SUSAN MAZE-ROTHSTEIN: I was born here in Brookline, Massachusetts, in the Boston Lying-In Hospital, which is now, I think, Brigham and Women's or some other conglomerate of the now collapsing medical profession that we have. I grew up here and went to the Brookline local schools. So what else would you like? You got to interrupt me with questions.

JR: Tell me a bit about your family, your parents, your grandparents, if you had them around.

SM: Well, my mother was a single parent for our whole life. She was a really remarkable woman in her own right. She had married three times. And I was – my brother and I – the children of the third marriage. She was always very idealistic. And so she had – her father had said that the world would never be at peace until there was a complete melting pot of peoples. And so she took him at his word and, as a white woman, married an African-American man, and, of course, her father disowned her. But nonetheless, we were the byproduct of that. And she had two Christians that really were – she went to Brown, actually, as many women didn't really go to Brown. She was able to get A's without attending classes. She decided that this was a waste of her time and wanted to be autodidactic for her life. And so she did do that. And two of her central questions

were, “What is the best thing for people to eat?” and “What is the best thing for people to believe?” And so, as a result of that, although she started her life as a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, throughout our childhood especially, she studied all sorts of religions. We ended up with Judaism, as we studied lots and lots of versions of Christianity, some Eastern religions, and then Judaism. And it was really the social philosophy of Judaism that was most strongly attractive to us, as compared to Christianity, which has a very strong focus on afterlife and sin – the sin of being, whether or not you get in or out of this vaunted afterlife world. What was so refreshing about Judaism was its focus on the here and now. And that Christianity has a concept of love one another, but Judaism has a concept of, “Well, we can't really love one another unless we're being fair to each other. And how do we actually create that in our current existence?” With much less – unless you go into the sort of mystical aspects of Judaism – much less emphasis on the afterlife and much more on the here and now and how we live our here and now. So we converted to Judaism.

JR: How old were you at that point?

SM: I was a teenager. I was about sixteen. My brother became very Orthodox, went to Israel and studied in yeshiva and lived on a kibbutz, and speaks fluent Hebrew. I studied Hebrew, but we sort of stayed at the Conservative to Reform level of Judaism. And the patriarchal nature of all Western religions, including Judaism, was the area where we had points of tension with Judaism. And Orthodoxy, of course, is very much more so leaning in the patriarchal direction than Conservative Judaism or Reform Judaism. So that's sort of how we really got – became Jewish and had our Jewish experience. During college, I went to Cornell undergrad and was active in the Hillel House, and pretty observant during college. We became quite friendly with Rabbi Axelrod from Brandeis University. And he's rabbi at our wedding – my husband Steven Rothstein and I. Steven and I both went to Brookline High School, met at our tenth-year high school class reunion, and so that’s sort of – my father died when I was one, and my grandmother was not interested in us –

on my mother's side – because we were Black. Her comment to my mother when she first met us was, “How about you put these children up for adoption now?” And so, of course, my mother didn't have any interest in that. And so we didn't really have much grandparent experience. My grandfather on my father's side died fairly young, so I never met him. My grandmother on my father's side, who had come from North Carolina when she was twelve to work in white peoples' homes in – where is it? – one of the coastal neighborhoods – wealthy neighborhood. The name will come back to me as I talk about – she worked very hard throughout her life and died when I was fairly young. So she was one of nineteen children. I don't really know many of the nineteen. She was toward the end of the nineteen. And most of them lived in North Carolina.

JR: They weren't close by.

SM: Yeah.

JR: Was your mom active in the community?

SM: Well, she was in her own inimitable way. She would always challenge the sort of structure of religion. I remember in childhood us going and sitting while she had long discussions with rabbis and sort of arguing with them about points of Judaism that she was interested in or concerned about. And I did attend some Hebrew School. But she wasn't – she was more of a – she called herself a rebel. And bearing in mind that I grew up during the ’60s, and so she was somewhat anti-establishment as a result of that whole timeframe and the [inaudible] for the country. So her activism was more of questioning and challenging sort of the areas of authority within the religions that we studied. And we would – each religion that we studied, we would join the religion and attend – observe their ceremonial observances. And it was in the context of that that we would attend meetings and she would challenge their – then there was several when she was lifted up in the chair and bodily put outside. [laughter]

JR: That probably wasn't the right religion for her, then.

SM: Just one question too many. But from her, I did learn a lot about the ability to question authority and not just accept the normative structure of society, generally, and of people within authority structures in particular. So yeah, that was her kind of – her brand of activism.

JR: What did your mom do for a living?

SM: Well, she was a grand mal epileptic, so she was on public assistance for our lives. And we grew up in the Egmont Street housing project in Brookline. And we had Social Security – my father had been in the Navy, and he had a head injury from World War II, and so that was the cause, ultimately, was [his] death when I was one. So she was on her own, and essentially we were – had about two thousand dollars a year to live on. I thought all books came without covers because we were always surrounded by books, but they all had no covers. And we shopped at the Hadassah Thrift Shop because she understood quality. We were always extremely well-dressed, but we'd get old bags of clothes for a dollar-fifty, and that was – I never knew want, but it was because she managed this teeny, little amount of money that we had so extremely well. Her father had been one of the early engineers in Boston Edison and actually made quite a nice little pile for himself. So it wasn't insignificant when he disowned her. But she was an amazingly strong person.

JR: How would you say being African-American has impacted your experience as a Jew?

SM: Being African-American in the United States is an experience of being the other, being outside. And being Jewish, there's some simpatico with that. However, being Jewish in Brookline, for example, there's such a critical mass of Jews in Brookline and largely Ashkenazic Jews. My brother, in his most observant time, became much more

Sephardic tradition, because he felt more comfortable in the Sephardic tradition – but because we didn't go all the way to Orthodoxy ourselves, we mostly were in the Ashkenazic community for our interactions with Judaism. The United States generally has got such strong imaging for the otherness of African-Americans, which I think really harks from unprocessed stuff around slavery. It spills into the Judaism experience, especially where Jews really equate themselves with whites – so their alignments are such that even though as a religion, there's more simpatico between the African-American experience and the Jewish experience, especially the history of Judaism and so on and so forth. Day-to-day life with Ashkenazic Jews generally is not that different from being around any other white people. [laughter] There's still a real feeling of avoidance. And so I would attend, but I never really felt embraced by the Jewish community that I was a part of. So it's an interesting kind of feeling. And my youngest son, who is eleven, is attending Hebrew School – Temple Ohabei Shalom. So we go to services there. Everybody's pleasant and friendly, but it doesn't have that same feeling of embracing that I see that is there for the white Ashkenazic Jews that join the temple or attend and so forth.

JR: Yeah, it's unusual to find that. My parents belong to a synagogue in New Haven that has a very multicultural community, but I'm realizing how rare that is now that I'm not there anymore. [laughter]

SM: Yeah, it's a very rare thing – and to be cherished if you have any opportunity to partake of it. I don't get a unified – there's diversity, and then there's multiculturalism. And we have diversity in Brookline, but we don't have multiculturalism. We have a lot of people in the salad, [laughter], but the salad doesn't really bond together – or really work hard to understand across those differences.

JR: How would you say your relationship to Judaism has changed over time? How would you describe it now?

SM: I think that those things that we've just discussed have made me a little less observant. Because part of being observant in a community is the feeling that there is community, and when it doesn't feel so good, you tend not to – you tend to start to avoid it yourself. So I think that and also the cognitive conflicts that I have with a lot of the patriarchal nature of Judaism makes it hard also. One of the beautiful things about Judaism is that it does allow a lot of dialogue and questioning around the belief – the bases of the belief and what interpretations we bring to the bases of the belief. But the formalistic – I've become less and less formalistic as I get older. And I don't know if that's just the continued influence of secularism or whether that's just the culmination of all these other things sort of adding up together or all of the above.

JR: And do you have two children?

SM: Yes, two boys.

JR: And how old are they?

SM: Galen is twenty-one, and Isaac is eleven. And Galen is over at Tufts in his junior year.

JR: Let's see, did I skip anything here? Is your brother still in Israel?

SM: No, he's here. Yeah, he lives here. Actually, he came back because my mom was getting more frail. Because we were the children of the third marriage, she didn't have me until she was forty-three, so she was essentially two generations older than I was, and she just passed away at age eighty-six in 2000, February of 2000. So during the last nine years of her life, she lived here. We refinished our ground floor and made it into a living space – an apartment for her. And my brother took care of her and tutored Hebrew students for bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah. And did bookkeeping for local businesses while he helped care for her. And so he's still living here and working out what to do now because – and she became bedridden during her last two years. And it was a lot of

heavy work for him. So his grieving period has been quite extended. He's working through it and getting on with things, but it's been kind of hard.

JR: Do you see your activism as being related to Jewish values?

SM: Yes, I do. Yeah. It is that point of simpatico between Judaism and the African-American experience that I'd find so intriguing and is a source of emboldening, empowering me to feel very strongly about trying to create justice in our society. I am a lawyer. I am a judge, and so that means a lot to me. Judaism has a very strong focus on justice and fairness, and a lot of the study that we did when I was younger was sort of focused on exactly how do we play this out. How do we do it in business? How do we do it in agriculture? How do we make things fair? What do we do for the strangers at our gates? So Judaism holds in it the concept of marginalized peoples and has actually got dialogue and thought around how do we treat marginalized peoples. And that's, to me, an extremely important and wonderful aspect of Judaism that I draw on as I work through what I work through.

JR: So tell me a little bit about your experiences with factors about issues in diversity in Brookline schools?

SM: Well, I actually had gotten your phone message about artifacts and have recently done a cable TV program about growing up and going to the Brookline public schools myself, which also became an article in the TAB – and before you leave today, I'll give you a copy of the article, and you can borrow the tape – I only have one tape. I'm not sure exactly where I put it, but I'll have to look for that. And so my experience growing up in the Brookline public schools was one that I didn't want to have my children repeat. And we were the first mixed-race family to live in the Egmont Street projects, which was at that time entirely Irish Catholic when we moved in – or nearly entirely Irish Catholic. There may have been some Protestants living – [laughter]

JR: [inaudible]

SM: Right. No different races. It was a very difficult place to live. So when we first arrived, kids would try to take their jump ropes and whip me back to Africa and stuff like that. And because my father is half Native American, I would run away and yell over my shoulder, “I was here first!” [laughter] In school, both my brother and I were basically overlooked. And the constant comment to my mother was, “Oh, she's so bright, but she's just an underachiever.” And as a professor of law right now, it really gives me cause for pause that a person who is charged with educating children should view someone as an underachiever and not really have parsed out what is actually going into that. And how can you sit there and say, “She's so smart, but she's an underachiever?” Is there anything that you have to do with that? [laughter] My brother – they initially said he should go to vocational school instead of the public schools. They said he was slow. He is incredible with languages. And in high school said he wanted to study Russian – they were like, “Oh my God, he couldn't possibly. It's a hard language. He couldn't possibly.” And so he took it, and he got straight A's throughout high school in Russian and did Russian plays. And when my mother – and then hadn't been with Russian for years, and when my mother in the year 2000 was in the hospital, there was a Russian elderly woman sitting in the hall, and she was talking. And everybody was walking back and forth by her, and no one was paying attention to her. And my brother listened, and he said, “She's asking for things.” And so he went out and interpreted for this Russian woman to the nurses who had no idea that she just wasn't an old white woman who was just babbling about – and then they got an interpreter for her and figured out that she was asking about her home. So to have the Brookline public schools miss all of that, that was there in my brother and not help him to feel what it was that he had to offer. And similarly, with me, nobody helped me figure out going to college. I figured it out on my

own and basically applied to colleges I had heard of. [laughter] I applied to Harvard and Cornell. And fortunately, I got into all of them, but it was not an experience where what I had as a potentiality was part of the focus and embraced. And I never felt like I was smart. I always felt that I wasn't able to do as well as these other kids in school with me. And I think part of that – because it's hard to know when you're a child – but I think part of that was how the educational process was treating me as a learner. So during my eldest son and my younger sons' life here – my eldest son went to Lawrence School, and my youngest son is at Driscoll – I started to get more and more active with exactly how are we – what are the subtle messages that we're giving to our learners? And in Driscoll, we've started a diversity committee, which really, for the past four years, has been working on finding out how do we bridge the differences. And how do we, as adults, parents, and teachers, and administrators, learn to start to make contact across the differences and talk about little points of friction and tension between us so that we can do a better job of conveying this to our children so that we don't just continue avoiding each other around difference or doing a dysfunctional helping of students who are otherwise extremely capable, but because we have this imagery in our mind about them, we're treating them as though they're somehow incapable and giving them subtle messages of incapability which then translates to the learner – and creates an environment where you have diversity. I mean, Driscoll can say they have like thirty-two languages, and all these different people are there. But African-American children are still not achieving at the level of their counterparts. It gets to a very effective level, sort of communication piece that is very hard to put on the table because it's not just intellectual. It's sort of who we sit next to and who do we invite to our play dates, and who comes to the birthday parties. How do you actually do inclusion? And how you do it in the classroom? And the materials on the curriculum. And all those pieces have become the focus of our diversity community. So we've recently expanded it to create sort of an umbrella organization where we have all of the committees. There are lots of different committees in the school. There's a special learning committee; there's Hispanic families

starting a committee. There are, of course, the TTO. So all of these different representative little committees, we're trying to bring them under the umbrella of the diversity committee because we're all people of color. You think of people with brown skin – wouldn't say people of color, but white people are people of color too. And part of working through differences is to learn to deconstruct whiteness as the normative, unspoken rule of the societal pattern. So that's sort of how I interact, and we do lots and lots of meetings.

JR: Yeah. That's a lot of what organizing is, I guess.

SM: Yeah, meetings. Lots of meetings.

JR: How do you address issues of diversity in anti-racist education in your work as a lawyer and professor?

SM: Throughout my educational experience, I have been an activist on those issues. And so, at Cornell, I found myself leading student uprisings. Not something you put on your resume. [laughter] But when they repeatedly would review the African Studies Department every year, and all the other departments would be reviewed every five years. And they were at that time investing in South Africa. We had strong positions as student groups against that policy on the part of Cornell. And during undergrad, I was a nutrition major because of my mother's certain interest in what's best to eat. But then my other interest was sort of the health of society. So that drew me toward law and law study. And I became active in the Black Law Students Association in law school. And then, after law school, I became the president of the Black Alumni Network – we created this network. And then in my practice, I was first a civil litigator, and then really got tired of large firm practice, which is – it's a grind, and it was more of a grind for a person like me who was really interested in social justice. And I felt very replaceable because any bright person can sort of put deals together and take them apart. And it's intellectually challenging work – litigate. But I felt like I was just maintaining the status quo. And it's

not a status quo that I particularly feel in accord with on all fours. I felt that my valuable life energy was not being well expended. So I stopped practicing and had Isaac. And for a year or so – then got a call from a friend who said, you know, “Governor Weld” – who was new at that time – “is looking for judges at the Department of Industrial Accidents. You should put in an application.” I was like, “Well, I finished practicing law.” “Oh, you really should...” So I applied and ultimately was appointed and did, at the trial level, for about two years work, worker's compensations and working [inaudible], which is essentially for the blue-collar labor side of our society. Ironically, there are many, many back injuries in worker's compensation. I think of the employees who go through this system as the unseen backbone of our society. And you really don't pay attention to what your back is doing for you every day. And they're the people who put the food on our tables and make our houses and make sure that the trucks are moving and the buildings are getting built. And they're pretty unseen and uncared for. And so, for me, that work was very noble work. However, I am not a Republican, and we've had Republican governors in the last nine years. And so I had a six-year term, and now I'm in my second six-year term. It’s a governor's appointment with all the standard judicial processes of nominating committees and blah, blah, blah. And so when approaching my first reappointment timeframe thought, “Hmm, I may not – because I'm not a Republican, they may not want me.” And I did everything I could now at the appeals level. So writing decisions that affect the entire nature of how this act is interpreted – the worker's compensation in Massachusetts. And had done my level best to assure due process exists for the employees because when Weld came in, the law was changed, and it became much less user-friendly for employees, much more user-friendly for business. Fewer benefits, harder for employees to get benefits, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And I've done what I can to try to assure that benefits are as available through [inaudible] appropriate as possible. And that may not have been a winning position for the Republican Party. So I have always stayed involved with Black law students and have attended and judged at a moot court competition called the Frederick Douglass Moot

Court Competition. David Hall, who is now the provost at Northeastern University, but was then the dean of the law school, was my co-panel member – and was sitting with me. Our third-panel member didn't show up, so just the two of us were the judges for these groups of students who were doing their moot court competition. At the end of it, we critiqued their work and talked with them. And then he turned to me, and he said, “Have you ever thought of teaching?” And given the background that I just explained to you, I said, “No, I never thought of teaching.” He said, “Well, you should think about teaching.” And I said, “No, I don't think I'll ever think about teaching.” But when my reappointment came around, I gave them a call, and I said, “Well, remember what you said about I should think about teaching? I've started to think about teaching.” And so he interviewed me. He said, “I have a program that's very unique. It needs development and work. But if you were interviewing people for it. And so I did. It's called Law, Culture, and Difference. And I was elected by him. And I've been doing it for five years. It's unique in the country. It is a required course for the entire first year of study. And in the fall, we have our first-year students do critical legal analysis about issues of law as they affect marginalized populations coming out of the first-year curriculum. So for a property issue, we look at how parents can, in DSS settings, give up their rights to children – and what does that mean, and how does that affect children and the ownership of children as property? Which is how children have always been conceived of in the law historically. So we study that kind of thing. And the students do – they do discussion sessions and advocacy exercises. In the course of that, during the fall, they learn how to become a team. Then in the winter, we do community lawyering projects. And we take each team that has developed with their advocacy exercises and so forth in the fall, and we assign them to a project. And we serve fifteen different organizations – community-based organizations. And the requirements for a project are that it be a social justice issue and that it have a strong legal research component and a field research component. So each student is required to do five hours a week on their project with their team, which equals, over the course of the implementation, about six hundred

hours. So each year, we give away pro-bono for the good of the community about 65,000 hours of public service from our first-year class with tightly supervised – we have supervising attorneys involved; they're both in the law school and in practice. And faculty involvement and our clinics are involved. And so it's a really exciting program, and it enables me to do what I thrive on, which is address social justice issues and how we actually work through how we interact around difference. And the law is our tool of maintaining norms within the society. So any effect that we can have on how the law addresses marginalized populations will increase the effect of justice for the entire society – and inclusion. One example – I'll give you one example of a project.

JR: Sounds like a great program.

SM: We just presented it this year at the American Association of Law Schools National Conference, and everybody was like, “Wow.” I was sitting with Georgetown and Yale. You know all these deep-pocketed law schools – and Northeastern has no money to speak of. And they had these cute little – it was about pro-bono in law school. And they had these little delightful, cute programs –where people would voluntarily – a few students would voluntarily do this or that. They were wonderful, but they were small. And we've got two hundred students every year required to do this and required to grapple with the stuff that they might otherwise not have to. So one example of a program that we're – [a] project that we're working on is in its fourth year. We do multi-year projects as well – of work. It’s to change the status of runaways and throwaways homeless youth in our law. And homeless youth – because children are thought of as property – if you don't have a parent or guardian, you basically are not cognizable for many things. You can't sign a lease. You can't get a job if you're a minor. We don't even have – we have shelter restrictions. You can't house runaways and throwaways that are minors because then you're harboring – it's almost like kidnapping. So we've been studying all the national models of laws that are more favorable to youth who are in this predicament in life – and are just at the point where we're about to be able to make

some legislative recommendations. And then, our client organization will be pushing those recommendations into draft legislation. So it's that kind of work. And are we almost out of tape?

JR: No, no. We're fine.

SM: It's that kind of work that I do in the law – and that really excites me.

JR: What would you say your greatest challenge is for you in your activism?

SM: I have a Paul Goodnight poster in my office. He's an African-American artist. I don't know if you're familiar with his work. But he did it for the Olympics. And it's run ever since, so they're – and at the bottom, it says, “Feet don't fail me now.” And I thought I needed that for my office. I think that – Northeastern, for instance, is a highly progressive school, as law schools go. Law itself is a highly conservative function of our society, and law schools are reflective of that reality. And it took a lot of energy to get the law school to truly embrace this program. It's existed since 1992 and had different incarnations until the time I reached any sort of formalized [inaudible] now. But it wasn't until last year that the law school acknowledged the course, which for the first year had been a two-credit course. And this year, it's a six-credit course. That jump took a lot of politicking in-house to get to – for them to recognize. The marginalization of the work is – it's a symmetry that exists in this society. Work with marginalized populations, your work is marginalized and undervalued, and so forth. So also, I think that on the theme of – on family now, even in the Brookline public schools. Brookline prides itself on being this open community. So any inkling that there's something up with that that is not quite kosher makes everybody highly defensive. Because they're well-intended people, and nobody wants to feel ill of themselves. And so things that are not lovely are sort of swept under the rug because of this need. And so those are areas of – it's the societal resistance, I think, is what it boils down to, that really is so challenging, and why I need my feet to continue to give me energy for the race.

JR: What has it been like for you to take these kinds of risks within your own community? Most particularly in the case of this course, diversity course.

SM: For me, where I start from, there's very little to lose. But I mean, I can't be really more of an outcast. [laughter] I know what being an outcast sort of feels like, so it's not a place that's very frightening to me. In some ways, being an outsider is very liberating, freeing, because you're not required to actually fit the norms because you don't. And you're reminded of that frequently. Childhood was very difficult because all children want to fit in. They want to have friends. But by college, I was pretty much like, “Okay. If this is the deal, I'm alright with it.” [laughter] And it was at that point that the risk of being different, of pushing the envelope, of challenging some of the fundamental, unspoken norms of our society, which are actually the most powerful ones because they are unspoken and just taken as a matter of course, became – it's not a frightening place for me to be. It's actually a rather comfortable, although exhausting, place to be. [laughter] But I'm quite okay.

JR: And how do you feel like – how do you feel that your community has responded to your activism?

SM: I think that the community has been taking halting steps forward. We have been able to advance the diversity committee each year, and the leadership at Driscoll has become open little by little. Sometimes one step forward, two steps back. Also, finding sort of a cadre of people who are somewhat like-minded has been a wonderful thing. And it doesn't have to be a lot of people. In fact, most major accomplishments are not done by a lot of people. They're done by a small group of people who were dedicated and work well together. So I have been able to establish that. And the work is getting done.

JR: What has been most rewarding for you about this work?

SM: Watching the learning happen. I mean, you can actually see learning happening when somebody's eyes – as it occurs, the second that it's happening. The eyes change. There's something in the eyes that change. And that is amazingly satisfying to me. I'm proud of the body of law that I've made for this worker's compensation act. I know that employees are better treated because I've been there at the table. I know that my child will have a better opportunity to have a more inclusive life than I have. And I know that every year I'm affecting the lives of two hundred students who might view their practice somewhat differently when they go into our society. And to me, that makes everything worth it.

JR: How do you think your contributions have affected others?

SM: The only way that you really can tell is when people come back and say things to you. And I've gotten a lot of positive feedback from people who – former students who stay in touch and tell me about their exploits in life and how they're addressing things. And the course is called Law, Culture, and Difference – LCD. So I will get an email saying, “I've just had an LCD moment!” [laughter] And that, to me, says that they've got something that they're carrying with them that I was able to participate in and establish in them – because, of course. It's mostly them. If they're going to take something, it's because of them. It's because of me. I put it there, but they decide to pick it up and carry it.

JR: Well, it's something that happens in the interaction.

SM: Yeah.

JR: That's one of the great things about teaching, is even if people – I was talking about this [with] a friend of mine who is also a teacher. I taught both at Brown and at high school. He was saying, “Well …”. And I was saying, “Well, getting that one – even one call from one student,” saying, “I still think about that,” or “This had an impact.” He’s like,

“Yeah, but it's so rare – and students so rarely do that.” I was like, “I know, but even just one is like totally – they make it worthwhile.”

SM: Yeah, it's so incredible. It is so incredible. I remember one even in the courtroom, one individual who – he had a very complicated case. He's trying to decide whether he should settle it. He was a construction worker. And I spent about a half an hour – and he had a heart condition, and he was on the operating table for his back, and something went on with his eye. So there were all these causal connection pieces that were difficult. And so I sat there and talked with him about it. And afterward, he looked up at me, and he said, you know, “I've been in the system for nine years. Today is the first day that I understand my case. Thank you.” To me, that made all of that worth it. Because if he can understand his case, then he knows whether he's making the right decision. It's that empowerment of people to decide and make better judgments about their lives and the lives that affect them that makes me really excited.

JR: How would you say your activist work has affected you?

SM: It's what I do. It is me. And I don't think having – having had the experience of standard practice, I think I felt as though my soul was being deadened. And it was intellectually challenging. And [a] learning curve, all of that stuff. But it didn't make my heart sing. And doing this – I wake up, and I'm happy to go and do what I do. So everybody is given a small piece of life energy. And if you feel good about how you're using it, then that's a good thing.

JR: Have you had any role models?

SM: My mother. My mother, in her own way. And many of the people who were active in the 60s were formative and informative for me. Because it was a time when we were really in the posture of questioning. I think that some of the questioning was silly. But some of it was extremely valuable. And there were lots of people who were extremely

playing to their more idealistic notes. I think that everybody is like a musical scale. You have high notes, and you have low notes. And you can play to any of your notes. There's some choice in that, and there's some environmental impact on which notes you end up playing, but I think that there were – the leadership that was available in the '60s, which hasn't really been replicated that I can see currently, had a big impact on my formative years.

JR: Who specifically are you thinking of?

SM: Well, certainly our African-American leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. Maya Angelou. Angela Davis. [Women] who were extremely willing to express the view of a society that – of what our society could be as opposed to what it was and willing to challenge what it was. Sometimes in less societally-acceptable ways. [laughter] But also, I was very positively influenced by what is known as the Warren Supreme Court, which was thought of now as an activist court. But I think legal activism is something that society actually, in some ways, wants of the law, rather than just holding the line. I think that most law students coming into law school write about wanting to do something with social justice. Two percent get to do it as their life work after law school because of the forces of economics and what law school teaches, and as a general rule, and so forth. So most practitioners go off into standard-size law practice. And yeah, I think all of those practitioners still live those applicants that would like to see law doing things that are more leading than following.

JR: What are your plans for the future in terms of your working both professionally and in terms of the activism of the schools?

SM: I'm a very here-and-now person. For instance, as you've heard in the story that I've told you – I never aspired to be a professor doing what I'm doing right now. That was not my aspiration. I didn't aspire to be a judge. Some of what has happened is sort of like a flow that I've gotten into. So I would like – I would like for what I do to spread and for

other people to take it up and find ways to do it more efficiently, more effectively than I do. So I think that would be my biggest hope. But I don't have any specific game plan for that.

JR: I think sometimes the best things come out of things that aren't planned. It's hard to predict things.

SM: Serendipitous sort of things.

JR: Have you been involved in other activist causes? Other things?

SM: Well, I continue to be involved in wherever I find myself. I am still on the Black Alumni Network. I work on admissions issues for law schools – African-American students – and our presence in the law school there. I do all of the – I feel that I am in all of the fifteen projects that we do every year. We've helped about forty different organizations. So I feel that I'm involved in each one of their causes in a certain degree. And I don't have a lot of additional time left after my two jobs because I'm also a mom. [laughter]

JR: No, I certainly didn't mean it like, “So what else are you doing?” As if you're not doing enough.

SM: But I feel that – I feel through all of these avenues, I have lots of commitment and engagement and a variety of social justice sort of issues.

JR: One of the things that we've started to add into the website is sort of recommendations from the “Women Who Dared” of ways to get involved so that – I mean, the website isn't designed overtly to be a – I mean, it’s designed to point out the amazing kind of things that women do every day in our communities, many of which are things that we sort of take for granted or don't recognize as being big contributions, or that women themselves don't – or that history hasn't. Although we aren't trying to present

it as an inspirational thing exactly, although I guess we sort of are. We started to add this section so that people who come away from it being like, “Oh well, I am inspired by this. What can I do?” So one of the things we've started to ask is if the “Women Who Dared” have suggestions for how people can get involved in their communities – things they've learned.

SM: Yeah. I think that, especially on the issue of public schools, parents who have children in public schools should, who are interested in trying to do something more than go to school with people who look different from themselves, see if there are diversity committees. And then find out how formulated their committee is. One of the important steps for our committee was making a mission statement so that people – because people tend not to know – because we don’t talk about our differences that much, they tend not to know that we need to. So to have a mission statement and then start to create structures that will actually draw in and make inclusion. One of the things our committee is going to do very soon is make a presentation to the PTO – town-wide PTO presidents, with the superintendent, to talk to leadership of all of the Brookline public schools about whether or not they have diversity committees and how might they go about structuring them. And to model a little bit of what it is that we're doing. And then see if they take an interest or they have things that they've already started that they want to share with us. It's that cross-pollination of information and willingness to start to examine the structure – not just to join. But what is the structure, and how effective is our structure set up so that we can reach as many people as possible within our community? And I think that that would be my best advice. Because everybody is located in connection with other people. And there are lots of little structures set up. But you have to have the willingness to go beyond just joining. And that means looking at something from a thousand feet above the ground level. What does it look like as a whole? Because when you're just a member, you sort of let the structure be what it is, and you're not up above it looking at it. And you need to get up above it and look at it, and then feel empowered to say, “I can affect this structure. And there may be suggestions

that I have." Women are now so accomplished, educationally, and so on and so forth – and yet using the skill sets as transferable skills to the community experiences that they find themselves in, I think, is sort of a bit compartmentalized for them. So it's sort of becoming more lateral in your thinking – I have these skill sets, and they actually are quite transferable to this situation, or that situation – and using them that way. So those would be my recommendations.

JR: I always ask at the end if there are – once we've come to the end of my questions – if there's anything we haven't talked about that you would like to tell me about that we haven't covered.

SM: Well, this has been a very exhaustive review. It's a great set of questions that you've framed, and I hope I haven't bored you.

JR: No, not at all. Not at all.

SM: I think that we've covered a great deal of ground. And if, after review, you find you have any follow-up questions that you need to fill in a gap in some way, I'm happy to be of assistance there. But I don't think that there's – the only thing that I thought back to is your question about – which was the most challenging – and one of the most challenging questions for me was what about taking these risks – what was it about taking these risks? I have maybe just one other illustration that would be demonstrative of what it means to me – and in my first large law firm experience, I learned very quickly that one of the important things about law firms is that the name partnership be dead. [laughter] Because if it got large under their watch, they tend to think of it as their little private fiefdom. And so, in my first firm, both of the partners – the main partners were still alive. One was Irish Catholic, and he did the litigation side. And one was Jewish, and he did the corporate side. And the Irish Catholic fellow was really – he was an excellent trial attorney but a very impatient man. He happened to like me, which was fine. But there were three attorneys that sat near me that he did not take a liking to. And one day at

high noon, he had them come into his office one at a time and fire them, which is basically unheard of in large law firm practice. If things are not working out, they generally say, “Things aren't working out. You've got six months. We'll give you a letter of recommendation.” He just – “Go clean out your desk and leave.” The whole firm was in an uproar. You know, how could this happen? Blah, blah, blah. Everybody was angry and upset. And immediately, they had a damage control meeting to tell everybody what bad practitioners these were and how they needed to be fired. And everybody was in the halls – blah, blah, blah. We got into the meeting. Nobody said anything. Nobody spoke. That's how I said, “Well, I know these attorneys. They sat right near me. I watched what was happening. I watched the flow of work start to become a trickle.” I said, “This is not looking good. You better start asking for work.” And so on and so forth. And I knew the quality of their work because when you sit next to each other, you always share work product, see how each other's doing, and help each other. And so I started to cross-examine the partner – the main partner. And I realized, because I reflected back on that and said, “Why is it that everybody was so silent after being so upset and angry in the hall?” I said, “You know what? I think the thing is that they feel they have a lot to lose.” Since I grew up on two thousand dollars a year, I know how to live just fine with no money to speak of. And it's not a horrendous place to be if you do it thoughtfully. That enabled me to use that moment in a way that my colleagues were disempowered from using. So feeling empowered and feeling able because you're not afraid of what you have to lose, I think, is the biggest part about taking a risk.

JR: It's interesting because I think a lot of people can come from an experience of knowing what you have to lose and not wanting to be in that situation again. So it's interesting how people can react differently to different situations.

SM: Yeah. Absolutely.

JR: I have a couple just bookkeeping questions. Just because we need –

SM: Tidy up shop.

JR: Right. We put all the – although the Women Who Dared exhibit is sort of separate from some of the other exhibits and from the virtual archive, we do put all of the information that we have into the virtual archive as well. So because of that, I had to learn various kinds of information that we need to get [inaudible] so that the form that is filled out in the virtual archives, so all of our information is in the same – has the same fields and stuff that you filled in. So one thing I need is your full name, including any name changes that might have happened.

SM: My name is Susan Maze-Rothstein. And I have a middle initial of A, which is for the name Angeline, but I don't use that very much because I already spend most of my day spelling my last name [inaudible]. And there – Maze is my maiden name. So that's my name.

JR: Yeah, I have two middle names. One is my mom's maiden name. And it just – it gets very confusing when my husband and I talk about what we're planning to do, and we both have three-syllable last names. Our poor children are going to be sorry.

SM: Yeah, it gets to a point. [laughter]

JR: Can I have your birth date?

SM: Yes. August 11th, 1956.

JR: And one thing that we put in the bio is like a one-sentence activist role or definition. And that's something that in the past I've written myself, but sort of realized maybe I should give the women themselves an opportunity to define that.

SM: I got an email from Rachel saying [inaudible] about that. And I emailed her back. She left me a message yesterday. I was over at Northeastern and not at my state job –

and saying that her email crashed. Could I re-email it to her? So I left a message for her this morning saying that I would re-email it to her when I got to my office. And with that is a bio – a little one-paragraph bio. I have here for you a copy of my – off of the website – a description of the Law, Culture, and Difference course. And descriptions about twenty projects that we've done. One little paragraph descriptions of projects that we've done over the years. And the marketing materials that we use to get projects with a description of what makes a good project, so you can really get a good sense of the project piece of that.

JR: Terrific.

SM: So there's that article from the Brookline TAB about that…

JR: Great…

[END OF INTERVIEW]