

**September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015 – Sister Claire Whalen speaking with Professor Mary Ellen Lennon at the Convent of the Sisters of St. Francis, in Oldenburg, Indiana.**

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SCW: Sr. Claire Whalen  
MEL: Mary Ellen Lennon

MEL: It is September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in Oldenburg, Indiana, at the Convent of the Sisters of Saint Francis. This is Mary Ellen Lennon and I am here with Sister Claire Whalen. I am very happy to be here. Would you like to introduce yourself, Sister?

SCW: Yes, I'm a, actually since we were supposed to do this yesterday, as I was telling you yesterday would have been my sixty-eighth anniversary of entrance into the community. And I went to Our Lady of Angels High School where I had four years of our Sisters the St. Francis and really was inspired by them, they were excellent teachers and very friendly. And the one Sister that brought three of us, she was our mentor you might say. We came on the twelfth instead of the eighth because she wanted to bring us. And so the three of us came together with her Sister Geraldine Marie, and we came with her on a train, my first time on a train, from Cincinnati. And I told her I wouldn't come without my tennis racket, so Sister Janie and I came with our tennis rackets. But you know we didn't get to play tennis until the summer because of the tennis court was right next to the, to the bishop building the postulant building. And the girls would be playing tennis there, so we didn't get to play tennis until they left. But anyway, as an aside it was my sixty-eighth anniversary being a Sister of St. Francis.

So, I just wanted to start by saying who am I, Sister Claire Whalen. I'm a woman who had remarkable opportunities to develop my God-given gifts, and talents and skills, both from childhood. I'm from Cincinnati, Ohio. My parents were good teachers, they invited me to be who I was. I had three other sisters at the time, and when I versus one another sister came along after I was in the convent. So there was twenty-one years difference between us. And I went to Catholic schools, my parents saw that we all went to Catholic schools. So I had excellent teachers but in my in my teen years, as I've mentioned, I went to Our Lady of Angels High School, and I was taught by the Sisters. They helped me develop my skills, my intellect, my my music skills, my athletic skills. And of course as an adult, since I've been here sixty-eight years, I've learned a lot from the Sisters of Saint Francis. So I owe my my education to these Sisters.

I'm a religious person because my mother as an example, we would go to the church a lot, First Fridays and all that. And I learned to love religion, I learned to love God and Christ, and the Bible and all of that from my mother, and of course from Catholic schools. And then I'm a Catholic and I'm a Franciscan. So being a woman, a religious, a Catholic, a Franciscan. And a woman religious through, living through the decades of change we've seen change to the forty-seventh, when I entered we didn't have TV at home. And we had radio but not TV, so I went through all those changes of, of course

being in the convent is information we didn't get to watch TV until we were later, so I didn't know anything about TV until much later. And I'm an educational leader, a collaborator, with other people of area professionals. At first in teacher education at Marian, and now here in this area among the agricultural people. And I'll tell you more about that later.

I'm an earth inhabitant, living on a finite planet, on this planet that needs to be taken care of. Of course you've probably read the Pope's newest encyclical haven't you, *Laudato si'*. And I'm an aging human person in good health who continues to live out my attraction to create a better world. And you might want to know what I did, why I became a Sister of St. Francis, why I was attracted to this community. I felt a call to serve God, and the Church as Sister. Of course, I had good role models, all the Sisters. There weren't any lay teachers at my, one late teacher in high school. That she was there a long time before other lay teachers came. We almost felt like she was a Sister. Anyway, I had good role models as Sisters, and the first example of my mother being very religious. And I think I had this vocation from early childhood, but it was the Sisters at my high school that kind of clinched that. I saw how devoted they were, how happy they were, what good teachers they were. Not that I thought I'd be a teacher but I wanted to be like them. So the other thing is, I had a lot of fun in high school but there was something missing in that fun, fun wasn't all there was to it, you know. I had a lot of friends, I did a lot of things, I was on a lot of sports teams in high school, and even in the summer those of us who like sports came together. There was always something missing. Fun wasn't enough. So basically I wanted to be, to do more, okay?

And so, you might I might say how was I formed, how did this Clare come into who she is now, at age eighty-six, okay. I made a retreat not too long ago, a Franciscan Sister who looked at the life of St. Clare of Assisi, and said Clare was formed by the place where she was. And same is true with me, time and space formed me, as well as events and persons. I looked for a timeline that I made once, I've had to write a lot of a lot of biographies. When I do programs they want to know who you are. I've been interviewed but by the papers around here for my agricultural work, so I've done a lot of reflection on who am I, and what do I want to share with people, where I share a little bit different with people who are looking at my agricultural leadership, or people are looking at my educational leadership, whatever that might be. So I'm looking at how did I become who I am. That might the end of interest to posterity, do you think?

MEL: Very much so.

SCW: So time and space. My position in the family, I was the firstborn. So I was I took leadership, I became the boss, so to speak. My friends will call me bossy, but that became my way of leading others to what, to something in the in the future that I could see could be. I'm always a person who's looking at the possible. And so by being the first person in the family I got a chance to be the leader, okay. When I was born my mother was ill, and so I didn't have a bonding with my mother. I had my grandmother, came to take care of me, and when my grandmother left I became a very independent person, very independent. I wasn't very attached to anybody. It took me a long time to

learn what it meant to be to be close to somebody, but in a way that was good for me, because I could do what I wanted to do and I couldn't care about anybody else. But that that changed later, but I look back and saying, we also moved a lot during my childhood, I grew up in the depression time. And my dad had to look for jobs so we moved a lot, we might not have been able to afford where we were living, we had to move someplace else. I went to five different grade schools, so that too made me independent. Made me able to stand on my own, so to speak. And so change became something natural. So the changes that I've gone through in the world and in the community, were just kind of it was natural, okay.

So growing up in Depression years I became a very self-reliant and creative person. Nothing, nothing that I did, it was, I responded to the places, the times, the events, the people in my life. So I became a risk taker, and I've been a risk taker all my life. I believe I could do anything, anything was possible. And in Catholic schools I had women leaders, women who led the schools, women who taught in schools. And so, I saw women as leaders, I saw myself as a potential leader. And my parents sacrificed to send me to Catholic schools, and even to to give us music lessons which were extra. I love music, I love to sing in the choir. I played trumpet and violin in high school. And we didn't, weren't able to bring those instruments along to the convent, so I didn't continue that until later in the convent. But I picked up the trumpet and began to play for liturgies. And then after I couldn't play anymore I had sores in my mouth, back in the '90s, and I was, couldn't play for two years. When I wanted to get back to playing, I couldn't get my my lips back in shape. But I needed, if I would practice a lot I could, but at the time I was at the farm. I had a full-time job at the farm, so there was no time for practice. So I said well, I really want to play something, so I went back to pick up the violin after fifty years. And I took some music lessons from the Sister here, and I still play the violin. And as a maybe two years ago our local library offered a ukulele club, and I joined the ukulele club and learn how to play the ukulele. That's one of my what you call it, hobbies. So in my retirement I'm continuing with music.

Well, back to back to the OLA, back to Our Lady of Angels High School. That was a very formative experience in my life. The teachers you know, made you reach for the academic excellence that was possible. We, I was both in the band and orchestra and I loved it. And I was in all the sports, all the sports. And at that time high schools' women's sports weren't anything special in high schools, but our gym, phys-ed teacher [Betty Ferrians] arranged, she was a woman's lib you might say. that time in the '40s. And she arranged for us to play other high schools, so we played a lot of varsity sports, of all kind. And I think you know, I I continued being athletic all my life. I think that's why I'm in such a good health. And currently I swim a lot, I swim laps at our 'Y'. When I moved back to Oldenburg, the town had just opened the YMCA, so I've been able to swim at the YMCA on a you know they give us a sliding scale fee for the Sisters since we don't we don't make any money. So an avid child, we also learn how to make our own fun, we didn't have money for entertainment. We were able to play all kinds of games without a lot of equipment, or we'd go to the park. The out of doors were always something special for me. So I'm rambling, okay.

So I lived through the Depression years, I lived through the changes in the Catholic Church. When I first came to the community we had the full habit. And after Vatican II we were encouraged to return to our baptismal names. My name in the religion when I was first at Marian was Sister Mary Giles. Now I'm back to my original family name. So after Vatican II, the community our congregation went through a lot of changes. During that time, we had superiors and we had we had very strict regulations. We weren't able to go visit our families. And so I really didn't get very close to my my brothers and sister, my cousins, who were fellows. And so I really didn't get connected with my family that much. Interesting, when they would come to visit me my dad was a was a cement contractor after the war. Because he worked in the factory during the war, but after the war he was a cement contractor. And they would have to come down in the truck, even in wintertime. So sitting in the back of the truck, open you know the covers, when we were allowed to go home no longer did they come visit me, they said, you owe us, you got to come visit us, now. We went through hell and high water so to speak, to listen to you. So I did.

The other thing is I lived in an all-girl family, and I went to an all-girl high school. So leadership among women and being comfortable among women, was was a positive thing for me. So entering a community of women was a positive thing for me. And again, I'm highlighting women leadership, you know, before there was ever even a women's liberation. Okay, that's enough for that part.

My ministry years. I started out as an elementary school teacher at St. Christopher's in Speedway. And before, before there there really wasn't a Catholic school there, we were the first Sisters in the area. And we lived, there wasn't a convent for us, we lived in a regular house, there were three of us. And we were, you know, the Catholic presence in the area where most people weren't Catholic in the area. So when we started the school we were strange, in these strange habits walking down the street. They saw us in grocery stores you know, so they got used to us. They took good care of us after a while. But we started a school that was wasn't completely finished. And there were three teachers and only six grades because they didn't want to add to seventh and eighth. And the, with the school not being finished, I don't know if that people is St. Christopher realizes, there were only two classrooms finished, and the building wasn't completely finished. There weren't even any bathrooms or restrooms in the area. So we had to walk over to the priest's house, to his basement. There weren't that many kids, we had maybe twenty or thirty kids in the classroom at that time. Years later, it was forty and fifty, okay. So I taught there for about six or seven years, as a novice starting out, as a young sister. And finished my almost finished my baccalaureate degree in the summer as well, while I was in Indianapolis. And then graduate study at Butler, and then at the University of Cincinnati.

Interesting thing after, after when I was close to finishing my baccalaureate, we came home for our retreats, we had the summer retreats here at the motherhouse. And that was also the year of we had an epidemic typhoid fever. A lot of the Sisters here got typhoid, they went back to the missions and the Sisters on mission got typhoid. So

everybody had to come home, and since I was supposed to go to get my doctorate that year I was free, I wasn't assigned to any any school. So before before that happened when I got my my obedience, you remember you know about those little slips of paper?

MEL: Yes, but would you explain it?

SCW: About the obedience, okay. We talked about obedience, and we were mostly teachers, or music teachers. And each year we got little slips of paper that said where we were going. And we didn't know until we got that paper where we were going the next year, that was part of the discipline of obedience. And when I got my paper in 1950, no 1956 I guess it was, '55 or '56 it said Marian College. I'd been going to school at Marian you know in the summers. And I knew I was almost finished. I didn't know how close I was to finishing. It said Marian College and I went to the Reverend Mother and I said, I don't know what this means, what am I going to do at Marian College? And she said, well, do whatever they tell you. Which is you know, okay alright. So I've been doing whatever they tell me since. Not completely, because some things I've cooked up for myself. So when I got to Marian I had to finish. I had to take, this was like early August, and school didn't start until the middle of September in those days, I had to finish two classes for my baccalaureate degree. I had to finish a philosophy class and a biology class, and with two professors, Marian Sisters, gave me an independent class, taught me. When I finished with that, okay now what? Well, you're going to go to Butler University and get your master's degree. And while you're here you're going to teach a couple of methods classes. Because I taught school they figured I could teach teachers how to teach. I think was a language arts methods class.

So I did that, I went to Butler and I taught language arts methods class the first semester. And when I had to sign up for a second semester, I was taking also a geography class at Butler, I said, do I you know, can I take something up that I want? And I thought the geography class would be good so I took a geography class, my first formal geography class. And then the history teacher who had been teaching the geography class saw that I liked geography said, well you could teach the geography class the second semester. We did such things in those years, do whatever they tell you. So I did, I taught the geography class to the seniors who needed it before they graduated. Elementary school teachers needed it. Plus, it was a elective for social science requirement in those days. So maybe some history people took it and others who thought it was going to be an easy course took it.

Okay, so I did, I finished the master's degree, that year in that summer. There's there's some stories about that which I won't belate you on this. But if there's time I'll tell you about this.

MEL: Oh, because we'd be happy to hear it.

SCW: Well later on. And then the typhoid summer started that summer and I came home like everybody else did, and we had to be real careful with with germs so we we had to use, the academy had a dishwasher so all the dishes had to be washed over in

the academy dining room, where there were lots of us home. And so since I was young and healthy, I got to be on the dish-washing team, and everybody else got to take a nap. Those who weren't on the dish-washing team. And so that, I was dead tired from finishing my degree, writing a thesis, and even taking comps. People at Butler forgot I was writing a thesis and they made me take comps also. After I was finished they said, you really didn't need to do this. But anyway, those were some very, what shall I say, interesting things in my background.

So that year, that summer a lot of the Sisters weren't ready to go back out on mission. So I got to go to two different places to sub, for the teachers who couldn't go there until they got there. So basically you know, even though I taught at St. Christopher's I subbed at a couple places for a couple of weeks, before I started my classes at the University of Cincinnati. That was an interesting experience too, but I don't think you need to know anything about that right now. So I started my doctorate work at, for a year I was there. When I came back to Marian I became head of the education department, and I was a full-time teacher. And I hadn't finished my coursework at UC, so I got to go there in the summer, a couple of summers, and also one other semester I was released to finish the coursework. Then started the dissertation, it took me six years to write the dissertation. It was the history of Marian College, the first twenty-five years. And I was doing it only in the summers because I was full-time teacher. After that they never, anybody who wrote a dissertation got time off to do it because they could see what a drain it was on people. And again their stories related to that.

So I wound up teaching at Marian for twenty-three years. Teaching teachers, that was a very, very interesting and very, very delightful experience. I loved being at Marian, the campus is beautiful. It wasn't as beautiful at the time because we didn't have money to do all the landscaping and all that. It was beautiful, even in-and-of-itself. And of course we had only the Allison estate at the time, we hadn't purchased the Stokely or the Fisher estate. I'm sorry that we we already had had given up the land for that public school that was there, but that's alright. If I have time I'll come back to the years at Marian teaching. They were some of the best years of my life. Of course, I was young and anxious to to prepare good teachers. I'll come back to that. Toward the end of my teaching time at Marian which was in the '70s, it was a time when when things were happening very quickly in elementary, in education period. But in elementary education which is what I was training teachers for. Educating I shouldn't use the word training, my plane. I began to be very learning things about how to make education for children better, but I had never done those things. I was teaching my teachers how to do it, expecting them to do it, and yet never knowing how it would turn out. When they came back to talk to me they said, you know, we can't do those things out there that the older teachers won't let us do those things, they think we're whippersnappers, you know, that we know better than them. So I got the idea that I better go back and teach school. I had been there let's see '56 to '70. Fifteen, twenty years maybe. No, fifteen years.

So I took a sabbatical and I went back to teach school. And it wasn't just a regular classroom. A friend of mine in the Providence Order, was being sent to teach to be the principal at school in Bloomington, Indiana. St. Charles Borromeo. And she I was talking

to her I said, I got a sabbatical, I got to go back, I want to go back to some school and teach. Get me some ideas, you know, where I could go. She goes, well, why don't you come with me? You're serious? Yeah, she said, the only thing you'd have to do is you'd have to be director of , if order for them to give you a salary you'd have to be director of our CCD program. That way, I could pay you because I didn't want a full-time teaching experience, I wanted to be able to dip in and dip out and try out different things. And then go away and take some some courses and some workshops and some conferences. So I couldn't do that if I were a regular teacher. So she arranged that in the first semester I could team teach with two of the intermediate grade teachers, well three of them really. So I did, and so when when I wanted to go away they could cover, because we taught together. And the second semester I work with the primary grade teacher. So I was like almost like an in-service person for them which benefited them but also benefited me. I could see how much time it took to prepare the kinds of things I wanted to do. But when I got that to Marian I no longer taught the methods classes at the college I talked about in the schools, because I had taught in their elementary schools at St. Christopher's and used St. Christopher's as my last school. Actually I was living at St. Christopher's and commuting to Marian at the time. And so the teachers at St. Christopher's gave me carte blanche to do whatever I wanted in their classrooms, with their kids. And then I did that same thing and when I wasn't living there anymore when I went to St. Monica's. I did the same thing at St. Monica's. And when I taught the reading methods I was able to use other children and other schools among my Providence friends. And of course I had student teachers and so I had to place my teachers in schools where I knew there were excellent teachers.

So it was a good experience for me. And in doing that I became very instrumental at the state level to insist that laboratory experiences be part of the teacher had experience, from beginning to end. So I was very instrumental in the teacher certification improvement kinds of things. And because I knew the people there, when I finally when the Catholic schools needed more training for their teachers, I created an internship program with the Catholic schools where they released two or three of their teachers, full-time, to work with with the people who were to be interns in their Catholic schools. So we had a good really, I'm used to working with people to further, what I see is possible down the line. So that was a really good experience and of course, I think Marian became known then for its teacher education. And I'm so proud of them now. Sister Marilyn and I, Marilyn Hofer was there in the secondary ed. I don't know if you knew when she was in the Alumni Office, okay. So she and I were invited to come back to the NCATE, National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education, to their NCATE brunch with the people who were going to examine them that week. And they gave little overview of their report to this examining group. And I was so proud of them, I mean they continue what we started. And that's so good for for people to see. You know, I don't have grandchildren, but this is my grandchild. The education department. Anyway

MEL: Excuse me, Sister. Would you mind giving an example of one of those innovative teaching experiences that you, that your student teachers were unable to do with older teachers, and then you were inspired to then go out into the lab schools?

SCW: Well, yes sure.

MEL: Something specific.

SCW: All right. Language arts. How do you get children improving in language arts? Well, you get them talking. And you get them writing. And so you can tell your students at the college classroom, that's what you need to do. But you have to give them the actual experience themselves so that they can do it, with my guidance. So we would we went to a sixth grade classroom, and at that time we also had video cameras were just coming into vogue. And I was able to purchase a video camera and we used that for, long story short, I they had to talk with a small group of children-I must have had fifteen students at the time, twelve or fifteen, and each one had two or three sixth graders that talked about something interesting to themselves. And they would then get them, guide them onto how to write the story about that. And I would walk around their sixth grade classroom watching what my students would be doing. And I would take what they were doing. They would critique themselves also.

And one other program we did with that sixth grade classroom is that we, with the video camera, we had a newscast for the school. The children, the sixth graders created puppet stories that they took to the first grade class. Puppets, so their little art and they took him to the first grade class, and did the puppet story. And then we we videotaped the puppet stories. And then another time they they would say, what this was all in one semester, they would have the children write the news for the week for the school. Including going outside to the football games and videotaping the football game. But it was really good experience. And then of course because we had the videotape, I could have them prepare a teaching lesson on any subject whatever methods it was, and we would videotape their teaching and then they could they could see themselves. So those are the things that we taught. I mean, really first-hand experiences in classrooms.

And maybe another time in their first-grade classroom, children can't read yet, they can't write. But they can talk, so we would they would talk a story and my students would print, they had to learn how to print, didn't call it printing but that's what it was. They would print a story on a big sheet paper and then the kids would read what they already said, so that was an experience. So we would go to the fire station or the bank and have a, but with the children each of my seniors they were seniors by that time, guiding a small group of children or to the bank or the, and they were like a half a block away, there at St. Christopher's in Speedway. And then they'd come back and the kids would talk about their experience and they would write it for them. And then the kids could read that. So the teachers let us do all that in their classroom. Of course, they were happy you know, they didn't have to plan those lessons. And they could, they could see their children what they were doing. So that's it.

MEL: Thank you, that was wonderful. Thank you.

SCW: I enjoy doing those things. Those were special times for me. But I guess I saw myself getting too stale, you might say. And I decided that I would change. I would leave



Marian, and do something else. And I told the people in the department you know, you got to take your turns at being Chair of the department, because when I go somebody gotta be Chair. So we did that, we rotated the chair person-ship. And there was an opening here at the motherhouse for somebody to come to help our sisters learn how to write resumes, and do interviews, to get jobs in schools. Because we no longer could appoint people. Can you stop that and then--

MEL: Of course, Sister.

## Part II

MEL: Part two with Sister Claire Whalen,

SCW: Whalen,

MEL: Whalen. Thank you, Sister.

SCW: Sure. So I was telling you I left Marian in 1979 to take a job here at, a community job here at the motherhouse. It was called Director of Ministry, but basically it was office of personnel services. The name changed afterwards. During that time I helped our Sisters with resume writing and interview skills. I also worked with Sisters who were moving out of teaching into some other position, particularly into pastoral work or DRE work or something else, hospital chaplaincy, whatever that might be. And I also encourages Sisters to take sabbaticals because the sabbatical that I had was such a powerful thing for me. So I encouraged people to take sabbaticals and I would study what they were out there. We didn't have computers and emails yet, at that time. Although I when I left a Marian I had just started you encouraging people to look at computers, and when I came here we started looking at it, at computers for our offices. And also our Sisters in the infirmary, didn't have the opportunity to know what was going on in other parts of the building, so I I invited our Assistant Reverend Mother to check out the intercom system so that we did that in the chapel, so that the Sisters in their bedrooms could be connected with our chapel services. So I brought a little bit of that here, technical kind of thing to the community. But anyway, mostly I work with our Sisters to encourage them to improve themselves either in the teaching or to get prepared you know either in graduate work or take a sabbatical so that they would know what they're gonna do afterwards. That was about seven years, six, seven years I was in that position. At that time I was also still interested in what was going on in the world in terms of education, for myself and for others. And I became connected with Jean Houston, the brain-mind person, [unintelligible] and Pat and Jerry [unintelligible], who were looking at global systems changes. So I had the opportunity to study those things and become involved in that. And Jean Houston, brought Jane Houston here to give us a workshop and the teachers. Even though I was helping people change from teaching to something else, I was also helping our teachers improve their own teaching. And so we did a lot with with imaging, with brain-mind understanding at that time. So I was still doing teacher education at the time.

Toward the end of that, one of our Sisters at Marian one didn't want to be Dean anymore, Sister Margaretta. She had been there a long time, and I looked at possibilities at that College. That was that was my child, you know, Marian College. It was very important to me and to our community and I said, well I think I might, I would step in and be Academic Dean for a while. And I did, and it about killed me. But it it was at a time when I felt that the faculty could be more empowered. I wanted to empower the faculty to be more than just teachers, wanted them to to do some of the things I did in the education department, you know. Hands-on kinds of things, but also to improve themselves and to, and to share it with other people in their in their profession. We hadn't been doing that. But the most important thing is the College was beginning to erode on student quality, because we needed students badly. And so everybody her brother was coming in to Marian College who really weren't qualified. We had basic English and basic math, many many divisions of that, people coming out of high school who weren't prepared for college could get prepared. So I feel like those were my main contributions to the College, save the college quality, and also improve faculty, you know, empower the faculty. And talking about empowerment, since basically our ring has DMEO on the inside, "deus meus et omnia", it means my "my God and my all". It's the St. Francis, what's the word, I can't remember words, theme, okay. And I was a very obedient child because I wanted to please my parents. But I was also very independent, so coming into a community where obedience was very important was was important to me. So wherever God called me to go and do I went. But in going and doing that my community let me do what I could do with my gifts. In other words they didn't squelch me, and I would say I am who I am because community, whoever whoever moved me into whatever I did saw the possibilities of my being able to do that.

So I saw how important that was for others, and so I get a big bang seeing the gifts of others being developed. I mean, I like to empower people and I feel like that's been one of my contributions, both when I was personnel service director, as well as anything I do personally, you know. I see what people do and I like to acknowledge that. And I like to pride them on that they even do better. When I retired from the Academic Deans job, actually I left because I was worn out. The President wanted me to stay longer, and I just couldn't. I had been working, you know, midnight, midnight times, and I even had an accident going to a destination where I fell asleep in the car. And so that wasn't too good for me. But nevertheless it was the the pushing and the pulling of the community at the college to be better, that wore me out. And so, I decided, you know, that but I don't know what I was going to do but I was going to not be a Dean anymore.

So I guess it was '61 or '62 at the time, still pretty young. And we had just opened our farm, the possibility of the farm. And during, I took a year off. I didn't want to do anything, I didn't want to go to school. I took a year off, I stayed at Marian part-time and I stayed at the house up on the farm part-time, during that year. And I took the video camera and I went all over the farm and made a tour of the farm via video camera, so that our Sisters in the infirmary and anybody who wasn't here could see what that farm was. That farm's been over there all during our our growing up years here in the community. The only thing we know about the farm is apple picking. We picked apples

the younger Sisters got to go out and pick apples, but we sold that apple orchards to the person who who was working on it, and the farm was there right across from you've seen the farm? Right across from the from the high school up there, but we never paid much attention to the farm because we were teachers, not farmers. The farm fed us, the farm fed the academy. I mean we were able to keep tuition down at the academy because we had the farm. Apples, potatoes, meat, milk. Everything possible that kept us going. So when when the leadership at the time had to look at this three hundred acres at the farm, they had to decide what to do with it, we spent a year studying the farm because we all we all knew there was a farm but not anything about it. So we studied the farm and we decided we would return to the farm, and help it to become an organic farm if possible. And I was just coming out of academic leadership and one of the Sisters said, you want to be director? I said, no no no no, somebody else took over that job. But the year after my sabbatical, I was assigned. I said, I would be happy to go to the farm now. I was you know, rested, and I was their program director offering programs that would be related to ecology and sustainable agriculture and things like that. Where I learned that? I brought in people to present it. We offered programs and all of us at the farm learned those things, we learned about earth, we learned about rotational grazing, we learned about straw bale houses, we learned about a lot of things, together.

And then we created an internship program where we taught people to who wanted to learn about sustainable agriculture to come live with us for nine to twelve months, and work with us and learn not only farming skills but also holistic living skills. I also taught tai chi during that time, which I had learned on my sabbatical, and part of that we taught them about Saint Francis and St. Clare. So we did some Franciscan values things. Anyway those were very important years for me, I learned from the interns we had to cook the noon meal for maybe twelve people, so I learned I hadn't done much cooking before so I learned from them. And that's stayed me well when I was working with a CSA program.

But anyway I was at the farm for another six years, and I retired from that in 2001. Took another little sabbatical. I'm used to working my head off, and then stopping and taking time off to rest. And so I did that and during that sabbatical I lived in an apartment here in Batesville, because I needed time for myself. And most of my sabbatical for things they weren't formal academic programs, there were things I needed at the time. That's what I needed at the time and my community let me do that. During that time I created a card game, I have a copy of it for you. It's called three square for Earthcare.

MEL: Oh, thank you, Sister. Would you like to talk about it, for the recording?

SCW: Just a little bit. But anyway it wasn't this particular copy of was just the idea of the card game. That didn't come into fruition until about 2007. I had to ask our community for money to get that going. And some donor did the first amount and the community put a little bit in so that I could get that printed. Well an artist to do the work and then print it, but it was to be since I wasn't at the farm anymore it was to be a fundraiser for the farm. And I was able to sell maybe fifteen hundred of them. I still have some the first two

thousand printed. And I'm hoping that one of the the business persons in Indianapolis now that I'm retired again and helps me market it again, okay. But anyway, that's enough for that.

So during my after I retired some time from the farm, I was still part-time for a couple years, I created a program called "share the bounty", it was a program where the poor the poor in Brookville and in Batesville got an opportunity to have some of the fresh vegetables and fruits from the farm. But we also had a cooking class connected with it because they don't usually use fresh vegetables they can't afford it. So just giving them fresh vegetables wouldn't help so we did a cooking class. And that's when I started connecting with the people in Brookville and Batesville who were interested in healthy foods. From that experience is when I when we looked at how can we promote local foods in our area, that's when I started the Food and Growers Association. And it's still going, ten years. And out of that came the farmers market in Batesville, and also the Laughery Valley Growers which was a co-op of about a dozen growers a dozen farmers in the area who came together under my leadership to offer a subscription of the produce during the season to people who pay for it at the beginning of the season. You've heard about the community supported agriculture today.

So we have eight years, after eight years I decided that was enough in my old age I didn't want to work so hard. so now I'm fully retired as of two years now, and I'm enjoying a variety of things. What else I want to say? I mentioned to you how important the community was for me, both in my formation years and in my spiritual development along the way. You wanted to know how has my prayer life changed. Well, in the beginning we had a lot of vocal prayers we said the office together, we did have meditation there's a young Sister meditation. Didn't work too well for me. I got too tired, I think. But it was important, our retreats were very important for me. Our annual retreats, I don't miss any of them. Can you imagine, you are obliged to take time out to to further your spiritual growth. It's an obligation I took seriously. And a, well what I want to call it, treat retreat is a treat. How many lay people in the world can take a week off, to foster their spiritual growth? So I'm very grateful to my community that that was an obligation imposed on us. And then of course the Franciscan studies where we became more more aware of our Franciscan roots, and also given an opportunity to travel to Assisi. I was able to go to Assisi one year with a another Sister.

And my time at the farm you know, I connected with with nature again. Being an educator very heady, you know, intellectual. My doing the video tour of the farm, all through the three hundred acres and mapped it, because I mean I also taught geography. And mapping was very important to me, and so I mapped the farm. And the farm, all parts of the farm spoke to me. I my special farm work besides doing doing the the programs you know, creating the programs, inviting the presenter, getting the people to come, you know, how that goes, with putting in the trails in the woods. I blazed the trails in the woods. I loved doing that. I didn't get it finished and I don't know if ever got finished, but that was important to me. And of course we have the retreat house at the farm, do you know about that? That was important to me, too. I took care

of that, I cleaned that while I was there. Took care of the rental, and things like that, people making.

And then another big thing that out of out of the programs at the farm and the ecology and and the understanding of my connection with land, and this planet, I got connected with several several professionals. I mentioned Miriam Therese McGillis, Pat and Jerry [unintelligible], Brian Swim, and and the whole concept of the universe story came alive to me. And I began teaching it, and I also taught it a connection with Tai Chi, is that Eastern movement. And so the universe story and the first story has been one of my specialties. I tried to get people in this area to come to two classes that I teach over at the retreat center, but it's too far out for them. I had to go away to teach it. I'd go to South Carolina to a retreat center there and teach it. One of our sisters was there, so I knew that place. I tried to teach it elsewhere but it it just didn't take. So I gave up on teaching that, but nevertheless it was very important to me.

MEL: Sister, would you have time to describe the universe story for us? Would you tell it or a little bit if you feel comfortable?

SCW: Well, as I teach it I teach it in four units, the first unit is the cosmic dimension, the beginnings of Earth through the formation of stars. Then the second is focused on Earth, the formation of Earth coming into its own, having an atmosphere and a water-sphere. And then Earth bursting forth with life, so the next focus is on life. And I try to get people to realize that, but the immense time that it took to do that in evolution. Nothing is fast, everything is slow, but fast in its own way.

And then the focus on on life, and how valuable the bacteria was to life. That it's still valuable to us, if we didn't have bacteria within us we wouldn't be able to live. And then you know when the bacteria is not working well, get cramps. Anyway, I appreciate gas, because the bacteria put the gas in there, how else would we get that stuff out? That's just being funny. And then the last focus is like humans, so going through 14 billion years ago through the development of birth through the so the emergence of life, and then the many diverse life forms. And I just delighted with Pope Francis's encyclical. Wow, you know with his coming to this country and helping us to focus on on our common home, Earth.

So a lot of my my current retirement stuff is related to justice, peace, integrity of Earth. I do about on emails you know, active active work. Especially in the area of energy, and food. And of course energy meaning climate, so climate change, climate justice is so important for me right now. I've signed up about two years ago with the [unintelligible] and others who are trying to keep the Keystone XL pipeline from being approved by the president, he's delayed it for two or three years now. He hasn't finished it. So if he if he approves that those of us who are trained to do civil disobedience would go up to Indianapolis and open ourselves up to be arrested, if necessary. But you've got to do something to make to make a point. So I'm involved in that, anything related to climate change, and then of course the peace deal with Iran. I held a vigil in Batesville last Thursday, peace vigil for anybody who wanted to come pray that our senators would not

disapprove this deal. So anyway, this is my job now, trying to, and you make you get one victory and then you get a rest for a while and then you come through, and have work over again. But it's worth it.

Of course, all the food-related things you know, against Monsanto and their GMOs, and healthy soils, local foods and labeling that people have a right. So I'm babbling right now, so anyway those are my my end of life experiences. So, how's that?

MEL: Thank you, Sister for your story. Thank you. If you still have a moment I would like you to talk about what well, I would appreciate you talking about the strength that you've received from your community, to do all the things that you've done all your life. Living with other Sisters, if you could reflect on that. I think right now you're living with another Sister as well. What does that sense of community mean to your work?

SCW: Well, the support of each other you know, It's not always easy to rub shoulders with people who are different from you. But you're all in the same boat. You're all advancing the reign of God at this time in your life. And you're doing it together. We have a motto it says "Where One Sister Is, There We All Are". And that's true. Well, we might not know what everybody's doing because some people change jobs a lot, but we know that what they're doing they're doing in the name of the community. And that because they're there, we're there with them, you know. Whatever it happens to be. And in the past twenty years a lot more of our Sisters have been choosing to live and work with the poor as you know, it sometimes we then, the formal Church has looked at us and said, well why aren't you teaching more of this, that, and the other thing? But that's where God has called us, to be with the poor. But also not only with the poor, with the changes that need to be done, at the systems level. Well that's where I've been mostly involved with. Does that make sense?

MEL: Thank you so much, Sister.