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Smith, Sandra Renee

Sandra Renee Smith

Damien Johnson

David Katchadourian

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Gullah Digital Archive

Interviewee: Sandra Renee Smith

Interviewers: Damien Johnson, David Katchadourian, Hope Harrod, Peter Rutkoff

Location: St. Helena Island, South Carolina

Date: July 20, 2012

DJ: Good morning, today is July 20th, 2012 we are here with Sandra Renee Smith who's a Gullah folk artist from Beaufort, South Carolina. She has been kind enough to have us do an interview at her studio which is off of---

SS: Storyteller.

DJ:---Storyteller Road. Ok, did I get everything I need? Oh, my name. Well my name is Damien Johnson and our team consists of Hope Harrod, and Dave Katchadourian. And our distinguished professor, Peter Rutkoff. Alright so, now that we've got all that taken care of let's get back to that painting over there and I was asking before what's, or what was your inspiration for the painting? And you just talked about how lucky and how blessed you are to be in a place.

SS: Yeah that painting was one of the first of a part of my earlier pieces and again it was inspired by just the beauty of living on St. Helena. I think we're so blessed to be in such a very special place. You know, and there's beauty all around and so you just can't help but try to capture it. I try to do my best in trying to capture you know, what I've known and what I've grown up with in my art.

DJ: Speaking of capturing we came up with a number of questions but I think this is probably a great time to ask them. How do you capture the spirit of the Gullah culture through your art?

SS: If it's in you, I've always felt that if something is within you then what you're trying to capture is the way to express it or bring it out. Again I've not been painting very long I started painting in 2008 for the first time, with no classes, with no brushes, with nothing, you know, it just happened. And because of my experiences growing up here, I've always wanted to be able to at least try to share that with other people, that don't know about the beauty and the specialness of this Island. So um, with each day I mean I can always just look at a piece and kinda think about what I grew up with you know one of my most fondest memories was just looking across the marsh one morning and seeing my father way back in the distance with his cast net. And he's out there throwing that net and the sun rise and the you know, the marsh birds. But he was getting breakfast. You know, for us that was breakfast and that was very important. But it was such a beautiful thing to you know, to see and to remember. I remember my mother sitting at the, the um water shores early in the morning and she had her little knife and her little chair. And she was opening oysters, you know so we grew up on all the delicacies of the sea, you know it was

just a wonderful thing and I don't know that I've been able to totally capture everything that's in my mind but my hope is that one day I'll be able to put it all down. So that people in the future will know again what kind of you know, what special place this is and the kind of place that we grew up in.

DK: Now most people take for granted what they grow up with.

SS: Yeah.

DK: Why did it---why did you see the beauty in it?

SS: I saw the beauty because I was fortunate enough to leave here. I think unless you have some kind of comparison you don't know what you have. So I was fortunate to travel, my husband is in the---was in the military, he was a United States Marine. You know, so we traveled away to other places, Virginia, we even went overseas to Japan and all other places---but you know, all the time that I was gone I just yearned to get back here. Now he's from Philadelphia but I noticed that he had the same yearning, we all---you know no matter where we went we always wanted to try to get back home because there was no place like this. I mean growing up on the water, the people are so friendly, they're open, they were honest, things were you know, the crime rate was low. It was a wonderful place to raise family and children. And we just didn't find that anywhere else. You know, and even if you didn't work, which most people did try to work but you could live off the land, you know and that's something I'm eternally grateful to my parents for, because they taught us farming, we didn't like it because they did so much of it. I mean, they did like fields, and fields of beans and corn and you know, okra and all of these things that we ended up having to help prepare, so that they could be canned. And I promised myself when I got older that I would never can anything. I just, I just was not going to can anything because I was---they would can by the hundred jars, you know, and it wasn't enough to say I'm gonna do a dozen. No, you know and there was this, this, this competition between my mother and her sister. They would call each other and you know, "how many jars did you can today", "well I did a hundred and sixty", "well how many did you do", "well of course I did one eighty". You know, so there was always this one upmanship of trying to can this stuff but as a child we didn't realize the importance of it. But there were days when there wasn't work, no, when things were hard, when you didn't have transportation to get out of here to go somewhere to make money then there was no food. And they used those cans, you know the things that they canned and we grew up on it and we didn't even realize how healthy it was for us then. You know, but this is how we survived winter. I was telling my husband there was a practice of growing sweet potatoes and they would make these sweet potato banks. And for the life of me I don't understand how those banks preserved the sweet potatoes. Because they would put them underground, they would put some straw on top and some dirt and I don't know why they didn't rot or why the you know, the animals didn't eat them. But all winter we could go out and they would say, "ok dig right here".

And you'd just start digging and you'd just pull out as many sweet potatoes as you needed. And you'd cook those and you know, you covered up the hole. And they lasted all winter.

DJ: So you basically just buried them in the ground---

SS: Buried them in the ground.

DJ: Like in the fall.

SS: In the fall after they were harvested.

DJ: And the idea was they would keep.

SS: They did keep, they did keep. And I bet you now if we went out there and put a sweet potato---I don't know what they did to make them keep.

DK: Did they, did they cure them before they---

SS: They didn't do anything to them they just put this big hole and I know there was pine straw, pine straw was an essential part of it. But they covered them up and we ate sweet potatoes and all the things that they canned. And I mean when I say canned they canned everything. My Grandmother even canned the vines from the sweet potato. And who would think of eating that but it was so much like greens that you would not believe.

DJ: Wow, greens.

SS: And talking about a good cook those women could make---take anything and make it seem so delicious they were excellent cooks. They were excellent mentors and they were excellent examples of, of you know, women to follow. So I think they have inspired me to be the woman that I am you know because they were strong and raising many children. My mother's family, there were ten children in her family. You know, so we were small compared to what they grew up with, there were five of us. But they were strong children and my mother's mother died when she was five. So her sister raised all of those children. Now you think about men today I mean what man would bring in all of his wife's sisters and brothers and raise them but they did that. And they, they were wonderful people I just, I just hate to see that our culture is changing so much and it is, it is dying. Because we don't have that influence anymore.

DJ: It's...yeah. And explaining your family and I've heard sustainability, I've heard self-sufficiency, I've heard a true understanding of your roots. We look at you Mrs. Smith and see that you're a product of your environment.

SS: Yes, yes.

DJ: Can you elaborate more on your environment, you've done so much but like getting back to the art thing like how has your environment influenced you, like we see this beautiful painting here. And we see the sunrise and it's so beautiful but like we all are teachers and we want our students to understand what it means to be a product of your environment. So how are you a product?

SS: Well, I hope I can explain in terms that your students will understand. Except for me it's not being so much a product of the environment as actually being a part of the environment. I actually feel fully and totally connected to this land, this place. And the land of course is very important to us I know that you know, I don't know in other places if they talk about heirs property and all of that but all of this road, Storyteller, all the way up and down, we're all family. We're all family there's a cousin, or an aunt, or a sister, we're all related here and I'm so...it's, it's more than just being in a place. You know, and the place is really within us, it's in our heart it just can't be separated and again, this is what I try to bring to my art. Another vital piece of what I try to bring to my art, because if you notice all of the women are wearing hats or some sort of covering on their head and that goes back to my spirituality and the religious culture that I was raised in. They were pentecostal women and they believed in adorning themselves you know, there were certain ways that you went to church which again we have lost. But you go to church and you dress up and you put on your finest and everybody had a hat. And the most favorite time for me was when they had women's day. And imagine a sea of women in white and white hats, all over the church. And it was just a beautiful thing and those things I remember, from my childhood. And I try to, you know, capture and embrace the church was a very important part of us growing up.

PR: Can I ask you a question about your art?

SS: Sure.

PR: And I've been curious about the use of the face without features, and I've noticed that some other Gullah artists do the same thing.

SS: Right. We---I don't know I probably shouldn't speak for others---

PR: Yeah.

SS: ---but for me, I find that it is better to allow the viewer to bring that face in. What I like you to do is to look at the piece and look at what's going on in the piece and imagine who these people are, you know. And most of them they do look like they're back in another time.

PR: Yeah.

SS: And so, really we can't put a face to those people, you know. So I like you to imagine who you thought this woman might have been and what she was thinking and what was going on. And I think that adds something to the art.

PR: Thank you. Another thing I've been thinking about is how Southern several of the figures look and African others.

SS: Yes, and I think that's a part of our heritage as well. Coming over from Africa bringing some of that culture with us, some of it being lost but trying to preserve as much of it as we can. Like the story with the Yam, certainly to me that had to come with us. We would not have known how to do that from the people that settled us here. You know, so some of that had to come with us. There were so many other things with the farming, and just with the way things were done. I had a fa----

[End clip 1]

[Begin clip 2]

SS: I had a father that was--- not my mother and father, neither one were, as you would say, very well educated. They had very limited education as a matter of fact they did the time at Penn Center. When there were school there for the people of the Island. My mother would tell me about baby day, they didn't teach in the way that you probably instruct your students now it was more about survival skills. The canning, and how to care for the children, and how to make sure that they weren't sick and those kinds of things. But those people had something that we came to know as mother wit. They could take a piece of whatever, stick, wire, whatever and they would come up with some of the most creative and ingenious ways to accomplish things. It was just amazing. I remember when---you probably didn't notice on the outside and we've done a lot of changes but the back portion of this building used to sit over there (points out window) when we first moved here. And we wanted it moved, it was a little shed. And my husband, being from Philadelphia of course, didn't know too much. But he tried, and he got his truck, you know and his force and all of that would move it. And my father was up in age at the time and I remember him walking over on his cane and he stood there and he leaned himself against the cane. And watched my husband, struggling, doing everything he could to pull and move this shed. And he walked over to him and he called him Searge at the time and he said, "Searge why don't you do

this". My father went and I don't know where he found these two huge pieces of pipe. And I'm looking at him like what is he gonna do with this pipe. But he said, "Now come over here, lift this side". And he stuck the pipe under that side, he said, "Now come over here, lift this side". And he pushed the pipe on that side. He said, "Now pull it Searge". And the (laughs) believe it or not the shed began to move. And I just looked at him like how, I mean maybe it wasn't fantastic for anybody to think of, but we couldn't think of it. No we were struggling and it's like how did he think of this? And the other thing they did, you know when they slaughtered pigs, I don't know if you ever heard about that but that was a community event. Oh my God, we had the best time and see those things are gone, but my father was one of the premiere hog slaughters of this area. And just to watch the process they would get this huge barrel, you know, and of course the pig had to be sacrificed. But then they would put him in the water and they would skin him down and they would hoist him in the tree. And by the time he got in the tree then half the community was there. Ok, 'cause everybody just looking and they're waiting. And he would butcher that hog and my husband, not being from here, the first time he witnessed this he said, "You know what did I get myself into, who did I marry, I mean who are these people". And before the hog was open everyone ran in the house to get wires, clothes hangers, the wires. And he's like, "What are they getting ready to do with these wires". And he just said he go kind of frightened, you know. 'Cause he didn't know what was going on. But when the liver came out, and then they'd cut the liver up and then we had it in the, on the end of the wire, and you roast it just like you did marshmallows. And it was a wonderful treat, it was a wonderful treat but he could not understand that, and he just like, "Oh my God". But he grew to love this culture.

PR: What time of the year was this?

SS: The hog slaughtering was in the fall because w---

PR: The harvest?

SS: It had to be a little colder because of these flies and all of this, they weren't then, they weren't out yet. So it was cold.

PR: And did that correspond to any moment in the religious calendar?

SS: I don't that it did, if it did but I know that it was in the winter that we did and you know, before it got too cold. So probably around the harvest time around October.

PR: And were there other ceremonies that accompanied?

SS: The slaughtering?

PR: The slaughter, yeah.

SS: Well, they did a lot of drinking I know (laughs) I know that the men enjoyed that portion.

PR: You said sacrifice, so what does that mean?

SS: Well, I mean I said that because, you know, today we're in a kinder, gentler place and nobody wants to talk about killing the pig. But the pig had to be sacrificed so we could live through the winter, you know.

DJ: And it was purposeful.

SS: It was purposeful.

DJ: And you used everything---

SS: Everything.

DJ: So it wasn't a situation where you were wasting.

SS: Exactly.

DJ: You know, it was communal.

SS: It was communal. And everybody got a piece of the piece, so everybody that came, every family that came went away with something. But it was a wonderful time and the, the neck bone or the spinal column was my father's specialty in cooking. That was the only time he cooked because he didn't cook. But that was the one day that was relegated for him to cook. And oh my God when he cooked that neckbone.

DJ: So what did he use, use onions or?

SS: Oooo I tell you but you could smell it all over the community, it was so good. But yeah a lot of onions, a lot of peppers. And I don't know what else he put in there but it was always delicious.

DJ: That's my dad's favorite dish.

SS: Yeah.

DJ: I like them but they don't have enough meat on them to me.

SS: They---they're not the same, they're not the same.

DK: Um, how would you, how would you preserve the meat to keep it?

SS: Now, I remember a time when they would hang it up and dry it. And again I don't know why that worked you know, because now you put it out there it won't last. But I remember him salting it down with a special salt that was brown and they would take it, we had what we called the corn house, and that is actually what it was where they put all the corn that wasn't used for eating for the animals. So this thing was filled to the brim with corn husks and corn. But off to one side he had an area and he would hang up the meat, the ham, and you know certain portions of it. And it would dry out. Yeah, so it was amazing, it was amazing how you know, looking back at how self-reliant we were. I mean I think I took it for granted growing up because I didn't know but we were really self-reliant and a trip into Beaufort proper was like a treat. I mean it's like oh, we're going across the water, you know. But those trips were very few and far between my uncle had the store, which is still there, down the street and so those things that we couldn't get we got from the little community store. And then otherwise---I mean we made clothes, we didn't go to town to buy dresses and that kind of thing we had excellent seamstress, you know, and they made most of the clothes. My grandmother even made some of the hats so---

PR: Wow, so is this the Smith community?

SS: This is, the Chaplan I would actually say is the foundational group. My mother was a Chaplan.

PR: But is it---I can't remember the name of the community.

SS: Scott.

PR: Scott, so Scott community. And does that derive also from an old plantation?

SS: Exactly. It's not our family name but it was Mr. Scott who owned this area. And so that was the plantation that we're on. Yeah, and actually they called this Schoolfarm, which had to do with some of the experimental crops that they did way back then. I don't know if you came through Orange Grove, these are things that I learned later about this area because unfortunately when we went to school they didn't seem to teach us a lot about our Gullah culture. You know, so we learned a lot about other people but we didn't learn about things here. And I found out later that Orange Grove was actually an experiment to become an Orange Grove. They looked at growing oranges here like Florida. And so now we still have, you know, every now and then

you'll ride the Island and there's a stray orange tree coming up. But they're oranges and peaches and things like that they tried, even bananas. And while they are no longer grown and everything went to Florida, we are now able to grow some of those things again because of the climate changing and whatever. But, the children don't know how to do it. They don't know how to take care of it they don't know how to grow it.

PR: Well this Grove, just these few streets of the community looks to me more prosperous than other communities on the Island.

SS: Yes, yes.

PR: What....

SS: What attributed to that?

PR: Yeah.

SS: I think we have to thank the tomato growers for that. The Sanders and Trask, they came into this area at a time when again, we were self-reliant but there wasn't a lot of economic well. And almost everyone that lived here at one point or another began to work the fields. They had huge acreage of tomato plants and tomatoes that was coming out of this area. And for years people worked those tomato fields and began to save a little money and then after a while the farmers got a little smarter. And they said, "Well I've got all this land maybe I should plant some tomatoes". And they began planting tomatoes, my uncle---all these places were fields and they planted tomatoes and the same buyers---probably not the same buyers but smaller buyers came in and they began to become a little bit more prosperous by selling their own and soon we were able to leave the fields, which was I think a wonderful thing. I don't rue the day but it was hard work, it was very hard work for very little money. You're talking about picking tomatoes for a bucket, which was not a five gallon bucket, but for twenty cents sometimes ten cents a bucket, a bucket.

DJ: About how many tomatoes would be in that bucket?

SS: You could probably get anywhere from fifty, sixty tomatoes in a bucket, but you're talking ten to twenty cents a bucket.

DJ: Wow.

SS: And the men actually worked the fields and the women were sent to the packing sheds, and I think you've seen them coming along---and we stood, God, from morning 'til night. And what

you did was you grated the tomatoes somebody had to decide if this was a large or medium or small. Or if it wasn't fit at all for use and then you would get those. But we stood there, I'm telling you from morning until two AM in the next morning, standing at those lines where those tomatoes were coming and just, just grating the tomato. Then the women made a little bit more money, maybe you know, forty cents, but---

PR: This was still working for the large landowners?

SS: This was still working for the large landowners.

PR: But when it was converted to people doing their own farming did it, was any of the farming or marketing done cooperatively?

SS: Families would sometimes get together.

PR: Yeah.

SS: Yeah, I know my mother and her sister they would, you know, probably work together and do a large field. And then when you did the independent farming, we didn't have to do any grating or any of that, it was just boxing it up, getting it to where the buyer was, which was always funny 'cause he was always under some very shady tree with his van, you know just sitting there waiting. And people would come from all over the community and bring the boxes to him and get paid.

DK: And did you remember when that was?

SS: That was in my time so we're talking maybe '60, '50, yeah '60s maybe in the early '60s so it wasn't, to me, not that long ago. But that I think is what made us prosperous, plus I think people in this---and we always, I don't know, I don't want to say that we were any different than anyone else but we always wanted a little more for our children. You know I could tell that---my parents---and they would say it, "I want your life to be better than, then mine was". And the other thing I think that influenced that was after they stopped the farming, because that was hard work and you know people couldn't continue doing that. My father went to work for a lumberyard, after some other odd jobs, and my mother worked as a, the help. You know, remember the movie *The Help* but she was the help. And so she left us to go and work and clean for the people in Beaufort my mother and aunt.

[End clip 2]

[Begin clip 3]

SS: And they, I guess being there they saw another culture.

DJ: Yeah.

SS: And another way of life and they saw things that they wanted for themselves. And so they were very proactive in trying to, you know, to raise our standards you know, based on what they were seeing in other places. And I think that had a lot of influence as to, and I think most of the people in this area were that way. Most of the women left here to work in Beaufort. And they cooked and they cleaned and they raised the children. And they saw something different and they brought back, that desire back to have better. And to do better.

PR: How far back in time does this tradition go, '40s, '50s?

SS: The tradition of....?

PR: Working in Beaufort.

SS: Oh, my mother was doing that when I was born. So I mean and I was born in, I don't wanna tell you, but '58. So in '58 she was, she was working outside, you know and she would come home and she was very sad many days because she wanted to come home, I mean her hours were based on the hours of the people that she worked for. And she, you know I won't call the family but they were in banking. And of course they had late hours when they were doing you know, certain things at work but she cou---

[End clip 3]

[Begin clip 4]

SS: She couldn't leave their children but yet I was home alone. You know, so I remember coming home alone many days and especially in the winter to a stone cold house. I don't know if you ever have come into a stone cold house but they're just you know--- 'cause we couldn't afford to burn the oil, and the oil that we had all day when nobody was at the house and because I got home first coming off of the school bus, then I would arrive to the stone cold house. And I was responsible for getting the heat on, as best I could, my mother said she waited many days to turn the bend and see her house in flames. Because she knew I was too young, I know she prayed all the time, you know, 'don't let her burn it down today'. But I managed and I didn't burn it down although the house eventually did burn down, on Christmas day.

DK: Oh, no.

SS: Yes, on Christmas day we were all at home, this was early, early '77. Christmas day we, I mean joyous time but the old chimney I guess couldn't take the roaring fire that she had there. And so we lost everything that Christmas day, yeah but again, I have resilient parents and they came back and you know, they just made a way. And I think again it had to do with our faith in God, 'cause otherwise we don't feel like we ever would have made it, you know. So we relied on God for everything and asked him to just give us help to get it done.

PR: I'm just thinking back about two minutes ago you talked about your mother and other women going to Beaufort---

SS: Yes.

PR: ---and in a certain sense understanding the distance between these---

SS: Two cultures.

PR: Two cultures in the world, and then remembering that the very first voter registration programs were here in the '50s---

SS: Yes, yes.

PR: And thinking about ok well maybe this is the sort of consciousness that change, that was fertile ground for that kind of activity.

SS: Yes, yes.

PR: Do you remember any of those things, the voter registration, Septima Clark's work?

SS: I don't remember a voter registration but I do recall the stories about Martin Luther.

PR: Yeah.

SS: Martin Luther King coming here.

DK: Can we just take a break for a minute, I'm, I'm not sure this doing what it's supposed to do (likely talking about the camera).

DJ: That reminds me of college.

SS: Which one?

DJ: The [inaudible]

SS: I know right I thought it was getting a little risqué though.

DJ: You gotta just wear some risqué things in college. You have to change colors.

DK: It [the camera] is supposed to do a continuous thing, and it was set, I set it before we came to do continuous record.

SS: So it didn't record anything?

DK: Oh yeah it did. But we ran out of space on the first card. And I'm not certain that it switched the second card.

DJ: Well I see it's still recording 'cause the red light's on.

DK: So are just gonna have faith that it's doing what it's supposed to do?

PR: Can you stop and playback for a few minutes?

DK: I think I---

[End clip 4]

[Begin clip 5]

SS: ---spend the night but she the, the mother always managed to come, it would be late but she would come. Yeah, but I grew up with the baby and you know, I knew him. It was a, it was a wonderful thing, it's children you don't have any problems with that, you know. And certainly they loved my mother, you know because I mean she spent more time with them than their own mother. You know, so they loved her but something happens after time, things change and so, but um...should we continue?

DK: You've been continuing, you didn't wait for me.

SS: I'm sorry but the question was asked about the, the Civil Rights Movement and all that when it came I have a cousin now, her name is Cecily Smalls and she's seventy seven. And she's an amazing woman she was the first black nurse to work at the US Naval Hospital. And was years

before she explained to me the story of how she came to be there. But again her mother was also one of the help. And what was wonderful was that the woman that she worked for was very proactive and she decided that integration needed to come to the military hospital. They, they had some integration at the private hospital in Beaufort but nothing at the military hospital and so she encouraged her to---they paid portions of her education actually for her to go to nursing school. And when she was done they said, "Now we want you to go and apply to the naval hospital". And of course it wasn't an easy thing but she went and thru grace she got the job. Now she said she cried many days, many days she cried but it was her advancement that helped me because I ended up being able to go to work, you know for the naval hospital. And a lot of other African American nurses so it was a beautiful thing. But she told me, and she kept all these things from me until---I don't know if she didn't think I was old enough to know or 'cause some of this I'm still learning about. But she said she left here to go march in, you know, Savannah and other places with Dr. Martin Luther King, she actually touched him. Walked with him and sat with him, she said she remembered when he was here at Penn, and they planned marches and sit ins and so forth. So it was really very exciting, you know to hear all those things, that I didn't have a chance to be a part of. But certainly I'm reaping the benefits of, you know.

DJ: You said she was the first, what were some of her stories 'cause I know she had to overcome so many obstacles?

SS: Oh she had stories. She had stories. She said that when she first went there, she said they didn't speak to her. You know, so she was a full, you know, a nurse just like everybody else there but she said that they would not speak to her. And that they waited until, you know with, in nursing when you start a new shift there's a turnover, and so you sit there and you give report. And so she would be there in report but when she left the room for whatever reason then the conversation would be about her. It wouldn't be about the patients. And she said that they would actually say things like, you know, "why did she come here".

DJ: Wow.

SS: Why didn't she stay, you know, with her own people and stay at the other hospital. But she said there were good people there that knew that it wasn't right. She said that she knew that she had to know what she had to know. And she had to know it better than anybody else up and down and sideways and she made sure of that. And she said she never sat around, she was always active and she got up and she did what she had to do. And so, at some point they couldn't help but respect her for, for the work that she was doing. But she said she cried, she worked as an obstetrical nurse, so she's taking care of babies. And she said that they would use the n word they didn't---you know some of the parents didn't want this you know, n word person taking---touching our baby and, I mean it was just she said it was horrible. She said she cried many days but she, but she would come home, and she would cry to her mother, and her mother would say,

“Now you have to go back, and you have to do it because it’s not only about you”. You know, she said, “Now you hold your head up”. And she said, “Well so what if they talk about you”. You know she would put a whole different spin on it, “So what if they have that to say you know that’s not you, you know that that’s not taking away anything from you, you go back and you do what you have to do”. And my mother was the same way, and this is what pushed us to you know, try to do better. You know, and it just---but she had difficult days, difficult days and the leadership, I think because it was the military and you know they were a little bit more proactive, they began to embrace her and they did not allow the abuse to continue. And I think that was important, when they actually stopped the abuse when it came from the patients and others and slowly over time then things got better. But she said they actually plotted to, you know do things to make her make a mistake and you know, it’s just---

DJ: Crazy.

SS: Just crazy, yeah, just craziness. But she withstood the storm and she did thirty two years. Thirty two years of it. And I came in about, almost on the end of her tenure. So I was able to serve with her and I was very proud, very proud, and I---and it was because of her that I became a nurse, ‘cause I was so proud of her. We just didn’t see that in our community, you know.

DJ: That’s probably she didn’t say a lot because she didn’t wanna discourage you and others---

SS: Yeah, right.

DJ:--from not wanting to pursue a career in nursing.

SS: Right, right.

DJ: You know what our parents and grandparents and you gotta be twice as better to be considered equal.

SS: Yes, yes. So that’s what I’m learning now that she probably did conceal a lot of it. But, but she was there for me to support me so.

PR: If you think back to whatever you’ve learned about your grandmother, your great grandmother, great great grandmother, are there any natural healers in that family or was there something---

SS: Well, let me tell you I don’t know about natural healers but I come from a family of women that believe in prayer. And it was nothing to get up at---you didn’t get up because you’d be in bed, laying in bed at five, four in the morning and you’d hear this sweet sound just flowing

through the house. A charge I have to keep and a God to glorify. They would sing their prayer and they sang it and it resonated through the house and it was like something mystical 'cause you would wake up and you would hear it and you would hear these women begging God and with tears you know, to help their family, and to bless their men, and to be with us all. And I, I can only say that it was those prayers. You know, and so when we got sick, I tell you I didn't get to the doctor too often, you know. They just didn't have it, they didn't have it to give and plus there weren't really a whole lot of doctors out there for us. So they would come and oh yeah they would just lay hand on you and then they'd go on that kitchen and find something. Half the time you didn't know what it was but you just like open your mouth. Just take this, you know. And after a while you start feeling better, and I mean and that was the other thing because, it wasn't not only them being natural healers but it was like the Earth, the land. I can tell you we played outdoors with no shoes for the majority of our time growing up. So it was inevitable that you'd get cut or you know, stuck with something. And we'd go down to that water, and I don't know if it was instinctual they'd say, "Go wash it out in the river". And we'd go down there and put our feet in there and just kind of let the water clean it out and before we knew it, it was gone. So I don't know if the Earth cleaned it, and then there were times they'd tell you, "Well pack it with sand". You know, you'd be bleeding profusely and these people would say yeah, "Pack it with sand". Now modern medicine would just like freak out over some kind of instruct---but it's, it would stop, the blood would coagulate over the dirt, and after a while when you washed it out the dirt would come out and the wound would heal. No infection, no antibiotics, so I don't know why things were so different, you know, I just feel like even the Earth was different growing up here. We played outside all day long, they'd send us out early in the morning because they had to clean and get whatever they could get done, you know on the weekends. So they didn't want children afoot, so you didn't sit around playing games, no get out, get outside. So we lived off the land all day, there was no coming back for lunch and you know. We would find pomegranates and grapes and watermelons, and peaches and I mean we ate all day long, all day long we were never over hungry you know we were never hungry. Because we found things to eat all day, then they'd call us when the sun was setting, they'd tell you before you left home, "Now you go outside and play and before dark falls, I want you back in the house". I tell my children before dark falls and they're looking at me like what is that. But they meant before the sun goes totally down you were to be back in the house. And when you didn't come back...this Island was like a, I don't know, a natural acoustical area because my mother lives, would live about a mile away from where we would be playing. And she would go to that riverside and she would call and she would call each of our names. And you, you would stop because you would hear her just like, you know, like it was coming out of the sky, "And come on home now". And they'd send messages back and forth, it was li---it was amazing. But there was no interference 'cause we didn't have a lot of cars and you could just really hear, and that served not only to call us in but also when things happened in the community, like during the night if somebody got sick or somebody died and you could hear that wailing and everybody would know. Everybody

would just get up and they would gravitate to where things were going on because, it just, you just could hear everything.

HH: Can I ask you a question?

SS: Sure.

HH: You do a fantastic job of painting a picture with words and you started painting later so---

SS: Thank you. Yes.

HH:---I remember you talking about the image of your father casting a net in the sunset, how did you---first of all how did you get into painting but also it seems like just visuals and images are just as much a part of who you are, how did you deal with that as a child? Were you always artistic did you recognize an artistic side of yourself?

SS: (Shaking head) I read a lot because there wasn't a lot to do. And I observed a lot, I liked to listen to what was going on with you know, what my um, the elder people talked about. And so I kinda always just kinda stayed in the corner kinda listening, you know. And I think with the books and just the hearing of the stories it just, you know, made me who I am. But um....I don't know just, just hearing those stories I think is what did it for me.

HH: How did you know that you, you obviously figured out at some point that you could paint but how did you---when was the moment that you discovered that?

SS: Well, it's a little dark I didn't wanna really talk about it but back in 2005 my husband's mother became ill. So we took her to the hospital just thinking it would be a routine thing, you know, and I, of course I was working full time, my husband was working full time and we were raising a family. And so we took her to the hospital and they said she needed surgery. Ok, she goes into surgery and she comes out, and the doctor proclaims that, "Well we just took out over, you know, fifty percent of her intestines and we don't know how she's gonna do. But I suggest you try to you know we'll keep her here, but you may take her home because she's going to die". And that was just unbelievable to us, we um ended up getting---

[End clip 5]

[Begin clip 6]

SS: Getting her home the care was too much, we tried to get her in a nursing home they said the care was too much. So we brought her home and we took care of her until she went to sleep at

about two o'clock one morning. So after she went, shortly after my father went to the hospital having just a little difficulty swallowing, well they proclaimed, "He has esophageal cancer, he doesn't have long". So he's going to die as well and my parents have always said, you know, "No matter what happens to us don't put us somewhere, where other people are gonna take care of us". So we had no choice I brought [him] home, still working full time just buried this one now we're taking of my father. Brought in hospice. He lived, God was gracious to him, my father laid down during the period of sickness, he went to bed maybe one week and then he died. He was able to see his first great grand though, before he passed away but he slept away in the middle of the night. Then after that, I'm sitting there my husband goes to Philadelphia just to visit his family, and my father in law calls and he says, you know, "I want you to come over". So I go over, I sit with him, we're sitting there having a nice little chat, and he falls dead in the chair. Right in front of me, here it's dark, nobody's in the house. And I'm like Lord how much more can I take of this. But he was dead, and after that my mother. And that was the hardest of all, my mother. And we buried my mother on Christmas Eve. Yeah, and so you can imagine after going through all of this in about an eighteen month period that I was like someone lost. Because I'd been on such a high just running and taking caring of people and you know getting pills and getting necessary medical things. Plus continuing to work. I was almost gone but I didn't realize but I kept going. And so when it was all over and we buried her on Christmas Eve and I was sitting there and it was like ok now what am I supposed to do and I do recall with each person that I took care of, either they said it before they died or they said it after they died, but they all told me that, "You will be blessed for what you've done, you will be blessed". And you hear that but you don't, you know, I will be blessed you're grateful and I'm glad that I could have done what I did. But I just didn't think about it in any other terms. So about March, April I guess I was sitting around a little too much, you know my husband saying no you've got to do something, you've got to come back. And he said---so I was sitting on the porch one day and he came home and this man had probably about this much paint and this little easel here, that's about to fall apart and he had a little apron and some canvas and all these things. And he said, "You know what, you talked about painting all your life, you never---I never saw you do anything". He said, "Now let's go ahead and start just try, try to do something for me". And I looked at it and it did peak my, you know, I got a little excited about it. And so I started, and I just started putting the colors on the paper. And they looked at it and you know everyday they would say, "You know you might be doing something, you know keeping going". And so finally around June he took two of my pieces down to the gallery and the gallery framed them for me 'cause that was my birthday. And they told him to bring more. And that's how I started and I recognized then that you know that was the blessing that they talked about. Because I had never painted before that, never knew I could do it and this is why in my own personal life I make a point of never underestimating anybody. You know, we see a lot of people that maybe have problems and maybe are on drugs or alcohol or whatever but everybody has something in them that just may be---and you know I just am so grateful that I didn't die with my music in me. Because if somebody if---and the other point is sometimes we look at adversity and you know, don't

understand why we have to go through certain things but I think if you don't go through certain things you'll never know. You'll never know what's in you it's just like the bible talks about gold being tried in the fire. It doesn't look like gold when it comes out of the ground but once you get it and you put that heat to it and you smelt it down and you shine it up and then you get the true product. And so I think that's what adversity is for us in life while we don't like it, it helps to refine us and to make us into who we are. And so I just, I'm just so truly grateful, you know, for my gift. And the fact that I had to go through that but still just to be able to come out with something on the other side that maybe somebody will enjoy and that I can, you know, leave to say that Renee was here.

DK: Have you been able to, to say thank you to your mother for this gift that really in some ways came from her?

SS: I have not, I have not except that you know I saw her once, and that's the other thing now we getting a little Gullah, because now spirituality and all these deep, rued things are a part of us. Now each one of those pers---people that I lost came back to me in a dream. And I only saw them once. And it's an interesting thing because when you see them they're not like you saw them the last time. I saw my father he was in shorts and he was on the beach in Florida. Under this tiki hut, you know. And he was the most handsome man, I knew he was a handsome man when he was young. And that handsomeness was in him and he was smiling broadly. And my brother was there and he came and he sat down under the hut, and he said, "I wanna thank you guys, I wanna thank you, y'all did good, and I just want you to know how much I appreciate it". And he was beautiful, the other man, the one that just felt it and that one I think bothered me most because as a nurse you just feel like you should be able to bring him back to life. And it took me a long time to realize that---and it happened, I just flipped the bible open and the bible just said, you know God gives and takes life. And He's in control. And so that was my message to let go of that, you know. And, and not hold myself accountable for that. He was eighty six years old and God was just ready for him, there wasn't anything I could do about that. But even he came back but he was going through a window, which was interesting. And he got through on the other side of the window and he looked back and he said, "Thank you, I'm glad you were here to help me get through this window". So that was his passing. And my mother, oh my God when I saw her she was gorgeous and I always thought my mother had lovely legs. And she was in her young state and in her prime and she made---she always wore long dresses but in this dream she had her dress up above the knee and she had those legs out and she was just beautiful. And she looked back and she smiled and she waved and she said, "Thank you". You know, my mother in law, the same thing. So I think that you know, people leave things with you. We have got to understand that we are not in this life alone. And what bothers me more about the way that our life is changing even in our Gullah community, technology is forcing us to become isolated. And this is not good. Because we are to touch each other each of us gives something off to the other. You know, but I'm not sure what's gonna happen to our lifestyle. But I'm hoping that we

can change that because, I mean we really, we really need to stay in touch with each other. We are one people, no matter what color, no matter what nationality, no matter what culture. It's just unfortunate that some of us are still in a lower state in our minds that we feel that we're better than each other but no we're not better, we're all the same people. We're all the same people and we have to recognize that you know. So that's my story and that's what led me to paint and I know that there's still more promise within me and I'm excited, I'm very excited about it.

PR: Do you do any teaching?

SS: No except in my work as a nurse. I'm not a teacher.

PR: You have all the mannerisms of a really good teacher, the way you're looking at us individually, you're back and forth with connecting to one of us, no really.

DJ: Very expressive.

PR: So there you go.

SS: Yeah maybe that's the next part, the next part of that girl that they're gonna give me. You know, 'cause I fully expect to be totally and completely blessed, I think they didn't lie in what they said. And what another interesting thing, two other interesting things that I hope I don't forget but one of them in when my---oh, I have to tell you about my mother. And this is a part of the resiliency and the way that the Gullah people think. My father was in a small room, when he became ill we put the hospital bed in a---

[End clip 6]

[Begin clip 7]

SS:---Now the last thing my mother did, and this one blew my mind, on this week I had a cousin. My cousin is in her seventies she came all the way from Florida, we had a family reunion in North Carolina, she came back through here on her way back to Florida. She said, "I have to tell you a story". We sat and we talked for a long time, and as she was about to leave she turned around. And she said, "I have to tell you this, I have to do this now". And she said, "I want you to know that many years ago your father got into a little trouble". And he gave my mother, her mother she's seventy now, gave my mother to a ring to keep for him while he was gone. So I'm like, ok. And she said, "When my mother became ill she took the ring back to your father, but your father told her to give it to" my mother to her "his wife". My mother. Now all these people were in their eighties so this was a long time in coming and I'm like where is this story going. So she said, "And I came to visit my uncle before he died and that after he died I came to visit you

mother. And when I came to see your mother she said, ‘well I want you to take this ring’”. And she said, “Well why do you want me to take this ring”? She said, “Because you will be blessed, your whole family’s already blessed, but I know you will be the one to do the right thing with it when the time comes”. And she said she didn’t really want to do it but she did it. And so she kept this ring all these years. And she said, “ I was gonna say something at the family reunion”. She said, “But I didn’t do it then”. And she started crying. She said, “ But I want you to know I wore this ring all these years”. And she said, “It wasn’t until recently that something said take the ring and my daughter”. So my mother came back to me after all---you know and I don’t even know how convoluted this story could be, but I must of and I know that I did something good that week prior, you know, I thought was good that she would have been proud of. And she came back to me with this ring. And it’s not a valuable thing but the fact that it came through all that time.

DJ: All those years.

SS: All those years. And---

DJ: For whatever reason your dad said, “I need to give this to someone keep it in a safe place, so it can---

SS: Yes, yes. Make it a full circle.

DJ: Yeah. Wow.

SS: It was, it was incredible.

DJ: Yeah.

SS: It was incredible. So we cried on the porch together, ‘cause she never knew why she had to it, you know. And certainly it just was a blessing to me so you said my mother never saw it. But I think she did see it. I think she did, I think she knows wherever she is. You know, it’s a wonderful thing.

PR: Is there a community cemetery?

SS: Yes we do have two as a matter of fact. And they’re all by the water, yeah they’re all by the water which I think is just amazing I don’t know what we thought about but I was reading, some years ago about the Egyptians. And how they would, you know, send the dead across the water to the other side and I don’t know if s---I don’t know how that would tie into our culture but all of our cemeteries are near water. Yeah.

PR: There's an old story from slavery about flying away home, the water is the medium for which the spirit goes home.

SS: That was the other thing I was gonna tell you about my mother. She was telling me when she saw my father after he died. She said, "You know I saw your daddy last night". And I said, "You did". She said, "Yeah". She said, "He pulled up and he was in a little boat". And he, and I just some of these things are incredible. And I said, "A little boat". She said, "Yeah". And she said, "He has been appointed to do---to help carry some of the other souls". And she said, "I stood on the porch and I waved at him, and his little boat took off and he just, he just went off. And it wasn't until then that I'm like you know, would momma know about the Egyptians or whoever going in this little boat but she told me that. And it was very amazing.

PR: What was your father's first name?

SS: My father's name was John. Why?

PR: I was thinking of the song "Michael".

SS: Well that's my husband's name. That's my husband's name Micheal but my father's name was John. Yeah but life, life has been sweet here it's definitely changing though. Which is very unfortunate.

DK: I wanted to ask you about that because a couple times you talked about, about changes and about how the culture is dying the word you used---

SS: Yes, it is.

DK: What, what can anybody do about that?

SS: I think the main thing that we have to do is recognize that we are losing something that's valuable. That's the first step. And I think too, I know that it's happening in some small part in the schools, but you know, every time that I think about my culture, our culture, I resent the fact that I wasn't taught more. You know, I resent the fact that it was kept from us. I resent the fact that when we went to school they just said you know, "You talk bad, you don't talk right". And all of these things were taken away from us rather than embraced and I understand why it happened, but I just, I don't think it was a good thing. And then I don't understand why my children can go to school and they get french, and they get spanish, but they don't get Gullah. Which is their own language. And if it's recognized in the Smithsonian then why don't the people that own the language know it, or how to speak it. I just find something wrong with this.

And so I think that we, in order to keep our culture alive, we're gonna have to be a little bit more active I think what you guys are doing is just really what is necessary. And it's unfortunate because I'm not speaking the language now although I know it, you know, I just know that if we don't have something like this after a while you'll just hear the word Gullah and not even equate it to anything. You know, anything that is recognizable. You know, I think it needs to be in our school it needs to be a part of the curriculum. It doesn't need to be dusted under the corner. Yeah bad things happen, but hey we're still here and we survived that and we will survive other things. And we just need to move on. You know, another thing that I think is all mixed up in our Gullah culture is we never talk about the people that were here when we came here. There were people here and any look at my profile will tell you who those people were, there were Indians here. And all the places on St. Helena Dat Taw these are not Gullah words, Cousaw, you know, these were Indian people my great grandfather was Indian. Everyone that you speak to can tell you they had Indian in their family. So that's a whole race of people that just been forgotten. And if we don't have the truth about our culture, it's gonna be forgotten. And I don't, I don't know the reason for the suppression of the truth I don't understand why the truth had to be suppressed. But again it's time, it's time to bring it out before we lose everything. You know because we are gonna lose it and we need to know. Because if you take a look, if you just even think about it realistically you would have to know that there was more. We couldn't---I mean even surviving the middle passage and coming here would've been a struggle in itself. But we had to have some help, we had to have some help, and there were people here. And we are mixed with those people, I mean we have genetic testing to show that we are mixed with Indian. But that's not mentioned at all. And so I think our culture is, is not really complete, I mean the information about our culture is not complete. But I do think it is unique and I think we have to get it back into school so my children will know. Do you recognize that, I don't know how many of you have children but my husband and I have stacks of vinyl albums, good ol' music. And we put the vinyl on and you know we enjoy ourselves from time to time and maybe the record will get to the end and I sent my daughter in one day and I'm like you know, "Go flip the record over". And she went, "Well what do you do how do you get it to you flip over, I mean what do you do with this". They don't know what that is. And that wasn't that long ago. And they like the music from that era but they have no clue how that music came to be or you know what the vinyl albums were and so it's like that. And we're just losing things everyday faster and faster we're losing it and I know it's bad because I took my Granddaughter, she's six, Jasmine. And we were outside and in fields the blackberries still grow wild here. And so we were out walking and I'm like oh Jasmine look at the blackberry, and you know I picked up the blackberry and I'm so excited getting ready to pop it in my mouth, she slapped my hand--- "Don't eat that Grandma, Grandma don't put that in your mouth". And I'm like oh my God you know these children don't even know. So then that put me on a quest, I said I have to start planting things and getting them drawn back in. We go about the life of chasing paper so much until we forget about what's important, you know and after all this papers gonna be gone and what are you gonna have. Nobody's gonna understand the truth, nobody's gonna know what happened, nobody is going to-

--and I think if you can't understand who you are, because of where you come from then that's a serious problem because then you can't figure out where you're going.

DK: I got two questions for you. One is, is your art part of this? Part of trying to preserve the culture and---

SS: I think so, I think so. Because we had so many wonderful times at the riverfront and the waterfront and the water ways, that's just our life. That was our life, I mean when we got up in the morning we were in the water, walking through the marshes and getting what we could get out of the water, so water and the ponds to me are just a natural part of who I am. You know, I couldn't see myself separate from that piece of it because that just, was just my cocoon and the world that I grew up in. And all of my fond memories are tied up with the water, just being out there, you know. In such a free and open, so yeah.

DK: I have a question, you did promise to yourself that you were never gonna can, did you go back on that promise?

SS: I went back on that promise, I went back. And I have cousins going, "And you're doing that". And I'm like yeah, I had to you know give in. And I don't know if that came because of the economic situation or I just think I had to it so that my children would know. So I got my daughter in there and my husband who is from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, never canned a day in his life, is enjoying the canning. So I have a pear tree on the other side of this little building and we can pears and we can peaches, okra and tomatoes which is the staple of our lives. I canned figs this year for the first time, yeah. My grandmother could make a mean fig bread, oh my God, and that's my hope if I can perfect her fig bread, that would be something. They were just extraordinary cooks I'm telling you those people could pick up anything and you had a meal fixed---and macaroni and cheese, I've never had any like hers. I'm close, I'm getting there. But they were just extraordinary cooks, extraordinary cooks. But yeah I canned, I'm not doing a hundred and fifty jars but I will say I did twenty nine this last time I canned. So I'm getting there and I'm stacking in them up---

[End clip 7]

[Begin clip 8]

SS:---so you know things get rough, but even if they don't I just enjoy okra and tomatoes in the winter.

DJ: Yeah.

SS: It's not winter unless you got a good soup pot going. So I just enjoy it and I think I will continue 'cause I want my children to know how to do it.

DK: Now, what I hear you say is, when you're talking about spirituality, when you're talking about cooking and canning, it sounds like a lot of the culture is passed down through women.

SS: Yes, it is. Because the men didn't---the men's part in canning was only to make the fire. You know, and to bring the products because they were heavy so they would pick the tomatoes, and they would cut the okras, and they would line it up on the porch and after that they were done until it was ready for the boiling. And when we talk about boiling a hundred and sixty jars you're talking about a couple fires with big tin tubs going so that was their part of it they had to make these fires and keep it going 'cause you gotta boil okra and tomatoes a long time. Now, my sister now I'm pretty upset with her she's got a press stove, a press stove, pressure cooker (looking at one of the interviewers) you do too (laughs). See, so much for the old ways.

DK: Do you still do your outside?

SS: Yeah, if I'm doing a lot yeah. My husband does it, because he never had that experience. You know, and my daughter never saw that so that's a part of the---

DJ: It's education.

SS: Yeah, that's a part of them for the experience to get out there and see how it's done. You know, he had an opportunity to raise one pig before my father died and he was so excited. But he was not happy when the pig had to die he just, he just felt like that was his pet.

PR: How does that look (hands SS something)?

SS: Now what is this? Oh, you're canning!! That's it.

PR: It's a---yeah. This is from the Dominican Republic, in the country, eating lunch and a bunch of families would make coffee beans.

SS: Oh my God. Oh, wow.

PR: So as soon as I heard you talking---

SS: Same thing.

PR: Yeah.

SS: Wow, that's why I say we are all the same people. We have really---if we don't get together on this planet, I mean this thing is going beyond just St. Helena, we have got to do a better job as human beings we really do, we really do. But again our culture I think is dying, and in recent days we've had a number of deaths in our community which has been very alarming to me. Because what has happened is that we're losing the men, we've had all male deaths. About six of them in the past month which is I think kind of devastating and so it had me thinking about you know where are we gonna go from here.

DJ: Are they older, younger?

SS: They're older men but they're the men that built these homes, you know. And the children seem to think a little differently, you know they're so in-tuned to the electronics they don't, they think a little differently. And I don't know that they're going to have the, the push and the will to you know to keep going what we've started here. Because I do think we have a unique community but we w----so my thing recently, I've started inviting young men back to church. And I've invited all men, all young men. We've had a lot of deaths of young men lately and I figure if we can't get them back into the place of their foundation then they're gonna be lost. So that's just my little piece.

DK: How do they respond?

SS: They, I got three in last Sunday. And that's a start, you know and that's a start. You know when they walk up down the road and be like, "What is wrong with Ms. Rini (Renee)". But I capture them right out there and I'm like come on will you go. Because, and I try to explain to them, it doesn't take anything fancy or special just come, just come and just sit, you know. And let's see what happens.

HH: What church?

SS: This is New Life Deliverance, the church where the young lady told me about this program.

HH: Oh, ok.

SS: Yeah, yeah. And so, just trying to get them back in and I think if we can get their minds settled, you know kids are up against a lot. I mean, they really are you know, you hear about the suicide rate and all these other things and it sounds like those things are way far away from here. And while we don't have that particular problem, we got the drugs, we have all this technology, we have the lack of resource because there are no jobs. You know, and so they, the self-worth of these young people it's just not there and they feel kinda helpless. And if we can't get them in

and encourage them in some form then I think that we're gonna have a serious problem. You know and I don't wanna see that happen, I mean the people that walk this road, they're my family and they're part of the same stock that I came from. So that tells me that what's in me is in them. And it's possible that they can try to---and you know we don't even know what else is in them as I said earlier. So we need to try to get them to where they can think about themselves a little bit more and be a little bit more, focus a little bit more inwardly. And so we can try to get the best out of them, 'cause we're losing too many young people, we are. We may not even have a culture to think about I mean we lose all the men the way they're going. So it's, it's---

DJ: So, in parting what could you say to students because students will be looking at this video and as Peter said, we think you could be a great teacher.

SS: Oh wow.

DJ: And you've been imparting wisdom on us. What could you say to the young people, just something to remember and to reflect on?

SS: I think if I were to leave anything with the young people, I think what is most dear to me at this point in my life is to look at the technology. It is wonderful to have but it is not life itself. And it can't become everything. When you find yourself in a car and everybody's texting and nobody's talking that's a problem. That is a problem. We have to figure out how to reconnect with one another, and not allow this wonderful toy, I mean they're wonderful things that we get out of technology don't get me wrong I'm not against it. But it needs to be balanced. Because we cannot lose each other and that's what's happening. When people are unable to have face to face communication any longer, that's a problem, that's a serious problem. I was in Columbia at a workshop and I was with a group we were talking about the victim advocates for sexual assault and so forth. And they brought the Chaplain in. And the young lady, one of the young ladies in the conference wanted to know, well if we have mental health why do we need the Chaplain? And that just kind of blew me away it's like these people don't even understand this was a younger group and so they see no relationship between spirituality and you know man. And we are spiritual beings regardless of how we wanna look at it, whether you worship or not. There is going to be a void because we're spiritual people. And that spirituality while it doesn't have to be anything organized, it still means that we need to be able to connect to one another. And I spoke with the Chaplain, asked him a question about you know, do the young people come to you with issues. And he was appalled. He said, you know when they come they can't hold a conversation because I guess they're speaking in text now, you know. He says it's almost unintelligible that they cannot even communicate, let alone you know, understand that your world does not exist on Facebook, that you are a living breathing human, you know and you're not in this thing. It's just become very interesting so my thing is balance the technology with real life situations. (Door

opening) this is my wonderful husband, Michael who brought home all that paint and stuff for me. So because of him I'm painting today.

DJ: Well thank you so much Mrs. Smith this has been a wonderful, wonderful opportunity.

SS: Oh wow, well thank you, thank you all for coming and I'm so glad I could be here to share with you.

PR: It's our privilege.

