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LF
Today is May 13, 2008, and we're sitting here with Dr. Bonnie Simon who is the Division Director in the Math Science Division at Naugatuck Valley Community College. Welcome, Dr. Simon.

BS
Thank you.

LF
Could you tell us a little about your background, your family influences? It's so unusual I think, even to this day, to have someone in the math and science area, a woman. Please talk about what led you to choose math.

BS
My career path started as wanting to be a pediatrician. I always liked kids, liked to play with them; thought that I could help them. Then somebody suggested that I spend one summer in high school at a hospital as a candy striper - - in those days; I don't know if they still have them now, but they did in the '60s - - and said, "See if that's really the environment you like." So I did do that one summer.

LF
Where was that? You grew up in …?

BS
I grew up in the Bronx. That was in Jacobi Hospital in the Bronx. I did do that; I did fine the first month because it was new, exciting. I didn't have too much responsibility. But then as I got attached to the patients, and then we lost one or two, I came home at night and I was devastated.

LF
These were children.

BS
These were children. I can't remember exactly how old but one was definitely in a crib, and definitely hooked up to tubes.

LF
And you were how old yourself?

BS
Probably I was about 12 or 13, so very impressionable and I thought, "I don't think this is something I really can do." So I sort of abandoned that idea - a little bit - but I always liked science, always liked math; went on to college - I actually graduated at age 16 from high school because in the Bronx we had something called the S P, special something students. I went from 7th grade to 9th grade; totally skipped the 8th grade.

In high school I was so far advanced in my math courses there wasn't a lot to take so I had enough credit that I graduated in January and went to college in January, City College of New York. I was a commuter, lived at home in a project with my mom and my dad and my younger brother. Here's this 16 year old on her way to college, not quite sure what to do. Loving math, loving science, still not abandoning the doctor idea. I had a cousin, older - my oldest cousin, who was an OB-GYN resident at the time and said to me, "You don't want to be a doctor, women don't do that."

LF
This was a male cousin?

BS
A male cousin. "Women don't do that. Why don't you decide to do something else, like teach, and have babies, and you'll have plenty of time to be a pediatrician." So I started to take my basic math, my basic sciences, still not sure if I should believe him or not. But then thinking I really wasn't good as a candy striper and women probably shouldn't be doctors because could I commit the kind of time it would take? So I thought, "Let me do something I like equally as much," and that was math. So I focused on taking math courses, not thinking about teaching, even though people said, "Girls could be nurses, girls could be teachers." My dad was very strong and he said, "*No*, no. Either you be a doctor or not. A nurse is not what you should be." I thought, "I'll give up that thought," focused on the math which I *loved* and excelled, and got a Bachelor's Degree in mathematics.

But somewhere along my junior year I had trouble in physics. Trouble to this Type A personality was that I wasn't getting an A in physics, I was getting a B. So I said to my best friend and actually a female in the math courses with me , which was us the two of us and twenty guys, that's how we went through our career; and she said to me, "Let's go to a fraternity party. Let's go find you a physics tutor." So we went to Cooper Union, which is also in New York, very famous for the high standards of acceptance there. We went to this fraternity party and sitting in the corner was a very handsome young man, and I thought, "This guy looks pretty good." I sat down next to him, started some conversation, and said to him, "Are you good in physics?" And he said to me, "I got an award for outstanding physics in high school." I thought "This is good." He said, "I also got 800 on my math SATs." I thought, this is good, this is good. He said, "I'm an Electrical Engineering student here at Cooper Union and I'm in the top 1 % of the class."

I figured, great qualifications… and cute! I said, “Would you like to tutor me in physics?” He said “Well, I’ve never tutored before; I’ve never taught before. But this could be fun.” He said, “So why don’t we do this. Where do you live?” I said, “In the Bronx.” He said, “Oh, I live in Manhattan,” he said, “but I might be able to borrow my dad’s car and come to your house.” So now I have to make sure my parents are home, because a boy can’t come to my house, I’m young and without a chaperone.

My parents were home and he got his dad’s car, and he came to tutor me. I did so well on my first test he came back again, took me out for ice cream, and that was the beginning of a romance in1964. I married - - we got pinned in1965, engaged in ’65, married in ’66 and we’re still married in 2008.

LF
What a wonderful story.

BS
And I got an A in physics! That was the other goal.

LF
That’s excellent.

BS
I had not taken any education courses. Here we are newlyweds. He got a job, went to grad school, got a Master’s Degree, while I finished my senior year. He got a job at Sikorsky because it was the Vietnam era and he wanted to be deferred. He didn’t want to fight in a war and we really didn’t want to go to Canada, so we thought, “This is a good thing.” So he went to work for Sikorsky and I needed a job in Connecticut. Women didn’t go into industry so I went to try to get a teaching job.

At Central High School Bridgeport, they said “You’ve never had a teaching course in your life and you want to teach? How about this: we’ll hire you in September contingent on going to University of Bridgeport during the summer, double session summer school, pick up any ed. courses you can, and then we’ll hire you.” I did that, I picked up 12 credits of some education and they hired me. I taught there one year; they gave me the worst students. I had the worst math students. I had Review Arithmetic for seniors. Nine pregnant girls who had nowhere to go, had to graduate, and had to have babies, hopefully after graduation.

LF
These were young women…?

BS
Young women.

LF
Teenagers…?

BS
Teenagers. At this point - - remember - - I graduated high school at 16, I graduated college in June, and I was 19, I had turned 20 in July, had my teaching job as a 20 year old. These girls were 17, 18, and 19 - -

LF
and pregnant - -

BS
and pregnant, not married. I was the married teacher, not pregnant, and 20. I wasn't sure how I was going to teach them. Was I their friend, and call me by my first name? Was I Mrs. Simon, because that's my new name and I wanted to use that. So I was always Mrs. Simon. It gave me a bit of respect until the age difference in my mind didn't matter. I got many of them through the course. Not all; some had babies and left. But the interesting part of this story was, four years later when I had my first child in Bridgeport Hospital, two of them were having their second child in Bridgeport Hospital! We met in the room, and they looked at me, and I looked at them and I said, "We know each other, right?" and they said, "You were our math teacher!" And there we were in labor together. So that was a nice ending to that.

But at the end of that first year with students who were the lowest level, least motivated, I decided maybe I really wasn't a teacher, maybe I belonged in industry. So I had an interview at Sikorsky because my husband opened that door. And they said, "Oh sure, we'll hire you."

So they hired me as a programmer. Never took a programming course in my life. They gave me this huge book, thousands of pages, called *FORTRAN IV*, and said, "Here's your project, here's your book: go for it."

LF
Another crash course, hm?

BS
Talk about trial by fire. The men in my cubby area, as I asked them to help me, gave me erroneous advice, which was not good. Then as I was learning myself I had to punch cards to get to the computer. So I had all of these punch cards. In the old days it was a big UNIVAC that had its own room, bigger than this, for one computer. I had to stand in line with my punch cards - - in order- - to feed them into the computer to see if what I had created would work, and not put me in an infinite loop, and stay in this loop.

One of the wonderful men in my cluster, would come by, knock my elbow and my cards would go scattering. Talk about competition? Or a threat? I don't know what, but not a nice person. So the female part of me cried, as I spent my morning picking up these cards, trying to re-assemble them, to run them through the program. That was about two months in. This was June and July. Finally got my first project through and had some

interesting experiences as I would take my project up the line to the superiors. As I would walk through the hallways men would say, “Honey, next time on your way back could you get me a cup of coffee?” Very chauvinistic. Very expecting me to be subservient. Not quite! So I built up this shell, or immunity maybe is a better word, to all of their derogatory comments or sexist comments. But in 1968. Think about those things. Here I am trying to do a job. The money was twice as much as I’d made, so that was exciting.

That was August. September I was still there. At the end of September layoffs came: last to come, first to go. “So long Bonnie!” So now it’s October and I have no job, no plans on having a family, still wanted to work. I called two friends that I made in graduate school. One of them happened to have been the chairman of the math department at Long Lots Junior High School in Westport. She said to me, “I don’t need you right now but I heard that someone in Norwalk - - at the high school, Brien McMahon - - that is going on maternity leave. You would be perfect; let me make a phone call for you.” Open up the door, got a phone interview, principal said, “Come down.” Gave me the textbooks, I met with the teacher, she said to me. “Oh, thank you, you’re a gift.” She left and had a baby. I stayed in ’68 and ’69. In ’70 I had my baby. She was born June 23rd and I worked to June 11, and then said, “I better stay home, buy a crib, paint a room.” And that was it. I stayed home for one year. Seventy. I taught adjunct at Housatonic one night. So we would pass the baby. At that point, 1970, another turning point. My husband had worked at Sikorsky. When the layoffs came he went to Norton, a UTC company. Then he said to me, “You know, I can’t see myself doing this. My boss who’s been here twenty-five years got laid off. I need something more secure.”

Somebody suggested he teach at BEI, Bridgeport Engineering Institute, which now belongs to Fairfield U., and said “Why don’t you see if you like teaching?” He taught one night a week and said, “I love it. I’m independent. I can share the knowledge that I haven’t been able to use. I love it.” Then, as life would have it, Housatonic Community College opened their doors in 1970 at a high school and said - - and the husband of my friend in Westport was the chairman of the Science Department, said - - “Mike, you can be the physics, you can be the chemistry, you can be the engineering, anything you want. Ground floor. Come with us.” And in 1970 he started his teaching career at Housatonic, I left my career and had a baby.

He was happy. We were poor but we had a house, he had a job, I had a baby, life was good.

In ’71 my friend from Westport called and said to me, “I’m desperate. I have someone who unfortunately just got diagnosed with cancer. She needs radiation chemo now.” I have no time. She said, “It’s a rotating schedule. I can give you two courses if you can just promise me three days a week. Just for these two classes. Come and go as you need.” I said, “What am I going to do for a babysitter? My family’s in New York; my husband’s working.” And she said, “But he works for my husband, right?” Right! So somehow the four of us made this happen. My little one-year old managed to get her diaper changed, her food fed, and was no worse off for it.

Then I was pregnant again and I had my second daughter in 1972. I stayed home with the both of them but taught at night, adjunct. So now my husband's courses ended ten of six, he had two little girls while I taught the six o'clock class and the seven o'clock class two nights a week.

(phone rings)

LF
Sorry about that.

BS
No problem. Two nights a week. Always did my math, and one developmental, one non-developmental. I had wonderful experiences there. The students were working during the day, coming at night. It was my first foray into diversity; it was my first foray into understanding what people do and go through just to be able to sit in a class. I was in love with it! So I did that for a long time. I also supplemented my income, *lots* of tutoring. I tutored high school students in every math course they could possibly have. So I stayed current with new technology, the new textbooks. So I was always ready to do something.

But then I ran into something totally different, something I never thought I could do. Some people saw in me a side I didn't know, it was the sales person. They said, "You've been selling yourself. You've been selling mathematics, you've been selling algebra. You've been selling things that you didn't know you were selling."

LF
Those are tough things to sell too.

BS
Exactly. And they said, "We have a business for you. If you can make it grow *exponentially*…." and I'm like, "Alright, count me in." Amway business. So at that point I tried the products, because I couldn't sell something I couldn't believe in. I was hooked on the quality of the detergent. I was hooked on the fact that they were concentrated, and dilution and rations are right up my alley. I thought, but okay, let me show people. My home was always open, it was a very open home, as my parents had. I would always have cookies out and coffee going. And I'd say, "Come in," informally, "let me show you the products." I had some demos. "Let me show you the way you make money here. There's immediate cash," which appealed to me, "and then there's bonuses each month that you have to wait for but it's based on sales of people that you sponsor. You work with them, you mentor them, you train them." I'm like, "This is pretty good! I get commission on what you sell and you could do the same thing and they could do the same thing." Three years later I had reached some great goal, so I learned how to set small goals. I learned how to set strategic goals. I learned how to set long-range plans to meet my goals.

I had my kids involved at that point. They were six, seven, eight, ten. They knew they had to be quiet on the days we had meetings in the family room. The days the products came to my house we were all involved. "Who's in charge of opening? Who's in charge

of inventorying? Who's in charge of stacking?" on the shelves in the office we had. They learned an awful lot. They learned the value of a job. They learned the value of money. They learned the value of teamwork. And so did I. So did I.

Now we fast forward to probably 80s, 80-ish, early 80s. A friend of mine that I was teaching adjunct at Housatonic said to me, "You belong at Fairfield U. You have not taught anything but low-level courses. They are desperate for calculus adjuncts. I said to him, "I haven't thought about calculus in 5, 10 years!" He said, gave me three questions. He said, "Do these now." (snaps fingers) Right back! He said, "You passed your interview. I'm going to call someone for you, open the door for you." I got a phone call, talked to the chairman who said, "You come highly recommended." I had a Master's Degree at that point.

LF
Where was your Master's from?

BS
U.B. I did that actually on NSF scholarships, in between everything.

LF
Babies, Amway, teaching.

BS
Nights, summer, Amway, you name it. So I was an adult learner so I understood what juggling family and career and degree was all about.

Now I'm at Fairfield U., and I love it because it's a different kind of student. It's a Jesuit school so they come from a parochial background. They understand the value of an education.

Didn't have to motivate them. But the problem I had, and I don't know if this is going to sound strange, was that they were homogeneous. I looked at 30 - - and they had large classes - - I looked at 30 students and the girls were all blonde and ponytails. The boys were all preppy. There were many Michaels. There were many Christens, and Christians, and Christophers, and they all wanted to be called Chris? I prided myself on knowing everybody because that's, maybe - - here's the Jewish word: yenta - - in me. I just like people, and like to know. So I had a hard time looking at this sea of people and remembering Christen from Christian, from Chris, from Christine, and that was tough, but I managed to get over that and they were wonderful people. They came with hats because it was a bad hair day. First time I'd ever heard of that, and it meant they were out partying that night, my class was in the morning, barely had time to shower, put a cap on and it was a bad hair day.

So that was a new avenue. I taught two courses at Fairfield in the morning and this same friend said to me"There's an opening at U.B. and I think you're perfect for that too." I'm like, "Well, if I can get my head through the door after you've inflated it, I'll go." I had a

telephone interview again. He opened that door for me too, and he's still a dear friend. I interviewed there and that was in the College of Basic Studies. Back to Remediation. At University of Bridgeport they had a whole college called the College of Basic Studies. They did it as a cluster. There was a math person, biology, psychology, student ASD-type person. Of course English Lit, English Comp., history. We were the college. One faculty. We recruited our students together. We did that on the weekends. As one group would talk to students the next group would charm the parents because this tuition was $15,000 a year and in the 80's $15,000 a year was a lot of money.

We worked again as a team. We followed the students on Friday afternoons the team would meet in the division director's office, who was actually like a dean, but not quite, and he had a very big office, I remember. He always had tea sandwiches, cucumber sandwiches that he made the night before. Would *never* tell us his secret. We had to guess. Is it mayonnaise? Is it dill? Is it butter? Never told us. That was his treat. Somebody always brought a bottle of wine. We brought our roll books because we didn't have computer stuff either, and we would talk about student by student by student. How were they doing in math? Did they attend English? We would find out that sometimes they would cut classes and go to other classes. So attendance was critical in this retention effort.

LF
Was that word used, "retention"?

BS
Oh yes. Because of that, in 1990, I won an award, for the retention effort. That award was part of being part of this team. I also did some Jell-O wrestling on a homecoming weekend. They filled a ring with rubber - - it was an actual boxing ring with rubber around the edge - - filled it with green Jell-o. I wore this jumpsuit which was cotton and I didn't realize how cold knee-high green Jell-o is, because it has to stay cold or it would melt. There we are, students and me, wrestling in this Jell-o, covered from head to toe,. Green, sticky Jell-o.

LF
I hope there are pictures of that!

BS
I got a t-shirt that said "I survived Jell-o wrestling" and that's somewhere in my house. That was just the part of me that just enjoyed being there.

Then, in 1986? '87, they decided this was such a good job that they wanted to make this position permanent. I was only teaching adjunct, two courses, and still at Fairfield. They said, "Let's make it permanent." National search, and they said to me, "We're sorry, we need a doctorate here. So we don't think this is going to be yours anymore." I said, "Well, you know, I did the best I could. I enjoyed every minute of it. I'm not sure if I've learned more than the students, but that's my attitude. If I need to move on I will."

So they had a search, and they used *my* classes for the demos. Well, my students sabotaged the people! When they wanted class participation, silent! When they wanted feedback, "That person was awful! That person was this…!" But they did give me the opportunity to apply anyway. Didn't promise me anything. So of course I go into *my* class, I teach *my* way, they want *me*. They were so wonderful, they were so good.

To make a long story short: I got the job. Permanent. They gave me three years towards tenure, so I had four years to get a doctorate. Start to finish. Because at the end of the fourth year I was coming up for tenure and without the doctorate you're out the door. So I went home to my family and I said, "Here are my choices. I can either stay part-time and continue what I'm doing…" - my daughters were now 16 and 14, so I had a driver, that was good, *critical* - and I said to them, "…or I could apply for a high school teaching job; I promise it won't be Trumbull High," cause that's where they were. I said, "I know I could do that with my Master's. I could wait and hope something opens at Housatonic but maybe not. *Or* I can accept this job. *We*, as a family, can accept this challenge. I can apply to graduate school and go for a doctorate."

They were like, "Go Mom! We want to call you Doctor Mom!" I said, "Okay, but here's the plan. Somebody's going to have to do laundry, somebody's going to have to be the driver if Daddy can't; if he's in class and she has a haircut you're going to have to take her to the haircut, or the dentist, or the soccer field, or the tennis game. I will be at as many games as I can. I'm going to try to go to school."

I looked at Columbia, I looked at NYU, and then I looked at UConn because I wanted to do mathematics education, I didn't want to go pure math. I knew I liked the end part, the teaching part. Columbia had a program, NYU had a program, and UConn had a program. UConn, I would have had to drive from Trumbull probably two hours in the winter, in the dark, at night: it didn't feel too good. NYU looked appealing but I would have had to travel down, way down in Manhattan, two hours, probably all train. Columbia, uptown was a little closer. I could do the train or I could drive. I really liked Columbia's program better. So I went to Columbia. I did drive, I did do double sessions, summer school. I did take the train on bad days. I did my course work as fast as I could. I met wonderful people, great contacts. I knew that what I wanted to investigate were attitudes. Affective side.

I believe and I still believe if you can have the student *believe* that they can do the math, someone can teach them the math. So I went for beliefs. The title of my dissertation was "The Effects of Beliefs on the Cognitive Processes of Students in College Algebra Courses." That's where I was coming from. I did a lot of interviews, which was why I was always the interviewer, signed forms; collected data, videotaped students in the class and at the interview and tried to see if I could see if knee jerking, hair pulling - if those kinds of things were affecting what was going on. I tried to do a lot of psychology kind of stuff.

Because I do believe, and I taught my courses, "I'm the cheerleader: *we* can do it. *We're* the team. *We* need to talk. You need to let me know how best I can get past the phobia,

the anger, the frustration: whatever you tell me you've felt in the past." I did find out: students remembered their fourth grade math teacher! What she wore! How she acted! How they felt! The topic that they couldn't get. Invariably, fractions. "I couldn't understand a quarter from a half. It didn't make sense to me. It didn't make sense how to add them. It didn't make sense how to multiply them. Nothing. Made. Sense. I could memorize, maybe, but then I would forget."

It didn't make sense. I thought, "Wow. Maybe that's what we need to do." So every time I taught something I tried to say, "Does this make sense?" I brought in lots of visuals. Fractions were Hersey bars because they had all the little partitions I could break them. We could add them. We could take a Hersey bar and say, "Two of us? How are we going to each get an equal piece? So someone break it in half." Well, that's obvious. "Now I have two Hersey bars. How are we going to do that? Okay that was easy. Now we have three people. How are we going to break the one bar?" Well that got a little bit better. "But now we have two bars. How do three people break up two candy bars so you all get a piece and an equal size. You can't give me a big piece and you take a little piece."

So we did a lot of thinking and talking and it started to make sense. We did metric punch. Everybody brought something in. In those days, a liter bottle was something brand new. We made metric punch to see how that looked like, ounces versus liters, things like that. That was meaningful.

Then we expanded that to algebra. They didn't know they were solving equations when I would say things like, - which my granddaughter who is six, said to me this weekend, she said to me "I'm *always* going to be two years older than Rachael," who is her cousin. I said, "Right." She said, "I'm six and Rachel's four."

"Right."

She said, "When Rachel's ten, I'm going to be how old?" I said, "Well, tell me." She says, "When Rachel's ten…" and I could see her going … "…twelve! I'm going to be twelve." She's shaking her head; I could see eleven, I could see twelve.

"That's great, very good!"

She said, "When Rachel's twenty, I'm going to be twenty-two."

"Right!"

"When Rachel's twenty-nine… Uh oh, now I'm not in the twenties anymore. Rachel's going to be.., no I'm going to be thirty-one." She's thinking! Great! Then she says to me, "But when I'm a hundred how old is Rachel going to be?"

I said to her, "Well, what do you think?" She said, "Well, I'm a hundred, I'm older, so now I know Rachel can't be in the hundreds." She starts to subtract and go backwards.

So here, this six year old is doing what I was teaching other people to do, to say, if you're always two years, x plus two equals a hundred, what's x? Or x minus two equals ten, what's x?

It made sense in that respect. So people solved equations when it made sense.

LF
The practical applications interested them.

BS
Right, exactly. So I was doing reformed math before reformed math came into vogue. So I like that for some students. Some students like "Give me the role, let me practice," and that's good too. You need both you really do.

So, where am I, I've got my dissertation done? It's now 1991, and UB has a huge strike. They are almost bankrupt, the Moonies take it over. The faculty are on strike. The unions don't like what's going on. Everybody lost 30 percent of their salaries, and another friend of mine who was teaching biology at UB was looking for a job. She was looking in The New Haven Register and she saw an ad for Mattatuck Community College needing an assistant professor of mathematics who could design a developmental math program. She calls me up and she said, "This. Has. Your. Name. On. It. I'm positive it says "Bonnie Simon, call me"." I cut the ad, I called, saw what they wanted, sent my resume in. When I came for my interview did an off-the-wall presentation because I teach math differently from the other ten candidates.

From what I understand - afterwards, of course - their presentations were all textbook.

LF
By the book.

BS
Concrete, sequential, no value-added. The topic was to teach quadratic equation solving. I started with an area rug. Everybody else started with "x minus 2" (pounds on table). The area rug started with fundamentals, the concept of area, so we multiplied plain numbers, whole numbers. So people got the feel for, "What does it meant to multiply a length times a width?" Then we expanded and I put variables, and we multiplied. Then I expanded and used mathematics notation of parentheses. Then I created a word problem out of it. We solved the word problem using a quadratic equation. They found out the length and the width that gave them the maximum area rug.

Joe Cistulli, who was the dean, was in love. That's what he told me! Afterwards, when I met him for a second interview, and he said, "You are it. I'm in love with the math teacher. I love the way you teach and I really want you here. But, we didn't get, the budget has not been approved by the legislature and your position is in that budget." This is May, and in June UB says to me, "Are you signing the contract next year?" I'm like, "Uh, hmmm. Uh, *hmmm*!"

So I called Joe Cistulli again, in June, and I said, "UB has asked me to sign it, but I really would like to come to your place." I had also had an offer from University of Hartford because they had a College of Basic Studies, to a Basic Skills, CBS, they called it.

Theirs was starting in the summer because they had a bridge program. I thought "Am I jumping out of the frying pan into the fire?" It's four-year to four-year, it's private-to-private, it's enrollment-driven, and it's Hartford. Do I want to drive from Trumbull to Hartford every day? I thought, "Nah. I don't really want that job." The salary wasn't good enough to make me do that.

So I declined that job. I thought, "I'll stay at UB. I'm here. They're not throwing me out, it's just me who wants out." So I accepted my job. Joe Cistulli calls me in August and he says to me, "They still haven't passed the budget, but we do want you." I said, "Well I'm teaching at UB and I'm not breaking the contract." He calls me in November and he said, "The legislature finally approved the budget. I haven't seen everything yet."

He calls me in December and he said, "You know, school starts January 18th, 16th." I said to him, "Let me tell you: I go to Florida to visit my mom. Let me give you my phone number there." No cell phones in those days. January, I want to say 5th or 6th, my mother gets a phone call from "some guy" in Connecticut and she puts me on. Joe Cistulli says, "The position is approved. You could start January 18th." I said to him, "I have a minor problem because I am teaching at UB. But I made all of my courses in the morning. So I could come to your school and teach in the afternoon." So I did. That spring of 1992 I taught four courses four days a week in the morning, two each; drove up Rte. 8 with a sandwich in my hand, driving a stick-shift car; came to teach here. I taught three courses and expanded the Pronovost Math Lab because Hank's position was the one I got; he had passed away. His family had donated the plaque, and they had dedicated a room to be a Math Lab. I got to create it as well, and that was wonderful. I felt a connection to Hank even thought I never met him. The people on the search committee were like, "You make him proud, he'd be glad to meet you."

LF
So it felt right.

BS
It felt just right, just right.

What I didn't know was that Joe Cistulli had called all my references; never asking anything about my math skills, my teaching skills. He wanted to know about my management skills. Of course they all said, "Team player. We love her." That kind of stuff. So I think my fate was written on the wall, unbeknownst to me.

The first year I was faculty, set up the Math Lab, created the book marks, computerized it with a little Mac computer, a cute little sign-in program. They were doing in by pencil and paper. I hung plants and made it home. I made it a happening place because I forced

my students in there. You got extra credit for spending 15 minutes a week in the math lab. They went, and told a friend, told a friend, told a friend. And now we see probably - hits, we don't care if it's duplicate, we count hits - about 3500 hits a semester. So we know the students are using it. That makes me feel good too.

By the next year Cistulli was on my case. Ron's overburdened (Ron Schnitzler was my division director). "I want to split. I want a science chair and a math chair. I want you to be the math chair." I said, "I hardly know people. I'm here a year. There must be somebody in there that wants this job. I cannot take this unless the faculty want me there." He said, "Okay, I'll take a survey." He took a survey. He put me at the end of a long table and he said, "You ask her anything. She's your department chair, you tell her what you want." I mean, that was the hot seat! I guess I answered okay because everybody said, "Make her the department chair; we don't want it."

Department chair two years, and now Ron Schnitzler says, "I want out, I want to go back to teaching." Cistulli says, "No problem. We'll switch. You take the faculty position and she'll be the division director." I'm like, "I haven't even thought about this yet. I don't want to work in the summer. I've never worked in the summer. On the other hand, my kids are still in college; hmm, maybe it's a good thing to do." So I did do that. I got to share my dreams and my hopes and things with science *and* math people.

One of the things I wanted to do was have them talk to each other. When I came, science wing was one wing with Ann Marie as the secretary. Math people were the other wing with Elaine Elliot as the secretary. Ron was up in the science, so the math people felt like step-children because it was "Ron the Scientist down in the science wing." So the first thing I did was I put the secretaries together and I said, "This is the division office with the division director." I thought that that would start people communicating.

Then I wanted them to talk to each other, because being married to the physics/chemistry teacher, and sometimes math teacher, he would say, "Math people just don't understand what the chemistry people need, and the physics people need. They're so theoretical they need to be careful about units. Fifteen is not an acceptable answer. Is it 15 dollars? Is it 15 milliliters? Is it 15 joules? That's important. Math people tend to be sloppy, or not care, or just get 15." So I started those kinds of conversations so the science people and the math people would talk together.

That was good for a while, and then I had a new science chair, a new math department chair, and they were just so overwhelmed that kind of died a little. But with my brand-new faculty that got hired in the last couple of years, they've resurrected it and now we do workshops so that students in science classes can come to the math lab and practice the math they need to convert inches to feet, and milliliters to liters, and stuff like that.

LF
There was the Pasada project? And STEM?

BS
So now, here I am as division director, always looking for new challenges, and always looking for ways to infuse new ideas and money into the division. Audrey Thompson came to me and said - she was new in the Development office - "There's an NSF grant out there where they mesh science, technology, engineering, and math. It's the new buzz word." She said, "You'd be perfect. Science and math are your field. The application engineering. You work so well with Ray and the division director there. Technology could be anything but if you want to include Mitch's division as the technology division we could probably put this together." So Audrey and I brainstormed, which I love to do, and thought about what did we need, and what did I want, and we came up with this idea of putting all of this together in a recruitment idea, recruiting people into STEM careers.

LF
What are STEM careers?

BS
Science, Technology, Engineering and Math careers.

LF
Okay, that's an acronym.

BS
And then retaining them. Because I could sell anything, but can you keep them? What do you need to keep people in here? Are we targeting any special populations? Oh and I need to say, somewhere in there, Joe Cistulli, in his usual way, came to me and said, "You just finished a dissertation. You know how to write grants. I want you to be the Perkins grant writer, and do the Perkins grant." So for three years I wrote the Carl Perkins grant; I was a great Perkins administrator. No compensation. I had all these great workshops at all the high schools here. We had to go from room to room and we organize, and lunches… I had a Women's Day, and that was great fun too.

Then I said to him, "I am overwhelmed. I can't do two jobs." So he hired a full-time person to do the job I did as division director, and paid her lots of money. But I had that grant experience. In that time we had somebody from Hartford come down and evaluate the grant and I got this big blue ribbon that said "One hundred percent compliance." No one had ever done that. Then this guy asked me if I would share how I do this with Norwalk and the other schools who weren't in compliance with the Feds. So I got that reputation for being in compliance, writing a grant, maintaining a grant, creativity to run the grant. So that was perfect for Audrey. We did this, we put together this grant. Audrey said to me, "We need a little buzz word, STEM isn't the right thing. That's the guts but now what's going to attract people?" We started to brainstorm. "What am I doing? I'm attracting, I'm retaining." We thought, hmm. But retaining wasn't the buzz word, so Audrey came out with "sustaining". So we were Attracting and Sustaining Students, so we had A, S, S (laughs)… not good! Not good!

LF

(laughs) Something else!

BS
Something else. Then Audrey said her piece of the grant would have to be business and industry. Partners! So now we're at PASS, P, A, S, S. That didn't work. Then we finally decided on, what are we doing? Partners to Attract and Sustain…who? Adult Learners! That's how we came up with PASAL. That became our buzz word.

Then we put the grant together, wrote it, I did the budget narrative which I had done for Perkins, it was easy as long as Audrey knew what NSF was looking for, I could make the budget. They were going to give a hundred thousand for three years, for ideas. I thought, "I'll give you ideas." I made the budget $99,938.00. Just under a hundred, so they would do that.

I knew to attract them we had to have something going on. I knew a web site that was new and exciting so I enlisted Tony Biello's students from his Digital Arts classes to create the web site for us, and they did. It's there, still up as far as I know. So that was it. I included engineering, EET 101, as a core course. I was trying to create a learning community, before that was the buzz word. So I had Math 137, EET 101; Mitch could do CSA 105, and any of the sciences, I think.

LF
Science, technology, engineering, and math.

BS
Right. So it was Math 137, we focused on EET 101, Mitch could do what he wanted, and the sciences could do whatever they wanted. But the core was to get the people interested in the engineering because that was weakening, and the math because they're scared to death. We would fit the sciences in either way.

To attract them we had the web site, we had the partners who were willing to mentor, that was a good thing. We had an Early Alert Liaison, who was my version of their retention specialist that they're now hiring, but I had this person. She would go into classes, she would meet with students. We made forms for faculty to fill out as referrals. She would get her referral forms. She would have, during club hour, she would have her own type of club that was the STEM club. She would help them network. She would have the mentors come in. She would have guest speakers come in. So that was fun. We designated a Math 137 course, e, because we had already used a; we had already used c; e. She had guest speakers come in and she would apply the intermediate algebra to what the students would need. That was good.

LF
The response was very strong.

BS
Very strong. She would come in, it was at 9:40. I would put her in a room where there was no 8 o'clock class. She would do extra help sessions before class in that same classroom. So they would come at 9, extra tutoring from the teacher, then they would go to class, have the lesson and this extra stuff. Then they would go to engineering, so it bridged it a little bit. That worked pretty well, but it was very hard to sustain without college support. So when the grant was over so was this. Although my ideas live, resurrected in different ways. Now Mitch has a learning community for his young people, and we're hiring this new retention specialist which is really apt.

LF
You laid the groundwork for some of what's going on.

BS
So that makes me feel good too. Other pieces are, my coordinator that I hired to keep everything in order, is Ginger who worked for me during the summer in a DHE nursing grant. She came back and worked and now she's the Perkins coordinator. She's working on that, so that's good, so she's learned.

The young woman who was my Early Alert Liaison left here and is in a doctoral program. She is a female black woman so she is a female minority in an environmental science Ph.D. program in Maryland, not too far from where my daughter lives, so when I visit my daughter and I babysit, Yvette and I go to lunch and we catch up. And when she comes back to visit her family she stops in. So I've made friends along the way, many avenues; people call it networking, I call it friend sharing. People person all the way. I just enjoy being with people.

LF
Sounds like you don't separate your career from your life, that it's all one big wonderful world there.

BS
You're right.

LF
What would you say is the part of your career that you will remember most, that you would like your children and your grandchildren to remember about you?

BS
I think "champion". I think I want them to know that I am a champion and a cheerleader. That I champion everything they do, I cheerlead for all of the things they want to do. I think - - supportive - - part of that. I think the same thing with the division. I'm here, I want people to remember that when they had the idea I went out and did my best to support and to champion, to cheer them on. If it didn't always happen I was there to kind of wipe away the proverbial tears and move on, and move on. Not to get caught up in

politics and emotion. To look at it and say “We did the best we could, we walked with our heads held high, and we move on to the next activity, next challenge, next reward.”

My grandchildren as well. If soccer doesn’t feel good, don’t play it. If karate feels better, go do it. If you like to do art work and it doesn’t look like what you thought it would look like, I’m going to hang it up anyway, and I do. So if you came to see my office it’s filled with pictures of my grandchildren, art work from my grandchildren. My home looks like my office. It’s very neat and it’s very orderly, but it’s organized with pictures at different stages, different accomplishments. And love. Love. I want them to have this feeling that they’re always loved by somebody. It doesn’t matter whether they’ve done the right thing or not, if they’ve tried to do it, and can sit back and evaluate it, and know I’ll champion the cause. That makes sense?

LF
It does, it does. What wonderful words. I want to thank you.

BS
This weekend my daughter who is a Merck representative was supposed to sell a new product and the product didn’t get approved by the FDA. So she gets a phone call along with 800 other people, to say, “You’re probably going to be out of a job.” She’s worked for Merck for nine years and she felt like she lost somebody. She went through denial, anger, like a death in the family. I’ve not ever seen that with a job. The optimistic person that I am, I sat with her on Friday. I went to Baltimore on Thursday night knowing she was hurting. Friday we sat, we rewrote her resume. We sent it to a couple of jobs. She hasn’t lost her job yet but in her mind… She sent me two things today. Two people called her up wanting to interview her. I spent that whole weekend saying - - Mothers’ Day weekend, right? - - I spent that whole weekend saying, “You’re young, you’re healthy, you’re bright. You’ve got a great resume. You’ve got a husband that can support you, You’re not going to be on the street. So what if you give your car back? You have a mama who has an extra car in the garage. You can have my winter Jeep, I don’t use it in the summer. Take it! I just try to champion that it’s not the end of the world. “I’m behind you.” I’m their cheerleader. And because I’m like that, today at 3 I’m being “punished” by Larry and Gloria Pond, who have donated $100,000 to the Math/Science division if I will put together a program that will attract and sustain females in science. So I am blessed to be punished!

LF
Congratulations!

So I’m going to be taking thoughts from PASAL, thoughts from things that I’ve read, and stuff that I’ve pulled off the Web and see if I can design something that they will be proud to have their name attached to.

That’s the story!

LF
Thank you so much for spending this time today.

BS
I love it. As you can tell, I talk a lot!