

09/28/2012

Shaleen's Interview

St Catherine University

Shaleen

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S - My name is Shaleen _____.

L - When and where were you born?

S - I was born in St. Paul, MN in 1981, _____.

L - So you just had a birthday?

S - Yeah.

L - When you were growing up, can you tell me about your household numbers, who you grew up with?

S - My parents divorced when I was 3 and I went to live with my dad until I was about 4 and a half, when they divorced and when I moved back to Minnesota, my mom was living with the person that is now my stepfather. I grew up in South St. Paul and the suburbs of St. Paul for the first 13 years of my life. My parents lived in Inver Grove Heights when I final[ly] ended up leaving their house when I was 13.

L - Did you have brothers or sisters?

S - Nope, I'm an only child.

L - So you mostly lived with your dad?

S - I lived with my mom and dad until I was 3 and a half and I actually attended my mom's divorce hearing and I remember it and when the hearing was over she asked me who I wanted to live with. Of course I said my dad, because I never saw him. I was like I really want to see my dad, so I moved with him when he moved out of the house to Arizona. I had my fourth birthday in Arizona and he called my mom and said he couldn't take care of me anymore, so they sent me back up to Minnesota. When I got back to her apartment my current step-dad was already living with her. They got married when I was 12 or something like that.

L - So you started by taking me through a timeline and then at 13 would you say that's when you first experienced housing insecurity?

S - Mmmhmm. I got into trouble in school and they suspended me for the last two weeks of sixth grade. No big deal, but I kinda covered for someone else and did a worse cover up than I should have, so I ended up getting suspended... In retrospect I did the wrong thing, I didn't know what to do. I was scared and I was having home troubles too, so I didn't have a lot of guidance and my school, I just don't feel like they dealt with everything in the right way. I went from South St. Paul schools which were fantastic and wonderful to Inver Grove Heights which was horrible.

They had no sports programs, no extracurricular. Like in South St. Paul, I was in high potential programs the whole time and then as soon as I moved to Inver Grove, there was none. So I got really depressed right away and just kind of fell out of everything.

L - That's a tough age.

S - Yeah, so within a year and a half of entering Inver Grove Heights school system, I had run away from home but I had gotten suspended from my last two weeks of seventh grade, I never graduated seventh grade. They scheduled me to repeat it because I had failed and I just never went back, I ran out of the whole system.

L - Where did you run to?

S - Minneapolis.

L - Ok, across the river.

S - I met someone older on the bus. He was 19, so I met someone of that age and they were of course willing to take me on, so I just kind of left with them.

L - Was he living [in]...?

S - He was homeless.

L – So, he was willing to let you come along.

S - Yeah, like we stayed on people's couches together and stuff. That was about June and by July I had found good people to be with. Within a month, I got away from this person who didn't really care about me and found really good friends that were my age group and older as well. So I did the same couch hopping, living under bridges and stuff but I was with a good group of friends.

L - It seems like a lot of street kids have really tight relationships.

S - Yeah they ran off the person I was with. I told them I didn't feel safe with that person and they all banded together and scared them so that they never came back, I never saw him again. It kind of didn't mean much to me at the time but in retrospect, it means more and more. That doesn't happen for everybody so I was really, really blessed to get a good group of friends, some of whom I'm still friends with today.

L - How long did that stage last?

S - I was homeless the whole summer of 95 and turned 14 that September. And then I moved in with my first good real boyfriend. [We] moved in with his parents, lived in the basement and it was fine, but it didn't last long. Then I actually got a job at McDonalds when I turned 14 and rented my first apartment. So I paid rent for a few months in my first apartment, until we got

evicted for whatever reason and then just kind of slept at best friends' apartments and things like that. And kind of just did that for a long time.

L - I think that kids can find that way of life.

S - Cause all my friends didn't go to school. I'd actually hang out at other people's schools if they were still going to them and it got old after a while. But you just move in to different social circles and just kind of bum around for way too long. I ended up getting my GED through a program called "project off-streets" and they helped me take the assessment test because you have to be 19 to take it. So I took all the tests when I was 16 and I got my GED when I was 17. I wanted to go to school but I just didn't have the structure so it didn't really pan out that way for quite a while.

L - But you basically stopped going to school after seventh grade?

S - Never graduated seventh grade.

L - But you were able to pass the GED?

S - Yeah I just went in and took it. I didn't even study for it. Which I think the standards are different now.

L - Well and [I] think some people are able to do that kind of thing. So during this period, how well do you think it worked?

S - It could have been a lot worse. Although there weren't always the best of times, it didn't go terribly wrong at any point. I maintained a sense of self throughout the whole thing, which is something you can't always do. I think it was my friends supporting me and all my friends seemed truly who they were at the same time. It seems just kismet or something; we all were just there and found each other and hung on as hard as we could for as long as we could. I think without each other, either one of us could have just gone a different way. And not all of them are doing well, but I think for at least that time period, we really saved each other. I think that's the only way any of us really got through that summer because we were all 13-16 years old and a lot of those kids were coming from way worse place than I was. I have to say I didn't run away from home from abuse or anything like that. My parents just were having a lot of hard times in their own lives. We started to fight all the time and it was just awful and I just didn't want to be there anymore so I just took off. But a lot of the kids that I was out there with were way worse off, [they] couldn't go home... you know shouldn't go home. My mom always had a place for me, it's just that I didn't want to be there. So I wasn't kicked out. I called her once in a while, it wasn't good but....

L - But there was some line of communication?

S - Yeah.

L - And you knew that if you needed to, you could...?

S - A lot of times I would go back there if I was really tired or I couldn't find my friends and I didn't want to be by myself. Once in a great, great while, I would take the two and half hour bus ride to my mom's house and then we would just get in a fight and I would just catch the last bus out. It just wasn't working. There wasn't structure for us to have a good relationship so I think I was better off honestly somewhere else. I think it could have gotten worse at home.

L - And it seems like you were a pretty... a kid who could... who was resourceful.

S - My mom raised me really independent. She always let me do thing[s] on my own. And it was apparent it didn't matter what other people thought, just be yourself for the most part. I was prepared in a way, I don't know.

L - Right – So in terms of resources and stuff that was out there to help... it seems like your friends were the most important line of resources.

S - Definitely 'cause it doesn't matter what resources there are, if you're not safe, you can't get to them. If I wanted to be out at night I'd have a group of people that I knew I could be out with or if I needed to go to Project Off-Streets, I'd have 4 or 5 or 10 people to come with me and I was too young to be at Off-Streets. [Someone] kind of took me aside because I was honest about how old I was and they were like "legally, you cannot be here," and I was like "really, so I have to wait outside by myself on the corner of 2nd and 2nd downtown Minneapolis while my friends

have cereal up here?” And they were kind of like, “Well alright, just don’t tell anybody.” My friends really helped me to hold onto a lot of those resources.

L - Agencies and nonprofits, they’re operating in parameters that don’t necessarily make a lot of sense...

S - It’s no better now. My old case worker, I talk to her as an adult, I went back because a case worker passed away from the place, so I went to his memorial. She was like “now that we can really talk,” she talked about how it was back then to be a worker there and how much less good it was then. Budget cuts and people leaving and things you can’t do that you used to be able to do. It’s just a different time and things are more and more rigid all the time and you have to cover yourself a lot more. Like you can’t take the same risks as a social worker that you could 20 years ago, it was almost 20 years ago.

L - So this period of housing insecurity lasts through your teens?

S - I had that apartment I rented for a few months, my friends.... The caretaker of the building actually didn’t pay our rent; he just took the money so we ended up getting evicted after a few months from there. _____ I didn’t have my own place again until I was about 21. So that whole time, I would just sleep on people’s couches. I had jobs but I just didn’t want to be at home and I just couldn’t get housing because I wasn’t 18 and the whole flop house mentality wasn’t happening anymore and I didn’t want to be associated with those... that like listlessness anymore so I wasn’t exactly in those...

L - Shelter system?... I think for a lot of young people that's not what they need.

S - A lot of the [youth] shelters, they would absolutely insist that you have to call home and that you have to go there. So like the Bridge for Runaway Youth, they wouldn't even let me in the doors unless I was willing to call my mom. I was like pffff, I'll go sleep under the Washington Avenue bridge again tonight.

L - Right, if I wanted to call my mom, I could do that.

S - Yeah right. I just felt better and safer with people I knew and the system never really seemed safe.

L - I think a lot of the stuff for adults it's not very safe... out of the[ir] elements.....

S - No it's not

L - Safety is a relative thing. Can you describe what your priorities... sort of guiding you at that time?

S - I think I was reveling in the freedom I had because it was my first year out of school and I was a tiny kid. I just felt like the whole world was my oyster and it was good. I didn't feel bad most of the time. I had friends and I had places I liked to be in the day and there was bad times but really wasn't that bad. It felt good to be out there and I felt responsible for myself and that

felt good too and then to say “well things aren’t so bad, I’m doing pretty good if I don’t say so myself” that stuff was a bolster to me.

L - To prove to yourself that you could?

S - Yeah I just felt like I was on top of the world pretty much.

L - And that freedom is pretty heady stuff.

S - For a priority it was definitely my best friends staying together and because I didn’t have this other family... I never really glommed onto my blood family. I never felt like they were everything and I had nothing. I was really... I was always kind of wanting to separate from it in a way. When I found these friends, it was almost like I knew I’d find them somehow through my whole life. I was just waiting for the moment break out and find them. The priority was just day-to-day. It was like – I just want to see my friends. I wanted to like... you know [how] as kids think, I want to get big apartment for us or I’m going to get a job and take care of everybody and we’ll always be friends forever. The priority didn’t really extend beyond that. School was always kind of in my mind because I always thought I’d go to school.

L - School was something you were good at and had liked it, until the last minute.

S - I was thinking kind of loftily, but not really like what happens in the middle.

L - Right and just taking care of the day-to-day needs took a lot of energy too.

S - But it was fun. Taking care of everyday needs were just fun. Let's walk from this downtown to the other downtown and after that four hours, we'll have breakfast or something at safe zone. It's just kind of, what can we do with our day? How can we get by but how can we have fun too? Because when you don't have the whole world weighting down on you, you don't think about how am I going to make it? It just does, it just happens, you just do.

L - Did you have food insecurity?

S - All the time, but it didn't matter. I'd panhandle 5 bucks and I'd go to the café that they knew me at. They'd make me a massive plate of nachos and I've take this massive plate of nachos out to my friends and we'd all eat it. Then someone else would get 5 bucks and go get a different plate of nachos. It's just kind of...

L - You made it work.

S - Yeah it just worked. Now, I get hungry and I'm like, how did I ever do that? How did I go eight hours without eating? 'Cause now I go four hours and I'm freakin' starving, something about being a kid and just making it.

L - Right and [you were] determined that you were going to take care of yourself. Can you speculate how gender influenced your experiences?

S - I think I had it a lot easier than a lot of my friends because of my gender. I think I made it easier for my other friends because of my gender; I was really cute. I was really cute and I was really nice and people just invited me to stay at their houses. My best friend was this huge native boy so I'd always take him with me wherever I went, so no one would invite us to stay if they weren't really planning on being nice to us. He was like my rock and I just took him everywhere I went.

L - So [was] he like your boyfriend or just...?

S – No, he was just my friend. He's still my best friend and we've never had a relationship. It was a really wonderful thing but as far as gender went, I think because of my good friend base in conjunction with my gender, it made it easy for me because a lot of my friends wouldn't have the same offers that I would. I can't speak for people's intentions initially or afterwards but I know that I had acceptance where others didn't and I still do. Everybody I think...

L - Part of it is the world smiles on some people more than others.

S - There's a lot of factors I'm sure that I didn't see at the time but people probably took pity or they're scared for me too. There was a lot of that, like "oh my god" and I just feel like what..."Oh God, get away from me, just buy me a cup of coffee and leave me alone." So now I can kind of see where they're coming from but they'd be like "just come over, just stay on my couch, oh my goodness" I feel like whatever, I'm tired, leave me alone. Gender definitely played a role in my opportunities for sure.

L - Do you think it made things riskier in some ways?

S - I think I was in a lot of risky situations that didn't go as wrong as they might have gone and I keep kind of referring to things could have been a lot worse; they just could have. Like, my god, I can't imagine what could have gone on at any slight moment. The things that we did, like one night we missed the bus back to Minneapolis, the last 16. So we just walked east to East St. Paul and a different friend of mine lied and said he knew this guy that lives in this house because it was open. So he was like "yeah I know this guy, when he wakes up everything will be fine". We slept on the couch in this guy's house. He did not know that guy. He did not know him and the guy wakes up and I'm sure if we were two teenage males, it would have been a lot worse but I was like "oh my friend is just sleeping... remember him" and he's like "Get the hell out of my house!" It was really scary but it would have been a lot worse had I not been a female and maybe had I not been so innocent, etc.

L - You kept your cool and you talked to him.

S - Had I known that we weren't supposed to be there, which I should have known, I probably would have looked guilty and he would have been a lot more upset. But instead I was like, can we just go now and he's like just leave now before you can't leave. I can laugh about it but when I think about it from a different perspective, it's like "oh my goodness, I can't believe that happened." I forgot the question but...

L - Partly talking about gender [and] that the streets can be a risky place. Is there something about this time in your life that I should know that I didn't ask?

S - I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I always think the main factors are the people I fell in with, and the neighborhood I fell in with, that on the Cedar Avenue, the West Bank, the U of M, it had a long standing community. Although the older people in that community may not have been talking to me at that moment, they were all looking out for all of us. And I'm still there and now I know all those people. I'm still friends with the guy that took a cigarette out of my mouth in the café and said you can't smoke if you're not 18. I thought he was so mean at the time and now he's like "I'm just looking out" and I still know him 20 years later. It's nice to have just gravitated to such a place really.

L - And that you can find other likeminded...

S - Yeah, it's so amazing to me I cannot believe it honestly. Just how fleeting chance and fate is, just not being on the bus that one day, to me the 19-year-old guy met maybe I would have stayed home the whole time and who knows how that would have been. You could get lost thinking that way but it's incredible and it always will be the rest of my life. Having [] grown up on that basis, to think back on, it's ever apparent to me that things could go any way at any time. It's exciting to me, it's not scary.

L - Right. I think that is something that a lot of people who are maybe more middle class and sort of snug won't even let themselves imagine. Since 2008, a larger number of people have

experienced housing insecurity and realized that it's a permeable boundary. I think that it's part of what I'm interested with this is just showing that it's something that [as] you note, [and happens] for a lot of reasons and have troubles providing permanent housing and still make their way.

S - I find it interesting that I kind of embraced it for my own reasons and own circumstances but I free fell into it. Some people are forced into it. Some people get their housing ripped out from underneath them. And I kind of chose it in a way, as much as a kid can choose it from an unhappy house.

L - Right, you didn't have great options but you were able to feel like this was a better option.

S - It's just another way one can come across housing insecurity.

L - Definitely and you're definitely right about domestic violence another factor for a lot of people.

S - Yeah

L - So you were 20 or 21 when you said you got another apartment and how did that happen?

S - I met my first husband, not married yet again, but my marriage, my first marriage everyone is like ok, now we can live. ' Cause you know housing wasn't so important to me. I worked the

whole time, I just really didn't want all the responsibility of it. So I would shack up on the couch and I'd pay all the utility bills and do all the dishes and clean the whole house and that just went on for years and they were happy to have me in their house, happy to have found them. I was happy that way and I did a lot of traveling, so much traveling, but when I met the person I wanted to marry, I was ready to dive into the new stage in life. So I dove into that and I was like, I make tons of money let's go get a house. I've [had] disposable income for the last I don't know how many years – like let's do it, so we rented our first house in NE Minneapolis. I lived with him for a couple years until we got divorced. I have had an apartment ever since just on my own and that feels good too. It's expensive though.

L - Shifting to your education and we covered some of it and you got a GED when you were 16?

S - I got my GED when I was 17, but I didn't do anything with it. I applied to the U but my housing was still so insecure I just didn't feel... I mean... I had never been to high school, I didn't know what I was doing and I just kind of shied away from it. I just kept working and then when I, I think right before I broke up with my husband I was like... He didn't have a job and things like that... I was like "you need to do something or I'm going to do my own thing" and [he] didn't do what I was asking him to do, he didn't get a job etc. So I was like I'm going back to school... not back to school but go to school. I enrolled in MCTC and that was it and I was like "see ya" I'm tired of being held down. And it wasn't bad, he's a very loving person it was fine, but I just wanted more for myself and I didn't want this person's lack of ambition to hold me back anymore because we weren't happy. I wasn't happy so I enrolled in school as a way to move forward and we ended up breaking up and that was kind of that and I had my other thing

going on and that was kind of the way that went. We're still friends and I see them all the time but I just had to do my own thing.

L - Then you saw that the current situation wasn't really working?

S - Yeah that is a theme in my life, I'm just like I'm ready to go at any second here. I'm like poised to jump off at any moment and that's probably not always the best. I don't hold onto things too much and I give 'em a good warning too, I'm just like "ok, here I am." I was there on and off at MCTC. I think I left to go to work full time and then I went back after a while because I was unhappy at my job.

L - What was your job?

S - I was doing pizza delivery. I did it for five years, I was making tons and tons of money but I wasn't being treated very well and I'm really super sensitive and I can't handle being talked down to at work because I care so much about my job. So I figured I can't deal... I'd go home at the end of the night and just be bummed out and then I'd have an anxiety attack when I had to go into work and it's just because it wasn't jiving with what I really wanted overhead myself. I started going back to MCTC while I was doing that job and I was very unhappy there because of the administration and I just jumped ship and came to St. Kate's. It's the best thing ever because I can actually talk to people here. Like at MCTC, I would have to wait for a walk-in appointment to the counselor and still not get in and that was my day basically and it just wasn't working for me and I did enough course work there where I was ready to go.

L - Along as you have at least 32 credits.

S - Yeah I did.

L - What's your degree plan?

S - Elementary education, I just started my first teaching classes this semester and I have about two years, two and a half – three years left... I think I'm going to go to St. Paul College to finish some of my psychology classes and stuff just to speed it up a little bit.

L - Requirements...

S - Yeah, otherwise I'll be here for five years. I can actually take a 16 credit load there no problem but here I can't so I have to take it methodically.

L - That sounds very wise. So why St. Kate's?

S - I've had a couple of friends that went here and a couple that graduated from here and I really liked the feeling that I got. My first term here was great and that was with you and with... I can't remember her name off the top of my head, Aldrich... Patricia Eldred, it was absolutely fantastic so...

L - She just retired.

S - I know, that was her last class. So she took us to her house for the last meeting and it was just... everybody that I attended class with and my instructors were so wonderful. That cemented it for me because I was a little nervous and I was going through a super rough time in my life at the time and it's kind of rough times come with change and it's good but it was a lot and I was kind of scared like maybe I should go somewhere else but everybody was so inclusive here and I could relate to everyone so much that I felt it was kind of necessary for my educational environment and so I was on the fence and then I enrolled for a second term and it was great and I was alright I have to stay and I'm still really, really happy to be here.

L - And you're working doing childcare?

S - Yep, I do freelance childcare. A friend of mine introduced me to a really nice family so it's kind of here and there but that's kind of good for me, not a huge commitment.

L - Do you think your classmates at St. Kate's are sensitive to issues of poverty?

S - I do. I don't know... I think a lot of people at least feel that they can relate to poverty if they haven't grown up in it or if they feel that they haven't but a lot of people have and a lot of people have kids without a second parent and that inspires poverty pretty fast. If not poverty, hardship for sure, and if not hardship or poverty, nontraditional ways of going about things. A lot of

people here have experiences that seem unique and I'm still meeting new people all the time here that surprise me in good ways.

L - Good!

S - That's the thing, I just love it because I can sit next to someone in class and I've never met them and you just kind of already have some things in common. Maybe not the same things with everybody, but it's exciting.

L - Do you think that the weekend program has been sort of the right fit for you?

S - It's nice. I like it because of the life experience people have behind them. Sometimes it feels too distant, like with the philosophy course, it was really tough. I felt like I just wanted to be here once a week or three times a week because there would be something I wasn't sure on and the professor's perspective is fine and dandy but sometimes I want somebody else's perspective. It's really hard to email everyone in the class and be like, so what did you think? A lot of the times each person I seemed to click with in class lives four hours away so I can't just meet up at the library... "Let's write a paper together." It doesn't really work like that. So it's taking some adjusting but I would take what I have over not having it. I like the distance course more than I don't like the distance course.

L - And it seems like you just have a skill for making communities, finding good mutual support.

S - Yeah, it's important for me to feel like people can at least understand if I need them to, they don't have to but if they can, if they seem like they can it already makes me feel better even if they don't know what I'm thinking about or whatever. I wanted to say something right before that but I can't remember what it was....

L - Well if you think of it... I was going to just ask again any particular examples that would be to illustrate how your classmates, how you've been able to connect with them?

S - For the most part, I'm doing a physics class right now, the stem physics class...like making and breaking and engineering a new world and so it's really project-centered, so I know that I'm going to end up physically collaborating with people. And I've already got them picked out people I'm going to ask to be on my team. But for the most part it's really just a mind frame. Like the classes I've been in it's really just feeling accepted and accepting others and that is pretty much enough for me at this point. That's pretty much the extent of my classmate experience but I know that it's going to move into other things. _____ On one of the surveys for St. Kate's it said "have you had a chance to work with faculty?" And I was like I will with this homeless project so I was pretty excited. And just the fact that they ask, that it's on their mind that they want faculty to reach out and work with students. That's just too exciting.

L - It really is. It's something, I think it really took having this project that I was interested in enough but also whether it was too big and too ambitious to do by myself and I needed people with other skills and really checking out and learning that there is support for student/faculty collaboration and that's been pretty exciting.

S - The enthusiasm that people always bring is continually amazing to me because at MCTC it's not even comparable, but I would have a big presentation and half the class would be literally sleeping....Not just looking off into the corner and not that I cared about my presentation but it was kind of a bummer, all the wasted space in there. It's like go home and sleep. I don't care if two people show up for the presentation but it was just kind of a bummer. It's really fun... fun for me to look around my philosophy class and be totally lost and see like most people actually get it. Whereas at MCTC, I'd look around and be like "ah" and everyone would be like "what??" Or they just didn't care so it's fun to be confused and look around and have people be like yeah, yeah, I get that and know that I can actually ask them about it. So it's fun, it's fun to see that people are at a level engaging and enthusiastic and responsible and just everything, it's really nice.

L - Well that's so nice to hear. In terms of your curriculum, your professors, staff that you've dealt with, do you [think] they have been sensitive to issues of poverty and homelessness?

S - I think everybody, like all my instructors, have been receptive to those ideas because how can you not be, in the group that you're speaking to. I've never had a professor here that didn't have an idea of what they thought weekend students would be. And every instructor, at least kind of says well, you guys are weekend students so la, la, la like I don't have to spell this out for you or I know things happen or whatever. Each one has said in their own way that they understand who you guys kind of are and that they're willing to work with you or that they're happy to see you or whatever. So I do feel that they are receptive to the various issues that the weekend kids might have that other people don't.

L - I think part of it is [you have] adult lives; you are supporting yourselves and with work or family responsibilities, there is often a lot of juggling in order to make this education work with the rest of life. Where I see that traditional day students and I wonder why do they have such a hard time getting their work done because they don't even seem to have all this other stuff to do but they don't have that motivation.

S - Yeah and I can see the appreciation sometimes with the professors they're like, "Oh it's so nice that I don't have to pull teeth to get a conversation here. Everyone is more than willing to talk and talk and talk and talk and talk." It can go both ways but I can see sometimes the appreciation on the professor's face when they're like wow, that's a really good point whereas maybe their day kids didn't really come up with so much or they're just not capable of it.

L - I think part of it is kind of the kind of reasoning... but also that [with] the stuff I teach, life experience is useful. It's not just what comes from the books. So to get American History, it helps to know what it's like to have a job...

S - I think the day program or anywhere really might be more about preparing people for the experiences they are having later. _____ This is more like making sense of what your experience has been so far, like in a way not completely but... it's catering towards the individual learning styles of people I think more.

L - And I just think you know, you're further down the journey and you know more about yourselves and some of the day kids, I think are in school because they don't know what else to do, that they're that age.

S - Or their parents...

L - Their parents are kind of making them.

S - Or just to get out of the house, that's what they have to do.

L - Without needing to get a job. One question I definitely want to ask now; if there was something you could tell your professors, other students, what would you want them to know?

S - About?

L - About... I guess housing insecurity or struggles with poverty issues?

S - Initially, what comes to my mind, that people should know is that it can happen to anyone. It's cliché but it can and like what I said earlier, about how I dove into it, I didn't dive into like other people may have dove into it either. Everyone has their own reasons for choosing it or their own circumstances for falling into it and that spectrum is so wide. I think that it's hard to understand that until you've really been on the precipice of it. You can stress about how you're going to make the rent this month but you know that you're not just going to be out in a couple

days or that someone isn't going to terrorize you out if it. It can be very... the veil can be very thin between having a home and not having a home.

L - I think that's partly why this project is 15-20 interviews because I know there is no one story.

S - And everyone knows there's no one story.

L - But to actually know what that means, I think it requires asking.

S - This is going to be great because it will have a big spectrum of people, a full spectrum.

L - Yeah that's part of what I want. So, you're looking to graduate in a couple years?

S - Yeah, I was originally going to do a concentration but that would have added like a year or a year and a half to my thing and it's not required anymore like it used to be for the licensure. So I'm going to do a STEM certificate instead and hopefully, by the time I'm wrapping everything up, they'll have opened up the STEM minor to the weekend program because they haven't yet. There are five classes in the STEM minor and we have to take three of them to graduate with the elementary education program and so I want to take those other two just to have the minor so I can have something that isn't just a degree. Because I wanted to do the concentration to say "and this" but instead I'm going to do the STEM which is what I wanted more in the first place. Anyway I just felt like it wasn't available to me because of... you know, science concentrations usually require calculus and I've never even taken an algebra class outside of college and it's

really, really tough for me. I dropped out when math was becoming math and so my spongy childhood brain didn't get any of that so it's really tough for me. So I'm pretty excited to do a STEM minor and have like the application of all those things but not have to have the huge bulk of information that goes behind it.

L - Able to compute.

S - I hope my fifth grade students don't ask me about calculus because I'll have to refer them to the department down the hall.

(laughing)

L - So when you say your fifth grade class, is that part of your hopes and plans and dreams after graduation?

S - I would love to do third-sixth grade, any of those. All the people in my education class so far seem to want to teach kindergarten and I was really kind of scared at first I was like "oh no" I actually want to teach older kids and I hope that this K-6 isn't mostly centered on K-1 or K-3. But maybe it's fortuitous because I got placed in a fifth grade classroom and everyone else kind of got their kindergarten or first grade. I was so happy to see that I got fifth grade so next Thursday will be my first classroom shadowing. And I was really excited that it was at a STEM school and it's fifth grade. I'm really getting more and more excited as time goes on.

L - That is cool. So... stay in the Twin Cities, find a job in those grades, and...?

S - I'm not focusing too heavily on employment now as far as what's going to happen because in two years... Like I said, they required the licensure the content area two years ago and I could have been going for that this whole time. And then last year, they said actually you don't need it. So I'm not really thinking so much about what exactly is going to happen when I get out, but I'm not limiting myself to the public school system. I might want to open a center or do a specialty program or something. My paper for the teaching class it's like teachers as leaders and changing society, I want to do girls and science and I'm hoping that I just kind of continue down that path of

L - That seems like a really hot area and that this is a good place to be.

S - I'm even more excited than last week or an hour ago. It just keeps blossoming a little bit it just keeps getting better.

L - I agree that is a neat age. They are kind of on the cusp of, they're preadolescent but they're big kids they have a sense of things.

S - Yep, just putting the tools in people's hands is really what I want to do and to be someone that had a genuine interest. Just to be someone they remember as having a genuine interest because all my favorite and most influential teachers at least cared, you know, so that was a big thing for me.

L - And students pick up on that.

S - They really do and everybody needs a lot of things, so to be able to put tools in people's hands and do it individualistically, is really exciting for me.

L - And I can say just watching people acquire new knowledge and gain some skills and some confidence, it's exciting. So if you were conducting this interview with yourself, is there a question that you would want to ask that I didn't?

S - Maybe something about decision-making? I don't know if we touched on that, it's been kind of a whirlwind of memories. But like, what decisions did you have to make or something like that? Or like, was there ever a time when you made an important decision that you can remember or the circumstances or something that changed your life?

L - There are points when you make a choice and continue on from there?

S - Those points in your life where you remember that choice.

L - That you saw that fork in the road?

S - Yeah.

L - Ok well, so...

S - I think for me, I mean the easy one to fall on, is the people that I surrounded myself with and I remember I “whew” thank goodness I didn’t stay with the that person... like the boyfriend or whatever that I met that was 19 and...

L - And picking up a young girl on a bus.

S - Well gosh, you know, exactly. I just kind of do the like it could have been so bad but it really wasn’t so bad.

L - So do you feel like you... in the choices you made and [deciding] who to trust.

S - That was it.

L - You just listened to your heart or your gut or your brain?

S - I don’t know, I think I have to thank my mom for being an honest person because I was just to a fault just kind of innocent and I didn’t... A lot of the people I hung out with had a lot more problems than I had, so they felt like they had to be somebody. I just didn’t have a lot of that. I was kind of there by choice and I think that just kind of opened up more truthful interactions with people and as far as decision-making. It was really just keeping good people close but that kind of... as a result those people, keep bad people away. _____ It’s kind of reciprocal and I probably did that for them too. I’m sure I protected my 15-year-old friend that he couldn’t

protect himself from I'm sure of it so it goes both ways. Really I think just being true to myself as much as I could at the time helped a lot.

L - And it seems like that's still who you are.

S - Yeah.

L - Just the Shaleen that I've gotten to know. Anything else that you've got?

S - I can't think of anything

L - I so appreciate your coming in and doing this.

S - It was a pleasure.