ABSTRACT – Louise M. Conley

Interviewee: Louise M. Conley

Interviewers: Jill VanDeMark & Kristian Christian

Interview Date: October 5, 2018

Location: Alumni House, Cortland, NY

Length: 1 audio file, 1:07:20

Louise Conley of Princeton, New Jersey is the granddaughter of Francis J. Cheney, the second principal of Cortland Normal School from 1891 until his death in 1912. Growing up, she never knew her grandfather and did not inquire more about him until she was much older. Both her mother, Clara Cheney, and her father, Rollin McCarthy were graduates of Cortland Normal School. They later pursued their master’s degree at Cornell University. Her parents and both set of grandparents are buried in Cortland Rural Cemetery, which is located near the college. Although Louise Conley herself is not an alum, her roots at SUNY Cortland are just as strong. Louise Conley shares her family story and is a big advocate for her grandfather.
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The Interviewee. Louise Conley is the granddaughter of Francis J. Cheney, principal of the Cortland Normal School from 1891 to 1912. Although Louise Conley did not meet her grandfather, she provided a large amount of information and history involving his life. She grew up in Madison, New Jersey, but now resides in Princeton, New Jersey. Louise Conley shares her family history, memories, and involvement with SUNY Cortland.

The Interviewers. Jill VanDeMark and Kristian Christian are current students at SUNY Cortland, majoring in Early Childhood/Childhood Education with a concentration in History. This interview is part of a project taking place in Evan Faulkenbury’s Oral History class during the fall 2018 semester.

Description of the Interview. This interview took place in the sunroom of Louise Conley’s room at the Alumni House in downtown Cortland, New York. The Alumni House is full of historical charm. While interviewing in the sunroom, we overlooked the backyard, decorated beautifully with flowers. For the interview, we sat in patio furniture facing each other. We had no interruptions. Around the 39:00-minute mark, Conley started interviewing Christian and VanDeMark.

Note on Recording. Recorded on a Zoom H4N device.
Jill VanDeMark: Today is October 5, 2018. My name is Jill VanDeMark and I’m with Kristian Christian and we are interviewing Louise Conley in Cortland, New York. So, to begin, thank you for interviewing with us.

Louise Conley: You’re Welcome.

JV: First, can you just tell us a little bit about your childhood.

LC: Yes. But, I didn’t have anything to do with Cortland during my childhood.

JV: Okay.

LC: My story may be a little bit different.

JV: That’s totally fine.

LC: Well, my childhood does relate to Cortland. Can I just start?

Kristian Christian: Yes

LC: Okay. I thought it was interesting that my grandfather was born 170 years ago. That’s a lot of years for only three generations. He was a bit older when my mother was born. He
was head of Cortland Normal from 1891 to 1912. “Normal” is what they called schools for teaching teachers in those days. Do you know where that came from? It came from a French expression *ecole normale*. I can’t quite figure out whether it was in the 1600’s or 1800’s but the goal of those schools was to bring uneducated kids up to the norms of the day. The values of the day, educational norms, behavioral norms. And that’s where the normal word comes from, which I think is kind of interesting because it doesn’t make since now. So, in 1912, in those days, you put your car up on cinder blocks. Very few people had cars. The reason why you did that is that the tires were solid rubber. So, if they sat on the ground all winter long they would be flat on the side that hit the ground. That wouldn’t bulge out in the summer time, it would just stay flat. You couldn’t drive your car in the winter time, you had to put it up on blocks. And it was in March…I should explain that I’m kind of all over the place but, in those days Cortland Normal was downtown near the government house. It was just one gigantic building. A biology teacher came to the door and asked for the keys to the lab. I guess in those days they didn’t have their own keys. So, my mother at the age of 12 was in the house and ran out to the barn where my grandfather was working on the car and she found him sitting with a wrench in hand, dead. Can you imagine being 12 years old and finding your dad dead? I think my grandmother was at the hair dressers and my mother ran down the street and got her.

JV: That’s crazy.

LC: In those days there was no pension or pay for widows, so my grandmother and mother actually didn’t have a place to live. I think maybe the house belonged to the school. My grandfather had it built and its right next to the Sunoco station downtown, it’s still there. So, what do you do? You’re out of your house and you don’t really have any income. No social security or anything like that. A family on Tompkins, named the Stilson’s took them in. And I’m
probably named after the woman of the house. She was always referred to as “Auntie Stilson” and I think her first name was Louise or maybe her middle name. But my mother continued on at the Normal School and I think the school kind of became her family. So, growing up, I heard about Cortland, Cortland, Cortland, and I had never been here until my freshman year in college when my dad came. His parents and my grandparents and now my parents are buried in the cemetery up there and he came to see his parents’ grave. And then, that was kind of a passing through and there weren’t I’m sure as many buildings as there are now and we didn’t really look at the campus because that wasn’t his campus. There was a fire and I have pictures and stuff to show you.

    JV: Oh, wonderful!

    LC: So, the next time I came up, they were rededicating Old Main and I dragged my husband up [laughing] and I don’t know. My dad was in the nursing home, so I got the columns and read about the fact that they were going to rededicate, and I got into it and I don’t know why. So, we came up and they dedicated it. I think in Columns before that, they asked for pictures of the school previously and I had sent in some of the pictures that I’m going to show you. In one of the articles they had given my grandfather the wrong middle initial. So, I wrote to the president saying, “I’m the only person on the planet who cares about that middle initial but its J.” So, the next thing I know I’m giving money to start an educational conference and the rest is history. It was because the school became a substitute family for my mother. So, I heard Cortland, Cortland, Cortland, but I hadn’t really seen it. Now I’ve got some pictures to show you of way back when.

    JV: Cool.
LC: You’re a very good listener. You nod your head so very well. [laughing] Do you have any questions so far?

JV: You are doing perfect.

LC: Well I’m sorry, I’m really not giving you my experience but it’s a vicarious experience. Actually, when I stayed in this room several years ago, there was a book in the drawer that had a picture of the Stilson’s house. I checked it, it’s not there anymore. I could have shown you its just down the street. I’m not sure which house it is. This house [pointing to her photos she brought] was built by Wickwires. Is that a name you know of?

JV: No.

LC: In the turn of the 1900s and probably late 1800s, Wickwires were the big wealthy family of the town. They owned and maybe even started a factory that made fine wire that you would use for mesh in screens. I think they were the main employer of the town in the late 1800s and early 1900s. I heard about the Wickwires a lot. One reason why I have a room here, is because I’m sure my mother played in this house way back when. It’s kind of fun to connect that with.

JV: Right.

LC: Stilson, the family that took my grandmother and mother in, he was the plant manager of the Wickwire company.

JV: So, you grew up around here?

LC: No. New Jersey. Madison, New Jersey. I live in Princeton now. I just drove up from Princeton. If you want to learn more about the school at the turn of the last century, there’s this
little book, which I cannot part with. There may be a copy in the library. It’s called State Normal School, Cortland, New York. It has letters written in 1949 by people who attended the school in the early 1900s. And so, it brings back lots of memories that are kind of fun to read. Do you know where Reynolds Avenue is?

JV: I do not.

LC: I think it’s off of Tompkins. My dad went to Cortland Normal also. This is the house he grew up in.

JV: Oh, my goodness.

LC: His mother died when he was 8. Both my parents lost their parents at an early age. Now, he wrote a letter in 1908, which I think is kind of cute. He was 8 years old at the time and I think his mother had died because this was written in December. He’s writing to his older sister and he’s thanking her for a book. He then says, “We went up on south hill with bobs (as in sleds) and came way down to Wickwires office.” So you see, Wickwire was well known. “For Christmas dinner we had two chickens, they tasted dainty.” [laughing] but, it is kind of nice to have.

JV: Yeah.

LC: Okay. Now, this is my grandfather Cheney and my grandmother.

JV: Oh wow.

LC: That’s who the dorm is named after.

JV: Right.
LC: She taught physical education. She was Clara Robinson when he joined Cortland Normal. She taught physical education, which kind of makes since because my mother was not very well coordinated at all, but I am and you kind of wonder where it came from. I must have gotten it from her. [car horn] She died when my mother was a senior in college during the spring. My mother kind of had a tough time of it. Here is my grandfather with the faculty. [Showing us photos, she had brought with her]

JV: This is the faculty? Oh, Wow.

LC: Yeah. You see he’s in the middle and then I think this is my grandmother, I’m not sure.

JV: That’s so cool!

KC: The way they dressed…

JV: I know.

LC: When I first saw those pictures, beards weren’t in the way they are now, so a beard doesn’t look that unusual actually. It did when I first saw them.

JV: Yeah.

LC: My dad thinks this was in 1909 and he has 1909 written on the back. Cortland Normal was one big building and they had a garden outside and here they are working in the garden, the students. [showing us photos] I guess that was part of the education. I did an oral history of my mother and I can remember her saying that they would go outside and play croquet and the bell would ring and they would throw down their mallets and run back into school.
[laughing] It’s a little bit different than it is now. This is my grandfather on the front porch of the house that sits down by the Sunoco station.

JV: I’m gunna have to go look at it now.

LC: [Showing us photos] That is what the inside of the house looked like in those days.

JV: How close were you with your grandfather?

LC: I didn’t know him.

JV: You didn’t?

LC: No. He died when my mother was 12. I couldn’t have known him. I kind of began to know him more about him when the building was dedicated to him. The story on the building, I may not have it accurate. The Cheney building and the DeGroat building were dedicated at the same time but they had to wait so many years after the person died, after whom the person was named. DeGroat lived much longer. They had to wait 25 years or so. So, I think in 1965 the building was dedicated so I didn’t know anything before that. My mother didn’t even really indicate that they were going up for it. They played basketball, this is my dad on the team.

[Showing Photos] But, you had to compete to get into Cortland Normal. So, there were the town kids who didn’t get in and then the Cortland Normal kid who as a group, brighter than the town kids. In my father’s family of 6, 3 got in and 3 didn’t get in. They would play football against the town group who didn’t get in. This is my uncle who didn’t get in. He turned out to be the wealthiest of them all. After my grandfather died, Professor Cornish, who taught math, ran the school for a little bit. That’s the Cornish of Cornish Hall. He was a very kind person I gather. He had twins and those twins were very good friends of my parents. They would come to the house
and visit. I’ve meet them. Old Main (She meant the original Normal School building) burned down, and this was what it looked like after it burned down. [Showing us Photos]

 JV: Oh, wow.

 LC: That’s a steam shovel I guess for cleaning stuff up. Steam shovels were a bit less modern looking than they are now. That was a big deal when the school burned down. That was in [1919] the early 1920’s. I began to Xerox some pages out of this green book and then I got tired. So, I’ll read you excerpts from the stuff I Xeroxed and then there’s some quotes in here. My eye would always catch Dr. Cheney of course because that was my grandfather and I didn’t know him. [Readings from the book] This is from a science teacher who wrote in 1949 so this is almost 50 years after he graduated. “Dr. Francis J Cheney, the principal of the school, took me to the science office where he warmly welcomed me as a member of his faculty and asked me to take charge of the department. Here, about 300 students received instruction daily. The physics classes were always so large individual instructions for all was out of the question and we had to maintain the lecture in quiz forms. These were only partially successful. When I left Cortland in 1903, physics remained undeveloped as a laboratory course. This I regret.” This is what the guy said. “The entire school owned one very good compound microscope.” In other words, things were pretty basic. And then a letter from another person talks about “outstanding teachers among whom was William Cornish. He was in charge of mathematics. Cornish was a beloved member of the faculty for many years.” Apparently, he was a very kind, gentle guy. “No provision was made for athletics in any form. Boys and girls, I should say young men and young woman had separate classes for calisthenics or gymnastics in a basement gymnasium. I do not recall who instructed the men. The woman was in charge of Miss. Clara J Robinson, who later became Mrs. Francis J Cheney.” My granddaughter was named Clara. My middle name was Robinson so that
continues on. “To get a flavor of the time, dancing of any kind was absolutely taboo. There was a minimum of dating among male and female students. Most students had too little money to permit social activities. Boarding houses for students were numerous. The cost of board and room being 3-4 dollars per week.” Times were different. “This usually included laundry.”

KC: Wow.

LC: [Continuing to read from the book] “Some students rented rooms often for as little as 50 cents a week and managed some kind of light housekeeping in these rooms. Others did as I did, paid 1 dollar a week for room and bought their own food, which the land lady cooked and served for all. All our lessons were prepared by the light of kerosene lamps. In those days, there were no paved streets in Cortland except the one short block on Railroad Street, now, Central Avenue. Streets were lighted by noisy shuddering electric lamps. A street car drawn by horses ran from Cortland to Homer.” Now he says the manufactures of Wiggins were Cortland’s chief industries in the 1890s. I thought it was the Wickwire thing. But anyways, that’s what he says. This is the guy who wrote the letter. “In about 1897, women began to use the school gymnasium for a more lady like game called basketball. They wore bloomers.” Then they had a student from Japan and the only interesting thing about that was that I came across a post card that this student sent to F. J. Cheney, Cortland, New York. And it’s from Japan.

JV: Oh, wow.

LC: She says, “By the way, I am now down for an address at the Kyoto Normal School.”

Anyways it was kind of fun. It is a Japanese postmark.

JV: That is really cool.
Then I got tired of Xeroxing. I'm sorry. “Professor Cornish was always very slow and deliberate in his speech. He was a very thorough Christian.” Which was very important in those days. Not Christian versus Jew. But, to believe in a faith very deeply was very important. “At the end of the first term, I had my first personal contact with Dr. Cheney. In those days, we got our grades first hand from him. We would go into his office at the designated time and await there in fear and trembling of the calling of our names in alphabetical order. Each victim in turn went up to Dr. Cheney’s desk and watched him leaf over the pages of the big record book. Somewhat as St. Peter will on judgement day. Then he heard his grades read aloud in the presences of the whole room full of students, it was a big office with appropriate comments by Dr. Cheney.” That’d be kind of embarrassing if your grades weren’t too good. Fortunately, I think this guy got an A in geometry, so he was okay. Now in those days the Normal School just went to 12th grade. Then you went out and taught in a one room schoolhouse. And I think some even went out and became principals right away. Can you imagine doing that? Tremendous responsibility. “Speaking of our German classes reminds me of another grand person, Mrs. Robinson. “That’s my grandmother.” Who was teacher of methods until she became Mrs. Cheney. During the term when we translated Chillers Ville Hotel, Mrs. Cheney sat in the class to listen and to brush up on her German.” I guess my grandmother was rather scholarly. My mother was very bright, and do you know Phi Beta Kappa? She was Phi Betta Kappa in Physics. In a 4-year college. And she also met Madame Curie when Madame Curie came to the states. You don’t know who Madame Curie is. [Laughing]

JV: No.

LC: The third woman ever to get a Nobel Prize in physics was just awarded this week and Madame Curie was the first woman to get the Nobel Prize in physics in the early 1900’s. I
think she got that with her husband. And, before that she got one in chemistry. Really bright. For a woman in that day and age it was very unusual. These are some memories… “I can still feel their influence. Dr. Cheney for his strict religious training.” I think that carried over from my mother a little bit. “Professor Cornish for his fatherly kindness.” Isn’t that nice. So, some boys got into trouble. They did something up on the roof. They really weren’t supposed to be up there, and they got quite a bit of attention. “The next morning, Dr. Cheney announced that he would like all those who participated in the affair on the roof report to his office as soon as possibly convenient. I was one of these. I expected to graduate and had a contract to be the principal of the high school of a village in the western part of the state. I was in debt. The whole matter was very serious as far as I was concerned. When I went into Dr. Cheney’s office I was pretty low. I thought of lifting my eyes to the hills from when comeith my help.” Are any of you Christian?

JV: I am.

LC: Do you know the hymn, lift up thine eyes…

JV: Nope. Not that one!

LC: …would come my help. “but I could not get my eyes higher than the pattern of the carpet of his office. I remember the pattern of that carpet to this day. The first thing he said was, so you were one of the young men who took part of this affair yesterday. The thing I regretted most at the moment was that it had all been reported in the newspapers. Even the New York City papers. I knew how Dr. Cheney must feel. I was deeply moved by him because I was fond of, and loyal to him and the school. I replied, Yes, I was one. Then he said, well you got what you were after didn’t you? That gave me a little hope. He threw the matter right into my lap when he said your going out to be a school principal. You graduate this June. Just what would you do if
this thing occurred in which a school you were a principal? I had not expected to have to pass judgement on my own sentence. There was a silence for a long time while I thought. Finally, I said. I suppose I would expel those from school who were involved. “Ahh yes”, he replied. “Then what would the boy do who was expelled? What would happen to him?” “Well” I said, “I hadn’t thought that far.” Cheney said “If you were in a school very long, and I hope you will be, there will be many times when you feel like expelling a student from the school. Think a long time before you do that. Think what it may do to him. That is all. I arose with a lump in my throat and left his office.” The guy writing this said, “I have been a principal or superintendent of schools for 43 years. Never have I expelled a child from school. That is what I learned.” I thought that was pretty cool.

KC: Wow.

JV: Yeah it is.

LC: Well you get the flavor, kind of. In those days there was a Van Hoesen mentioned. But I never heard that name growing up. So, does that give you a flavor?

JV: Very much so. Thank you.

LC: A little bit different

KC: I wanted to ask you a little bit more. Could you tell me about the funding that you put in towards Cortland?

LC: Okay. The first thing I did was to sponsor a conference for administrators. My feeling is that there’s lots of conferences for teachers but little for school administrators. So that was the first thing. And I guess some of that goes towards a scholarship. The next thing was the
Alumni House. The house was going to be sold and to raise money they offered the opportunity to buy a room. And I jumped on it because I knew my mother had probably played here. She talked about the Wickwires a lot. The next one, and I’m sure you both have been there, was a driving range in the Student Life Center. I took up golf at the age of 60. Thanks to my husband, I say modestly, I became quite good at it. The way I did it was I hit golf balls inside against the walls. Which was kind of fun because it was a loud bang, so you felt powerful because you didn’t know where the ball went. I hit 25,000 balls inside before I ever went out onto a golf course. I sponsored that one. [Laughing] In the winter time, it’s a great way to practice. Now what they put in there are movies of famous courses. You can play the course if you want to. But that really wasn’t my intent. My intent was to just have a place where you can hit the ball inside. But one of the courses that is in films is a course that I have played many times. Before the golf tournaments that are on TV, there’s two days of tournaments where amateurs can play with professional golfers who are going to be on TV. I did that quite a bit and I did it a lot on this one course. To be able to do that in my late 60s and to be able to play with a real pro golfer was pretty exciting for me. So, thank you grandma for your genes. [Laughing] And thank you to my husband for teaching me so well. I had a dear friend who went to the University of Pennsylvania, and according to her, that’s the only college in the universe. But, she was on the board there, and died 15 years ago. But, she underwrote a professorship, an endowed professorship. And, it was from her doing that, that I got the idea to endow a professorship in school administration here. I guess it’s the first here at Cortland, I gather. That’s all I’ve done. I mean, the giving, you give every year.

KC: Also, there was a quote that I saw that said, “Louise Conley is a champion of public education.” Can you tell me more about that?
LC: Yeah, I don’t know where you got that from because I went to private school. I think Bitterbaum said that. Bitterbaum, well sorry Eric, he’s apt to say anything that serves the purpose of the day.

KC: Okay.

LC: But, I am very much in favor of state schools, especially those who cannot afford a private school. From what I see, if you apply yourself here you will come out of here just as well prepared as you do from a private school. But, I even went to private school from 7th grade on. Partly, because my sister who was far brighter than I almost flunked out of college, so they figured I might want to study. I’m sorry I don’t fit that quote. Where’d you read that?

KC: On the Cortland website, its under your name. [Laughing]

LC: Well, I’m certainly a champion of Cortland. I think he kind of used and said that to serve his purposes.

KC: Can you tell me more about the day that they put your grandfathers name on the building?

LC: I don’t know much about it. It was in I think, 1965. I’m guessing that was 25 years after De Groat died. My mother and father came up to the college. My mother didn’t tell me much about it. She was rather modest. They just dedicated the place. They have a plaque in front of Old Main. Have you seen it?

JV: In front of Old Main?

LC: Yes

JV: I’ll have to look.
LC: Its dark and its really hard to read. Oh, I should have brought a copy. The plaque was dedicated to my grandfather in 1912 by the students of the school. It was very flattering to him. I gather he was a pretty good guy. Very strong Christian. I think his heart was in the right place. You might want to go over to Old Main. I think its to the right of the door. But its dark and I’d love to polish it up.

JV: So, what does Cortland mean to you?

LC: Well, if were talking private and public, I figure my money would go further here than it would at Vassar College where my mother went. My grandfather wanted my mother to go to Vassar and at that time Cortland Normal only went through the 12th grade. I figure my money would go further here than it would at Vassar. I think obviously because of my mother.

JV: Okay, so lastly before we turn off the audio recorder, is there anything else you would like to share with us and talk about?

LC: Well I’d like to know what you guys are majoring in and all that kind of stuff.

JV: We are both majoring in early childhood education for like teaching.

LC: Okay.

JV: Yeah.

LC: Now, and that goes up to what age?

JV: Here, we can get a dual major so its birth through grade 6th.

KC: Yeah.

LC: Grade 6!
JV: Yeah, so it’s really nice here.

LC: That’s quite a change from birth through grade 6. [Laughing] Do you favor the early birth years or the late elementary ears?

JV: If I got to pick I would honestly love the pre-k to kindergarten era.

LC: You have lots of energy. [Laughing] How about you?

KC: I prefer the older kids because dealing with younger children can be really difficult.

LC: It takes a lot of energy and patience. Well, teaching in general does but little ones don’t always know what the right thing to do is and it’s not because their bad it’s just because they feel like doing it. Now where are you from?

JV: I am from like upstate New York. I don’t know if you know where Owego area is?

LC: I know of it.

JV: Okay. I’m about 20 minutes past there.

LC: And how did you choose Cortland?

JV: Honestly, I went to SUNY Broome first but everyone just kind of told me to come here. They’re like “This is the best teaching school to go to.” So, I kind of got influenced to go here

LC: And how about you?

KC: I’m from Brooklyn in New York City. And I went to Broome as well in Binghamton, NY.

LC: Really! Both of you? Did you know each other there?
JV: Yes

KC: Everyone kept telling me that Cortland was the school to go to if you want to teach.

LC: I used to work in a school. But the thing that disappointed me when I first kind of got connected with Cortland is that the teaching program doesn’t have as great as an emphasis as the extended liberal arts does. I don’t know how you feel about that.

JV: No, I agree.

LC: I find that disappointing. I think Eric thought the school would have a bigger place on the map if it taught a greater variety of courses. But I assumed that being the number one teaching school in the country and having its gigantic reputation as that.

JV: Right. I think in New York State it is one of the biggest ones to go to. But I don’t know nationally. But I think it does have a good teaching school reputation.

KC: At home when I googled it, it was.

LC: So, when you googled it what did you find out?

KC: I would google “What’s the top teaching schools…” and Cortland would come up.

JV: Yeah, its really nice how it started out as a Normal school and it still kind of has that teaching thought to it today.

LC: Good!

JV: I didn’t know to much of the history about it so its fun learning it and hearing…

LC: …how it’s evolved from this one building to so many buildings and teaching a whole variety of different courses that don’t have anything to do with teaching. I don’t know, I think
maybe in the early 1920s it had grades beyond high school. I know my aunt went here and she went right out and taught in a one room school house. They must have trained people pretty well because she was the first woman to get her doctorate in chemistry from Cornell and the third woman to get doctorate at all. Her elementary in high school was through here and I guess she must have gone out and taught and went back to Cornell.

JV: Right.

LC: I think teachers were more highly respected in those days. That’s going to be one of your challenges. To keep the parents off your back. So, you’ve done your practice teaching? Or your going to do it?

JV: Yeah. At Broome we did this student teaching for a semester and its not too much student teaching, but you do get a lot of field work. So that was fun to do. I substitute and work part time at a daycare and kind of school.

LC: Little squirts

JV: Yeah, its fun to get into it.

LC: Have you done it?

KC: Yeah. I did it when I was at Broome. You have to take a class where you do observations from birth through grade 6. In different places and watch them. But, you also have to do it here too. You have to have a certain amount of hours in your student teaching and you do it at the end of your senior semester.

LC: Oh, senior year?
JV: I think it is. I think your senior year, teaching wise, it’s very structured and all planned out.

LC: It’s teach, teach, teach. So, you guys went to Broome for two years?

KC: Yeah.

LC: It was a community college?

JV: Correct.

LC: Then you came here. Was it hard to adjust to a school where everyone kind of knew each other for two years?

KC: I don’t think so because a lot of kids from Broome came…

JV: I think going from Broome to coming here is a big difference. Here it’s a harder and the course work is more structured as where Broome is very laid back and a community college pretty much where its simple.

LC: Wasn’t quite as challenging.

JV: Correct.

LC: Was that a shock when you came here?

KC: No.

JV: I was expecting it to be big.

KC: I knew the work was going to become difficult because some of my professors graduated from Cortland and they were giving us the heads up.
LC: Sometimes, if you’re not given what to study it can be quite challenging.

JV: Correct.

LC: So what other courses are you taking?

KC: I have, it’s called FSA. Its kind of like a social class. They teach you about gender, race, and class.

LC: Wow.

KC: Yes. I also have a teaching elementary math class. So, they’re reteaching us elementary math so we are able to each student’s elementary math.

LC: When you say reteaching… there teaching you a new method? Is that it?

KC: Yes, so I have to relearn it different ways so I’m able to teach it for different learning styles.

LC: What do you think of the new way your being taught?

KC: It’s kind of difficult. Certain things that I was taught in elementary school, like rounding. When I was taught rounding I know when its 5 and up, you go up. And I was taught when it’s 5 or lower, you leave it alone.

LC: Yeah.

KC: But my professor tells me to round it down.

LC: Even if its 7.

KC: If its at 7, you go up. If it’s at the number 5, you round up. If it’s at the number 4, leave it alone. So, if it’s like the number 54, you leave it alone.
LC: How is that different than what you’ve been taught?

KC: Because he’s telling us to round down now. So, if its 54 you round it to 53, you go down. I was taught to go up.

LC: Yeah. Well, which would you rather have? 53 dollars or 54 dollars? [Laughing]

KC: I’d rather have 54. I’d rather leave it alone but he’s telling us to round it down.

LC: That doesn’t make sense.

JV: No. I feel like basic addition, it went from like adding the numbers to like now their doing complex diagrams where they have to do things.

LC: I know. I think it’s developed by people who really understand the numbers and how they’re put together. When you’re just learning, you just want to know how to do basic math. You know, my granddaughter, I think they were doing groups of 10. So, in a column you look for 8 and 2 and a 7 and a 3, I don’t know if you’re doing that now, but we were just taught to add all the way down. Also, I think different people learn different ways so you have to find out what works.

KC: Yeah, that’s what he’s telling us that we have to make sure we learn different ways because we’re going to have different learners.

LC: Things may be different now, but I started out teaching math. Where I went to school a teacher broke her ankle, so I substituted. I had majored in biochemistry. I was one page ahead of the kids that year. I was working with a girl after class, it was an all-girl school. She was afraid she couldn’t do it. I realized she had the aptitude, but her self-esteem wasn’t so good. So, I
ran to the head of the school and said we need a guidance program focusing on mental health and I think it was first in the state.

JV: That's awesome.

LC: It was 49 years ago, and we got a grant and I ran out and got my masters in guidance.

JV: That’s awesome.

LC: From that I went out and got my doctorate and now I’m a psychologist. I don’t think I would have the patience to teach the same stuff. That would be hard. So, do you belong to extracurricular activity?

JV: Not really, no.

KC: I’m in the sign language club.

LC: Wow.

KC: I don’t know why but I took it for two years in Broome and…

LC: …it took?

KC: Yes.

JV: I didn’t know they had a club, I would have joined it. I really like it.

LC: Now on TV when they have the person doing sign language beside the person who’s talking, can you understand what that person is saying?

KC: No, I’m not that good. I wish I was. I want to be able to. I want to so bad.
LC: It would be neat if there was a summer camp and all you could do was speak sign language. You would probably pick it up real fast.

KC: Yeah.

LC: We vacationed in a place near a school, we’re talking to each other and it was fascinating.

JV: It is beautiful. When I go to church there’s this one lady who will sign and I just get so focused on her and sometimes I can understand a sentence. And I’m like, So cool! Its really fun.

LC: My grandfather would approve of you because you go to church. [Laughing]

JV: Yeah.

LC: So, you go to church here?

JV: No. I actually drive home every Sunday. I don’t know if you know where Johnson City is, I go to church there. After that I drive back up to school.

LC: How long of a drive is that?

JV: Half hour. I live about an hour away from here.

LC: Good for you.

JV: Yeah, I’m very fortunate.

LC: What do you do during the summer?

JV: I work at a camp for all children with special needs.
LC: Such as?

JV: Well, for instance I have one girl who I work one on one with and she’s autistic and I have another girl, she has cerebral palsy. So, it’s just a summer camp for them to play and we also do a lot of school work just to keep them focused. But that’s my whole entire summer.

LC: Good for you.

KC: Yeah and I work at a summer camp at my church.

JV: That’s fun.

LC: Now are you a Yankee’s fan? You don’t care do you? [Laughing]

JV: I’m a Mets fan actually.

LC: You have my condolences!

JV: My dad’s side of the family grew up in Queens, so I was born into it.

LC: He probably remembers the Amazing Mets!

JV: Yes, he does! My grandmother actually dated one of the Valentines from the Mets.

LC: Wow.

JV: Yeah so when they were kids they actually got into games for free and got to run around the field when the game was over. They did a lot.

LC: So, your courses are teaching math, what else?

KC: FSA and my history class.

LC: This is a required course?
JV: For teaching we have to have a concentration like an area of focus. So, I picked history, and you did too.

LC: Now what do you do with history and squirts?

JV: This is a little off topic but when I was in second grade we did heritage and my teacher gave us all paperclips. We had to create a doll that focused on our heritage. All my family came from Ireland, so we made a doll and it had orange colored yarn for hair. So, for me its kind of fun.

LC: So, you start them young?

JV: Yeah. I just like history and learning about it.

LC: Good

KC: And you can also teach the little kids about what happened back then. You can even incorporate what’s in their schools.

LC: Yeah. The history within their schools. And probably there’s some well-known people they can refer too.

KC: I remember when I was in school, the pilgrims, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and a lot of different people.

LC: What age?

JV: I even remember, I don’t know why but when I was younger, the pilgrims were so fascinating to me and I remember doing that when I was in elementary school.

LC: Did you have a skit where you would dress up as pilgrims?
JV: No. but, that would be a good idea. I would love that back then. [Laughing]

LC: And the little ones would love it. They could throw tea over the harbor. [Laughing]

JV: The Boston Tea Party, that’s funny. They would love it. I feel like its so important to go into education. Children need to learn more than just the basic structure of what were required to teach.

KC: True.

LC: Well, one of the joys of teaching are the kids.

JV: Very much so.

LC: When I left the classroom I certainly missed the kids.

JV: Yeah.

LC: They make a big difference. So, do you give a flavor of what it was like then?

JV: I think the pictures put an image in my mind and brought your story to life.

LC: Okay.

KC: I kind of want to know more about you working in the Psych industry? [Laughing]

Yeah, so its so fascinating the way people’s minds work.

JV: Its diverse.

LC: Its fascinating that we can think even. That your tongue can move.

JV: Yeah
LC: So, what aspect of it? You mean how do I do it? [Laughing] All of it is relationship with the client.

KC: Why did you go into it?

LC: Well, when we started the guidance program I moved out of teaching math, I think I must have had a hidden agenda. I knew I couldn’t teach algebra again and again and again. Then I got the masters in guidance and then I had a divorce and I had time on my hands. So, then I didn’t know what to do with all the time on my hands. Well, I knew I had time to study. I did it for the wrong reasons. I got my doctorate at Fordham, which is in the Bronx. Which is in Manhattan actually, in the city. Which is where I went. Groups are tricky some can handle them, but I can’t. That’s why I can’t work with couples, somebody is always ends up getting mad. Its really problem solving and figuring out what’s going on. Often its developing. The imprinting when your young is very powerful and people don’t realize it can have a big influence on how you function when your older. I had once client who saw her future husband but slides in a slide holder and he had a bent finger just like her father had a bent finger and she had a weird feeling that went right into her. I had another client who was not invited to a party on her street and attempted suicide. It was because she had siblings who were 9 and 10 years older then she. Her parents would go take the older siblings to more age appropriate things and left the little one home, she felt left out. Her parents didn’t know that, they weren’t doing it to be mean or anything. I don’t know why she felt it so strongly out of this party that she couldn’t handle it. But, you get stuff like that.

JV: Yeah.

LC: You sound like you seem a bit interested in it.
KC: Yeah. I love psych. I took psych when I was in SUNY Broome and I was like “Do you guys have more? Any more classes?”

LC: You should follow up on it!

KC: Yeah. They start you off at like 101 and I took up to 301.

JV: You should look into it here.

KC: Since I covered it, they don’t want to give me more.

JV: Make that your concentration.

KC: Yeah but I would love it. People don’t understand it starts at the brain. As a child you start to grow up and think and effect you.

LC: And the developmental change too for your little ones, its tremendous what they can do after they have been with you for years.

JV: Yeah, its crazy.

KC: I was telling my roommate that people don’t understand that its not about your physical health its about your mental health. If your mental health is not okay, your body is not okay, it’s about the brain. I feel like the brain is the most important thing.

LC: Its not too many years ago that you didn’t talk about mental health. You really have a problem if you have to talk about mental health.

JV: Yeah.

LC: We have come a long way.

JV: Very much.
LC: Do you have siblings?

KC: I have 4 brothers and two sisters.

LC: Your mother was a busy lady. [Laughing] So there were 7 of you?

KC: Yes, there were 7.

LC: And where do you fit in the 7?

KC: I am number 5.

LC: My husband had 11 children.

KC: Wow.

LC: So, it means a lot of grandchildren.

JV: That’s good!

LC: What about you?

JV: I have one brother and one sister.

LC: Where do you fit in?

JV: I’m the baby.

LC: And do they take good care of you?

JV: A little too much. I’m spoiled. [Laughing]

LC: Oh good.

LC: And your parents, do they work?
KC: My father is a retired history major. He was a teacher and he taught social studies. My mom is a nurse right now.

LC: So, what does your dad do with his time now?

KC: Nothing. He reads a lot, that’s his thing. He’s a politics person.

LC: Oh, he must be having fun now.

JV: For sure.

KC: I called him earlier, I really wanted him to answer so we could talk about the Kavanaugh case and Dr. Ford because I know he would have so much to say about it. He didn’t answer.

LC: How old is he? He’s pretty young to retire.

KC: Yeah. He’s 67.

LC: Your mothers still working?

KC: Yes.

LC: Good for her.

KC: She’s 52. Don’t tell her I told you. [Laughing]

LC: There’s a big spread.

KC: Yes. A huge spread.

LC: So, he does a lot with the children while she’s off working?

KC: Yeah, the younger ones are 19 and 17 so there’s nothing he really has to do.
LC: Okay. And how about your parents? Do they work?

JV: Yeah, both of them work for Tioga County. My mom works for the department of motor vehicles and my dad works at the Tioga County jail.

LC: I have a client who works at night at a jail.

JV: He works during the day.

LC: Okay.

JV: Yeah, he loves it. It’s not a big jail so the people are not serial killers or anything like that. I don’t know he likes it, it’s kind of humbling to him.

LC: Well you can have a great impact, if people will listen to you.

JV: Very much so.

LC: Yeah, my guy doesn’t like his job. Apparently, there are a lot of people who work there who goof off. He gets annoyed. So that’s too bad.

JV: Yeah.

KC: Do you have any siblings?

LC: I have two sisters and they’re both dead actually.

JV: Are you the youngest?

LC: Yeah. And, as I said my husband’s first wife died. When I stepped in to do the guidance he came in and taught math. He was an excellent teacher. He was trained as an engineer. So, we got married, much to my surprise! He had 11 kids, so we had 30 grandchildren. We kept it busy. And 9 great grandchildren.
JV: Wow.

LC: Pretty big group. But its very sad that his wife died and didn’t get to see them grow up.

JV: Yeah.

LC: So…

JV: Well thank you!

LC: Thank you for letting me rattle on and on.

JV: No, thank you for taking your time and letting us do this.

KC: Yes.