Winter 2-2016

Summary and Reflection of Interview on Teacher Experience within Public and Private Education with Anita Sabon

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Recommended Citation
Cline, Elizabeth, "Summary and Reflection of Interview on Teacher Experience within Public and Private Education with Anita Sabon" (2016). Oral History Interview Projects. 5.
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Interview Transcription with Anita Sabol

AS : Anyway, I know I got into that [private school] because I started tutoring kids. So then I ended up tutoring quite a few kids over about 6 or 7 years. And then I always was volunteering here to do vacation bible school. I’ve done it here like for 30 years. And Ann Coone was there doing it, and so then I was doing it both here [Holy Family Academy] and at at our parish of St. Anne’s. And then St. Anne’s was getting pretty liberal, and so I was getting pulled towards this parish.

BC : Okay.

AS : And then, that’s when Ann asked if I would teach over at Holy Family. I really wanted, I was going to start with a fourth grade class, and then my son was getting married to Brittney. I was really sad because you know, she has no faith, and she was wasn’t even baptized. They were getting married in the church; it wouldn’t be a sacrament, but at least it would be a valid marriage. I just, that was really heavy in my heart, and then my husband who had been working really hard, they were trying to begin this new company going in San Montao, California. So he was in California a lot, and it turned out that they were going to have this big party like the day before Christmas Eve because this company was going to be funding this new company and that company pulled out that day. And this was just like, 6 weeks before Chris and Brittney were getting married. And, I just, you know, the week when they got married I just went into this depression, and I’m like ‘Oh my gosh, I just feel so terrible’. So I had to pull out, and I said to Ann, ‘I just don’t know if I can do this, I don’t know where I’m gonna be at when it gets time to be for school to start’. And because I hadn’t been teaching a normal class, I’d just been tutoring kids, I didn’t really know what was expected of people anymore.

BC : Okay.

AS : So then, as I got better, I said ‘Well I’d be happy to do something’, and so that’s gonna be mornings, and then within a few days they asked me to take, you know I was gonna actually, I actually had everything but Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. So, but it was, I loved it. The only thing is is you know one of the things you asked about what about having a small group versus a normal size-

BC : Mhm, Yeah. Smaller classes with those kids, which is better teaching versus the larger classes?

AS : Right. Well, you know, it was probably a real blessing, I mean it was a real blessing. But it was kind of a way to get me into it again you know. But on the other hand, you know there is pros and cons with anything, and I didn’t feel I could have that kind of that authority of a teacher as much. It was more like being a grandma person, or a motherly person, which I loved. And it was such a treat having all girls.

BC: Oh yeah, that definitely changed the dynamic.
AS: Oh my gosh. And I had had a class of all boys in Burnsville.

BC: Okay, so-

AS: - didn’t want to retain in kindergarten and they had a lot of them, they had a lot of summer birthdays, very immature. There were some with some pretty serious difficulties too, but I had 17 little boys and all with big needs. And but I really loved it. And I was hoping, we were hoping to have a baby and I said to my husband, ‘God’s preparing us for a boy’ - and sure enough we had a little boy Christopher so um but it was just a delight to have the creativity because they didn’t have the curriculum set yet they were trying to figure it out and they were using some materials that were like for home-schooling and some of the ones that I was using actually for the tutoring too. But -

BC: Yeah, I remember the little math blocks we used to add and subtract. Those were very useful.

AS: Right, and some of the things I can’t even quite remember because you mentioned something about the, um, ladybug boxes. I can’t remember what those were.

BC: Oh, we had little boxes where we would get - if we answered questions correctly - you would hand out little stones like those little stones you would have in the bottom of aquariums or you know, like fishbowls -

AS: Oh, okay.

BC: You would call those little ladybug things; you’d hand us those. There were various things we would have in those little boxes. And we would decorate the little boxes and we’d call them our little ladybug boxes.

AS: Right.

BC: Cause you called us your little ladybugs and those were like little rewards that we got for being engaged in the classes and everything

AS: Well you know, because you could get those we called them gems you know. -

BC: Yeah! That was what we called them.

AS: -new age movement that has some of that gem type stuff things to it. That wasn’t the vantage point I was taking - it was something easy to give to kids and it wasn’t too big and they’re pretty and um and I - What are the two things that really have been wonderful for me is that I just felt a real joy in teaching. I mean it was so wonderful to just share it from my heart. And I think it makes a big difference what you’re teaching and you know if you really love your subject that just kinda comes out too. And especially being in a Catholic school I was able to interweave the faith so beautifully you know.
BC: Oh yes definitely that was so strong.

AS: - And I could… And then one of the things too and it’s almost like you know. Partly what you get like when you get a liberal school arts education and I think because I was in education, plus I was actually in social too. I was considering majoring in sociology and I almost - I was one course shy cause I couldn’t get it all in, for a minor in theology. So all those areas were areas I was interested in and I had considered social work and actually I had considered nursing and because I was younger and there was a friend- I was just sitting by this little place where people could swim. We, um, we were just discussing what to do. And this was between my freshman and sophomore year of college. I was going to St. Theresa’s in Winona. And also I had this the job I had - I was this park director, but you know it didn’t hardly pay anything. I had done that for about 3 years you know during the summertime and so um. Basically this friend said, “well i’m gonna work at St. Mary’s hospital - apply to work there as a nurse’s aide. Now they call it — assistance or something like that. Well you know if I do that, then I can earn money for another year of college and I could kind of get a feel of what nursing is like. Plus my friends were in the nursing program at St. Theresa’s. The second half of the year they went to St. Mary’s Hospital in Rochester. Pretty soon my friends would be there too - you know, nursing ones. So that was- but you know it was too bad in a way cause I was on the worst floors. I was on fourth medical, which is cancer and ulcer floor. And back in those days they would have you give this twenty-five cc’s you know for these enemas. You would give twenty-five to people. It was so wild and just um you know they just didn’t have enough help and so a lot of times I would be there a couple hours after then I was supposed to be. Never got paid any overtime or anything. They didn’t even know how long I was there. Sp, but it wasn’t a positive experience. Sometimes they gave me up to 17 patients and you know some of them are supposed to have bed baths and some - it was impossible. So and then the students from St. Theresa’s would always just have two patients and so I’m like. And then they would give you split shifts from 8-12 and then form 6-10 at night. So you know you’d have to dress and get over there and all that you know and it was just like. So you know anyway that kind of ruled out nursing because I pretty much had to know by my sophomore year, you know. Because they would- in the middle of sophomore year over to St. Theresa’s.

So but that was good because I figured out what I wanted. At least, at least I made it down to two majors. So but you know for being a school social worker you need to get some intern experience teaching and I just loved the teaching. And I thought, well I like the teaching

BC: Might as well do it

AS: And the hours are certainly good. In some ways the hours are good. Because you get the vacation system. Some ways the hours aren’t so good, because I just really spend a lot of time - part of it’s my personality and part of it is the way I do things. But, I figured when I taught at the public school which was easier, um. When I got it all down I say ten hour days but that was before it was a lot more than that. Because back then they didn’t have any size curriculum, no spelling. I’d have to come up on my own words.

BC: In the public school?
AS: This is the public school, and I’d have to come up with my own science. So I’d be writing units all the time and stuff.

BC: Wow, okay.

AS: And so -

BC: This is for elementary right?

AS: This was in elementary. Yeah I started with fourth; I think I had fourth for three years. And then I had third and then they had something called un-graded. They were trying something all new where the kids would be like second third and fourth together or fourth fifth and sixth together, first second and third. So the kids would have homerooms and you would always have three levels of kids in your homeroom.

BC: Okay

AS: And then, it varied you know like kids who were really you know you might have like a first grader who’s doing third grade math. So they could be um they would move along at their own capability. But then sometimes you would be stuck. You would have, you couldn’t always group them like that - for math and reading you could so that was good. But then like for spelling- I could remember one time, I don’t remember if they were like what the ages were. Maybe second and third and fourth. But their capabilities would be like very much like first grade level up to maybe seventh grade for spelling. And so then you know to try and make a program for something that fit all those kids -

BC: Yeah

AS: - a lot of work. Plus, it- you didn’t have your regular classroom anymore. And um, they tore down half of the walls between the rooms. So you would hear the noise from the other rooms. I think I’ve had, I’ve realized I’ve had a hearing loss even from the time I was in high school. Because you know I was in the choir. I knew I should be a second soprano, but I couldn’t hear second soprano. I knew I would have to sing soprano but it would be too high. So um, then I would always try to sit in the front to hear things. And so even when I taught in Burnsville it was hard to hear the kids some of the time. So and when I went to Europe with my friends I was 24; I couldn’t hear them when going forward. We’d have to stop and look at each other. So when I got back from that trip I you know talked to an ear doctor and they said you have something where you’re gonna be losing hearing maybe a lot of it. So it’s been very frustrating; I guess that’s the cross the Lord’s allowed me to bear. But so um in Burnsville you know when I first went in it was just like wow. You know, I had, when I started school in Catholic school - first of all I went to a public school which was also under the college there. That was considered to be a teacher’s school but they did not have any phonics. I did not learn one sound. I was younger, because I had an October birthday, and um I never learned any sound or anything. So the next year when they built our Catholic school it was like um they were teaching phonics but to me it was you know like a foreign language. I didn’t know what they were talking about.
AS: I was over my head.

BC: So you never learned any phonics?

AS: I never had phonics.

BC: Okay you never had phonics.

AS: I never had any until I was in graduate school. I had - it was so hard. I was teaching before I had phonics. So I was teaching fourth grade because you know the first sounds I ever learned were in Spanish when I took Spanish in college.

BC: Wow.

AS: Isn’t that terrible?

BC: That’s -

AS: I never could sound any words. And the only way I learned how to read was just by - fortunately the kids read a lot in school and you know I would be afraid when I was babysitting and the parents would be there and I would come across a word I didn’t know, you know when reading to the kids. That’s how bad it was.

BC: Yeah, wow.

AS: So actually, I was started in the graduate program at Winona, you know because that’s where I’m from. And um and so I got a third of the way and I would’ve - and you know that’s when I started traveling Europe with my friends and then met my husband and I didn’t want to be down in Winona.

BC: Okay.

AS: So I didn’t continue that even though I got way over the credits. But I can remember probably one of the hardest things we’d ever learned was the difference between “ie” and “eh”. I mean it was like “euh” so hard to figure that out. You know

BC: Silent “e”s were what I had trouble with.

AS: Yeah. Right so that’s why when we got into having the Saxon Phonics you know I was just excited about it. You know because it’s just like -

BC: Did you get that in graduate school or did you get that at Holy Family?

AS: No, I got that at here [at Holy Family]
BC: I remember the big sheets you would have up on the board. And you would take us through
-
AS: Well actually, I had because of my disability or whatever - and the educational background
I didn’t have or didn’t get and then also my hearing loss. I started with Project Reed. This was a
special project they had in the Bloomington schools.

BC: Okay.

AS: And so I really learned a lot about sounds that way and um and so I was able to tutor a lot of
kids. You know in some ways if you have a weakness in something you can understand the
weakness somebody else has.

BC: Yeah

AS: Problem from other -

BC: —

AS: Right so. But when I got to that school, for fourth grade, it was like a brand-new school.
And I’m like wow, this beautiful classroom, and a big sink and I’m not using counters and sinks
and all that. It was really really beautiful. And so I was pretty excited about that. One of the
things from my background, and from even there - back in those days you were expected to do a
lot of bulletin boards. And you were expected to change them once a month. So that was a lot of
work because there would be four regular big bulletin boards and then at least one across the
whole wall. I’m not sure if it was on the other side. And then one over by the sink and then one
in the hall.

BC: Wow.

AS: I spent a lot of time just on things like that. So when I went to Holy Family I just expected
that we were supposed to change these boards, and some people just never changed them. I’m
like, oh my gosh - but you know that was one piece of work I wouldn’t have to put so much into
it. So I think that if you can find a happy medium between you know especially making
something for the kids to feel really special when they’re the student of the week. They
eventually called it the Saint of the Week or American Saint -

BC: We had American Girl of the Week when it was just us girls.

AS: Right, you know so um so I think some of the times I did more work than I should’ve done
-

BC: Okay
AS : Because you know you have to be careful to pace yourself too and you don’t always know when you’re doing that and when you’re not. It’s more in retrospect you realize it. And one of the things I think I should’ve done was actually not taught during the summers. Because I would tutor a lot of kids in the summers and I think I really should’ve just gotten away from it. Because you know you do need-

BC : A bit of a break

AS : A break sometimes. It was like sometimes - And then I would still have kids I would tutor you know that would still want me to tutor them for…. So that, that was - I realized later, some ways in which you kinda get yourself into something without meaning to. One of the things would be like new things that would be added to the curriculum here and then you would still be doing things from before that this is the way we’ve always done it. This is the way the parents expect it to be done. And this spelling and words and … and sentences. And so then you know you don’t feel like you can just stop doing something but when you’ve got more things. And I think too Anne Coone is just - there couldn’t have been a more sweet and wonderful principal. I just love Anne. But she didn’t have the background of teaching. She was a preschool teacher and she was in charge of the preschool.

BC : Oh, okay. She had a much different background.

AS : -how much -she took on- I mean she was great principal. But she was expecting me like when we get - she really was pushing me to try and like finish all the science books - and we got into really pretty intense science book. And even the rep for the science book company didn’t expect that. But because you have kids with various needs. And I think you know almost like a happy medium between when I try the public school - I mean the kids really didn’t have any homework or expected to except for the spelling words. When you got here, it was very academic and I think that as kids are as things are moving on as things are becoming more and more academic and kids are expected at a younger age like what they’re doing in kindergarten now is what they used to in first grade then. And even when I was teaching in Burnsville, I was thinking you know the fourth graders had already lost some of the sweetness and some of the innocence of what they knew already in fourth grade. You know something where they would’ve maybe expected of the fifth grade you know and I think it was like that - I think with the faster pace of everything. And with the parents, I feel so sorry for many of them both having to work and make an income it’s like - I see this with my son and daughter-in-law. It’s wild. You know, and their daughter’s two and a half and they take her to swimming lessons. But they don’t even know —when they start getting in Irish dancing you know, and piano lessons and scouts and

BC : Everything

AS : Everything else. It’s, all you do is run around you know. And so anyways - Let’s just see what else I have here from around that first classroom. One thing is interesting- a thing I never thought of from a health perspective both just from physical, not physical, from being too worn down but little did I know that the whiteboards would really cause me a problem in the long run.

BC : Really?
What happened is the chemical in the whiteboard markers. It’s the same chemical that’s in ink. And like when you have the copy machines and the toner in the copy machines and so I eventually became allergic to that.

BC: Wow, just from being a teacher?

AS: Yes, just from that exposure.

BC: Wow.

AS: I mean, I did write a lot on the boards because I don’t think I did it when you were there, but as the kids got older I got these cute sweet little pictures that had a little book and each day they would - not every day but a lot of days they would put a picture of a saint in them whatever special saint was that day and then I would write out on the board something about that saint. And then they were supposed to write it in cursive. And I didn’t worry so much whether they were- I didn’t care so much if they were perfectionists. You know, I started this after they knew how to write the small letters. I said for the capital letters, just print it. And I just wanted them to get used to writing and be comfortable writing. Because that’s one of the big things now that I really feel is gonna be missing for kids in the future. Is cursive writing.

BC: I already don’t very much use it.

AS: What?

BC: I don’t use it very often.

AS: Yeah

BC: I mean I still have the ability, but compared to a lot of my friends-

AS: You see when you have your iPad or you know -

BC: Computer-

AS: But you know, there might be- there will be situations where you are not gonna have those tools.

BC: available, yeah.

AS: And it might be just waking up in the middle of the night and wanting to write something down. You know what I mean? But for me it’s like when I’m in church; I take little notes on the sermons you know it’s like

BC: The big thing is tests. Exams you don’t necessarily have technology-
AS : Right.

BC : -for it. And you have to be able to write. And a lot of teachers I know -basically every
single class the teachers go - If I can’t understand your writing, you are gonna get marked off for
it because I need to be able to read your writing.

AS : So what’s happened is like we were in Georgia a year ago and we have a great niece there
who’s in sixth grade - fantastic student. And I written something, and she couldn’t read it. She
has -they don’t have cursive writing.

BC: She- Wow.

AS : They don’t teach cursive writing. She doesn’t even know, they don’t even have it. -
elongated cursive writing so I think that’s a real mistake -

BC : Okay.

AS : You know, and I mean just the way the world is right now it might not always be as simple
as - i mean not simple, complex in a lot of ways. But we might not always have access to all
these tools and I think it’s important that we have some of the basics. Or even when you - I write
a lot of people get well cards and things like that

BC : Just little things

AS : It would take me a lot longer to print out all that. It takes a lot longer. So it’s just one of
those little things. But so that was one of the things I got in 2007 - well first of all I had gotten
you know I could tell I was getting really lot of pressure. You know another thing that’s good to
know. You don’t have to correct every single thing every kid ever writes. One of the things Anne
thought was that you did. I had 500 papers a week. So even when they are simple papers, plus
they so many of them like the math papers and the phonics papers. It's the same ink I was being
exposed to. So I would have a pile *this thick* to give the kids by the end of the week and I
spent - like when I taught at the Burnsville schools I would say - I thought a 50 hour work week
was reasonable - 10 hours a day. But when I taught here it was something like 60-70 hours a
week. Because I just had so much correcting to do. And she would expect for me to do it all. And
see I wasn’t - maybe - I don’t know- didn’t have the confidence but I was just trying to do what
what she expected. It was kind of like being an intern or something but so that was - And then
you’d have some kids in your class - And that’s another thing when I first started teaching this is
something to know too. My first year- I can remember too when I was in sixth grade and I had a
teacher who I thought she was the sweetest teacher - She was so sweet with all the girls in
between recess and stuff she be out talking to us and - She’d begin the class and she’d be so
crabby. But I didn’t realize that we had the worst class in the school - known for being really bad
and really bad kids in there and some boys were nauseous and stuff was interesting - one of the
students but so she’d yell a lot. So I thought well why would a teacher have to be so mean. And I
thought how can she be so mean one time and so nice one time when we’re with her ? So when I
thought when I’m going to be teaching I’m only gonna be nice, I’m not gonna be mean not that
you don’t have to be mean but you have to be really firm. Especially when you first start the
beginning of the year because kids’ll kind of see where they can take advantage of a person see how far they can go -

BC : Yeah.

AS : So I think that’s pretty you know- Then there are kids you get even in the Catholic school I mean and kids with so many varied problems in the public schools - [loud noise] That’s terrible - Anyways when I was in anyway what were we just talking about ? Wonder what that noise was.

BC : I don’t know.

AS : I completely got off- We were talking about even in the public schools, in the Catholic schools- Oh kids with difficulties you know and in the public school we ended up having some apartment buildings built close by the school -

BC : Okay.

AS : And then the kids that started coming came from really challenging homes and things and so then you’d have a lot more kids with problems. Whereas here it would be more solid families usually but then there would still be kids with a lot of emotional problems or - I had one little girl who was very autistic and that was just you know - And one little boy was from Romania as a baby and he didn’t get to - [loud noise] - I don’t know what that loud noise is - But he didn’t get to - [loud noise] Really is that -

BC : I think so - I think there’s rocks that they had in the bottom of the flowers

[Shuffling around - We moved locations because of her hearing and the constant loud noise and so the record continues, but not on our topic, so not recorded here. The record was also paused for a minute or two before discussion began again.]

AS : Anyways so one of the things that I tried to do you know when you see a child that’s got some diff- kind of has a hard time at school or whatever. But you know I realized we kind of needed to do it for all the kids to really try to zero in on them. There was one little girl who just had a hard time and her behavior - So I would try to set her in a spot where there would be like a safer place for her. And I used to tell all the kids, find a safe place. So they wouldn’t be sitting together so they wouldn’t bug each other. And so sometimes you can prevent discipline problems. Or with her I really tried to make a lot of eye contact to really try - not that you’re - you don’t wanna be, have a teacher’s pet. Because someways she would be the last to be a teacher’s pet. But on the other hand sometimes you need to make an extra effort with some kids who need - you know she had a lot of problems in her family and things and they just need that extra -

BC : Yeah, I know I needed that extra push to read. If I hadn’t got that, I probably wouldn’t have.
AS: Lemme get this back in [referring to hearing aid]. And so I’m sorry we got that little thing but you see why I had to stop teaching.

BC: Yeah, that’s kinda difficult.

AS: I’m just gonna see where this thing is now [Again referring to hearing aid]. It’s like you know where a sound system goes off sometimes — That’s what it’s like with my ears. So it’s so painful. And when this first started happening it was in 2007. We’d had gone to see - Things had been getting louder and louder at school. And I think it was because of the stress- because I was being asked to cover more and more material. And these kids couldn’t do it. And then I didn’t feel I could take them out to recess and after -

BC: In public school?

AS: No, here [Holy Family Academy Catholic school]. You know because we got that new science program and I was supposed to you know - History was wonderful. I loved that chronology

BC: I remember your timeline at the bottom of your classroom with the American girls

AS: Yeah, and it got to be even more and more fun as I got more familiar with it too. That’s one thing too after a year or two of getting to use - after a year or two of using then it’s more fun too.
Because then you can bounce with it a little more you know?

BC: Yeah

AS: So but then we had. then I had you know the regular curriculum for religion. But then I also had the preparation for first communion, first confession. And then we had that little faith and freedom readers And butt then when we got that Saxon phonics which was very intense and it was hard to fit all these things in. And then the Saxon math - you see I figured if I got the Saxon math, Saxon phonics - basically the sacraments and most of the religion and the obviously got the spelling And um what was the other one - the math oh I said the math. Anyways, I just felt like, you know that was as much as we could handle you know. And there were little kids - And I mean I can remember when little guys - these little people usually in front of you. They’d try t be helping you. One little guy was pulling his lead right out of pencil and it’d come down the middle. I mean everything was disheveled all the time everything would be falling apart and he would just be sitting there and everything just disintegrates. You don’t even know how it happens. And then you’d get a few like that and then on the other side you know it was just like these kids needed help. And then I had one little guy- I don’t think he was ever in the class with you but he would just get so frustrated because he couldn’t get his math facts. And he would just start pounding on his desk and stuff you know. So I’m like- I’m just you know - And then the one with autism would scream at the top of her lungs and you would never know when it was gonna happen. And you know it would be 10 minutes later after something - All of a sudden she would think that -One time I told the kids- we had this little contest going and I told them somebody had blurted out the answer and I said well we can’t use what you said because somebody had blurted out the answer - so we have to go to the next set. Well, 10 minutes later
she’s screaming at the top of her lungs like “You’re mad at me, I didn’t do anything!” And I was like, I wasn’t even talking to you, you know what I mean? But she just couldn’t -

BC: Do you think they’d be better off in a special needs school? Or do you think that they -

AS: Well, actually she turned out - well in her case she’s just a very bright girl. In her case, we had to go through a lot of red tape - but she finally got processed through the public schools - so she went to the public school for a number of hours per week for extra help - and she really improved. And she’s now over - she’s still in high school but she’s in Normandale college and almost finished with her second year there. She’s a very smart girl. But you know back in those young grades you know when you have that problem. You don’t know how to control it yet. And then also the little kids- you know it’s not like you get as much of a break just to start pairing work. Because you pretty much have to be right there for those kids whereas in junior high and stuff they can be working on their own and you can be doing something. So I think the person has to be kinda have to have the right patience level and just the ability to know that they’re going to just have to do even little physical things like helping them put their coats on and stuff like that. Because they’re just small and they need they need extra help. And they need that extra attention and love. You know. But that was kinda like, and so but the first thing was the ear thing. And that happened partly because of my just being under so much stress. And you know this happens when you get under a lot of stress but then I had a really important phone call and I could never get out of school soon enough to get home to call from my phone. And the phone at school didn’t work. And so I used a cell phone but it went too loud and pressed something wrong and it got too loud. But I was trying to finish up this answer with the doctor. Because I was trying to get this appointment right and I shouldn’t have done it because it was too loud. And that was really hurt my ears. So everything was getting louder and louder and -

BC: I know when you were teaching me I would tap my pencils because I could never sit still and that definitely irritated you -

AS: See and that wouldn’t have been that bad. I think I had to some degree. People can have it to different levels of hypercosis. And I think I had it because I had a lot of loud things without wanting to. You know, like, lightning struck our house and the thunder was so loud. So you know I’ve had some loud things happen. But this was the final straw -

BC: Okay

AS: And so, then we flew into Boston - and it’s like going up and down. We had to go to Atlanta first, you know. When we got into Boston, everything was like 10 times louder.

BC: Yeah, big city.

AS: It was excruciating. And I’m like, I wasn’t smart enough to know about to bring some ear plugs or something. So I was in so much pain. And I was - it would be like this thing going off all the time and you couldn’t get away from it. And so then it just me sick to my stomach and everything. And then my daughter didn’t have air conditioning and I mean I was so sick I just wanted to lay on the floor. And it was like any place - they didn’t have normal couches; they just
had chairs. And I’m like - Anyways. But you have to be careful of what you can physically
handle because you don’t think of things like that happening. And your body can have some of
your weakest areas. You might not even know it’s a weakest area.

BC: Okay so it just develops over the teacher-

AS: Yeah, And also just being exposed to kids and their different things. That can be a plus
because you get immune to it. But I know I remember having to tell kids if you have a really bad
cold, stay home. Because I remember one little boy had a terrible cold and the people all around
him, they all -

BC: Got sick -

AS: -Them too.

BC: Yeah, I do recall ; Kasia recalls it fondly. The one day that everyone got sick except for one
of us in our grade because somebody had come in with a really bad cold.

AS: Yeah, oh yeah. And then do you remember that one time you guys had to take a
standardized test and especially Sofia - you know it was like the first time you had to take a
standardized test and I’m like oh my gosh. You know such a formal thing - just this amount of
time for everything-

BC: Was that first grade or second grade do you remember for when we first had to take the
standardized test?

AS: This was in first grade you had to do it like towards the end of the year.

BC: Wow, I didn’t know we did it that early.

AS: Yeah, and you and sophia in particular you know a lot of you had a bad cold. But Sofia in
particular - she just was like [horrible sniffling sound]. You know, and her nose was just - and
it’s like a terrible noise. Nobody could do the test and so finally I said okay girls stop. We’re
gonna have to practice learning how to blow our noses. And so I said now you don’t just blow
once, you just keep blowing for awhile - get as much as you can. And then hopefully it’ll last for
a few minutes before you have to do it again, you know. And so it really made a difference
because not everyone was just going on and on-

BC: Do you - when you first started teaching was standardized testing already a big thing you
had to do?

AS: We-

BC: -Holy Family here?
AS: We didn’t worry about it. Which is - maybe I was too dumb to worry about it. But actually one of the things that happened years ago when I started teaching in Burnsville. They would have the standardized test in the fall like in September. So it wasn’t really kinda like how you did with the class. It would - well it would be your class from the year before how they are doing in the next level.

BC: Okay

AS: But it would be in the beginning of the year rather than in the end-

BC: End-

AS: So they were measuring more what they were coming in with rather than what they were going out with for that year. But I think - from the impression I’ve gotten from some of my friends who were teachers especially in the public school. And even with my own kids who were in the public school in high school. That they got so much that the teachers had to teach to the test because they had so much to cover and I know like in the Bloomington district. You know because sometimes I would be taking classes just to learn more things- And they would have these whole like extensive workshops like in certain areas like in science. But it would be just like two things that they basically had learned in a year because that was what was going to be on the test. So they’d have to be some really knowledgeable about that. But then they didn’t know all the other things that are just important for kids to learn. Just to be a reasonable -

BC: So you didn’t teach the test as much -

AS: I never had to which it was really a gift — I was fortunate. I never worried about it here [Holy Family]. There it was always in the fall. So I never even thought about the fact from the kids from the year before.

BC: Were gonna be -

AS: Were tested on how they were doing too. One thing they used to do in Burnsville -there were like a hundred and twenty kids in each grade. So we would never - there were four classes

BC: Per grade-

AS: Each of us would get thirty kids. And so they would try to divide the kids up according to what might work out better for the kids and the teachers. But sometimes- I got kids - one little boy - he would - the very first year - he would come in, he was a fourth grader, and he would stamp his foot on the blackboard - he would just do weird things. But this other kid could hardly stand him - he hit him and I’m like- . And then there was this little girl in fourth grade - her name was Nancy- and she was um she had these big glasses. And she wasn’t very good looking you know. You know, not very popular, very shy. And I found out when she was in high school she committed suicide.

BC: Oh no.
AS: So you know, you just - your heart just aches. So one thing that I do now - I pray every day for the kids that I’ve taught. You know and I kinda take it to the second mystery of the rosary of when Mary kinda like had Jesus and everything. So just to ———even if their in purgatory or something - to pray for your kids. To really pray for them. You know and that God will touch their lives. You know some of them had had rough things happen to them and some have had babies and such. And you just ask the Lord to touch their hearts and work with them where they are at. So it makes you so sad when you think about just like 10 years ago their lives were just being happy go lucky little kids.

BC: Yeah, pretty much.

AS: And life goes so fast don't you think?

BC: Oh definitely. I mean, 10 years ago I was in what grade- I think fourth grade with Mrs. Ziebel learning how to turn my paper to the side to write at a diagonal angle. She had tape on the desk that we had to learn from. That was ten years ago. And now I’m in college.

AS: Well you know the thing I was so surprised about - I mean this was kind of just a fun thing- One year somebody had just given me these Easter - they were like from nylons - they looked like Easter eggs. They were about this big [mimes a small egg]. And so I had a whole bunch of them. So I said, why don’t we make a special - why don’t we do this around the time of their first communion - why don’t you write a letter to yourself to open up in 10 years. You know so you can see, you know where you’re at and what your life is like. And you can think back to what you were thinking about in second grade and all this stuff. And then they put tissue paper and shellacked it. You know it would just then open easily. I remember one little boy saying - after it was all finished - Oh boy I wanna see what I wrote. I can’t remember what I wrote. You know some of the kids, now 10 years has gone by. I thought 10 years - that’s forever you know. 10 years gone by and some of the kids have checked out what they wrote. Some of them have lost it you know.

BC: I don’t think I ever did anything like that-

AS: It wasn't - I think it was the year after you -

BC: I remember what we did for Easter was we had the 12 little eggs and we learned the - what is it- oh my gosh - Oh I’m just having problems - It’s lent you go around the church praying what happens at each station - Stations of the cross there we go!

AS: Right, right.

BC: There we go. We would do like little stations in each little egg and that would bear a resemblance to the station -

AS: I remember your grandparents - they worked on -
BC: Oh that’s right they did help with that - that’s when they first started working at the school and helping out.

AS: Yeah, because each year they would - and Diane would somehow - and I found some little bitty cloaks or little crosses. And you know it’s interesting because they have that in some of the stores now - they’ve kinda come up with that idea-

BC: oh really-

AS: But that was kind of -

BC: A hands-on-

AS: way to make it real

BC: And it definitely was a great way of learning and even now I’m still remembering - Oh yeah we had little bloodstained cloths and-

AS: Right

BC: All these different things - And that was to teach us the Stations of the Cross

AS: Right. And to teach us actually - even things like that little stone - where we put a stone in for that - Shut the grave, cave whatever it was. And you can change it too- it doesn’t have to be exactly the stations you know. Well, one of the things I felt was one of the first years I got to teach here I had a lot more chance to be creative. Because I didn’t have to be locked into this real strict overwhelming curriculum that was more than little second graders could handle. At least some could — and you could just keep going. But then you know when you have too much you feel like you can’t - kinda just let down- and the kids - they don't have a lot to come with too - and when you just have to feel like you’re almost like pushing/kicking them - gotta keep moving, gotta get this - and I almost felt like after a while I could hardly take doing the decade of the rosary each day but I thought no, that’s gonna be a priority. And I also thought it was a priority to have that little adoration time at church.

BC: Yeah-

AS: And then I would have the kids sit in the front row of the church. And I don’t know; I presume I did it with your class. And I would just try to share with them things about the faith -

BC: Yep, I remember that.

AS: So that was a real joy for me. I mean and I think - I had worked a lot with the boy scouts and something called altar de — this was a religious emblem. And you know it’s kinda like the more you teach and the more you do from different vantage points- you can almost come in like in different way and share things with the kids-
BC: okay

AS: And like someday when if you have children, you know like I’m finding things that I can do with my little granddaughter that I never would have thought to do with my own kids. Like you guys I think you each had a lamb at Easter time. And we learned the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me lie down in green pastures-

BC: Yes

AS: I never knew it before I had to learn it then. And it’s interesting when I see different translations of it you know I never like them as much as I like that one.

BC: That one, yes.

AS: That one is still a very — you know like for my little granddaughter - I had little lambs. And you know she knows Jesus is the shepherd and he loves the lambs and stuff. So you know you can kinda bring it to different levels. Or last year I was the sponsor for, a godmother, for a young girl who became Catholic. And I could bring in a lot of things, even from the - you know, truth is truth, no matter if it’s really easily shown to you or in depth theological thing. You know, it’s the truth and lot of ways I think I could really help her ignite in fire for her faith. You know she wants to go through the Catholic studies program at St. Thomas and she wants to really share her faith - you know. She didn’t even know at Christmas - I gave her a nativity set- she didn’t even know what it was. So that’s how little she knew.

BC: Wow, okay.

AS: So anyways -

BC: I just have another question. For you know, kids have their own ideas to bring up. I know my class, we were all little girls and everything, we would play with our American girl dolls all the time. Who’s idea was it to have little tea parties all the time?

AS: There was what?

BC: Little tea parties.

AS: Oh!

BC: Was that our idea or was that your idea?

AS: I think it was my idea-

BC: Your idea-

AS: I just thought that was something really precious. I remember having Mrs. Gettler come in and Mrs. Coone. And I remember we did something - it seemed like we made some rice krispie
bars somehow. I don’t even know what all happened. Somehow there was something being
outside and we made rice krispie bars. I don’t remember what it was for. And then also I did like
little scrapbook type things.

BC: I still have those scrapbooks. I have both of them there somewhere. We moved so they got
put in storage somewhere. But I still have both of them

AS: You know, I think there are ways to just touch the heart of
anyone for that matter. It’s almost like with people who are - I’m just thinking of people who do
scrapbooking and that stuff. But if there’s something that can add a little, just a little extra touch.
It can be like when they’re giving you a present. And they add a little touch of a sweet pretty
bow. Or it could be a cute sticker. It just brings a little bit more joy. And that’s one thing I really
enjoy doing. Although I did so many stickers and I think that caused problems with my mouth
too - because they were bad ink. You know, cheap ink, because they were cheap stickers and all.
You know and you don’t think of anything like that as so you have be kind of-

BC: Cautious-

AS: Cautious! You know. Anyway. One of things in Burnsville was I had to teach like music
and phys-ed and all that. It was really amazing when I said to Anne Coone one day - because
when I was in Burnsville you were told you could leave the classroom and go for a coffee break.
Can you believe it?

BC: That would not work out well; I don’t think.

AS: Well you know, the kids would start working on something and you could just go down the
hall to the lounge and get coffee for 10 minutes. Take a ten minute coffee break. And that was
just a given. So here, you know all these many years later and my youngest was in junior high
when I started coming back to teaching. I had tutored kids for a number of years. And so one of
the first days when we just started school, I said how do you take a coffee break? She said,
coffee break, what are you talking about? You don’t get a coffee break. So what you can if you
have a preference and time — but you know one thing that’s gotten kinda to me it’s a little off-
the-top. You know I’m just sharing from the heart because these things are kinda private too
about Anne. She didn’t see some of these things. But you know it got to the point where there’s
so many rules it almost made me feel like in the Old Testament when they had 613 rules you
know. And it was like you could no longer have coffee in a regular coffee cup. You had to have
something that had a top on it. And I mean, I know it must have been a concern, nobody said
why, but I presume it was it was so no kid could bump into you and get coffee spilled
everywhere. But it almost, it almost seem things are getting to an extreme. You know, even with
the thing too; our school is very affectionate. I mean Anne would be having her arms around the
kids and things like that. That was just the way it is with little kids. Now that things are so strict
with concerns- you know you want to be very concerned. But you know, it’s like - and when we
had to have you kids hide behind my desk you know in case there was gonna be an intruder. I’m
like, something like that isn’t - you know it’s so sad little kids have to think about something like
that.
BC: It is terrifying. I mean, that was just a given for us, that was just something we had to do.
We never thought anything of it. We never thought it was gonna happen. But I mean as I’ve
grown up I hear even more stories about it happening in high schools, even in colleges.

AS: Oh, I know.

BC: It’s terrifying. Because it’s like, that’s something that can actually happen. It’s something
that’s always been taught - I don’t think it’s ever gonna happen but now it’s fairly frequent. So-

AS: I know, my son teaches at Benilde St. Margaret. It’s a fine how-to being a teacher but
being a teacher can be a dangerous job. I mean, you know what I mean? It’s like - oh wow. So
one of the things you had - one of the questions you had was what was one of the most
consistent traits in the kids and you know ; I think kids are kids no matter what.

BC: Well that stemmed from my teacher for this class. The one phrase she says basically every
class is no matter how things- what is it- the exact wording - “The more things change, the more
they stay the same”. So I was curious if that -with that - how much our society has changes -what
values are being brought in now with genders are more fluid in this society - if that changes kids
in the way they act in the classrooms at all. Or is it - I mean from your time as a teacher - is it
just kids are pretty much the same and they aren't as influenced by society.

AS: I think you know, I can remember being in a workshop in public school and they just started
talking about gender change - and I couldn’t believe it because they were talking about
this little boy that wanted to come to school dressed as a girl and they thought it was fine and the
teacher [talking over each other] That was back when - and I’m like, hey let’s be reasonable, this
is off the wall

BC: That was in the beginning of -

AS: That would’ve been back in the 70s. You know and so I’m like - that was way back then -
I’m like where is common sense and you know Chesterton - he really talks about common sense
and I think that’s what’s been lost. In a world - and so but you know there are so many different
things coming from- that kids are coming from and that confusion - a lot times it brings
confusion and truth is truth. A lot of people do not want to - you know God is the one that said
this is the way it is. I mean, if you don’t like it, well there are gonna be consequences you know a
lot of times maybe we don’t like it because it’s not easy and you know there was a little girl that
was in my class and she was - her mom was a white witch. You know back in those days they
said one of the biggest problems in the 70s was all this stuff with the occult and the police would
have to deal with all this stuff. And this little girl came and her was all messy and she looked
disheveled- she looked starving - I think she had to sleep on the floor when they finally went in
to check on her. And but her mom was a white witch. And so we had one time each week on a
Friday where there would be a special fun activity that each teacher would choose a different one
each week. And kids could come of all ages you know. And I mean, she would always come to
my room, even if it was always above her capability - she just needed that love you know and so
um and there are some real basics you know when Sophia - do you remember when she would
always fall asleep
BC : Yes

AS : - she needed her adenoids out. And she would be up all night with the terrible whatever it was-

BC : Coughing

AS : - Coughing and she’d come to school and she couldn’t stay awake. And so I’d send her back into the corner and tell her I’d wake you up for afternoon class or something. But I literally - I remember Anne [principal] watching at the door - where she [sophia] would literally fall asleep in the aisle you know things like as basic as that. But when you think of kids that are being homeless and stuff like that. Some of them are taken to shelters and then they have to go to school in the day and I just wonder now there are so many kids who are having another language or just who knows what else. It’s interesting that Eden Prairie district that used to be considered to be just a wonderful school district and a nice suburb. But they have- and I’m not sure if it’s Somalian or what - and I’m not saying anything, well maybe I am saying something. But I’m just saying when you get a group coming in where the parents are just so stressed out that they can’t take care of their kids really and they can’t be there for them and they can’t oversee them and they can’t come to any parents meetings or anything. We had this neighbor guy - just the most amazing teacher and the most amazing guy and you know they put him in 6th grade in Eden Prairie schools. And after awhile he just quit - he just said you know there’s no discipline. The kids don’t respect and it’s just horrible. I had one class in Burnsville where it was like that. And I thought you know- the teachers that were in that school - I thought my kids had those teachers I would be very happy because they were very Christian teachers but there was one class I had and the kids it was just - they would be swearing, it would be horrible. I have never seen kids - never a whole group like that - and I said if I ever had a child who was in a setting like that I would do anything to pull them out of that setting.

BC : do you think when teachers go into that setting, do you think that it’s lack of discipline that causes the kids to be that rowdy or do you think it’s all - the home situation?

AS : Well I think it depends - you know this is why I feel like it’s sometimes unfair for teachers to be judged by certain results of some classes. You can get one kid that can cause all hell to break loose. But you know I think it’s both but I think you can get something where it’s completely out of control and I don’t think the teacher can help anything-

BC : - help anything no matter how well trained the teacher is?

AS : No I think - like this teacher - I mean in he’s this big strong guy - it’s not like he’s just a little timid person or something. And very loving and very good and very sharp. And really knows his stuff. But when you get- if you get enough of the forces against yourself and against the class. You can’t deal - you can’t - I mean you do what you can but you know you can only get so far. First of all, the school is gonna have so many different needs for the kids and you know you can only teach to a certain level. And you know if you teaching to a level that maybe some of the kids are ready for and then you have a bunch of them that aren’t. They aren’t -
they’re gonna cause so much ruckus that they don’t allow you to get to that level. So all these
other kids are getting basically cheated out of their education. So then that’s why - even with my
class didn’t really know because I was kind of a shy little thing. And this teacher later on she said
you know your class was known for being the most terrible class and what happened is we had
all these kids come from the public schools starting at 7th grade because they went through 6th
grade in the public school and then after they went to our school which went further. Actually
they had 7th, 8th, and 9th in that school and then after that they switched the 9th to the
countering school?? — So you know things just change when you have kids that are having a
rough time. And so I mean in a way it seems like - it’s unfair to a lot of kids and it’s i dunno and
this is - I mean I’m kind of prejudiced this way - I think sometimes certain kids with certain
disabilities do better in a setting where they get the special help right where they are at rather
than being a big distraction to the classroom. I know I have a niece with down-syndrome.

BC : Okay

AS : And my sister-in-law- she’s very brilliant. She was going for her PhD at University of
Minnesota when she met my brother. And she wanted her to be in regular kindergarten. But
when she was in that kindergarten; she couldn’t follow - she couldn’t do what the rest of the kids
were doing. She was off doing her own thing all over the room and just making it difficult for the
rest of the class. Because it was like babysitting. She couldn’t- she wasn’t at that level.

BC : yeah

AS : And so after that she realized you know this isn't you know. So then she got something
where she did really well. So I think you know you have to be careful because you don’t want to
keep kids out that really need you know that extra compassion and love and being with the rest
of the kids -but you know there’s a certain amount to learn from kids that are having - you know
hard lives. But it’s really a kind of fine line. Because I know there’s a lot of times there’s a
professional with them and they use big machines and all that stuff and I mean- you know the -
you know you probably are familiar with the boy from Benilde St. Margaret who was in that
terrible hockey accident.

BC : Yeah

AS : And he was in my son’s class - you know his first year teaching - but you know he just had
him in the homeroom that year. But the next year he had him later on. Somebody like that - that
this kid’s got a good attitude and he’s fine in the classroom. I’m just thinking more the ones that
are really disruptive and stuff so that they can’t really have a normal class and teaching. So that’s
a fine line. But maybe I may be a little prejudiced. Partly just because I was just trying to move
kids forward and frustrated that I couldn’t. that some people just couldn’t - it was too hard for
them.

BC : So what do you think would be the most - like the best advice to give to a new teacher in
this day and age based on your experience.
AS: Well, I have a couple of ideas. First of all, I think you really need two things. I think you need to love what you’re teaching for the most part and to love the kids.

BC: Okay.

AS: And I think to really pray for them too. Because I think that as Catholic Christians we can bring in joy a lot and I think - I had a class in college - physical science - it had things like electricity and stuff like that - That was my favorite class. Because that teacher was so full of joy that she could relate it all back to this part of creation and all that. So it’s kind of like that whole liberal arts education when you see this is connected to this and this and this. And that’s what brings a lot of joy I think. And that’s where history is just pure joy. Because you see all of this and you can bring it in - weave it in from God’s perspective and from human perspective too. And from so many different perspectives and help kind of see - there’s lessons from it and But I think - for me you know there’s so much that I love teaching. And then I love the kids. So those were the big things. I think I wrote some other things too. And some of these ended up being… Let’s see. You had one of the things about….. I think….. I think to try to - you know you almost have to be at the right spot for being reasonable for yourself and reasonable for the kids. So you can have a life of your own too. That if you’re planning to do this and you’re planning to marry and have kids, you really need to be able to get a balance.

BC: Yeah.

AS: I didn’t always do that good of a balance thing. Are you thinking of working with older kids?

BC: high school.

AS: Yeah. See I think you can have a much better balance.

BC: That’s what I’ve been told. I wanted to do elementary but I’ve been told by Mrs. Leighton (Ms. Lashinks) who has four little kids and other elementary school teachers said don’t do that it’s hard to balance.

AS: Yeah, because I mean so much motion - not that there isn’t a lot with the older kids because they are going through all the other things. But they can catch things better and if it - if you can help it mean something - if it you can make it interesting and fun and exciting - if you know - I think it really helps the first year where you can’t do it as much because you are just trying to get into and stuff. But as time goes on you can kind of weave it in and — that’s kind of the advantage when you become experienced teacher - even after your first year. That you can you can almost - it’s almost like when you know Christmas is coming and you know Valentine’s - it’s kinda like you can forsee and kind of get things all ready - getting ready for these things. And so i think that would make it more joyful for them. And I think even just being aware with them in the normal life - what’s going on in our country, what’s going on the world what’s happening in the faith especially if you’re going to be in a Catholic school. Or a Christian school too for that matter. You know, say New Years comes, that’s gonna be something secular for everybody. But you can bring in well, you can do - what happens with this and that you know and help them to
look into their future too. Not just be stuck where they are but to know that your future is coming sooner than you think. And you are already part of your future. You know if you can be thinking about - especially in your area, you know you can help them think about possibilities that they may for see that they can prepare themselves for. Does that make sense?

BC: Yeah that makes sense.

AS: [muttering]. One of the things too you have to be careful - you know when the internet opened up we started getting emails. You can have parents that are just you know like they are so demanding - In high school they may not be, but I think you have to show where the kids are at almost each day, and that’s a big job. Plus you can have an aide who can do something like that.

BC: Okay

AS: Because you know you s- —— [sound cuts out] And if you have a parent that’s emailing you four times a day about so and so staying up till 1 o'clock doing homework and needing help, that’s pretty tough.

BC: Yeah

AS: So not to be careful - you don’t get overburdened. So-

BC: So consistency and a variety-

AS: Yeah, you need the one and you need the other. So many things just need to be sensitive. - wherever they were going for class - and a lot of times they would just be sitting on the floor and the teacher would be teaching them and then they’d go to whatever desk they would be on. Or they might lay on the floor on their stomach or something. And then the halls all filled with fun things like blocks and stuff like say the math and they could be doing these counting things and they would - you would get a lot of homework checking - because they were all - and they would have just big packets of work and we’d just keep on moving them forward and so they could be - in math and reading - all these different things. And then in social studies and science they would be with a group their age. Not always their age, sometimes it would be different. Sometimes it would be with their homeroom too. Another thing I did was with the national science foundation called ESMUS? - And I had to go to Boston College, and they were trying to find a lot of things where the kids could be much more open-ended. And they would be able to come up with ideas they would see with the school. One of the things I wanted to do was paint this wall where they made like cartoons - it was really sweet whatever it was. In the basement they literally painted this whole wall. And another thing, they made this crossword puzzle and trying to come up with these unique ideas and that was the whole front page of the national science - you know what the kids had done. I think little 4th and 5th graders. One of the things they came up with was made in school was an elevator. And I mean that was something so far out, are you kidding in those days an elevator you know. But you know here and down the road that’s you know.

BC: It’s quite common.
AS: Yeah, it’s interesting how things progress and things change. Yeah like when I was a kid they wrote the teacher had to write everything on the blackboard- everything. You know there were tests and oh my gosh they would write write write the questions and you even would have a page where they wrote down the answers And then she’d be erasing the big boards because she’d have new questions. It wasn’t like you could have you know the copy machines. Then they had mimeograph machines - have you ever heard of those?

BC: We mentioned those in class the other day, and how those were brought in-

AS: That was when I first started teaching in Burnsville and I’m like you’d have to have all this horrible ink and that’s probably caused some of my problems too who knows. This was pretty interesting.