

INTERVIEW WITH SISTER MARIE SYLVIE PARÉ, O.P.
(Formerly Lucille Paré)

Conducted by Madeleine Roy
in her home on the Old Lisbon Road in Lewiston
on
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This interview will become part of the Oral History Project housed in the archives of the Franco-American Heritage Collection Reading Room at Lewiston-Auburn College in a continuing effort to preserve some of the life stories of various Franco-Americans in Lewiston.

Roy: What is your name, and where are you from?

Sr. Sylvie: Right now, I'm known as Sister Sylvie. My baptismal name is Lucille Paré, and I'm from Lewiston, Maine.

Roy: When and where were you born?

Sr. Sylvie: I was born, I know the exact date—October 3rd, 1923. Where? I'm not sure. I know my baptismal certificate is from St. Peter's Church, so I was probably born in Lewiston, and maybe on Pine Street. But I'm not sure.

Roy: So you never lived in Auburn.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh yes. I did. I did live in Auburn, and I remember living in Auburn on uh, I don't remember the name of the street.

Roy: But that was later?

Sr. Sylvie: That was later, at Mrs. Laplante's tenement. We lived on the second floor.

Roy: But you think you were born in Lewiston?

Sr. Sylvie: My baptismal certificate is from a Lewiston church.

Roy: So at the time, you evidently were living in Lewiston—your parents were living in Lewiston. Okay. So what were the names of your parents?

Sr. Sylvie: My mother's name was Aurore Lessard and my father's name was Cyrille Paré.

Roy: Okay. Were they both of French Canadian origin?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. They were.

Roy: Had their families, or your grandparents emigrated from Canada, and if so, why do you suppose they came to the United States? Do you have any idea?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, I was told that they were born in Canada, and did immigrate to the United States, and I think it's because of economic reasons.

Roy: Uh huh. Like most of the others.

Sr. Sylvie: Most of the other Franco-Americans.

Roy: Did they have large families?

Sr. Sylvie: Oh yes. Very. Both of them had very large families.

Roy: Uh huh. Do you know how many?

Sr. Sylvie: In my mother's family, probably nine. I have to go through them. I think I know their names. And in my father's family also—eight or nine.

Roy: Uh huh. Were your parents—your mother and father both born here or in Canada? When your parents immigrated, had your parents been born in Canada or were they born after they got here?

Sr. Sylvie: Well. What I remember is that my father was probably born here and my mother born in Canada, because I know that they were teasing one another when it came time to vote. That my mother was Canadian. I'm not sure about that. It was a memory, but...

Roy: It's just that you'd have more memory, being a little older than I do. Because I don't know any of that. Do you know if either set of grandparents or any of the aunts and uncles, after they immigrated, worked in the mills as so many Canadians did, or did they do some other type of employment?

Sr. Sylvie: From what I heard Mama say, I don't think her brothers worked in mills. They worked in woods. I remember them working in the woods. I think Béb  worked as an insurance salesman—some kind of office work. My father's family, I don't know where they worked. I don't remember hearing anything about the mills.

Roy: About the mills. No. Not the mills. If they didn't work in the mills, what did they do for a living? You more or less just answered that. But the grand parents—like P p re Par —you don't know what he did?

Sr. Sylvie: I don't know what he did. And P p re Lessard either. But they must have earned a living, because they had large families. But I don't know what they did.

Roy: Right. Like the Lessards, I think we've heard that they came from a farm or something in Canada. But the Par s, we never heard that. But I've heard that the Par s were fairly well-to-do compared to the Lessards. And they never lived in tenements like the Lessards did. They owned their own home in Auburn. So they must have been a little better off there. I just wondered if you knew why he was a little bit....

Sr. Sylvie: I don't have any idea. No.

Roy: Okay. Do you know if Papa or Mama ever worked in the mills.

Sr. Sylvie: I know Mama never did. Did she? I don't think so. I don't remember. Did she work in shoe shops?

Roy: I think probably shoe shops.

Sr. Sylvie: Probably shoe shops. And I think Papa also—probably shoe shops.

Roy: So they were not mill people—like the average Canadians who came down. What did Papa do for work, besides shoe shops that you remember?

Sr. Sylvie: He was a painter. From my earliest memories, my father always was in painting. I remember the smell of paint, brushes, wallpapering around the house.

Roy: Yes. He did that. I remember that.

Sr. Sylvie: And washing his hands you know with that soap that smelled so good.

Roy: Yuh. How large a family did your parents have?

Sr. Sylvie: We were—eleven children, but nine lived. The oldest one died as a baby, and one of my sisters, Madeleine, had a twin who also died as an infant.

Roy: Okay. Where were you in the birth order?

Sr. Sylvie: I was the third—there was my oldest brother who died, then Pat, and then myself. I'm the third one.

Roy: Okay. Growing up, from the time that you remember, did you always live in Lewiston?"

Sr. Sylvie: I remember living in Auburn. And then I remember living in Lewiston—on Coburn and Bartlett.

Roy: You don't know how long you lived in Auburn, about?

Sr. Sylvie: It mustn't be very long. It was pre-school age.

Roy: I see. And after that it was always in Lewiston. How old were you started school, and which school was that?

Sr. Sylvie: I must have been around six—five and half or six—and it was St. Peter's School. We went from Coburn and down the Androscoggin hill to St. Peter's school. That I remember.

Roy: You walked?

Sr. Sylvie: We walked to school.

Roy: How long did you go to St. Peter's?

Sr. Sylvie: I think just a few years. One or two years. I remember at least one year—maybe two, but now more than two.

Roy: And after that, where did you go?

Sr. Sylvie: Both my older sister and myself were sent to Ave Maria Academy in Sabattus.

Roy: Okay. Do you remember the circumstances that brought you to Ave Maria?

Sr. Sylvie: I don't remember myself. I remember what I was told. I remember that it was because it was during the Depression era and that my father had left for the West—my father went West to find work—and my mother was left alone with my sister and myself and I think at that time, I don't know if she had the two boys, but she couldn't live by herself, either economically or otherwise, so she moved in with her older sister, and I don't think there was room for all of us. So, because she was very friendly with the nuns in Sabattus, especially one, Mère Marie de l'Annonciation, she put us there in the convent.

Roy: How long did you go to Ave Maria?

Sr. Sylvie: I myself went from that time until I graduated from High School. So it's probably eleven years.

Roy: All your school years.

Sr. Sylvie: All my school years.

Roy: Now, did you enjoy the convent life there?

Sr. Sylvie: At first, I remember crying—crying the first years. You know, being very lonely and crying, but then I adjusted, made friends. It was a very small school. It was easy to make friends, to belong. It was, yes, it was a good time for me. I remember at time, probably when I got into High School age thinking it would be fun to go to Lewiston High School. You know, to be like other girls, go to Lewiston High School, but Mama didn't agree and the nuns didn't agree.
(Laughter)

Roy: So you just did what you were told to do, more or less, huh? So you more or less enjoyed the convent life?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. I did. I did. I enjoyed the company of the other girls, I enjoyed the learning experience, I enjoyed the study. I don't have bad experiences of the nuns, although there are always some bad experiences, but you know. But it was good. It was a good experience.

Roy: The sisters that were teaching at the convent, were they from this country, or most of them from France or Belgium or....

Sr. Sylvie: There were some from France, Marguerite, Soeur Marie Marguerite. The prioresses—Mère Marie de l'Annonciation, Germaine. They were French nuns, but all the younger nuns who were in their twenties were American nuns—like Jeanne Françoise, Marie Céline, all those were younger nuns and they're still alive, and they were talking about that last night you know. They were young, and for them, they say that those were the happiest days of their religious life. I was talking to Soeur Gertrude, you know, she's at Clover Manor, and I asked all the sisters, you know, "What was the happiest moment of your religious life?" Invariably, they say "Sabattus."

Roy: Oh really?

Sr. Sylvie: Yuh. So, I think that reflected on the kids. They were young, they played with us, they, yuh. That's my experience.

Roy: Yuh. Yuh. Did you find that the sisters who came from France used discipline or ways of teaching that were different from the American nuns?

Sr. Sylvie: Oh, yes. Well now I can evaluate it better than I did then. But I think the teaching methods that they had trained mentally. It was such a wonderful mental formation for me. I realize it now. I didn't then. But personal study, personal work.

Roy: So the discipline was? Formed character.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh, oh. Character and learning methods were very different. More personal study I think than what I see now in schools.

Roy: And of course you got more individual attention I would imagine.

Sr. Sylvie: More individual attention. We were two or three or four in a classroom so we were followed very closely.

Roy: I see. That's what I was going to ask you. "How many were you in a class?"

Sr. Sylvie: I remember being a Senior—we were two. Through High School, as a Freshman we were three or four—Claire Leblanc and myself and the Shaffers girls and the Giboin girls—but never. I don't remember being over five or six in a classroom.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: In the younger grades, yes. We were probably ten or twelve, but that's still a small group.

Roy: How many students were there in all at the convent?"

Sr. Sylvie: What I remember, the first years, I think they started with twenty-nine, then, you know, they went up in the thirties, and when I was there, it was probably in the forties and fifties. But I don't think there was any room for more than in the fifties.

Roy: No, no. It was limited in what they could take. So you feel that you received a better education than you would have in a regular parochial school.

Sr. Sylvie: I do if I compare myself to other people who went either to parochial school or public school. And I don't know if it's due to the learning methods or if it's just my own personal, you know, ability. But I feel there's a great difference. And I feel—Can I go on?

Roy: Yes, yes.

Sr. Sylvie: I feel that even Mama, who only had an eighth grade education with the French nuns, knew more than, she knew things. I remember even going to France and studying in France, seeing things, and I said, "Mama knew that! Mama knew that!"

Roy: Yes, yes. Because they were exposed to that kind of culture.

Sr. Sylvie: And the way they taught about French of course, about religion, about Geography, about History, and so on.

Roy: Yuh. Because even in the collection, we have some things that come from older people—like Mrs. C Shaffers, for instance, who was brought up by the nuns also, and some of Mama's things—and to the extent of what they were learning, or even like needle work, sewing, singing, music. The arts, even ballet with one of the Dominicans, initiated plays.

Sr. Sylvie: Plays, theater, gymnastics, and now, people are so much in gymnastics. We used to do that every day. We had excercises.

Roy: I see, I see. So it was part of the curriculum more or less. Uh, did you get to go home often?

Sr. Sylvie: At first, no, but then the rules changed, and at first I think it was once a month, and then after a while the rules changed, and we were allowed to go home every week. Every weekend. Yup.

Roy: And when you couldn't go home in those years, were your parents allowed to come and visit?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes, yes. They were allowed but, I don't remember staying any weekend. And if I did, I don't remember it. And I don't remember my parents coming up to visit us there.

Roy: They had no car either.

Sr. Sylvie: They had no car, but I remember being driven home. That's what I remember. I don't know if Pat remembers staying there weekends. I don't.

Roy: And when you did go home? How did you get there, and who would bring you home and bring you back to the convent?

Sr. Sylvie: We always had to have rides. And that was hard, you know, always bumming rides with somebody else. The Faheys. I remember Dr. Fahey used to drive us, the Pinettes used to drive us, the Shaffers I don't remember that well. Or once in a while, to bring us back, we had a cousin, Bob Barcelou, and Ernest Lamontagne, you know, they would drive us back. So I remember being driven back by either those people, the Faheys, the Pinettes, and so on, who would pick us up, or Bob would drive us up. But coming down, it was always one of the parents of the children. And that was sort of—maybe humiliating is too strong a word—but you felt it. You felt that you're always dependent on somebody else.

Roy: Was there ever physical discipline that was used at the convent—I think you more or less answered that—and if not, what methods were used to discipline children?

Sr. Sylvie: I don't remember any physical disciplining—ever. If it happened to other children, it never happened to me. How did they discipline? We had a system of reward and punishment at the end of the week. Every end of the week, we had a *contrendu*, where the mother prioress came in her white dress. They took off their black aprons you know, and the *la maitresse générale là*, the principal, and the homeroom teacher. It was very solemn, and they gave us either a gold medal or a silver medal, or if, you know, for conduct, *la bande—la bande d'honneur*. (Laughter)

Roy: Ah *oui*. (Laughter)

Sr. Sylvie: So that was the way of disciplining—more by reward and to have the gold, and then you wore. You wore your gold medal, your silver medal. And I remember once having the silver medal—I always had the gold—having the silver medal, and it was really a traumatic thing for me. How will I ever explain that. That I only had the silver medal.

Roy: So you did get medals. You specifically.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh yes. I always had the gold medal. (Laughter) And then, the other things that we had, we had language points. They were like little cloth squares with a pin, and every time we didn't pronounce a word right—either in French or English—that was taken away from us. Every time we did, you know, have a language point. *Alors on attachait* a little square after the other.

Roy: Laughs. Like boy scouts or....

Sr. Sylvie: Like boy scouts. So we learned how to speak. I remember when I first went, I couldn't speak English. I couldn't pronounce the th's, you know, the vocabulary.

Roy: Because you spoke French all the time.

Sr. Sylvie: We spoke French all the time, so that helped. It was more motivation I think than punishment—for language, for conduct, *la band d'honneur*, for studies, *les médailles*.

Roy: Laughs. So you had the medals and the band, and the....

Sr. Sylvie: Physical things, I don't remember at all.

Roy: Non. Okay. Because sometimes you hear in schools, or even parochial schools, the nuns, knuckles and straps.

Sr. Sylvie: And every time I hear that, I think, Where did they go to school? And with what nuns?

Roy: Even at Holy Cross. Laughs. I never myself, but I've seen it.

Sr. Sylvie: I don't know if it's because it was French or Dominican.

Roy: Or being a smaller school with fewer students, they could deal with you with psychology maybe or with, like you say, reward and that type of thing.

Sr. Sylvie: It was more motivations, *oui*. I remember one girl who bit her nails. And to cure her of that, they put some bitter stuff on her fingertips. That's the extent of the physical thing. But that girl, her mother, her step-mother used to burn her fingers, but that wasn't the nuns.

Roy: Yes. I see. 'Cause she's written articles. You never would have thought. So apparently, you and your sister Pat ran away from the convent once.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh yes!

Roy: Do you remember that episode and can you tell me what you remember about it—how you remember it.

Sr. Sylvie: I remember it very vividly. It was in mid-morning. There was always a break—what we called *une récréation*—a ten, fifteen minute break, where we got out of the classrooms, went outside. It was a beautiful location. Went outside, played, and when the bell rang, we all lined up in the basement and then were called to our respective classrooms. Pat had told me during recess, "Don't go up to your classroom when they call your classroom. Stay down here, and then we're running away. (Laughter) I was much smaller than she was. You can see can that from the

photos. (More laughter) So I did what she told me. And in the basement, there were *des crochets*—you know hooks—all around the basement where we had our berets and sweaters and so on. So after everybody went up, we stayed down there. We took our—whatever we had to take—and we went out by the basement door in Sabattus. Instead of going by the road, we went by the woods behind the convent (Laughter)—there were little paths there—until we reached Sabattus Road. But there was a sister in one of the dormitories on the third floor, and we had blue pinafores—little blue pinafores. She was up there for some reason, and through the window, she saw two little blue things running off in the woods. So she alerted some people. So we were on Sabattus Road, encouraging one another. At that time, Mama was at Taylor Pond.

Roy: Oh, at camp.

Sr. Sylvie: At camp at Taylor Pond. So we were encouraging one another. “Won’t Mama be happy to see us. (Laughter) She’s going to say, “*Bon, bien les v’la les p’tites!*” you know.

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: And we were running. All at once, we see a horse-drawn cart—les Beaulés—because those were the farmers who took care of the grounds. *Il y a monsieur Beaulé* and his two sons. So we saw them coming, so we hid in a gully—a culvert next to the road—but they had seen us.

Roy: Oh dear.

Sr. Sylvie: So they stopped, they grabbed us, I think monsieur Beaulé grabbed one, the boy—Alfred or Léo, I don’t remember which one—grabbed me and put us in the car and brought us back.

Roy: Laughs. Oh dear!

Sr. Sylvie: That was terrible. You know, kicking, and.... So we drove up, if you know the Sabattus house, and the prioress, Mère Marie Germaine at that time, and the principal, Marie de Nazareth, were standing on the front steps in their white habits—they had taken off their black apron—and for us, not having the black apron meant a solemn moment.

Roy: Laughs. It was a signal. Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: They were waiting for us there. Oh.

Roy: Laughs. Oh dear.

Sr. Sylvie: And you know, making us feel how serious that was. So for our punishment, for one week, we were to be isolated from all the others—not to set a bad example because we were the bad apples.

Roy: Laughs. You were contagious.

Sr. Sylvie: We were contagious. And we weren’t even together. They had a third floor dormitory and a floor second floor dormitory. They put me on the third floor, and they put Pat on the second floor. There was a staircase in between. And I think the greatest humiliation for me was that we couldn’t even use the toilet. We had to use the pot. And I hadn’t done that since I was six months old according to Mama. So that was terrible.

Roy: Oh, I see.

Sr. Sylvie: So when we knew that all the nuns were in chapel, I used to come out at the top of the staircase, she used to come out at the bottom, and we used to communicate.

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: And I remember there, they used to bring us our food, and I remember there eating what we called *une pomme de terre en robe de chambre*. You know, baked potato—and loving it, and loving it.

Roy: Oh, I see. Did you go to school, to classes during that time?

Sr. Sylvie: No. No. So you talk about physical punishment, it was the pot and staying up there.

Roy: The pot and staying up there.

Sr. Sylvie: I don't know if Pat has the same memories, but to me that's what stays with me. Oh I remember that so vividly. And I don't know if I remember it because it's stuck in my memory or because I related it so often.

Roy: Oh I see. Yes, yes, yes. If you say it...

Sr. Sylvie: Sometimes, you know, if you say it,.... Oh, poor Pat.

Roy: Oh boy! So did this ever happen again? Or did other pupils ever run away?

Sr. Sylvie: I don't remember that anybody ever did.

Roy: And you two never attempted it again.

Sr. Sylvie: No.

Roy: What was the reaction of Mama and Papa?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, they called Mama, Mama came, you know, I don't think Papa came. I think Papa was still out West at that time—so just Mama. I remember, they called Mama, she came, and they wanted to expulse us.

Roy: Oh really.

Sr. Sylvie: But Mama came, and you know her, she talked them into keeping us, and that it would never happen again. I don't remember Mama scolding us. I don't remember her being angry, or, you know. I don't remember if she did or not. But I remember that the result was that we stayed.

Roy: I see. At the convent.

Sr. Sylvie: At the convent. She must have told us something, but I don't remember.

Roy: You probably didn't see her right away either. Because if she couldn't come up, and you weren't going home, and that type of thing. And she probably figured the nuns were dealing with it. Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: Probably.

Roy: So when did you graduate from Ave Maria?

Sr. Sylvie: I graduated in 1941. From grammar school in '37, and four years later, '41, from High School.

Roy: And did you have a—like Pat said she did four years of High School in two—was it the same thing with you, or did you have four years of High School.

Sr. Sylvie: No. I had four years.

Roy: They had changed it?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. I had four years. They abridged it for her. Yup. I remember she only had two years and then she came home.

Roy: Now was that done specifically for her?

Sr. Sylvie: I don't know. I don't remember anybody else doing it in two years. Maybe she remembers.

Roy: She said, "They did it for me." Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: No, they did it for her. They did it for her. But even Pat, even though she has just two years of High School,....

Roy: She had the equivalent of four.

Sr. Sylvie: ... knows probably more than High School graduates today.

Roy: Well that's what she was saying, that she definitely got four years in two because you could get such individual attention, and you had no choice but to pay attention.

Sr. Sylvie: No.

Roy: Okay. So you graduated from Ave Maria. What did you do as your first job after graduation. What did you do for work?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, I babysat, but those were just little jobs. But very quickly, I think I went to Maine Baking Company. They were asking for help there. I went to Maine Baking Company in the doughnut department.

Roy: Oh? That's where you started?

Sr. Sylvie: I started in the doughnut department with Bernadette Morin and Thérèse Fortier. That's where I met my really close friend—Thérèse Fortier. And Bernadette was much wealthier

than we were. And we remember so many things about that. You know, the doughnuts coming through the belts, and we had to hurry to put them in boxes and load them and so on, and for our breaks, eating on flour sacks, and Theresa and I just having balogna sandwiches, and Bernadette, chicken.

Roy: Laughs. Oh yes. And probably cut very appropriately. Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: But we laughed, laughed, laughed. You know, I was young and funny then, I think.

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: That's what Teresa remembers. And I remember at Christmas time, she had given me her photo, you know. And I remember her mother telling me, "*Thérèse est assez contente. Elle dit, 'Ah, j'ai rencontrer une p'tite fille là. Elle est assez drôle.'*"

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: So our friendship developed from there.

Roy: And it stayed all through these years. Yup. So that your first job? And from there?

Sr. Sylvie: And from there, from the doughnut department on the second floor, we went down to the packing room on the ground floor.

Roy: Both you and Theresa?

Sr. Sylvie: No. Theresa at that time had had a job at John Hancock. So she left, went to John Hancock, and I went down, and there, *encore* Bernadette Morin, ... Parent, *les Parents là*, you know, *Éveline Parent et puis tout ça là*, you know. Yuh. So there, we packed. We packed boxes. That lasted for, I don't know, a year or sometime. And then I was promoted to the office.

Roy: To the office. Now did you stay there until you left for the convent, or,....

Sr. Sylvie: No, no. At one point, I left to go to, I think Mary's Candy Shop. I don't know what came first, Mary's Candy Shop or the Gas Company. I think I left for convent from the Gas Company. Or Trober's also. Trober's Fur Shop.

Roy: Yup, yup.

Sr. Sylvie: But I was fired from Trober's Fur Shop. (Laughter)

Roy: Why?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, becauseThérèse Marcotte. It was, you know, we had a disk, and uh, I think I couldn't abide by certain rules. I was bored. *Oui*. It wasn't my type of work at all.

Roy: Was that office work or in the store?

Sr. Sylvie: It was office work. Office work. I found it boring, I found it, and I think I always went down into the store. I don't know what I did, but anyways, I know that they fired me. I didn't choose to leave.

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: And then I think I went to Mary's Candy Shop, and there it was the same thing. I was a sales girl at Mary's Candy Shop, and to me, every sale I had, I marked down, one, two, three, four, five, and then the owner noticed that I was keeping tabs—you know, "You're not supposed to do that." I always want to.... So I quit on my own, because there was an opening at the Gas Company. So there, I did office work, and there I stayed until I entered the convent.

Roy: I see. I didn't remember that.

Sr. Sylvie: So I did all those jobs. But I wasn't very good at jobs.

Roy: Laughs. Why was that, do you think?

Sr. Sylvie: Probably my temperament. Probably not enough creativity.

Roy: It was boring to you, or...?

Sr. Sylvie: You know, not enough stimulation. Yuh.

Roy: So you did it because you had to.

Sr. Sylvie: I had to. I had to earn a salary. Yuh.

Roy: What was your social life like then? From your graduation 'til the time you left?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, you know, of course, I was very friendly with Theresa, so social life was a lot with Theresa and you know, Bernadette, and you know, a group of girl friends, and eventually, boy friends came into the picture. I remember—social life at that time, we didn't have that much. I remember going bowling once in a while and going to the movies—that was the big social event—going to the movies a lot, a lot. Dances, once in a while.

Roy: When you did, where did you go dancing?

Sr. Sylvie: At the er?

Roy: The *Club Musical*?

Sr. Sylvie: Well I did go to a ball at the *Club Musical*. The arena—not the arena, what's that called?

Roy: The armory.

Sr. Sylvie: The armory. They had dances there, sometimes at City Hall. Okay. So, a lot of memories there.

Roy: Were you active in community or parochial organizations?

Sr. Sylvie: Community? I tried once with a group. It was during the war, in '41, it was the beginning of the war for the United States, so '41 to '45? The end of the war?

Roy: Yup.

Sr. Sylvie: So, you know, that marked, that's why, that marked our dating years very much. We corresponded. And dances were with GI's. I remember on Lisbon Street also, there was like a Chinese place, almost on the corner of Main and Lisbon, upstairs, I remember going there with sailors, you know, dancing with sailors, going to the pier in Old Orchard and dancing on the pier. Oh, that was marvelous! I remember waltzing.

Roy: And the bands were wonderful at Old Orchard.

Sr. Sylvie: Okay. That's social life. But community life, I remember going to, next to the library, USO? Is that what those clubs were called, for GI's? I remember going there to entertain GI's. But that's the only community things that I did. Parochial, I belonged to the choir. That's about all the parish activities. *Les Enfants de Marie*, I remember going, once or twice, but I didn't relate that well.

Roy: I see. So it was mainly the choir?

Sr. Sylvie: It was mainly the choir.

Roy: Okay. So when did you decide to join the convent? How old were you, and....

Sr. Sylvie: I was twenty-six, and the decision, you know, it was, it's a funny thing. It's not a one-time thing. It's something that, you know, from all my social, I knew that it wasn't quite satisfying. That wasn't it. That wasn't it. And, you know, what do I do? What do I do? What would fulfill my life? And then the prioress-general, *Mère Catherine Dominique*, came from France, and had asked to see me. I think the sisters sort of had an eye on me, and I had an interview with her, and she was very persuasive.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: And, you know, you'll come to France, you'll come to Europe, and I thought, okay, if I do join a religious community, I wanted it to be something exotic, you know, go to Japan, be a missionary, but not just be a nun—not an ordinary nun.

Roy: St. Peter's, or....? (Laughter)

Sr. Sylvie: But to go to Europe and study and so on. So I accepted. I accepted, and I went with her. That was the deciding factor. Her coming and her talking to me personally was the deciding factor. But it was traumatic. It was very very difficult.

Roy: To decide.

Sr. Sylvie: It was difficult—not to decide—but to leave. To leave Theresa was very hard. She had broken up with her boyfriend at that time, and she made me feel that I was really,....

Roy: Abandoning her.

Sr. Sylvie: And feeling her hurt, you know, I felt so hurt. And leaving the family, you know. André was just seven or eight, and Louise, and leaving the whole family. You kids were....

Roy: I was a teenager, I remember.

Sr. Sylvie: I think you were in High School at that time. So it was very hard to leave. It was hard.

Roy: Had you considered joining other orders, or was it just the Dominicans because of your background?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. I remember going to see the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Auburn and talking to them, but somehow, nothing developed. It wasn't home.

Roy: They weren't exotic enough?

Sr. Sylvie: They weren't exotic enough. It wasn't home.

Roy: It wasn't familiar to you.

Sr. Sylvie: It wasn't home. No. They didn't know me, and I had to explain a lot of things, whereas with the Dominicans, they knew me ever since I was a child, and it was home.

Roy: Yes, yes, yes. Okay. What was your parents' reaction to your entering the convent.

Sr. Sylvie: Of course, Mama was very happy. She had been telling me all along, "*Tu seras jamais heureuse,*" you know, "You'll never be happy with that sort of life." Papa, did not manifest. I see him sitting near the radio in the living room and I could just *feel* him.

Roy: Where did you go after you joined the convent?

Sr. Sylvie: Well, I flew to France, and see, that was, she, *Mère Catherine* had told me that she wanted an international novitiate in France, so people from all over the world would have a common novitiate in France. So people from Japan, from Mexico, and from Sweden, from Belgium, from France and so on would congregate there. So we all went to France to Mortefontaine, and I sailed, I didn't fly. I sailed.

Roy: Oh, really?

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. I sailed on *L'Île de France* with another nun, *Soeur Jean-Baptiste*, so that was an experience, we crossed the ocean....

Roy: Were you sick.

Sr. Sylvie: Yes. I was, I did feel sick. I don't think it was sick through ocean movement as it was the mayonnaise.

Roy: Laughs. On the ship?

Sr. Sylvie: We'd go to big dining rooms for supper. It was a nice, nice experience.

Roy: I see. How long did it take?

Sr. Sylvie: It took about from eight to ten days.

Roy: Really? Oh! It is a nice experience.

Sr. Sylvie: And we landed in *Havre*, and then in *Havre*, we took the train to Paris, and from Paris, they drove us to Mortefontaine.

Roy: I see, I see. And how long were you in Mortefontaine?

Sr. Sylvie: I was in Mortefontaine, first, for five years, then they assigned me to Nantes, where I stayed for two years, and then I came back to Mortefontaine for two years. So altogether in France, nine years.

Roy: And you enjoyed your stay in France?

Sr. Sylvie: Oh, I enjoyed it. Yes. At first, it was very hard, and there also, just like going to Sabattus when I first went. I cried every night, and I wasn't staying, I looked outside, and where could I go? It was way out in the country, and how far could I walk by myself before finding road. It was very primitive. It was right after the war. So we lived in the top of a stable for a while, with partitions. Physically, it was very hard. You know, the food, I had a hard time adapting to the food. It was so different from American food. They had *les gros bolles de café au lait là*, in the morning, and big chunks of bread and cheese and butter. (Laughter) Now I love it. And then the superiors would look at me and know that I had a hard time chewing. But I always had. At swallowing. And they asked me, "Well what do you eat at home?" I told them, "Well, we have eggs, bacon," They didn't know what bacon was—*J'ai dit, "C'est une espèce de viande."* So the next morning, I had a big piece of cold liver in my plate. (Laughter) So the food was very hard.

But then the contact with those sisters, with the nuns, was terrific—nuns who had gone through the war, who had lived in fields, who had eaten rutabagas, you know, in fields, slept in barns. They were girls who had gone to the Sorbonne. Intellectually, it was such a challenge.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: Soeur Marie d'Aquin. All those girls were. I discovered people who were so intellectually above me—and to me it was a challenge.

Roy: It was a challenge that you needed.

Sr. Sylvie: I needed and wanted and appreciated. And I remember, still today, other sisters talk about, "*Ah bien. Les Françaises,*" you know. It's too bad they felt that way. To me, I didn't feel, they lorded over me. I felt, Oh, what an advantage for me.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: Their conversations and what they talked about, and the books that they read, and then because I was American, they made it a point to send me to Paris, because I guess they realized.... (End of first side of tape)

Second side of tape:

Sr. Sylvie:girls to Paris because it was a boarding school there also, but there also the boarding school—I'm going from one topic to another—was the aristocracy, the French aristocracy. So princesses and duchesses, and, and to me, it was an exposure, from little Lewiston, Maine, that I never had. So there also, I never thought that they were looking down on me. I just thought, What an opportunity.

Roy: I see. Yes. Yup, yup.

Sr. Sylvie: To learn and an exposure to another world. So every time—and those girls had to have field trips, mostly around Paris or surroundings—so they made it a point, and I think that was very nice of them, to send me along—either to chaperone the girls or with another sister. So I got to know Paris so well. I got to know Rambouillet. I got to know, you know, *les châteaux là*, all around Paris, Versailles, and of course I know I was very spoiled and very lucky and everybody did not have that experience. Like, Bibiane did not have that experience. To her, it wasn't a good experience. Why did I have that good experience? I don't know.

Roy: Right, right, right.

Sr. Sylvie: But it was given to me, and I appreciated it, and then, all the way down to the southern part of France, I took groups all over France. It was wonderful. And of course I taught. I taught English to French girls. That was another experience. Oh boy! Discipline.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: They weren't the little docile Lewiston girls, believe me. Uh!

Roy: They had characters of their own? minds of their own?

Sr. Sylvie: And then they made me study. Then they realized, first l'Alliance Française, and through, you know, what I did in l'Alliance Française, they said, "Well we're going to push her a little harder." And then you're going to try for the French baccalaureate.

Roy: I see.

Sr. Sylvie: Which was a challenge. So then I attended classes, because we were preparing girls for the French baccalaureate in our school in Mortefontaine, so I attended, you know, all my classes, made my homework, so then I was relieved from teaching chores and things like that to study—and that, I loved. Like you probably understand what it means.

Roy: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yup.

Sr. Sylvie: I don't think I was smarter than anybody else, but I enjoyed it!

Roy: And you had a chance.

Sr. Sylvie: I had a chance. It was given to me.

Roy: Yup, yup, yup.

Sr. Sylvie: Then I passed the baccalaureate, and it's very hard in France to pass the baccalaureate. It's a national exam. It's not your teacher who tests you and gives you a grade. The questions, the exam comes from the national office, and then the students are grouped—they're called, they're summoned to a different lycée, a different school in Paris where envelopes are opened and everybody has the same exam. They come from all the schools—from everywhere. And in our class *de philosophie*, we were seven, we were only two of us that passed it—a French girl and myself, an American. But it was English, Spanish, French, Math, Philosophy, what else—written exams. And if you passed the written exams, then you're called for an oral interview—an oral test. Aahh!

Roy: That was even more trying probably.

Sr. Sylvie: That was more trying, so the one who questions you has your *carnet*, you know, where you.... So they saw that on my English.... They grade on twenty in France. So they never give twenty, but *dixhuit* or twenty or *seize*, and the passing grade is ten. If you're below ten, you're in trouble. So in English I had eighteen, in Spanish I had eighteen, in French, I had probably sixteen. In French, it's a *dissertation*. They give you a topic and you have to develop it.

Roy: Yes. Uh huh.

Sr. Sylvie: So that, also, I think it's also heredity. I know I inherited that facility with words.

Roy: Yup, yup.

Sr. Sylvie: And of course, then also my studies and my reading—so it was very good. So I was called for the oral exam, but in the oral exam, they had math....

Roy: Oh, you're not good in math either?

Sr. Sylvie: I took a commercial course in Sabattus, and when I studying in multiple ten for preparation for that math, I had been sick all summer. I had some kind of an intestinal occlusion, and you know, with high fever and sick, and I really couldn't prepare well for it. So math was terrible. So she gave me a thing on the board, and I couldn't.... *J'en avais les yeux croches*.

Roy: Laughs. Staring at you?

Sr. Sylvie: Staring at me. *Bon bien, allez-y. Aidez-moi un peu*. So that was terrible. But I think my other notes were so good that they passed me.

Roy: They passed you anyway.

Sr. Sylvie: So that's a story among the sisters. When I came back, and I told the sisters what had happened. So even now, they ask me, "*Sylvie, raconte ton histoire de baccalauréat*." Ha, ha!

Roy: Laughs. So that's how you got the degree.

Sr. Sylvie: I got the degree. So I have my French *baccalauréat* from the University of Paris.

Roy: So that was your first degree.

Sr. Sylvie: My first diploma, my first degree.

Roy: I know that you did many other things, went to many other places after France, so could you share with me sort of chronologically where your life as a Dominican nun has taken you, and the opportunities that it's afforded you, and how it's brought you to where you are today. That's a long question, but after France.

Sr. Sylvie: Nine years in France, after France, at first, I was assigned to Macon in the eastern part of France, but for some reason, we weren't told why, they changed that and they sent me back to the United States. So they sent me back as sub-prioress to Lewiston. I was sub-prioress under Marie Félicien. *Ça c'était un dépaysement!*

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh, God! Oh that mentality! Going from that. And we were on Bates Street, you know the convent, and in France, I went out by myself. You know, Mère Henri Marie would give me money and say, "*Bon, là vous allez à Paris pour des études ou des emplettes. Bon, puis voilà de l'argent. Arrêtez dans un puit café pour prendre un café*" all by myself. Here in Lewiston, I needed something, I couldn't cross the park to go to the store without a companion. It was stifling! (Laughter) And then I heard, when I hear, you know, the French nuns were so strict and *fermée, puis nous les Américaines on est libre. Liberty!* That's not my experience at all. So, I was sub-prioress there for one year, teaching at St. Dom's—French and religion—and that was also a *dépaysement*, you know, an adjustment.

Roy: Compared to the type of student you had?

Sr. Sylvie: The type of students. And I remember, you know, many things that I wanted to say, I started, "Well, everybody knows," or "As you know," and after a while, they'd say, "Sister, we don't know."

Roy: Oh, I see.

Sr. Sylvie: As you know.

Roy: Yes, yes, yes.

Sr. Sylvie: So I had to adapt. That was very hard. And I think the students had a hard time with me also.

Roy: You had to change your teaching methods? Your teaching style?

Sr. Sylvie: My teaching methods. A lot. But I don't think I did that much—because I'm so convinced. So that lasted, then I was sub-prioress for one year, and then they sent me to Fordham University to get my American degrees, because with my French degrees, I couldn't teach in the United States. I wasn't approved. (Laughter)

Roy: Oh my. Even if it was way above intellectually.

Sr. Sylvie: Way above. There, to have American degrees. So there, I studied at Fordham, and at the same time, I was teaching, you know, a group—a group. Avec Mère Marie Cécile, okay. Et puis Monsieur, Monsieur..... But just French conversation. It wasn't really deep, deep teaching. And then, from Fordham, we led a group to France—French students to France. So that was

very, very enjoyable—very nice. But then I came back, and when I came back, I was named prioress in Lewiston. So, for six years, I was prioress in Lewiston, and to me, it was a good experience. I really....

Roy: I see. As prioress.

Sr. Sylvie: As prioress, it was a good experience. I don't know if it was, you know, you'd have to ask the sisters if it was a good experience for them, but for me, it was a very good experience. I liked it. It lasted six years. Then after six years,....

Roy: Can I ask what made it a good experience? Was it because you were prioress and you could sort of change some things? Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: I changed different things, I could share a lot, you know, make conferences, study, I organized a study room, make conferences, yes, yes. That was good. There were a lot of sick sisters and older sisters, but on the whole it was good. And I'm sure for some, it wasn't, but, for me,

Roy: For you it was a good experience.

Sr. Sylvie: Because I was in charge.

Roy: Yes, yes. And you could change, that's it. In charge of changing.

Sr. Sylvie: Whereas at Trober's and at Mary's Candy Shop, I wasn't in charge.

Roy: Laughs.

Sr. Sylvie: I'm not a good second hand. So after six years, I was assigned s prioress in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Roy: Uh huh.

Sr. Sylvie: Because, and then, they told me that I'd be there and that I'd have my masters from Boston University. So, while I was prioress in Brookline, I went to Boston University. It was walking distance from our convent in Brookline to Boston University. So there, you know, I had my degree.

Roy: Was that a good experience, Boston University?

Sr. Sylvie: Er, it was, I can't say it was a terrific experience, but it was a good experience. It was a continuing experience. Okay. It was okay. Convent experience wasn't that good. Because at that time, they had named a provincial, so I was prioress of the house but it was Soeur Agnès who was provincial who had come directly from Japan after thirty-three years, so it was very difficult. So my name in the convent was *la Mère Sylvie*. (Laughter) *Qu'est-ce qui veut suivre la Mère Sylvie?*

Roy: Laughs. Oh! And her bright ideas. Laughs. Oh dear!

Sr. Sylvie: It was difficult. It was a difficult year for me. Convent life was very difficult.

Roy: That was one year.

Sr. Sylvie: Two years—in Brookline. Very difficult for me, but at the same time, the University. Then after two years, they had a foundation in Arizona, and there I was sent to Arizona with the sisters. So we drove cross-country, so there was Nicknair, Louise Leblanc, Renée Turcotte, myself, Timothy, there was a sixth one.

Roy: Not Bibiane?

Sr. Sylvie: Bibiane. *Oui*. Bibiane. Okay. So there, we went first in a parish, and I wasn't quite finished my masters degree at Boston University, but they told me to try to transfer it to a university in Phoenix. But at that time, ASU, the University in ASU, did not have a French program—or advanced French program. So I had to go to Tucson. So while being prioress in Phoenix,....

Roy: So you were prioress in Phoenix.

Sr. Sylvie: Oh, I was prioress, *oui*. I was prioress, but absent from the community a lot, because I had to commute to Tucson. And there, they had an advanced French program, I got into their French program, and after a while, I had a grant for a doctorate, so I wrote to the general and I asked her could I continue towards the doctoral degree? And she said yes, so then, what happened? I had to be full time to have the NDEA—the National Endowment for the Arts, NDEA. It was a foundation thing. I had to be resident. So that's when I had to be full time in Tucson, so they sent sisters with me. That's when Bibiane came with me. She was part of the group, but she came with me, and I think Timothy also, but I think Timothy did not find work, so Thérèse Couture asked her to come to St. Dom's, so Thérèse Couture—er, not Térése—Timothy left to come to St. Dom's, and that's how Bibiane and I were left by ourselves.

Roy: Oh, I see.

Sr. Sylvie: And settled in Tucson. So at the University in Tucson, I did have my doctorate degree, but there I met Dominican Fathers at the Newman Center, and Gerry Melizia(?) was head of the, director of the Newman Center, became the vicar for education for the diocese of Tucson. So he said, "Sylvie, what are you doing after your doctorate?" I said, "I don't know, I have to apply." So I had applied at different Universities. I had been accepted at Harvard, but it was between myself and a younger man. Of course they took the younger man.

Roy: Yes, yes, in those days, yes.

Sr. Sylvie: And I understand that. I understand that. So I was left without a job, so I said, "For the time being,...." He said, "Well, don't say yes to anything I speak to you." So he came over and he says, er "Bishop Green want to start an adult religious education program in the diocese of Tucson. Why don't you head it?" I says, "Well, that's not my preparation. My doctorate is in French Literary Criticism. I do know Theology, and...." He says, "I know your theological output, I know what you can do, why don't you try it?"

Roy: Right.

Sr. Sylvie: So, okay. So I did, I started an adult religious education program in the diocese of Tucson, and Bibiane taught in school—St. Peter's School, Saint Peter and Paul—we were together there. And after several years, Bishop Green came in my office and he said, "I would

like you to focus on Scripture.” Because of an experience that he had had. He was on the plane, coming back from Washington, and this young man, you know, was sitting with him, and told him that Catholics weren’t doing anything for Scripture, and so on, so the bishop took a resolution, We’re going to do something in my diocese. So I was very happy. Because Scripture is sort of Literature, and I didn’t have the administration and board meetings of a doctorate of Education, so I started teaching Scripture full time throughout the diocese of Tucson. From the Mexican border to the northern towns. Everywhere. And the traveling—I enjoyed the traveling at sunrise, at sunset.

Roy: On your own.

Sr. Sylvie: On my own. And I enjoyed meeting with the groups, and there I could apply my teaching methods, and all the groups were surprised. My teaching method was probably not better, but it was different—it was different. Like one evaluation was, “At last came Sylvie.” Oh no. “And then came Sylvie.” It’s different from American teaching.

Roy: Yes, yes, yes. So that was well-received.

Sr. Sylvie: It was very well-received. So I did that in the diocese of Tucson for almost fifteen years. You know, and very, very well. I did organize sessions, weekends, spirituality weekends, myself did a lot of teaching. It was a very good experience. We loved it. And after a while, Bibiane was asked, they opened the library at Regina Cleary, which was the ex-seminary, and she was asked to be the head of it. So she came up, had a training in library, but she was very fortunate to have a young man who had a library degree from Brown University in Rhode Island. So with him, she learned a lot about library, really did a wonderful job at Regina Cleary, and then, they changed—we had a wonderful boss, Father Calahan(?), he was Irish—but then he left and another priest came, Gary Reebine came from California. He eliminated the education department. Well, we hated him.

Roy: Laughs. Oh dear.

Sr. Sylvie: No. He fired the two priests we were working with—who were STD’s, Trinitarians, Father Ryan and Father Dill, who were *wonderful* priests, the best priests you could ever find—he fired them. When I learned he had fired those priests, I was so angry with him. And then, he said, “Well, Sylvie, now you’re all alone.” And he wanted to close the library—that would eliminate Bibiane. I said, “Gary, if you’re eliminating those two priests and Bibiane, I’m quitting.”

Roy: I see, I see.

Sr. Sylvie: And at that time, that very same time, and of course, that’s know in Church circles—what Gary had done at Regina Cleary. So I had a call from Phoenix from the director of Keno Institute. Father Fred Tiltson. He said, “I heard what was happening.” He said, “Here at Keno, I need someone to teach Scripture, and I need a librarian. Could you and Bibiane come?” So I called my provincial and said, “This is what’s happening.” So, so we came.

Roy: So they allowed you to come.

Sr. Sylvie: And then we formed community. Timothy was there already, so, so, that’s it. And we’ve been in Phoenix ever since. I was at Keno for two years, but there also, I branched out on

my own. (Laughter) And gave my notice and said, “I will contract directly with different parishes.”

Roy: Oh. I see.

Sr. Sylvie: So I was in Keno for two years, but then I contracted directly with different parishes.

Roy: Laughs. *Tarvisse*. Laughs. *Mama dirait bien....* (Laughter)

Sr. Sylvie: And I’ve been doing it ever since. And there also, in different parishes, you know. It’s been a *wonderful, wonderful* experience, and I’m still doing it much less, but I’m still doing it.

Roy: At your own pace.

Sr. Sylvie: At my own pace, and what I want to do, and without administration, without meetings, without board meetings, without having to go through all that. So I’m doing it now.

Roy: So that’s where you’re at.

Sr. Sylvie: That’s where I’m at now. And No! It’s not where I’m at. Now I have a web page.

Roy: That’s right.

Sr. Sylvie: We have a web page. Because I’m teaching less, and Bibiane is very much into computers, you know, she’s head of the resource center at Keno and computerized the whole system so she’s very much in that. She’s been after me, Why don’t you do something, and we can do a web page—so we did. So I do the commentary, and she illustrates it with her photography. So we’ve been doing that now for the past year. It’s a lot of work. I don’t enjoy it as much as meeting with groups, because you’re alone, you know, at your living room table, writing a text that has to be perfect.

Roy: So instead of preaching it or teaching it, you’re writing it.

Sr. Sylvie: I’m writing it. And I’m a better teacher than a writer.

Roy: Because it’s very different.

Sr. Sylvie: It’s very different. And I think teaching is my charism. It really is. It really is. I say so, because that’s been reflected to me all the time. The feedback is always, “She’s such a good teacher.” And I know I am. So, we had to evaluate, and there’s so many things being done on the web—especially Scripture commentaries, that we have to evaluate if we want to continue that or do something else.

Roy: Oh, I see.

Sr. Sylvie: I don’t know if it’s that necessary. It’s time consuming. Every week, you know, we have a different text.

Roy: I see, I see. And if you prefer....

Sr. Sylvie: I prefer oral teaching, but I don't know how long I'll be able to do oral teaching.

Roy: Yes. Because it means traveling.

Sr. Sylvie: Because of the driving, the driving. Yup. Okay. I think that's says it.

Roy: That's it!. Okay!

Sr. Sylvie: I didn't plan to say that much.

Roy: No. That's fine. Laughs. I learned a lot of things that I didn't know about you.

I