

Interview of Brother Edward Sheehy, FSC.
By Lauren De Angelis
La Salle University
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0:00:48

De Angelis: This is Lauren De Angelis. Today is Wednesday, March 7, 2012. I'm interviewing for the first time Brother Edward Sheehy at 12 P.M. We are currently at La Salle University in Philadelphia. The interview is being conducted in his office in Olney Hall on the third floor in the History Department. This interview is sponsored by La Salle University for the 650 Oral History class. May I ask permission to interview you today, Brother Ed?

Sheehy: Yes, you may.

De Angelis: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

Sheehy: May 6, 1946 in Brooklyn, New York.

De Angelis: How many years did you live in Brooklyn?

Sheehy: We were there only a brief period of time.

De Angelis: And who were your parents?

Sheehy: Edward Joseph and Rosemary Sheehy.

De Angelis: Were there any major moves that you made as a young child with your family? You said you moved a few months after being born.

Sheehy: Yes. We moved around a lot because of my dad's post as a naval officer. He had graduated from the Academy in 1945.¹ And what happened was is that he actually didn't see me for six months. He was in the Pacific onboard the USS Iowa.² And I can remember moving several times to New Jersey. He flew blimps out of Lakehurst.³ We moved—we lived in Florida when he flew out of a—lived in Georgia when he flew out of Glencoe and so we went to St.

¹ United States Naval Academe, 121 Blake Road, Annapolis Maryland, 21402. The institution's mission is to: "To develop Midshipmen morally, mentally, and physically and to imbue them with the highest ideals of duty, honor, and loyalty in order to graduate leaders who are dedicated to a career of naval service and have potential for future development in mind and character to assume the highest responsibilities of command, citizenship and government."

² A WWII era ship that was nicknamed "The Big Stick" of the Navy because of its speed, armour and 16 inch guns.

³ Lakehurst Naval Air Station in New Jersey. Now known as McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

Simon's Island. Monterey, California I can remember. That's my first memory of school. I was in kindergarten at the time. And then he went to [0:02:31][inaudible] Massachusetts where he went to MIT for a while.⁴ And Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where the Navy sent him in order to get masters in chemical engineering. Newport, Rhode Island, Alexandria, Virginia, Cumberland, Maryland and then I joined the Brothers.

2:48

De Angelis: Well that's quite a—quite a list.

Sheehy: And that's probably only a partial list.

De Angelis: You said that you remember moving around. Were you content with moving around so much?

Sheehy: I thought everybody did it. I mean my life was such that—was very much within the Navy community. So I presumed and assumed that everybody did the same thing, moving roughly every two years.

De Angelis: So were you—do you consider yourself the quintessential Navy brat?

Sheehy: Maybe not quintessential, but certainly a Navy brat absolutely, and proud of it!

De Angelis: I was going to ask you if you were proud of it. Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your parents since they are the main reason why you moved around so much and basically raised you. When was your father born and where?

Sheehy: That's a very good question because that was one of our big secrets in the family, okay. He was born in 1923. He was born on August 6, 1923 in New York. And my mom was born on May 31, 1925 also in New York. It may have been Brooklyn for both of them, but it was in the New York City area.

De Angelis: And why is that a big family secret?

Sheehy: That's a very good question. I don't know. But how much money my dad made and when they were born and how old they were seemed to be kind of running secret or running joke within the family.

De Angelis: Interesting. And can you describe a little about his character?

⁴ Massachusetts Institute of Technology located on 77 Massachusetts Avenue, MA 02139.

Sheehy: Well, he had gone to a Christian Brothers high school. He went to Bishop Loughlin High School in New York and then spent a year at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute before going to the Naval Academy.⁵ He was—his first career was as a naval officer. Certainly a very conscientious man, very honest man, a person who always emphasized being truthful and also obviously a very patriotic individual who put family, faith, and country first in his life.

5:08

De Angelis: And you talked a little bit about his educational background. Can you go a little more in depth about that?

Sheehy: Well Bishop Loughlin, at the time, was one, and still is one, of the elite high schools in New York. They only took two students from each high school.⁶ It's an all male school. And he went there and did well. He also played basketball there. Then he wanted to attend the Naval Academy, but instead decided to go to RPI for one year, which is Troy, New York which is a very strong engineering school. And then went to the Naval Academy and, because of the war, graduated in three years.⁷ They had to go on Saturdays and go during the summer. And out of eleven hundred students, he finished sixth in his class. He has a masters in chemical engineering from Lehigh University.

De Angelis: Did he always want to be a naval officer?

Sheehy: I'm not always sure about that. There was some discussion about he actually wanted to be Brother at one point but his parents, my grandparents, counseled him against it, and at that point I think he then turned to the Navy. I don't know what other options he might be interested in, but it was the perfect career for him. He was the classic naval officer and extremely successful in a variety of responsibilities during the Cold War.

De Angelis: Do you know why they advised against him becoming a Christian Brother?

Sheehy: No, I don't. I don't have any idea. He and his sister were the two in the family, the two children, but I don't know what the rationale was. In fact—the fact that they advised him against it is something that I only just heard in passing at one point.

6:53

⁵ Rensselaer is America's oldest technological research university. It is located on 10 Eighth Street, Troy, NY USA 12180.

⁶ Brother Edward meant to say grade school/middle school instead of high school.

⁷ World War II.

- De Angelis: Oh, and how many siblings did he have?
- Sheehy: One. His sister, his sister Patricia who actually was an actress in soap operas in New York on television and she later married and they had one student—one son—one daughter. Excuse me.
- De Angelis: And your dad was a naval officer. What exactly did he do in the Navy? What kind of work?
- Sheehy: He had a variety of assignments. His first assignment was as an ensign onboard the USS Iowa.⁸ And other times he flew blimps. He was a navigator. He was trained in both as an aviator and also as a surface warfare officer. He took off and landed on carriers. That's why we lived in Pensacola, Florida for a while. He was third officer on a destroyer. He was on a number of carriers and then he became a rocket expert and worked with NATO.⁹ So he had a number of very, very varied careers within the Navy.
- De Angelis: So would you say he was an elite member of the Navy?
- Sheehy: He certainly was. He certainly was—and as a lieutenant commander, he had very important responsibilities as time went on. And as the Navy modernized, he became an important part of the missile program. And after he left the Navy, of course, he went to work for Hercules, which is a company in Wilmington. And he later became president of Hercules Aerospace.
- De Angelis: And how old were you when he left the Navy?
- Sheehy: I was sixteen years old when he left the—fifteen years old when he left Navy. He left the Navy in 1961 I believe it was, sixty ('60) or sixty-one ('61).
- De Angelis: Did he work at Hercules right after getting out of the Navy?
- Sheehy: Yes, he did. That's what led to our move from Washington to Cumberland, Maryland.
- De Angelis: Do you remember him ever being out of work at all, when you were a child?
- Sheehy: No, I do not. Again, it was either the Navy or then—once he resigned his commission, he went to work for Hercules as a chemical engineer,

⁸ Ensign is the entry-level commissioned officer's rank in the U.S. Navy, and is equivalent to the rank of Second Lieutenant in the other armed services.

⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

but also rocket scientist. Hercules had a plant that built missiles, built rocket engines near Cumberland, and so that's what he worked in.

9:28

De Angelis: Since he was a naval officer do you ever feel that he was absent from your life? You mentioned he was absent for the first six months of your life. Was he absent for other long periods of time?

Sheehy: Generally, it was not long periods of time, but the work did require him to be away. The longest period of time that he was away was six months in the middle fifties. I want to say fifty-five-fifty-six ('55-'56). Actually, I think it might've been in the time of the Suez Crisis at least part of it.¹⁰ His destroyer was in Mediterranean. But his responsibilities with the Navy took him away at various times for shorter periods of time.

De Angelis: And did you ever fear for his safety?

Sheehy: No, I did not because I had tremendous confidence in the Navy and tremendous confidence in him and tremendous confidence in people that I knew were around him, either his commanding officers or people who worked with him.

De Angelis: And what about your mother. Can you tell me a little bit about her?

Sheehy: Yes. My mother went to a Catholic high school in New York and then worked for a bit afterwards. She and my dad had met before he went to the Naval Academy and they stayed in touch all through his time at the Academy. They were the first to be married, June 6, 1945. He was—graduated from the Academy, commissioned an ensign and married my mother all within a couple of hours in Annapolis. And so there they began their married life together.

De Angelis: Did she have any other formal education besides high school?

Sheehy: No, she did not. Her formal education—she was a very educated woman. She certainly was very widely read and certainly a very practical education but nothing formal beyond high school.

De Angelis: Did she ever work?

Sheehy: Yes, she worked before they were married, primarily. And then I don't know if she worked between the time they were married and the time I was born in that year or so.

¹⁰ This was an international crisis that occurred in 1953 when the president of Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, even though it had been controlled by the Suez Canal Company, a French and British joint company.

11:39

De Angelis: Do you know what she did as an occupation?

Sheehy: She told me but I don't remember.

De Angelis: And as you were growing up, did she ever work?

Sheehy: No, taking care of—she was a full time housewife, a homemaker. And again, at one time, she had five children under the age of nine and that's when my dad was away in the Mediterranean, so obviously that would all be a pretty fulltime operation.

De Angelis: And since your mom was a fulltime housewife and your dad was away, who would you say you were closer to growing up, your mother or your father?

Sheehy: That's a very good question. I felt close to both of them, but I guess primarily my mother because she was always there. But I felt close to both of them.

De Angelis: And you mentioned that she had five children under the age of nine. How many children did she have besides you?

Sheehy: I have five brothers and four sisters.

De Angelis: So you're one of ten.

Sheehy: I'm the oldest of ten.

De Angelis: And how was it being the oldest of ten?

Sheehy: It was an experience. It was—there was always something going on. There was always an opportunity particularly for me to be on my own cause my mother was taking care of my younger siblings. Although I did a lot of that also; particularly in terms of babysitting and taking them out for walks and watching them while they were napping and things like that. So it was never a dull moment. Let me put it that way.

De Angelis: And what are the age differences?

Sheehy: There are twenty-one years between myself and my youngest sister. So my brother and I are four years apart but after that my brother and my sister are of course the Irish twins, they're like eleven months apart, then it's roughly every two years.

13: 31

De Angelis: And since there is twenty-one years between you and your youngest sibling, did you ever feel like another parent figure in your household?

Sheehy: Well, actually I did at the times, and of course I joined the Brothers before two of them were born. So my youngest sister we always joke that she was twelve years old before she realized I wasn't this little old man who came to visit. She didn't realize I was really her brother. She just—because they were not alive yet before I left for The Order. So, and I haven't been home for terribly long periods of time since I joined the order. But I did. I felt I had, respon—you know, changing and washing and feeding and the other things too trying to help out when I could at home.

De Angelis: And since there were ten of you, do you feel like your parents made time for each of you, individually?

Sheehy: Absolutely. You know I think that was one of the great things about growing up in that time. There wasn't as much emphasis on media and education and internet, things like that. And so I felt they gave equal time and equal opportunity. And also they made sure that each of us had the opportunity to do what we wanted to do. As I got—as I was older, my mom would be working with the kids and the dad would be working. I have the opportunity to go off on my own and do the things, whether it was an athletic practice or something academic or something like that.

De Angelis: Would you say that they— I know that you said they made time for each of you but do they do one-on-one things that specifically interested your siblings and you like, such as playing a game one-on-one?

Sheehy: Yes. Yes. And they encouraged all of us to do the same. So often, my brothers and I would engage in various games. One great thing about growing up in a larger family was whenever you want to have a pick up basketball game or something you always have enough people. You don't have to go next door or down the street or something like that. You'd just say, "Come on let's go." I can still remember when we moved to Cumberland four or five we went up to the local football stadium and had our own little track meet. So I mean, yes, it was very good that way.

De Angelis: And did your parents raise you and your siblings to consider certain things important in life?

15:52

Sheehy: Absolutely. Being truthful, being conscientious, being sensitive. I mean long before the phrase “politically correct” came into being my parents tried to instill in us the importance of being sensitive to other people. And I guess the thing that most impressed me thinking about it was I thought everybody told the truth until I was like in my twenties. My parents—that was something that they all emphasize—they both emphasized very, very strongly that you be, in my case, a man of my word. And I think I have really taken that to heart.

De Angelis: Were there any issues though when you were growing up that you would get in trouble for?

Sheehy: Oh, every so often. I mean you know the story. We were in Florida. Well I guess we were in Pensacola. We’d be traveling and I’d throw my mother’s wallet or shoe out the window and she finally said, “Why don’t you just—you gonna do that, throw the other one out.” There were always little things. But generally though, generally though, we toed the line. I mean part of it was being brought up in a family in which discipline was considered to be important and even to the point of having a system for answering the phone. “Hello, Sheehy’s residence. Edward speaking. Who is this please?” I mean that was our standard mantra for answering the phone. And so we were also taught to be very respectful of people. So it was—but in that time I think a lot of people were in that situation. Coming from a military family it was a military approach, but not one that was—not the stereotype. Not the, you know, [grunts] no love in the house or anything. It wasn’t anything like that. It was a very good combination of discipline, but also obvious love. I mean when I was in Newport, I made a little league all star team and my dad went out and bought me a glove. And that always stuck with me cause it cost a significant amount of money for him at that time. So I mean that’s just one example.

De Angelis: Now if you did something wrong, what would the punishment be? Was it more military or more loving?

Sheehy: Well it was a combination. It depended what we did wrong, but it could mean not being allowed to do something, not being allowed to go some place, not being allowed to go out and play. That was primarily the type of punishment that was involved. But it was always—my parents always felt they were harsher on me being the oldest, but I don’t believe that at all. I often said that to them. My mother said, “I wish we hadn’t practiced everything on you as the oldest.” I said, “you didn’t.” I said “the time period we were growing up, that was expected” and I didn’t feel anyway that it was draconian.

19:14

De Angelis: Well you grew up around Navy families was the punishment that you and your siblings received different would you say from other naval—

Sheehy: It didn't seem to be. It didn't seem to be. It seemed to be very similar. I mean people that I grew up with and lived with seemed to lead similar lives, come from larger families, moved around a fair amount. So no, I didn't think there was anything really unusual about it. People have the stereotype about military and naval families coming from reading the *Great Santini* or something like that.¹¹ And it is just that. It's a stereotype. My dad knew the importance of his country, knew the importance of his job, knew the importance of what he did to help keep the country safe.

But as I said faith, family and country, were three things that were certainly woven together.

De Angelis: Let's talk a little bit about your siblings. What were your siblings names?

Sheehy: Michael, Christine, Richard, Dennis, Andrew, Terry, Ilene, Katie, and Kelly.

De Angelis: And was that in age order?

Sheehy: That was in age order, yes.

De Angelis: From oldest to youngest?

Sheehy: From oldest to youngest.

De Angelis: And what sort of work are they doing now?

Sheehy: My brother Michael is the public advocate for the state of Delaware. Christine teaches special education part-time. Most of them have at least two degrees. Richard is a pretty high-powered lawyer in Texas. Dennis runs his own consulting firm; he had been a partner in Deloitte Touche. Andy is an executive with a physical fitness firm. Terry is president of a large paper company. Ilene is a doctor on Long Island. Katie is a writer and editor for the *New York Post*. Kelly did work for the Central Intelligence Agency, but now she stays home with her two children.

De Angelis: So basically you're all very successful, would you say?

¹¹ This was a 1979 movie focusing around a Marine Corps family.

21:29

Sheehy: They are all very successful.

De Angelis: Do you think that has a lot to do with how you were raised by your parents?

Sheehy: Absolutely. I think hard work, honesty, what you see and what you get, an emphasis on education. When I was in eighth grade, the tuition at the Catholic high school was like \$300 but considering my dad made about \$8,000 a year as a Navy lieutenant commander, it was a tremendous sacrifice. And they said, "if you get into the Catholic high school, if you get into the one we were talking about going to, then we will send you. If you don't get in obviously, then you'll go to another school." But I got in and they sacrificed and they did that for all my brothers and sisters.

De Angelis: So you all went to either private or Catholic institutions your entire lives?

Sheehy: For the most part. I went to a couple of public schools, a couple of public grade schools, and I imagine for the most part the reason for that was proximity to the Catholic school. But for the most part, we went to Catholic schools.

De Angelis: And you went to college. Did all your brothers and sisters go to college?

Sheehy: All of them went to college. One went to the University of Virginia. One went to the University of Texas. The other six are graduates of University of Delaware.

De Angelis: Okay. And did your parents pay for all this education or did they help out at all?

Sheehy: They helped out. In some cases completely through scholarships and work and other cases at least part of it.

De Angelis: And grade school, you mentioned your dad paid for your high school or your education at least. Did he and your mom supply all the primary education, monetary wise for your siblings?

Sheehy: Yes, they did.

De Angelis: Are you close with your siblings today?

23:27

Sheehy: Yes. I mean I don't see them as much—the two that are in Texas as much, but yes I am.

De Angelis: Besides the two that lived in Texas, do any other ones live far away?

Sheehy: The farthest one would be Long Island.¹² So that's pretty close.

De Angelis: And how do you keep in contact with the siblings that are far away?

Sheehy: Email primarily, but my brothers and I once a year get together for a weekend and that's something we do. **[cough]**

De Angelis: And you are a Christian Brother. How did they feel about you going into the brotherhood?

Sheehy: Well again in 1963, it wasn't as unusual as it is now. We had a relatively small class in the Brothers that would be thirty. Some of the classes after us there were a class of fifty-six right after us. So they were surprised a little bit. What happened was my parents left—moved in November of my senior year, but they decided to let me stay so I wouldn't be in three high schools in four years, which just so happened that that enabled me to become closer to the Brothers who taught in high school. And then one day in April 1963, the principal asked me have I think about being a brother. And I said, "No." And he said, "Would you think about it." I said, "No." He said, "The Brothers thought that you might be a good Brother, would you think about it?" I said, "All right. I'll think about." I went away and two days later I came back and here I am.

De Angelis: And has their opinion of you as a Christian Brother changed over the years at all?

Sheehy: I don't know. It's probably more still a mystery to my brothers and sisters and my family, particularly my brothers. I remember one of my brothers saying to me, "kids at my class asked if we called you Brother Edward at home." So they're kind of— they're *extremely* solicitous for me. They're extremely concerned about me. They're extremely helpful to me. They think I don't have anything. So they're always—like when we go on these trips my brothers and I, they're always very, very helpful for me. I'll go home. They'll go out, and they don't ever have a problem with that.

¹² Long Island, New York

So I mean they've been very good. But I think it's a little bit of a mystery, as it is to most people. I think most people—first of all nobody, my high school classmates, I remember one of them telling me at a reunion we thought you'd last about a week. Because you never think that somebody your age is going to make that that kind of decision. You just think those people are born at the age of forty as Brothers or nuns or priests. So again, you don't think anybody would do it. And again I was very involved in high school. So many people just didn't see me as whatever that "type" was.

26:39

De Angelis: In your childhood you'd mentioned living in multiple houses. Can you describe the houses you've lived in? Were they on the naval base? Were they in the neighborhood?

Sheehy: Sometimes they were on the base, sometimes they were off the base, sometimes they were housing provided by the Navy off the base. So it was a real variety of places to live. In Virginia, for example, we lived in a development in Alexandria. And my dad would go to work at the Navy Department in Washington everyday. And I went to grade school in Virginia and then one year high school in Washington D.C. before we moved.

De Angelis: Did you ever own a house that you lived in?

Sheehy: Uhm, Yes. After my dad got out of the Navy, we began to own them, and actually I think his last assignment of Washington we owned one. But obviously, the last assignment in Washington we were there four years, which was a long time for us. But most of the other times, it was either naval housing or we would rent because we simply weren't going to be there that long.

De Angelis: And which was your favorite?

Sheehy: I enjoyed every place I was. I guess, looking back on the neat places we lived—I forgot to mention San Diego and Monterey for example.¹³ But the place I remember—I loved Newport. I loved living in Newport, Rhode Island. Alexandria was great. Three years I spent in high school in Cumberland were especially memorable for me. But I don't ever remember a place that was a—I liked every place I lived and every place I worked. I liked both of them.

¹³ San Diego and Monterey are both cities in California.

28:26

De Angelis: Logistically speaking, how are these houses set up with ten children, two parents. What was the sleeping situation?

Sheehy: Well in Cumberland, which we had eight at the time. It was a big rambling house. My four brothers were upstairs in bunk beds. I had a room to myself as the oldest and my one sister had a room to herself. And then my eighth sibling was also a girl, so the baby was in with her. When we were in Alexandria, now that was tight. It was three rooms. My parents had a room. My sister had a room with one of the babies at any one time, one or two of them. And then we had a room with bunk beds and a trundle bed. So there were five boys in the room which was *roughly* the size of this office.¹⁴ It was a really—the house was really small. We've gone back and looked at it and it's really hard to believe how anyone could live with one bathroom. It's very hard to believe how anyone could live in a situation like that but we did and again we didn't know any better so it was good.

De Angelis: And did you ever have to share a bed with anyone or did any of your siblings have to share beds?

Sheehy: No. We never had to share a bed, but as I said we had bunk beds and we would go to sleep at night playing the game Ghost, the spelling game Ghost.¹⁵ You start with a letter, work your way around it and eventually we'd all fall asleep.

De Angelis: And since you guys again were Navy—a Navy family, did you guys own the furniture that you used?

Sheehy: Generally yes. Generally yes. And the Navy would move us, but I mean I'd—the moving process I still always remember. It was exciting. You get up early in the morning and movers would arrive and pack things then you go across country. It was—I mean I was across country five times before I was two. So again it was an exciting life but you just figured everybody else did it too.

De Angelis: And when you were growing up, did your parents ever change the houses at all? Like did they ever make an effort to say paint the walls or make it their own, I guess.

Sheehy: Well again when we owned the house, later in my dad's military career and then when we went to Hercules, a bit, but I don't

¹⁴ See image in appendix

¹⁵ The purpose of the game was to form an English word.

remember much of that. I don't remember. They were just too busy doing everything else. But there was some of that, some of that.

30:58

De Angelis: And did you have any chores to do as a child?

Sheehy: Yes. And they varied. They varied. Again the babysitting, the watching, the changing of diapers. I remember that when I was in Cumberland, one of my jobs was take out the trash twice a week. Of course we have dishes. We had no dishwashers or anything, so my dad, in typical military family, had a posted schedule of who would do what. It was clean the table, wash, dry and one person got off each night. Of course you could trade if you wanted to. So it was a highly organized system. But then of course you had to help out and help out everywhere. Again with a large family and the amount of washing my mom had to do and things like that.

De Angelis: And was there any ever gender segregation with chores?

Sheehy: Uhm **[pauses to think]** Not really. I mean—and it's a good question. I've not thought of it. But I don't think so. I think—I don't know whether it was a function of this. But I know my dad talking to me, one of the things about the military is it teaches you that it doesn't make a lot of difference what gender a person is, what sexual orientation they are, is can they do the job? And even in the days of segregation and things like that, the military, and especially my dad, that's one of the thing that was very much inculcated into us as kids that the person to do job and that's all you're interested in. Because it may, and certainly in my dad's case, it may be a question of saving a life.

De Angelis: He seems like a busy man when he was in the Navy. Did he ever help out with the housework?

Sheehy: Yes, he did. But generally he was very, very busy. And on the weekends, he would spend his time shuttling us back and forth to various athletic practices or some of my brothers and sisters cases work and various things going on at school. They always, always made an effort to make sure that if we wanted to do something we're able to do it. Now sometimes—as I got older, my parents would say, "you can do it if you can find a way to get there." And that again helped me become more self-reliant. And that was one of the things by coming from a large family I learned fairly early to be self-reliant and that was a tremendous lesson and a tremendous help to me.

34:00

De Angelis: In all of the neighborhoods you lived in, what were they like? Can you describe them a little bit?

Sheehy: A very typical 50's suburban households. Much different in terms of the nuclear family, much different in terms of the father went to work, the mother stayed home, the kids had their bikes and scooters and everything else, and the kids have their own little operation in terms of what they played and who they played with and things like that. I'm not going to say it's "Father Knows Best" or "Leave it to Beaver," but there's some truth to that stereotype of that time.¹⁶ And it was a very segregated neighborhood. I mean I don't remember ever interacting with an African-American until I was nine years old. So I mean people lived in different parts of town and functioned in different parts of town.

So, it was very much like the stereotype in the 1950s. And with all the positive aspects of it and all the things that were not, like in terms of dealing with diversity, for example.

De Angelis: So would you say that was typical of all the areas that you lived in, all the neighborhoods.

Sheehy: Yes, I would say generally that was true.

De Angelis: And did you always feel safe in the neighborhoods?

Sheehy: Yes, always. There was *never* a time that I did not feel safe and frankly there are not even later in my life, in my career, I've been fortunate enough to have learned prudence in terms of travel and things. So I've always felt—I've almost always felt very safe.

De Angelis: So would you and your siblings be allowed to play outside then?

Sheehy: Yes.

De Angelis: In the front yard? with others?

Sheehy: Front yard, back yard, and going down to the field. And again as we got older we joined a pool so during the summer my mom—I still remember my mom dropping me off with a couple of my siblings with a lunch and coming back and picking us up six or seven hours later.

¹⁶ "Father Knows Best" and "Leave it to Beaver" were American television shows that aired in the 1950s and depicted the stereotypical family environment of that time period. These shows normally idealized family life and dealt with light hearted story lines of family problems.

36:12

De Angelis: You mentioned that there was no gender segregation in your house. Was there any gender segregation when you guys played?

Sheehy: Yes, there was. There was. My sisters used to play with their group of friends and my brothers and I. And my brothers and I had different sets of friends because there was four years between Michael and myself. So sometimes we would play together, but often times he would go with his gang and I would go with mine, especially when I was in high school.

De Angelis: You are a Christian Brother again. Obviously, would you say that there was a value of faith in your household?

Sheehy: Very strong, very strong Catholic faith. Very strong emphasis on Sunday mass as a family. Very strong emphasis on the dogmas and the rules. Again, not much different than any other group at the time. Not as stringent as people think it was. But I mean I still remember my freshmen high school religion test. It was basically memorize the *Baltimore Catechism*.¹⁷ And that was the test. They would give you the questions, and we would just them back wrote—spit out—wrote what it said. That being said it was not one of these “nobody smiles” kind of thing. But it was a very strong Catholic family.

De Angelis: So you went to church every Sunday?

Sheehy: Yes, we did.

De Angelis: And would you pray before meals?

Sheehy: Yes, we would. Yes, we prayed before meals. Usually, as I recall, a different person leading the prayers, but many times it would be my dad again leading the prayer.

De Angelis: And was it nightly routine that you would pray before bed?

Sheehy: We were encouraged to do so. I wouldn't say we always did it. My mother still says, “Be sure to say your prayers, Edward.” But it was always encouraged and always mentioned. In fact, it was always said, “Brush your teeth and say your prayers.” So sometimes we did both, sometimes we did one, and sometimes we did neither.

¹⁷ The full name is: A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, Prepared and Enjoined by Order of the Third Council of Baltimore. It was the first Catholic catechism written in North America and laid out all essential Catholic beliefs. This was a standard text studied in schools from its introduction in 1885 to the 1960s.

38:31

De Angelis: How would you say religion impacted how you developed as a child?

Sheehy: I'd say it had a very strong emphasis. Obviously the Catholic schools at the time. Significant presence of clergy in elementary school, particularly nuns. And so we would go to church regularly. And obviously prayers in the school were very important. When you add the whole Cold War emphasis the Godless, atheist communism against Christianity and democracy and everything else. It was a very—it was an extremely important part of our lives. I mean I still remember that in high we would be able to come in late on first Fridays so we can go to first Friday, have our donut after the first Friday mass. And then of course the Lent was a serious time of preparation. It's much more today a personal decision about what like to give up or what to do positively, but then it was much more things that you were supposed to do as a group. I wouldn't say it was lockstep but it was a much formalized set of directions.

De Angelis: So would you say that you intensely celebrated the major Catholic holidays, such as Christmas and Lent then?¹⁸

Sheehy: Yeah. They were very important. They were very important. They weren't out of proportion but they were very very important as a family and as individual too.

De Angelis: And how Christmas play out in your household since there were ten children? Would you all receive a lot of gifts? How did that work?

Sheehy: Well don't forget it wasn't ten when I was there. But the answer was yes. It was pretty much a mad house with people opening. My parents again sacrifice tremendously for us. I can still remember one of my big thrills was in sixth grade, sixth or seventh grade, being allowed to go to midnight mass. And my dad walking me through the living room with all the lights off and I had to keep my eyes closed cause I was stepping over all the toys and things. But it was always a real mad house. They say Christmas is for children. In many ways it was. I still see such joy to see my nephews and nieces, particularly the younger ones, at Christmas. You hope that they realize the importance of the feast as opposed to just getting presents. But just the light in their eyes and it's such a great experience. But yea, anyway it was just a mad house. People tearing things up and running around, playing games and everything else.

¹⁸ Lent is a religious time period that precedes Christmas that is celebrated by Christians as a way to prepare for Christ's birth.

41:27

De Angelis: You described your family as laid back, loving, not like the typical naval family. So—

Sheehy: But there's a balance to that. I mean that's true, but it was also a high disciplined operation. It was everything—I remember this later. My father didn't say this about the family but I think it's true. We were all treated fairly, but not necessarily equally. And I always remember saying "Why did Michael get that and I didn't?" or "Why was Michael that?" And my father would always say, "That's between Michael and I. You need to deal just with yourself and things." So I mean yes it was a very loving family but also a very structured and disciplined family also.

De Angelis: So would you and your siblings always be called by your full name or where there any nicknames?

Sheehy: There were nicknames. Everybody in the family had a nickname. Everybody in the family actually had an animal nickname. Everybody in the family was known like Christine was Christine Cat or Michael Mouse, Dennis the Dog, Richard the Bear. Yeah, so they were all in that regard.

De Angelis: And what were yours?

Sheehy: My family nickname—I was the duck. Neddie Duck, that was my nickname. My father at my twenty-fifth anniversary celebration got up and went through all of them, which has caused me significant angst among the Brothers every so often.¹⁹ He assigned a naval rank to everybody starting with the youngest would be the highest rank like Admiral Chipmunk and would get down to me and I'd be Ensign Duck. So, he did that. He did that at my jubilee, and of course the place went crazy. So every so often if I start acting up one of the brothers will say "Ensign Duck" and I would crawl off at the corner and growl.

De Angelis: That's so cute. **[laugh]** And let's talk a little bit about your early education. When did you start school?

Sheehy: I guess kindergarten. I guess that would be when I was six in Monterey, California. And then, as I said, went to like six different grade schools, two different high schools.

De Angelis: What was the name of the first school you attended?

¹⁹ Brother Edward's 25th anniversary as a Christian Brother was celebrated on April 15, 1989

43:59

Sheehy: That's a good question. I don't know. The one in Monterey I don't know the name of the first school.

De Angelis: And you mentioned you went to how many grade schools?

Sheehy: Six different grade schools.

De Angelis: How long would you stay in each grade school?

Sheehy: It would depend. Again it might be a year or two. In Newport when we lived in Middletown, I was actually in two grade schools in two years. My parents decided to take me out of the one so I went to two for two years.

De Angelis: And was it hard for you to make connections with students?

Sheehy: Not really. You're kind of forced to. You're kind of really—that was one of the strengths I think of all that moving around was enabled me to adapt, enabled me to meet people. And the fact that I was very much interested in sports, so I'd immediately joined teams and things like that. But yes. One good thing was, obviously, I can talk about any place in the country. But obviously you move around a lot and every so often it's sad when you make new friends and then all of the sudden in two years you're off again, realizing you'll probably not see them again. That at time was difficult growing up.

De Angelis: And these grade schools, were these always Catholic, the grade schools?

Sheehy: No, for the most part they were. But there were a couple of times. I think first grade I was in a public school and kindergarten I was in public school. The other ones were Catholic schools.

De Angelis: How long did these schools go till? Do you ever attend junior high or did these grades school go—

Sheehy: No, these are your classic K through eight. So I went six, seven and eight in St. Anthony's in Falls Church, which is now combined with another. In fact, I'm a distinguished graduate of that high school—grade school. [points to certificate above desk] It's got a different name now. So it was basically K-eight, nine-twelve.

De Angelis: Would you say that the teachers were very strict during your time?

46:14

Sheehy: Yes. The classes were very big. I remember in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in second grade, sometimes two to a desk. They were fairly large classes. When I got into sixth, seventh, and eighth grade they were smaller classes. But yes, it was a strict environment.

De Angelis: What kind of punishments would there be say you didn't do your homework for example.

Sheehy: I don't remember any specific punishments other than the obvious the grade reductions and basically being called out as not having done what you're supposed to do. I can remember nuns having rulers and things, but that's funny. I don't remember anybody getting hit. Occasionally you might have to stay after school for something but I don't mean—I mean corporal punishment is—people might have seen one example of it and they all of the sudden magnify it. Every Brother beat up every kid. That's simply not what happened.

De Angelis: In the Catholic schools were you taught by religious or lay?

Sheehy: Generally religious. Although, I did have lay teachers occasionally throughout, but it was mostly religious.

De Angelis: We talked a little bit about the punishment your teachers would give you. What about if say you didn't do your homework, what would your parents do?

Sheehy: There's a line from "Apollo 13" or something: "Failure is not an option."²⁰ Doing your homework was not an option, all right. My parents again were extremely fair about this. They expected you to do your best. And for me that meant not real well in mathematics. Okay, but really well in liberal arts and things like that. So they didn't have great expectations for me in math but they expected me to do my best. And that was important. When they moved, when I was a senior in high school, if I made the honor— they told me that "if you did not make the honor roll we will take you out and bring you to another school." I don't think they would have done that, but I made the honor roll. I did what I was supposed to do. So it wasn't like they were hovering. And they were always very—my dad basically got me through math. He was always willing to help out but it was an expectation that you meet your responsibilities, very much a sense of accountability, very much a sense of if you do A, B will happen. If you don't do A, then something will happen. And that's a lesson that I

²⁰ A 1995 movie depicting the real life space shuttle mission to the moon.

have taken to heart and I think it was helpful to me when I was in positions of administration.

49:16

De Angelis: From K through 8 what was your strongest subject?

Sheehy: History without a doubt. I mean I was—I loved it. I read. We owned the *Landmark Series*, which was fifty books and I read them several times.²¹ I was a voracious reader, but I loved history. History was clearly my favorite and math was clearly my worst subject.

De Angelis: Did you ever have any tutors beside your father in math?

Sheehy: No, because I didn't—he was perfect. I mean again it's ironic as bright as he was in math and science I was out in right field, especially in math. I just simply did not have—I mean I could stare at geometry thing but just not be able to figure out what they were talking, which angle and this angle and whatever.

De Angelis: We're almost out of time for today's session. So, I guess we'll pick up the next session with your higher education. Okay?

Sheehy: Very good.

De Angelis: Thank you so much for today.

Sheehy: Thank you very much, Lauren. It's been a pleasure.

50:24 End of Audio

²¹ The Landmark Books are a series of history books published in the 1950s and 1960s by Random House.