Oral History Interview with Stephanie Krusa
February 17, 2023
At the Montauk Library
Montauk Library Oral History Program
Interviewed by Aimee Lusty

Aimee Lusty [00:00:02] Today's February 17th, 2023. My name is Aimee Lusty. I'm the archivist at the Montauk Library, and I'm conducting an oral history interview with Stephanie Krusa for the Montauk Library Oral History Program, we're recording in the sound studio at the Montauk Library. And again, I'd like to ask you to confirm on tape that you agreed to participate and be recorded.

Stephanie Krusa [00:00:21] Certainly, I'm happy to participate and be recorded.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:25] And would you mind pronouncing and spelling your first and last name?

Stephanie Krusa [00:00:28] Stephanie Krusa. And the spelling is S-T-E-P-H-A-N-I-E and Krusa is K-R-U-S-A.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:38] Where were you born?

Stephanie Krusa [00:00:39] I was born in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn in 1943.

Aimee Lusty [00:00:44] And did you spend your childhood there?

Stephanie Krusa [00:00:46] No. We moved out when I was two weeks old and most of my childhood was spent in and around Huntington in the middle of Long Island and in Connecticut, Fairfield County, which was farm county farm country at that time.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:00] And what were your parents' names and occupations?

Stephanie Krusa [00:01:03] My dad, Lawrence King, he was an accountant and my mother was an artist and a homemaker. And her name was Evelyn King.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:11] And before you were born, did they live in Brooklyn?

Stephanie Krusa [00:01:13] Yes.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:15] Were they born there?

Stephanie Krusa [00:01:17] They were born there. Yes. Their parents both were immigrants. Dad's from Ireland and my mother's from Norway.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:24] Have you ever visited Ireland or Norway?

Stephanie Krusa [00:01:27] I haven't visited Ireland. It's on my list. But I've been to Norway and traveled extensively there. I guess around 1982, with–with the family. My family. And visited and met our family over there.

Aimee Lusty [00:01:45] And do you have any siblings?

Stephanie Krusa [00:01:47] Lots and lots of siblings. We have two blended families. So I lived with eight brothers and sisters and I have many, many other half brothers, half sisters, half-step and step brothers and sisters.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:01] Wow. Big family. Do you still keep in touch?

Stephanie Krusa [00:02:04] Absolutely, everyone.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:06] That's great. Do any live out in Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [00:02:08] No. No, But most of them are regional. They're in Vermont or Rhode Island. In Connecticut. Some in Florida.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:18] And where did you attend elementary school and high school?

Stephanie Krusa [00:02:21] Huntington. And in Trumbull, Connecticut. I graduated from Seton Hall in Patchogue.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:29] And did you attend college?

Stephanie Krusa [00:02:31] I did. I went started out in community college one course at a time because I was putting myself through college. Eventually, pardon me, went to Peninsula College out in Washington when Dave and I lived out there for a year, came back, went to Southampton College and got a B.A. and then I went on to Bank Street to get a dual master's in education.

Aimee Lusty [00:02:55] Was that directly after high school or was there some time?

Stephanie Krusa [00:02:57] It took 11 years to get my B.A. because, you know working and then becoming a mother and traveling. We I grabbed school where I could, but eventually I got finished with everything. And it was every every semester was worth it.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:16] And when did you come out to Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [00:03:18] 1971. Kip was born, and Dave and a business partner had formed a fishing corporation Sea Capture and the fishing capital of New York, to their minds, was Montauk. You know, it's a commercial fishing center, so anything you need is provided here, pretty much. So it was the place to be. Plus, you're close to the fishing grounds all the way up and down the East Coast. So it was a logical move to come here.

Aimee Lusty [00:03:47] What are some of your earliest recollections of that time when you first moved?

Stephanie Krusa [00:03:51] 1971 in the winter. Montauk was like a ghost town. It was just amazing. We lived on Mulford Avenue and we had three families near us on the street behind us. The Carews and the Bowmans lived, and I got to know both of them. Those families and Tom and Marilyn Bogdan also moved to Montauk the same time we did. They lived across the street in back of Four Oaks. So we got to be friends and from there we just networked out.

Aimee Lusty [00:04:21] And did they all have young kids for the kids to play with?

Stephanie Krusa [00:04:24] The Carews had girls who were the ages of our our children. Kip at that time, Lee wasn't born yet, and the Bowmans had children. I taught one of them later. But that's an established family here in Montauk as well. Bogdan's baby, Nicky didn't come along for a while. After that.

Aimee Lusty [00:04:48] Is there anything you miss from that time?

Stephanie Krusa [00:04:50] Montauk was such a rural, rustic town. It was so interesting. It was full of characters, you know, any manner, and being a wife of a fisherman, I knew all of them. I was amazed by every one of them. But they're all goodhearted. You know. Folk who were, you know, eking out their their living out here. And a funny, funny, you know, enjoyable people, the townsfolk, you know, just a regular small rural town with businesses and a school and a post office and a supermarket. But, you know, it was really sparsely populated in the winter. And I literally saw people in the supermarket, especially those first months walking up and down the aisles and stopping when they met someone they knew and spending an hour talking. I just thought, oh, my gosh, you know, these people don't have a place to meet or it's not Sunday, so they're not in church. But yeah, it was a real feel of Montauk being a place of isolation. And the more I got to know people and, you know, you begin to have dinners or go to a movie or do something fun together with your kids, the more I found the community and the life of of Montauk, which is really strong and was strong then, we were just all holed up in our houses during the winter.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:18] And what was your husband's name?

Stephanie Krusa [00:06:20] David.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:21] And how did you two meet?

Stephanie Krusa [00:06:23] We met on the docks in North Port, a fishing village. Both Dave and my brother were clammers, and I walked down the dock one dusk as they were unloading their clams. And. And Greg introduced me to Dave, and that was that.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:39] And when did you get married?

Stephanie Krusa [00:06:42] Two years. Later. We were married. We got married in New York City. We eloped and then came home to a big party, which was great fun.

Aimee Lusty [00:06:53] And after you married, where did you where did you first live?

Stephanie Krusa [00:06:56] We lived in Huntington and Northport, but we had decided that we were meant for each other based on our interests and our, you know, our our the feeling that we had to travel and see the world. And there were special places that we both went to see. One of them was Alaska. So we decided that was the goal and we would save money up for two years. However, within months of getting married, Dave was working seven days a week lobstering. And I said to him, Dave, don't you think you would take a day off? You're working so hard. We were driving down to the boat. He was about to go off. He said, You're right. Turned around and we passed the crew for the lobster boat, and he said to them, You can have the boat and the pots. I'm going to California. And we did. We left that afternoon. He also said, You tell my mom. So they followed us so and said, we'll take the boat in the parts, but you have to tell your mother. So we did. We stopped by Dave's mom's, Toddy's house, and she was wonderfully supportive, you know,

and knew her son well enough to not to try and argue him out of it. So we took off. And Dave's brother was living in California at the time. So that was our ultimate destination. But we took a really long side trip through Mexico, had a wonderful time, and went down as far as Mazatlan and found the Tar Marra Indians in the Sierra Madres. We had to take a train to get up there. We just had a it was a great, great adventure. It was our honeymoon, even though it was an unplanned, spontaneous. But there was also a lesson in that about my husband and what I should gently suggest to him. And so I, I took that lesson to heart. But it was it was worth it. It was great. Yeah. So two years later, we came back, of course, to Montauk. We had saved up enough and we took off for Alaska. Do you want me to elaborate on that?

Aimee Lusty [00:09:06] Please.

Stephanie Krusa [00:09:07] Well, Alaska was the mecca of fishing and in our minds coming from Long Island, even though it was, you know, seventies, we just felt it was polluted and crowded. And there was a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of fishing regulations. And since it was an ultimate goal anyway, we just set off for Alaska. So we drove across to Colorado, bought a camper, put it on the back of our pickup, went up to British Columbia in the Yukon, and then caught them on the Alaska Highway, which either went north to Anchorage or south to Chilkoot, where you would pick up. It's also called Haines, where you would pick up the ferry that bumped down the coastline on the panhandle. So we went as far as Petersburg. They stopped at Sitka, then Juneau, the capital, and then went to Petersburg. And it had been snowy or rainy this entire time, but the sun was shining on Petersburg, on Mitkof Island this day. So we said this, this is a sign. And it was Easter Sunday. So we jumped off the boat. We had the whole day in port. Dave got a job immediately on a 100 year old wooden fishing boat called the Betty when old Norwegian named Earlene Thomason and was the captain and owner. And so we said, okay, that's it, we've got a job. And we jumped off the boat, found the trailer park, dropped our camper, literally dropped it from the back of the truck because we didn't have any help. And moved in. And that was that. And Dave was going to be gone three weeks out of the month. And I'd always had this notion that I wanted to teach, and I especially wanted to teach Native American children. It just was another one of those life goals that I dreamt about. And here I was, Mitkof Island the Tlingits, the Tsimshians, the Haidas where all, you know, the population is on that island in that whole region. So I went to the local church where there was a preschool for children on the island, visited and was astounded to see that there were two white teachers and 25 white children. And I said, where are the Native American children? And I was told by the two ladies well-meaning, good teachers. But their opinion was that the Native Americans weren't interested in education. They had taken in two what they called charity cases, which gives you a sense of how they felt about these children. But their mothers objected to cleaning the church after about two weeks and withdrew the children. That that was what these women felt was the reason. There were probably many other reasons that the families were experiencing, the native families. So I talked to the Reverend Reverend Goodman, and I said, you know, what do you think about trying to pull together a classroom just of native children? He said, I'll give you a room and you can have all the supplies go to the public school and get the roster of the kids who will be coming in to kindergarten next fall. So at the public school, they said, Good luck, we have nothing. Please share it when you get it, but come back tomorrow. So I did and met with Melvin Housley, who was the administrator of special programing in this tiny little town and tiny little school. And he said, we think you should have your classroom here. You know, you've got the public school, you've got the library, we've got a cafeteria. We have everything that you could need. And all you need to do is write a proposal to the state legislature to get it funded. And they closed down in two weeks. So you got to do this fast

and here's the paperwork. Come back when you need some help with it. So that was it. I was off and running and coincidentally, Dave had gone fishing for three weeks, so I had nothing but time, which was perfect, it filled the void and it just it you know, it gave me every bit of time, every shred of time I needed to get the proposal down on paper, because I was at that time an undergraduate with a few college courses under my belt, you know, very little experience in any kind of school setting except through my own. So and still I was confident that I knew what I was doing. Right. Well, the proposal helped me understand what I didn't know, partly the rest came later.

Stephanie Krusa [00:13:45] But we did submit it. It got funded. I was salaried. I was so impressed. I made more money than Dave, which hurt him a bit. But and that wasn't the reason for wanting to do it at all. But it was, you know, sort of an eye opener. Oh. You know, you do get paid for doing things like this. So we I then had to go and find my students, right, because there was no list. So I went to the public nurse in Petersburg and she had a rolodex with 3000 names and birthdates. I found every person born four years prior. And there were 24 or 22. I'm not sure which children in the class. Then I had to find where they were, because mostly the Norwegian and Caucasian population lived on this continental shelf right on the harbor. The Native Americans were in the forest and traditional lands. So I needed to go find them. The post-officemaster postmaster said well, good luck, but I can tell you where the Suckinaws is live and you could start there. So I did, I wandered through the trails of the woods and found the Suckinaws and I had prepared several pages of information about what the school would be, hours, program and duration of time, and what my hopes and and purposes and the mission of of this endeavor would be. So I the intention was to leave that and come back in two days with so they had time to absorb it, talk about it. And I did that with each of the families. It took a couple of days to meet everybody, but it it introduced me to them. You know, I was the face by giving them something written. And it was a new idea for the Native Americans, you know, on that island that there would be a school just for them. It turns out, though, they had great reservations. Why is the day so long? The children will get tired, you know, what will they eat? Will this be good for my child? Will it help them in kindergarten? The exact opposite of what I had been told about these people by, you know, the teachers in that nursery school and others in the community who said, good luck. They'll want you because you'll be babysitting their kids. You know, I mean, the cultural dissonance was already very evident there. So every family agreed I would park in town because we were way out the road in the trailer park and then walk to a junction in the woods. The kids would gather and we'd walk to school, rain or shine. I learned that in Alaska, you don't let the rain stop you. You put on your Helly Hansen's and you get out there. And everyone was out every day as they needed to be. So we walked to school, settled in, and I had gathered Tlingit tales because most of these children were Tlingit from the grandmothers, because I met them when I visited the homes and they shared these stories with me. They wouldn't let me tape them, but they would let me listen and then go home and type up what I'd heard. And I did that because I wanted to use the native culture as the basis of my classroom. These were native children. I wanted their stories represented in the classroom. And I did have the idea of building all of any pre literacy, you know, experiences around these tales as much as I could and their history and culture. So we were having snack one morning, third day of school, and I said, how many of us are native? Raise your hands. And the children that went dead silent, they all looked down into their cups. I, they, they looked grave and Honey Lou Suckinaw looked at Darnell and said, Well, at least you might want to edit this out. Well, at least I ain't a nigger. And I almost fell through the floor. I thought, How do these four year olds understand the meaning of that awful word? You know, how do they know to stratify themselves and that they are a notch above? I mean, it was just astonishing. Here's an island off the coast of Alaska, 3000 inhabitants. And these native

children knew already where they fit and where others fit and who the others were. It was it was profoundly disturbing, but it set a course. I learned so much from those kids in those families. And I knew from then how I wanted to proceed with my education, what kinds of purposes I wanted to serve in my classroom. And among them was respect and understanding across difference and every difference, you know, racial, socioeconomic, language, ethnicity, special ed considerations, you know, anything kids who are in wheelchairs because of physical injury. These are in another bracket. They are not part of the normal. And we really need to help kids and other staff, other colleagues understand that there shouldn't be any barriers or any separations or and—the most profound separation I would see in later years was in the Bronx, where special ed classrooms were behind the gym or in a renovated bathroom. I mean, just amazing. We'll get to that later. Anyway, I continued, We finished the program. The kids were wonderful. They forgave this, you know white woman from New York wasn't part of the culture. But the most profound lesson for me was that these kids needed their own people, teaching them, you know, that there should be Tlingit teachers or Native American or people of difference teaching them people who understand, who understood who they were, what their challenges were, and believed in their ability to learn. Because that was the second issue that I wanted to address. The white children would have one or two years of preschool, knew how to write their names, knew the alphabet, were beginning to read, knew, you know, all of the rituals of a of a classroom and fit right in and were already a year or two ahead. The Native kids came in from the woods and learned as much there as kids were learning in the schools. But a different kind of learning, you know, more useful learning in their culture. So I wanted to be sure that these kids were exposed to the same kind of program. So why don't I stop there? Because I could talk about Alaska forever.

Aimee Lusty [00:20:44] How long was that program?

Stephanie Krusa [00:20:46] The program lasted for, it was a summer program, but it continued for two years, and they continued it after we left. Dave and I, you know, decided that we didn't really fit in in Alaska. It was a really rough and tumble culture backwoods, very politically conservative, 12 churches and more bars, 15 bars that I could count. And it didn't provide us with the same kind of cultural experiences and diversity that we were comfortable with, you know, so though we loved it we decided that we fit in better. You know, elsewhere. Somewhere south, somewhere east.

Aimee Lusty [00:21:31] Well, that program seems like a it was a good crash course for you to develop your your teaching practice and—

Stephanie Krusa [00:21:39] Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:21:39] What you wanted to learn and pass on.

Stephanie Krusa [00:21:42] Yes, but the first of many lessons. Because as you progress in your teaching and you're doing, you know, new and different things and you hope doing it better, there's always something else that you don't yet know, you know? So that's one of the best aspects of my profession is that we're always learners. We are as much learners in the classroom as children are.

Aimee Lusty [00:22:05] Did you see any parallels between the community in Alaska being a fishing community and the fishing community in Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [00:22:13] Yes, lots of parallels. The same wonderful characters, although the fishermen, the Native Americans, had their own fishing fleet, the Norwegian Americans had their own fishing fleet. They went out. They fished lands known to them, you know, you know the bottom lands known to them. They spoke on the radio. But the Tlingits talked in their language. The Norwegians talked in English or Norewgian, which is amazing. And they would talk about being on the radio and every different fisherman having a code. Or a different frequency to communicate with his buddies. You know, so. That was just one apparent—But fishermen are very down to earth, practical, hardworking, you know, dedicated and risk takers. I mean, those men went out beyond this little slip of land that separates the inland towns with the outside is what they called it, the ocean. And they often were out there catching halibut and salmon in the roughest weather and logging country, you've got these treacherous logs called sinkers, which are soaked and they're just under the surface. But you run into them at eight knots and you've done some damage to your hull. And there you are offshore in the North Pacific. So. So. Yeah. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:23:44] I respect that profession.

Stephanie Krusa [00:23:45] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:23:51] Do you have any children?

Stephanie Krusa [00:23:52] We have two wonderful children. Kip was born in '71, and Lee was born in '77.

Aimee Lusty [00:23:59] Was Kip born while you were in Alaska?

Stephanie Krusa [00:24:01] No. No. Just after.

Aimee Lusty [00:24:05] And where were you living then?

Stephanie Krusa [00:24:06] When Kip was born, we were living in Smithtown, but that's when we moved to Montauk, when he was an infant and met the Bogdans, and the Carews and the Bowmans and then everyone else.

Aimee Lusty [00:24:18] And what did you and your family do for recreation with your children?

Stephanie Krusa [00:24:22] Well, as you know, fishermen, you know, and young marrieds and starting out in life, we did things outdoors, you know, very active. We canoed and hiked and went to the beaches and camped and, you know, traveled down the coast to visit family. We loved movies and read books, but for the most part, we were family centered. And working hard. So it's pretty much more work than recreation. And before long, the kids were in school.

Aimee Lusty [00:25:00] And do your children still live in Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [00:25:03] No, sadly, but happily, because they saw different vistas and horizons. Kip went off to the Prescott College in Arizona, and then Lee, after graduating, they both graduated from Putney up in Vermont. Really great school. Very similar to the schools I taught in. So Lee went off to University of Wyoming and then went to University of California. Several campuses, depending on the kinds of things that he wanted to learn. And he's a landscape architect. Kip is the he's the director of a see if I get this right. Well,

it's a business that fabricates materials, but he's also a luthier. He builds fine wooden guitars, and that's his first love, but he earns a living otherwise.

Aimee Lusty [00:26:01] Can you talk a little bit about your first residence in Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [00:26:04] On Mulford avenue? It was lonely. All that whole area was vacation homes. So in the winter there was no one. I loved it. I loved the isolation. Kip and I would do, you know, we'd preamble down to the water in a carriage, which was unusual for Montauk, but I'd been given it as a gift. And, you know, it was a windswept, cold, rainy, very similarly to Alaska kind of environment. But you you could see the evidence of community. And the more you got to know people, the better life became because your social circle expanded. You began to make friends. And once the kids are in school, that's a tremendous, you know, opening up of of new social connections and friends. And for them, as well as parents, you know, it's a big piece of being a young parent is getting to know other families and visiting while your kids play together.

Aimee Lusty [00:27:11] And they both went to Montauk Public School?

Stephanie Krusa [00:27:13] They did. And they both started out in East Hampton, but it didn't suit them. And my interest in progressive school and my connections at Hampton Day School by then led me to and Dave, Dave and I both to take a look at Putney and also the Vermont Ski School, because these both seem to suit Kip, the first to go off. And he went to Putney and it was magnificent where he wasn't doing well in East Hampton, he just flourished. And teachers said to us on the very first night there was a, you know, a potluck supper. We went up to Vermont for dinner. Someone said, Who is your child? And we said, Kip. And they said, Kip, Oh my God, He's the most wonderful student. He's just taken off like a dynamo. He's involved in singing every morning and he's on student government. And it was an environment where he just flourished. And of course, Lee, six years younger, saw all this and that was know no doubt that was where he would end up as well. And he also loved the programming.

Aimee Lusty [00:28:16] And what age range was that?

Stephanie Krusa [00:28:20] And the years that they went to school. A late eighties. Up till mid-nineties.

Aimee Lusty [00:28:29] They were, was that middle school or high school aged?

Stephanie Krusa [00:28:33] Yes. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [00:28:36] And can you tell me a little bit about your career as an educator? We started with you going to Alaska.

Stephanie Krusa [00:28:43] Alaska. One of my defining moments. Well, it just, you know, made me even more convinced what I wanted to do, what I needed to learn. So I got a job coming back from Alaska, let's see several jobs in there. But I started back at Southampton College and met a professor named Mona Dayton who said, come to the Hampton Day School. You'll like it. Well, I. I visited and they hired me on the spot to be an assistant in the nursery. You know. Exactly where I should have been. And I had this marvelous co-teacher, Jonathan Celyn, who taught me the ropes. He was just. He's now a professor at Bank Street, has been for many years. He's just a magnificent mentor and teacher with such perception about children. So it was a great match, and I stayed there

until I got pregnant with Lee. And for both of the kids, I stopped working and stayed home for three years, which was so wonderful that I could do that, you know? And the other places I taught also were wonderful educational experiences. The Ross School Traveling School after Hampton Day. I taught at Ross for a few years and went to London, Paris and Berlin to study Egyptian antiquities. How precious is that. Went to the Galapagos. To study ecology and, you know, Darwin's theory. It just it was very eye opening. But I also still needed to get back to graduate school and finish off my education. One of the things that happened at Hampton Day was that I, when I went back to teach [unclear] school, I'd been there for three or four years maybe, and the director suddenly quit. So the board said, Steph, will you take over as interim director? I said, Well, I'll try. I did. Three months later, they named me full director. We were just going into the summer and had a lot of time to assess the school and look at all manner of governing and finance and, you know, the conditions of buildings and grounds. And it was a lot of work to be done. So I wrote a report and that's when they said, okay, you're hired. So I was there for two years. But the one thing that I was not able to do successfully. I mean, I was very good at just about everything, but failing miserably as a leader of my co-teachers. And I was still teaching besides being director. But I was I had stepped out of that role and into another. And for one reason or another, some of them resisted the fact that I was now their director and now their boss, you know, ostensibly their boss. And I thought, you know, I just I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to work with the adults, I'm great with the children. So that sent me back to Bank Street and to focus on a career not only of issues in education, but administration and adult and human behavior and interaction. So that's what I studied at Bank Street and I learned it. It isn't all that inscrutable. You just need to go to the class and figure it out.

Aimee Lusty [00:32:06] So you continue that director position after Bank Street?

Stephanie Krusa [00:32:09] I didn't know the day I graduated, a professor said, Steph. There's a job waiting for you if you want to go and interview for it, in the Bronx, I said, Well, I'll take the interview, you know, thinking it's good experience. Well, I was hired to be director of magnet schools in District 10 in the Bronx, right around Fordham Avenue, Bronx Zoo, Botanical Garden, Riverdale. And it went down as far as Yankee Stadium was a huge, huge area of the Bronx with three other districts in the Bronx, huge area, 53 schools in District 10, and 11 of them were magnet schools. And I was trained by a company called Metis to write a new magnet grant because the year I was hired, they needed someone to write a grant. I guess because I had written the Alaska grant, they thought I could do it. Well, a federal grant. It's like 200 pages. But Metis, that was their work. And they helped me. They shepherd me right through. I did the educational writing, but, you know, they did all the statistics and graphs and, you know, looked at what we had to do was desegregate these schools. That was the purpose of magnet schools, to draw families back into the public schools because they'd been tremendous white flight. Our schools were up 99 to 100% people of color, people of second language, immigrants from all over the world. So, you know, 50 languages spoken in our schools and the need for 50 translators. What else about the Bronx? It's just a wonderful, wonderful experience. North Bronx and Riverdale, very well financed and tight good educational schools. Riverdale had a large section of Eastern Europeans who are really well educated at home. And they were very active in their schools, their kids, you know, really high achieving. Other sections of the Bronx was in the Irish section. Norwood again, good schools. But then as you traveled south, you would come into regions of very like 99 to 100% free lunch, which meant these people all lived in poverty. And you know, always second language is to contend with and a lot of difference. So the Bronx was wonderful and I did many other things as director of magnet. You could consider it a teaching position because I taught principals and teachers and

APs and shepherded them through developing their programs. Once they got the money, then they had to strengthen their schools with staff development, with collaborations with community organizations, museums, music programs, you know, anything they could do to make their school more attractive, the people who lived in the community so that they would come back into the schools. And we made very little progress. But we did make progress, and I did that for the entire time I was there. I wrote four or five federal grants during that period. Every one was approved. So that was just a really wonderful piece of my work. But then I was named director of many other initiatives because in a district office you wear many hats. So I was named Director of Standards, academic standards. Whole little world of itself. I was asked to present nationally by the company. This place, called the Learning Research and Development Lab in Washington, had done the new standards program of what work should look like for kids who are in 4th, 8th and 10th grade with samples of student work that came right out of classrooms. But the the criticism of the new standards out of D.C. was that, oh, that's fine for kids in Stamford, Connecticut, or Scarsdale, New York. The kids in the Bronx can't do that level of work. So use that cultural dissonance, you know, also seen in the magnet program. Well, my job as a customizer of the standards was to pull work from all the schools in my district, 50 some odd schools, and submit work that was good enough to stand up against the pieces from Scarsdale or other parts of the country. Our district got, I believe it was, seven pieces of work, more than any other. My superintendent was so proud. But, you know, it showed that our kids can do this. And it dispelled that assumption that they weren't able, with the right teaching, the right materials, the right emphasis, kids can do, you know, rise to every level. And I learned the phrase from the head of the magnet schools program. He called it the soft bigotry of low expectations. We've all heard that. That was the first time I heard it. But I thought, wow, that's what it is. It's it's a level, a kind of bigotry that we just need to fight. So the Bronx was a wonderful experience. And the best thing was that everything intersects in New York City. Every program that, you know, new innovations, all the movers and shakers. Mel Levine and special ed, Lauren Resnick in conditions of learning, one of the best practices that make a school a high end school. Howard Gardner, Project Zero. You know, multiple intelligence theory and how we learn differently and how children best learn. What are the conditions for children to learn? I mean, so many of the people who were big names because they were doing big things would pass through New York and talk. And our district, District 10 did a lot of innovations with, you know, these really far reaching, far thinking people. So it was just a crossroads and I was gifted with. All of you know, this additional kind of schooling that it was incidental to my work.

Aimee Lusty [00:38:43] You can learn from each other and teach other folks in other districts and have it spread further.

Stephanie Krusa [00:38:49] Yeah. Yeah. And we did some of that. For the most part, we worked contained. But you did do a lot of sharing. We did citywide workshops on many of these initiatives. I built a portfolio initiative that was adopted, which I'm so proud of. And I still work on portfolio and Hay Ground where I'm working next month.

Aimee Lusty [00:39:16] Do you miss being in the classroom?

Stephanie Krusa [00:39:18] Well, I am still in the classroom because I observe twice a year at Hay Ground I do an anecdotal record and then write a transcript of what I've tape recorded then and use the notes I've written and photographs because kids move fast. So I'm always photographing to see who's sitting where, what they're doing, who's not doing anything. And then I type up a transcript and comment about all the brilliant things the teacher did, all the wonderful comments. But then I say, Here are some suggestions. Try

this, or why not spin this project off into, you know, a larger study of... So that's my job, to help teachers have a second pair of eyes and another window into their practice. Because when you're in the midst, many things are happening that you're not even not even aware of.

Aimee Lusty [00:40:14] And how long have you been at Hay Ground?

Stephanie Krusa [00:40:16] Oh, years. When I was at Hampton Day, many of the families who are still involved with Hay Ground now on the board or directing the school are there now. And so they asked me to come in and work with them, you know, maybe ten years ago. I'm not sure. And I'm very flattered because it's a teacher-centered teacher-run school. You have two teacher leaders. They are administrators, but decisions are made among the staff and they vote every year to have me back, which I think is it's so it's wonderful that they trust me and that they feel I have something to share.

Aimee Lusty [00:40:59] And what do you like most about either being a teacher or administrator?

Stephanie Krusa [00:41:05] I love being with kids. I love working with teachers to solve issues that most challenge learning in the classroom. Oftentimes there's a bad or difficult interaction amongst students, particularly in middle school, which I spent many years teaching. So I know back and forth and a big piece of what I help teachers do is figure out how to deal with that disruption, where the boys hate the girls and, you know, they're teasing and, you know, being disruptive and it's interfering with learning, right. So the big reason to sort these things out is so that teaching and learning can happen. So that kind of thing is is what I work on. Also very interested in the kid who's sitting off to the side. Out of the view of the teacher quiet, doesn't want to be called on, puts himself there or herself there for that reason or other reasons, but is away from the group. So it's those children that I pick on, on immediately because you see it happening. And I do a lot of sort of helping teachers figure out what's going on with the child and then how we can help bring them into the conversation. Or even when a teacher teaches, usually these are the bright kids right in front of her, you know, the ones who are really achieving well. And the other kids are sort of on the side. Often the interaction is between the teacher and that small group of kids who are so ready to answer the question and, you know, so facile with language. So I do a chart showing who talked, who talk to who, and the kids on the side are talked to maybe a fifth of the time as this small group and some kids are not spoken to or respond at all. So we analyze that kind of interaction, which is so easy to fix if you go around and ask everyone to contribute, which also provokes everyone to think about, to pay attention, I mean, you know, it's not rocket science, but when you've seen enough of it, you know how to help teachers broaden the scope of what they're doing.

Aimee Lusty [00:43:20] That's great, teaching teachers.

Stephanie Krusa [00:43:23] I love teaching teachers. And they're so great. You know, I mean, I've done a lot of mentoring, too, of new teachers who've come in, and they usually come in with the public school background. And so we really need to help them understand the focus of Hay Ground, which is aligned with the teachings of John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky and all of these very progressive educators. Very different from a typical public school education, which is textbook driven for the most part, I don't want to judge all public schools, and I worked in marvelous, marvelous public schools here and in the city. So I'm not separating out and sorting out the better. I'm just saying that to my sensibilities teaching in a progressive school fits who I am.

Aimee Lusty [00:44:16] So I'd like to transition to talk about the Friends of the Montauk Library. And what year was the Friends of the Montauk Library formed, and what were your motivations behind founding the group?

Stephanie Krusa [00:44:28] I met Suzanne Gosman in the parking lot behind White's, waiting for the bookmobile on a rainy, cold winter day. And we became friends and we commiserated about the fact that we didn't have a proper library. We were happy to go to East Hampton, but it was a trek, and we just thought the community deserved it and our children deserved it. It was really, as Suzanne once so wisely said, for the love of our children and the things that are available to them, we want to start a library. So in our minds was starting a library. So we called SCLS—Suffolk Cooperative Library System and talked with Annette Bassett, who was director then in 1978, '79, '80. Not sure what the year was we talked to Annette, but it was about a year before we were really underway and she said, Come in and meet me. And she she had us figured out immediately. She said. You need to start a Friends of the Montauk Library. You don't have one yet, but nothing will prevent you from forming a 501c3 and beginning to raise funds and raise awareness. And here's how you're going to do it. So she gave us all the forms and it just, you know, fired us. We just sparked off, you know, everything and just sort of just spoke out from from that meeting. So it came home. We wrote the bylaws applied for 501c3 and, you know, established a mission. And there was a bunch of friends. We all had playgroups for the babies, right? So other people joined us. But Suzanne and I pretty much in partnership. I know I'm credited with starting the Friends. That was absolutely a partnership and then a cooperative effort with many, many folks working on it. And I, I appreciate being credited, but it's really not quite accurate. So we we were granted a provisional. And in '83 we got I think I got it took five years. But but in '83 we got our certificate but way before we got the certificate, even before we submitted the bylaws, we began planning and thought, Oh my God, we have all these wonderful women in town who knit and sew and create. Let's build a quilt, let's build a picture quilt. So that was one of our very first efforts. We pulled together this wonderful group of intergenerational ladies from Winnie Gilmartin to Sue Kelly, a young mother. Sybil Tuma was, you know, Charlotte Schorr, Ada Gigante, just a wonderful host of women. And we organized meetings and got quilt material and decided how big and people decided and what they wanted to represent in their picture quilt. And we got to work. And within a year, well, it was within months. Amazingly, we were auctioning it off, I think maybe in '81 of November at the Lion's fairs where we auction did so maybe it was a year and we showed it a long time and sold raffle tickets a long time. We didn't rush, you know, we wanted to earn enough money through the raffle to justify giving up this precious piece of our lives. So. So the quilt frame was set up in my living room. And the ladies would come to three at a time and quilt any day of the week. And it was just wonderful. We also started the pancake breakfast. I think that was our first fundraiser. John Lycke of the fire department said, Sure, come on in. I'll help you do a pancake breakfast. He got John's to bake, you know make the pancakes. John's Pancake house and volunteers from the fire department and it was a resounding success. I think we sold raffle tickets certainly to the quilt and other things. You know, I would say as every organization does gather things to raffle off, but it was also a public event where the community came together and we spoke about why we're holding this breakfast and what we planned to do. And that kind of grassroot effort was what helped to raise awareness throughout the town. Every manner of family. Every time we did programing we introduced, it with who we were, what we were doing and what the purpose was. So all of those Easter egg hunts and movies and book discussions and poetry contests, everything was prefaced with an understanding that we communicated about why we were doing this. So, you know, it just took off. The community absolutely was just thrilled with the idea that

this might happen. And before long, we were given the manse at the church for a dollar a year, given books from SCLS. And my mother in law was a friends of the library in Greenlawn. She gave us boxes and boxes of books, and we opened the manse in November of that first year. So that was it really all came together in 1980 was when we were officially formed, but we'd been thinking about it for a couple of years before and coincidentally and coinciding Minnie Proctor, speech teacher at the public school, had been you know, building the idea, you know, quietly to herself. Bill DePouli, clerk in the hardware store at Becker's. Also, we have to have a library beginning to, you know, do his research John Keeshan, same thing, politically connected. And, you know, part of the house buying and house renting community was working on starting a library. And little by little, we found each other, you know. And those folks were the original trustees of the library. And Suzanne and all of our compatriots were trustees of the Friends of the Library. And we worked together really well. You know, we helped with research on the library or whatever needed doing. Lynn Holmes from the Presbyterian Church pastor's wife joined. Audrey Grimes joined. I hope I'm not forgetting Bobby Borth, you know, teacher at the public school joined the effort. So it was the it was an idea whose time had come and people were so grateful that there would be not only a place to go and borrow books, but a place to meet and have programming. You know, I mean, they saw from the things we were doing without a building. You know, we met everywhere, firehouse and both the schools and the churches and wherever we could meet the Green. Kirk park, we found we used Third House, the outdoors of Third House. And, you know, so it just was something that gained momentum.

Aimee Lusty [00:51:44] And a lot of the first friends. Did you all know each other before or did this kind of bring a lot of you together?

Stephanie Krusa [00:51:51] It brought in new people, but for the most part, it was a core group of people who worked and played together, whose children knew each other. So yeah, we pretty much the original group, we all knew each other and were involved in presenting programming or building, you know, a quilt or making puppets for puppet shows. That was another one of the most wonderful things we did. Suzanne and I both love puppetry, so we got this fellow named Gary Schatmeyer to come in and teach us how to build puppets, how to write a script, how to make scenery, how to emphasize and modulate your voice to be a wolf or a little pig. And then he taught us how to critique ourselves. You know, one group would critique while the others performed and really fine tune. And we were off and running. We did puppet shows at every event we could as much because we it was just the most fun you'll ever have behind a puppet screen. Being a little pig or. You know, it just was wonderful to be a puppeteer. Something I'd always loved and always continued in my own private life as well. But it was it was so enjoyed by the kids and such a good piece of what we did. But boy, we had fun doing it.

Aimee Lusty [00:53:13] Where are you performing things you had written or books?

Stephanie Krusa [00:53:16] Usually we adapted, you know, a folk or fairy tale. We did some modern stuff. We did Pearl and the Amazing Bone by William Steig. Which was a very sophisticated story and great language. But it was also, again, so much fun. So yeah. Now, we didn't write any original plays for the library. There was just so much literature, you know, available and to be had that it was adaptable to.

Aimee Lusty [00:53:48] And can you elaborate on a little bit about the library services before you had the building at the church? It was a bookmobile.

Stephanie Krusa [00:53:55] It was a bookmobile. Period. We could access the Amagansett and East Hampton libraries. I'm not sure if there was a fee then I think it was free. There was an, you know, an understanding between the towns and that was wonderful. But it was far and, you know, we didn't have the the luxury of a building, you know, a repository for all the books and all the projects and all of the events. So so yeah, it was that bookmobile.

Aimee Lusty [00:54:26] How often did it come?

Stephanie Krusa [00:54:28] Every two weeks. This is what I'm recalling. I could be wrong, but every two weeks for two hours and there would be a line in the rain out the door so that you go in and you'd, you know, find your section. But you had to keep moving because there were people behind you. So you didn't even have much time to peruse a very, you know, small number of books that they they made available. And they tried to give you a little of something, a little of everything, like home improvement and novels and history and children's books and science. So you can imagine what we had to choose from. You always found something. But that was it.

Aimee Lusty [00:55:14] And no programs.

Stephanie Krusa [00:55:16] No programs. Absolutely none. I mean, the school did wonderful programs at school. Both schools, you know, had plays and things. But it wasn't it wasn't the same. Of course, other organizations were doing things. You have the MVA and Chamber, fire department and that would be like potlucks or fundraisers. What else? The Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts and Montauk Youth was active from that very early time. So they did their specific activities. But no, no organizing structure were bringing all the programming together that are usually under the auspices of a library.

Aimee Lusty [00:56:05] And when you have that first space or when we had that first space, there was enough room for programming and for collection development?

Stephanie Krusa [00:56:13] No, the manse is tiny and I think we had 10,000 books in there, so it was all shelves and a tiny little desk for Cora Alice Winter in the corner. What we did have was a lovely backyard and we put of the float characters back there after, you know, the St. Patty's Day, the quilts, I mean parades. And we had story hours and children's activities, singalongs in the backyard, but no meeting space. We were still relying on what we could find in town, and every organization was willing and delighted that we wanted to do anything. You know, I mean, MVA let us have Kirk Park whenever we wanted. Historical Society Second House grounds if we needed it.

Aimee Lusty [00:57:04] Can you talk about a little bit more about the early programs and activities and any that kind of continued on?

Stephanie Krusa [00:57:10] A lot of it continued on. But as with any organization and, you know, time marches on, the needs of the community change. New people come in with new talents and ideas. So for the most part, everything we were doing then, I guess except puppetry sadly has continued with some were one, you know, one time programs like the gingerbread house making that Suzanne and I did, which we decided would never do it again because gingerbread broke and we were up all night the night before a workshop for 12 ladies trying to get enough sides and roof pieces. So but it was great fun. So, yeah, other programs like George LaMaga doing stargazing, right? Incidental. Not necessarily an ongoing program like a book discussion or movie night for kids or other things like that.

Aimee Lusty [00:58:12] Can you talk about the group's organizational structure, how you operated and who had what roles and how that things were delegated?

Stephanie Krusa [00:58:20] Very easy, because when you are 501c3, you've got bylaws and that's your organizing structure that tells you who will run the organization, the hierarchy of officers and what their roles and responsibilities are, what committees you can form. And they had to align with the purposes of a library. And how you would operate. So Robert's Rules, as with any, you know, board, you know how to interact and you follow that procedure. You hold votes, you have quorums. And if enough people show up for a meeting, then you can pass, you know, new motions or, you know, start start a new committee. So we were very much bound by that structure. But it's a wonderful structure. That kind of structure allows you to function. So, yeah, there was never any thought to my mind that the bylaws were anything but brilliant because, Suzanne and I wrote them. With Annette Basset's help. So yeah. They have revised the bylaws since, I just read them.

Aimee Lusty [00:59:39] So in what were your roles and responsibilities through the years?

Stephanie Krusa [00:59:44] Well, I was part of everything that happened because Suzanne and I started it and, you know, just read everything that happened. You couldn't be more thrilled for every new activity. So it was not only part of my job, but it was fun. You know, it was it provided us with so much as a community. So I was the founding president and I served as founding president for two years, as I agreed to do, because I knew what being president would mean, especially for a new organization. That would be a tremendous, you know, investment in time. And Lee was a baby then, you know, one, two, three. I guess he was one when we started it and he was three when I stepped off as president. I stayed on on the board. And I've always been a member. But Suzanne was next up. Right. And she stepped in. And then she joined the board in '83 and made history. That woman was amazing. So, you know, as president, I led the organization, called the meetings, held them wherever we were holding them, and, you know, proceeded with all the plans that we made. And we did so much. I mean, it's just but again, it was a very enjoyable, you know, experience. I do remember dissidence on the board. However, we were friends. And yes, of course you had disagreements with people. You know how to spend the money, right? What kind of program to have. But we worked it out and and had just the best time together and had great respect and fondness for even those who disagreed with us. As they did for us. You know, we were a good group, a really good group.

Aimee Lusty [01:01:38] Were you part of any committees?

Stephanie Krusa [01:01:40] Well, as president, you have to be on every committee. That's part of your responsibilities. So, yeah, quilt committee, pancake breakfast committee. Any committee. Story hour. Everything that happened. I was part of it didn't mean I did the work, you know, because there were more than one person on a committee. Sometimes it was a one person. But yeah, that was just part of the job.

Aimee Lusty [01:02:08] What are some of your favorite memories from working with the Friends?

Stephanie Krusa [01:02:12] Puppetry, you know was just joyous. Suzanne and I continued to go to puppet festivals. They have the what is it, International Puppetry Festival every four years and the National Puppetry Festival the alternating two years. So

we went to those up at Glover, Vermont, brought our kids and had a week of puppetry that, you know, it was world class puppetry, I mean, just remarkable workshops for the kids. And so we brought all of that enthusiasm back and learned every time you went, you went to classes as well. I think the story hours were precious. Easter egg hunts were wonderful. Suzanne used to have them in her backyard. She'd a wonderful garden out on the pond. But we moved it to Kirk Park because her back yard was, you know, just limited space. And by moving it there, it went from the mothers of the playgroup that the kids were in to a town wide initiative. So we called for eggs from everybody and hundreds, hundreds of parents and kids showed up. And we did puppet shows for those events. So those were great. The potluck suppers that we held at Third House and the firehouse were just wonderful community events. We started doing a summer picnic at Albert's Landing, down in Amagansett you know, we cooked hot dogs and they really brought. Something to share. And the kids played in that dreen. It's, you know, the old English word for drain that washes from, you know, a sort of a brackish pond. Yeah, but it drains off and goes into the sound. The most wonderful, safe place for kids to romp, you know, frolic. And. You know, the area.

Aimee Lusty [01:04:11] That was my where I spent my whole childhood.

Stephanie Krusa [01:04:14] Just wonderful. And then beach plums on the other side of the dreen, you know, you could big beach plums or fish or, you know, swim in boat and frolic and run. And we just those were great, great family events. I, I do have notes about everything we did. Let's make sure I'm not missing something. Right past them. I think those are the highlights. Yeah. I think that's. That's the tip of the iceberg. But that's all I can speak about just now without reading this and you know, making this be a longer hour. Oh, here's one that I want to talk about Jackie Torrence was a legendary storyteller from South Carolina, nationally known. We brought her in and had her do workshops for teachers and adults, and we called in schools from around the area. And then she did storytelling workshops for our kids and she was magical. And that started a series. We had other people come in from the Riverhead Library and from New York City and do storytelling. So that was an ongoing program that we loved having. And I guess I pretty much mentioned the trips to New York City were magnificent. You know, Bronx Zoo, Botanical Garden, Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Plays. We went to see [unclear] and all kinds of really wonderful Broadway experiences.

Aimee Lusty [01:06:09] Did you organize a bus?

Stephanie Krusa [01:06:11] Yes, Hampton Jitney was wonderful. They charged us very little. Michael Mackie ran the programming there and, you know, we would do two or three trips a year, including a Christmas trip, and they provided us with a very inexpensive bus and just for us arrived when we needed them, brought us home. You know, before it was too late. It was just great.

Aimee Lusty [01:06:36] How many folks would come on those trips?

Stephanie Krusa [01:06:38] We would fill the bus. Yeah. Yeah. We we generally had no, you know, no empty seats on that bus.

Aimee Lusty [01:06:48] That sounds a lot of fun.

Stephanie Krusa [01:06:49] Yeah. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [01:06:53] In preparation for this interview, I was looking at some of the old scrapbooks that the Friends used to make with photographs, flyers, newsletters, and there were some really elaborate. St Patrick's Day parade floats.

Stephanie Krusa [01:07:10] Yes. Babar.

Aimee Lusty [01:07:14] A clam, there's a library inside of it and a boat.

Stephanie Krusa [01:07:19] Yeah. Yeah. They were wonderful fun. Bob-e and Eileen were very involved in their Bob-e Metzger and Eileen Bock, but a bunch of us worked on them. You know, Suzanne was always in there and papier maché what fun that is. You know, it's a great art project. So. But they are a lot of work, those floats. So it was a wonderful endeavor. I hope we get back to it because, you know, it is a lovely community activity. The church, the Catholic Church has done floats for recent parades, but I don't know if they were involved in this year's last year.

Aimee Lusty [01:08:04] I haven't been in years to the parade. Were there did children ever get involved with creating those?

Stephanie Krusa [01:08:11] Not as much. I mean, if Asa or Kipp was around and we needed help painting, we would. We would enlist them. But it wasn't their choice of an activity. They'd rather be off in the woods or, you know, surfing at the beach. But kids were involved in many other activities.

Aimee Lusty [01:08:32] Did you partner with any other local organizations on the Friends activities or events?

Stephanie Krusa [01:08:38] We did. We partnered with just about everybody in town, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, Jack Perna in the public school, fire department, the MVA, Montauk Youth, PTA, Community Church, Catholic Church, Chamber of Commerce, and probably others. But yes, we partnered with them either on an activity or we were allowed to use their property or buildings or, you know, or we worked together on something. I mean, it was just. Very, very few if any, things that we asked for of the community that that didn't happen. Everyone was so happy with the kinds of programming and the prospect of having a library that, you know, it was something that people jumped into very enthusiastically. So that was really heartening. You know, and you met so many people. You know, I met the board of the MVA, really wonderful ladies doing great work to keep the downtown area looking beautiful and clean and, you know, just so many important groups in town. CCOM [Concerned Citizens of Montauk] magnificent focus to that group. I'm not sure if we've ever partnered with CCOM, but they came later and I wasn't active on the board at that time. So but yeah, we and we all knew each other pretty much. So yeah, we did a lot of partnering.

Aimee Lusty [01:10:17] And we talked a little bit about some fundraising endeavors. The quilt, the first quilt and there were a couple of quilts after that. And pancake dinners.

Stephanie Krusa [01:10:27] Mm hmm.

Aimee Lusty [01:10:28] Potlucks.

Stephanie Krusa [01:10:29] Mm hmm. The book fair. The book fair was our main fundraiser. And what a natural extension of a Friends group. And Bob-E Metzger

spearheaded the very first book fair. That very first summer. We did that one in August, and then we switched to 4th of July because it was a weekend when the town was full. And we would make all the more money. And we always were really. Trying to be strategic about how to optimize an event and so that it really pulled in enough money to justify the effort because it's enormous amount of effort to run programming book fair was months long in preparation but also then to have sufficient donations for the library. So so the book fair, brilliant idea I think it was Bob-E's books by the pound, $0.50 a pound I think it was. And we all thought, well, how will you make any money? But the donations started coming in. Harry Bruno's family gave us their entire library, which was really wonderful, and many of those books would not be put out at a book fair. They were especially his collection on aviation. They were collectibles. And, you know, so we were very careful about going through every book and making sure there wasn't a first edition buried in there or something that, you know, we should take more care with. But we got thousands of books. SCLS gave us more books. Other families dropped off books. People were very happy to have a good place to pass their treasured volumes along. So the book fair started out mainly selling books at one half of the green was dedicated to just tables and tables and tables of books. Bob-E handled everyone, checked the condition, boxed it according to the category. It was gardening, health, fiction, history, how to you know, it's just an exhaustive effort. But she was so organized and the rest of the fairground was given over to a white elephant sale. Selling raffle tickets for whatever or chances, maybe a 50-50 raffle, a children's section, a little place to have performances for children, sometimes craft activities, bake sale, of course. And then we would sell. We had special tables for high end books, you know, really books that didn't belong in the by the pound section. So, yeah, it was a wonderful event. I guess we sold plants at that for sale, I'm not sure. But we were thrilled with the outcome and the crowds. You know, I don't remember the weather, but the crowds were enormous. So we just you know, it was very successful. And that set us off. And every I think we raised about $1500 that year. Every year it went up and up and up until we were up to raising $20,000 on a weekend at the book fair, which was thrilling.

Aimee Lusty [01:13:45] That's impressive

Stephanie Krusa [01:13:45] Yeah, yeah.

Aimee Lusty [01:13:47] And it's supported so many great programs at the library. Yeah. Allowed us to really expand and do a lot of different things.

Stephanie Krusa [01:13:54] Yeah. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [01:13:57] Are there any milestones of the group that you're really proud of?

Stephanie Krusa [01:14:01] I would say that I'm most proud of being involved in the founding of the friends and just the establishment of the manse as the first library by the time that the manse was being developed. Cora Alice was in there, Cora Alice Winter and her husband, and, of course, Alice Watson. Who else was there? Pam Lucas. Whole bunch of folks were in there shelving books, organizing books, organizing the space. Brian Cohen and Debbie Cohen were involved, and he did anything that we needed in terms of carpentry. You know, if we needed a quilt frame, actually, we would build we bought our quilt frames, but a puppet stage or shelving or he built every one of the tables that we used at the book fairs to display books. And I'm talking 20-30 tables that he slapped plywood on top of the framing. And put them together. And I mean, he was just a force. He and Bob Shorr as well. So I'm most proud of helping to establish the Friends and being part of that very first library. That was a milestone when that was opened in November of '80. But then

to have the library built in '92 and opened it, it was astonishing. And the thinking behind that, you know, the architectural design and the woman who designed the building. Very, very. Carefully. You know, sort of screened. Suzanne really knew what she was doing. When she and the board selected that that woman, I can't remember her name, but the plan was to phase it in, which was so smart, because there were a whole lot of people criticizing the size of the building will never use that much space. You know, what? Are we crazy putting up such a large building? We did pass the budget for it, but we passed it to open the ground, you know, the ground floor level only and leave the basement and the mezzanine unfinished. And as we gained funds and as we were able then to ask for more money, approval of, you know, spending more taxpayer dollars, we finished the basement and then the mezzanine. So the planning of that was so wonderful. And that, I feel, is a milestone that all of us should celebrate everyone who worked on it, you know, because it was years '80 to '92, 12 years in in the, you know, getting through to that point of opening our library. And now in '22 here we have this expanded and renovated space and we chuckle at the folks who, you know, criticized us and wrote letters to the [East Hampton] Star saying, what are they crazy building something that, you know, so huge on the hill overlooking the ocean? And you know. What a silly endeavor this is Montauk, after all, you know, 3000, 5000 people. But it turned out to be, you know, so carefully thought out and planned. And I'm I'm I take pride in being part of that very small part. But, you know, it's that's the big picture of why we did what we did.

Aimee Lusty [01:17:29] It's very it's active even in the winter, there is so much going on here. It seems I'm like drawing a connection now between your time in Alaska and here. Like, you saw a niche, saw a gap in kind of community services, whether it be a, you know, a program for Native American students or a physical library building here, or you're kind of observing and making making observations of the community and, you know, and fighting for for these new programs.

Stephanie Krusa [01:18:00] Yeah. Yeah. It was an easy fight. The hard work was the piece that was the fight. Otherwise they just happened. It was wonderful.

Aimee Lusty [01:18:12] And have you volunteered with any other community organizations in Montauk?

Stephanie Krusa [01:18:16] Pretty much, yes. Just about everything that's out here. I never worked with the Chamber [of Commerce], but I've worked. With the PTA and a little bit with CCOM, with Third House Nature Center, with the Historical Society, both churches. You know, I helped build the last float for the Catholic Church with Donna Clark, who's the driving force there. Oh, yeah. Girl Scouts. Boy Scouts. Cub Scouts. Yeah.

Aimee Lusty [01:18:50] Everything, you almost named them all.

Stephanie Krusa [01:18:51] Yeah. Yeah. So and it was all good work. I liked it all.

Aimee Lusty [01:18:58] And when and how did you get involved with Third House Nature Center?

Stephanie Krusa [01:19:03] In 1992, I was recruited to join the committee. I was neighbors with Kay Dayton. We lived on off East Lake Drive then. And she was best friends with Carol Morrison, who had been one of the founders of Concerned Citizens, which was formed to save that piece of land from East Lake back to the point from being developed. There were plans by developers to cut up that land and sell it off and make a

fortune. And CCOM was successful in having the county buy the land as parkland, but in '92 there were still grumblings, more grumblings. One of them had to do with privatizing Third House proper the building. It was in disrepair. The county couldn't figure out how to make money on it, so they thought to bring in a caterer. But that would have changed the whole focus of the building and the other grumblings that were happening. People were looking to develop the land back there, regardless of it being parkland, finding ways to either splinter off a piece, you know, because it's such pristine, beautiful land, some of it's very high. So you got a panoramic view. It's very, very desirable tract of land. So, Carol, you know. It was a real firebrand. You probably didn't know her. Amazing, amazing woman. She started this group and I was the third member, Dick Johnson, I guess, was before me as well. Jay Schneiderman joined us. Who else? I can't remember all the people, but it was a very small group, and I sit on that board until around 2004. I was in the city at that time. I just couldn't do it. They kept me on. No, I was beyond that. Actually, I was on there till 2016. What am I thinking? So I was on the board for a very long time and worked so happily with Ed Johann and Vicky Bustamante, Matt Steadman, you know, the movers and shakers of that board, Jack Perna was one of our partners. And so that was a a wonderful group. And early on, Carol wanted there to be programing in the park to justify its existence as a park. So we did Third House Nature Center for it was a nature group, nature club for elementary school kids like third, fourth, fifth grade. And every week after school we would take them on an excursion to the Walking Dunes or to collect sample rocks for a geology lesson or to the point, you know, to study wind, air, currents. And talked to Larry Penny about what was happening out there. And of course, we spent a lot of time in the Parkland of Third House, went through all those trails, named trees, identified the nuts, found owls nests, you know, and it was joyous. You know, kids loved being outdoors and, you know, walking around. If it was rainy, we went to the Marine Museum or, you know, some other learning experience where it was fun. So and Nature Club, I believe, is still functioning, still active. I jumped off after a while, you know, was working in the city or whatever I was doing. But that's still going. And we also started sending middle school kids to Camp DeBruce, our Montauk kids, many of them have never been out of Montauk or not far from it. So this was a wonderful program for kids whose families wanted them to have that experience. And we paid the tuition. We got the money to sponsor. Generally, it would be a person who would sponsor one child. And we just got enough of those people together, just sponsor the number of kids who wanted to join. And as long as we got our paperwork in time, all those kids went and it was life changing for them and their families. Who drove upstate and watched their kids go up to camp and drove back home without their children first time. And many of them shared those experiences and still go up there and they camp because some families like Matt Steadman and his wife would go up and camp for the week that their daughter was up there. So they were right down the road, which I found to be not only wonderful, but hilarious, right? So yeah, it was it was a great thing for the kids and the families. Then the Garden Club approached us about doing a internship program. Which would provide scholarships to high schoolers who are interested in environmental studies, provided they went through the educational program that Third House set up. We were in charge of educate, educating. They were in charge of finding the kids and providing them with a scholarship at the end of the program for college, these were all seniors. So Third House Nature, Third House Park was like a laboratory, you know, Big Reed Pond, Little Reed Pond, Oyster Pond, the beaches, Indian village, you know, those little streamlets that wash out into the sound. I mean, it's just a wonderful, rich little laboratory for learning. So every week there would be a different focus. Kids kept notebooks they could sketch or should, they did sketch the trees, the leaves, the berries. The animals they saw, they photographed. They had to do journal entries and write a blog and photograph and draw and do a report. At the end of the program, which was presented at a very prestigious

event at the Nature Conservancy, their annual meeting where they would have speakers like the head of Audubon come to speak to hundreds of people. And our kids presented at these meetings, and that was the culmination. So those three programs are the backbone for elementary, middle and high school kids. And I'm so proud of those, you know, those far seeing kinds of, you know, thinking. That was done by that little group started in 1992 in Carol's living room and met there most of the time, till we were able to be in Third House.

Aimee Lusty [01:25:47] Yeah, that's such a great gateway for children and high school, not children to get into environmental and biology fields.

Stephanie Krusa [01:25:55] Yes.

Aimee Lusty [01:25:56] Yes. Supplemental to their, you know, public school or private school education really pushed.

Stephanie Krusa [01:26:01] So one of our. I'm sorry I interrupted you. I'm one of our kids. Madison Aldrich was a nature club kid.

Stephanie Krusa [01:26:10] I think she was an intern. She was one of our high school interns. She's now a board member of Third House Nature Center. Isn't that wonderful? And all the kids who, you know, I would meet families or now adults would say, Mrs. Krusa, I was in your nature club. It's so sweet that they remember me and remember the experience. You know, of being in any one of those programs. It made quite a quite an impact on our kids, I think.

Aimee Lusty [01:26:44] And more recently, you became involved with the Montauk Historical Society?

Stephanie Krusa [01:26:48] I did after I retired from the Board of Ed[ucation] in 2006. I looked around for something to do, right? I thought, Oh Gurney's would be fun. I could use the spa. But I fixated on the lighthouse and I talked to Betsy White and she said, Go up and see Trish tomorrow. You're hired. So I became a docent. And walked that hill. And every one of the docents who met, you know, every morning before we went upstairs, would be given, you know, a rotation of positions to be in the lighthouse. And we were trained in the history of the lighthouse. And you're given the periphery, you know, are the, you know, just an initial training. But every day you're there, you can be reading the exhibits and, you know, learning more and more and more. The the knowledge of the history of that place just deepens every day that you're there. So I became fascinated with the history of the lighthouse and of the area and the people who lived here in the 1600s, 1700s. Lighthouse was built in 1796, commissioned by George Washington. Thrilling. And I'm a big fan of Abigail Adams and John Adams. And to know that John Adams signed the document that you know, is sitting in the lighthouse, it just to me, these are just wonderful, you know, things to be aware of and to make connections to. So the history intrigued me. The place is like a it's a very spiritual center. You're up on that hill with the wind and the waves and, you know, the clean air and the vistas. It's just an amazing spot. I really feel it's like one of those special places on earth, like Machu Picchu, you know, it just has this otherworldliness sensibility to it. So I worked there for seven years. I injured my sciatic nerve, climbing the tower a little too enthusiastically one day, and I was out of commission. So I quit. I couldn't take months off for the season and I said, You better hire somebody else. But then they recruited me to be on the board. Catherine called and said, Okay, you can't climb the tower, come join the board. So I did. And my very first meeting. I was voted secretary because they didn't have a secretary. And I said, Aha! Okay. So I served as

secretary for four years. And then when. Catherine stepped down, I served as president for two years. And when I joined, the bylaws of the Historical Society stated that you served two terms and step off for a year. And that was always my mindset that I would do that. And that's what I did too. I'm still a member. I'm still aware of all the programming. Talk to Mia, our executive director, often and enjoy, you know, visiting the lightouse and chatting with my buddies. I still go up to Vermont to meet the old lighthouse keeper Margie Winski, with Sally, who still works in the lighthouse Sally Schellinger who's was married into the Schellinger family the Schellingers was one of the original families of East Hampton. Most families came across all but two families came across from Connecticut. They were all British English colonists. The Schellinger and your brothers came from New York. They were Dutch and were among the the small number of families in East Hampton in 1620 or so. I'm not sure of that year is correct. So to be friends with Sally Schellinger, it's again another like sort of mind blowing connection to me, you know, that these families are still here. And so, yeah, the Historical Society was going through amazing changes then we rewrote the bylaws, which had been in place since '77 and really needed to be updated. We established committees. You know, committees were fairly ad hoc. We established, I think seven or eight committees. Were criticized for creating too many, and maybe we did in our enthusiasm. But we we established a little a little more structure to the organization. And so I'm very proud of that. That was really wonderful. Catherine and I worked together really well, and it's a really dedicated board of people. But my kids being in Tennessee and Hawaii, I was traveling a lot to be with them and my life is getting very crowded. Plus I started writing a book about Abigail the ghost to the lighthouse, and I'm just revising it. It's almost, almost ready for the wider world. I hope. So, I was busy and at this stage in life I think, okay, now I really need to focus in and I have these collections of things, family photos and letters from Norway and, you know, in Norwegian that I have to translate and things that I want to do and organize and, you know, do a lot of writing around the things that, you know, happened over the years, you know, my family, my ancestors. So my focus is more, you know, trying to pull together a lot of the strands of our lives, you know, before and after Montauk and get it all done. Or my sons are going to be sorting through it. Right now I'm focusing on Abigail. So. And I belong to a writing group. And we read for each other. So they're helping me to really finesse that. It's just such a help to have those 12 listeners, you know, hearing your language and helping you, you know, just or asking questions about what they don't understand. I mean, that's probably the biggest piece that helps us as writers to develop our work. So.

Aimee Lusty [01:33:11] And what's the audience for this book? Is it adult or children?

Stephanie Krusa [01:33:13] It's a young adult. Yeah. It's a pretty serious story about a shipwreck. Right. And Abigail, the ghost at the Lighthouse is known to anybody who lives there, has lived there or works there. I mean, ask anybody. Henry, our historian, you know, one of the most serious people, you know, and grounded in fact, person in the world would be in the attic. And the archive and he'll tell you that Abigail was tapping him on the shoulder and he turned and she wasn't there pulling on his jacket. And he'd say to her, Abigail, I have to work now. And it would stop. Trish trying to set the alarms at the end of a night. It just wouldn't set. Finally, she said, Abigail, I need to go home so she could set the light. I mean. We attribute Abigail to all of these things, right? But we love the notion that she's there, you know, unless we're living there. Margre Winski was afraid to go into the north basement and I don't know about Joe Gaviola, who's there right now, but I think he's a little spooked by the idea of there actually being another presence there. But it's great fun, too.

Aimee Lusty [01:34:27] Yeah, I saw that you had done a program based around that lighthouse.

Stephanie Krusa [01:34:31] Um, I did a puppet show at the lighthouse, surprisingly, but it was a Halloween show. Yeah. And we bunch of kids helped me with that. So. No, what have we've done readings from our writing, our writing group has done readings, so. Yeah, yeah. We haven't substantiated her to the point of doing a program about her. But every other person who walks through the doors says, Tell us about Abigail, you know. And was it Terry Flanagan who drew a painting? She did a painting of Abigail. Very funny. I was a little chagrined by that. Wait a minute. That's my project.

Aimee Lusty [01:35:16] Well I look forward to reading this book and have a copy in the archives.

Stephanie Krusa [01:35:21] Me too. I very much look forward to that because I have really enjoyed doing it. And I've worked a long time. You know, it's really time to launch this project if I can and I will find a way.

Aimee Lusty [01:35:33] You will. Absolutely. I'm still at the end of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add or clarify that we didn't cover in the interview?

Stephanie Krusa [01:35:43] No, but this was a lovely exercise because it helped me to look back and see, you know, how rich the programming has been and how much in a short time when you think about what we have today has been accomplished by this sweet little community of everyday folk, you know. Who work hard to get through life and take care of their children and, you know, do their. Best. It's just an enormous accomplishment. And I'm so happy that I had the chance, I was there in that parking lot in back of White's, you know, wondering, you know, is this all there is? Could we do something more? And then finding that so many other people had thought the same. So, yeah, in so many ways, the things that I've been exposed to in life are just amazing. You know, I mean it. And I want to sort of put that down on paper for my kids, too, because I'm their mom and they knew me from when they were born forward. But, you know, they don't know much about what I did before, and I think for everyone, male and female it's important to share those accomplishments. And, you know, years later, people will be very interested in the things that Dave and I did and his brother and wife did, you know, so. So, yeah.

Aimee Lusty [01:37:17] Well, thank you for sitting with me and sharing your story.

Stephanie Krusa [01:37:22] Thank you, you're welcome. Thank you for asking me.

Aimee Lusty [01:37:23] I'm going to end the interview. Today is February 17th, 2023. And this is the end of my interview with Stephanie Krusa at the Montauk Library.