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Abigail Sullivan and Linda Stone

IWU Council for Women
Illinois Wesleyan University

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2017 Council for IWU Women's Summit Recordings: Abigail Sullivan and Linda Stone

Abigail Sullivan: So, this is Abby Sullivan, class of 2008...

Linda Stone: ...and Linda Stone, class of 1985...

Sullivan: ...and we're gonna start with 'Describe one of your favorite things about the town where you grew up.' So, the town I grew up in was really family-friendly and very much like a neighborhood town. So, that's really important to me as I think about where I would like to raise children someday ... so I always stick back to that neighborhood feel. I actually grew up in kind of a townhouse complex...um... so there were like kids everywhere constantly, which I think, you know, it's funny, I'm only 30 and to think that like that doesn't happen as much anymore just 'cause I think parents are nervous about their kids being outside without them and we would literally just like leave, in the morning during the summer...and, you know, come back for lunch or eat lunch at someone's home where they would, you know, somebody's mom would feed you or something...but... um ...So one of my favorite things about that town, though, was our pool. We had like an aquatic complex and I am a swimmer. That is the only thing I can do athletically. So... we would just spend our days there, like I would go to summer camp in the morning during the summer and it was walking distance from my house, so when I got older, it was like a right of independence to be able to be able to go to the pool by yourself when I was like in junior high and stuff like that, so that's probably my – and I actually ended up working there as... like a high schooler and kind of into college a little bit so it was cool to have that as like... it was almost like a little hub in the community, like everybody went there...um...so, you know, it was a neighborhood town for sure, the whole year but definitely in the summer that came out a lot...so that's probably my favorite thing about...

Stone: What town was it?

Sullivan: um...so I grew up in Park Forest, IL.

Stone: Okay.

Sullivan: Yeah... so south, south, south suburb of Chicago... very far south... so barely a suburb anymore...[giggles]... so ... yeah ... what about you?

Stone: So, this is Linda and I grew up in Peoria, IL which is not far from Illinois Wesleyan and I do like where I grew up. I think when you're a child ... or I was born there... you don't get to pick where you grow up so I didn't actually learn – maybe to appreciate it, until I was much older but I felt very safe always and my parents both worked but it was never an issue for, you know, coming home from school and not having anyone there 'cause I had a brother and a sister, so I always felt safe, you know, it was a fun place to grow up. It wasn't too big of a city ...[overlapping]... and not too small

Sullivan: ...[overlapping]... Did you live in actual Peoria?

Stone: ... lived in Peoria...mm-hmm... and I think what I liked – one thing I liked about it is the Peoria center river, and not that I went out on boats all the time or anything but I think I just appreciated the beauty of the river and seeing the barges go up and down the river and kind of dreaming about, like I'd wonder where they're going, and wouldn't that be cool to ride on one of those and so... but when I became older and left the Midwest and went to other parts of the country, people always ask that question, "Where are you from?" And I was always really kind of proud to say, "I'm from Peoria, IL." And people are like, "Oh, really? Wow. That's like middle... mid-west." I think it said something about sometimes your values when you're in other parts of the country, and also just the same, you know, will it play in Peoria? And I used to have a boss one time that would joke about Peoria and then one day I told him I'm from there. He said, "No, you're not." But there were always some kind of jokes that would be coming up. So I don't know – it just I guess I've gotten older, I've appreciated it even more that it's sort of a – one of those kind of towns, you know – not too many people are from there, so...

Sullivan: No – yeah... Cool

Stone: Okay.

Sullivan: So this is Abby again. Tell me where you are in your sibling order – just kind of general talk about your family. So I'm the oldest of two children. I have one younger brother who's almost to the day 4 years younger. My mom always says well I had maybe (4:23??) in May and that's the only time I wanted to have them -

Stone: Oh!

Sullivan: - So we actually are – his birthday is 6 days before mine, so just shy of 4 years. So he was my 4th birthday present that I did not want ... so ...[laughs]... I really wanted a little sister. And when you're 4, you don't really understand that. You're like, you don't understand Biology and the fact that there is no control and really back then – he's 20 almost 27 now like you didn't find out... what you were happening and so my parents couldn't even be like, "*No, we're gonna have a brother.*"

Stone: Mm-hmm...

Sullivan: So yeah, I mean I'm very much your typical – this child, very type A personality. My brother and I, you know, got along okay as children. He is a very – he – like with, you know, we always called him Sam in ham. So he wanted to be involved in everything. He thought my girlfriends, when I was growing up, were so cool and I thought he was so embarrassing. But we actually got to be a lot closer when I came to Wesleyan, so kind of random story about that. So I was very excited to come to Wesleyan. I came to Wesleyan for the first time the fall of my junior year of high school, so I still had a lot of high school to go through. And I walked on this campus and I was like, that's where I'm going. So I – and my parents were like, wow it's expensive. We should talk about that...

Stone: Mm-hmm...

Sullivan: ...So in the back of my mind, it was always there and Sam knew that. And I think he started to realize that, you know, he was going to be the lone kid in the house and like, O-oh, what did that mean? You know ... and we would joke about it and I think we both, once it was decided I was going to Wesleyan kind of more into later in my senior year, we started talking about – I think we both were realizing how much we would miss each other but like playing it cool and we didn't wanna talk about that, so actually he would, every time I left the house during that spring and summer, he would be like, *so you're going to Wesleyan yet, you going to Wesleyan*, and I would be going to random places like I'm going to Walgreens or I'm going to Target, like I'm not going to Wesleyan. So when, I don't think he actually came with to drop me off, or maybe he did, but later around that time, he ... I think we both again were like a little sad about, you know, not being siblings living in the same house anymore and he was like, *it's okay, you're just going to Walgreens*. And so that was like the joke then for the next – he got married last summer and I talked about it in like the toast I gave at his wedding so we have a really close bond. And we actually got I think a lot closer once we realized how much we relied on each other...

Stone: Mm-hmm...

Sullivan: ...and just being the two, like I have friends who have bigger families. Both my parents are one of 5 kids so I come from a very large Irish Catholic family, which I think engrains it into your culture and so I often, when I was little, I would wonder what it would've been like to have more siblings. But I think we are really good at communicating now that it's just the two of us and as we add spouses, you know, someday kids and things like that, I think we're very good at knowing that we really have to be there for each other, so ... so yeah, so it's kind of been interesting to, you know, have such a close relationship with a brother among other things 'cause a lot of people are like, oh, if you have a sister then it's easier but we didn't. We thought a lot when we were little, like, because he was the annoying little brother but as the adults we're pretty good and we're pretty close to our parents. My parents have been – I don't know – I'm almost 31 so they've been married for almost 34 years so, yeah ... so we're a pretty tight family of 4 and then he got married last summer so now we're a family of 5 and that will just keep growing. So it's kind of cool to – yeah but I'm definitely (**8:18??**), very much (**8:19??**) as child so I was the leader of the pack. So... and I still probably am. So, yeah ... what about you?

Stone: So this is Linda and I'm the opposite of Abby. I am the youngest of three, so I have a... my brother is the oldest. His name is David Stone and he lives in California. And my sister is in the middle and her name is Susan Pinton (**not sure 8:46??**) and she lives in Edmond, Oklahoma, and I live in Atlanta, Georgia. So we are about – each of us about two years apart and unlike what you might have thought that I would be real close to my sister because we're close in age, I ... have actually always been a little closer to my brother but we're all really pretty close now because we've lost our parents and even though distance separates us, we only get to see each other a few times a year. I'm so grateful that I can have my siblings and now with our parents gone we just have this incredible, even tighter bond and you know, just come to each other first when we need something instead of what normally we would call a parent, perhaps. So I really... I'm happy that I have them. I wish I could see them more and ...but you know, good thing we can fly and go see anyone anywhere quickly.

Sullivan: Yeah.

Stone: So that's what we do. We travel around and go see each other.

Sullivan: Yeah. Cool. Okay this is Abby again. So the next question we're going to do is how has your life been different than what you imagined? So I think as I mentioned earlier I am 30 so I'm turning 31 in a few months. I would say that ... how has my life been different ... so I think when I was younger, it was still very much... I mean I think we have come a long way in helping women see, like girls and women see their potential beyond just becoming a mom and you know, hanging out and raising kids. So when I was younger I probably thought that by this time in my life I would be married with children and I think as I have gotten older, like I have a greater sense and appreciation for the fact that that hasn't happened yet... because I see like, till that's – my mom has a college degree but didn't really do much in terms of like a career. Her career really was like us, which I think is great of some women but I think in her situation she probably could've and wish that she had been more career-focused. She likes to say, when I turned 30, she said to me, *you know I had both of you by this time in my life...* [giggles]... and she is really quite an advocate for, you know, making the choices that you wanna make and I do wanna be a mom someday but I'm not – I think that my life is different in the fact that you know, even may be 5 years ago that made me nervous that I wasn't there yet or I didn't see it immediately happening but now I look back and I even... I look back since my time at Wesleyan which is only 9 years ago that... I haven't – that I've just gone to do so much and travelled and I still have like, I mean, I have a bucket list of things I wanna do before I have kids someday, not because you have to stop living but just 'cause you're focused during this and, so I think that's probably the biggest thing that's different... and I think it's for me just... about doing it when it's the right time, if it's the right thing for you ... 'cause I – you know, that's something I wanna do but I've been able to ... I mean, I had the financial freedom to be out of school for a few years and then go back into a full-time masters program which was amazing. I mean, it was phenomenal for my career but it was also amazing from a personal level and just make decisions. I bought my own condo, like... and just to know that I did those things even if it wasn't – I went and lived in a different state... just to know kind of to push your boundaries a lot. I'm very much a home body and so those were all challenges that I wanted to get and I don't think I would've done those things if I would've just stayed, you know, in the Chicago area or you know I came to Wesleyan because literally my parents drew a bubble for me and said okay this is, 'cause I wanted to be close enough so I can get home if I needed to. And I think not doing all those things that I thought I should've done in my 20s allowed me to expand that bubble and then have a greater appreciation for ... like what my future will look like, so yeah, that's like the biggest thing that I thought I would've done by now...

Stone: Mm-hmm...

Sullivan: ...is like gotten married and have babies but I'm excited to do that in the next stage of my life and I'm really happy that I had the freedom to travel and make career decisions that were only about me, things like that, so... yeah that's probably my biggest thing.

Stone: That's a great story. It's interesting to know that we're paired up here today because I'm 54 and I'm still single and I – I would say that that's one of the things that I – has been very

different in my life than I thought. When I was in high school, I had a very close group of friends and on graduation night, we all put predictions in a jar, folded them up, wrote it, didn't share with each other what our predictions were for each other, but then 10 years out of high school, we all came back for reunion and we opened the jars to see, okay 10 years have gone by. What were our predictions for one another? And universally, everyone predicted that I would be the first one married, and that I would have four or five kids because I always talked about that's what I wanted in my life... and so, fast forward, I also had some of the same thoughts when I was about your age... about...my mother the same way, she had all of us before she was 30 and very similar thoughts but at that point, you know, career started taking off and I also was finding my life moving in different directions with my work. I also have always loved to travel and I started having opportunities to go and see, you know, many different places outside the United States, so but I guess, like a big realization for me, and I almost got married a couple of times, but also wasn't sure it was a right thing. But I realized at this point in my life that I still hope that I have children in my life and I realized that I can do it in a lot of different ways

Sullivan: Yeah.

Stone: and one thing I do is I volunteer for special needs children and I spend time with kids. Fortunately, I am in a relationship now and he has a child, a son so I get to not really be as mother but

Sullivan: Yeah.

Stone: you know, have the – so – so I guess it probably didn't hit me until I turned 50 that I realized I can enjoy children in so many other ways and so I think for me that's helped me but just another thing, like career-wise that's very different is I never thought I would be in the industry that I'm in. I'm in insurance and I didn't pick insurance. I just picked a good opportunity after Wesleyan to do a management training program but I think I've learned through that career while I didn't pick the industry that there's so much good around you in whatever you are doing that, you know, it might not sound glamorous but in many respects, you know, I've had a lot of neat opportunities just in the industry that I never thought I would be doing this for, like, 32 years now.

Sullivan: That's crazy, yeah – I actually, it's funny you say that about industry so I work in finance but I started as a public accountant so I was like, media clients and everything looks so flashy and fun and I audited TV stations and got to do stuff like that and I actually went back to school and then, the job I'm currently in is a dredging company. So my company is 127 years old and is... I mean, incredibly vital to our infrastructure of our country, and you know like, trade and export and all those things, import, and it's just funny you say that 'cause I didn't even know that dredging was a thing and when I look back and I'm like, oh, I wanted to do something artsy and maybe that will still happen in my life and I work in non-profit and ... but you find those things like you were saying about children, like you find those in other ways so I like my job, it's very stable, it's a very – like we always need dredging

Stone: Mm-hmm...

Sullivan: but when I see where I'm like, Oh I wish that I would be doing something that makes me be happy, I use my talents to do that even though it's not in my career, like you were saying with children like, just because you're not biologically someone's parent does not mean you can't be a parental influence. So I think it's interesting, like you said, that we're paired up 'cause we probably think similarly about – about those things, so...

Stone: Cool...

Sullivan: Okay... so this is abby and the last question that we're gonna do is, 'For new incoming students at IWU, what would you want to say to them? So I think back to my time at Wesleyan and I think what I would probably say may sound cheesy and like, cliché but is like, really seize the opportunity for what you – the next four years of your life provide. I think for me, like, one of the biggest struggles I had coming out of Wesleyan was how to continue my relationships, 'cause you're here and you are like living down the street or down the hallway from the like, your closest people and I think what I would say is to really use the time that you are here to foster the relationships that you care the most about and to not really worry about the other ones because you know, people, you know, be really important for certain aspects of your life but they might only be in your life for a few months or a few weeks, whatever, but to really foster and appreciate the relationships you have here and then figure out how to make that work out outside of here. So I'm, you know, as I said, class of 2008, and we were actually students when the council started. And so there's actually quite a, you probably noticed, there's a large contingent of us 'cause we were students and we continued -

Stone: -I actually wondered that-

Sullivan: -So there were 5 of – there's 5 or 6 of us here this year, but there's probably a few more – a few – one had a baby a few weeks ago, things like that so... so, and we were actually three of us, or four of us are in a book club still, together in Chicago and we were talking to this other girl that's on our – in our book club, and she did a non-traditional college experience so she went to culinary school and you know, kind of found her way back to a four-year degree and she was talking about how impressive it was that the four of us were still that close and we see each other maybe once a month – usually not – I mean, 'cause life is busy and I think – so when I say... like foster those relationships, you kinda have to use this time to really, like, make those relationships solid because then when you are put out into the world, jobs happen. One of them left for a year to go to Germany. The other one was in Malawi, Africa for 2 and a half years. I went to grad school, you know, just people kind of come and go but we've continued those relationships. I think you can do that in so many ways, like, it's not just the people you live down the hall from but it's the people that you're in like, an organization with and you know, it's important to take advantage of your academics and things like that 'cause those are important, too. But I think what I came out of here knowing was that I had a really solid foundation of people to like, rely on, not to give me a job or not to, you know, whatever, it was, you know, a solid foundation of people to like live life with and to, 'cause till the end of the day, like your job is good and your career is important but the people you surround yourself with, it doesn't matter if they share the same, you know, career aspirations, like, we're still ... you know ... I think that's what I would say is the most important thing – to foster relationships and appreciate the bubble you live in...[giggles]... 'cause that bubble gets a lot bigger when you ... when you leave the confines so

... and for me, that took a while when I came to Wesleyan. It took a while 'cause I'm a bit of an introvert and I take a while to warm up to people ... and so... funny actually, when I went to grad school my mom turned to me and said, *No Abby, you only have two years in grad school so you need to find a best friend in the first three weeks*, because she knew at Wesleyan it took a little longer and by junior and senior year I was like, you can't make me leave this place. I don't ever wanna leave. So yeah, foster your relationships and appreciate them.

Stone: Good advice! Hey, this is Linda and I would say for new incoming students, one thing not to worry about is whether or not you know exactly what you want to do, because I think you'll be surrounded with students who do know what they exactly want to do and perhaps have known that long before they came to Wesleyan but I came to Wesleyan and I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to do and so, I – I selected a major right away but then ended up exploring a language and so ended up majoring in German also in addition to business, and I just hadn't expected that I would enjoy studying a language that much and while I don't use it in my career, you know, just opened up several opportunities for me here at Wesleyan to learn how to teach others, for example, when I did teacher's assistant so I didn't know exactly what I want to do when I came here and that's okay and even when you leave here, you might not know exactly what type of com[any you wanna work for or what kind of – or whether or not you wanna go to grad school right away, and that's okay too. It might sounds like you've heard this a million times, but follow your dreams, but sometimes we don't know, you know, what they are, so I would just say, appreciate the moment that you're in and see all the good that's around you at all times and you just never know where your path's gonna lead and that might not look anything like, you know, what you were expecting... so, good luck.

Sullivan: Yeah...awesome advice too!