

Interview details:

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Interviewer: Barbara Alvarez

Interviewee: Suzanne Speltz

Transcription:

Barbara If you can say and spell your name.

Suzanne It is Suzanne Speltz. It is S-U-Z-A-N-N-E and S-P-E-L-T-Z.

Barbara Alright, Suzanne, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your connection to being an elected official?

Suzzane I'm a social worker by profession. I was a school social worker for 26 years in Sheboygan, and I worked with the Sheboygan Area School District for 26 years.

That's what brought me to Sheboygan initially. And I retired in 2016. And then since then, I've done a number of different things. At the current time, I won my county board seats because I ran for office, and I'm in the process of ... I'll be doing some counseling because I'm also a licensed clinical social worker. So I'm getting those insurance processes, I'm getting those things going. Prior to that, I've done a lot of volunteer work with different agencies in Sheboygan, I've done a lot of prayer evangelism.

Also, right after I retired, I was able to spend a lot of time with my family. My dad was kind of under his last two years of his life, so I was able to help them, my mom and dad, with kind of those end of life issues. So that was really nice. I also did some substitute teaching, and I got involved politically in some kind of grassroots organization, and that kind of led me to run for office and leads me today. What else can I say about myself?

I actually am from Minnesota. I moved here from Madison. I finished my graduate degree there. I moved here over 30 years, 32 years to be exact. I like to do a lot of things outside. I like to bike. I like to do anything outside, outdoor activities. I've done a lot of traveling, the United States, international, so I'm very social. Anyways, I've had kind of a colorful life, so that's kind of a little nutshell.

Barbara Great. So who or what inspired you to run for office?

Suzzane What inspired me ... Well when we had the Coronavirus stuff come down, I just saw some things that were going on that I found very concerning. So that's kind of prompted me to get more involved in a local level. That's kind of where I got involved in kind of a political grassroots organization.

And a number of different people had said to me, "You should really run for something." And I said, well, "If the Lord wants me to run, I will run." I just really didn't think that I would be led by the Lord and the Holy Spirit to do that. And ultimately that's really what happened. I keep everything in prayer, so I was just led by the Holy Spirit to run for office. Some people had said different things, school board, whatever, and I think I've kind of done the school district thing.

I just want to run for County. So that's kind of how I got started.

Barbara

So when did you first decide to run? In 2020 then?

Suzzane

No, it was actually a little over a year ago, about 2021. I think around June. I think around June. I had made that decision— June of last year.

Barbara

To run for county board? (Yes).. Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about what it took to run that campaign?

Suzanne

It actually takes quite a bit of work, I thought. I was really fortunate because of the people I was connected with. There was a lot of support and a lot of education and training. So there was just a lot of education and training in how to run a good campaign. I was already kind of educated myself on local government and all those kinds of things. So then it was like just getting that training, like I said.

So doing that kind of getting social media lined up, your literature, kind of getting the message honed down, just trying to decide where do my beliefs exactly lie and how do I hone that down and make it into a very clear, concise message so people can- it will resonate with people and they can grab a hold of it? And then that's as far as planning.

I did a lot of door knocking, like a ton, because I was running against someone who had been in office for a while. He was a well-respected incumbent, kind of respected on both sides. So I knew I really had to bust in order to win and I was going to win. I was very determined. I was like, I need to win. So I was going to knock on as many doors as I could. So I found the map, I looked at my District Twelve. I kind of figured out where the borders were, where I had my little strategies. And I also had like a door knocking app.

It kind of directed me to the doors that were most likely to vote for me. And then so that... those are the doors I knocked on.

Barbara

What was it like to knock on doors for the first time? Were you scared? Were you feeling confident?

Suzanne

Yeah, it was kind of nerve wrecking. I mean, I'm very social and actually for my job as a school social worker, I did a lot of home visits. It was a different situation as to why I was knocking on doors.

So it was a little intimidating at first and after a while I kind of really liked it.

I really did. So it just was kind of fun.

Barbara

Did you do phone calls or anything? Or was it mostly knocking on doors?

Suzanne

No it was mostly... I did phone calls, maybe at the end, some phone calls. But it was really mostly door knocking because that's what was told us that as far as local races, whoever knocks in the most doors wins. I'm like, "Okay, I'll do that."

Barbara

So what was the outcome of you running for office?

Suzanne

I did win.

Barbara

Okay.

Suzanne

Yeah, I did win.

Barbara

Was it a pretty big margin?

Suzanne

Well, it really wasn't.

I only won by 40, so I know there was other races, like on County Board, the local ones, that the difference was like well, one was like zero. They were tied. There was a kind of a few votes. Eleven votes, something like that.

Barbara

Some pretty tight races.

Suzanne

Yeah. I mean, you don't get a lot of voters in a local race, like a spring election.

Barbara

So it seems like knocking on the doors was not only a way to get people to know you, but also to drum up people to actually go out and vote.

Suzanne

Absolutely right. And I did a lot of signs, too. They heard me, they came to my door, they saw my face, and they see my sign. And they're like "Okay."

Barbara

Right. And through this whole process of knocking on doors, I'm sure you talked to countless people. What did you learn about yourself and also about the community?

Suzanne Well, about myself, I found that I was a little thicker skin than I thought.

And most of the people I was going to, there were people that were more likely to vote for me. But I did come across some people who were very opposed to my message. Like, very much so. It was like, "Oh, well, then you don't like my message or like me, then you don't have to vote for me." So I just kind of learned to brush it off.

As far as I learned, a lot about the community, like a huge part of my area, District Twelve is rural, and I had never really been out there, so just getting to know the layout of the land and the people, so that was kind of fun.

Barbara I'm sure some people in the rural areas were surprised to have somebody knocking on their door.

Suzanne Yeah, absolutely. Because they were like, you know, kind of like, "Who comes out here?" Even in town...

Because I have a portion of the town of Sheboygan, and like in town, one guy said, "Because campaign in the winter, it's the worst time. The campaign is crazy."

Barbara Wisconsin winter

Suzanne Right, December, January, February it was the worst. I was out there. It didn't matter what the temperature was. It didn't matter to me. I don't care. I'm going to do this right. And then you're out here in this horrible weather, and you came way out here. I'm going to vote for you just because of that.

Barbara Just for showing up at my door in the winter.

Suzanne And, you know, must of resonated with my message.

Barbara It sounds like you learned that you have thicker skin from the experience.

Suzanne Yes. Yes.

Barbara Was there anything specifically you learned about the community from meeting all these people?

Suzanne Well, I thought there was a difference between rural and then in town, and I'm more of an in town type of person. And to be honest with you, I don't know that I would really open my door for people, but people did. I guess people were super friendly out in the country

and not that they were rude in town, but they weren't quite as talkative.

And then this is sort of interesting... I very much noticed a difference in dogs, because out in the country, the dogs are kind of intimidating because they have guard dogs.

Barbara

Right.

Suzanne

So that was like...

Barbara

Should I walk up the path or not?

Suzanne

Exactly. So I had some encounters. But then in town, they kept their dogs inside and they were very much even they weren't guard dogs let's put it that way. So it was easy in that regard.

Barbara

That's an interesting observation.

Suzanne

Yes. I even had, like, a dog horn in the event that the dog wasn't going to back off.

Barbara

Wow. You got to be prepared.

Suzanne

I had one German shepherd, like, right on me.

Barbara

Wow.

Suzanne

In my face like, growling.

Barbara

You're brave.

Suzanne

Well no I'm not.

Barbara

I'd have been like, "Bye."

Suzanne

I was trying to get out of there, but the dog got me before I could get to my car.

Barbara

Oh, my gosh.

Suzanne

I'm not a big fan of country dogs. Yeah. People I love, but not their dogs.

Barbara Yeah. So that's a whole other obstacle.

Suzanne Yes. In town, the dogs are pretty non-threatening.

Barbara So what would you say to another woman who is thinking just like you were, "I think I'm going to run for office." Or perhaps people are like, "You should really run for office." What would you say to a woman in that position? And perhaps maybe they feel a little insecure about it.

Suzanne I would tell them if they really have the desire and the time and the energy to run, I would say go for it. Just the fact that if they're hesitating because they're a woman, I would just say, "Forget it, just get rid of that thought because it shouldn't be part of the picture." I mean I guess I would say that to anybody, regardless of if they're a woman or not. If they have the desire, I think they should just go for it.

When I look for someone to run, I look for someone that shares my values, whether they're male or female or whatever race, it doesn't matter to me. If they share my values, they're going to stand strong and stand for truth and freedom. I just say I would encourage them.

Barbara And what do you think is the future of women in politics? Either on a local level, a state level, and national level? Do you see any trends?

Suzanne Well, I don't know if I see any... I can't even comment on any trends because I paid no attention to local politics prior to 2020.

I just didn't. But I think it's really good because I was a woman, I ran against a man and he was well-established, and I won. So it is possible. And I know for these elections on August 9, I know three women that I'm going to vote for personally, and they have a very good chance of winning. I say go for it. It would be nice to see more really strong, conservative women get into office. So that's my feeling.

Barbara And you mentioned that you hadn't really been involved on a local level prior to 2020.

Suzanne Not at all.

Barbara So now that you have been involved on a local level, why do you think other people should also get involved on local levels?

Suzanne

Well, at the local level we can all do something and it's very accessible to get involved. It's very easy, I think, to get involved because you can meet with people face-to-face very easily.

You can call them, you can email them, you can go to meetings, like at a state or federal level or whatever. I mean, you can't just drive to Madison or drive to Washington DC and just go to a meeting. There's like school board meetings, city council, county board. You can do that. And there's a lot more that they do that affects us directly than probably what most of us realize. Yeah, I think it's very important, actually.

I think a lot happens more on a local level than what I had ever thought before I even paid attention.

Barbara

Right. And now that you're involved, how long is your appointment for?

Suzanne

It's for two years.

Barbara

Two years.

Suzanne

I wish it was longer.

Barbara

Do you think you'll run again?

Suzanne

I don't know. I'm not really sure. It's an awful lot of work. And that's one thing I would actually tell somebody if they are going to run for office. You really have to have the time to put into it if you want to win.

I mean, it's a time commitment to win, especially. If you don't have an opponent, that's one thing. But if you're running against an incumbent, you really have to get out there. Plus you have to have the time to do the job. It's not a full time job and not even close, but you still have to have time to do it. The people will elect you or vote for you based on the fact you're going to do something.

Barbara

Yeah. Well, thank you so much Suzanne, for speaking with me.

Is there anything that you'd like to add to this conversation?

Suzanne

No, I don't think so. I appreciate it very much. Thank you for asking me. It was a really nice conversation. I'm glad to see your company here.

Barbara

Thank you, Suzanne.

Suzanne

You're welcome.