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Narrator

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

AJ: Alicia Joswiak

CS: This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student research project initiated by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today is June 5th, 2023, and I'm here with Alicia Joswiak. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I am an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today, I'll be talking to Alicia about what life was like growing up in the Twin Cities. During this interview, I'm going to ask you to reflect on your childhood life experiences as they relate to a variety of social topics from that time period. For the purposes of this interview, we have defined childhood as birth through 17 years of age. To begin, please state and spell your full name, including a maiden name, if applicable.

AJ: All right. So, my full name is Alicia Joswiak, and that is spelled A-L-I-C-I-A J-O-S-W-I-A-K.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

AJ: I'm Caucasian, or white, and female.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

AJ: October 2nd, 2000.

CS: Finally, please share where you grew up, such as the name of the neighborhood or a nearby street intersection. Include any major moves you made during this time period.

AJ: When I was first born, I started by living in the East Side, Saint Paul. My parents didn't want me to go to the school district that was there, though, so we moved to New Brighton, which is a smaller suburb. I moved there when I was still a baby, around 2002. I lived right by Hansen Park and Bel Air Elementary School, which is off of the major Silver Lake Road.

CS: Okay. Thank you. I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with the memories you have for immediate and extended family. Please share some memories that you have about these relationships.

AJ: Yeah, of course. I wasn't very close to my extended family growing up since on my dad's side, a lot of my family members didn't get along very well, so I wasn't super close to them. Sometimes we saw them for different holidays and things, but there was always fighting going beyond the siblings, so I didn't get to see them all that often, kind of off and on. Then on my mom's side, a lot

of her family members live far away, so we only got to see them during holidays and birthdays, things like that. I did have a somewhat closer relationship with my mom's older sister, my aunt and her husband. My uncle did a lot of volunteer stuff with them, going geocaching with my uncle on that side growing up, just a few chances here and there to get together with them. Of course, they were very busy as well, so not super close to extended family but have small memories. Then I have a younger sister and her name is Amanda, we were really close growing up. We played together all the time. This is before cell phones became really big. We did a lot of biking outside, going to the park where we lived, doing jigsaw puzzles together, playing with toys, just all kinds of things like that. Then eventually when the first Wii came out, we started playing that a lot too. I remember a lot of memories of us waking up on Saturday mornings and sometimes playing a Wii game and playing that for a while. We would spend a few hours with that before going and playing outside. So I had a very close relationship with her, and I still have a close relationship with her since she's only two and a half years younger than me. So I'm still very close with her. Then my parents unfortunately didn't get along very well either. Overall, I do not have super fond memories of them growing up, just because there was a lot of fighting, arguing and things like that. After I did go to college, they did end up getting divorced, which I wasn't entirely surprised. My dad worked the second shift, so I didn't get to see him very often anyway, because he was working during the evenings when I was home from school. The only interactions I really had with them was him driving me to school, until I was able to get my license or take the bus when I got a little bit older. Then occasionally seeing him on Friday's when he had off on those days. My mom, she worked a lot. She was a manager, so she worked all day, but then she was also on call. Quite often she would get calls at the break of dawn and had to get up and work or was always sitting at a computer. I had a better relationship with her than my dad because I got to see a little bit more. Overall, she was just always very, very busy, so I didn't get a chance to play with her a lot or things like that growing up. Then there was my grandma, who I would call Granny and so did my sister. We were really close with her because she did a lot of the babysitting for me and my sister growing up. This is because my parents worked really long shifts or just off shifts during the day. My grandma often picked up me and my sister from school and would bring us to all of our different activities and sports and things like that. She was a really goofy lady. She always had these weird quirks about her, just kind of silly in general. She was also very much a clean freak and things like that, which I think has passed on to me a little bit. It was passed down to my sister a little bit as well. She was super loving. We have good memories of going to Perkins with her because she loved going to Perkins as a lot of older individuals do, doing jigsaw puzzles with her, watching all kinds of goofy TV shows like The Price Is Right and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. She loved watching those types of things, and she only lived about 15 minutes from our house. A lot of times me and my sister would go and sleep over at her house since she had a pretty big house. She had four kids, all these empty bedrooms so that me and my sister could sleep over there quite often. Just lots of funny stories with her just because she was a goofy lady. We would come home from eating out or something like that, and then she would be trying to get us to eat a bunch of more food at her house, which sucks, but a good relationship with her. Then one other person, her name was Mary, and she basically was a grandma to me, even though she was just my next door neighbor. We ended up forming a really deep bond because she was an older lady. She didn't have any kids or anything like that, but I would spend time with her all the time. Quite often I would go over to her house and we would work in her garden or do some puzzles, especially with her spouse, Frank, who unfortunately isn't around anymore. I did puzzles with him all the time, quite often, like playing with her Russian nesting dolls and her jewelry box and things like that. She would let me look in all of her little random trinkets and things like that. She used to live next door to us then she moved to Plymouth, which was unfortunate because there's a little bit of a further drive, but still would try to visit her whenever we could. She's moved around all over since then, she would go to Florida every once in a while to stay for the summers, and now she lives in New Hope. So I try to visit her whenever she can and have a good relationship with her. She had cats as well, and loved cats, so we always bonded over that. Growing up she taught me and my sister how to play tennis. She would bring us to Dairy Queen sometimes after school, just things like that. A real sweet lady who I see as my grandma, even though she's not really related to me by blood. Those were different family members of mine.

CS: Okay, cool. Thank you. Next, please describe the ways in which your family's economic status influenced your childhood.

AJ: Yeah. My family was kind of middle class, maybe slightly upper middle class. So, we lived really comfortably. We were in a good neighborhood. So, no concerns like safety or anything like that. There were never really any concerns with finances and things like that either. Of course, later on in my childhood, closer to like 17 my mom was having some career issues. She ended up losing her job and that caused some financial strain for a little while, but otherwise she was able to retire after that. Overall, really comfortable and financially well off growing up. My family was able to travel a bunch. That was one of the things that all of my family members loved doing together. Each summer we would go up the North Shore, visit Duluth and Lutsen to hang out there in the summer. We took a few trips to Florida and Hawaii and just lots of different little trips. I took a trip recently with my mom to Texas. I guess that isn't really my childhood, but in general, just lots of traveling. That was a big thing that my family liked to do and bond over. We lived in a nice house and had vehicles that didn't have any issues because we didn't have to deal with any financial concerns. Overall, I just felt very privileged to be able to grow up in that situation, even though it kind of resorted to my parents having to work a lot more. They had to work really long hours in order to have that good financial support. It was kind of a give or take situation that way, but very privileged from a financial standpoint and from an economic standpoint.

CS: Okay. In what way has your family's financial circumstances shaped your spending habits today?

AJ: Yeah. So, growing up, we were financially well off. I guess not super recently in the last few years, my mom ended up losing her job and then we ended up having more financial strain. Then when my parents got divorced, that caused more financial strain. So now I'm pretty thoughtful about how I spend my money and things like that. Of course, that's an important thing to have in general, but even more so, knowing like one car maintenance or car repair could send me into debt if I'm not careful. Just finding ways to save money by going and buying things secondhand and shopping at less expensive grocery stores. I always shop at Aldi instead of Target. I do everything I can to try and save money. Since now finances have become more of a concern in my life. Now that I live on my own, I don't have any financial support from my family. They kind of thought that since we moved out there, these are all of your responsibilities now, all of your insurance that is now your responsibility. My own phone bill and just different things like that. As soon as I moved out, they wanted me to take care of all of that myself without any assistance. So, I have all of those to think about in addition to paying rent and things like that. So, I just try to be more careful with my finances and such.

CS: Okay, great. Now, I would like to know about your experiences with religion, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, etc. Describe what you can recall about your family's religious practices when you were growing up.

AJ: Yeah. So, on my dad's side, he didn't practice religion at all. He grew up Catholic, but once he became an adult, he just didn't practice it anymore. Once he was an adult. My mom's side, they were nondenominational Christian, so kind of a section of Christianity that isn't super strict, if you think about it that way. So, they would try to get me and my sister to go to church each Sunday. And for a while we were. Then, as me and my sister grew up, we became less and less involved in the church just because there was kind of a toxic environment. In that, the youth group was kind of their own little clique, and there were issues with the pastor, and overall that church was just kind of toxic in general. So, my family ended up leaving that church, and then for a while I had another church I was attending, mainly just because I enjoyed playing in the orchestra. I wasn't really going to their Sunday services every single week, but I would go there on Wednesday nights to practice in their orchestra and then occasionally play during their Sunday services. So, I wasn't really strictly

practicing that religion, but finding other ways to get involved. I just enjoyed having that community of people. My piano teacher at the time was also in the orchestra, so I got to see her as well, since we were pretty close. And then we. Overall, my family, me and my sister, don't really do a lot to practice their religion. Same with my dad. My mom still goes to church every Sunday, so we still practice like Christian holidays, such as Easter and Christmas and things like that. However, not too strict of a religion that we follow.

CS: Okay. How important or relevant is religion to you now as an adult?

AJ: It's really not in my life all that much anymore, like the orchestra I was in. I'm not involved in that anymore just because I'm working full time and having other responsibilities in the evenings. Since I work a part time job as well, I just can't really fit it into my schedule. So, at this point I'm not really practicing religion at all.

CS: Now I'd like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. If you moved during childhood, you may wish to reflect on more than one neighborhood. This is fine to do, but please indicate as you do it. Please describe what comes to mind when thinking about the neighborhood that you grew up in.

AJ: Yeah. I did start by living in East Side Saint Paul, but I was a baby at that time, so I don't really remember anything from that time growing up. So, I really only remember my time when I was in New Brighton. So, I'll talk more about that. I lived close to Bel Air Elementary School and Middle school, which are both of the schools I ended up attending, which is really convenient. I lived right by Hansen Park as well; it was literally right across the street. So, walking down there, or biking there was super convenient and since it was a very safe neighborhood, it was kind of nice. As my sister and I got a little bit older, my family felt confident that me and my sister could go down to the park without needing supervision all the time because the park was safe. What's the neighborhood like? Like I said, my family was kind of middle class or middle, slightly higher class. The people in that neighborhood were very similar. So economically and financially well-off, predominantly white, which was kind of unfortunate to not have more of that diversity. What was nice was my school districts did have a lot of diversity because the surrounding cities had a lot more diversity. When they brought us all together, I got to mix and mingle with lots of different people from different backgrounds and different experiences. That was really nice to have. Otherwise, that's the majority of what I remember from the neighborhood I grew up in.

CS: Okay. If you had to describe the best part about growing up in your neighborhood, what comes to mind?

AJ: I would definitely have to say the park that was nearby. Overall, just everyone in the neighborhood kind of congregated at this park. My neighbors had dogs as well, so I got to meet all of the dogs of the neighborhood at this park and get to know some people who live nearby. I have a lot of good memories of going and playing with my sister down there or going down there. I have a lot of memories with my grandma and Marianne, spending time with them at the park and getting a chance to get outside. Yeah, that's probably my favorite part of that.

CS: Okay. Next, I would like to learn about the values shared by your family and your neighbors. Values are principles or standards that help guide behavior. What memories come to mind that demonstrate what these values were for your family and your neighbors?

AJ: Yeah. So, my family and my neighbors really valued being well-rounded and being involved in lots of different things. Again, economically speaking, since we were able to afford it and the individuals in my neighborhood were able to do so as well, that gave us an advantage. I guess, to be able to participate in lots of different things. So many people participated in different musical activities, and our school districts also highly emphasized getting involved in orchestra or band or

choir. So, lots of music-related activities. We also had lots of sports in the park right next to us, and lots of community sports to get involved in. Then we also just had lots of sports activities in the area because the schools offered lots of community-based sports. We had a community center that had lots of community-based sports, so a lot of people were involved in things like soccer and baseball and things like that. We also highly emphasize volunteering and things like that and luckily, we live nearby. Feed My Starving Children is in Coon Rapids, so I know a lot of people in my neighborhood went and volunteered there. New Brighton also has a place called Bundles of Love, where you can package baby items that then get brought to hospitals. This was for mothers who aren't able to necessarily have access to these baby items or are not as financially well off to be able to afford baby items for their newborn. A lot of these items are handmade by individuals. These people live in New Brighton and have people who help make parts of it like sewing on buttons or just cutting fabric. So, a lot of people were involved in that as well, and lots of different volunteering activities were in the area. Let's see, I guess intelligence and learning and kind of excelling or striving to go to higher education was also highly emphasized. The school district highly emphasizes higher education and college preparation. The high school had lots of courses, they offered AP classes and tests like that, but they also partnered with a local Ramsey community college. So, a lot of our teachers were actually professors who had master's degrees or doctorates teaching at our high school. That way we were able to get both college credit and high school credit in the same class, which was really nice without having to take an AP exam or anything like that. I would say the majority of the students that graduated from the high schools in our neighborhoods went to college just because it was so highly emphasized. For example, I was able to graduate with my associate's degree and my high school diploma at the same time because I took them out of college courses in order to do so. A lot of students were able to do that as well or shave off a whole year or two of college. Once they went on because they had these college credits that transferred. So that was also kind of a big value in the neighborhood. Overall being outside, given that we have the park nearby. So, a lot of going and walking around the park biking, walking your dog, playing with kids outside. We often see kids in the neighborhood who have what we call the "night games", or whatever. Once it got dark outside, we would all like to play games in each other's yards called night games and things like that. Keeping the neighborhood clean as well. Cleanliness, I would say, was also a good value. I would find people walking around picking up trash, which is really nice, trying to keep the park clean, trying to keep the roads clean, just to keep that nice, clean and comfortable environment. So those are just a few values that come to mind.

CS: Okay. Now I'm going to ask you all about leisure time. Describe some of the ways in which you, your family and your neighbors engaged in leisure time when you were growing up.

AJ: Yeah. So, like I said, going to the park was a big thing. Whenever we have free time, especially if it is nice outside. I know winters were a little bit tougher, but especially in the summers we would go. We went Biking or walking in the park or playing on the playground there. In the wintertime, they would take the soccer fields that were there and plug them into an ice-skating rink. So even in the winter we would go ice skating or go sledding down the hills. We were trying to get outside as much as we could. Then when we were at home, my family and I guess a lot of my neighbors as well, did a lot of jigsaw puzzles or games. Me and my sister would just sit and do jigsaw puzzles all the time or play board games with each other, so I have good memories of that. Then of course, when the Wii came out, a lot of people in my neighborhood were getting involved with playing the Wii. So, it'd be fun to see your friend and be like, "Oh, you have a Wii, too? Then let's play some games with that." Those were some other leisure time activities, and then gardening was a big thing as well. My family didn't really do a whole lot of gardening ourselves, but our neighbors did a lot of gardening. So, my sister and I have good memories of going and helping out our neighbors with gardening. Even though we didn't really have a garden ourselves, we picked a lot of vegetables and things like that, that we then got to bring home and cook. My family in particular did a lot of reading, especially me and my sister. Quite often we were the kind of kids that would just grab a book and sit and read the whole thing in one sitting. Then suddenly four hours have gone by, so

reading was a big thing too. I think that ties back to the value of intelligence and just higher learning.

CS: Okay. What television shows did you watch growing up?

AJ: I guess as a kid, me and my sister watched a lot of Disney Channel since we had that. We watched: Wizards of Waverly Place, Good luck, Charlie. I am trying to think of other shows. I haven't watched them in so long, so It'd be interesting to see them again. Another show called the sweet life, things like that. So, a lot of Disney shows. I remember watching Scooby Doo quite a bit too. I have good memories of me and my sister watching Scooby Doo in the evening before going to bed. We would make a big bowl of popcorn in a giant green bowl and watch Scooby Doo in the evenings. Like I said, we did a lot of playing outside and reading and other activities too. So, we kind of watch TV intermittently, not usually sitting and watching it a lot because we're busy in other ways as well.

CS: Okay. Which bands or music genres were your favorite?

AJ: So, what's interesting is that my parents listened to a big variety of music. It's kind of funny because my dad, he was into nineties, grunge and metal, so I got a mix of that when I was a kid that I still like to this day. Then my mom liked more classic rock or eighties. I listen to a lot of that and have that to this day. Then kids our age quite often listened to pop or indie music and things like that, so we got a mix of that as well. Overall, both me and my sister like a wide variety of different types of music just because we were exposed to so many different types. At this point I'm more into rock and metal, whereas my sister is actually more into EDM music, which is very different from what my parents listened to. Yeah, both of us had a wide variety of different types of music we listened to and kind of just enjoyed all of it.

CS: Okay. What types of toys did you play with growing up?

AJ: Yeah. So, me and my sister played with dolls quite a bit like Barbies and things like that since those were big. My sister actually got the Barbie house when she was a kid, so we played with that quite a bit. Lots of different dolls and just come up with all kinds of different stories in our heads because very active imaginations are played with a lot of puzzles and board games. As I got older, I started to get less interested in board games and more interested in games that didn't take quite so long. So, I played a lot of UNO, or Sequence or Raco, things like that. These were games that you could play lots of different rounds to kind of stop whenever, without having to sit by one board game for a few hours straight. Um, let's see. We also played with Matchbox cars. We had a bag of a bunch of Matchbox cars and quite often we would play with those kinds of little tracks that they would go on. We even simply just lined them up by color and things like that, just because we like the sense of organizing them. Those are the main toys that I remember.

CS: Okay, Next, let's discuss your experience with schooling. Please describe what it was like going to school as a child.

AJ: Yeah. I went to a really great school system and had really great teachers, I think. So, I went to the Mountain View Public School system. I think it's actually one of the top ones in the state of Minnesota, which I was very fortunate to be able to go to since I feel like I got a really good education. So, starting in elementary school, I went to Bel Aire Elementary School. At first it was a little bit rough just because elementary school kids can be ruthless. Sometimes I got picked on so that took me a while until I was able to find some friends that I hung out with. Unfortunately, a lot of my friends in elementary school I didn't have a lot of other classes with, so I mainly just had them in the homeroom and things like that. That's also where I got first introduced to music, which is a big part of my life now. In fourth grade I started orchestra and violin, and then in fifth grade I started playing in band and learned saxophone. I was that kid that was always carrying around two

instruments that were half my weight. I would put them together in a backpack and looked pretty goofy as an elementary school student. That was kind of the start of my musical journey. I also started piano, but that was outside of school. Also, a lot of music was introduced to me in elementary school and then going into middle school I went to Highview Middle School, which was just about four blocks away or so. It was really nice and close, so not too different of a drive in middle school. In middle school I made more friends given that we were separated and more advanced versus intermediate classes and things like that. I met a lot of people who were in a lot of the same classes as me because I was in more of the advanced math class or the advanced reading class. I met a lot of students that were similarly in those classes, being in the same boat from there. I actually still have one of my best friends who I met in middle school, sixth grade. We sat next to each other in math class and she is still one of my best friends and I just went to her college graduation. It is really fortunate that I had the chance to meet her there. In middle school I also had my music grow even more since I started. I still was in orchestra, but then I also started chamber orchestra and then in middle school I couldn't do band in addition to orchestra. I did jazz band instead, since it was an extracurricular activity. So that way I was still involved with all of those and still doing private lessons on piano. I also picked up mandolin and guitar as well, so I was just doing lots of music related activities. Once I was in middle school, I also just felt more confident in my classes. In elementary school I was very self-conscious thinking I wasn't doing very well in math or very well in reading just because I had to get a lot of help from my mom with things. Looking back on that, that's very normal when you're in elementary school. In middle school, I was starting to feel more confident, more independent from that regard. Then in high school I went to Irondale High School, which was just the next city over, which was only like a ten minute drive so it was super close. It was just a lot of clusters of little cities. That's where I met my boyfriend, who we're still together now. Our six year anniversary is actually coming up in just a few days, so we are very fortunate for that. I got involved in even more music, was doing orchestra and chamber orchestra, and then I was in jazz band and marching band. At that point I was still doing all my private lessons, so I was very involved with music at that point. Then I was doing a lot of college prep at that point. Once I got to sophomore year, I was able to start taking college classes. I was taking a lot of Ramsey community college classes and AP classes and classes that prepared me for club tests. My course load got pretty busy since I was doing a lot of homework and studying and things like that, which was good in the long run. At the same time I was a bit overwhelmed and I got pretty tired sometimes. So overall that wasn't probably great for my mental health because I was very anxious and overwhelmed. Luckily, I got through it and it worked out in the long run since I got my associate's degree at the same time as my high school diploma. Irondale High School is also where the student body got a lot more diverse since we were taking students from multiple different middle schools and combining them all together. I got to meet lots of different people and learn about lots of different clubs like the LGBTQ club or the Black Student Union and things like that. That was really cool to be able to be exposed to all that different diversity, especially growing up in a neighborhood that didn't have a lot of it. I met some of my closest friends while I was in high school as well. I'm still friends with today, even more so than people I met in college. Overall, just kind of great schools I went to and worked really hard through my whole education and great experience overall.

CS: Okay. For our final topic, I'm going to ask you to reflect on local and global issues such as war, poverty, discrimination, social unrest, etc. In your opinion, what were some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

AJ: Yeah. Growing up in the neighborhood that I was in, I was pretty sheltered to global issues. This was because my neighborhood was predominantly white and middle to upper class. So overall, I didn't have the impression that global issues were directly impacting our little suburban neighborhood in the middle of Minnesota. I'm mainly going to focus on local issues, I guess. So, the main local issue that I remember was Hansen Park, given that it was a big deal for lots of us. They had a major water management change, so they flooded all the baseball fields and flooded a big area which took many years before the project was complete. I remember a lot of people were upset

about this. They had signs in their yards like protect the park and protect the park from this project and things like that. Overall, I think it's a good thing that it happened because it helped improve flood control and wildlife habitats. I'm pretty sure Hansen Park is technically a nature reserve. It is a good thing for the sake of wildlife and things like that, I just remember a lot of individuals in the neighborhood having signs for protecting Handsome Park. When I was a kid, I didn't really understand what that meant just because I was not sure what's happening to this park. When they're flooding it takes a while for it to recover from all that. Now it has this awesome walking track around this big lake. We get to see lots of ducks and geese and lots of birds and really awesome areas. So that's kind of the main local issue that impacted our neighborhood. Like I said, not a whole lot of global issues come to mind just because I was kind of in that little sheltered area of my life.

CS: What sticks out to you as some of the most serious health threats to people in your community, such as a specific disease or illness?

AJ: I guess the main thing would be, in our school districts, we have stuff going around all the time with kids, like you'll have lice go around or strep throat go around. I remember as a kid, sometimes we'd get these slips of paper, come home that would say, like strep throat is being passed around or there's someone in your class who has lice, and my mom would freak out in some way. We have to take all these precautions. If lice came out, I'd have to go to school with my hair braided up into a bun. Since I have really long hair to help reduce the chance of that, or my mom would say avoid everybody if it was strep throat. That was just kind of like a minor thing, given that we were living in an area with kids and within the school district, given that we were right next to a park. I'm sure there were health threats related to ticks. I know there were a lot of ticks in our park, so quite often if we were playing outside, we'd have to come home and completely check ourselves for ticks to make sure we didn't have any of them. I do know somebody who ended up developing Lyme disease from ticks, so that was a concern. Luckily, even though my sister and I would come home with ticks, sometimes we never had any issues. In the long run there were not really any major health concerns other than that that we're spreading around our neighborhood.

CS: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of that you want to comment on as far as those local and global issues? If not, it's okay. You don't have to elaborate.

AJ: I don't think so. I think I've covered the majority of it.

CS: Okay. This is the end of our interview. Your responses are invaluable, and we really appreciate that you took the time to do this today. Thank you so much for participating.

AJ: Thank you.