

Beth Peter
Narrator

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Interviewer

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Transcriber

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

BP: Beth Peter

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 27th, 2023, and I'm here with Beth Peter. My name is Cole Steinberg and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today I'll be talking to Beth 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.

BP: Sure. My name is Beth Peter, B-E-T-H P-E-T-E-R.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

BP: Female Caucasian.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

BP: January 17th, 1966.

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

BP: Grew up in Roseville near Victoria and Connie Road C, and I did not move.

CS: 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.

BP: Immediate and extended family. I have five siblings. Three of them are older than me, and I had a younger sister. We are fairly close in age. We all were born within nine years of each other, so very close in age family. Relationships. We grew up in I would say a pretty typical—what one would consider a typical family.

My father worked here at Concordia University. My mother was a homemaker and also taught piano. We had that daily interruption, if you want to call it that, in mid to late afternoons where piano students would be coming over for lessons. That was always part of our life. My siblings and I got along I think as most siblings do. We still get along now. Of course there were always little fights here and there. Two of my older siblings are brothers but—and then an oldest sister. I think it was a very close connection.

We didn't see a lot of my extended family. They live either in southern Minnesota or in south Dakota. We would go see them a couple times a year maybe down to southern Minnesota. Once every other year out to south Dakota. Holidays were always just with—with just our family or maybe with another family in the neighborhood who didn't have relatives in the area either.

CS: Did you have any family pets? If so, please describe them.

BP: Well, by the time my parents got around to me as their fourth child I think they'd had pretty much enough of family pets. Because they were taking care of them [*laughter*]. But we did have—well, let's see. We had cats. I remember one was named Kitty, apparently. I remember her. I remember when after she had a litter of cats we had to—we brought them all down to my uncle's farm where eventually they became feral cats.

We would see them later on [*laughter*] but we didn't know what to do with a litter of kittens in the early '70s. Had them, and then I actually had a teddy bear hamster for a few years. I'm trying to think of his—his name was Orpa. This was before there was an Oprah Winfrey, but his name was Orpa. I think I got that name from a friend of mine from New Zealand who told me that was a special word down there. Those were our pets.

CS: How were household chores divided between members of your family?

BP: For the most part—household chores. I would say my brothers and I—outdoor chores like mowing the lawn. By brothers and I would—we had divided the yard in three different areas.

Those with steeper hills they would do and no hill—'cause they were older than me. I would take care of some areas and they would do the others. That's how we divided up that work.

Indoor chores. I don't remember it being a big stressor to have to do a chore. I'm sure because my other did not work outside the home, she just took care of the laundry and dishes and things like that naturally. Because she was teaching piano we would have to—we would set the table and maybe get the food started while she was still teaching just so dinner wasn't too late.

There weren't a lot of big tasks that we had to do around the house. I don't remember us being told that we had to vacuum or we had to dust or do anything. We needed to keep our own rooms clean, but we didn't take care of the other rooms. I guess our parents let us off pretty easy.

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

BP: Sure. As I mentioned, my mom did not work outside the home. She taught piano and she was the church organist, but both of those paid minimally. My father was here at Concordia on faculty which also did not pay great in those days. I remember his first year here in the mid '50s he was earning 5,000 dollars a year.

They managed to buy a home when they got married or shortly after they got married. There was enough income to buy a 17,000-dollar house at that point in Roseville in the mid—early '60s—in 1960 for their then growing family. My parents were always very frugal, I would say. Very careful with their money. We didn't talk a lot about it but I know they had budgets.

I remember once we went on a vacation to Washington, DC, and it's funny 'cause I was nine. I wanted to go to—I'm trying to think of it—Monticello. We were camping this whole trip. That's how we travelled. We never stayed in hotels. We had a camper and the seven of us, all the kids and my parents would get into the car and drive around the country with our camper. We didn't have enough money to go to Monticello.

Looking back, it's probably because my father had a budget, and we'd spent it all and we needed to go home. There were little things like that. In general, I don't think we were denied anything because my father was a church worker. I think we were able to—our church had a Lutheran school attached to it. We were able to go to the Lutheran school there for a minimal cost because we were members, so that didn't cause an issue.

I think it was just always a matter—even into their old age my parents were frugal. It was just something that we just lived with, I guess. They didn't spend extravagantly but that's just how we lived.

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

BP: Well, as a single person I don't have to save money for my children and *[laughter]* I can spend it all on me. I would say I'm definitely—I think I'm thrifty but I'm not as much as they are—they were. If anything, I'm a little bit more willing to splurge on nice things if I'm traveling and do that.

How has it impacted me? I definitely think about it more when I spend a large amount of money on something. It doesn't stop me from doing it. It's just that I'm more conscious about it, I think. One thing my parents instilled in us was a love of travelling, and it's—I continue to do that. I try to find cheaper places to stay but it doesn't necessarily mean that's something I'm always going to do.

CS: Great. Now I'd like to know about your experiences with religion, such as Catholicism, Lutheranism, *et cetera*. Describe what you can recall about your family's religious practices when you were growing up.

BP: Sure. I was raised Missouri Synod Lutheran and still am. We would go to church every week, all—my entire family. My mother was often on the organ at church, so our dad would kind of chorale us in church. My younger sister has down syndrome. She could be a little bit noisy at times just because of the nature of her—not her illness but her life.

I remember we would go to church and sometimes I would hope she'd get a little noisy so I could take her out into the hallway and not have to sit through the sermon *[laughter]*. We'd go to church every Sunday. There really was never an excuse not to go and it was expected of us. That's something that my siblings and I still do to this day. That was really brought as an important—brought forth as an important thing in our lives.

Our practices at home we did not do family devotions on a regular basis. We always, of course, prayed before meals and at Christmas and holidays—religious—Easter, religious holidays. We always celebrated those with family. With our family and sometimes with friends as well. It's just a part of our lives. You didn't really think about it. It was just always there.

CS: Did most people in your neighborhood identify with the same religion as you?

BP: Thinking about the neighborhood. I don't think so. I would say it was a pretty good protestant/catholic mix when I was growing up. I do remember I had a good friend—a girlfriend who was catholic. Then when we got into first grade, she went off to a Catholic grade school and

I went off to a Lutheran grade school. We didn't really see much of each other after that. She just lived half a block away but our paths kind of diverged at that point.

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 in which you grew up.

BP: I did not move. I lived in the same house all the time so that wasn't anything. It was a very—it was a neighborhood that was just off of a fairly busy street. Connie Road C and Roseville. There were no through streets so you weren't going to be in the neighborhood unless you were going to one of the homes there. We didn't have to—so in that way it was a somewhat closed area.

If you walked half a block from my house you could go across the bridge and get into the ball fields and into a park. That was very nice. I think there were a lot of friends in the neighborhood. My best friend was just across the back yards so you'd cut across the backyards to get to her place. We definitely knew all of our neighbors. A lot of them were slightly—the children were a little bit older than me so I didn't have a lot of people my age.

My parents moved into that house and build their house in 1960. They built it in that neighborhood. A lot of the people I grew up with in the late '60s and into the '70s were the original owners of their homes. It was a very stable neighborhood. Definitely got to know some of the kids in the area.

We would play mostly in our backyard. There'd be games going on. Like I said, I'd go cut across the —the yards to my best friend and her place. We'd do typical things. Swinging and swing sets and stuff like that in the yards. My brothers would play sports more. I don't remember this but I'm told my father would flood the backyard for skating in the winter.

I think he stopped doing that by the time I—by the time number four came around he got a little tired of it [*laughter*]. It was a very quiet, very friendly place to grow up, I think. Even now when I got back to that neighborhood there's a couple people there, I grew up with who still live there and I see them.

CS: 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?

BP: Values. That's a tough question. I think in our family the values were definitely honesty. That was something that was taught. I think just being friendly or kind to other people. We had a very—definitely my parents but even in the neighborhood they were very—what's the word I'm looking for?

There weren't any neighbors that you had to stay away from or you were ever concerned with. Most people knew each other in the area so it was just a very—at least in our block. That was being friendly and kind to other people. Values. That's tough. I'm trying to think of an example of a value. Let's come back to that one. Let me think about that one.

CS: 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 growing up.

BP: Leisure time. Well, for me I would get together with my girlfriends in the neighborhood. When we were really little we would put a cloth over a card table and it was like a little fort. We would playhouse or something within that fort. When we got a little bit older like young teens, we would play school. Because at that point we thought we wanted to grow up to be teachers. Actually, my best friend did grow up to be a teacher.

We had a whole roster of students' names that we got. I think they were probably former Concordia students because my father brought home leftover manilla folders with names on them for some reason *[laughter]*. We would make up a class list. We knew which students behave well. We would teach them and we would pretend that there were students who weren't behaving well. Kind of this whole fantasy or plaything that we were doing with playing school.

Janice is my best friend. We did a lot. We were together quite a bit. I'm trying to think. We went biking. In her backyard she had a really nice swing set. We'd go do that. Your typical things. We play Jax and other games inside. I'm just trying to think. Played a lot of Jax. That was probably the big game that we would play in her house. At my house we would... Yeah, that's probably it. I'm trying to think what my brothers would do for fun.

I'm sure they were doing a lot of sports, other kinds of games. My family as a whole has always been really big game players. A lot of card playing with my parents and my siblings and I. Five Hundred or Pinochle and Hearts. Things like that. That's what we would do as a family for fun. That type of thing.

CS: What television shows did you watch growing up?

BP: *[Laughter]* Probably way too much *[laughter]*. I don't know, what was on the TV in the early '70s *[laughter]*. Oy, television. I know I watched some PBS *[laughter]* so it wasn't all

terrible. I remember very clearly watching *Sesame Street* and *Electric Company* on PBS. Boy, television. I'm sure I watched a lot of it I'm just trying—I'm blanking.

In the '70s was *Happy Days*, *Laverne and Shirley*. *Mork and Mindy* was probably on. Lot of sitcoms. I don't remember watching a lot of dramas. I remember watching PBS when I was probably 10 or 11, they started on *Masterpiece Theatre*. They did a six-year cycle of all Shakespeare's plays.

I remember watching those with my mother and then reading the—she had a book from college about the plays. We would read the notes beforehand so we knew what was coming up. I remember very clearly watching those Shakespeare plays and other sort of mysteries like that on *Masterpiece Theatre*. I remember watching reruns of Hogan's Heros and other things like that that would pop up.

CS: Did you ever go to the movie theatre with your family or with your friends?

BP: Actually, I worked at a movie theatre [*laughter*] starting when I was 15. Once I was working there, I would go to the movies quite a bit. We didn't go to movies very much as a family because of the cost. That was probably the bottom reason. I do remember once very—well, my parents coming—it must've been—it was in the evening because they decided my—we would go to a drive-in. which was something unusual.

We did that a couple times. We go to the drive-in at night, obviously. We wouldn't usually go to movies as a family. I do remember seeing my first R rated movie with my mother [*laughter*] as a teenager. What was the movie? *Life of Brian*. It was Monty Python. I know I went to some movies with my parents but they wouldn't take us—they wouldn't take all six—all six of us would never go together.

I think part of that was because my younger sister could not be—with down syndrome. She would never sit still for a movie. She couldn't talk so she was really low-level when she—with her down syndrome. She would never have sat still for a movie so someone always had to be with her. To have everybody go to a movie would not have been a possibility. One parent might go and take a couple kids, but never everybody.

CS: Was renting movies prevalent back then as well?

BP: My parents did have a VCR VHS player but we did not do it very much, no.

CS: Which bands or music genres were your favorite?

BP: Well *[laughter]* this ties back to my sister with down syndrome. She would listen to music and if it had a good beat, she would sit on the floor and walk back and forth to it. Because my oldest sister had—who's eight years older than me, was born in '58—she had all the music albums. I listened to her music, so a lot of Beatles *[laughter]*.

A lot of Simon and Garfunkel and kind of '60s folk music, I would say. That's really what I grew up. Some Elton John, Billy Joel. That era. Things you would hear '60s, early '70s music. Definitely a lot of Beatles music in my life. My parents, we'd also listen to a lot of musicals. Show tunes like *Sound of Music* or *Oliver. Fiddle on the Roof*. Things like that that they had albums for.

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

BP: Yeah. I went to kindergarten at one school, North Heights in Roseville. North Heights Lutheran. Then for first through eighth grade I was at King of Kings. Before I started kindergarten my oldest sister who wanted to—who actually became a teacher taught me how to read, so I was a little bit ahead of the other kids.

When I was at King of Kings, I was able to do first and second grade in one year and jumped right from first to third. I skipped a grade while I was there. King of Kings was class size—there we had three grades in a room at that point. There were maybe 20 kids so it wasn't—25 kids in a room. It wasn't huge especially for three—considering three grades.

I loved school *[laughter]*. I really did. I was one of the better students. I remember I was always competing with the boys in my class for—to be the better grades or to do the valedictorian speech. Things like Iowa Basic Skills test, which I don't even know if they do those anymore. I loved taking those things. Just because I found—I don't know why. I guess *[laughter]* I just thought they were good.

We had a thing called junior great books, which I don't think exists anymore. It was a book club I guess we'd call them now but for grade schoolers. My mother would lead it for many years. It was a set of books you would get and it was—boy, I don't know if they were just condensed from the great books. I'm trying to think of what a great book would be. Anything by Charles Dickens or something along those lines.

You would read these great—junior grade books together and then you would have whoever was reading them, It was always a subsection of your class would get together and discuss the books. It was kind of an early book group. King of Kings had things like that which I always thought

were kind of interesting. Being a smaller school, it was—it gave you a chance to get to know your teachers and shine a little bit more.

Then after eighth grade, instead of going on to the private school, which would've been Concordia Academy, I transferred to public schools in Roseville. For ninth grade it was Parkview. Then 10 through 12 was Alexander Ramsey which is their—both merged into Roseville Area High School now. The switch to ninth grade was pretty smooth, I think.

Even though I hadn't been there—same school for seventh and eighth grade I had a really good English teacher. During free time I would go down there and we would play scrabble together *[laughter]*. During my study hour we would play scrabble. She was really supportive of the—of my move. I remember very clearly getting into ninth grade and having no idea how to use a locker.

For some reason that first day I was like, "How do you turn a locker? I have no idea." *[Laughter]* Those things you have to learn when you go to school. Ninth grade is also the year I got over my fear of deep water. I remember in swimming class the teacher had me just climb down the pole into the bottom of the diving pool. I came back up and that took care of my fear of deep water *[laughter]*.

It was different going to a public school 'cause in the private school we never had a pool or things like that. That was really a different experience. Also moving between classes was a whole new experience for me. Every hour. That was ninth grade. Then 10 through 12 I was at Alexander Ramsey. I was on the high school bowl quiz team. We had a really good team. Our senior year we went to the national tournament. That kept me busy there. I worked after school in the activity office.

They had a little place where they sold candy. It opened up right after school got out at 2:15. They sold candy and things to the kids. Then they also had—it was called the activity office 'cause they coordinated not the athletics but every other activity that would be going on. Clubs and things like that for kids. I worked in that area. Obviously, I must've been a pretty trusted person *[laughter]* since I was doing those jobs after school. Then I also was starting—like I said, when I was 15 so that would've been 10th grade, I think. I started working at the movie theatre.

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

BP: Yeah. I'll admit I think I had a very sheltered life in Roseville. I was in a primarily Caucasian neighborhood. I can think of one family that was from India. Think everybody else

was Caucasian [*laughter*] so it wasn't—race issues weren't a big issue there—a big topic. Although I'm sure they were in other parts of the cities if we'd been in a more mixed-race neighborhood.

Local and global topics. It's interesting. I grew up in the era of Watergate and the end of the Vietnam—I do remember the Vietnam war ending. I was seven or eight. I remember the troops pulling out. I've always been interested in history, so that's why that kind of sticks with me in my mind. The troops pulling out of Vietnam in '75.

I think we were so focused on our family and school and church that we didn't really get—we did not have table conversations about what was going on in the world. Nixon resigned in '74 and we didn't—that was not a conversation at all in my family. I would ask my mother—I'd ask my mom and say, "What do you remember about the 1960s when Kennedy was—" I was only two when Kennedy and Martin Luther King were killed so obviously, I don't remember that.

She said she was too busy with her family to remember any [*laughter*] to focus on what was going on outside. I think that probably was true for a lot of my childhood, too. We weren't really focused on a lot of bigger issues.

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

BP: I'm glad to have done it. Thank you.