

Maggie Berry
Narrator

Cole Steinberg
Concordia University, Saint Paul
Interviewer

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Transcriber

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

MB: Maggie Berry

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 August 8th, 2023. I'm here with Maggie Berry. My name is Cole Steinberg. I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today I'll be talking to Maggie about what life was like growing up in the Twin Cities.

During this interview, I am going to ask you to reflect on your childhood life experiences as they related 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 mid name if applicable.

MB: Okay. My name is Maggie Barry. My maiden name was Seidel. Seidel is S-E-I-D-E-L. Barry is B-E-R-R-Y. Maggie is M-A-G-G-I-E.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

MB: I am a female. I am Caucasian.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

MB: June 3rd, 1955.

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.

MB: I grew up in the Summit Hill neighborhood in Saint Paul. From the time I was just a few months old until I was five, I lived at 1116 Fairmont Avenue. Then I moved with my family a couple of blocks away down to 975 Fairmont Avenue, which is on the corner of Fairmont and Chatsworth.

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.

MB: I grew up in a large family. I had ended up with two sisters, two older sisters and five younger brothers and my mother and father. My memories are of always having people around. My father traveled for his job. Originally, he worked with one of my uncles. They sold baby furniture and baby furnishings. They traveled all around the Midwest. A little bit later, he got the chance to switch to golf equipment, shoes and clubs and golf kinds of things. It was the same thing. He was traveling around the Midwest as a manufacturer's representative. He loved golf. It was a great thing for him.

Anyway. He was usually gone Monday through Friday. My mother took care of us. She didn't have a driver's license until I was older. She actually got her license when I was 17. I was the one who took her out driving, *[laughter]* so she could learn how to drive well enough to get her license. Our life was really centered in the neighborhood. We didn't go to a lot of places. When my dad was home on the weekends, we would. It was just centered on home and the playground and school.

We would take the city bus downtown. The doctor's office was downtown. The public library was downtown. We would take the bus. At a fairly young age, we ended up taking the bus by ourselves. I clearly remember the summer when I was eight years old. My oldest sister would have been 11. We were on the city bus at least once a week going down to the library. I don't think kids do that so much anymore. It was a great way to grow up though.

CS: Which family members did you engage with the most growing up?

MB: That's kind of hard. Let's see. Like I said, I had five younger brothers. Especially when the two youngest came along, I was like eight and ten. I was more involved with them because I felt more responsible for them. Even as a kid, I remember—I don't know, I was engaged with all them, though. That's hard. I shared a room with my two sisters until they went to college. Of course, I was always around them. They were a year apart. I was two years younger than my middle sister. Somehow that year made a big difference. Those two, my two older sisters, were more aligned with each other. I was a little bit more aligned with my brothers.

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

MB: Yeah. I have just the vaguest memory of a wonderful Irish Setter. Then for some reason, my parents decided that they wanted a Dachshund which is like the complete opposite of a Irish setter. We had a dog Max for a long time. I'm not really a dog person. That's partly because—well I won't even go into that. Anyways. We had a dog Max. Then when Max got too old, there was another Dachshund who I think we also named Max. Then there were a couple of other dogs as I got older. Not a big part of my life. My parents hated cats. We never had that. Although, I had cats as an adult for a while. *[Laughter]*

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

MB: My mom did a lot. We also pretty typically on Saturday morning, maybe not every Saturday morning, but at least a couple of times a month, we would be given a job. I remember dusting the baseboards was one job. Or just dusting in general or that kind a thing. My mother had a cleaning woman who came once a week. They would work together to clean the house on Fridays. Some of those kinds of things were taken care of. As far as chores go, as I got a little bit older, the biggest chore was probably helping keep an eye on my younger siblings. That was just an expectation.

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

MB: Well, I think in general—the Summit Hill neighborhood now is I think considered a fairly, I don't know, upper, not upper class, but it's considered kind of a ritzy neighborhood in some ways. At the time thought it was just a neighborhood full of big old houses. Some of them were in better repair than others. There were a lot of big families. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I felt like we were sort of middle of the road. I knew that there were people who had less money and less resources than we did. I knew there were some people who had quite a bit more.

It was very comfortable being in that middle. Never had to worry. Never, never, never, ever had to worry about having enough food or anything like that. I think growing up when I did, people—kids didn't have as many toys and as many things. There was sort of an expectation that when you were maybe around 10 years old, you'd get a fairly decent bike. I got that. My world was good. I think it's just—I just remember that even at the time, I knew that I was safe. I could trust that things were safe and that we were comfortable. I did know that there were other people who didn't have it quite as good.

CS: Okay. I know you mentioned that your father traveled for work. Did your mother have any employment or was she a stay-at-home mother?

MB: She was a stay-at-home mom until my youngest brother got into school. Then she had been trained as a teacher. She had taught for a year before she started having kids. Then she went back to work first as a teacher's aide at the school that my youngest brothers were at. Then she was a Title 1 teacher for a couple of years. Then she went back to being a teacher's aide. That was probably, I would have been almost out of the house by then. I would have been probably 17 or so when she went back to work.

CS: Okay. Great. Now I would 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.

MB: *[Laughter]* Well we were Catholic. We went to Catholic school. We went to Saint Luke's. We went to church every Sunday. That was, well it still is I guess; a requirement and it was a requirement that my parents took very seriously. Yes, we went to church every Sunday. It was just something you did. Usually, my father and my mother would split up because they wanted to be able to leave the youngest kids at home. My father would go earlier. I would go with him and usually a couple of my brothers on Sunday morning. I don't know, my memory of that is sometimes we'd go over to University Avenue. There was a bakery over there that was open on Sundays. Then after church we'd get donuts and bring them home. He would cook bacon. It was great.

Then my mother would go to church. Because they were like five masses on Sunday morning. My mom would go to a later one. We would go at 8:00. She would go at 10:00. That kinda thing. During Holy Week, the week before Easter, we didn't have school because Catholic school closed down during Holy Week. We'd go to church on Holy Thursday. We would go on Good Friday. Then we'd go to the Easter vigil on Saturday night. That was a big deal. We would give up something for Lent. Then it was a lot of fun to be able to resume whatever it was, resume eating candy or whatever it was on Easter.

Another thing was that during Lent, I don't even know what the incentive was, but there was some sort of incentive to go to church every morning. I went through kind of a religious period when I was in maybe fourth or fifth grade. I would get up and—I don't know what you know about the Catholic church, but if you're gonna go to Communion, back then you were supposed to have fasted from midnight on the night before. I would get up in the morning on a school morning. I couldn't eat breakfast if I was gonna go to church. I'd get up. Then I'd walk up to church by myself. My mom would have made me hard boiled eggs. I would have my little bag of

hard-boiled eggs. Then I could eat those after church before school started. That's a memory that really sticks in my mind for some reason.

Other religious kinds of things. Well, the school was just such a central part of our lives. It was Catholic school. Then for high school, I went to Our Lady of Peace which was also in the neighborhood. It's where William Mitchell is now. Again, there was just—by the time I got to high school, I guess I had started thinking a little bit more. There never was really a choice about going to public school. Although by the time I got to high school, I started to think, "Maybe it'd be a nice change." It was just accepted that you would go to Saint Luke's for grade school. Then my sisters and I went to Our Lady of Peace. My brothers went to Cretin.

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

MB: Well, I've gone through—I've always been a Christian, but I've kind of taken a journey for several different reasons. I have spent time in the Episcopal Church. I also spent several years, my husband and I did, in a Baptist Church. It was sort of a minor Baptist Church. Even that became too Baptisty after a while. Anyway. Now, my husband and I are Lutherans. We attend church at a little country church over in Wisconsin. We have a cabin over there. We're usually there on the weekends. We're very involved in that congregation and have been for about 15 years.

I am very glad that I had the foundation in church. When I look at my grandchildren, some of them have that and some of them don't. It is what it is. For myself, I'm glad I had that foundation because then I did have the opportunity to kinda choose where I wanted to go next. The purpose of your question [*laughter*] isn't to get into theology. I think growing up in Saint Paul, from my perspective and I think from the perspective of a lot of people, there were so many Catholic people at that time that you were either Catholic or you weren't. It was just one or the other.

Now it's of course, much more diverse. There's a lot of difference. I know that my Lutheran friends would disagree with that. I ended up living on the East Side of Saint Paul for many years. The East Side tended to be more Lutheran in some ways. For them, they're like, "Well no, everyone's Lutheran. What are you talking about?" In my part of Saint Paul everybody was Catholic.

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

MB: As I mentioned before, I did move. It was only a couple of blocks. The original house that we lived in was on the west side of Lexington. In some ways it felt that Lexington, that kind of felt like kind of a border. It felt like we moved into a new neighborhood when we moved down, what was it, two, three blocks because we were on the other side of Lexington. Most of my memories are from the house that was on Fairmount and Chatsworth. It was a great place to live. We were four or five blocks from school. Although I did go to kindergarten at Linwood which was only a couple of blocks away.

Linwood Park, the playground was on Saint Clair and Victoria or Saint Clair and Milton. I have a lot of memories of there. Used to be an old box car that served as a warming house for the ice rink. I played softball there in the summer. My brothers played baseball there a lot. That was a bigger deal. I didn't start playing softball 'til I was maybe 12 years old. They played baseball all the way up. Just two blocks from our house was a place called the Saint Paul Tennis Club. It had tennis courts. The tennis courts were fairly well known. It also had a swimming pool. That's why we belonged to it.

I was on the swimming team there. My summers were spent there. It was like I had two different sets of friends. I had my school friends and then I had my summer friends. There was very little overlap. It was like a job for me. I would go up, I'd get up in the morning, I'd have swimming practice at 8:00, come home, have breakfast, and then go back at noon and then swim for the afternoon. It was great. Let's see, what else about the neighborhood. Grand Avenue, Grand Avenue at that time was, it was not the Grand Avenue that we know today. There were a lot of stores there. When I got older, I worked at Swanson's Supermarket, which was on Grand between Lexington and Oxford. It was right next to the Bungalow Bakery, which is now Wuollet's. My sister Lisa worked there. Grand Avenue, it was kinda going downhill as I became a teenager. It was getting kinda seedy almost. Then, I don't know, the great reawakening happened. Then it turned into what it is now.

Certainly, everything you needed was right there. That block on Grand between Lexington and Oxford, there's Swanson's Supermarket, there was the bakery. Across the street was [Beauport?] Drugs. There was the First Grand Avenue Bank. There was the Uptown Theater. That's where we went to go to a movie or go to the drugstore or do whatever we needed to do. It was really a neighborhood that worked well, especially if you had a mother who didn't drive and you had to get to things without a car.

CS: How safe was your neighborhood when you lived there. What factors made it that way?

MB: It felt safe. I wanna say people knew each other, but that's not entirely true. We knew the people who had families and kids. On my house across Chatsworth was a big apartment building. We never knew any of those people. I think looking back, it seems like it was incredibly safe. At

the time I don't even remember feeling safe. I think my mother, and it was probably because she was home alone a lot with my dad being out of town, but she was very cautious about keeping doors locked and that kinda thing. Like I said, looking back, it was safe. I don't know whether I really even noticed that when I was growing up.

CS: Okay. How well did the residents in your neighborhood know each other? What were some of those relationships like?

MB: Well, I think people knew each other and knew of each other quite a bit. Like I said, especially the families who had children. Families tended to be bigger then. There were multiple points of contact. The [Orpid?] family lived down the street from us. Pete was my age. Tommy was my brother Joe's age. There were just different connection points. I think you just kind of absorbed what was going on with those people just through daily interactions and things like that.

I know that there was—my mom knew some of the neighbors. She was not the kind to sit around and have coffee or she wasn't part of like a neighborhood group of women. I know that there were other women in the neighborhood who did do that. I think some of the connections sorta radiated out from those core groups of women who were at home. They were sittin' around in the backyard watching their little kids play and keeping with the big kids every now and then [laughter] checking in with them at lunch. [Laughter] Then also, through the church and school connections, I think those were pretty strong as well.

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?

MB: It just so happened that most of the—within the couple of blocks, our closest neighbors, most of them that we knew were Catholic. There's that shared set of values that kind of revolved around Catholicism. That was at the time where the Catholic Church was going through that spirit of renewal. It was after the Second Vatican Council. Church services changed from Latin to English. Nuns, [laughter] their practices changed drastically. They weren't wearing the long habits anymore. They went from using their nun names to using their real names, their original names. Those are just examples of things really sort of exploded in the Catholic Church at that time. Nuns became [sighs]—it's like they got more freedom.

My father's family, he had five sisters, six sisters, five sisters. Every one of them was in the convent at one time. Some of them only last a couple of months. Two of them were nuns for quite some time, one in particular. They both ended up leaving and having different kinds of lives. It was also the time when the kinda racial tensions were rising. It did affect the Summit

Hill neighborhood because just to the north was the Summit University neighborhood. There were issues. Looking back, even at the time, I knew that it was very interesting because people did not agree on what was happening in the Catholic Church or people did not agree with what was happening in terms of race.

I remember a big controversy where it had to do with school boundaries. Our neighbors who lived across the street from us were not Catholic. Their kids went to public school. They were just up in arms because school boundaries changed. Their daughter was gonna have to go to Central High School. They just could not accept that. They ended up moving over to Highland, so that she could go to Highland, 'cause before that, it had been an option. You could go either to one or the other. It was an interesting time to grow up because there were clashes of that. It gave you a lot to think about.

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.

MB: Well, as a kid, I spent a lot of time on my bike and just biking around the neighborhood. Another thing I spent a lot of time doing was playing Barbie dolls with my friend Megan. She lived just one very short block away. She lived on Chatsworth and Osceola and I lived on Chatsworth and Fairmount. We had a place in my house which was like the landing from going from the first floor to the second floor. We had a place in her house, which was kinda similar. We would set up our Barbies and just really play a lot.

I mentioned the Saint Paul Tennis Club. For me and most of my siblings, that was a big part of our summer recreational kinds of things. My dad was gone during the week. I'm sure to give my mom a break on the weekends, he would take us places on the weekends, get us out of the house. We would go to William O'Brien State Park is one I remember or down to Fort Snelling over to the pony rides over by Minnehaha in Minneapolis. My father's parents lived in Minneapolis. They belonged to the Minikahda Country Club. A couple of times a year, we would get to go over there, go swimming and have french fries. *[Laughter]*

Anyway. My father always loved golf. Whenever he could, he would, which wasn't that often as when we were really young. Then as we got older and especially as we got outta the house, he played a lot of golf. What else? I don't know. My parents were involved in—they were often involved in what we called study clubs. That was tied to the church. It was tied to Saint Luke's. There'd be a group of people. They would take turns on Friday nights hosting little study club. It still happens. It wasn't like Bible study because they were Catholic. Catholics don't pay that much attention to the Bible. They wouldn't use the Bible so much. They would debate questions or just different kinds of theological related matters that they would talk about. Then they'd have

dessert and go home. That was a big part of their social life for several years. I feel like I'm forgetting something. Yeah. That's about it.

CS: Which bands or music genres were your favorite?

MB: I listened to KDWB. Maybe not bands so much. Just pop music, rock music. I certainly as I got a little bit older, Carole King, James Taylor were big favorites of mine, Gordon Lightfoot. I liked the Beatles. I wouldn't say they were a favorite. Beach Boys. *[Laughter]*

CS: What television shows did you watch growing up?

MB: It was a little bit later than some other people; it was a little bit later than some other people when we got a color TV. One of my really strong memories when I was fairly young is that our neighbors across the street had a color TV. We would go over there once a year when the Wizard of Oz was broadcasting. It was usually on a Sunday night. It was like winter, late winter. Wizard of Oz would be on and because of the whole Technicolor where it goes from black and white to Technicolor, we would go over there and watch that. Eventually we did get a color TV.

I'm not saying I didn't watch TV. I didn't like it all that much compared to my brothers. They would come home. They would watch TV every afternoon. They'd watch Gilligan's Island, that was a big one for them. I don't know. It would be on in the background. I would usually be reading or doing something else in my own little world. I just didn't, I don't know, I didn't get into TV all that much.

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

MB: Well, I look back and I just shake my head. Classes were very large. They were between 35 and 40 kids. It's just a fact, I was very smart. *[Laughter]* I learned to read very easily. I was always very concerned about doing things well and not making mistakes. It was easy because the work was easy. I just remember being bored a lot of the time especially as I got to third, fourth grade, fifth grade. I still look back at fifth grade and think, "Oh my god. That was horrible." The teacher I had, we had to copy pages of the dictionary. I have no idea why, but we did. You'd have to do like two a day. Still to this day, *[laughter]* there are times if I'm doing something that I don't wanna do, times where I feel like, "Oh my god. This is never gonna end." Then I think back and I think, "At least you're not in fifth grade. This is still better than fifth grade."
[Laughter]

I'm a teacher. I think about that. I think about how things are different now. Thank god things are different now. Yeah. I don't have a lot of great memories of school just because it was so boring

most of the time. Then when I got into high school, the nuns at OLP, I don't know, they had had some sort of an awakening or something. They put into place modular scheduling. You'd have like say English, you'd have a large group that lasted 60 minutes one day a week. Then there'd be 15 minutes here. I don't know. It was goofy. They also were looking at what got taught and what didn't get taught. For example, somehow, I never had U.S. history. I didn't have U.S. history until I was in college. It was kind of a revelation to me. I don't know. I don't think I had the best educational experience. *[Laughter]*

CS: Which teacher stands out to you most in your memory and why?

MB: *[Laughter]* Well, let's see. For kindergarten, my teacher's name was Miss Lightfoot. I remember her just 'cause it was an easy name to remember. Second grade, I had a sister named Sister Rose Cecily. The only thing I remember about here is that—I was a good little girl. I was so good. One time she said something to me about—she thought I had said something to my neighbor. She admonished me for being a chatty Kathy. I was so embarrassed. I knew I couldn't talk back. I just wanted to say, "It wasn't me. It wasn't me," but I couldn't. That's what I remember her for.

The aforementioned fifth grade teacher, her name was Mrs. [Bliven?]. I didn't even dislike her. It was like we were all trapped in this horrible situation together. During seventh and eighth grade, I was still at Saint Luke's then. I had a couple of years of rebellion. I was just kind of obnoxious along with several of my friends. There was a teacher, she was a nun, she as an older nun. Her name was Sister Margaret Casey. We would do terrible things. She would turn to the board. We would pick our desks and move them about three inches, so that when she turned back around, she'd be disoriented. Who does that except for obnoxious little seventh graders? Just other things like that. I remember her. She ended up having to take a leave of absence. She disappeared for a while.

Then there's a few teachers I remember from high school. When I look at my own kids, they had teachers where they just developed a strong bond with them especially in high school. Certain teachers where they ended up being their TAs or their—I don't know. There were relationships there. Probably because teachers had so many kids, I think that was one thing, I didn't really feel that kind of connection with my teachers.

CS: Okay. For a 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 affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

MB: Well, there was a lot of unrest in the '60s and '70s. Certainly the assassinations, Kennedy and then Martin Luther King. John Kennedy and Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy and the Vietnam War had a big impact. I and my cohort were lucky enough to be a little bit younger. My friends, the boys that I knew didn't have the draft lottery. My older sisters, they did. I remember watching TV the nights that they did the draft lottery where they picked the numbers. My husband talks about that too where if you got a low number, you were going to Vietnam. If you got a high number, you were safe. It was just so random and so almost surreal the night that that happened each year.

The protests over at the U. There were a lot of protests going on. I remember thinking—I wished I were a few years older at that point. I wanted the opportunity to be involved in protests. I was just a little bit too young. I also thought it would be very cool to be a hippie. *[Laughter]* I was just a little bit too young. My older sister lived in, I wouldn't call them commune. She lived in houses with whole groups of people. She did that for a couple of years. Things changed very rapidly. By the time I would have been in a position, people weren't living in houses with large groups of people anymore.

I think on a more local level in terms of racial issues, Minneapolis was like a whole different world. I was never really aware of what was going on in Minneapolis. Although clearly things were. Same with the Minneapolis police even back then. Here in Saint Paul, there were fears about riots. There weren't actual riots, but there were fears about what could happen because people were watching TV and seeing what happened in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention, just seeing some of those different things. Sometimes rumors would start, "Oh, there's gonna be a riot tonight," which didn't happen. There were fears of that. It was kind of a unique way to grow up. Of course, every time is a unique time to grow up.

CS: What messages did you receive about how to treat people who were different from you in some way?

MB: For the most part, my parents were, I don't wanna say they were open-minded. My parents were decent people. The message I got was that you treat people decently. I think they certainly had some blind spots or they certainly had prejudices or maybe generalizations about people that they weren't even aware of. I could see the difference between my parents and some other parents where other people could be hateful about people that were different from them. I didn't get that in my family. Could you ask that question again? I feel like I'm losing the point here.

CS: Yeah. What messages did you receive about how to treat people who were different from you in some way?

MB: Yeah. I think kind of the bedrock principle was you treat people well no matter if they're the same or different.

CS: Do you have any more to say about local or global issues before we wrap up?

MB: In terms of Saint Paul, I think one thing that has always struck and in contrast to Minneapolis is that in Saint Paul, there wasn't that adversarial relationship between the people who live in Saint Paul and the police department. Yeah, I didn't think of the police as my friends, but I wasn't afraid of the police. I don't think as a child or as a young adult or as an adult there is definitely a difference between the way the relationship between the population and the police is in Minneapolis and the way it is in Saint Paul. I think it's a real defining characteristic of Saint Paul.

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