

Scott McGrath Sr.
Narrator

Julie Luker
Interviewer

Charles Schultz
Transcriber

October 29, 2021

SM: Scott McGrath Sr.

JL: Julie Luker

JL: This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student initiative by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University Saint Paul. Today is Friday October 21, 2021 and I am here with Scott McGrath Sr. My name is Julie Luker and I am an assistant professor of psychology at Concordia University Saint Paul. Today I will be talking to Scott about what it was like growing up in the twin cities. During this interview I am going to ask you to reflect on your childhood experiences as they relate to a variety of social topics from that time period. For the purpose of this interview we have determined childhood as birth to 17 years of age. To begin, please state your first and full name.

SM: It's Scott McGrath Sr. Last name is M-c-G-r-a-t-h and I just use S-r for senior.

JL: Please identify your race and gender.

SM: Male, white.

JL: Please state your date of birth.

SM: December 17, 1962.

JL: Thank you. Share the name of the neighborhood you grew up in, in just a few sentences if you could please.

SM: I grew up in the Armitage neighborhood right by crosstown and 62 area.

JL: Ok, I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with the memories you have with your immediate and extended family and please share some of the memories you have about these relationships.

SM: I hate to say this but I think I had a very typical childhood for the time in which I grew up. My dad was from Farmington Minnesota, so every Saturday we would drive down to see his uncle. It was pretty cool for me to do that because it had that sort of small town feel to it. It was more like a town rather than a neighborhood and everyone knew each other very well. My mom was from Ohio but her grandparents would come up to see us around Christmas time and so I had a very wholesome relationship with my family. It was nice because everyone knew each other so well. That aspect has really drifted away over the years.

JL: Did you have any family pets?

SM: We always had a cat or a gerbil growing up. I wanted a dog but my mom and dad settled on a gerbil and then a cat so that was what I got.

JL: Are you able to describe one experience with family during childhood that may have been particularly memorable for you, perhaps as a family unit?

SM: Just one memory? I would have to say one of the Christmas memories because it was more about the family being together than the presents and the idea of what's under the tree. As a child I knew that the generation that my uncle was in would be gone at some point. So my mentality was to try and have the best time that I could. Birthdays were really great for me as well because of the great friends that I had, which I also have home movies of those memories as well. The whole dynamics with friends was so different because you knew who your friends were and who lived in the neighborhood. Then my dad had a sister who lived in Minnesota who was my aunt Jen, who we would spend 4th of July with and that was always fun too. So even though we lived in one spot we got to travel around a lot and visit family. There were always good times and memories.

JL: How were household chores divided by the members of your family?

SM: Mom did the house work and dad earned the bread and I got the yard. When I did the yard work this meant things like mowing the lawn and snow blowing. I remember after a couple of winters my dad and a neighbor would come together and buy a snowblower. My dad is not a very big person so the first time he used the snowblower he could not use it so my mom sent me out to do it. I was 10 years old and was trying to ride this giant snowblower so my dad would not go down into the street with it. So that and yard work was what I did and I was not necessarily what I was told to do but rather was just something that I did. I enjoyed doing it.

JL: When it comes to the snow blower, do you remember what year you got that?

SM: This was in the early 70s and it was big and clunky. I mean nowadays you would get worried about a kid getting near it but back then it was very normal. It did not matter if it was really cold because if my mom or dad told me to do it then I had to do it.

JL: Can you share a memory to describe what meal time was like for your family?

SM: It was always a sit down at the dinner table and eat as a family and then every so often we would eat in front of the tv. I think that was more of a throwback on how my parents were raised. You would all sit down as a family and socialize on each other's day. There were no distractions.

JL: Alright thank you. Please describe how your family's economic status may have influenced your childhood.

SM: I never really thought about that as a child. I mean I was raised as long as we had a roof and food and a little extra money for whatever then we were good. In that time period it was not about having more money than the people next to us. We didn't even know that we were in a nicer part of Minneapolis. Now if you say you grew up in south Minneapolis then people think you were a rich kid but that's not the case. We were just like everyone else back then, we paid bills and had food on the table and were not struggling but there were no new cars in the driveway. We lived very much in our needs and I never wanted anything as a child, I had what I needed and so I was good.

JL: Earlier you mentioned that your mother was a stay at home mother and your dad worked. Can you talk more about his role and what he did for a job?

SM: He worked at the Red Owl food stores. He started when he was 18 and retired there 48 years later. If he had kept going for 2 more years then he would have been the only one there to make it a half of a century working there. He did a variety of things and it amazes me that he worked at the same job for 48 years. Not a lot of people can say that and I think that was a norm back then and looking back at it now, dad was a suit and tie guy. I don't think you really see that anymore and I'm not sure if it's because of the time period or what. He worked at the main office out in Hopkins and I had to go out there a few times with dad because he was a warehouse auditor meaning he counted things in the warehouse. I remember this because it was in the early 70s and they just started punch card computers. Most people don't even know what that is, but I once went into my dad's office and he had rows of boxes with these in them. He told me very clearly to not knock them down or bump into them because then they would get out of order and the whole machine would go down. There were hundreds of these things in the boxes and my dad was so nervous about anyone knocking them down.

JL: In what way has your family's financial situation affected your spending habits today?

SM: It has made me realize to live within your means and that is not always the easiest thing to do. You don't need a new Porsche when the Chevrolet will get you to where you need to go just as well. As long as you have the essentials then you're good, but that doesn't mean you can't have nice things but it just depends on where your values are. Learning where my values are at a young age has really helped me very much.

JL: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

SM: No.

JL: Ok thank you. Now I would like to know more about your experience with religion such as Lutheranism or Catholicism. Describe what you can recall about your family's religion growing up.

SM: I was raised Methodist and my mom was Methodist and dad was Catholic. It was never a question of whether or not I would have to go to church or not. Every Sunday we would get up in the morning and go to church and then have confirmation classes after. That has really helped me out over the years and I have followed that. The good thing about that was I met a bunch of kids doing that and we were all kind of getting through the times together. It was a mix of kids because the church I went to had a fluent mix of family's. We all got through the economic times together and there was no being better than one another because we were all in the youth group. That was all that mattered.

JL: Did most of the people in the group identify with the same religion as you?

SM: I'm not really sure because it was not something we really talked about. I think it was a group of different people and our neighbors were Lutheran. We had a little melting pot going and I think your religion and beliefs were more personal and between you and God. It was not something that you went and talked openly with your neighbors about like you would with other things.

JL: What messages did you receive about interacting or dating people of a different religion than you?

SM: I never really received any direct messages. It was always a matter of being decent to other people and keeping everyone on the same playing field. There was no weird stuff about one

person being better than the other. This was a really good thing because it made you realize that you were all in this together good or bad.

JL: You had mentioned that religion was good for you growing up.

SM: Yes, I am still a practicing Christian.

JL: Ok, so can you talk more about that impact now that you're an adult?

SM: I don't want to go on a tangent because I know people get weirded out when you say you're a Christian. In reality it just gives me a different way of understanding things and as a result I'm passionate about other people. I do not think I am better than anyone else. That has really helped me out and it's weird because it does not seem like I have been part of a religion for very long but it really has been my whole life. Which has been really good.

JL: Now I would like to learn more about the neighborhood you grew up in. If you moved at all please let me know. What comes to mind when you think of the neighborhood you grew up in?

SM: I have to be really careful how I explain this because we were a very typical late 60s neighborhood. It was a really white neighborhood so there was not a lot of interaction with other races or ethnicities. It was also a very close neighborhood because you knew who your neighbors were and whose kids belonged to who and which were good or bad. If a kid did something bad then we would be involved because everyone knew each other and were involved so we would equally share the blame. It was a good neighborhood. It's funny I still think about this but back then we would burn our trash in the back alley and that is not something you could get away with today. Every Saturday the dads would be outside drinking beer and bringing their trash not thinking anything of it. It was just part of growing up for us and we as kids were kind of snots. We would put stink cans in the yards of people we did not care for just for the reason of doing it. We didn't know what was going to happen because we were doing childish things. I kind of feel sorry for the kids today because if we had known what was going to happen then we would have not done it. This is going to sound weird but I feel very fortunate because at the end of our block there was a swamp and we used to play in the swamp as a kid. I ask myself why kids don't play in swamps anymore but then I realize we should not have done that because who knows what was in that? That was most likely not the best thing for me to be playing in as a child growing up but that was the thing being a child you had fun doing things like that. You were not sitting on videogames and were outside on your bike. On one side of our block we had the swamp and on the other we had a creek. We would be in the creek catching fish or getting muddy and I always knew what was going to happen after I got home from the swamp. The first thing that would happen is my mom would spray me down with a hose and it did not matter how cold it was. I got sprayed down really but if I was not very dirty from the swamp then I could just go into the bathroom tub and take a hot bath. Then if I was really dirty then I was brought upstairs and told never to do that again. Then the next day I would repeat and that was just a part of growing up. I have very vague memories of this but there was an old and abandoned house by the swamp which was our haunted house growing up. That whole section of Minneapolis had been a truck farm at one point. It had been developed after the war to make more housing available and was just a little shaky farmhouse. There was an old lady right across from us that was one of the original farm ladies and was very old when I was even growing up so I bet she is not around anymore. She lived in an old cottage and was part of the last generation of those houses before

everything got re-developed. I talk about this stuff with my kids like back then you knew who your neighbors were and you didn't worry if your kid went out. As long as we were back by the time dinner was around we were fine but if it was late then we got yelled at. You really did not get too worried about where your kid is and it wasn't like we're trying to be unsafe but rather we were just always hanging out at people's houses. Now you wouldn't just walk into someone's house. A very funny memory I have is when my friends used to crash their bikes into our garbage cans but it was not funny when you yourself did it. When it was your friends doing it then it was hilarious and now your kid can't even get on a bike without a helmet and pads. I mean there was not a single crumpled up garbage can that was not done by us growing up. We did not get yelled at for doing so because it was part of growing up and having fun. It was just a wonderful time.

JL: As far as the galvanized trash cans, did you have allies that you played in?

SM: Yeah we either played in the allies or streets growing up and like I said earlier dads would drink beer in the allies and us kids would be playing. We would just run all around and get into trouble and it was such a mark at that time by both the dad who saw you and then your own parents as well. We also just learned not to do certain things but it was a fun place to grow up.

JL: Are you able to recall what your house looked like? Such as the layout and features that stood out to you.

SM: It was built right after the war by a gentleman named Ray and it was a one and a half story house with two bedrooms and one bath. When you walked in you could see everything: living room, hallway, bathroom, kitchen and bedrooms and family room. It was not a big fancy house but what was interesting about it is that Ray had built another house just like it for his kids. The layout was identical so going over to the other house made me think and make sure I was not at my own house. It was very weird but it was a typical house to live in and it was enough. What was interesting about the neighborhood was the architecture was not defined for the homes that were there. As I understand it, the house two houses down was a two story house that was a different type of house and was on Washburn ave. Next to that was a very odd looking house that was between us and the two story house. The people who lived there had a funny last name called Putz and the house looked normal on the outside but not on the inside. Inside there was a living room and a kitchen then had a couple of steps and a landing and then more steps and bedrooms and a bath then had more steps and another bedroom. It was carved up like that and that is how it was built. I did not know this growing up until mom pointed it out to me but the house next to us had a foundation for the house but kept adding more as the owners got more money. It was a very different way of doing things.

JL: How long did that process take?

SM: It was done by the time I was grown up so I don't know how long it took but it was always very cool to go in because the basement was basically its own house.

JL: Next I would like to learn more about the values you shared with your family and neighbors. Do you have any memories that demonstrate these values shared by your family and neighbors?

SM: I think the biggest one was family and knowing that family is most important whether you liked them or not. Family is where your values start and also being content with what you have even if it's not the latest and greatest thing. Also having a good relationship with God and

religion as a whole. I mean that was what you did and you did not question it. Mom was Methodist so then I am Methodist and that was part of the values. We learned to respect our parents and our elders as part of our values which are lacking today. You did not have to be told more than once to stop screwing around because the first time you got the look and then it was a spanking. That was part of the value and we learned that.

JL: Speaking on that issue of now and back then. How closely do you think your values reflect the current people that live in the residential area of where you lived growing up?

SM: I have to be very careful how I put this because I do not want to come out on the issue incorrectly but there was definitely a difference when I was a child. We had a neighbor that was not a fan of minorities and did not want our neighborhood to turn into a black ghetto neighborhood, and as a child I was polite about it but as an adult it was BS. I realized that his values are not the only values and that the world does not work like that. I think a lot of that has to do with how my parents raised me, to listen to other people's values but not buy into them. I would just nod my head as a child and respect my neighbors views but not agree with them. One of the values I still have is to respect other people's opinions even if you don't agree with them. You don't need to call them names but rather you can just say that you don't agree with them.

JL: Now I am going to ask about leisure time which you did touch on a little bit earlier. Describe some of the ways in which you or your family engaged in leisure time when you were growing up.

SM: Leisure time growing up? I think one of the things we did was go and visit my aunt and uncle over the 4th of July. My aunt and uncle lived in the northern part of Minnesota and I would always march in the parade on the 4th and was in a boxed costume. I never thought about it as a kid but my mom would hang a sign on the back. It was one of those things we did not think of at the time. I am trying to think of other leisure activities we did. I feel kind of sorry for kids today because we did not have video games but I had a neighbor who was a hand radio operator. We could always tell when he was working on his radios because the tv signal would go out while we were watching tv. I spent countless hours in his basement listening to his radios. I would just listen to him talking to people in other countries and I would look for those countries on the world map. Once again you don't think about these things when you're growing up but then you do later. I remember the first one he had and it had a big vacuum tube on the end and I probably inhaled a lot of radiation as a child. I was talking to his son years later and he mentioned that I could have cooked a hot dog in this thing. I was only like 2 feet away from this thing and I should have been more like 10 feet away from it. It was really cool to be exposed to this thing because this was the time period where it was the height of the Cold War and we should not really be in contact with people in Berlin or Russia. This was my kind of internet growing up and I still remember the memories with the radio so well. There were so many code names and even after 50 years it still stays with me. These were the first kinds of hand radios so there was a lot of tinkering to do and he used to go on the roof and hook up antennas on his house. I am not even sure where he even got these things. He was always up on his roof and his ladder would always be bending and making his wife nervous that he would fall off. The ladder did what it needed to do so he never got a new ladder.

JL: As an adult, have you kept in touch with any of the friends that you hung out with growing up?

SM: No and I don't really know why I have not. After high school we all just kind of went our own ways. I do know that two of the friends I had in high school have passed away and it has been 10 years since I saw them. They were fairly young when they died. Like I said I don't really have any solid answers of why I did not keep in touch even though we were close together in high school. I do remember one weird thing about my best friend growing up. My wife and I lived in another house and she would give medical rides and I noticed this driver's name and it ended up being the nephew of my best friend. I just thought what a small world it is and I kept in touch with them until this kid's uncle died. Something like this I could not write these odds out or script that I would randomly meet the nephew of my best friend in a medical situation.

JL: Now let's discuss your experience with school. Please describe what it was like going to school as a child.

SM: I don't want to seem like an old grandpa but we walked to school. I went to Armitage for kindergarten through 6th grade. That was about 3 blocks away from home and it did not matter how cold or rainy it was. In 7th grade I went to a Lutheran school and did that again for a year in high school then went to Southwest. I remember walking to school every day and it was a good 3 miles to walk. We never had our parents drive us to school, the only time we would maybe is if it was snowing or cold out but if it was a decent day then we were walking. We never really questioned it because it was just what we did. I think the relationships you develop in school are good but I realized as an adult that you may not really stay in touch with those people. Sometimes you find out they are not even around anymore and you go your own separate ways. I think back on those days and how lucky I can write these days because we learned cursive in grade school.

7

We had these pencils that were crooked like tree trunks and still had tree bark on them and the paper had curses on them and I don't know how we even learned how to write that way. It was so hard to hold these pencils and I don't know how we did it but we did not question it. I think if I look at the big picture not just at school but at home as well I read a lot. I read everything I could in the school library growing up and I still read a lot today. Another thing I look back on in those days was that you did not really question what your teachers were saying and you just did what they taught. I thought that they must know what they are doing. I remember when I was growing up and if you had a disagreement with your best friend you would beat each other on the playground. However, 5 minutes later you were back to being best friends and you didn't hold a grudge. It was nothing weird and it was usually about something stupid like stealing a piece of bubble gum or something. It was a different time period and it was not like we were going to kill each other but we just settled things. Other people around you would cheer you on and if it got really out of control a teacher would step in.

JL: Did you get into a lot of fights?

SM: I did not get into a lot of fights but just a couple of typical fights growing up. I think I have one more thing to say that ties into values and has to do with my best friend. I never thought about this before but he was different and I don't mean in a negative way. He was hard of hearing and he wore hearing aids in both ears. He also had a speaker with a lanyard and I was taught that

some people are just different. He was not weird or someone you should not hang out with just because of his hearing.

JL: In your opinion how diverse were the schools that you attended?

SM: I don't think it was very diverse so it was mostly white.

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

SM: It was not actually a teacher that stood out to me the most, it was the school nurse. There is nothing that pops into my head right away but I would always talk to her about things growing up and things that were troubling me. One part I really liked was her office was full of Charlie Brown characters because she loved the Charlie Brown stuff and would have characters like Snoopy on her walls. If I had to pick on one teacher it would be my 6th grade teacher because she seemed to really help me out a lot more.

JL: Alright last topic. I am going to ask you to reflect on local and global issues such as war, poverty, discrimination act. In your opinion what were some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

SM: I was not able to really understand it very much but I would say the Vietnam War. It was huge when I was growing up and we watched it on tv. I did not really know what was really going on but my parents were irritated with what was going on. I remember one of the biggest events, it was 1969 and I stayed up late to watch the first man step on the moon. As a kid I knew that this was really huge and won't see it again. It was way past my bedtime but mom and dad made an exception because we may never see this again. We got to see something that would never be repeated and there is only going to be one step on the moon. We started off in the 60s and not even a decade later we stepped on the moon. Growing up like that I knew that it was something really significant and understood the major impact. I have vague memories of the Kent State incident in 1970. Maybe I just have more memories of the 70s because I was pretty young in the 60s. I don't know how we got through the 70s because we had so much happen in that time. We had the Kent State shooting, we had kidnappings, and other world events that just seemed like everything was coming apart. Then we had the Iran hostage crisis and the 70s started bad and did not get much better. That does not mean that the whole decade was a bad decade and I have talked to people and was glad to grow up in the 70s. Music is a big part of my life and the 70s into the 80 music was really big. You had anything and everything like rock, disco, ect. If you could throw anything at the wall and it is music it was going to happen. It was just an exciting time because even if you did not know it was impacting you, you still knew that times were changing. Things were just changing at such a different pace and so it was an exciting time. Some of the things you were frustrated with what was happening but other things were cool.

JL: In your opinion what are some of the issues affecting your neighborhood today?

SM: I have not been back to my old neighborhood in years. It's weird because I have been out of Minneapolis for 18 or 19 years or something like that. Earlier this year my daughter took me there to take care of some business at the bank where my mom worked. We drove through my old neighborhood and it felt so weird because I am so used to being in an open area. It was like a postage stamp yard and it was cool to see the houses I grew up in but it felt so different. I don't mean this in a negative way but I saw one big difference from when I was growing up. I have talked about this before but the dads would get together and hang out in the alley and kids would

mess around. I don't want to say that the neighborhood got a lot more closed but there was a lot less interaction with your neighbors. I looked like they knew who their neighbors were but did not really know them. This might be a little off topic but there used to be a little convenience store on the corner where you could get cheap playing cards and bubble gum. I remember this because there was a gas station across the street. This had been mid 70s and I was talking the garbage out and then a Vietnamese man flew by me and I thought that was pretty rare because I was not exposed very much to different people. It turns out that he had robbed the convenience store on the corner and they caught him a couple of houses down. I remember this very well because I was in front of my house and I saw the owner of the store in a truck going after him. The police got to them first but I think that it would have been a lot worse for this guy if the owner got to him first. Today you would not dare to do that because you would just let the police handle it and not get involved yourself. Like I said it was just kind of funny and I am not trying to be racist at all. There was nothing wrong with who the person was but only wrong what he did to the store. It was just weird.

JL: Well I think that is all of my questions so that is the end of our interview. I just want to say thank you that your answers are invaluable and we really appreciate you taking the time to do this. Thank you so much.

SM: Not a problem.