

Kate Shelley
Narrator

Cole Steinberg
Concordia University, Saint Paul
Interviewer

Landmark Associates
Transcriber

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CS: Cole Steinberg

KS: Kate Shelley

CS: This is an interview conducted as part of a larger faculty and student research project initiated by Dr. Julie Luker of Concordia University St. Paul. Today is July 6th, 2022, and I'm here with Kate Shelley. My name is Cole Steinberg and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University St. Paul. Today I'll be talking to Kate 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.

KS: Kathleen Mary, Geary is my maiden name, Shelley.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

KS: Female, Caucasian.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

KS: 11/21/1953.

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.

KS: I grew up in Highland Park, St. Paul Avenue in the intersection, Montreal.

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 you have about these relationships.

KS: Well, I come from a family of four kids. I'm the oldest girl. I have an older brother and a younger sister, and I had an older brother, and happy lots of kids in the neighborhood. Extended family. I had cousins who lived three blocks away, and it was like another home. Yeah, it was fun.

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

KS: Probably my sister Colleen. She's a year younger than me. We shared a bedroom and everything else.

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

KS: Oh, not when we were young, no. Fish, sea horse, nothing. No dogs or cats.

CS: You had a sea horse?

KS: Yeah, I had a seahorse. You sent away for it and Prayed Magazine came in the mail.

CS: How long did you have that around or?

KS: Oh, not very long, until my cousin Maureen picked it up with a comb so she could see it better out of the little fishbowl. They're only like, I don't know, quarter of an inch bag if that.

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

KS: Boys and girls. The boys did the outdoor work, and the girls did the indoor cleaning with my mother.

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

KS: Well, we were, I'd say, there was a joke. There was Upper Highland and Lower Highland if you lived on the south of Fort Parkway or Lower Highland, and that's where we lived. I'd say that we were lower middle class to middle class, had a lot of wealthy friends. I had everything I wanted always, but, well, everything I needed, I didn't always get everything I wanted as compared to some of my friends.

CS: Who in your immediate family was employed and what did they each do for a living?

KS: Well, let's see, my mother was an RN at Miller Hospital, then went to United Hospital, and my father was a brewer at Hamm's Brewery.

CS: Describe the extent to which your family, or to which you felt your family's income met your basic needs such as food, medicine, clothing, housing, transportation, et cetera.

KS: A hundred percent.

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.

KS: Well, I was raised Catholic, and we went to mass every Sunday, and I went to Catholic school at St. Leo's, which is now Highland Catholic. When I started grade school, the mass was still set in Latin, so you did a lot of mumbling, pretending you were speaking Latin. I was very into it as a young child. I wanted to be a nun, and I had a really good experience in grade school and high school.

CS: Are you able to share a specific memory that stands out the most for you regarding your family's religion?

KS: When I was in second grade, we had first communion, and then the next week on Sunday, we all got to put back on our fancy communion dresses, and trope up in front of the hall everyone at mass and you couldn't eat anything, or you could only take sips of water after midnight on Saturday. I got up in the morning being seven and ate something like a piece of candy or something, and then I freaked out. My dad called the parish priest from where grew up,

and he absolved me Father Steiner over the telephone that that I could have communion, so that was a good memory.

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

KS: Not at all.

CS: What, if any, impact do you feel that religion has had in your life?

KS: Well, I think because I went to religious school, parochial school, it had really good things for me. Really good strong sense of community, and good morals, it taught you a lot.

CS: Now I'd like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. If you move 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.

KS: Well, we had a huge neighborhood of kids, and we had a cul-de-sac. We didn't have alleys behind my section of St. Paul Avenue, so there was a cul-de-sac that we called the circle, and we played kickball, and rode our bikes, and climbed trees, and they were building a new house in the neighborhood. We spent one whole summer there after the guys left. It was great. There was probably, I don't know, 40, 50 kids in the neighborhood all different ages, so you just had to swing out your back door and you were ready for anything.

CS: There are a variety of ways to describe a neighborhood such as urban, suburban, rural, bustling, quiet, working class, upper class, et cetera. How would you describe your neighborhood when you lived there?

KS: Urban.

CS: Describe what you recall about your home, such as the layout and other features that come to mind.

KS: Let's see. We had a really nice big kitchen with a brick wall in it, and on the other side was the living room where there was a really nice fireplace. Three bedrooms, one bathroom for six people, so that was a busy place. My mother was an extremely good housekeeper, so our house was always really clean, and we had a candy drawer that all my friends remember.

CS: What candy was kept in the candy drawer?

KS: Lots of candy, hard candy always, something chewy and something chocolate. It was a really good drawer.

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

KS: Oh, everyone knew everyone. Our next-door neighbors for years, my dad and he had been friends since grade school, so my parents had a real bond with them. On the other side, great people as well behind us, I'd say 90 percent of the neighborhood parents and kids got along really well.

CS: How safe was your neighborhood when you lived there, and what factors made it that way?

KS: Oh, it was really safe. I think the lower population, less guns on the street. I am not certain, that's about what I can come up with.

CS: To what degree were you satisfied with the quality of your living conditions?

KS: Oh, I was satisfied. I wanted my own bedroom, but that wasn't going to happen. Other than that, I didn't want for anything.

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?

KS: Oh, well, I think one time, I think this is good. I was little, probably in first grade, and I stole something from the [Ben Franklin]. I stole a Coleman brush set and then brought it home. My mother took me right back up there and had to talk to the scary manager and tell him I was sorry, and pay him for it, and then I had to leave it there as well. That taught me that, don't steal. I don't even really know if I was stealing, but I think enough that I didn't have it out, I had it in my drawer, so I must have known something was up. That taught me a really valuable lesson, that, don't do that.

CS: In what ways were your values similar to, or different from others who lived in your neighborhood at that time?

KS: Gee, I think we all had similar values. People were raising families, and trying to make a living, and doing the best they could to be kind.

CS: Did your parents teach you anything about referring to adults by their name, or by how they wish to be introduced?

KS: Yes. You always call them Mr. and Mrs., and you always greeted your aunts and uncles with that title as well. There was a couple really special neighbors we could call, my mom had a really good friend in the neighborhood, Jean Johnson, and we could call her Jean because that's what she wanted, but we called her husband Mr. Johnson. That was about it. Other than that, you call everybody Mr. and Mrs.

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 when you were growing up.

KS: Well, you were out in your backyard a lot, or you were on your bike a lot as a kid, that was your freedom. When I was a kid growing up, parents didn't play with their kids, like they do now, or I did with my kids. I think 'cause there was so many kids in the neighborhood, or in your family that, that wasn't one of their roles as far as leisure time. We would go to the lake every summer, or on a road trip, just hang out, watch TV. My dad loved TV, getting one to watch it with him, he was happy as could be. I played cards, played board games, just really simple.

CS: Can you recall if your family ever took vacations, and if so, to where?

KS: Oh yeah, we went on vacation. We went to the Black Hills one summer; we went to Banff & Lake Louise one summer. We'd go up to the [*unintelligible 13:24*] area some summers. You didn't go every summer, and as you got older, as a teen, you tried to think of every excuse you could, why your job wouldn't let you off to go on the family trip.

CS: Did you bring any of your friends on family trips or was it just your family?

KS: It was just our family. There was four kids and two adults. That was enough for the Chevy Impala,

CS: Growing up, how did you meet new friends?

KS: Through school, and then their friends at the playground, met friends there that went to public school, neighborhood friends. My first job was at Embers and Highland Village when I started there when I was 14, so I met a lively crew there, and it was easy to make friends. We had a lot of opportunity.

CS: Describe some of the activities engaged in when you were with your friends.

KS: Well, as a kid, you rode your bike, you went to Highland Pool, you weren't supposed to go two places on your bike to the Ford Plan 14:40 and to Minnehaha falls, so you immediately went to both those places. As I got older in high school, you did a lot of house parties when you were young, and then as you got a little bit older and people got driver's licenses, it got crazier for sure. A lot of time spent down at the river.

CS: Swimming?

KS: No, drinking. Every weekend, you had your spots. Each school and each class had their own little spot, where it was yours or so you thought. Dances, the whole nine yards.

CS: How many kids would be down by the river when everyone was hanging out there?

KS: Well, probably about anywhere from 40 to a hundred. Hundred would be a pretty big party. Different groups would be at different spots along the river. I suppose on the St. Paul side, on any Friday night, there might have been like hundreds of us down there.

CS: Wow. It was a big attraction?

KS: Yeah, it was. Yes. You could get to the bottom, you go down to the river bottom, and the police didn't really like to come down there. Sometimes they'd be waiting for you when you came up.

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

KS: Oh, let's see. Dolls. I wasn't crazy about them, but I did play with them. Erector Set, I really liked that, board games, clue, life, cards. Cards were always big in our family, so when you were really little you played Go Fish and then you moved on up.

CS: What television shows did you watch growing up?

KS: Oh, too many. All the Saturday morning stuff. I wasn't a crazy about cartoons. I really liked like Sky King, and Fury, and more of the rifleman. I was crazy about that, lots. We liked movies. You didn't get a whole lot of TV time; it was restricted except with my dad. Evening shows like Carol Burnett, we really like that. Ed Sullivan, I'm really dating myself, you're like, what?

CS: Did you ever watch TV as a family? Was that reserved for family, or was it more like just entertainment for anybody?

KS: Sometimes you watched, like on Sunday nights you watched as a family. My mother wasn't much. She would be jumping around doing this and that, but you'd watch movies like Gone with the Wind if that was on, or Wizard of Oz. I can remember all of us watching that.

CS: What about mealtimes? Was the TV on, or was it a strict policy to have it off?

KS: It was off, and dinner every night was at 5:30, until my dad changed shifts and they worked afternoons, and then we would bring this tiny portable TV into the kitchen, and my mom would let us watch, leave it to be. That was on at 5:30.

CS: Which bands or music genres were your favorite?

KS: Well, that changed radically as I matured. When I was young, young, my dad and mom liked music, so we had a lot of Big Band. That's the records they had. My aunt and uncle also really liked music, and they had a lot of Dixieland, so that's what I grew up with. When I was young, I really liked soft rock, like The Association, and the Letterman and kind of old school. By the time I was about end of sophomore year, my friends were giving me so much heat about it, that I definitely expanded my repertoire, and then I'd say, my favorites were like The Rolling Stones, Blood, Sweat & Tears, the Allman brothers, typical rock for 1970.

CS: As an adult, have you kept in touch with any friends from your childhood?

KS: Many, many, many. Just had my 50th high school reunion and was part of that planning committee. I keep in touch with lots of friends from when we were young.

CS: Back to the music genres a little bit, how did your parents feel about this rock and roll era when you were in high school? Was that a big point of contention or?

KS: My dad thought it was a lot of noise, but they were pretty cool about it. My mom liked some of it. You played it in your bedroom, you weren't blasting it in the living room. Played it in the car when you could drive. They were pretty open to—they didn't necessarily want to listen to a lot of it, but they didn't care that we did.

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

KS: Well, it was all nuns, other than a couple of laid teachers, it was strict. You stayed in line. I liked school a lot, and it was fun. I got told more than once that I was a little bit too social in school, so it was a great experience.

CS: As best as you can, try and recall the schools you attended during your childhood, including the grades in which you attended them.

KS: St. Leo's, kindergarten through eighth grade, and Durham Hall, ninth through 12th grade.

CS: What is one memory that stands out for you about being in school?

KS: I think when I was in kindergarten, they had the crowning of Mary on Mayday, and they picked one kindergartner out of a hat, and I got picked, and you got to wear the second graders communion bale, and marched down the hall in front of the whole school, and then climb up on a ladder, and put the crown roses on her head, and I just thought that was like, I was a movie star, so that one really sticks out for me.

CS: What about later in school like, high school or junior high?

KS: There was lots of good experiences all the way down the line. High school was great. We had really young teachers, young women teachers, and so they were pretty progressive, and really gave you a lot of information to think about and to discuss. High school was just fun, and interesting. The courses were interesting.

CS: In your opinion, how diverse was the student body of the schools you attended?

KS: Like several. Maybe, what would that be? Absolutely everyone in grade school was white, Caucasian, and in high school, I think there was two women who were black, and the rest of us out of 500 were white girls.

CS: The school lunch hour has changed over the years. Can you recall how your school handled the lunch hour when you were a student?

KS: Well, in grade school you went home for lunch. If you lived less than a mile away, you went home. You had a half an hour for lunch, or 35 minutes you run home as fast you could, and then eat. The Fugitive was on at that time, so catch about 10 minutes of The Fugitive, and then run back to school. In high school you stayed of course, and there was cafeteria the first year, and then after that it was vending machines, and I just ate junk, but that's what I had for lunch.

CS: You mentioned both your parents were working, so did you go home by yourself and make your own lunch during—

KS: No, my dad worked afternoons, and my mom worked days. When I was a young kid, up to about fourth grade, my mom only worked on the weekends. She was part-time, so somebody was always there.

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

KS: I'd say my 5th grade teacher, Mrs. [Evanson], was really a good teacher. She was strict, but she was really good. She really kept your interest, and you wanted to do good for her. She was an inspiration.

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 affecting the people in your neighborhood when you were growing up?

KS: Well, I'd say my first true memory of a global issue is when JFK was assassinated. I was in fifth grade, and that was just earth shattering. I think that changed all of our lives, especially as a kid to see a president murdered was unfathomable. As I got older, the war in Vietnam was a huge presence in all of our lives, that was big. The Civil Rights movement was really a big issue for us to learn about, because our knowledge of all the strife was so far removed from us.

CS: Do you remember seeing any of it, any of Vietnam on the news?

KS: Oh yes. Vietnam was on the news all the time. Every night, and in the papers, when the papers were much larger, there was many articles about the war.

CS: How safe or unsafe did you feel in light of these issues?

KS: They all seemed really far away. I think I felt safe as far as my physical safety concerned that things were going wrong.

CS: As far as local issues, can you recall any that stood out to you during your time growing up?

KS: I can remember one. We had Charlie McCarty, he was super mayor, and he would drive around and follow the fire trucks and police cars in this huge black Cadillac. He was somebody we all watched. He was somewhat comedic. When I was in, I'm not sure about third, fourth grade, there was a murder in Highland Village, Carol Thompson, and it ended up being that her husband had set it up and had it done for insurance, but that was huge because they didn't know that for a long time, and at that time it was during Lent. My friend Janet and I would go to mass every morning before school. That's what we were going to do for Lent, but it was pitch black when you'd leave to go. I think Mass was probably at seven, I'm going to guess, and so we would just run terrified that this madman was going to get us to—so those are my two biggies, I think.

CS: Did your family or your neighborhood have a bomb or fallout shelter in case of nuclear war?

KS: Well, you'd go to the basement. You did bomb practices in school. We'd go out in the hall, and then knee down and put your hands behind your head and I was gonna save you. I can remember we all thought that was stupid, even when we were little, this really isn't gonna work. I didn't have a bomb shelter. I didn't know anyone in my neighborhood who did, in their house until years later when I bought a house, and it had a bomb shelter in it.

CS: Do you remember videos of the nuclear explosions on the news? Is that how you found out about that or?

KS: Well, the nuclear thing was with Russia when I was a kid. That's who was going to bomb us. I remember seeing photos of Hiroshima definitely, but that was with World War II, so that was far removed. I grew up in the Cold War, so this was the worry that the Russians were going to attack us.

CS: In what ways did these issues impact your family?

KS: Oh, I don't think much. Back in that day too, parents didn't discuss a ton with their kids. You didn't have an open dialogue like you do now. I think it was probably more hidden from us than anything. If you had a question, it was answered, but it all just seems so remote. You're just in this little la la land, I think a lot in the fifties, sixties.

CS: What messages did you receive about how to treat people who are different from you?

KS: Always treat everyone the same way? That was key in our household. Everybody's treated the same way with respect and kindness.

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?

KS: I'd say probably smoking, 'cause everybody smoked, and as a kid you hated it, it stunk and people cough. I think that was probably what we were the most worried about, and not even terribly worried, just didn't like it more than anything.

CS: Were there teachers or parents that would talk about smoking with children, either in a positive or negative way?

KS: No, not really. No. I don't really remember anyone really talking about that it was a health hazard.

CS: Was anybody in your family a smoker?

KS: Oh yeah, they all were. Everybody smoked. My grandparents, my aunts and uncles, my mom and dad, I smoked. That's what I asked for my 16th birthday if I could smoke at home, and they said yes. That's crazy, isn't it?

CS: Yeah.

KS: Right. Times have changed.

CS: In your opinion, what are some of the biggest local or global issues affecting the people in your childhood neighborhood today?

KS: Oh my God, there's too many to even where to start. Roe versus Wade, racism, guns, on and on and on. I think everybody is really worried about America now, or should be, in my estimation.

CS: Are there any other local or global issues that come to mind when thinking about that period in your life?

KS: I think that we are all becoming aware of, as a woman, the disparities between men and women as far as jobs and pay, and attitude. I think that became a big thing as I got into my teens that, you know that needed to be looked at and fixed.

CS: When you were a teenager, were there any like cultural or social issues that you were interested in or passionate about?

KS: I was really passionate about zero population growth. That was a big to do when I was a young woman, and I was really passionate about that, 'cause at that time I think was probably the large with baby boomers, the largest expansion of population and it was scary, and it was gonna impact everything, just too many people.

CS: 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.