

Cynthia Rieck, by Julie M. Luker

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August 3rd, 2022
Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

CR: Cynthia Rieck

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 3rd, 2022, and I'm here with Cynthia Louise Ricks. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today, I'll be talking to Cynthia, 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.

CR: My name is Cynthia Louise Rieck, spelled C-Y-N-T-H-I-A L-O-U-I-S-E R-I-E-C-K.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

CR: Female. White.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

CR: April 1st, 1957.

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.

CR: I grew up at 904 West Montana, which was near the intersection of Montana and Victoria Street in the Como Park neighborhood.

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.

CR: Well, my grandpa lived around the block from us, and my grandmother lived in the Macalester Groveland area. Grandpa's wife had died before I was even born, so he would lots of times come down and have dinner with us. While I was at home, I had one sister. My parents always made a point of us having breakfast together. We always had dinner together. It was very important to

usually spend Sunday with family and all the holidays. My dad had one sister. My mom had one brother. We were very close with our aunt and uncle and all of our cousins.

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

CR: I engaged the most with my sister and both of my parents and probably my Grandpa Rick and my Grandma Anderson. I had two brothers. Also, I have a half-brother from my dad's first marriage, and I also had a foster brother. My parents tried, golly, for several years to have kids and didn't have any luck and had the foster child live with my parents for a couple of years. That was before I was born. And then my parents adopted my sister and then I was born when my mom was 41 and my dad was 46. So, my grandparents, my grandma Rick had already died before I was born, and my grandpa Anderson died when I was five. So, yeah, all of my grandparents were gone by the time I was in high school. But I was very close with both of my parents.

CS: Are you able to describe one experience with your family during childhood that was particularly memorable for you?

CR: Well, there are a few. [Laughter] Probably the biggest one when I was little is that my dad played Santa Claus for all of my cousins. He also played Santa Claus at the elementary school that I went to. And he would you would go to Grandpa's and change into his costume and then come back to our house and just pound on the door, yelling, "Ho, ho, ho!" And afterwards he would come back home, and I was like, "Dad, you missed Santa again!" You know, I never put two and two together until my neighbor, Peter Zechmeister, when I was in second grade, I think it was, or first grade. I was coming home. He was a police patrol and he said, "Cindy Santa Claus sure looks like your dad." So, I got home, and I told my mom, and my mom very wisely called my dad to let him figure out how to handle the situation. And he convinced me that if he was Santa, he would squeeze my little finger when I went through the line the next year. So, he did, and that was the last year Santa came to school. And then another big deal for me probably was my dad being involved with the Saint Paul Winter Carnival. So, I got to do lots of things with that, with my parents being involved. I got to go with them to parades and on some trips. I also feel very lucky getting to grow up by Como Park. We used to go over on the rides all the time or walk around the lake or bike around the lake and stuff like that.

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

CR: We always had dogs. Well, probably the dogs we had the most were miniature poodles. I would take them for walks after school and I would go down to Victoria Street, which was a bus route, and I would have my poodle stand on his back legs. [Laughter] And the people on the bus would always clap for him. I'm sure it was the same people going home from school or work. I don't think he would be allowed to do this now, but after dinner, lots of times my dad would play hide and seek with me, with the dog and I would have the dog. My dad would be hiding somewhere in the neighborhood-and the neighbors were fine with it-but he'd be hiding behind the garage or wherever. And then the dog would help me find my dad. And yeah, so we always had had pets, always had dogs growing up. So, they were a big part of the family.

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

CR: Well, we were expected to do certain things to get... We would get an allowance. By the time I was in high school, I got \$10 a week. We were expected to help. When we got a dishwasher; load the dishwasher. We had a cleaning person come every week, so I didn't really have to clean my room. I just had to pick up my clothes and get things out of the way so that she could do her work. But I did a lot of outside chores. I was lucky enough to have a horse. And a lot of the people that I

showed up with had lots and lots of money. We were not one of those families. So, it would have been very, very easy for me to get spoiled. So, what my parents did is they paid for my lessons and everything else went on an IOU list. So, I had to pay for all the farrier bills, any of my equipment, any of the horse show bills. So, in order to schedule everything around my riding lessons and the horse shows, I had a snow removal business in the winter and a lawn mowing business in the summer. And I had several different neighbors where I took care of their yard. And then as part of that, I got to use my parents' lawn mower. But I did all of the lawn care at our house, and I would make extra money, like weeding the gardens or doing things like that. And then all of those checks, I turned everything over to my parents because I kept an IOU list for my horse bills. So, most of the outdoor chores I ended up doing just to help pay off my horse bills. But I didn't have to really do cleaning inside the house, outside of helping with the dishes or helping with dinner sometimes. My sister had moved out, had got married and moved out by the time I was in ninth grade. So, it was pretty much just me at home from all of high school.

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

CR: Well, I would say that up until about the time that I was ten, we were probably lower middle class. We only had one car. If we had to have a ride while Dad was at work, either my grandma would give us a ride, or my aunt would come over and give us a ride. Grandma had a car and my aunt; they both had two cars in their family. And then it was just kind of by a fluke that my dad ended up in this business that did well. He bought this building and one of the ranchers asked my dad if he would invest in his business and my dad did. It was a cleaning business, just a small cleaning business. Dad found out that the guy was "fudging" on the records, so he said, "I'll give you 24 hours. You buy me out or I'll buy you out." And the guy said, "Go ahead." So, my dad ended up with this business that actually ended up being a very successful business for him. He had over 300 employees, they maintained Met Stadium for the Twins and Vikings in that sports arena. And because of that fluky deal, I would say. My parents did okay pretty well financially. And then my dad sold that business. That's what gave me the opportunity to have that horse. My parents paid for my college education. You know, I had a lot of nice breaks that way. So, they had a membership at golf clubs. We got to go out to eat at nice restaurants. Then before that, if we went out to eat, it was to the AMW or, you know, we really didn't do too much. All of our trips before that were always camping, or we'd go for a weekend, we'd go fishing at Prior Lake that day. My parents were pretty conservative because they both grew up during the Depression and they strongly believed in not taking loans. The only time I ever remember my parent's borrowing money was when they mortgaged our house in order for my dad to buy a building on the corner of University and Pascal. Otherwise, they didn't borrow money.

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

CR: I would say that I am still very conservative that way. I don't borrow money. You know, I'm a big believer in having everything paid off. [Laughter] I never have credit card debt. I always pay my bill every month. I think I also try to be, you know, someone who donates to different organizations of different causes that I believe in. I volunteer my time with different organizations up here in Pequot Lakes where I live now. But I would say that they influenced me that if you can't afford it, don't buy it. And to live within your means and try to take care of yourself if you can financially.

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

CR: I was raised Lutheran. My parents were charter members of St Timothy's Lutheran Church, which was in the Como Park area. We didn't go to church every Sunday, but I went to Sunday school. I was confirmed. Probably didn't attend church a lot after I was confirmed. Actually, my mom's brother, married someone who was Catholic. So, I remember that. It was very interesting because Aunt Muriel was a very devout Catholic and she it was like, nope, we are not going to a Lutheran church. Lutheran church doesn't count. [Laughter] It had to be a Catholic church. Even some of my classmates that had gone to the private Catholic schools and then came to our public school for ninth through 12th grade. And they're still being that firm belief that if you are not Catholic, you're not going to cut the mustard and make it. But yeah, my mom had been raised Baptist, so she switched over to Lutheranism once she married my dad. Yeah, and it was fun. We had a lot of youth groups. A lot of families in the neighborhood belong to our church so it was fun. I look at attendance at church now and we probably had 20 kids in our youth choir and in our confirmation class. We were all friends. It was a good social opportunity as a kid as well as in church.

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

CR: I'm a member of a church up here. I think it's important for the church to be involved in the community and to reach out to support everyone in the community. I like the different denominations to work together rather than be competing. I believe it's important for a church to be welcoming to all. And I feel we have that at our church now. But we went through a bad spell with a pastor that eventually sort of got run out of the church. During the past couple of years, just because I'm a health care provider, I've gone to church some. But when COVID cases started going up again, I've stayed away because I don't want to-I could go with my mask and have that-I kind of stay away from crowds because I don't want to risk infecting one of my patients. But what I enjoy the most about the church is the sense of community.

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.

CR: Our neighborhood. I was in the Como Park neighborhood all of my teenage years. It was quiet. It was safe. I mean, we didn't think anything about walking up to Lexington and Larpenteur in the middle of the night with friends that there is any issue of safety or playing games at night when it was dark outside. It was a clean neighborhood. Everybody made an effort to take good care of their yards and keep their homes looking nice. We knew all of our neighbors. We knew who their kids were. It truly was a neighborhood where people looked out for each other, and they and they knew what was happening with their neighbors. They knew if someone was sick, or someone was having problems. It was a neighborly neighborhood. One of the one of the things I do remember-and speaking about church-everybody on the street for three blocks would put Christmas lights on. And people would come from all over the city, at least Saint Paul. On Christmas Eve, it was hard to even get out of our driveway because cars would be lined up for three blocks going down our street to look at all the places that had Christmas lights. And then when we had the big energy crisis in the seventies, early seventies, all of a sudden people just stopped putting Christmas lights on and it was so sad. It was when some of those movements were just starting, you know, air pollution was just starting, the energy crisis was starting. And we were just starting to become aware of how badly we were treating our planet and that we have limited resources and starting to pay attention to some of those things. That was all part of that kind of late sixties, early seventies time period. So yeah, we had. Well, I'll wait for the local and global issues. I'll talk to you about that then when you ask there. Okay.

CS: As far as transportation options, how did you typically get around town?

CR: Well, either my parents drove me or going to school we walked. My fourth or sixth grade was Como Park Elementary and that was about a mile away, but we all walked or rode our bikes to school. Unless the weather was bad, or it was raining. Then I was lucky. I had a stay-at-home mom, and she could come and pick me up. But I'm going to high school, junior and senior high. I went to Murray, which was a junior senior high school. It was the smallest public school in Saint Paul, and we rode the bus there, to and from. There that a special bus that came and picked us up about a block away from where I lived. I was one of those kids when I graduated from high school, my parents gave me a car. So, then I had wheels. But up until then I was dependent on the bus or my parents or my bike.

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

CR: We knew each other. Well, I mean, I would say that those relationships were all very cordial. You know, I knew a lot of them because it was a lot of my neighbors that I did snow removal for, or I mowed their lawns. The neighborhood older girls were my babysitters growing up. A couple down the street... There were two couples on our block that my parents were close with, and they would get together and play bridge with them or have them over for dinner or do things socially with them. One neighbor up the street, the Merrill's, he and my dad, would always be pulling pranks on each other. Like one time my dad stole some of Ken's light bulbs from his Christmas tree and it was like two days later I'm walking down the street with my dad, and Ken is taking the lights off his tree, [Laughter] telling my dad "Those damn kids! They've already stole my bulbs." And that evening my parents had them over to play bridge, and my dad had the light bulbs up on the fireplace mantle. Ken was not happy, but they would pull pranks on each other that way. And people were good, you know, about walking through their yard to go to my grandpa's. We looked out for our neighbors if they needed help with something, you know, my dad would plow, do something extra or mow their lawn or, you know. We just kept track of how they were doing and would ask about how they were doing.

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

CR: I would say I felt very safe there. I think it helped just that the neighbors knew each other. I didn't have any concerns about safety. We would ride our bikes during the day, during the night. The only thing that we watched for was car traffic. You know, my parents, when it was time to come home, my mother had a loud whistle. She'd whistle, you know, nobody had cell phones or anything. You just if you said you were going to be home at a certain time, you better be home at that certain time because your parents didn't have any way to get a hold of you. You told your parents what time you were going to be home, and then that's what was expected so that they figured that you were safe until then. If you were going to someone's house, or going somewhere to play, I would tell my parents where we were going and whose house I was going to be at and what time we were going to be home. So, they knew when to look for us or where to find us if some emergency happened at home. And that's how that worked.

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?

CR: Well, I think I've kind of touched on that with things I've already said. But we you know, just that we would watch out for each other. We knew each other's kids. We knew everybody's name that lived on the street. We regularly spend time with our family. I really value that, that I got to

have breakfast and dinner with my parents every day. You know, when you were asking about church, I grew up we said grace before every meal. I think it was just that that sense of community and that you all wanted to get along together. And that you were all neighborly. I remember there being one neighbor up in the next block. Just was so careful about his lawn that if kids were riding their bikes and they cut the corner and went on his grass, he would say, "now, don't do that. I painted that lawn green." Just very precise about how you wanted to take care of his lot and that it was, you know that. I think we tried to be a little bit more easygoing, forgiving in our block, just so just for the sake of everybody getting along and having fun. But a corner of worn grass wasn't a big deal.

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

CR: Every pretty much every night after dinner, my dad would play Frisbee with me, or we'd play catch. In the back yard for a while. We would watch TV programs together after dinner. We would go to Como Park, usually that would be on the weekend after we had all been working around the house and getting chores done at home. We get to go to Como Park and to the A&W restaurant on Como Avenue and have dinner. We would go fishing at Prior Lake and lots of times invite my grandma or grandpa to go along. And then our trips were usually camping. We would go swimming. We would go to Como Park for picnics and go on the rides. And Como Park had a swimming pool. We would go there a lot during the summer. But it was. Mostly pretty non-expense things that were just easy to do. You know, you didn't have to go far, and you didn't have to pay a lot.

CS: Was there a local hangout spot in your neighborhood where you could be with your friends? If yes, describe it.

CR: Mm. I would say no. We would just do things at each other's homes. Yeah. I don't think of there being. Not for me, there wasn't.

CS: Which bands or music genres were your favorite?

CR: Oh, well of course, the Beatles. The Dave Clark Five. I actually like a lot of my parents' old music that they played, like Frank Sinatra or Quincy Jones. Xavier Cugat. But it was probably mostly the Beatles and the Dave Clark Five and The Monkees. We watched The Monkees on TV; their series because that was always good. Thinking about things we would do on Sunday nights for almost always just TV night we would watch Disney and Bonanza. And they had a series of murder mysteries with Dennis Weaver and Rock Hudson and Susan Saint James. And we would color. We did a lot of... My parents would get colored by a number of things, and we'd all sit in the TV room and color while we watched TV.

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

CR: It's mostly through school or church. And then when I got into horses, because during those times when I would show from about February until October. I would be riding horses six days a week. So, my closest friends ended up being people that I knew through horses. So that was a big way I met friends when I was in high school, junior high and high school, were my horse friends, because we spent so much time together. I'd be at the barn and half a day. Some of those folks lived up by Forest Lake or Hugo. Some, our barn at the time was a popular stable, so a lot of the kids came over from like Wayzata, Minnetonka, that area. So those ended up being a lot of my friends too. So sometimes I'd be over on the other side of town doing things or staying at friends' homes there.

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

CR: Again, usually during our vacations, we're camping in a tent. And that's sort of how my parents ended up here. We would go camping at a place in Pequot Lakes. The first trip that I remember really being on a plane going anywhere was when I was in seventh grade, and we went out to a place in San Diego and stayed there for a week. We took road trips. I remember taking a road trip. My parents took my sister and I up to the East Coast to go to like all of the Civil War sites. So, we went to the Capitol and the Washington Monument and went to all of the historical sites and some of the battle sites. I was only seven. So, part of it, I don't remember really well. And we also we went to the during that trip, we went to the New York World's Fair. That was in 1964. So, I remember the log flume ride. That was fun. But yeah, so we usually we did that road trip, and we flew out to San Diego in like 1970 or 71. But otherwise, all of our vacations were camping.

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

CR: Well, you knew most of your classmates because they all lived right in your neighborhood. I only lived about three blocks away from the elementary school that I went to. The first kindergarten through third grade. I loved going to Como Park School. I was a police patrol at both schools. It was when I was in fifth grade that they started integration. They started bussing kids. Kids that were black to our school districts, and I thought that went fine. I was friends with them just as the other students, but I'm sure it was probably uncomfortable for them being moved out of their neighborhoods. And that was kind of a... It's a difficult time as well, because fifth grade where they started bussing, it was when I was in fifth grade that Robert Kennedy was assassinated and also Martin Luther King. Both of those assassinations happened the same year that they started bussing in the Twin Cities. All I remember about school. One of my hardest things. My dad would give us money for our grades, which is sometimes frowned on. But if I got an A, I got maybe I don't know what I got or if I got a B, I didn't get anything for a C. I think that I was probably left-handed because I had horrible scissor skills in kindergarten. We would have to cut papier mâché or crepe paper to make these floats or Easter baskets. And I just struggled and struggled. And by the time I reached sixth grade the only C I ever got from fourth grade through 12th grade was in sixth grade handwriting. And I just fought to overcome that. But I really think that I was a lefty. I have some nephews that are. A nephew that's lefty. I think I was a lefty. And back then, they frowned on that. [Laughter] We were supposed to be right-handed. So, and what really confirmed that for me was after I became a physical therapist, we were being trained in work hardening. I was the subject that they did all the tests on. My strength and all of my dexterity is better with my left hand than my right hand. So, but that was probably the traumatic part of school for me was that I was a lefty. But I've gotten over it. I liked school. And I worked really hard in school. I wanted to get good grades. So, I was very upset when my dad forced me to take typing. Now that we have computers, I'm glad that he made me take typing. But at the time I wasn't happy about it because it ended up impacting my grade point average. I think I dropped from third in my class to 10th in my class with having to take typing. But it was a good practical skill that I'm thankful for now.

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

CR: From high school, probably Mr. Broderick, who was my ninth-grade algebra teacher. He was a very, very kind man, a very good teacher. And I think the reason it stands out to me is because at the end. It's going to make me sad...

CS: It's okay.

CR: It was such a kind thing to do. And I'm sure I still have it saved somewhere. He wrote a letter to my parents, telling them what a good student I was, how much he appreciated having me in his class. I'm pretty sure I saved it, but I don't know where it is. But I liked Mr. Broderick. He was a very good teacher and a very kind man. Now I thought that he was really going above and beyond his call of duty to take the extra time to write a letter like that. And I still like algebra. [Laughter]

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

CR: I would say that a real big one was at that time we were having riots in the city of St Paul. There was a lot of racial unrest. The whole bussing situation. I want to say I was in sixth grade when we had-could have been fifth or sixth-for the 1968 election. I think sixth grade. And our classroom teacher wanted us to all get involved in the election process. And the three candidates were Nixon, Humphrey, and George Wallace. And George Wallace, of course, was very into segregation, very against blacks making any kind of headway with their rights. You know, it shocks me when I think now that I don't think blacks even got the right to vote until 1962 or 1964. But that was a really serious election. And I remember my friend, one of my friends that I went to school with. It was interesting because you would hear what your friends were saying and you knew that that was in sixth grade, that that's probably who their parents were voting for, whoever they were choosing to vote for. But I remember one of my classmates saying, you know, Cindy, just think how horrible this would be if the whites were marrying blacks. And pretty soon we aren't going to have any white people left in it. Yeah, but it was so that the 1968 election was a big deal. The riots in St Paul were a big deal. President Kennedy being shot. His brother being shot. Martin Luther King being assassinated. Those were all big issues. I'd also say water pollution, the whole thing with finding out about water pollution. And I remember my parents had their boat in a slip on the Mississippi River. This is how bad the Mississippi was back then. The chemicals in the river were corroding a hole through the hull of my parents' boat. That's how bad the water was on the Mississippi. They had to have the boat rebuilt. And I think about women's lib was a big thing right about that time. Up until I was in high school, the only time that we were allowed to wear pants was between like January 1st and March 1st while we were waiting for the bus. We could you could put pants on the women. Girls had to wear skirts or dresses up until I was in junior high. Women were really subservient to men. You know, I'm thankful that I had a mom that was at home, but it was because my dad did not allow her to work after they were married. My mother would have loved to work. My mom wanted to be a cartoonist, but my dad said, no, you stay at home. And my mom always made our cards, made all of our birthday cards with her artwork. But then actually became a very talented painter. The biggest thing I remember about the women's lib movement and our family. I don't know what my dad had done, but my mom was upset. We're all sitting around the table and usually if we were sitting there having a meal and my dad said, Margie, do we have any ketchup? My mother would jump up on the table and run to the refrigerator and get the ketchup and bring it back for my dad. Well, this one night we were sitting there at the table and my dad said, Margie, do we have any ketchup? And my mother said, yes, Don, it's in the refrigerator. My sister and I looked at each other like, oh, my God, what's going to happen now? My dad stood up, went to the refrigerator. [Laughter] You know, that was I grew up in that old school household. But my mother got my dad converted. I give her credit. She took a little bit of time. But yeah, that was a lot of women weren't brave enough to do that. So, I admire her for that now. So, I guess the dress code, you know. It was all the time where air pollution I think about us all being concerned about the ozone layer. But that's kind of when the whole thing started of being concerned about us depleting our natural resources and air pollution and water pollution. That was all sort of in that time period also. Climate change wasn't even on the horizon yet. So, Earth Day that started the Walk for Mankind. That was all kind of my junior senior high school years that those things started.

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.

CR: Thank you for asking me.