

# *Catherine Paulsen*, by Julie M. Luker

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**Narrator**

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**Interviewer**

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**Transcriber**

**July 24, 2023**  
**Minnesota**

**CS: Cole Steinberg**

**CP: Catherine Paulsen**

**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 July 24th, 2023, and I'm here with Catherine Paulsen. My name is Cole Steinberg and I am an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today I'll be talking to Catherine 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 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.

**CP:** Catherine, C-A-T-H-E-R-I-N-E, Crowley, C-R-O-W-L-E-Y, Paulsen, P-A-U-L-S-E-N.

**CS:** Please identify your race and gender.

**CP:** White female.

**CS:** Please state your date of birth.

**CP:** December 22nd, 1944.

**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.

**CP:** I grew up on the northwest corner of Cleveland and Fairmont. I lived there until I was done with college. Most of my life—*young life*.

**CS:** Thank you. I would like to learn more about your family life. Let's begin with some memories you have for your immediate and extended family. Please share some memories that you have about these relationships.

**CP:** Well, the house that I lived in was built by my grandfather in I believe 1910, 1911. He had two small girls. Their mother had died and he remarried my grandmother. They had a child, my mother who was born 1915, in that house. She was there until she was in her late 60's. She spent a long time in that house *[laughter]*.

Also, the two little girls grew up and they both lived in the house growing up. One never married and so she lived in that house until she was in her 60's and moved into her sister after her sister was widowed. The sister and her husband as adults also lived there for a time. My grandmother lived there until May of 1946 when she died. My father probably moved in there in 1943 when they married.

Mind you, there were three bedrooms in this house. One room went across the back of the house. It had two of—I think they used to call them dust porches on each side where you could shake out a mop. I'm not sure why they—dust mop. I don't know why they needed two but two doors opened out to each of those. Somebody was always staying in that bedroom.

The other people who were living in the house when I was young was my great-aunt who lived there for a time. A great-uncle lived there until shortly after my grandmother died. Then a cousin of my two aunts also lived there for a time *[laughter]*. They always got that bedroom that was just—it was just real narrow with two doors and a big radiator and windows that faced west. It wasn't a great room. I also spent time in that room. It's a bedroom.

The house when I was little was full of adults. All of them smoking, which is my worst nightmare *[laughter]*. I can remember sitting on the front porch—it had great front porch all the way across the front that was screened—and sitting in the dark and seeing all the glowing tips of the cigarettes from all the adults that were in the house smoking and watching people go by. That was kind of how people lived.

You weren't out just walking around. You were either going to the store or going to work or coming home. Something like that. That's when you'd see other neighbors. The neighborhood was full of old people. There weren't very many kids in our area. We weren't allowed to cross Cleveland until I was probably in first grade. There was nobody who lived on Fairmont that was our age. We just really didn't have many people to play with.

My sister and I are—one sister and I are 13 months apart so we used to do—play together. We had an old swing set that had—was made of metal and wood. Then my father built a great big one made out of pipe *[laughter]*. It must've been 10 feet tall. Only had two swings on it. The yard we had was interesting. There were lots of trees in the yard. There was a Mountain Ash on the corner and front.

There were four plum trees in the backyard in the back yard, and four apple trees in the backyard. Lilac bushes everywhere. Seemed everybody in the neighborhood had lilac bushes. As far as the batch of the family, my two aunts always worked. My mother stayed at home. She was the cook and housecleaner primarily for everybody else. What else about them? I guess the lack of other kids to play with. For a short time, there was a family that lived behind us.

The people who lived next door to us had grandchildren who were essentially the same age as my sister and me. In fact, the oldest one was born on the same day I was. My father took his mother to the hospital and then came home and took my mother to the hospital. He and I, this grandson, we spent a lot of our early childhood together 'cause he was at his grandparents' house a lot.

He was like my best—I mean we were blood brothers and sisters with the little pin on the finger and mixed blood together *[laughter]*. We had a telephone with a string and cans going across the yard to the house next door. We didn't have a lot of toys to play with. I think he had a little red fire tuck toy, and I had a red tricycle. Then later on we had bikes and the swing set in the backyard.

I think we had a sandbox when we were really young. My dad would go down to Hidden Falls and get nice white sand. I don't think that's there anymore but it was wonderful. It wasn't that gray stuff. It was just pure white sand. We spend a lot of time doing that as little kids. When we were older, I had a friend from school who lived about two blocks away. Still there weren't many kids in the neighborhood to hang out with our play with.

Which is very unlike the Macalester-Groveland area that I grew up in where Nativity School was. There were hundreds of kids that lived in the blocks around Nativity. Literally hundreds of them *[laughter]*. They always had somebody to be hanging out with or play with. My parents were pretty strict. I didn't really know a lot of the kids at my class at Nativity even though I was with them for eight years. 'cause they lived on the far side of Nativity. That was outside of the boundaries where I was able to go.

Then in 1950 my second sister was born, so that involved—somebody had to move out *[laughter]*. It was my aunt who was married. She had left the house and my great-aunt was still

living in the house along with my parents. Then my brother was born in 1957. My single aunt actually lived in the house until I was in college. It was crowded.

I remember as a really young-young-young child I had a crib in my aunt's room. She had to share a crib with me—not a crib. A room *[laughter]*. I remember listening to old radio shows with her at night when the lights were off. Before I was three years old for sure. *My Gal Sunday* was one. *Fibber McGee's Closet* was one. There were other ones.

I was too little to really understand what they were about. That was just nice that I got that privilege to listen to the radio. Of course, TV wasn't around then. Another memory I have of the neighborhood is my dad would—we would walk down to Grand and Finn where there was an appliance store, I think it was. They had an 11-inch round TV screen in the window. We would walk down there on Friday nights and watch the fights on TV.

I was probably three and four years old at that point. Then we got our own 11-inch round TV, *[laughter]* which was pretty exciting. I look at the size of that now and I just think oh my goodness. That was prehistoric. As far as economics stuff with the family, they were all living together. Nobody was making enough money to be out on their own except probably my father and my one married aunt. They all wanted to stay there for some reason *[laughter]*.

My dad went to work every day super early. He worked at a trucking firm that did—he did the accounting work there. He did that for another cold storage firm later on and then finally retired from that. For fun on hot-hot days we used to "go for a ride". That meant everybody piled in the car. This was more when it was my two sisters and my aunt. My dad would just drive around with the windows open to cool off *[laughter]*. That was pretty much what we did.

We didn't leave home very much at all. We never had a babysitter 'cause the aunt was always there. People didn't go out to eat then. There was no fast food. I can remember going to a buffet kind of place that was on University near University and Snelling. That was a once-a-year kind of thing in the early days. Later on we would go out to eat a lot more often.

The Saint Pual hotel always had a big brunch on Easter. I remember going there twice and being just in awe of all the big round tables with white tablecloths piled high with desserts. I have no idea what was on the other table. I was just there for the desserts.

**CS:** Did you have any family pets?

**CP:** We did. Well, my one aunt had a dog named Tippy. It was a nasty little chihuahua and I didn't like that one. It was really yappy and old and *[makes noise]*. Then we got a dog when I

was probably in fourth or fifth grade. It was part Dachshund and part Lab, and its name was Dagmar *[laughter]*. This very strange looking dog. Very strange.

There was always a bird, it was a canary. Its name was Henry. That was always in the bird cage in the dining room. She'd cover it up every night then it would stop with its chirping. Then one day my dad and my uncle went down to the basement with Henry in a brown paper bag. I snuck down to see what was going on. Well, essentially, they were using the gas from the copper washtubs to put Henry out of his misery, I guess *[laughter]*. Then we had a parakeet for a while.

Then after Dagmar died, we didn't have any other dogs. Oh, we had another one. It was stupid. It would run away all the time. Back in the day you would put an ad in the newspaper, "Lost dog." I don't know how many times they did that. Finally, I think he just stayed gone *[laughter]*. We had a neighbor down the alley that had a Basset Hound. Dogs were never on leashes or chained up anywhere. They just wandered around.

Miss Liza the Basset Hound would wander up to our house at a very Basset pace and just sort of hang out there and then wander back home again. That was interesting about the—nobody picked up anything from the dogs *[laughter]*. It was always on your shoes. Speaking of shoes. You weren't allowed to go in the street when they were tarring the streets. That was a regular happening, that stinky tar. Then they'd put sand down. You couldn't help but track sand and tar in the house. Oh, it was a mess. It was really a mess *[laughter]*.

The other thing I remember about the house was it had—in the basement it had a furnace, and then a good-sized area where the copper tubs were for doing the laundry. Of course, we then got a washer and dryer down there. In addition to that there was a fruit cellar, which was a whole separate room with—it was just full of shelves. That's where any canning that happened was kept in the fruit cellar.

Wasn't any fruit in there that I remember. Well, canned fruit but nothing fresh. Then there was another room, and that was the coal room. Because the house was heated by coal at the time. Once a year they would come with the coal truck. There was a little door from the outside into the coal room.

They would come in the summer and they'd fill that up to the top—up to the top of that room. Then in order to keep the house once somebody had to periodically go down in the basement and shovel coal in the furnace. That was never my job. I'm so glad it wasn't *[laughter]*. That speaks to the economy of the times.

**CS:** That's what our next portion was about. I can go onto the religion piece. I have sections here for it. 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.

**CP:** Well, my father wasn't catholic but my mother was. When we were little, we could stay home with him and read the—he'd read the funnies to us from the newspaper. Then as we go to be probably four and five, we had to go to church every Sunday with my mom and my aunt. Then my dad started coming along. When I was in sixth grade he converted to Catholicism.

As I said, we lived on the far edge of Nativity's boundaries so my mother was never really involved in the church. I think people who lived closer did things like funeral lunches or—I don't know. Whatever they could talk them into *[laughter]*. We never did that. Anything outside of going to church on Sunday and then going to the catholic school for eight years.

I went to Groveland for kindergarten. Then I was four years old walking three blocks to kindergarten. Nativity was about nine blocks away. That was pretty much it. Every once in a while, my mother would decide we should probably start saying the rosary. We'd carry on about that moaning and groaning so that was never anything that happened really often *[laughter]*.

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

**CP:** It's important enough that I go every Sunday. My husband and I spend half the year and half in Florida, so we don't get real attached to any church. I always go to Assumption down in Saint Paul 'cause I love it. It's an old church. I never liked Nativity. I don't know. I never liked going to school and I didn't like going—being in that church. It just gave me the creeps. It was too big *[laughter]*.

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

**CP:** I just remember all the trees. All the boulevard trees. All the trees all around. Everybody had a lot of stuff in their yard. In fact, about four houses away in the next block there was still an old barn when I was a kid. The woman that lived there still wore a long black dress and black shoes from the 18—yeah, 18, 1900s. It was interesting. I never knew what her story was. Just that she'd lived there forever.

Everybody else in our block was older—there were only five houses in our block. Again, everybody was older. There was a family about four doors away. I don't know what number. They had kids. He was older. He was in eighth grade when I was in kindergarten and my mother

had him walk me to school for the first couple of days. It turned out he was the neighborhood arsonist *[laughter]*. Setting garage fires along—at that same time. I remember that.

The other part of the neighborhood was an assortment of houses. Ours was considered a pretty big house. The one next door was a bungalow. The one next door to that was kind of like a—well, it was a bigger house but it had an apartment—separate apartment upstairs. Then the other two were fairly good-sized houses. It was kind of a neighborhood where it wasn't—everything didn't look the same like things do today. It wasn't one developer that did everything. Every block was different.

**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?

**CP:** Well, my playmate when I was young, my blood brother, we'd get in trouble sometimes. Not big trouble but we were kind of—kept an eye on us, I think, more than anything *[laughter]*. You didn't worry about being carjacked or having your car stolen. Oh, but there was one story that apparently one time somebody who'd drunk too much came into our porch and slept on the porch.

I don't know when that happened but we were never allowed to sleep on the porch in the summertime because that happened one time *[laughter]*. That and the garage fires were the only criminal thing. I don't ever remember seeing a policeman around ever. Or being called. An ambulance, maybe, but there weren't the sirens going all the time like there is today.

When Highland Park from the bank to the drugstore had a fire that was very frightening. I think that was 1949 or 1950. The sirens were going—it seemed like they were going all night long. They were coming down our street because Cleveland was the main street. They were probably coming for other fire stations. That was scary to me because we didn't know where that was. Nobody I guess reported it on the radio. They were thinking maybe it was Saint Kate's. We didn't know.

Didn't know until the next day when you could go up there and see what happened. That was scary to me. All that fire and stuff and just—and smokey and the destruction. That was very scary. As far as—I think everybody was pretty homogenous then. Wasn't any trouble in the neighborhood ever.

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



**CP:** Well, when we were little, we used to run through the hose. That was as good as it got [*laughter*]. What else did they—going for a ride. That was it. We never took vacations because my dad was in the army reserve. His two-week vacation was spent doing that. I can remember one time we went to a cabin. My sister and I went swimming and came out covered with leeches. I didn't care if I ever went on vacation again after that [*laughter*].

I don't think people had leisure time. I think they were doing yard work. Doing laundry was not as simple as it is today. Of course, everybody had to iron everything, too. Cooking. There weren't fast foods, there were no supermarkets. Three blocks away there was the public food market is what it was called, and it was very small. They had little color—baskets that had colored stripes on them. I remember that.

Cooking a meal wasn't like it is today where you—half of it's already made or all of it, you just heat it up. I don't think people had a lot of leisure time. At our house mostly they were talking all the time. That was their leisure time. Sit on the porch and talked, and in the winter, it was shovel coal, shovel snow.

I just really don't remember. Both my parents read a lot and passed that on to the four of us. I think we probably read a lot. I don't recall anything else. As we got older there was TV then. Then my dad bought a stereo playing the old World War II stuff. It's what he liked. There wasn't much time for leisure.

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

**CP:** Terrifying [*laughter*] is what it was like. I was so neurotic. I was school-phobic until I was in third grade [*laughter*]. I could think up more reasons why I couldn't go to school or had to leave school and come home. I was not there regularly. For some reason they'd always come and pick me up [*laughter*]. I don't know why they didn't make me stay there.

My favorite thing to do in Kindergarten was when we played music. The only thing I could play was the triangle. You know, "bing" [*laughter*]. Not too difficult. Then you had rugs that you had to take naps on in the afternoon. Well, I was all worried how I was going to find my own rug. Mind you, I was four years old. I have never had a babysitter or been exposed to anybody else other than the family that lived with us. That was our family. We didn't have first cousins. That was it.

Anyway, my mother got me a rug that was all different stipes. Wouldn't you know it, somebody had the same rug. I couldn't sleep ever [*laughter*]. I had to keep my eye on that rug. Going to Nativity, that was—I was not—I didn't like school. I was really shy. I did well in school. Better

if I tired but I did well in school. Again, because we were on the end of the line as far as the school boundaries a lot of times there was nobody even to walk home with. It wasn't fun.

**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?

**CP:** Oh yeah. They had bent wood chairs, which were always tipping over. You ate in a big lunchroom at Nativity. Everybody brought a bag lunch if you didn't go home for lunch. It wasn't a huge number compared to the total number in the school. Because we were catholic, we didn't eat meat on Fridays, so we'd get a tuna fish sandwich that had probably been close to the radiator in the classroom until we ate it *[laughter]*. I still remember those.

We could buy milk. We were given nothing. We could buy milk. It was three cents. Sometimes they made a mistake and gave chocolate milk. Well, that was a happy day. Then after you finished lunch you went outside on the playground to, I don't know, get out of their hair for a while.

All the nuns, they all lived right across the street so they went to the convent to eat. Somebody must have been left in charge to—I don't remember that. Vastly different from today. Nobody worried about what was in your lunch. You got a sandwich, you got an apple, and you got potato chips. That was pretty much it.

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

**CP:** In my early memory?

**CS:** Any time throughout your childhood.

**CP:** I think my sixth-grade teacher, Sister Lanore. I sped through work fast just to get done with it and then she'd always give me extra stuff to do. Some of it was kind of fun but it wasn't like I had to sit in class. That's one I remember. I also think I was probably taller than my first-grade teacher. She was a little tiny, tiny person.

They put me in the line for the third-grade classroom because I didn't talk a whole lot either or give anybody much info *[laughter]*. I ended up in the third-grade classroom instead of the one I was supposed to be in. One more thing to add to my childhood neurosis. I generally liked the teachers we had until I was in eighth grade.

Then when I was in seventh grade I was in a split classroom where it was mostly eighth graders and some seventh graders. I liked that because could listen in on what they were doing. I didn't

have a lot of friends in school. I had maybe one or two and not that I saw regularly outside of school. There were some that I'd see once in a great while. In fact, I just had lunch with tow of them last week that I knew from grade school. I didn't have the enormous number of friends that the kids who lived by school had.

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

**CP:** Probably wasn't aware of many until I was much older. Our life was in that house. We never had other—my mother had cousins. Sometimes we'd see them but everything I knew about I learned in that house and not any place else or from any place else. I don't recall the war being an issue.

I do know that it was a relative of my aunts who had a son that I always thought was really handsome. He was older and he was in the air force, think. And I remember hurrying home from kindergarten because Billy Faith—that was his name. Isn't that a great country name *[laughter]*? Billy Faith. He was coming to visit and then he was leaving to go overseas. I just was so fond of him. He ended up being MIA in the Korean times.

Other than that, it really wasn't—I was never—they didn't talk a lot about politics at home. I don't remember it at all, really. Probably politics came into my mind more in the Kennedy era. I was in college and older. As a grade school kid too young, as a high school kid too narcissistic to be interested in everything outside your own skin.

**CS:** Is that all you can recall about local and global issues?

**CP:** Boy. Local, I don't even know—there was nothing going on local *[laughter]*. Things were just kind of—every day was the same as the last. There was nothing exciting going on. That fire was probably the biggest thing that I can remember. I'm sure that that plenty of—plenty to do with the economics of rebuilding it and people who were without jobs.

I remember my mother always talking about my grandmother always fed the "hobos" that came up from the river. We were never allowed to go to the river *[laughter]*. I don't know what she thought was—we were a few blocks from the Mississippi but we didn't have hobos in my day. Oh, you know what I do remember. There was a man who had a horse. I think he was like a junk man.

He'd come through the alleys and I think he would sharpen scissors. That was somebody I saw of as really poor but there weren't any poor people by us. Nobody was well-to-do but nobody was

poor. There were no food shelves. I think people who were really poor were kind of living with family. My aunts weren't really poor. They just didn't want to leave their home; I think that was part of it.

**CS:** Can you tell me a little bit more about the—that junk guys that goes around? Because in previous interview he's been brought up. Was he on a horse or was he on a cart—

**CP:** He had a wagon. A dilapidated wagon. He looked dirty. His clothes looked dirty. I don't know exactly what else he was doing. What he was trying to collect or—but he was kind of a regular. We weren't afraid of him. We'd go look at him kind of *[laughter]* because he didn't look like everybody else in our neighborhood. That's all I can remember of that.

It seems to me there might've been—oh, Fuller Brush Man. That was a common thing where they would come. I think the housewives looked forward to that. Because they were really stuck. If they had kids, they would be stuck at home. Most people didn't have two cars. I remember going downtown on the bus a time or two with my aunt.

We just didn't go anywhere or do much. I don't know how people went shopping for clothes or stuff. It was only in the downtown—oh, there was a dress store in our neighborhood. There was a bakery. A Dutch bakery, which was there until not too long ago. There was a pharmacy on the corner that had a marble fountain like you see on the old-time things. That was the pharmacy. As I got older that was a place to go and get a cherry Coke, but it was a hangout for kids by any means. Or teenagers. They were kind of there.

As a teenager I would take the bus to Highland with a friend and go to the—the drugstore up there had a gift shop, and they also sold books. We would go up there and buy Nancy Drew books and Cherry Ames books. That was probably it for high school age. It was a quiet time. I'm sure adults were concerned about economics and war but crime was not a big issue. Traffic wasn't a big issue.

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

**CP:** Thank you.