

Jean Moberg, by Julie M. Luker

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

JM: Jean Moberg

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 25th, 2023, and I'm here with Jean Moberg. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. Today, I'll be talking to Jean 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.

JM: Jean Moberg. That's J-E-A-N M-O-B-E-R-G. My birth date is July 18, 1957.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

JM: White. Female.

CS: Finally, please share where you grew up, such as the name of the neighborhood or a nearby street intersection. Include any major moves you made during this time period.

JM: Highland Park. I lived on Randolph with the cross street of Syndicate. The only place we lived until I was 24.

CS: Okay. 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.

JM: There were-my aside from my parents-there were four children. I am the oldest and the only girl. My parents bought that house before I was born. So, I've always just known that house. My father was a payroll accountant for Northern States Power Company, and my mother was a stay at home mother. It was a pretty traditional upbringing. I think, as far as my father, you know, they knew their roles in that, but they worked together as a team as well. I found out in later years how well they worked as a team. There were never any strict boundaries there for them. Basically, my mother won... My father was a Lutheran. My mother was a Catholic. Which at that time was a very big deal. You didn't marry outside those faiths. So, I don't think either side was very pleased. But

they got married and my father had to sign us all over to the Catholic Church. That's what you do. So, they sent us all to a parochial school, Holy Spirit school. We pretty much had, I would say, a pretty normal childhood, if you can define normal. But we would play with kids in the neighborhood. We would, we stayed on our block. We really weren't allowed off the block for a very long time. So just the neighbor kids, we would play games. During the summer, we did walk to school. However, we were required to come home and have lunch. So we would come home, have lunch, and then walk back to school. My father was a very caring person, so he was, but I would probably call it caretaker. So, he we got along. We got along well with both my parents. My father primarily would lay down the law for something, would be the one to give in. He would cave particularly with me, and I think that's because I was the only girl. And so, but my mother was more of the enforcer of the family. And so, my father would often have to hear about our antics when he came home from work, which I'm sure he didn't [Laughter] desire listening to. But that's what it is. My brother Bruce is two years behind me. My brother Paul is three years behind me, and Stephen is the youngest and he is seven years behind me. My father was a scout leader for about 18 years. He started doing it mainly with my brothers, became of age, and he wanted to, they got into Cub Scouts and whatnot. So, he ended up just staying in there until my brothers became Eagle Scouts. And then he served on the Arrowhead Committee for Boy Scouts of America. My mother didn't get a job until we were probably in high school. And then she worked at Highland Park in food service at Highland Park Senior High. So, it was interesting having your mom at school. [Laughter] Plus, she but that's what they did. And that's about all I can say about that.

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

JM: We had a cat. He was a \$2 Wards cat. It was from Montgomery Wards. And I talked my father into buying him for my little brother. [Laughter] It was something my father paid for dearly. But I thought it would be a really cute gift for Steven. So, it was \$2 cat sitting alone in a cage, and we bought him. His name was Charlie, and technically, I was allergic to him, which is why my mother was not overly pleased with Dad about that. But we all talked her into it, and I was already getting allergy shots and God knows what else. So, at this point, everybody just caved. And he we had him for about 13 years. So, but that was the only pet. I had goldfish up off and on, but that's about it.

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

JM: My mother did primarily the house cleaning and the cooking. She was kind of a nervous person, so she preferred to do the cooking. So, I never really learned that much cooking from her because she would get impatient that I wasn't measuring something properly or, you know. So basically, it was just, "Get out of here and let me do it!" Which I had no problem with at the time. But basically, we were required to keep our rooms clean. We not until years later, were we required to do our own laundry. My father basically took care of the house stuff. Our house was over 100 years old, and so there was always some kind of plumbing emergency or roof leak or something. And about when I was ten years old, he expanded the attic area and put in a dorm area. So, us kids had our own rooms upstairs. And primarily before that, we were all kind of stuck in one room. And so, he was always doing things like that or mowing the lawn. He was not beyond him to take a vacuum to something. So, it wasn't like that. I think it's just that my mother just kind of swooped in to do it, so we didn't argue too much. The boys were required to help in the yard. It was pretty sexist, but they were required to help in the yard, and I was required to help my mother in the house.

CS: Can you share a memory to help describe what mealtime was like in your family?

JM: We sat initially all in the kitchen around this little table and for six people at one end, or I should say one is in a wheelchair and a highchair. We were pretty crowded, so they would kind of

rotate the food to the table. And so, it would, you know, first comes the one dish and everybody would dish up. Then that dish would come off the table and another one. Which meant years later, I have this really bad habit of eating my food in order because you would only get one piece of food until everybody was, and then they went on to the next one because there just wasn't any room on the table. So, but we were required at 6:00 when the church bells rang. We were required to come home to have dinner. We always had dinner as a family, always. Eventually we moved out to the living room, which my mother got over the fact she could live with us being out there. So, we always, always had dinner together.

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

JM: I would say my father was probably lower middle income on the lower side. I was a very sick child. I was in the hospital a lot. I think that caused a good deal of financial strain on the family. I missed a lot of school early on. I would get pneumonia just really easily. And so, I think I don't know how insurance was back then, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't very good. And so, I think that was a strain on the family. I do remember some Christmases where my parents sat down and said, we may not be able to get to everything that you want. You know, not that they always would, but that things were slim. I don't remember us ever complaining about it, which is really weird. I would think we would have. I mean, obviously we felt bad, and we'd rather have things, but it wasn't that we were living hand-to-mouth either. We were living actually as a middle-income family. And my father in the early days would sometimes moonlight as a bartender up at Highland Park Golf course at the clubhouse. My grandfather, Joe Hines, was the manager of the Highland Park Golf Course and the pool. So, when there was a wedding in the evenings, my grandfather didn't feel like bartending for the wedding. So, he would hire my dad to come and bartend and clean up and make sure that nobody got out of hand or broke anything in the clubhouse. So, I think I do remember that he did that as a supplement to our income.

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

JM: My father was an accountant, fortunately or unfortunately, and was never pleased with the state of my checkbook. We were, at least, trying to be taught not to exceed what we earned. He said he really didn't... He wanted us to succeed in life, but he didn't care what it was as long as you made a living at it, and you were a decent citizen. So, I'd have to say my brothers and I accomplished that. So, I had a job. I started babysitting when I was 12 or 14, and so I started saving money then. So, by the time I was 16 years old, I had \$5,000 in the bank account, which back then was a lot of money. I am careful about what I spend, and I'll think twice before I know how much I'm going to have to pay for something on a charge card. So again, it wasn't that he was so terribly strict with it. It's just that you had to make sure your balance sheet came out at the end of the month.

CS: Great. Now, I would like to know 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.

JM: We were raised Catholic as children. My dad did not convert. So, my father would go to his Lutheran church on Sundays and all of us kids would go to Catholic Church on Sundays. And then we were raised in at the Holy Spirit Catholic School. So, my mother's side of the family was very Catholic. Those are the people we were exposed to. My father's people were up north in Detroit Lakes that way, and that was kind of a Lutheran stronghold. So, where we were was there a lot of Irish Catholic. Obviously, I had a lot of I had friends in high school, obviously, who were Jewish. And so, we were exposed to a lot of different kinds of faiths. We were taught to respect it. I know that, right. I wouldn't say I would say I'm a lapsed Catholic right now, but I do think that part of

those values that we learned carried through into my adult life and alongside of what my parents taught me. Christmas was a pain because we would have to go to my father's church Christmas Eve, and then we would have to go to our Catholic Church on Christmas Day. And it just seemed like an awful lot of church for years. [Laughter] But we did it. That was just the way things were.

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

JM: I would say I'm probably a spiritual person, but I'm not... I would not say there's a lot of things about the Catholic Church that I don't agree with, and women aren't treated terribly well in that arena. So, I have to say I have a rosary because I have one. And that was the only religion I ever learned or lived. So, I probably have to say I'm a lapsed Catholic. But it isn't that it destroyed my life or anything like that. It just I just grew away from it as I went out in the world.

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

JM: I think because I kind of used to volunteer quite a bit and I liked working in social and educational areas. I was an administrative assistant for the Minnesota Historical Society for about 20 years, and so I enjoyed working with the public. I enjoyed that it was an educational institution. So, we had classrooms there for school kids and everything. I did not work in the Education Department. I worked in conservation. I think it probably made me some gave me some idea of how to give back. In my older age, I probably have a tendency to give more money, not necessarily to a religious group, but to a social group or a social active group.

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.

JM: A lot of boys. There were in for some reason around my time period, there weren't a lot of boys. It was or excuse me, there weren't a lot of girls. There were just tons of boys. So that made it difficult for me to find somebody to play with. And so, I ended up learning how to play kickball. We would play kickball in the street. I ended up kind of learning how to play Army guys or whatever the boys were doing so I could be included. I was the older sister anyway, so they weren't terribly thrilled with me around anyway. But I would say I had one good friend who lived down the alley, and I've known her since the fourth grade. She and I have been friends for 56 years. So, but I remember us driving go carts and would be Nolan's parking lot was down the end of our street and at the time was probably called Rooney's and it was a grocery store. On the weekend or on Sunday when it was empty. Then Gail's brother had a go kart, and so we would ride the go kart around in that and try not to crash into anything. Otherwise, it was just we would play games, as in. Duck, duck, grey duck. You know, things like that. I kind of remember that we would occasionally go to movies if we were allowed to. We were allowed to go to a movie. And so, my girlfriend and I would go up and go to the St Clair Theater, which is the closest theater to us, sometimes to Highland Theater. So as kids, I'd have to say we just pretty much we were outside a lot. We rode our bikes everywhere. My friend and I would ride our bikes all the way to Midway routinely, a terribly busy streets when I think about it. And that's a no speed bike. There's no speed. So that was kind of our vehicle to travel around was using our bicycle.

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

JM: I'd have to say the relationships were good. They were all young families, with the exception of our neighbor lady and the one who lived across the alley. And they weren't too pleased with

children, period. So, we were told never to go in their yards, never to do anything. So other than that, it was basically, I think for my parents it was nice because they were all kind of around the same age and all had kids. So, they would kind of there'd be this network going on and my mother had this network of something that would happen and then it would call one person in the neighborhood, then another mother would call the other. So, it would just kind of go as a network of passing information. And it got to be pretty sophisticated, actually. And that way everybody knew what was going on. If someone couldn't find their child, then mother's call would go out and they would look out. They would go out of the house and look for that person and yell for us to go home. So, I think it was, you know, I hate to use term because it's used so much, it takes a village, but it really it really kind of does. It kept us out of trouble for the most part, because there were always threats that somebody was going to tell my parents. So, I think we all kind of were kept in line by the entire neighborhood. They were all pretty much Catholic on our street. And when I had friends, when I had some friends across the street, across Randolph, that was in the Mac-Groveland neighborhood over there, it was, I would say, predominantly Irish Catholic neighbors. And so sometimes the families were large, like 15 kids to a family. And so, we always thought that was kind of fun because there were only four of us. And to us, it was like a big party walking into a house with 15 kids, you know? I can say that much about Mac-Groveland is that I remember going over there a lot, being awed by all the people around, just so many kids. And so that left a lot of opportunity for me to find some other girls to play with. Otherwise, you know, I was pretty much stuck with the boys and doing boy things, you know, so. Yeah. So that's all I really have to say on that, I guess.

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

JM: I think back it was pretty safe because I remember as [unclear] kind of running around the block and it was I wouldn't say dark out, but it was dusk. We never had any problems. I don't recall any thefts or... I mean, we were warned not to talk to strangers. I think only once in my life. Was there a man who pulled over on Randolph and wanted me to get into his car and I knew enough to run away. But that was the only time I could think of. I think because the neighborhood was so watchful, you know, they just always kind of knew what was going on. And there was always that network, that phone network that kind of went into being when something occurred or someone got lost or someone was very strange in the neighborhood acting strangely, I should say. But I can't recall, maybe it was the time period or maybe it was naivete. I don't recall us... We had to be safe. My parents worried about us, and they didn't want us out too late. So, we were made aware that there were people out there who could be bad. But it wasn't that it was all encroaching on our lives.

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?

JM: I think probably one of them was respect. We were always to refer to our friend's parents as Mr. or Mrs., and even years later, when I was a teenager, later, it was difficult for me to call my friend's mother by her first name when technically by then I could have done so. But it was just that we were told not to be a problem at someone else's house. I do think because everybody watched out for everybody's kids, we were being collectively raised so. It was just kind of the thing you did. It was, you know, all these people, you knew them. They all went to church. They all were at their kids were at your school. And so, we were constantly kind of exposed to that. We did not have any at least in my neighborhood, we did not have any immigrant families. I know I had a couple of friends in Macalester – Groveland that were from Italy. And so, I was exposed to some different cultures there and different kinds of foods that we were eating and things like that. But for the most part, it was I think just because we were around each other all the time, you know, that we just kind of they happened to be good people, you know? I guess we got lucky. I mean, they could have been

some bad people. But I don't recall anything horrible ever happening. I guess maybe it didn't occur to us that they did, except for what we saw on television.

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.

JM: We play a lot of board games. One being monopoly and monopoly a lot. We would do so as a family. My father would come home from work, and he would be stressed out and then he would watch the news and become even more stressed out. And so, my mother would just walk over, turn off the television sets, would say, we're going to play a game now. And he never argued about it. I think you would have gotten mad, but he didn't. And so, we would all sit down, and we'd play Monopoly or Uno. There was another one involved, wheat and corn commodities. I don't even... it was a card game. I can't tell you what the name of it was, but we liked that game. When there were storms in the neighborhood, you know, we had to go down to the basement and stay there when it was tornado season. And even then, we would transport a board downstairs. There was a ping pong table downstairs, but I can't say we used it all that frequently. But we also were encouraged to read a lot, which is kind of a solitary thing. But, you know, my mother would give us the book and we would read it and she would ask us about it. Not exactly a task, but just kind of what it was about. And so there was always that kind of sharing going on. But I would say that, and we went camping in the lake two or three times a year. That was when my father got to really get to relax, to be out and outside. So, we all became very good campers. We became very respectful of nature. We knew how to survive in it as much as you could with your little kid. But we loved it, too. He expressed [and] he shared that love with us. A lot of the kids in the neighborhood, you know, would go to the lake and everything. So, we would talk about our experiences. It was usually a big deal going on vacation.

CS: Was there a local hangout spot in your neighborhood where you could be with your friends?

JM: Well, the parking lot over Rooney's grocery store was one. Sometimes there was a PDQ, it was called. It was a convenience store, and it was down on the corner of the next block, and we would all meet up there with our bikes. There are kids that live below the hill and kids that live above the hill. We were considered above the hill. And then down by West seventh, that was, I guess, considered down the hill that there was any huge distinguishment about it. But you would say, oh, I know that girl; she lives below the hill. Ah, you know, it's not like there's any big hill there. But sometimes the kids from below the hill would come up and meet the kids from up the hill, and we'd all meet up at PDQ. It wasn't like a fight or anything like that. We would just know them. At the end of our block, there was a place called the Nook, and it's still there. Ranham Bowling was right next to it. So, we bowled a lot because it we could someplace, we could walk to. My father didn't have to drive us, and you could probably bowl several games for a dollar. I mean, it was very cheap, and we spent a lot of time down there at the Ranham Bowling alley.

CS: What bands or music genres were your favorite?

JM: Growing up, oh, I'd have to say. Well, back in my day, it would have been The Beatles were very big. My father... and The Monkees. I remember The Monkees. I used to like that. My father, I would beg him to buy a record. We would go somewhere, and I would ask that you please, please let me buy this record. And the only way I would get a record is if it was something he liked. So, I had read prints of Chet Atkins and the other one, Al Hirt. Which exposed me to a lot of different music. I guess I was never terribly pleased that I didn't get my record. But my father, there was a show, or a radio show called "Polka Polka" on AM 1010, and that would play on Sundays. And sometimes my father just wouldn't go to church. So, we had to, and we always wanted to stay home with dad and "Polka Polka 1010" on the radio. But for myself, I preferred listening to WEGY,

whatever the pop bands were of that era, I liked them. The Beatles were a big one. And of course, The Monkees, I think.

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

JM: My friend Gayle, who I've known for about 56 years. The people who lived in the neighborhood, no. A lot of those kids moved on and moved out, some out of the state. So, I probably know who their parents were better than the kids now. I'd have to say the only person I probably stay really in contact with is Gayle, and obviously her brother. Pretty much those... We all moved off to high school. We really lost our neighborhood friendships, they kind of went away and we all did our own things.

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

JM: It was not a pleasant experience for me. I was gone so much, and it was run by nuns. And Monsignor Keefe was the monsignor of that church. So, he was the ruler of the school and the church. I remember in the second grade; I had been in the hospital a lot. He would come to the school, and he would sit at the teacher's desk at the front of the room, and he would read, we'll review your report card for each kid. He would review, and you had to stand up there and face the class. Well, he just more or less tore you down. So, I got a D in math. And so, he kind of went on and on and on about that. The teacher tried to defend me and said, you know, she's been sick a lot. And according to him, that was no excuse. So, I was always just a little bit behind in the grade school years. High school, no. But in grade school, it was always kind of a struggle because, again, I was home sick or I was, you know, things like that. I think my brothers probably had an easier time of it. For me, it wasn't that I hated it. I enjoyed seeing my friends and everything, but it was not my favorite experience.

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

JM: Very white. It was very white. The Holy Spirit, I think we had one child who had come here from Cuba. But I can remember in grade school, no people of color. I really wasn't exposed to people of color until I went to Highland High School. And even then, they hadn't really integrated yet. So, there was that issue. So, you were just exposed to a lot. I never had a problem with it. It was just that we had just never really had much experience with people of a different color. One moment here. All right. So, I think and that was around the time where, you know, there was a lot of civil unrest with the... There were the fights in the demonstrating in Selma. There were all those things that played out on television every single night. And so, we were exposed to it that way, which wasn't very complimentary. You know what I mean? It wasn't. We were only seeing one side of the story. And so. Other than that, I can't think of anything. There just weren't a lot of people of color.

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?

JM: Missiles. Missiles pointed at us from everybody. I would say that was one of our single most worries, mainly because, again, the only information we were getting was from the newspaper and what played out on TV. And obviously, it was a Vietnam War. I do remember when Kennedy was assassinated. I was in the first grade, and I remember people being very fearful, upset that he was assassinated, but more fearful that people at the time thought that this was part of a larger conspiracy, as far as not a conspiracy, but... You know those missiles. It had to be one of those people. It had to be a Russian who did it. It had to be... We were always kind of reminded of these

missiles all the time. And then when something like that happened, when the leader of the free world goes away, we were I think collectively everyone was frightened because we didn't know what was next. I think when I was in high school, predominantly it was the Vietnam War. I did not have any friends who had... But that was during the draft. But I didn't have any friends who were in the war. But I remember we did protest. We had a couple of times where we held protests at Highland Park Senior High and protested the war. So, I think during that time it was just a lot of it was very tumultuous, especially since you had this, this foreign war going on, and then you had conflict in your old country. I think just looking at it from our eyes, just sitting in our little house, you know, it was a scary thing. I remember it being scary.

CS: What sticks out to you as some of the most serious health threats to people in your communities, such as specific disease or illness?

JM: Polio was pretty much taken care of by the time I was born. Smallpox, I mean, we all got smallpox vaccines. We all got polio vaccines when they came out. I don't recall anything major other than at one point there was the swine flu. I don't remember how old I was when that happened. That may not be within your purview, but that was a big deal at the time, and we all had to line up and get this perfectly [Laughter] horrible shot. It was a live vaccine and so people got just destroyed from it. But that was the only thing I can think of, is that probably the biggest one was the swine flu. But we were all inoculated for whatever diseases were out there.

CS: Just to see if we missed anything. Are there any other local or global issues that come to mind that stood out in your memory when you were a child?

JM: No, I think there was just probably this you know, I think Walter Cronkite was a god. I mean, he would come on and everyone listened to Walter Cronkite. He would sit there with his sleeves rolled up and cigarettes everywhere and taking his glasses off and on and giving you the news and some of it in the same monotone voice. And some of it was pretty horrible. And particularly, I think, for what made everyone realized how it was probably the first... I think Vietnam was one of the more documented wars in that there were actual journalists that were embedded in there. And so, you were getting live, you were seeing video of people getting hurt, of bombs going off, of people running and screaming. I think prior to that, we'd been kind of sheltered from that kind of experience. And so, in a way, it was good that that was there because we were aware of what war is. This is what war really is. And people get hurt and people get displaced. And your sons at that time, it was only sons would go off to war. And so, I think that's probably why there was more protesting done in that time period was because it was so heavily covered that people finally realized that sounds lame, but war is bad and that there's an actual price to be paid for this. And is it worth the price? And so that's the only comment I have on that. It's just that had to do with coverage that what we knew and didn't know. It's one thing to read the paper, but it's another to actually see it on television. Television was relatively new at that point. We all had our black and white. I think people were like in the old days were glued to the radio. People were glued to the TV and witnessing things that were horrific. And so outside of our little world that perhaps it was a good thing that these things were shown to us, that it isn't just all perfect where we are. There is suffering going on all over.

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.

JM: Thank you.