

John Ward, by Julie M. Luker

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Narrator

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Transcriber

July 26, 2023
Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

JW: John Ward

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 26, 2023. I'm here with John Ward. My name is Cole Steinberg, and I'm an undergraduate student at Concordia University, Saint Paul. I'll be talking to John 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 to 17 years of age. To begin, state and spell your full name.

JW: John Ward. J-O-H-N W-A-R-D.

CS: Please identify your race and gender.

JW: Male and Caucasian.

CS: Please state your date of birth.

JW: November 14, 1981.

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.

JW: West 7th 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.

JW: Absolutely. So, where I grew up, I happen to live fairly-I made one move from-both within the West seventh neighborhood. So, I lived close to a number of my family members, and so we spent a lot of time together. On my dad's side of the family pretty much every Saturday from what I can remember to 17, there was breakfast on Saturday mornings at my grandma's house. It was, you know, nothing formal. Whoever could make it could make it. It was, you know, and there'd be some breakfast. Someone would, you know, volunteer to make some eggs or some bacon or sausages or

any of those type of things. And it was pretty cool. You know, the kids would play and do things and the adults would talk about whatever, solve all the problems of the world and that, you know, a couple of hours or whatever. So, lots of cousins, aunts and uncles, all that type of stuff were always around. And then my mom's side of the family, she didn't live too far from us either, just a few blocks away as well. Well, we didn't have that like regular meet up sort of time like that. There's a lot of time over there as well. My mom was a kind of a primary caregiver for my grandma, after my grandpa passed and then also did a lot of stuff because he was pretty sick during even while he was alive. And so, we were over there a lot, helping out with things, cooking, cleaning and all those types of things. It was great to be able to connect with all of these family members, like on a fairly regular basis. And it was actually, you know, not really a job was like my first way to earn money was by mowing the grass, doing things, little things around the house and making a couple of bucks. That sort of thing. So, I think about that. I was really lucky to be able to surround myself with that kind of with both sides of my family.

CS: Did you have any family pets?

JW: We did, yeah. We had two dogs and one named Kelly, who we got just right after I was born, and she lived for about ten years. And then we had another dog named Shamrock who lived for another... We got her a couple of years after that, and she was end up being 16 when she passed on. So yeah, we had two dogs. No, cats; I'm allergic, so.

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

JW: Oh, wow. I had certain things that I had to do, mostly around taking care of pets, feeding, water walks, cleaning up in the in the yard after them, stuff like that. But then I had other things I had to do. Take out the garbage, take out the recycling, those type of things. And then I got assigned other things as well. But I would say the bulk of chores or whatever you want to call them was actually pretty evenly divided. My mom probably did a little more of the cooking just because she got home earlier than my dad did. She was a teacher and so she just got home earlier. And so, she probably did a little more of the cooking, but then he probably did a little more of the cleaning because he was kind of a neat freak. Always, always wanting, always vacuuming. He was vacuuming a lot and all that type of stuff. So, we kept a pretty clean household, but it was pretty well divided. I probably did the least. But, you know, that's kind of how it went so.

CS: I don't remember if you already mentioned it, but were you the only child?

JW: I did. I am not. I have an older sister. She's about over a decade older than me, though. And so there was kind of a separation while she was like, as soon as I like was... She moved out when she was 19 or 20. I don't remember exactly when. And so, there was this kind of separation. We did also. She had to do things as well. I just honestly don't really remember because I was kind of too young. And as soon as I started to probably able to remember things, she had already moved out.

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

JW: Both my parents had periodic... They had periods of unemployment. And so that time when that happened, you know, times were always a little tougher. Not going out to eat or, you know, quote unquote, frivolous things or that type of stuff. But as I got older, that kind of went away. Both of them were working full-time and both ended up doing fairly well in their jobs and making good money. So progressively as I got older, they had higher incomes. I can really pinpoint like there was just a kind of a clear divide. I can remember having money and not having money because of periods that I said those periods of unemployment and then lower wages as well was I guess part of

that. But at no point did we ever, you know, was there never... We always had food and, you know, a house or a place to stay and never had the water, the heat or any of that type of stuff shut off. We were very lucky with that. But yeah, yeah, like I said, there there's kind of a clear divide. Once my parents ended up being both full time and making higher incomes, there was a clear line, I can distinctly remember that.

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

JW: [Laughter] I think about this a lot. I have a partner, my wife, she and I. I am the cheapest person in the world. You know, we go to the store and I'm just like, oh, why do we have to spend so much money? And can we just not get the organic thing or, you know, whatever. I'm a cheap person in general. I'm really cautious about how I spend money. I'm always very cognizant of that sort of a thing. So, like for an example, like right now we are doing a remodel of our basement and there's these things that keep coming in and in. It gets a little more expensive every time. And I'm just like, argh. So, it's just really kind of kind of gets to me. But yeah, it's definitely like of the two of us, I'm definitely the more frugal. It's not like that she's out, like spending thousands of dollars on a lot of things, but it's like I am more conscious of not having money. Even like-I know we're supposed to focus on like childhood-that's like even as, like growing into adult, you know, I also had bouts of unemployment. So just like really, I guess that I'm cheap, I'm frugal and I just really watch my money. And I think that definitely comes from those periods where I noticed that we didn't have as much when I was a kid.

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

JW: Sure. So I went to private school, for all of my schooling from kindergarten to 12th grade. So, the reason we were able to afford that and like I said, my grandparents paid for that. That was their decision. They wanted to pay for that. So that was on my mom's side. It was a Catholic private school, private schools. But my family, my immediate family, my mom and dad and sister, we are not really, we weren't then and we're not religious at all. Although I will say it was kind of weird, though, for some reason, and I think it was because some of my friends did it, we were altar boys at the at the at one of the Catholic schools in the West seventh neighborhood. I don't know really why. [Laughter] We were definitely not religious at all, but I thought it was a good duty or something to do. I guess. But through all that schooling, obviously religion was a part of it. It was essentially a daily class throughout my entire schooling. But it wasn't something that really stuck. I learned a lot, but it wasn't something that I would consider important to me now or then. On my father's side, they were mixed Methodists and Catholic. My grandma went to her church all the time. Never really went with her to that either. It just wasn't something that was important. I went to some of the bigger holidays, Christmas, Easter, those types of things. But it was not a regular churchgoer in any sense.

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

JW: I take what I learn through schooling and learning about the Bible, learning about all that. I use it today. I would say that I don't go to church anymore. I haven't been to church in I don't know how long. Um, so I would consider it not very relevant today.

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

JW: So, I did move once. Well, technically, twice. But I'm not going to talk about the one because it was... But then I did move once within the West seventh neighborhood, so I'll just kind of bring it all together. So, it was definitely working-class neighborhood. Well, at the time when I was younger, it wasn't very diverse, mostly white folks and that type of thing. But, um, because I went to private school, it was a little different. Like, it was very that community was like it just because we went there, and we were kind of separated from public school. It was just a little more insular for me. But the neighborhood in general was, like I said, working class. And one of the things that I always remember is-in both places-people just kind of looked out for each other. It wasn't in a creepy way. It was kind of like and hey, making sure that kids weren't playing in the street and getting hit by cars or if they do or, you know, making sure that they're safe and that sort of a thing. Being able to go to a friend's house without having to really check in. I know that it's a lot different now. Like, you know, I have like setting up play dates or making sure someone can come over. We'll just go over and see if our friends can do something that day. It wasn't, as you know, definitely wasn't as structured. It was more open. And I don't think there was quite the fear that there is now. I distinctly remember after, right after Jacob, I don't know if you remember, Jacob Wetterling was kidnaped. After that, there was a bit of a shift because people are like, oh no, like anything can happen. People were definitely more watchful, more worried about what was going on. I think I was like 11 and he was slightly older than I was. I don't remember exactly, but after that it was a little different. But the neighborhood, I guess it was just always like people watching out for each other. We did like block parties sometimes, and like I said, you could just kind of go where you want. And we took our bikes everywhere. No helmets, no safety gear, none of that type of stuff. I really love my neighborhood. And when we actually when we were looking for a house, that's when we were looking there, it didn't end up working out. You know, we live in the Frogtown neighborhood now, but I think I was very lucky where I grew up. I was really happy. I'm really proud of it. It was a great place to grow up. I guess I was close to a lot of family, and it was just a good place to grow up. I can't really describe it any other way.

CS: You had to describe the best part about growing up in your neighborhood. What comes to mind?

JW: Honestly, like how close everybody was. Literally like distance. You know, also, like, interpersonally. Just literally how things how close things were. Like, I had friends that were a couple of blocks away. But then also you could get to a park really easily. You could go to the little convenience store to get your candy and soda or whatever. You could go to... There used to be, you know, could easily hop on a bus and get to downtown to go to a movie. Stuff like that. It was just like everything was close. You could go to Burger King, you could go to McDonald's, you go to any of those types of places. And it was easy. I think that's a little bit of that is lost. You know, things aren't as literally aren't as close. We have parks and of course, parks. The parks were awesome. We had Palace Playground. West seventh or St. Clair playground that were very close to us. And I was able to go there, play sports there, went to the library there. Any of that type of stuff. So, what I really remember is just like how easy it was to get to be able to do things. There was never a lack of things to do or people or kids to hang out with that sort of thing.

CS: Next, I'd 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?

JW: When I was looking over this, this was the hardest question, because I can definitely talk about it within family. I don't know how much I'm going to be able to talk about within my neighborhood, but definitely within my family. It was definitely something around hard work. Hard work pays off, essentially. You depend on family for things. You can depend on us, that was really important. My dad and mom always really instilled that. And, you know, like I said that having everybody close

also helped with that, too. And you could lean on those people when you need them. I would say kind of it's like, I guess you could say it's a story from the Bible, but I was like, treat people how you want to be treated. You know, don't be a bully. My dad hated bullies, hated, hated, hated bullies. And so, it's like he talked about that a lot. He just said, don't be that person. Don't be someone like that. You're going to hate yourself with you when you're older if you're like that. Don't bully [Laughter] I guess was a value. Within the neighborhood, I don't know. It's a little harder just because... I would say that it was like I talked about before, but it was that kind of that working class ethos. But it was also like, I don't know how else to put this: *Don't feel too big for your britches*. I know it sounds silly, but, like, you know. No, you're not better than anybody else. Be your best self, but like, there's always someone that can take you down a notch. Not in a mean way, but it's like, just make sure you know. It's like one of those things. Just be a good person. I don't know how else to put it. Just be a good person.

CS: Maybe like, humble.

JW: Sure. Humility is probably a big one. Yep.

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 engage in leisure time when you're growing up.

JW: Yeah. So, a lot of my... At least for me, it was surrounded around like sports. I played baseball, basketball and tennis. So, a lot of a lot of stuff revolved around that. I was talking about before, like everything was close. We didn't travel like a lot of teams do now. It wasn't like traveling around the state or whatever. The only time we went anywhere was like maybe across the city or something like that. So, a lot of it was, you know, sports related, especially during the summer. Leisure other times it was, we took our bikes up to Highland Park swimming pool. That was huge. We probably went there two to three times per week. Um, let's see. You know, playing at those park, playgrounds, Palace, and St Clair. For my family, it was always, we played a lot of games. We were big on horseshoes. It was really unfair because I was sort of small. But it was like board games and stuff too. Played like all those board games. Within the community it was always kind of like because I was a kid, it was mostly surrounded, like what you could do with other kids. So, was playing football on the street, or riding your bike somewhere. Oh gosh, leisure things that we do. I mean, swimming was like I said, like we went to the swimming pool all the time. Those are the big things, I think. I mean, we there's always like one off things, you know, you go to... Once actually I'll say this, one thing that we did a lot was we were very close to the West seventh Street. And so, it was easy to hop on a bus to either downtown or once it opened the Mall of America. So, we would go there a lot. And these kids from the neighborhood, we would just take our take there and then mess around at the Mall of America, go see movies, whatever, that type of stuff. So having access to public transit was really helpful when you were a kid.

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

JW: So, when I was younger, because we talked about it a little bit before, we didn't have a ton of money, but we did what we did a lot was go camping. And so, we camped at a lot of different state parks and state recreation areas and all that type of stuff. All across the state. I went to the Boundary waters a number of times. Went to, let's see, my aunt lived in Wisconsin. We went there. So other than that. Not until I was a little older did, I actually leave the state besides Wisconsin. And well I guess technically Canada. My sister moved to Colorado. She did that when I was a little older. And so, we traveled there several times. Road trips or flying. My dad and mom don't really fly. And so, if I did fly, it was it was by myself. But road trips to there through like, you know, Wyoming, South Dakota, Nebraska, you know, depending on the way we went or whatever, you know. But most of

our vacations were camping in state parks all across the state or in the boundary waters. I spent a lot of time in Duluth for some reason. I'm not sure why.

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

JW: Oh, wow. I mean, this is probably not abnormal, but my favorite toy was Legos. That's a lot of kid's favorite toy was Legos. A lot of Legos. You know, once they got a little bit older, it was like seven or eight, maybe eight or nine, it was lots of action figures. G.I. Joes, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, any of those type of things. But then again, they're not really toys, but we played a lot of sports. So, football and baseball and basketball, so those type of things. What other toys... Oh, video games. We play a lot of video games. Nintendo, um, eventually, you know like Sega and all those. My parents wouldn't let me own a gaming system when I was younger and so I always had to play that at a friend's house. So that was always like special and they'd always like kick my ass because they were so much better at all the games because I never got to play them. But I think, yeah, like, video games, sports, and then Legos. We also played a lot of card games. You know, cribbage was our main game other and then just like board games and that type of thing so.

CS: Well, television shows did you watch growing up?

JW: Oh, well, for the cartoons I watched... They had in them on Saturday mornings. They had Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and a couple others that I'm blanking on. But ones that were after school, it was oh, was it Goof Troop? And what was it? Oh, gosh. Oh, Duck Tales. Tailspin, all those. But then once I got a little bit older, the shows that I started, I watched a lot of Friends, which I thought was really now in retrospect was super weird because now I don't like that show at all. And then I watched Dawson's Creek and some of the other, like more adult cartoons like The Simpsons and Family Guy and South Park and those type of shows. I just loved watching movies that were on like Comedy Central or HBO, and any of those. My dad worked for the cable company, and so we had all the channels all the time. And so, it's like I ended up watching just more like way more movies and TV shows. But yeah, those are probably the main ones I used to watch.

CS: What bands or music genres were your favorite?

JW: Oh, gosh. So, I was kind of an alternative rock fan. So, then it was like Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Sublime, those type of bands. And then. Oh, boy. I was, you know, classic rock, I was a big fan of Bruce Springsteen. Rolling Stones. It was not a classic rock band, but Green Day. and then also, like, David Bowie. My dad really loved Deep Purple. So, we listened to a lot of Deep Purple. I'm not a big fan of them. And Jimi Hendrix was a big deal, too. So, a lot of classic rock, a lot of alternative rock. I was never really, at least then, I wasn't much of a pop music fan and not much of a hip hop fan at the time. So those were the kind of the main ones, I think.

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

JW: Oh, boy. So, yeah, like I said before, I went to 13 years of private Catholic school and that was paid for... My grandparents wanted to pay that. Pay for that for me. It was in retrospect... My wife just asked me this little bit ago, like, do you regret not going to public school? And I do, because I think I miss out on a lot because there's so... Religion was like always controlling the schooling in some way because, you know, it was just always a part of it. That being said, I had a very good education. Besides the learning about religions. I had great teachers in English and reading and math and history and social and other social studies, science, all sorts of stuff. I had many, many great teachers throughout those years. In high school, it was even better. We had, so I went to

Cretin-Derham Hall and so in high school they actually did a really great job of being pretty inclusive of a lot of opinions and a lot of a lot of interesting classes you wouldn't expect from a Catholic school. Like I said, I think I had a very good education. I do think I missed out on some of the social aspects and some of the like learning that I could have done in a public school setting. Nothing I can do about it. But I would say that school, my schooling really prepared me overall for adult life and I don't regret... Some regrets, but not many.

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

JW: Oh, boy. There's a lot. This is incredibly nerdy, but I'm just going to go with it anyway. When I was in school within the same year, I won for my school. I won the spelling bee, geography bee, and religion bee. I won all three in the same year. And so, I think about that a lot because I don't know if people are just like they didn't want to win and they're just like, let him let me win or whatever. I'm probably the only one of the only people in the world that can probably say that because it's so ridiculous. So that's a random memory that I think of. But is that kind of what you're looking for or something else?

CS: Yeah. Yeah. Anything.

JW: Great. Well, I guess it's that one.

CS: [Laughter] Which teacher stands out to most in your memory and why?

JW: Oof, that's a very hard question. I got to think about this a little bit because I had a lot of great teachers over the years. I would say if I were. Yeah. So, the person that probably stands out the most is my first-grade teacher. Her name was Ms. Mayer. I had moved schools from one school to another, from kindergarten to first. And so, I went into that school not knowing anybody. And she was incredibly kind, very patient, very nice, very welcoming, and made sure that I was taken care of and that sort of thing. And she just kind of like when I think about like she had a couple of things that she did that always really stuck out for me. One, she played the accordion. I didn't know anybody that played the accordion. It was really weird. She would just play accordion songs for us. And then she also for a Christmas pageant or Christmas show or whatever, had us learned Silent Night in German. Can't do it anymore. That was almost 35 years or about 35 years ago now. I don't remember it now. And then a third thing is she always like, you know, kids are pretty young and there's like 25 to 30. I don't remember how many kids were in school in the class, 25ish somewhere in there. And so, like, we're always asking for things. And the thing she would always say to us, she said, you know what, guys. I'm not an octopus. I only have two arms. Who's first? Or get in line or whatever. And so, she kind of instilled this kind of respect. Like, she showed you respect. If as long as you showed her respect. And I think about that a lot because it really stuck with me that she did that. She kind of like made me feel welcome when I was like, really nervous. And so, she showed me respect and I showed her respect.

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, 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?

JW: Wow. Well. Local issues. Boy, I have got to really think about that one. I would say for local issues it was always like around essentially like public safety. You know, that means a lot of different things to people. But I would say that crime was always somewhat of an issue. There were, you know, robberies or, you know, we had people have been cooking meth in neighborhoods and that type of thing. So that's not good. [Laughter] Dealing drugs or any of those type of things within

neighborhoods. So, public safety was probably number one. Besides those type of things, there was always like worried about know, like I said, like kind of it was like that thing after Jacob Wetterling and people were a little more tense then, were scared about kids being by themselves or taken. If they were left alone being taken. I don't think it ever happened once in my neighborhood. Public safety around least where I live there was a lot of like semi dangerous streets in terms of traffic. So, it was like West Seventh and St Clair and Victoria and all these streets, and Randolph. These were pretty busy streets and there was always like there's a number of car accidents or people being hit by cars. So, I guess that was kind of a public safety. So, I think that was like the most important local issue, but kind of multifaceted in terms of what public safety means. I think for global issues, the one that was always... There were a couple of things. Well. I was like eight or nine when the Berlin Wall came down. I remember talking with my dad and some other people his age, like how important that was for them. I didn't really understand it, but how important that was for them. And like what a big deal it was to see that come down. Communism was always just like a threat, you know, all the time. And seeing that, you know, perceived or not, you know, it was a thing. And so that coming down was a huge thing. And then what there was, you know, the economic downturn in the early nineties that affected us as a family. And then the neighborhood, you know, there's a lot of people out of work and that sort of thing. And then there was, you know, with the I remember, you know, war in Iraq in the early 1990s, that was a big deal. People were worried about that, worried about, you know, even then worried about terrorism and all that type of stuff. And as soon and this is maybe a little odd, but as soon as the Mall of America was built, everybody was convinced that it was going to be attacked all the time. And it never was. But. So those are kind of the really big global issues that... I mean, the one that really affected us was the economic downturn, recession, whatever you want to call it, in the early nineties, because people in my family and then people that surround me and, in the neighborhood, you could see that because people are out of work, that sort of thing. It was obvious, whereas the other things were just, like, so big. Like I didn't. It was hard for me to really understand those types of things.

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

JW: Oh, the big global issues. No, I didn't even I couldn't even register it. I didn't really understand it. So fine. But I don't know. I've mentioned this several times now. But like, after Jacob Wetterling was kidnaped, that became... I got set down by my parents, by my sister, because she was so much older, too. You have to be safe. You have to watch out for who's around you. Surround yourself with your friends, go to a neighbor's house if you don't feel safe. Go find your friends' parents if you don't feel safe, you know, just knocking on whatever. Always do whatever you can to get yourself out of an unsafe circumstance or whatever. So, I'd say that one was definitely the biggest. It was like literally almost an overnight thing, how people started to think about what kids did and where they went. And it was night and day over the course of a few months. And so that one was like something that definitely affected me because it was something that I was talked to and talked to about and yeah.

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

JW: Yeah. This was, you know, something for both my school and my parents and the surrounding community. It was just to be accepting of the people that move in or come here that you are surrounded by. You can always find common ground with people. It's important to everybody. When it comes down to it, it's kind of the same things they want. A good place to live, food on the table, be treated with respect, that sort of thing. Racism is not okay. Sexism is not okay. Homophobia is not okay. Any of that type of stuff was not okay in my household or any of that type of stuff. And although I failed at that, sometimes I won't lie. It wasn't perfect, but I learned from those mistakes. But it was always drilled into me was to just treat people with respect, make sure

that folks that are moving here feel welcome. I grew up, our neighborhood kind of started to change. We had more Latin X immigrants, Hmong immigrants, that sort of thing. And so, as more folks that literally looked different than me started moving into our neighborhood. At first, I was a little, I didn't really understand, but they were nice people. They were great people. And, you know, we ended up, you know, the kids, we ended up playing with them and all that type of stuff. So, I think that it just became one of those things where all the isms were not, and phobias weren't cool. Don't do any of those and just treat people with respect. And if they want to keep to themselves, that's okay, too.

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.