

Marilyn Sobiech, by Julie M. Luker

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Minnesota

CS: Cole Steinberg

KR: Marilyn Sobiech

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 May 25th, 2022, and I'm here with Marilyn Sobiech. My name is Cole Steinberg. I'm an undergraduate at Concordia Saint Paul, and I'll just be talking to you 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 stay in and spell your full name, including a maiden name, if applicable.

MS: It's Marilyn, M-A-R-I-L-Y-N. Middle name Kay, K-A-Y-E. Maiden name Richards, R-I-C-H-A-R-D-S. Married name Sobiech, S-O-B-I-E-C-H.

CS: Thank you. Next, please identify your race and gender.

MS: Well, I am adopted. So, growing up I thought I was white. But at about age 50, for medical reasons, I opened my records and found out I'm a quarter Native American. So, I am Caucasian and Native American. But I didn't know that. I knew I was adopted growing up, but I didn't know the Native American piece. I'm now registered as a band member in my tribe, as are my children and my grandchildren.

CS: Next, please state your date of birth.

MS: April 13th, 1946.

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

MS: I grew up on the corner of Stanford and Kenneth in the Macalester-Groveland area, and my parents bought that home in about 19... I was about three when we moved there, so about 1949, I think, was about when they bought the house. And I lived there until I got married. I always lived in that house. I mean, that's a house that I remember growing up from my earliest memories. I don't remember the previous house that my folks owned.

CS: I'd like to learn more about the neighborhood in which you grew up. Tell me tell me about the neighborhood you grew up in.

MS: Basically, I lived there from age three to age 21. Not quite. We got married in January and I turned 21 in April. But almost until 21. A very stable neighborhood, very Catholic neighborhood, because we were one block to Nativity Church and one of the larger Catholic grade schools being born in 1946. I'm the start of the baby boom. So, there were 118 kids in my eighth-grade graduation class. When the teachers today whine about 50- or 30 kids in a class, we usually had 55 kids and 50 kids in the class. We always had a split grade, so probably two classes of 45 to 50 kids. And then the leftovers were in a split class of two grades. And so, everybody, sometime during first grade through eighth grade, got a year in a split class. And I was in a split class for fourth and fifth grade. So. And very stable neighborhood, by and large, two parent families. If somebody, if it was a single parent family, it was usually because the parent had passed away, not because of divorce.

CS: As far as transportation options around the neighborhood, was there a lot of public transportation used, or bikes, walking...?

MS: No fat kids! We walked everywhere and we didn't walk. We rode her bike. Her parents only had one car. We had two cars later when I was in high school. But growing up we had one car; we were two corner blocks. We lived on the corner of Stanford and Kenneth. The next block was Berkeley and then St Clair. So there actually were street cars when I was about four and five. So, I have some real vague memories of Streetcar. But then at about age seven, they switched to busses, but so that was one bus line on St Clair and that one didn't run quite as often as the Randolph bus did. But then when you got off on Randolph and [Unclear], you had a six block walk to get over back to Stanford. So, most of the time we took the St Clair bus that was the closest. That was two blocks away and that was closest.

CS: What was the average price, do you remember, on one of those city buses?

MS: Uh, \$0.10, I think. And since we used to keep a dime, two dimes, tape them in your shoes or something, a dime to call home and a dime for the bus. Oh, if you were a student, I think probably when we got older, junior high, seventh and eighth grade high school, we got a bus pass. And if you rode the bus between certain hours, you paid less. You paid a student rate to ride the bus. But I went to Durham Hall High School, which was [Unclear], so that was six-blocks for my freshman and sophomore year. Then they built the new Durham Hall, which was just west of Cretin High School. But still, that was just a couple of blocks past Snelling, and we'd start walking down Randolph Avenue. If it was really cold, if the bus came, we'd take the bus. Otherwise, I think by then the bus fare would have gone up to \$0.25. But it was nice weather. We walked on and saved the quarter. So that's why I said that there are not very many fat kids in the neighborhood, because what our we rode our bikes everywhere. It was a mile to Highland Park. A little more than a mile to the library. The Highland swimming pool, that was a little further, and it had a killer hill going up from the pool, up Montreal, to get back up to Snelling. So, if you'd cooled off in the pool, you would be hot by the time you got to the top of the hill. But even though parents were home, there was none of this driving you to sports practice. Well, there was no sports for women at that time unless moms got together and organized it. But no Title IV.

CS: How close was your family, or you with your neighbors, or the kids?

MS: Oh, yeah. On two sides of Stanford between [Unclear] and Prior, I thought I heard a number one times there were 50 some kids. So, lots of good Catholic families. Being an only child, I was definitely odd man out because everybody I knew had five or six brothers or sisters.

CS: Next, I would like to learn about the values shared by your family. If you can share a memory growing up when you behaved in a way that reflected one of your values.

MS: Just going to a parochial school, you know, that automatically kind of puts you in the same camp sharing the same values. Otherwise, you would have chosen the public school. And especially

that was pre-Vatican II, so if you were Catholic, I think tuition was up. I don't think they paid tuition. We had to buy books because at that time the public school didn't give books to the private schools. Nowadays they do. But that didn't change until maybe high school or even after. I think my parents paid, maybe, \$5 for books for the year, workbooks or whatever we had. But it was generally a Republican neighborhood. My mother always worked the election as an election judge. You had to declare your party if you signed up to be an election judge and they had to have an equal number of declared Democrats and Republicans because it was primarily a Republican neighborhood. She always got to be an election judge in her home precinct because my parents were Democrats. But many of my peers' parents owned businesses or had white collar jobs. Their fathers had white collar jobs. And the precinct was definitely considered a heavy Republican precinct. Definitely more middle-income families and upper income because the precinct went down to River Road, and you had more doctors and attorneys that lived down there.

CS: How closely do you feel your current values reflect those of the residents living in that same neighborhood today?

MS: You know, I've been gone from there so long. We lived in an apartment in Highland for the first couple of years we were married. Dick was in the Navy and stationed at what at that time was then [NAS Twin Cities?]. Today it's the Air National Guard Base. I wasn't too involved with politics at that time. Our first house then was in South Minneapolis. We lived there for quite a while. Then we did move back to Saint Paul, actually kitty corner across the street from the house I grew up in, and I would say it was still that would have been in the 19-- late seventies eighties. We were living there when our kids graduated from high school. It was still pretty Republican. The values of the homes went up. So mainly people that were buying those homes were probably second- or third-time homeowners. Very few were buying in that neighborhood as a starter house, unless it was a real tiny bungalow. And they got it at a really reduced price, maybe because they bought it from an elderly person that hadn't maintained it, that sort of thing. So, then the price would have been lower. But generally, the homes were more expensive. So usually, buyers were second- and third-time buyers and young, maybe young business professionals. So good neighborhood to raise kids in because it was one block to two little blocks to Groveland to a good public school, and then a few blocks to the parochial school, and then about a mile and a half to Cretin-Durham Hall. If you wanted a Catholic high school and not very far to Highland Senior High. It just was a good, solid family neighborhood. You could go outside. There were always kids to play with, boys and girls to play together. Um, you see, you see jokes on the internet like you played until the streetlights came on and then you knew the right time to go. You had 15 parents, everybody knew everybody. So, if you were doing something you shouldn't do, you know, [you heard about it from] somebody else's mom. And dad was looking out the window and knew who you were and definitely would report back that you were into mischief and doing something you weren't supposed to be doing. It kept the neighborhood pretty safe.

CS: Describe some of the ways in which you, your family, or your neighbors engage in leisure time growing up. Maybe activities that were popular for your family or neighbors.

MS: My dad liked to travel, so I did a lot of driving trips. Being an only child, that was easier. You didn't have a brother or sister sitting next to you saying, "Mom, he's touching me, looking at me!", that sort of childhood banter. I had the whole backseat to myself, so I had lots of room to bring... Obviously no video, nothing internet or anything like that. But I had dolls that I played with or games, so my mother used to pack a box that had stuff to keep me entertained. But we usually did a road trip every summer and then I usually went to the lake for a week. That was usually usual like activities, but a lot of fishing. My dad was an avid fisherman, so. So that was big.

CS: Did you go fishing with your father?

MS: Yeah, I was a real tomboy growing up, so I went fishing with him, went hunting with him, went ice fishing with him. He used to take me tobogganing by the Highland Park Water Tower, which, when I think back, is amazing because he was 40 years older than I was. So, I must have been nine or ten, which meant he was 50. And I remember him standing on the back of the toboggan, riding the fog, and down the big hill by the water tower. I did a lot with my dad.

CS: How did you meet new friends?

MS: You know, like 118 kids, divide that in half. That's about 60 girls that we had on our block. Boys and girls played together in the summer. We kind of had an everlasting baseball game in the alley with made up bases. One of the dads would usually come out to be the everlasting pitcher umpire, that sort of thing. So that was fun. And there were boys and girls mixed bike riding. Winter at Groveland had an old wooden warming house shack, really with a wood burning stove. And as we got older, probably from fifth grade on, that was the place to see and be seen. On Friday night you went. Everybody went to the park, and the park closed at 9:00pm. You were expected to be home by 9:30pm unless you went to somebody's house for hot chocolate. But I mean, there were just commonsense rules about where you went and how late you stayed out. And we were always in groups. I don't ever hardly ever remember walking anyplace by myself or not for any distance, half a block maybe, or something like that.

CS: You mentioned you were a bit of a tomboy, doing all the outdoors activity with your father. Growing up, when you played with kids in the neighborhood, did you find yourself more drawn to what the boys were doing?

MS: Well, the boys were more fun because they had organized sports that the girls didn't. So, if you wanted to play softball or something, it was more the boys that had the equipment, and the girls didn't. Although my mom and another lady did take it upon themselves to form a softball league for us. But they didn't get much support from I mean, because the boys there were because it was Catholic school, there was a Catholic League for baseball and basketball and football. So, the boys out, they got uniforms and helmets and the whole nine yards. And then they had a little league and played against other Catholic grade schools in the area, St. Mark's, St. Luke's, St. [Waite's?]. Well, what was Saint Leo's at that time? Saint Gregory. But there was nothing like that for the girls. Once in a while we used to get women from St. Kate's who were studying to be Phy-Ed teachers, and they needed experience organizing activities. They would occasionally get a St. Kate student to come over and maybe run a little basketball program or something like that. But very limited sports activities for girls. If we did it, it was something we'd organized ourselves. We never had the good times on the field at Groveland because there were two or three boys' teams that needed the field, the practice. So, you know, it's hard to play baseball on an asphalt field.

CS: I am kind of curious when you saw technology creeping into leisure time. When did those activities become more of a leisure activity?

MS: We had the first TV on our end of the block. There was another family that had TV across the street and up on the other end of the block. But we had the first TV on our end of the block, and so there was a family that lived across the street. And by today's standards, they were probably considered free range kids. They left the house early in the morning, and I don't think their mother ever looked out to see where they were. And that child's name was Judy. And she would be at our house around dinnertime. And my mother would say, "Well, Judy, you have to go home now. We're ready to eat dinner." "Oh, that's okay. It's not my dinner time. I can stay and watch TV because that's too much to watch TV." And my mother would say, "No, you have to go home. It's our dinner time and you need to go home." So that was probably in terms of technology. Big thing, about fifth grade, I think I got a transistor radio for Christmas. So that was that was big tech. I think pretty much everyone had a phone and everybody had they have party lines and private lines. But I don't

know if it was red lining at that time or what, but party lines were cheaper. But we all had private lines. That's all I can think of. Things like Walkman's didn't come in until our kids were little. Typewriters were manual. I don't think there were electric typewriters or anything. So, you know, technology didn't for my age group didn't come in until later.

CS: Do you remember any of the programs that were on the transistor radio?

MS: Mostly music on the on the transistor radio. I think American Bandstand was kind of a big teen show at that time. The Ed Sullivan Show. Families had one TV, generally in the living room. And so, if you watched a program, everybody had to agree on what program it was going to be. I Love Lucy was pretty popular. Howdy Doody was a big program. There was always some local programming starting about 3:00pm. Stuff that was directed more for kids' lunch time, because kids came home for lunch. There was Axel's Treehouse. If you're a real St. Paul person, you recognized that name. He was on during lunchtime. The school didn't have a big lunchroom. We didn't. There certainly was no hot lunch. If you were at lunch, it was lunch that was packed at home that you brought to school because they didn't have that much room in the cafeteria. The rule was that you had to live six blocks away in order to be allowed to stay for lunch, unless you had a special note. Some of the kids that maybe had asthma or health issues and the winter was too cold for them to walk home, would get to stay for lunch once in a while. My mom worked off and on quite a bit during my growing up years. Once in a while I'd get a note saying I needed to stay at school for lunch. And that was a treat. I mean, because otherwise you came home every day.

CS: I did have a question going back to some of the TV programs. Was The Andy Griffith Show on during that time or is that a little later?

MS: That might have been a little later. It might have been some of his first programs. I mean, the big one I remember is Ed Sullivan Bonanza. But even Bonanza might have come a little later in the sixties because I started high school in 1960. I remember watching The Beatles when they were on Ed Sullivan. I don't remember what year that was, but I'm thinking that was either late fifties or early sixties when they first came to the U.S. and went on the Ed Sullivan Show. Ed Sullivan was a variety show on a Sunday night. His big show was Sunday night. I'm trying to think what was on Saturday night. Maybe Gunsmoke was on Saturday night because I can remember babysitting from about sixth grade onward. I think [Mel Jazz?] on channel nine had movies and stuff, but that wasn't normal. It was network programming in the early, early hours of the evening.

CS: We kind of talked about schooling a little bit. Maybe you want to describe some of that. You said you lived within a six blocks radius of the school, so you could walk every day.

MS: Yeah, I lived a block, so, you know, definitely came home, was considered a walker and required to come home for lunch. Unless it was some special occasion that my mom wasn't going to be there. So, pretty traditional families with mothers, and especially if you had a larger family. 1946 was the start of the baby boom. A lot of times there was a child maybe a year or two older, but then a child in my grade and then maybe two or three younger ones that were still at home. So, you know, not much in the way of daycare in those days unless you had an elderly neighbor that came in and babysat for you or something like that. They just didn't have daycare organized like it is now.

CS: When you would come home for lunch, would your mother be there?

MS: My mom would be there, and lunch would be waiting. We didn't have that much time to eat and get back to school. Obviously, with my only living a block away, I had a few minutes more than other kids that had to live six blocks away. Those kids could ride their bikes when the weather was good. They only had a certain size bike rack. So, if you lived more than six blocks away and you went home for lunch, you could bring your bike to school and ride it to and from so that you

could get home for lunch and get back to school on time. But yeah, always, always a hot lunch, soup and sandwich usually, and just some kind of dessert cookies or cake or whatever.

CS: Was that a highlight of your day or was there another portion of school that you enjoyed a little bit more?

MS: I don't think I thought about it. It was just, "It's lunchtime! Go home, eat lunch and go back to school." Probably the highlight of the day was the end of the day when you got out of school and you were free to do, you know, other things. So, I was in Girl Scouts. My mom was the Girl Scout leader. In those days we met once a week after school. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts met in the school. They had special storage closets for all of their gear. But the girls, we had Campfire Girls and Girl Scouts. They were not allowed to meet in the school. They had to meet in homes. So, a little more discrimination.

CS: Was that something organized by the women, by the mothers if they wanted to do so?

MS: Girl Scouts. Boy Scouts are National programs. So, yeah, parenthood and stuff. But interestingly, at the public school, there was a Girl Scout troop, and they did meet at the school, and they did have a closet to store all their various supplies and stuff. Or, if they were working on a project that went over a couple of weeks, they were able to store that at school, whereas we didn't at the Catholic school. We didn't have that option. We had a stern bishop at that time that said girls are supposed to be in the homes with their mothers learning, you know, household things. So, definitely a different attitude.

CS: This brings us to our last section question about local and global issues such as war, poverty, discrimination, social unrest, etc. You mentioned a little bit about some of the discrimination between the sexes. Can you remember anything around that time, globally or locally, that was sort of a big issue in your community?

MS: Remember, not everybody had TVs, so we didn't have 24-hour news programming. So, it wasn't in your face all the time. You know, like unfortunately with the shooting that happened, CNN, Fox News, some of those it's, it's 24-hour programming. I don't know if that's good or bad, and a lot of it was repeated, but back then you had 5:00pm local news, 6:00pm national news, and then the 10:00pm news. That was it. I don't remember if there was news in the morning. I don't remember that we had the TV on in the morning because the TV was in the living room, and you ate in the kitchen. You know, my dad would... I would see him before he'd go off to work, but maybe they had the radio on or something. I don't know that I paid that much attention to it. But it was after the Korean War and before the Vietnam War. So, there wasn't really a war to talk about in that sense. It didn't seem like we were as aware of that, probably. I think Communism was starting. I do remember, in the Catholic school, there was an organization called, I think, The Christ Child Center, or something. And so, we always saved pennies or whatever to send in, and that was supposed to help children that were underprivileged around the world. We used to talk about that. It's kind of interesting. It's not anything to joke about, but I did kind of laugh. Every generation growing up has had starving children someplace. My mother said when she was growing up after World War I, there were starving Armenian children. And then there were starving children during World War II. And then the starving Korean children during the Korean War. When our kids were little, there were starving children in Africa, which is a sad commentary on the world situation and food. But that seemed to be a recurring theme that every generation was starving someplace in the world. So, the nuns used to say this about making sure you ate all your food, because that was, for my generation, it was that there were starving children in China. They had witnessed that.

CS: In light of some of these issues, did you feel relatively safe in your neighborhood and your country or your state? Or did some of that some of the stuff going on in the world that you were conscious of that?

MS: I felt really safe growing up. I don't think it was... I think it was talked about, but maybe there was a little filter of, "Kids don't need to hear some of this." You know, unless you read, we got the newspaper. I wasn't an avid reader in grade school, at least not an avid reader of the daily newspaper. I know my parents read it. We got we got the morning paper and the evening papers. So, there was definitely a newspaper available, but I don't remember really picking it up unless it was a school assignment. Find an article about whatever the assignment was, you know? Then you'd go. I don't remember that we got magazines, but I don't remember getting Time or Newsweek or something like that when I was in grade school. We might have had Time when I was in high school or something. I was a senior in high school when Kennedy was shot. So that was probably a big political thing. I think that's kind of the first thing that we were really aware of, that we could be vulnerable to something, somebody attacking our president. So, I was somewhat aware of politics. Like I said, just because my mother always worked as an election judge. I remember one time, I think Eisenhower was running for his second term, and he was coming to Saint Paul to speak for something, some political event, and no security like you have today. But they published the rumor that he was going to be taking in the newspaper and his limousine was going to be coming down Cleveland Avenue at such and such a time, I think 3:30pm in the afternoon. It was a big deal. All the kids were going to go down one block down to Cleveland Avenue and wait for his car to go by. Well, of course, like I said, most of the families were Republican and my family wasn't. But my mother said it was okay, that I could go because after all, he was the president, and it was okay to watch him go by. So, we all went and stood down on the corner and it was like it wasn't a convertible or anything. It was just a regular black limousine with a flag on it. It went by very fast. And we all looked at each other and were like, "Well, that was fun." Yeah. So, my claim to fame is I gave Eleanor Roosevelt a box of Girl Scout cookies. I think we gave her thin Mints. But I didn't know who she was at the time. It was in the summer. Very hot. I had been at Brownie Day camp and came home, and my mother was all in a huff or a fluff, and said, "Hurry up! You've got to take a bath!" We had to go down to the Saint Paul Hotel where she was staying. She must have come in to do a political speech or something. I was trying to find why she was in St. Paul, I even called the History Museum to Minnesota History Museum to try to research why she was here, what brought her to Saint Paul. I couldn't find anything. I probably could if I went down and spent some time digging through newspapers. But I and another girl from my Girl Scout troop wore our brownie uniforms and our little beanies and our white gloves because all well-dressed women wear gloves in those days. And we gave her a box of Girl Scout cookies.

CS: That's very cool. And you mentioned Eisenhower, making his way through St. Paul in that motorcade. You mentioned your parents were okay with you going to see it because after all, was the opportunity of being able to see the president.

MS: Right.

CS: Much different sort of from the climate we're in today? You know.

MS: Very divided.

CS: Yeah. The position of the president. It was like, "It's the president of the United States." That's a unique experience, whereas some people today might hesitate, depending.

MS: Right. "Oh, I wouldn't go see him!" or, "I wouldn't go see her!" or, "They're from the other party. I am not interested." But this was okay because, after all, he was the president. We don't tend to vote for him. This was in September, the motorcade was going down Cleveland, probably to University, and then down University into St. Paul. But that was way before I-94 was built, the freeway, but they could go down University Avenue to get to the Capitol and into downtown Saint

Paul. That was probably the easiest way to do it. But, you know, definitely my dad was a sheet metal worker. Not a big union guy. So, he didn't really [unclear] that the unions were corrupt. He probably was right. Sometimes I think they still are. Well, he always felt that he thought the unions did good work. He thought the leadership was corrupt in how they spend their money, you know, because they would be lobbying at the legislature and then having in those days, the three-martini lunch at the Lexington, or "The Lex", was always known as a as a restaurant where politicians would meet and greet. Hash things out and stuff. So, he didn't like the upper echelon of the union, but he hit what they advocated for, health insurance, and better work hours, and paid vacation, and those kinds of things, if that were worthwhile. But he didn't like it. Didn't like the big wigs. He just didn't think they were fiduciarily responsible with the money that they collected from the union dues. They were spending it to wine and dine verses. You know, if a man got injured on the job or something, to have a fund to help pay him while he was off work and stuff. So, you know, I think my dad thought that would have been a better use of the money than wining and dining.

CS: It was a super awesome experience being able to sit down and hear what life was like for you and your family in the neighborhood you grew up in. Dr. Luker and I really appreciate you taking the time to do this. Thank you very much for participating.