

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIAN CALABRO

FOR THE

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Marian Calabro, on March 22, 2023. I am Kate Rizzi, and I am located in Branchburg, New Jersey. Marian, thank you so much for joining me today.

Marian Calabro: You're welcome. Just for the record, my last name is pronounced Calabro [CAL-a-bro], like "calorie."

KR: Calabro, okay. Where are you located today?

MC: Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey.

KR: To begin, where and when were you born?

MC: I was born on January 17, 1954, in Kearny, New Jersey, at West Hudson Hospital.

KR: In these interviews, we usually like to get a sense of the family history of the person being interviewed. What do you know about your family history, starting on your mother's side?

MC: My mother's name was Marion with an O, M-A-R-I-O-N, Montagnoli, M-O-N-T-A-G-N-O-L-I, Calabro. She was born in a small town in Westchester in New York called Elmsford. She was the sixth of six living children, the rest of whom had been born in Italy. The family had immigrated from Grotte di Castro, G-R-O-T-T-E D-I C-A-S-T-R-O, Italy, which is on the border of Lazio and Tuscany, a little bit north of Rome near--Viterbo is the biggest city there. The family had, I would imagine, lived there for thousands of years. It's an Etruscan area going back millennia. Her parents came, I guess, in one of the great waves of Italian immigration. I couldn't tell you when; I'm not super into genealogy. I have a cousin who is, but I'm not sure exactly when they came.

A lot of my Italian relatives ended up coming through White Plains, New York for some reason, I guess chain migration. They ran a little neighborhood grocery store on a county road, and my grandmother primarily ran it. My grandfather worked in the yard. The only picture I have of him, he's holding a hoe in a garden. My mother worked in the store growing up. They lived behind the store. It was part of a three-family house. Over the decades, my mother's sister and her husband and their son lived on the second floor, and then other family members lived in the apartment on the third floor.

My mother was the only child to finish high school. She finished in three-and-a-half years. She was very proud of that. It was called Alexander Hamilton High School. She graduated in the teeth of the depression, 1933. She got a job immediately as a secretary. She took a bus to work, and she was very proud that she had work, professional work, in the depression. She lived at home and helped her family. She did tell me that they didn't suffer from the depression the way a lot of people did, because they had the grocery and people had to come to the grocery.

What else can I say about my mother's family? I mean, I can talk about them for a long time. [laughter] She worked. She was an active young woman. I have pictures of her in a hiking club, and I know she played basketball in high school, which was ironic because we're like five-foot-

one and two. Next door to the grocery store was, at the time--it's no longer there--my family had a nice piece of property, well, nice for this working-class area, and in that house lived my father's aunt and uncle. My father--well, I guess we'll get to him--was born and grew up in Kearny, New Jersey, where I grew up. He and his family would go visit their aunt and uncle every few months. He would go next door into the grocery, and that's how my parents met.

My father had tuberculosis as a young man. He was in and out of sanitariums, and they did not marry until my mother was--let's see, I've got to do some arithmetic here. My father was twenty-nine, so that would have made my mother twenty-seven. That was considered old in those days. [laughter] It was during World War II, from which my father was exempt because of his health record. That's my mother's side of the family in a nutshell.

KR: How about your father's side of the family? What were his family's roots? Is there any immigration history there?

MC: My father's name was John Calabro. He was the second of five children. His parents, Peter and Frances Calabro, had immigrated. Again, I don't have the specifics, but they came from Calabria, which is the toe of the boot of Italy, whereas my mother's family was from north of Rome. Calabria had a big earthquake in the early 1900s. I don't remember the year, but it drove a lot of people out, besides the general amount of immigration that was going on. I think that his father, who was born in 1888, came over here as part of that wave of immigration as probably a teenager. He was very smart. He was very business-minded. He went on to co-own a business, a machine shop-type business, called Pollock Manufacturing in Kearny, New Jersey. He was sort of the finance man of it, as I understand, but he knew machine shops. A lot of my male relatives on my father's side were missing fingers or pieces of fingers from having worked in machine shops. He was a businessman. He liked to read; I know that. I've asked cousins, "What do you remember about my grandfather?" They said he'd be in his chair reading a newspaper. We always were a big newspaper-reading family.

My grandmother was seventeen or so when she got married. The family legend is that her mother was a real hellion, and she wanted to marry early. I don't know; I mean, women did marry early then. They had money. In their wedding picture, they're dressed very nicely in traditional wedding garb, and they could go out and get a formal picture.

My father was born in 1914, the second, as I said. My aunt was born in 1912. She was the first. They grew up in Kearny. They had what was, you know, now we'd think it was a fairly modest house, but it was a nice house. My father attended high school also, Kearny High School. He actually went to school with some of the people who were teachers when I was there. [laughter] He was very musical. His whole family was. He played semi-professionally. He played at the radio station in Jersey City where Frank Sinatra got his start, because Kearny is in Hudson County, as well as Hoboken. Some of his friends and former bandmates went on to professional music careers.

Exactly when my father came down with tuberculosis I don't know, but he was a fairly young man. Because my grandfather had money, he was able to send my father to sanitariums in Upstate New York in Saranac Lake, not Dr. Trudeau's, but other ones. My father would get

better and come home and then get it again, or it would go dormant and it would come up again. I would ask him when I was a teenager about this; he didn't really like to talk about it. I read a book about the experience of being in sanitariums in Upstate New York. He didn't really like to talk about it. But, as things go, it wasn't a bad convalescence if you survived it. He was a good-looking guy. I suspect he had some romances up there. [laughter] He was very personable and a warm personality. He played music. Musicians are attractive. [laughter] Anyway, he survived it. During the war, he worked in his father's plant, which had been retooled as a defense plant. [Editor's Note: Dr. Edward Livingston Trudeau established the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium in Saranac Lake, New York in 1885.]

One note on my grandfather that I don't remember, but my sisters, who were older, do. They moved, at one point, my grandparents, from Kearny to Livingston, New Jersey, which was very affluent at the time and not a place that a lot of Italians lived, but I don't remember it. They had sold that house and moved back to Kearny by the time I was a kid, and then they moved to Florida. I really, sadly, did not know them very well, and my grandfather died when I was quite young. Similarly, I didn't really know my maternal grandparents well. My mother's father died in 1947 before I was born, and my mother's mother, I do remember extremely well, but she died when I was six or seven. I remember her very vividly, but I didn't know her for that long.

That's my father. Because of the TB, his schooling was interrupted. He told me he went to Newark College of Engineering for a year or two, which is now NJIT [New Jersey Institute of Technology]. I know he didn't graduate, but he did have enough professional training in tool design and what they called draftsmanship at the time to do it as a career and supplement his music. I know he always spoke fondly of the Curtis Institute. I'm not sure if he took classes there or he just wanted to go there, but to him, that was the pinnacle of musical education in Philadelphia, but if he went there, he did not graduate from there. [Editor's Note: The Curtis Institute of Music is a highly-selective, private conservatory in Philadelphia.]

KR: What instruments did your father play?

MC: He played jazz violin. He used to get records sent over from Europe, particularly I think when his brothers were over there serving in the military. He played piano, guitar, but his main instrument, when he was gigging and playing out, was jazz violin.

KR: You mentioned your uncles serving in Europe during World War II. Your father, you said, was 4-F because of tuberculosis. In general, how did the war impact both sides of the family?

MC: It was great for my grandfather. I can tell you this from writing corporate history books, which you see behind me [on the bookshelf]. Adversity creates good opportunity for certain kinds of businesses, unfortunately--fortunately, for the business--but in the bigger picture, it's sad. My grandfather's business thrived as a defense plant. My aunt worked, during the war, at her father's business. My father did. I'm not sure about his next brother. I think he worked there, too. I think he may have been 4-F for some reason, I'm not sure, but the two younger brothers both went into the Navy. One of them was a very young; he went in right after high school. I believe he was at the Normandy landing, but they both did okay. Actually, the youngest one, I think World War II had pretty much been over by then or was just about over,

and I know he served in the South Pacific, because I remember him talking about Hawaii, but I don't think he saw combat. I think it was after the war had ended, shortly after.

My mother's side, I don't know; they didn't talk much about it. One of her brothers had polio, so he would not have been in the military. The other two may have been too old. I'm not sure. She had three brothers and two sisters, and I don't remember if either of the brothers without polio served in the war. I do remember seeing a picture of a cousin of hers in uniform. It was like propped up on a sideboard in a dining room, but I don't think her brothers served. They were either too old; I just don't know. I had an aunt--well, she wasn't an aunt by blood but a friend of the family kind of aunt--who was a servicewoman in World War II, but she was not a family member literally.

KR: For how long did your grandfather's business continue?

MC: It struggled after World War II. I tried to drag these stories out of a particular uncle who was a good talker and had a sharp memory, who was a good judge of people. He was an uncle by marriage. But even he didn't have the facts, and this was in the '80s and '90s. I think in the '50s, they struggled because they didn't have a succession strategy or plan. Then, my grandfather got emphysema, and I would think it was probably the late '50s that it ended. I could actually find out, my sister's very hipped on Kearny history. She lives in Kearny, my oldest sister, Sandra, and she volunteers at the Kearny Museum, which is part of the Kearny Public Library, so she would know. Late '50s, I would ballpark.

KR: I was just curious if you know, did your grandfather close the business, or was it bought out by somebody else?

MC: I don't know. I'd have to ask my sister.

KR: You have two older sisters. Is that correct?

MC: Yes.

KR: What are their names and what years were they born?

MC: Sandra was born in 1944, during the war. Fran, Frances, was born in 1947. Sandra's married name is McCleaster, and Fran's is Spillane.

KR: What are your earliest memories of growing up?

MC: I have tons of memories. [laughter] I can keep you here for hours. I will try to cherry pick them. I have a very acute memory. People who tell me they don't remember their childhoods, I do believe it, but it seems sad to me. In general, I had a happy childhood. I lived in Kearny but in a kind of suburban area, quiet street, in a single-family house. I played in the yard, played on the street with the kids, went running back and forth through yards. You'd just cut through people's yards. There were no fences. I was not quite an only child, but my sisters are ten and seven years older than I am, so they were at school.

I have vivid memories of going to my grandmother's house and store in Elmsford, New York, which was near White Plains. I explained how my parents met there. [I have] very vivid memories of that whole house, of all my mother's relatives. We'd go there at least once a month on a Sunday and have the long, traditional Italian meals and chit-chat, and sit and play cards or poker or certain Italian card games after the long meal. I have very vivid memories of that. Even as I got older, I would go up to that town. My aunt still lived there in a different house after my grandmother died, and I'd stay there for two weeks in the summer, and then my cousin would come and stay with us, I guess to give the mothers a break.

I went to the library a lot. I went to Queen of Peace grammar school, grade school, in North Arlington, which was in a neighboring town. My parents were religious, particularly my father. He was a very devout Catholic, and I think my mother was more pro forma religious. We went to mass every Sunday. I was steeped in catechism, and all that stuff made a very vivid impression on me. I was run-of-the-mill, I guess, in some ways. I played in the neighborhood, had a lot of friends. My mother and I would ride the bus to Newark to shop. The bus ran near our house, and we would go to Hahne's and Bamberger's and McCrory's and Klein's and have our shopping outings. I was aware of Newark and racial differences when I was fairly young. We didn't have a lot of money. I didn't fly in a plane until I was sixteen. If we went on vacation, it was down the shore, which I didn't like. We didn't really like it. My grandparents, my father's parents, who did well, they had a house at Beach Haven, and, again, my sisters, this was very vivid to them, but they sold it when I was like five or six. My sisters grew up going there in the summer, so the shore was a big part of their lives. For me, I do remember it. I have certain memories of the beach and going to a drive-in movie and all that, but I was five or six when they sold it, so it wasn't ingrained in my childhood.

Other big things from my childhood, religion, friends. I took piano lessons starting when I was in third grade to about sixth grade, and I then took up the guitar. Then, when I changed schools in eighth grade because of a very bad experience and went to public school, they tapped me to play whatever instrument I wanted. So, I picked the flute, and so I was in orchestra and band and had chorus eighth grade through high school. I was very musical. I was in the drama club. I was a gleek as a young person.

One thing that really saved me from total boredom in high school summers was Queen of Peace, where I didn't go. I went to grade school up to eighth grade, but I didn't go to high school there. But I still had friends who were in the high school there, childhood friends, and they did summer stock every summer and I got into that. So, I would go to rehearsal every night and go to the diner with my friends. I was a gleek. I'm a terrible actor, but it was fun.

I got my working papers like the day after I turned sixteen. My father had stopped working. My father, unfortunately, through his life, was sick a lot. After he had tuberculosis and that cleared out, then he had other issues, what they called colitis at the time, that I guess now they'd call irritable bowel syndrome or something, but he really suffered. He was in the hospital for a long time, and my mother used to talk about taking the train to Baltimore to see him at Johns Hopkins Hospital, so that was pretty big. He had issues all his life. Then, after his father sold his business, he got a job right here in the next town from where I am now at another machine shop

that they had done business with. He worked there, I guess, until I was an adolescent. My sisters were pretty much out of the house at that point, but money was tight. My mother worked as a secretary; it's not a lot of money. Money was very tight. As soon as I turned sixteen, I got working papers, because I needed pocket money. My mother didn't pay for my clothes. I mean, it was what I could find. I worked at the Drug Fair in Kearny. [laughter] It's a great source of amusement to my writing groups because I write about working. When I ask people, "What do you remember about what I write?" they said, "Your Drug Fair years." It was just a high school job, but it was a colorful place. My life was colored by the tension between my parents that money was tight.

A seminal experience in my childhood--do you want to go into this?--was when I was nine, and my elder sister was nineteen, she got pregnant out of wedlock, as we used to say, and it changed a lot, our lives. I have vivid memories of her boyfriend's parents coming over on a Saturday to talk with my parents and figure out what to do. My mother told me, "Go watch TV. There's a good movie on." I sat in the living room and watched *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* with Shirley Temple. This is how acute my memory is; I clearly remember this. My mother liked Shirley Temple, so she was excited I had some good movie to watch on a Saturday afternoon. But I could hear everything they were saying, and I got the gist of it, even if I didn't understand the details. There ended up to be a hurried wedding. My mother was the mover and shaker in the family. She was the one who dealt with the world. My father, everybody loved my father, but his head was in the clouds a lot. My mother decided that we needed to sell the house. We had a nice one-family house, and I finally had my own room, because my sisters were out of the house. She bought a four-family house, same town, but it was a comedown.

We lived in a small railroad apartment with the rooms from front to back. My middle sister was still coming home from--was she still in high school? I don't know; it doesn't matter. Anyway, if not, when she went to nursing school, she'd come home on the weekends. We were supposed to sleep together in this tiny little bedroom, and I ended up sleeping in the living room. It was a comedown. I resented it, but my family did not talk about feelings or go to counselors or anything like that. It was a comedown for me.

I think it probably colored my attitude towards having children because I just swore, and I was nine or ten, I said, "This will never happen to me. I'm never going to come home pregnant and at the mercy of the fates. No way." Really, I thought that. I mean, I couldn't articulate the details of how you would do or not do that, but it was a bedrock feeling that I had and that I played out. When I was eighteen, when I went to Rutgers, I got birth control pills, and when I came home on occasional weekends, I left them in the trunk of my car. I bought a car when I was a senior in high school, so I could go places myself, 150 dollars, which was a lot of money when you were working at the Drug Fair for a dollar-sixty an hour, but I saved it and I bought the little car, which was eleven years old. I kept my birth control pills in the trunk. This was not going to happen to me, and it didn't. That was a very influential event in my life.

KR: I want to ask you about the neighborhoods that you lived in Kearny. You talked about these two houses that you lived in with your family. What were those neighborhoods each like socioeconomically and in terms of ethnicity? Describe the neighborhoods.

MC: The first one was called Fairlawn Manor because it was on the hill that sloped down to the Passaic River. It was the most suburban part of Kearny, and the houses were on fifty-foot lots, which was big for Hudson County. Ethnicity: white but mixed, Polish, Italian, Jewish. The Jewish people in Kearny tended to live in what we called the Manor, Fairlawn Manor. It was middle class at the time. The other neighborhood we lived in, which was down the hill--Kearny's shaped like this, there's a road up here and I'm drawing an inverse U here. The other side, which sloped down towards the east, where you could see New York City, that was a more crowded neighborhood. For instance, when we moved, we didn't have a driveway anymore, just to give a small example. But I would say ethnically, it was pretty much the same. It was working-class, mixed-ethnicity white, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Scots. Kearny, at the time, was the biggest Scottish settlement outside of Scotland, because Coats and Clarks Thread Company had erected a factory in Kearny at some point in the early 1900s. People immigrated, and they kept their culture. That was more in the other end of town. My end of town was not so much Scots, but I was aware of it. There were [Scottish] kids in high school, and there were still older people that spoke with accents.

I wish it had been more ethnically diverse. It was diverse in terms of disability, when I think about it, because it was pre-special education. I went to high school with a girl who was blind. I went to high school with a guy who had polio. There were people who were kind of borderline down syndrome--well, you can't be borderline down syndrome. You either have it, or you don't. I had a cousin who had it. But there were people who had some developmental disability problems, I guess is what we'd call it now, who were in high school. They were mainstreamed, as we would say. There was no special education really until I got out of high school. I was very much aware of that in high school. It was white middle class to working class where I grew up.

KR: In terms of your family's Italian heritage, what cultural traditions were practiced in your household? Did your parents speak Italian at home, and was the language passed on to you and your sisters?

MC: The language was not spoken at home, nor did my parents--my father didn't speak any Italian. He didn't speak it at home. They came from the generation of, "You're in America, assimilate." My mother did remember Italian because she spoke it with her mother, who spoke some English but not a whole lot, and there were people who would come into the store who would still only be Italian speakers. My mother did have what you'd call kitchen Italian or basic Italian, but we did not speak it. I would say culturally, the big thing that persists is what persists in most cultures, food. We had multicourse meals on Sundays and holidays, not every night. Food was important. I mean, we ate "American food" as well, but most kids did not grow up eating arugula in their salad, or lentils. I grew up with that stuff that's mainstream now. That's pretty much it for culture, I would say.

When I was an adult and got more into Italian, I studied the language as an adult and embraced the culture when I started to go there, in my fifties, to Italy. There was a certain Italian-ness that I can identify in my family, but it wasn't spoken. It was just there, a family loyalty, a certain--there's a phrase in Italian, *una bella figura*, it doesn't mean having a good figure, even though it sounds like that. It means making a good impression or taking care with your appearance; don't go out like a slob. When I was in high school and *The Godfather* movie came out, my father was

really quietly outraged by this, and I still have that feeling, to some extent. I watched one episode of *The Sopranos*. I said, "I can't take this." This idea that if you're an Italian from New Jersey, you must have people in the mob or these crude vindictive personalities. That was not my family, and it wasn't the family of most of the people I knew. We were, I guess, somewhat assimilated, but I'm proud of being Italian. I think it's a great ethnicity.

KR: You mentioned before being an avid newspaper reader. What newspapers were you reading, and what were political discussions like in your home when you were growing up?

MC: We always got the *Daily News*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Newark News* and then when that went out of print *The Star-Ledger*. I briefly remember getting the *Herald Tribune*, and when that went out of print, the *New York Herald Tribune* briefly became the *World Journal Tribune* and that didn't last long. We always had two or three newspapers a day in the house. My cousin told me that my grandfather loved to read newspapers. One of my very, very earliest memories is being in a high chair at my grandmother's house behind the store, and somebody taking the *Daily News* and putting it in front of me and asking me to read the headline, because I could read when I was like two or three. Nobody ever taught me how to read. There's a name for this. It doesn't just happen to me. I don't know the name of it, but there are some little kids who basically pick up reading almost effortlessly. I imagine that my mother or father would read street signs or things to me and I would put it together. When I heard the word, I would see the letters and make a connection. But I vividly remember somebody putting the *Daily News* in front of me and asking me in a high chair to read the headline, and I puzzled it out. I don't remember what it was, but I did kind of get it. So, I read those. [Editor's Note: Hyperlexia is the precocious ability to read words without prior training in learning to read, typically before the age of five.]

Politically, politics was not an active discussion topic, I guess, until I was in high school, and of course I was against the Vietnam War. I wouldn't say my parents were for it, but my mother was very conservative by nature and I think her father had been. I think he had been pro-Mussolini; I'm not sure. As I said, he died in 1947, so I'm not sure, but I know her father followed Italian politics all the time that he was here. She didn't care that much about it. I don't think she cared about it at all. My parents were in support of Ronald Reagan, which I found appalling, but by then, I was an adult. I think they came, again, from the generation of, "The authorities are in charge. They know the right thing." That's kind of the Catholic way too, which is very patriarchal. I had rejected religion by the time I was in high school.

The Vietnam War was very evident to me because the last draft, when they pulled the numbers for the lottery in 1971, my high school boyfriend, who I met in summer stock--he did tech--he, as a friend of his said, "John, you're behind the eight ball." His number came up number eight, his birthday, which meant that he was going to be drafted. He was a year ahead of me, so he was going to be drafted when he graduated from high school. Or, no--had he gone to Livingston? He was maybe at Livingston. He went to Livingston College. He was in a very early class at Livingston College. I think he did a year there, and because he came up number eight, he preemptively joined the Army to try to get a better gig than being sent to Vietnam. That was very top-of-mind for me. I got letters from an Army base as a junior and senior in high school. It didn't work out for him. I don't know, he ended up leaving the Army. I never quite understood

what all happened there. [Editor's Note: On December 1, 1969, the U.S. Selective Service held the first draft lottery during the Vietnam War, which was broadcast live on television and radio. Re-institution of the lottery was a change from the "draft the oldest man first" method, the prior method for deciding order of call. The lottery selected birthdays to determine the order in which men born between 1944 and 1950 were called to report for induction in 1970. Subsequent draft lotteries were held in 1970, 1971 and 1972. In September 1971, all future student deferments were eliminated. In 1973, the draft was abolished.]

I had high school friends who, you know, if you didn't go to college, you weren't exempt and they were missile fodder. I don't remember anybody particularly, but I do know that some of the people I went to high school with went straight into the Army. My parents supported it. It wasn't something we talked about every night, but I vividly remember my father's change of mind. There's a famous, famous photograph, I think by Eddie Adams, of little kids running down a road with soldiers behind them. They're being driven out of a town in Vietnam. One of the little girls, three or four years old, is naked, and these kids are running. My father, when he saw that picture, that changed his mind about the war. In general, I don't talk politics with my family. I'm way more liberal than most of my family members. [Editor's Note: The photograph being referenced was taken by Associated Press photographer Nick Ut in June 1972. The photograph shows children fleeing a napalm attack, including a badly-burned, naked nine-year-old, outside the village of Trang Bang. Eddie Adams is best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph of the summary execution of Nguyễn Văn Lém, a Viet Cong prisoner, in Saigon in 1969.]

KR: When you were in high school, were you involved in any anti-war protests?

MC: I do remember going to Newark. I think, though, this was not so much anti-war as it was civil rights. I would take the bus to Newark. Remember, I learned how to do that with my mother when I was a kid going shopping. Before I was sixteen and could get working papers, one summer, I volunteered at Head Start in Newark. I worked in a school, which was pretty comical, when I look back on it, because I'm not really great with kids. Kids are not my natural population. [laughter] I went to this school and helped out for like four hours a day. I went to a few civil rights protests. I remember vividly being on Central Avenue and standing in a circle. I remember there was a very tall nun next to me, and we were singing, "What Color is God's Skin?"

KR: How did you get involved in those civil rights protests? Was it through the church?

MC: No, not through the Catholic Church, [no]. It's a good question. I really don't remember how I found out where and when it was. I mean, there was no internet then. I don't know. Maybe I read about it in the paper, or I'm trying to think if I went with somebody. It wasn't my boyfriend. I don't know. I'd have to really cogitate on that one.

KR: What do you remember about the Newark rebellion and the aftermath?

MC: I remember that, on a practical level, my mother's employer, which was a fairly large law firm at 744 Broad Street, moved out of the city to Roseland, because people didn't want to come to downtown Newark. It was tough for my mother, because she didn't want to drive out to

Roseland herself every day. It's a far piece from Kearny. Could you just excuse me because I'm waiting for a medical call? I will be right back.

KR: Sure, no problem.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Okay, we are back on recording.

MC: Okay. I'm sorry, could you remind me of where we were?

KR: Sure, you were talking about how the law firm at which your mother worked moved from Newark to Roseland, and your mom did not want to drive.

MC: My father was out of work at the time, so he drove her there. Then, he would drive home, and then he'd go pick her up. That didn't work out too well. So, it materially affected her work. I'm not sure they moved out right away, but it was within a year or so.

The attitudes in my town were, I think, racist, "Good thing we have a river between us." I remember a few people in high school saying really racist things. I don't remember the teachers dealing with it much at all. My high school was a big public high school. It was very good in some ways and really a throwback in others. I think it coincided with you didn't go shopping in Newark anymore. The stores were moving out. They were moving to malls. I still went on the bus to Newark. I used to go to the Newark Public Library when I was in high school.

It's two steps removed, but I think it was related to the upheaval of Newark and the white flight from Newark that when I was a junior, the Rutgers-Newark campus announced something called the High School Scholars Program. I think they were trying to encourage people to come to the campus and see it and take classes there and maybe go there. I was so bored in high school at this point that I just said, "I'm going to do this." When I was a senior in high school, I took, I think, six or nine credits at Rutgers-Newark, and I rode the bus. I clearly remember getting out of senior English, because I did not read *Hamlet* in high school for that reason. I took a one hundred or two-hundred level literature class at Rutgers-Newark, and it was hard. I saw the difference between, you know, I could cruise through a high school class; this class was hard for me, which was good. The teacher kind of took me aside and said, "You know, this is what learning is. You're getting stretched here." It didn't scare me to go to class at Rutgers-Newark, but nor did I decide I wanted to go there undergrad completely. I was able to use the credits at Rutgers-New Brunswick.

KR: What other major historical events stand out in your memory from when you were growing up?

MC: Kennedy's assassination, November 22, 1963. That was a Friday afternoon. I was in fourth grade. The nuns revered John Kennedy, and my parents, I'm pretty sure that's the only Democratic vote they ever cast because he was Catholic. Just being stunned by the news. We were let out of school early. It wasn't that early because it was the afternoon, I think, by the time

the full news came through, and walking home with my girlfriend and talking about it. I remember vividly a big blackout that happened on the East Coast when I was in about the sixth grade. Vietnam War, all through its iterations. I remember Lyndon Johnson coming on television and saying, "My fellow Americans, I come to you with a heavy heart." I remember Pete Seeger in his first go-around on *The Smothers Brothers*. He recorded "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" and CBS said, "It's good enough that we got Pete Seeger through the censors, but we're pulling that song." Then, a few weeks later they re-ran it and they played that song. Vietnam was very top-of-mind, and I told you about my boyfriend's draft number. [Editor's Note: On September 1, 1967, folk singer and activist Pete Seeger recorded a performance of several songs, including the anti-war song "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* on CBS. When Seeger's performance aired on September 10, 1967, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" had been cut by CBS executives. After Tom Smothers' publicly spoke out about CBS's censorship, Seeger was invited back to perform that song and others, which aired in February 1968. The next month, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that he would not seek reelection. The day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968, Johnson delivered a speech that began with, "Once again, the heart of America is heavy--the spirit of America weeps--for a tragedy that denies the very meaning of our land."]

I would say those were the big ones, and the feminism. I remember seeing Gloria Steinem on *The Merv Griffin Show* talking about things that women generally didn't talk about on talk shows. When I came to Rutgers, I went to some kind of program they gave over at Douglass, and it was the full monty, just like you would read about in *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This woman gave some kind of feminist lecture, and then she pulls out a speculum and invites everybody to use it. I remember the advent of *Roe v. Wade* very much in 1971. I was starting to be sexually active, and this was great. As I told you, I got birth control pills on my own, but that wasn't until I got to Rutgers. I was like, "This is a good thing." I remember trying to talk to my mother about it, and forget that. [laughter] Those were my big ones. [Editor's Note: *Our Bodies, Ourselves* by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective first came out in 1970 as a course book on stapled newsprint about women's bodies, sexuality and healthcare. In 1973, the commercial, expanded edition was published by Simon & Schuster. *Roe v. Wade* (1973) was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in which the court ruled that the Constitution generally protected a pregnant individual's liberty to have an abortion. The decision was overturned in 2022 with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.] [Marian Calabro's Postscript: By the way, I wrote a piece for the *Targum* called "Health Center Hires Woman Gynecologist," probably in 1973 or 1974. She was part time, but even that was a big deal.]

KR: What were your experiences in terms of confronting traditional gender roles?

MC: I would say, as I alluded before, I had the feeling that I was not going to get pregnant and married too young. There are certain aspects of traditional gender roles that don't bother me. I like to cook. It doesn't bother me to make a meal for people. On the other hand, I did marry a man who could cook well, and we both cooked for most of our time together. Peer pressure was an issue, much more than family pressure. My family never pressured me to get married. I think they just said, "She'll do it when she's ready." My family did not pressure me to have kids. I think they said, "If she doesn't want them, don't have them." I had role models in aunts and

uncles who either had not married and/or had not had children, and it was just that's how it was. They weren't put down for it. It was just another aspect of life. My aunt was not a lesser person because she didn't have children. She was nice to her nieces and nephews, and she kind of just accepted what came along. But peer pressure did kick in. When I was in college, there were some women who really wanted to get married right out of college and start having kids. There was a woman in my dorm, I remember--I liked her, I was friends with her--she got married while she was in college.

If you don't have kids, it's a subtle minority to belong to, at least for women. I can't speak for men. Nobody really talks about childless men in the way they do about childless women. Some of the most ridiculous things, and offensive, said to me, or in my presence, have to do with not having kids, the principal one being, "Until you have kids, you don't know what life is about." What an attitude. What am I supposed to do, sit and stare at the wall all my life, and can't I contribute to society in some way? There were fifteen and sixteen-year-old girls in my high school having kids; they understood life and I didn't? It's really still a very charged topic for me. Those kinds of attitudes came from peers, not really from my elders, and it's kicking in again in a way with people having grandchildren now. I'm happy for them. I think it's easier to enjoy a grandchild maybe than your own in some ways. But, again, it's like, "This is what life is about." I don't know. It flusters me; this aspect of gender roles really, really flusters me.

KR: How about gender roles and career? What messages were being sent to you, first by your family, but then at school by your peers, by the church, by other communities that you were around about what you could do in your life career wise as a woman?

MC: That's a good question. The probably big three careers that were considered valid for women when I was growing up were schoolteacher, not college professor--it was usually a grade school or high school teacher--nurse, maybe librarian. Anybody who knew me knew I was not going to be a nurse. [laughter] I don't have that gene. My sister did. She became a very good nurse. Being a grade school or even high school teacher, I don't think people expected that of me. Ironically, when I was in my fifties, I started to teach at the Montclair Adult School, and I love it. I don't really consider it teaching, more like a facilitator, catalyst role, but I find it very satisfying. People call me a teacher; I don't claim the name for myself. I'm not trained as a teacher. What else? I would have probably been happy as a librarian and I entertained the thought of going to library school when I was at Rutgers, and this is too funny. [laughter] I didn't want to be called "Marian the Librarian." I would have had to change my first name. My boyfriend in college, who's a whole different story--not the same guy who was number eight in the draft--a different guy who was in RC [Rutgers College] '76, he said, "No, you need to be a writer. That's your calling." I think he was right. That said, I think I would have done okay as a librarian.

A lot of my English major friends, women, worked in publishing for a year or two--I worked in publishing immediately after college--and they got fed up with it--or they worked in journalism--they got fed up with it for one reason or another and went to law school or got an MBA [Master of Business Administration]. I could have done either of those things, my grades were good enough, and I got accepted to an MBA [program] when I was working in New York. It's funny because I've been clearing out a lot of files since my husband died, actually, in the past ten years,

and I found a letter from Pace University encouraging me to come and do this. I didn't want to. I liked being in the work world. I liked being in New York City. I liked being a young thing in publishing. It was an exciting time. It was viable. Publishing was a cultural influence at the time, in the way that it isn't now. Books and magazines were vital to culture, and there I was in New York City.

I think, again, it was a case of knowing my own mind for better or worse. Church, I don't think there was any influence on me about career. I will say my high school guidance counselors, I don't want to use rude language too much in this, but they fell down on the job. My main high school counselor was somebody who had gone to high school with my father, and the message I got from my high school counselors and my teachers, for the most part, was, "You should know your own place." I could have gotten into Princeton. I could have gotten into Yale. I mean, these places were all going coed. I probably could have gotten in. If you picked most of those, I could have gotten into at least one of them, probably not Radcliffe. But, A, I didn't have the money to go. They didn't tell me about scholarships because it wasn't in their Kearny thinking. I knew I would have to pay for most of college myself. Rutgers was cheap, and I already had some credits. My parents were just, "You deal with it, we can't," at that point. They were kind of that way about career. I mean, they didn't press me to do anything. I worked every summer as a secretary, and I'd go to summer stock at night. The summer stock thing was still running for most of that time. I worked because I had to; I needed the money.

I liked the work world. I'm like my mother in that way. She liked being out in the work world when she went back to work, when I was in grade school. I needed something that involved some creativity, and that was word and editing oriented. That's my talents. I could have been a lawyer, but I don't think I would have been a happy one. Actually, when my profession started to bottom out in the early 2000s, I got a paralegal certificate from Fairleigh Dickinson University and I worked part time in a law office, but I was still doing my writing. They would have happily hired me full time. I'm still in touch with the lawyer I worked with, the lawyers I worked with, and she just asked me, "Do you want to come back to work part time after your husband died?" I said no. It wasn't creative enough for me. I think the gender roles were, again, just superseded by my personality, but I do wish that I had been at least shown how to pursue more opportunity in high school than I was shown. But it all worked out.

KR: I am curious about you and writing during your upbringing. Were you writing things as a little kid? How did that develop? What were your outlets? As you got into middle school and high school, were you involved in activities that involved writing?

MC: Oh, yes. I was writing really young. I was published when I was nine in the *American Girl* magazine, which was the Girl Scout publication. I published an essay there. I wrote a family newsletter that my cousin and I would do in the summers. Like I mentioned before, I would either go to his house for a week or two and then he would come to my house. He was four years older than I. My aunt and my mother were great friends. His mother and my mother were sisters. They were three years apart. They were very good, close friends. They would sit and talk about the old relatives, and they used Italian dialect for the names. Just as one example, Italian for aunt is *zia*, Z-I-A, *zia*. They would talk about an aunt, Zia Mega, and it got Italian dialect-Americanized to Cemega, like cement. *Zio* is uncle. Plácido is an old-fashioned Italian

name, like Plácido Domingo. So, Zio Plácido would get Americanized to Ziplacido. My cousin and I would type these out phonetically and make up stories about these people that were totally bogus. I mean, we were just fictionalizing, and we would weave them in with things that were happening at the time, like there was a World's Fair in New York in 1964. [laughter]

My mother was very hipped on World's Fairs. She had gone to the one in the 1940s, and these were big things. Whenever there was a World's Fair, we went. We went to the one in Montreal, and I think it was '67, '68. They took us to the World's Fair in New York, out in Queens. We had the map. We drew a map and we did a story about these relatives going to the World's Fair. It was all bogus, and these people were dead. We didn't know them. We just knew these funny names. My aunt and mother--and my mother was kind of a tough character; she wasn't one to express her feelings that openly--they would sit there and read this and laugh until the tears just streamed down. They would like fall over laughing at this stuff that we wrote. I had an audience at an early age. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The World's Fair was held in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens, New York City in 1939-1940 and 1964-1965. The 1967 International and Universal Exposition, commonly known as Expo 67, was a general exhibition of the World's Fair held in Montreal, Quebec from April 27 to October 29, 1967.]

I wrote a Girl Scout newsletter. When I got to high school, I was in my rebellious stage, and I started an alternative publication. My mother said to me, "Why can't you just write nice things for the *Kearny* ...?" I can't even remember what the actual high school newspaper was called. No, I started my own thing. It didn't last too long.

Then, when I got to Rutgers, of course, I worked on *The Targum*, and that was a good but painful experience. I wrote all the time. I was in that office all the time writing. I learned how to interview people. I learned how to call people on Sundays. I had to call President Bloustein on a Sunday, they told me. I said, "But it's Sunday." They said, "Well, you have to call him. We need a quote for this." I had to learn to do those things. At the same time, there were a lot of--I'll say it on this tape--what I called "Peter's Prep Boys." They had come to Rutgers expecting it to be all men like their high schools, one of which was St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City. They were not happy about women being there, or they just didn't know how to deal with it. They really hadn't gone to school with women, at least high school. I have a bit of an edge to me sometimes. I ran for certain slots on the editorial masthead, and I got outvoted because they didn't like me, some of them. But I stuck with it. Barry Qualls now keeps saying, "She was the first woman editor of *The Targum*." I wasn't because I didn't get elected to that stuff. I made my own space. I became the theater editor. I got free tickets, and I took my friends to shows in New York. It satisfied the gleek in me. [Editor's Note: Edward J. Bloustein served as the president of Rutgers University from 1971 until his death in 1989.]

I wanted to major in journalism when I got to Rutgers, and they pulled the major that year. They turned it into something called mass communications. I took some mass communications classes and it was like Marshall McLuhan theory and all this, and I just said, "Ah, forget this." The traditional journalism curriculum had been upended, for better or worse. I went to English. I just kept writing for the paper. Being an English major, I'd write a ton. Yes, I've always written. I still write a ton. Everything you see on this bookshelf behind me, those are books that I either wrote or co-wrote or edited, and there are some up there, too [points to another bookshelf].

[Editor's Note: Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) was a Canadian philosopher and author who specialized in media theory.]

KR: When we get more into your Rutgers years, I will circle back and ask you about your experiences on *The Targum*.

MC: That's the gist of it.

KR: I am curious about your grandmother's store in Elmsford. How long did that store continue, and did it stay in the family after your grandmother passed?

MC: No, my grandmother passed, I would say, in the very early '60s. I must've been maybe six or seven, so 1960, '61. There was less traffic there, I would say, but my aunt couldn't keep it up herself and sold the building and moved to a house in the town. The whole building got closed. No, the family didn't run the store anymore. I drove by it a few years ago. Now, it's a bodega. It's probably a similar situation with Latino owners, because you have the rooms upstairs. You can rent out the apartments or live in them. But, no, it didn't stay in the family.

KR: When you went to high school, you shifted from parochial school to public school. You went to Kearny High School. What was that transition like?

MC: It was very liberating. I didn't have to wear a uniform anymore, and I wore outlandish clothes because my mother didn't buy me clothes anymore once I got to high school. That's a whole other subject. We fought to get rid of dress codes, so you could wear anything but jeans to school. I would wear shirts as dresses. I weighed ninety-eight pounds. I looked good. [laughter] It was liberating, because I went from having one teacher all day to having different teachers. I went from never studying science to studying science. When I changed in eighth grade, I had a biology class; I didn't even know what biology was. I was a terrible science student and I would have never pursued it because I didn't have the basic grounding in it, but it was an eye-opener. The math was much more demanding. I liked math. The reading was broader. It was always *Holidays and Holy Days*; that was the name of one of our literature books at Queen of Peace. It was liberating, and I made friends right away. Music, I mentioned that I was invited to try a new instrument, and they gave you a new instrument at the time. I didn't have to even buy it. My parents were happy. I had a nice activity, and that persisted in high school. I liked the mix of classes and the variety of offerings in the music area, and we had a lot of clubs. Mainly, though, I did music. Yes, it was liberating.

My main beef with my high school was that there was a lot of class; it was impressed on you, class limitations. We had something called star classes, which were Advanced Placement in effect, and I was in the star English and star math classes. One of the star English teachers made us do a career paper. I think everybody had to do one in junior year, where you were supposed to think about what you wanted to be and research it. My first choice was a social worker. "No, you can't do that." "Why not?" "This is not the kind of people you want to work with." I was literally told I couldn't do a paper on being a social worker. That's true; it would have been a terrible profession for me, but I was sixteen or seventeen. I did it on journalism, and that was okay with them. But she was the one who told me, this teacher said to me, "I could have gone to

Radcliffe, but I went to Montclair State, because you go to those schools and those girls go off to Bermuda at spring break and you're going home to Lyndhurst." Very class-restricted thinking. My parents were checked out because of their financial situation, and I didn't have much to counteract it. But, on the whole, I'm glad I went to public high school.

KR: Earlier in the interview, you described high school as being good in some ways and a throwback in other ways. Was it that class consciousness, that was the throwback?

MC: That, and literally the curriculum. This was the '70s. I read on my own Richard Brautigan and a lot of hippie writers that we read at the time; Herman Hesse, that was a big thing, *Siddhartha*; Kurt Vonnegut. My freshman year, we read *Ivanhoe*. It was the same volume that my father had read when he was there thirty-some years earlier. He's forty years older than me; it was longer than that. We did not have hip books to read. Yes, it's great to read [William Shakespeare's] *Julius Caesar*, I have no problem with that, but *Ivanhoe*, they should have junked that one. The curriculum was a throwback in some ways. When we were given, for instance, in star English, we had to do special book reports and you could pick the book yourself, again, you were steered away from certain things, but I still wrote a book report on *Siddhartha*. I didn't care what she said. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Walter Scott's three-volume *Ivanhoe: A Romance* was first published in 1819.]

KR: When you were a senior and you were taking the classes at Rutgers-Newark, did you seek that program out yourself?

MC: Yes, I think they came to the school and made a presentation, because we were only a couple miles away. I think they went around to the local community high schools and solicited, and I went for it.

KR: During the time that you would have been in late middle school going into high school, there were changes in society in terms of dress, social norms. There were changes in music during that time. What do you remember about that in terms of your own experiences?

MC: Dress, being in public school, I was able to, once the dress codes were protested away, I was able to dress more creatively. Music I was totally hip to. I played the guitar. I spent my very hard-earned money on records. I would buy mono instead of stereo, because they were a buck cheaper. I listened to the radio. I'm still a big radio fan. The New York metro area had stellar radio for rock and roll, and I listened to all of it. I was musical. As I said, I played and sang. I developed a good ear, and I could pick up a guitar and, after I heard a song a few times, play it. I created a fake book, which my father explained what that was because he had them, which is basically you write your own chord changes to popular songs. I loved my fake book and I wrote a number of--I had a pen pal in Vermont who was also kind of inclined this way and we would trade songs for our fake books. I lent my fake book in senior year, I think, to my friend Marty. He was still at the Catholic school, and I never got it back. He lost it, he said, and that stuck with me. I had a play produced, it was about ten years ago now, at a community theater in Manhattan, and it was called *The Fake Book*. It was that experience, but it was about an adult coming back and confronting the brother of the Marty character about the fake book

because Marty had died of AIDS in the meantime. Yes, music was a big, big influence on me. It still is; I still listen to music all the time.

KR: What were those New York metro area radio stations that were your favorites?

MC: NEW, WNEW, which had Rosko and Alison Steele and Jonathan Schwartz. I remember the night Rosko resigned. NEW was the big one, but I listened to AM radio growing up, the Good Guys and Cousin Brucie and Harry Harrison and the other Good Guys, they all played pop. 880--was 880 pop then? It's news now. Yes, all the big rock stations, but NEW was the biggest one. Then, there were college stations, FUV. There was one out of South Orange. I can't remember. FMU, I'm not sure. Anyway, I found them all. [Editor's Note: William Roscoe Mercer, known to New York radio listeners as Rosko, was a trailblazing Black disc jockey. He was the first Black news announcer on WINS in New York and the first Black disc jockey on KBLA in Los Angeles. In October 1967, when WOR-FM decided to switch to a restrictive format, he famously resigned on air. He then went on to work for WNEW-FM until 1970. During the 1960s, WMCA (570 AM) began playing top-forty hits with programming led by a number of disc jockeys known as the Good Guys. WCBS (880 AM) hosted music programming at night in the early 1970s but became a news radio station. WFUV (90.7 FM) is a non-commercial radio station owned by Fordham University. WSOU (89.5 FM) is a non-commercial radio station that broadcasts from the campus of Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.]

KR: Would you go into New York City a lot, especially as you got into high school?

MC: Oh, big time. I went to New York a lot and with or without my parents' permission because I could ride the bus there, or I would take the bus to Harrison and take the PATH and then walk around Greenwich Village. I'd get off on Christopher Street or Ninth Street and walk around the Village. I'd go to Bleecker Street Records. I'd go with a high school friend, very exciting.

One Sunday night, my friend, Anthony Fanelli, the late lamented, he died a few years after high school, he and I went to Fillmore East. I don't know what I told my parents, but we went into Fillmore East for a concert. We got mugged on the way back, mugged meaning just shaken down for money. I had a little money in my purse because I was supposed to pay for my SAT fee the next day at high school. We managed to get home. On Mondays in history class, I was probably a junior in high school, maybe a senior, we had to talk about current events and what had happened over the weekend. This was just a way, I think, for the teacher to slack off, frankly. He was not one of my best teachers in high school. Anthony Fanelli and I piped up, "We got mugged last night in the Village." [laughter]

I used to go to one dollar and two-dollar Schaefer music series concerts in Central Park. My girlfriend Annie, she was my grade school friend, but we remained friends in high school, and her sister was a few years older, and she would drive in. We would go through the Lincoln Tunnel, while her sister Trudy was as high as a kite. We'd park somewhere. It's just a wonder to me that we survived some of these things. We'd go to the concerts. I heard Richie Havens. Herb Alpert, he was young and kind of hot then. I can't even remember them all, but we went to concerts in Central Park. It was great on warm summer nights. I had a lot of freedom as a young

person. My parents either didn't know or didn't care what I did, because I was pretty trustworthy and I had a sensible head on my shoulders. I'm sure they were not thrilled with some of the things I did, but I survived them.

KR: When you flew for the first time when you were sixteen, where did you go?

MC: I was very hipped on going to Oberlin College. That was my big dream. Why? Because there had been an article in *Life* magazine about how it had always been coed and it was artistic and progressive. I'm sure they didn't use the word progressive, but it really caught my imagination. My mother had a nephew in Ohio who had grown up in that three-family house, and they had been very fond of each other and she hadn't seen him for a long time. He had multiple sclerosis, so it was difficult for him to travel at that point. She said, "We'll fly out there, and we'll take you to the college to look at it and we'll go visit the relatives." My father, I don't think, came with us; I remember my mother being on that trip. We flew, I guess, to Cleveland, and the family picked us up. I did tour the college, and I didn't go there.

KR: Did you apply to Oberlin?

MC: [No]. Sad, isn't it? I don't know what was wrong with me. Who can I blame, my parents? I hold some of the people at Kearny High School accountable for having that "Don't exceed your social class" kind of attitude, but unless I had gotten full scholarship, I wouldn't have been able to afford to go to a private school.

KR: Before we move into talking about Rutgers, are there other formative experiences from your upbringing that you would like to talk about? Are there any other things that we skipped over that you would like to bring up?

MC: No, I think we've taken enough time on this.

KR: When it was college application time, did you just apply to Rutgers College? Were there a couple other schools that you applied to?

MC: As I recall, I think it was only Rutgers College, but what softened the blow for me, if you will, of not going to Oberlin or maybe other places was the fact that it was going coed. I did not want to go to Douglass College because it was all women. The same way I don't think I would have wanted to go to Smith College at the time. I really, and still firmly believe, that we live in a, to use a 1972 word, coed society and that I wanted to be in a school that was coed. The fact that I would be part of that social change made Rutgers far more appealing to me than Douglass, say, would have been. Livingston, I had some experience of, because, as I said, my high school boyfriend had gone there. I can't remember if it was for a year or two, and I can't even remember if he went back there after he got out of the Army. I think he might have. But I had been on the campus and gone to classes with him and it was a little too loosey-goosey for me at the time. It was very pass/fail. It had a less structured feeling that was too unstructured for me and my personality. That wasn't in the picture. I didn't really want to go to Rutgers-Newark because I had commuted there and it was fine, but I wanted to live out. That's how Rutgers College came to the top. I applied early decision, and I'm pretty sure that I was the first woman admitted to

Rutgers College, because I got a letter from one of the deans--Arnold Grobman or Howard Crosby--congratulating me. I gave the letter to the Rutgers University Archives in the 1990s.

KR: Where did you live your freshman year?

MC: Tinsley 307.

KR: What were your first days and weeks like at Rutgers?

MC: I was introduced to my roommate, we got along, Suzanne Braun her name is. She became Brown, and she married Ken Brown, who was her big brother. We were assigned big brothers. I think about how paternalistic that is now. [laughter] My big brother was a perfectly nice guy. I don't remember his full name, Ted something. They would come around and try to answer questions and show you things. He was a nice guy, but I didn't really have much in common with him. I don't remember seeing him more than a few times, whereas my roommate quickly became, well, not quickly, but I would say within six months or so became incestuous with her big brother and ended up marrying him. But I think they eventually got divorced, and I think he's deceased now.

We were made much of in that we were interviewed a lot, asked questions by professors. When you went into a class, sometimes there would only be a few women in the class, very few, because I was told, you can check this fact, that the ratio was something like one woman to fourteen men. I don't know if that was in the whole school or just our class, but there were classes where there were not a lot of women. [Editor's Note: When Rutgers College became coeducational, six hundred total women matriculated in the fall of 1972 to join the 4,800 men in the student body.]

I checked out the Music Department, because I had been such an active choral person and an orchestra person in high school, and it seemed too difficult to me. It wasn't as easy as it was in high school to kind of casually come and go from that stuff. You had to audition and then make this big commitment to be in a band, and I wasn't up for that.

The Targum became my main activity and outlet. I had a work-study job the first year. I remember being excited when the application came back; I can see myself in the living room with my mother opening the thing and saying, "I'm getting some financial help." It was a big thing. Then, I read it further and it was a work-study job, which meant that they were giving me some minor job to do, so I could make a little more money on campus. The first work-study job I had was on College Avenue; it was an old building that was dedicated to journalism, Alexander Johnston Hall. I can't remember the name of the building. Basically, I was the press-clipping service because they didn't hire one. All the local newspapers from New Jersey, of which there were a number, a lot of weeklies, too, would come in, and I would have to scour them and clip out anything that had to do with a Rutgers mention or a Rutgers graduate. It was really boring. After the first semester, I said, "I need something else." They sent me out to Livingston Campus, and I worked at a TV station that would broadcast large lectures. People would sit in a large lecture hall, and a biology professor, or whatever these big 101 classes were--they tended to be in the sciences or engineering--they'd either play a pre-recorded lecture, or I guess maybe the

professor would stand up there and do it, but it was broadcast on a TV screen. So, I worked there. That was boring, too. Then, I didn't have another work study-job. What else did you want to know about our early experiences?

KR: I am assuming that Tinsley Hall was coed.

MC: It was but by floor, as I recall. My floor was all women. The first floor was men, because the reason I remember that--and Suzy, my roommate, claims she doesn't remember this, at least she told the *Rutgers Magazine* a few years ago, she didn't. There were pre-med students living on the first floor, and they had signs on their door, one, I clearly remember, "You rape 'em, we scrape 'em." "You hump 'em, we dump 'em." We were appalled by this. Remember, *Roe v. Wade* had passed the year before. Suzanne was a scrappy young woman, and so we would encounter these guys passing in the entryway and so on. They lived on the first floor. We lived on the third. She confronted them about it, and I can't remember if they took the signs down or not, but it's very telling to me that we did not go to any authorities. Now, you'd take a picture of that, and it would be posted. All of that stuff didn't exist then. I don't have a single picture of myself as an undergraduate, other than the snapshots that my parents took at graduation. We just didn't; you didn't carry a camera normally. When they did the 250th anniversary, they asked me if I had any casual pictures. We didn't have them. The pictures that existed then were the ones that *The Targum* would send out a photographer who would take of "student life," but you yourself didn't take pictures. You didn't carry a camera in the normal course of the day. That indicates still how that entrenched male feeling was still around, and I feel that it existed at *The Targum* as well.

I made good friends with people on my floor. There was a bank of payphones in the middle of the floor, a couple payphones. If you had a private phone in your room, it meant that you had money to pay for a Bell Telephone phone at the time. [laughter] We didn't have a phone in our room. So, it was good because it encouraged a lot of social interaction. If I wanted to go to the Commons with somebody for dinner or vice versa, they'd come and knock on your door, or, "I'll meet you in front of the Commons," or, "I'll meet you at *The Targum* office and we'll walk over to lunch or dinner." There was just much more socializing in that way.

In one of my classes, I believe it was philosophy 101, I think it was called moral philosophy, I met the guy who became my freshman-year boyfriend, Robert Kaplow. So, I did socialize in that way as well.

KR: How well prepared do you think Rutgers was for women?

MC: I don't know, that's a hard question. I suppose good in some ways and underprepared in others. The big brother effort, for instance, was well-meaning, but when you think about it, juvenile. I think the professors were prepared. I think they did make an effort to be inclusive.

One thing I vividly remember is that if you had any kind of little ailment, there was a clinic that you could go to, and it was right on the College Avenue Campus. You could see a nurse or a doctor. Every time you went in there--I think I was stressed out and I had things that resembled mono but weren't mono in the long run--every time you visited, the first thing they did was give

you a pregnancy test, and then they'd talk to you about birth control, which was good. I liked that, and I took a prescription. But there was an assumption that, "Oh, you know these girls, if the ratio is one to fourteen," it came through like, "hey, you must be out sleeping around," which I don't think was the case. It's not what I saw.

I think also I got no encouragement, for instance, to take a business class. The thought didn't occur to me because it just didn't, for better or worse, but how valuable it would have been to do that. You had to go to another campus. I think they were on the Busch Campus at the time, or I don't know what they call it now. It was called University Heights, I think at the time. It's out where the Engineering School was. But I remember there was a girl in my dorm or who I knew through a class and she said, "Oh, I'm taking all these business classes, I just love them," and I thought that was so odd. As I recall, and I don't know, you can fact check this, I think they added more education classes, assuming that some women students would want to become teachers. I vividly remember being sent tests that summer, I still have them up in the attic, aptitude tests, and because there were women coming in, they sent us both sets of tests, and they were graded and sent back to you. They were one of those fill in the dots with black log tests. On the men's test, I came out very high in mathematics, and on the women's test, I came out very high in arithmetic, which they called "numbers." The tests, if you look back at them, were very gender unsensitive, or they were gender conforming for the time. The women's test was softer and more oriented towards traditional professions, and the men's tests were a little tougher.

KR: How was it that you became involved in *The Targum*? Did you just go into the office?

MC: [Yes].

KR: Tell me about that first time. Did you immediately read *The Targum* when you got to Rutgers and think that that was something you wanted to do?

MC: Oh, yes, I was thrilled that there was a daily paper. The fact that the journalism curriculum, the traditional journalism curriculum, was being replaced by these mass communication, more Marshall McLuhan-ish classes influenced my thinking that it would be better to get practical experience. It was a daily paper, so it was practical experience. I don't remember the very first time I walked in there; I couldn't tell you. I mean, I walked in there a million times. There were typewriters. There was this certain yellow copy paper that you typed on. There was a dark room when I first went there, and pictures would be developed. There was a central space with some little offices around it that the editors had, some windowed offices. There was a production office that did layout. There was a teletype--well, an AP [Associated Press] machine--that dinged and sent out reams of paper when a national story came through. I think that had somewhat disappeared by the time I graduated, but I'm not positive. I think it might have still been there. It was an AP machine.

I just jumped in, and I was given assignments right away. The first story I wrote, I think it was the first, had to do with the debate over slide rules at the Engineering School. Should these be replaced with electronic calculators? Electronic calculators were fairly rare and expensive at the time, whereas any geeky guy who was already in engineering had a slide rule. [laughter] He had

already paid for it, probably had it in high school. That was a debate on campus at the time, and I wrote about it.

KR: Your freshman year, were there any other women on *The Targum*?

MC: Yes, a few. The main person I remember was somebody from Douglass though. She worked on *The Caellian*, the Douglass newspaper, but I believe that was a weekly. She wanted more practical experience, so she came over. I remember more women the following year, because a few of them became friends of mine. No, there weren't a lot of women on *Targum* the first year.

KR: What were some other topics that you were covering for *The Targum*?

MC: I just went wherever they [said]. You would be assigned a story. I'd have to look back; I still do have a few issues. I wrote about the experience, you know, I'd interview women. I think I did the story on "Coed: where are we now?" but that may have been a few years later. I developed more of an arts beat and culture, becoming the theater editor. I would attend lectures by key people who were at any campus and cover them. I remember covering Midge Decter. She was an anti-feminist, and she spoke at Douglass and was really a right-wing nasty, throwback kind of person, negative about gay rights and so on. That was interesting. [Marian Calabro's Postscript: Others I interviewed in person included Gloria Steinem, Lenore Romney, Susan Brownmiller, Dick Gregory, Ingrid Bengis and Flo Kennedy.]

Oh, that just triggered something I had almost forgotten. One of my very first assignments was the guys said to me, "We want you to go in and interview somebody in room, whatever, in the Student Center." So, it was right down the hall. I said, "Well, what do you want me to do?" "Just go in there and talk to them and do a general interview about them." I walked down the hall and it was--excuse me. [phone rings] I'm sorry, let me just silence this here.

KR: Sure, yes, no problem.

MC: I walked down the hall, and I don't have the name right, but it was basically the gay students league.

KR: It was the Student Homophile League.

MC: Yes, it had a particular name that I don't remember. Gay rights were just [beginning], and now, remember, this has been an all-male school, so it was basically a masculine and gay organization. I guess they thought they were playing a prank on me to send me there. I'd been in summer stock for several years. I knew gay men. It wasn't any big deal to me. I chatted with them. I went back. I said, "What do you want me to write about? There's a gay student league. What's the big deal?" But I guess it was a big deal at the time. It was not--excuse me again. [Editor's Note: The Student Homophile League was founded in the fall of 1969 at Rutgers-New Brunswick. Now known as the Queer Student Alliance, it is the second oldest LGBTQIA+ organization on a college campus in the United States.]

KR: Sure, no problem. I will pause.

[RECORDING PAUSED]

KR: Yes, so the group was called the Rutgers Student Homophile League, also known as the League.

MC: It was called the League, yes, okay. Well, you know, it didn't faze me, but I got the picture that they were trying to--it was a soft kind of hazing, if you will, by sending me down there. It didn't faze me. I don't remember if I wrote about it or what I wrote about it, but it wasn't a big deal.

KR: *The Targum*, at that point, was based in the Student Center.

MC: Yes.

KR: You mentioned that you called President Bloustein on a Sunday. Can you tell me about talking to the president?

MC: I don't remember much about it. I don't even remember what I was asking him to comment on, just that I was surprised that I was asked to do this. I didn't really cover much of University politics. I think I was sent to cover some kind of monthly meeting. I don't know what it was called; I don't know if it was the Board of Governors or something. It was a real pro forma kind of meeting, and it was a snooze for the most part. It would be like covering a municipal council meeting that cub reporters have to do, but I'm sorry I don't remember the details. [Marian Calabro's Postscript: "Bloustein scores state budget for high ed" was probably that story in the *Targum*.]

KR: Give me a sense of your daily routine at Rutgers. As a student taking classes and then you would be in *The Targum* office and writing for *The Targum*, give me a sense of that daily life.

MC: I never took eight o'clock or nine o'clock classes, because I tend to be a night bird and I would sleep a little later. I'd go to get breakfast at the Commons and go to whatever classes I had. I'd go to *The Targum* office in between. If I had an assignment, I'd work on it, either making calls, or I don't think there was a whole lot of research involved. It was usually making a call or two. I'd do my writing in the office, my newspaper writing. I remember I would struggle with ledes, and the older members of the staff, some of whom were very kind--there were just really a few guys who I think couldn't handle it or me--a few of them, they just said, "Marian, just bat it out. Don't worry about it. Go back and fix it if you want." But, remember, we didn't have computers, so you were typing on these old typewriters. I learned to write faster and to get into a story faster. I didn't take evening classes.

I'd ride the campus bus if I took a class at Douglass, which I did increasingly as my career went on because I took more theater classes and they were all out there. I always went for three meals a day. After I had a boyfriend, Robert Kaplow--I called him Bob--we'd usually have dinner together, and then we did a lot at the Student Center. We saw a lot of movies, went to every

movie that came, and walk around campus and talk. Talk, talk, talk. We'd go to Patti's, which was a pizza place behind that street [College Avenue] and sit there late at night, and then my roommate and her boyfriend, who was her big brother, would go, or other sets of friends would go.

I'd visit friends in other dorms. There were a couple of high school friends, like Angela [Scalpello], who was in a different dorm, and hang out in their rooms, or they'd come out and hang out in mine. If it was warm, we'd hang out in the Quad. It was an innocent daily existence, I guess. It was what I came to college for. I talked a lot. I mean, we talked about music or the meaning of life or whatever and saw foreign movies and hung out late at night, and it was fun.

What I do remember is on a Thursday night, the campus would start to empty out. A lot of people went home for the weekends, starting on Friday, and I didn't do that. I only went home, I don't know, maybe every six or eight weeks. I just didn't. I wanted to be on my own, and this was a time you didn't--I didn't have a phone in my room--I didn't talk to my parents that much. You just didn't. It's totally different today. The weekends were kind of lonely.

I would go to downtown New Brunswick, which was quite decrepit at that time. There was a store called P.J. [Young's]. It was a department store on its last legs and it closed while I was in school, probably when I was a freshman or a sophomore. I tried the New Brunswick Public Library and didn't find it very conducive, so I would use the Rutgers library. What is now the State Theatre was a falling-apart, decrepit vaudeville house that had fallen on pornography movies at that point. I wouldn't go there. But I would go downtown, where a lot of people wouldn't, again, because I was used to going to Newark, because I was used to going to New York City.

There was a different vibe on the weekends. It wasn't too lively. I would do a lot of homework, write a lot of papers. I kept a journal, particularly when I was a freshman, that was extremely detailed. I still have it in my attic. I reread it every ten years or so. I could always write. I told the stories, and it chronicled, unfortunately, the downfall of my romance with Robert Kaplow that year, which was a real heartbreaker. Unfortunately, I think it colored the college experience going forward for the both of us, or at least for me, and it was the first time I had really experienced that kind of personal rejection for what seemed to be no good reason.

Fast forward, Bob Kaplow became an English teacher and a novelist. I published books as well. I think we were reading each other's books. He always put his friends in his books, I could tell, and then he wrote a book in the early 2000s with a character who was kind of based on, not all about me, but there was a female character who had been based on my personality. The book was *Me and Orson Welles*, which became a movie by Richard Linklater. At the time, I had a business history client who was very wise, and I did long oral history interviews with him and his brother and his parents. It was a family-owned business. He had said to me--similarly to what we're doing; I'd give them the transcripts, or I'd write the manuscript using quotes from the transcripts, and they softened a lot of their quotes having to do not so much with the family, because they liked each other, but with their competitors. I was a little surprised. This was one of the earlier books I wrote, corporate history books, and I said, "Really? You seemed so vehement against x-company at the time." He said, "I was." But he said, "Marian, when you get

to my age, you let the range wars go." When I read that book by my old boyfriend, I said, "Let the range wars go." I wrote him a brief letter, and I sent it to his high school where he taught. That was in 2004. He wrote back immediately, and since then, we've been email pen pals and friends through email. I call it an English major-ish correspondence. We write a lot about writing and editing and articles and books we read.

I'm glad that we reclaimed it. I'm actually going to probably see him in April, and I haven't seen him since college, because all this time that we've been corresponding, we haven't gotten together personally. But he knows my husband died. He never married, but he has a partner, who is, I think, a blonde and prettier version of me. [laughter] If you put our résumés together, they almost overlap a hundred percent, not quite a hundred, but very close. She wrote me a beautiful letter after my husband died. It was so touching to me and something she said was something nobody else had said. She has a lot of emotional intelligence, which is great for him, he needed it. I may go down and visit with both of them, which will be a big thing for me, especially in the wake of my husband's death. I'm trying to get back in touch with people, and then the pandemic came and you were cut off from people that way.

Anyhow, to loop it back to Rutgers, it was one of the life lessons I learned, and I suppose if I haven't learned it there, I would have learned it at another college. It didn't specifically have to do with Rutgers, but it was kind of lonely there on the weekends. He was one of the people who went home every weekend. He did not stay. I see we're after 12:10, and I've just talked too much, no doubt. [laughter]

KR: No, you have not talked too much. This has been great. We have been going two hours. How does it sound if we stop for today and then we will meet for a second interview? We will finish your Rutgers experiences and then go into your career and other things that you have done in your life.

MC: Sure.

KR: Okay, that sounds great. I will thank you on the record and then I will stop the recording and we can talk off the record and schedule.

MC: Okay.

KR: Marian, thank you so much for doing this oral history interview. We will continue in the future with a second session.

MC: Oh, you're welcome. My pleasure.

-----END OF TRANSCRIPT-----

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