

INTERVIEW – MARCIA BECKERMAN (with Peter Beckerman, her son)

1/22/10

KK: Today is Friday January 22, 2010, and this Kimi Kossler interviewing Marcia Beckerman at her home in Waterville, Maine. So, first off can you tell me any stories about your family coming to Maine from the old country?

MB: We originally lived in Massachusetts. I was born in Boston and my mother was born there. My father was an immigrant from Russia. They met in Boston and married. We lived in Newtonville. I don't know if you're familiar with Boston.

KK: Only a little bit.

MB: My father had a lot of relatives up here in Maine, particularly Waterville. And he wanted them to meet my mother. So they came up here and she fell in love with Maine, particularly with Waterville where his relatives were and everything. They accepted her. So they lived a normal life. They had a house and my father had a little store. Then I was born and the family started to get bigger and bigger, three boys and three girls. Things went on for a long time. And he did a little traveling once in a while, everything. But...

PB: You moved here when you were about nine?

MB: Yup. When we came to Waterville I just came nine years old. I hated Waterville, the transition. I mean *hated* it. To leave all of my friends, even my teachers cried. (Laughs) But anyhow I went to school and years gone by graduated from high school. My father had a sister who lived in California so I made trips occasionally to California. Things just went on. [4:03]

PB: You worked in California. You eventually got a job.

MB: I had a job, yes, but I got funny feeling that I should be home. I had brothers who were growing up and I was missing a lot of that.

PB: You took some college courses in California.

MB: Yes. Yes I did.

PB: What was that college?

MB: Woodbury.

KK: I'd like to go back to something that you said. You said that your father wanted his family to meet your mother. How did they first meet even before that?

MB: All of the sudden I can't remember that.

PB: How they met in Boston?

MB: Yes, in Boston. He worked in Boston.

KK: Oh, okay.

MB: She lived in Cambridge, part of Boston really. And they married and had six children.

PB: You're the oldest.

MB: I'm the oldest.

PB: And the three boys became well known for what?

MB: They were athletes, very athletic. [5:52]

PB: What kind...

MB: And bright too. They weren't dummies.

PB: Where'd they go to school?

MB: Prep school. They graduated from Waterville High. Oren went to a school, a prep school.

Teddy. Burt didn't, no...

PB: Where'd they go to college?

MB: But he made the first touchdown.

PB: Who did?

MB: Burt did...

PB: Teddy did.

MB: On the new campus.

PB: Teddy did.

MB: No.

PB: Where'd they go to college?

MB: Colby.

PB: And Teddy was an All-American for Colby.

MB: Yup.

PB: He's the youngest of the whole family. And Burt was little All-American football for Colby.

Teddy was basketball and all the others. Teddy's number's retired up there, number ten. He graduated in '51.

MB: Yup.

PB: And Oren was five letterman at Colby, so a lot of Colby connections. [7:17]

MB: And Burt made the first touchdown at the new campus. They were very well known for what they could do. (Laughs)

KK: I know you said that you hated moving to Waterville when you were nine, but can you tell me anything else about growing up in Waterville after you got over hating Waterville?

MB: Well, I had relatives here and one or two became very friendly with me. My mother became active with Women's Club and other things that she did.

PB: Who was your best friend? Who was your best friend?

MB: Bibby Alford. (Laughs)

PB: What was her name before it was Alford?

MB: Levine.

PB: She was a cousin of yours.

MB: Yup, her father was cousin of my father. Yes, Bibby, I'll never forget that when we moved to Waterville, I met her and she said, "My mommy told me not to play with you 'cause you go to church." (Laughs) I didn't go to church after that.

PB: Well, 'cause in Newton...

MB: We didn't have a synagogue.

PB: Well, you did. I'm sure you must have, but... you were friends with the Italian kids and you'd go to church with them sometimes. When you came up here they didn't like that. [10:15]

MB: So anyhow I didn't go to church.

PB: What was her father's name?

MB: Bibby's? William.

PB: That's Levine store.

MB: Yes.

PB: And he was one of the big founders of the synagogue in Waterville.

MB: They were very wealthy people but very good people, very nice. Oh and they had the camp out at the lake. And through them other relatives and it became a big family actually, a lot from Massachusetts, quite a few... New York.

PB: You grew up near Bibby. What part of Waterville was that?

MB: North End.

PB: What street did you live on?

MB: Maple.

KK: You mentioned that your mother was involved in women's organizations. Do you have any other memories that you can tell me about your mother?

MB: Other what?

KK: Memories of your mother.

MB: She was a wonderful, wonderful mother and woman. She had never been in Maine, but when she moved up here with my father, see coming from Boston she was a Bostonian and I was born there in Boston. Well, she fell in love with Waterville and all the relatives and before we knew it we had a house. And she had something like a small house, attached, not attached to the house but next to it. Chickens, she wanted to be one of those people who had chickens. (Laughs) They laid eggs and everything. And then she had a big garden in the back of the house. So we had everything and it was good. [13:33]

PB: She was a wonderful cook.

MB: Oh she became a wonderful cook, wonderful, yes.

PB: What happened from the store? What eventually business did the family get into, the Shiro's? What business they'd get into after their little store?

MB: I don't know.

PB: Restaurant.

MB: Oh, yes. Oh gosh, yes. We owned, we my parents had a store built it became very well known not just in Waterville, all over.

PB: The restaurant.

MB: Restaurant.

PB: What was the name of it?

MB: Jefferson. My mother gave my father a middle name, Jefferson. (Laughs) And it became really, well, the best place.

PB: It was...

MB: People from all over came. The food was excellent.

PB: Became the largest restaurant in the state of Maine.

MB: Yes.

PB: Here in Waterville.

MB: Yes.

PB: Eventually your oldest brother, Oren, took it over with your mother.

KK: Were you ever involved with the Jefferson? Did you help out there or anything? [15:21]

PB: On weekends.

MB: Yes...well

PB: Saturday nights.

MB: Not much.

PB: Saturday night, you helped out every Saturday night.

MB: Yes. But I wanted to get away from Waterville, so when I graduated from high school I left and went to New York. I worked in New York for quite a while, yup.

PB: What did you do?

MB: One of the big companies that I worked for had to do with motion pictures. So I had a good job and worked there six or eight years, I can't remember.

PB: Distributing films around to the armed forces and around the country.

MB: Yup, then I was offered something bigger in a... where was I?

PB: Chicago.

MB: Chicago. I ran the business.

KK: A film business?

MB: Distribution of motion pictures. I was there for quite a long time. [17:31]

PB: That's where you met my father?

MB: Yes.

PB: Doctor Stanley Beckerman.

MB: Yes, yes. I worked pretty hard, but I had people working for me too, distribution of movies in hospitals all over the country and places where the men could recuperate from suffering and everything. The government started to watch me and what I was doing. When I finally stopped they sent me a...

PB: An award.

MB: Yes, yes because every serviceman, well they got to know me all the people that I worked for. Then I met a man and married him and had...

PB: Moved back to Waterville.

MB: Yes.

KK: Why did you move back to Waterville from Chicago?

MB: What did I?

KK: Why did you move back to Waterville?

MB: Because of my family when I got married.

PB: And there was a need for doctors.

MB: Yes, at Thayer Hospital, yes. So I've been here ever since.

KK: I saw in your questionnaire that you've been very involved in the community in all different types of organizations. What roles did you play in those organizations? [20:52]

MB: What?

KK: So I know you said you were involved with Thayer hospital...I think you said...

MB: I wasn't involved with the hospital.

PB: Well, you helped out with the Women's Auxiliary. You and Bibby volunteered.

MB: Yes, that's right, I forgot it. Bibby was my cousin and we were very close.

PB: You were in the Waterville Women's Club.

MB: Yes.

PB: What department were you in? What was your committee? Education committee?

MB: Actually it was.

PB: For years.

MB: Yes.

KK: What did you do on the education committee?

MB: My education?

KK: No, what did you do on the education committee?

PB: She has a hearing aid you have to speak up a little bit. (Says this to me.) Education committee. Did you work with the library, Waterville Public Library?

MB: No, no I didn't.

PB: I just remember as a kid and this is Peter Beckerman by the way, and I'm age 61. I was born in '48 in Waterville. I think you just moved here then. You had meetings with the education committee, but you don't remember now what exactly you did. You raised money, didn't you for...

MB: Yes we did raise money for young men who wanted to continue school.

PB: And women too.

MB: Yes, but mostly men it turned out to be.

PB: Well, things have shifted now I can tell you. You also helped out at the synagogue.

MB: I did?

PB: Well, there's some clippings. You helped out with different social events, dances, and bridge parties. You helped out at the synagogue too, in the early Sixties.

MB: Well my group of friends in large did everything. We learned how to play bridge and different things.

PB: You still play bridge...

MB: Yes.

PB: At the Muskie Center once a week. Duplicate bridge.

MB: Yes. (Laughs)

PB: Even at age 94 she gets in the top four. Now and then she's in the newspaper, even at this age.

KK: Wow, that's impressive.

PB: She's a very good bridge player, or was.

KK: Do you have any stories about raising your own children?

PB: We started...

MB: Well you've met my son. [24:44]

PB: We started skiing at a very early age when Sugarloaf was a baby. Sugarloaf had one or two trails, remember that? That was in the early Sixties. No it was actually probably late Fifties.

Remember we went skiing?

MB: Yes. He's a great skier.

PB: Well, not anymore. You hurt your knee skiing.

MB: Yes. (Laughs) I wasn't the greatest skier. He grew up and he married a skier, happily.

PB: Linda and I went through the Waterville school system.

MB: I had a wonderful daughter.

PB: They were very close and bridge partners. My sister contracted leukemia and didn't make it. In 2006 she died. Two years of fighting it. My mother is still of course...

MB: They're both college graduates.

PB: Well we didn't go to Colby.

MB: No.

PB: Where did Linda go?

MB: University of Maine.

PB: Where did I go?

MB: You went to Massachusetts.

PB: What school?

MB: Boston.

PB: Boston University. We lived right near the Colby campus so I wanted a change.

MB: Yup. (Laughs) I took courses at Colby, yes.

PB: You audited courses with Bibby.

MB: I learned a lot.

PB: Bibby distracted you?

MB: Well she decided that, she did everything I did and I did everything she did. I just wanted to continue, you know, so she decided she would continue with me. And we'd sit there and she'd write notes. Want to play?

PB: Want to play bridge? Those were her notes. Yes, yes, yes.

MB: We'd do this and that, oh boy. There were men behind us, students. They knew what she was doing.

PB: What she wasn't doing, yes.

MB: She wasn't a student, but she was a wonderful, wonderful girl. I wasn't a student either. I wasn't the best in the class, but I was...

PB: Better than Bibby.

MB: Yes and a few others. [28:53]

KK: Did you ever date anybody when you were younger in Waterville?

MB: I can't remember. I think there were a couple of boys that I saw.

PB: On Snow Pond there was a boys camp, Cedar Crest it was a boys camp then. You and your two sisters, did you date counselors from Cedar Crest? Anna did.

MB: Yes. Anna, my sister, was a beautiful girl and there was a boys summer camp near ours, and they'd come down in their canoes and everything. And one time she was sitting, and I think it was 6 or 7 anyhow...

PB: She met Gene PRice.

MB: Yes. He came down in a canoe and they got married.

PB: Eventually.

MB: Yes.

PB: And he was a concert pianist from Los Angeles or San Diego, La Jolla.

MB: San Diego.

PB: And that's where they raised their children.

MB: Yes.

PB: He was also an engineer.

MB: Yes.

KK: Was this boys camp a Jewish camp?

MB: Yes.

PB: Cedar Crest was Jewish?

MB: Yup.

PB: Really? I never knew that. I'm not sure about that.

MB: Well, no I'm wrong about that. A lot of Jewish people, but it wasn't a Jewish camp, no, no. But there were other camps, big camps too. It was very lively many years ago. [32:02]

PB: You had the Levine camp. Bibby had her camp. And then the Shiros, just a quarter of a mile down the lake, you had your camp. You all grew up on the lake in the summer and had a great, great time.

MB: My father had gone to California.

PB: Your father, yes.

MB: To visit his sister and while he was away she had a camp built for us.

PB: Your mother, really? (Laughs)

MB: Yes, yes.

PB: Your generation grew up there and my generation grew up there in the summer.

MB: Yes. What else? (Talking to her son.)

PB: When you grew up in Waterville besides Jews there were French. You had a lot of French friends didn't you with French backgrounds and Lebanese.

MB: Yes a few Lebanese.

PB: You were all very close. Sports and everything. Your brothers played with, there were Jews, Lebanese, French all got a long and all had great, great sports teams.

MB: Yes.

KK: I know you said that when you lived in Massachusetts that you went to church, but when you came to Waterville did you end up going to the synagogue? [33:51]

MB: We didn't as far back as I can remember we never had a synagogue in Massachusetts. There were plenty I'm sure it's just where we lived there was no synagogue, so I went to church. We moved to Waterville and my cousin, Bibby, who I met said that she couldn't play with me because I went to church.

KK: Did you start going to the synagogue then?

MB: So...

PB: Did you hear the question? Did you start going to the synagogue then?

MB: We never went to a synagogue in Massachusetts, so I didn't know much about religion like that.

PB: Well your family wasn't very religious anyway.

MB: No.

PB: And your mother loved the nuns, right? Grammy loved the nuns.

MB: Oh, yes.

PB: In Waterville.

MB: Yes, when they needed money or anything she would help, but she would do that for anybody. But the nuns loved her. (Laughs) See, in Boston her friends mostly were Italian, from other countries too, so she was used to that.

KK: So how did you get involved with these other community organizations in Waterville, like the Women's Waterville Club and the Thayer Auxiliary, I think it said.

PB: Well your husband...my parents were divorced in 1963 or something like that. Your husband was a doctor, my father was a doctor, so you got involved with other doctor's wives, didn't you?

MB: Yes, yes and other groups.

PB: Including bridge.

MB: Yes. I think there's still a women's group. They meet every week.

PB: Waterville Women's Club, something like that, probably still is. [37:22]

MB: But I married and I had two children, two wonderful children. Number one. (Points to Peter)

PB: I'm the oldest that's the only thing that makes me number one.

MB: I lost my daughter.

PB: We know, Kimi knows. We think they moved to Waterville in 1926, that's our estimate. My mother was born in 1915.

MB: I worked in New York first for quite a while and I went to Chicago, distribution of movies. There was a war.

PB: What about the... Your brothers were in the war too, your two oldest brothers.

MB: I saw to it that whoever was in the force, men, everything, had movies to see. I had to be careful about that, very careful. Certain ones, wherever in the country where they needed things to help them along, men in hospitals, I saw to it that they had movies. Careful of what I showed, but it helped them. They loved it. The government liked what I was doing so...

KK: Do you remember what the award was called that the government gave you?

MB: I got a letter. I got a couple of things.

PB: One was for bonds. You had something to do with war bonds. Let me see if I can find it.

MB: Yes, about that too, but it was mostly my sending movies to hospitals and different places where men were getting used to living again.

KK: How did you get involved in the film distribution?

MB: My first job in New York was a place, distribution of movies, yup. And I learned all about movies and shipping and all that. [41:59]

KK: How did you come to run the distribution center in Chicago?

MB: My parents were here. See, way back we moved to Waterville. My father's relatives were all here so they came and she fell in love with all of them, they loved her, and stayed. My father and she developed a restaurant that became famous, the Jefferson.

PB: My daughter put together several albums, but this one she calls Marvelous Marcia. And there's some pictures down at the lake, maybe in California with her friends when she was working out there. But she had, besides her aunt, she had two cousins, two boys who were linked to Hollywood. He was a trainer. He helped the stars get in shape. The other one ended up working dubbing in background music for TV series and some movies.

KK: So what did you do in Los Angeles?

MB: Well I had relatives there, my father's sister and her family. And they were connected with the studios. I didn't do very much there.

PB: You went to college. You took some college courses.

MB: Yes.

PB: And then moved back, later went to New York. I don't think she was in Los Angeles for too long.

MB: I was there for two or three years, I think, and then all of a sudden it dawned on me that I've got sisters and brothers. I wanted to see them and I came back here. I wanted to see them before I would never recognize them or anything. And eventually I met someone and got married.

KK: Well thank you for your time. I really enjoyed hearing all of your stories. That's all the questions I have for you right now. [45:56]