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Mary

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11/19/2012

M's Interview

St Catherine University

M

11/19/2012

L - M, how old are you?

M - I'm 19.

L - You're 19. Where were you born?

M - Here; in St Paul.

L - Can you describe for me what your household was like as you were growing up? Who was in your family? Where you lived?

M - Well we moved quite a bit on the East side of St. Paul. For a while we lived in Eagan and we moved to Maplewood but it was always a little messy because my family always seemed like it was split between two...It was my dad's side and my mom's side and then there was a messy divorce.

L - How old were you when they got divorced?

M - I'm not really good with my age, I always remember my childhood by level. I was in fifth grade and it was finalized in like sixth grade.

L - So 10 or 11. Did you have brothers or sisters?

M - I had one older brother who was living with us and then another older brother who basically wasn't in contact with me, my sister who is younger and, my youngest brother lived with my grandma because he's autistic.

L - Oh, ok. So as you were growing up you went back and forth between your mom and your dad's houses or were you mostly with one?

M - For a while it was them together and them fighting and then when the divorce happened, they kept calling the police on each other...one of them getting custody and the other taken away and then it would switch...

L - Pretty hard.

M - Yeah.

L - They were divorced somewhere in sixth grade. What happens then? Does it just kind of continue on?

M - Not really. My dad gets custody and I'm pretty much living with him...for a while yeah...but there were some complications with that as well. For a while we lost the house so my dad went to live with his grandma and my sister and I would go live with her as well.

L - So housing insecurity was something you faced...

M - While I was younger as well.

L - While you were younger too. There was some moving around. In terms of living with your dad...so then you went to live with your grandmother and your dad and your younger brother and sister?

M - Younger sister, yeah.

L - This was...where did your grandmother live?

M - In Maplewood.

L - In Maplewood, ok. I want to ask you a quick question about school. How did you like school as a kid? Was this...

M - I loved school. I don't know, I guess I liked being away from the house. I always wanted to go to school. I loved learning.

L - And it was stable.

M - Definitely.

L - Ok, good. And you had good teachers?

M - Yeah.

L - I bet you did well. And so this was a place that was just more in your control. Looking at...What would you say was your first experience with housing insecurity would be when you were little and your folks were together still?

M - I don't know how to describe the first, because, even before when I was a toddler, I found out...I don't really remember too much but I remember being put in a foster care or just taken away from my parents basically because they had an argument. That was before kindergarden, before school.

L - So really little. Was there domestic violence?

M - From what I hear. I was too little to remember.

L - What do you remember of the foster care?

M - Not too much. I remember the lady head of it, she was pretty mean, that was most of what I remember. She would try to force my sister to eat food that she didn't like and she would hit some of the kids, like spanking. I remember one night she made a kid keep their diaper on...I don't know, it was something like that.

L - Humiliating. That sounds hard. But you were with your sister in foster care [and] eventually you got back with your parents. That sounds like that would count as housing insecurity. Did you return to the system again as you were growing up?

M - No I didn't.

L - When you lived with your dad in Maplewood, was he working?

M - He was working but he was sort of in-between jobs. He was working at Pizza Hut, that's not the greatest paying job.

L - Right, the income. It just takes more to live and certainly [to] support a family on what you can earn at Pizza Hut. So in high school, did you stay in Maplewood?

M - No. Actually in high school or the end of middle school, my dad was able to afford a place in Battle Creek, so we moved into an apartment. It wasn't the greatest but it was an apartment.

L - It was your own place and that was with your sister and dad? And was that in Maplewood too?

M - No it's St. Paul but close by Maplewood.

L - And did you have to change schools?

M - No.

L - Ok, that's just nice to have some continuity. As you're dealing with housing issues as a kid, did you feel like you were able to access any sort of resources that helped you out?

M - Well when I was really young – no, because I didn't really know what was going on. In middle school I had an instance as well where my dad wasn't getting along with my grandma so he wanted us to basically live in the car for a while. But I don't know, even then I didn't know where to go or anything.

L - Right, you're a kid. So you just went along and did your best. Who could you rely on?

M - What do you mean?

L - When you found yourself feeling overwhelmed with the instability, was there someone or someplace that you felt like you could go to and just be yourself and be safe?

M - I guess school.

L - I'm sorry if this is hard.

Luci - Did you have a best friend during that time?

M - I was getting to know new people. In middle school I started making some best friends and they were going through some issues and I was going through some issues so...

L - You could only do so much for each other. What about your sister? Are you close to her?

M - I'm really close to my sister but at the same time we fight a lot.

L - Did your family have enough to eat?

M - Yes.

L - You stayed in St. Paul with your dad when you graduated high school and then came to St. Kate's?

M - In junior year basically my dad kicked me out because I came home late and he was...He gets very mad and tends to find...I don't know how to describe it. I wouldn't call it punish

but...discipline – he would discipline me and my sister strangely I would say. Like if I came home late, he would take away my volunteering instead of saying that I...

L - Can't watch TV or something...

M - Yeah...

Luci - Where did you volunteer?

M - I volunteered at the Children's Museum. It was a lot of fun.

L - Oh yeah. I remember when my kids were little going and there would be so many nice older kids who were helpful. I think they definitely depend on a lot of volunteers just because it takes a lot of eyes to keep track of what is going on there. That sounds really neat. So you're a junior in high school, your dad...

M - He kicked me out.

L - Kicks you out...where did you go?

M - I ended up going with my boyfriend at the time and I stayed there for two weeks before my dad came to my school, saying I ran away.

L - So, did you just keep going to school but you stayed with your boyfriend? And was he living with his family?

M - Yeah, he was.

L - And they were understanding?

M - Yeah.

L - When your dad notified the school, then what happened?

M - Well I couldn't go straight home right away so I ended up living with my uncle, just until things cooled down a little.

L - But you were able to patch things up enough to go back and finish high school at that point?

M - Yeah.

L - When you think about your experiences with housing insecurity, can you speculate whether gender, being female, has shaped your experiences?

M - I've never really thought about that. I think that age was a part of it. I always thought if I was able to work more...

L - So were you working? When did you start working?

M - I didn't start working until after high school.

L - But it sounds like you felt kind of responsible in trying to take care of things [by] yourself.

Do you think your ethnicity had an impact on things? I'm guessing you're multiracial but...

M - Yeah. I don't think my ethnicity had an impact on things but I know I've had problems recently when I was in between places. Even while I was in college with people looking at me funny. Or as it got colder, I started wearing my winter coat sooner and I wore sweatpants to keep myself warm and people would think that I'm homeless or that I'm not doing anything productive.

L - Do you want to take a break?

M - Sure.

L - Can you take me through the timeline that tells me when...

M - I already talked about when I was younger like a toddler I didn't remember too much about it and then the second time would be during the divorce going between each parent and losing the house and...

L - Was that a foreclosure do you know?

M - I believe so.

L - A lot of people. That's typically the way they've lost theirs...So you were in middle school at that point.

M - No I was just finishing up...

L - You were finishing grade school.

M - And then another instance in middle school where my dad wasn't getting along with my grandma.

L - And you stayed with your dad?

M - Yeah and he wanted us to basically live in the car for a few days.

L - That's what he could offer you. What time of the year was that?

M - A lot of this seemed to happen during the winter or November; the fall.

L - So the weather is really a factor because we live in Minnesota. When you were in the car were you warm enough?

M - Yeah. It was just more complaining, me and my sister being young.

L - And there's not a lot of room so you're in each other's business. I know you said school was really important. Were you able to keep up with your school?

M - I was a really good student.

L - That was great.

M - Studying comes naturally for me.

L - That doesn't surprise me. So that was something that you could do and do well and that felt good. After that experience...?

M - We moved into an apartment in Battle Creek and it was stable and my dad got remarried and we moved to Maplewood, which it was a problem getting to high school.

L - Cause you were still going to the same school but...

M - Because we lived in a different city so we had to get driven to the school bus stop.

L - So it was a little more hassle for everyone. How did you like your dad's new wife?

M - She was ok at first but she definitely changed him and that led to other problems which I'll get to. Later in high school, like junior year, I said I got kicked out, I lived with my boyfriend for two weeks then I ended up going to my uncle and going back to my dad for a little while and this was when I was 17 so I was going to be turning 18 pretty soon anyway. As soon as I turned 18, I was already deciding and figured out that I would just go live with my boyfriend.

L - And sort of start your adult life.

M - So that's what I ended up doing.

L - It's the same boyfriend from before or a different one?

M - Same one.

L - That's nice. So is that the way it worked?

M - Yeah it worked out that way and then my sister ended up getting kicked out of the house because of the messy relationship with our stepmom, and she decided that she wanted to come live with me and my boyfriend. That was ok for a while but it ended up very messy because she wanted to get an apartment, so we all moved into an apartment together but it just didn't work

out so from there more housing insecurities...this is me going to college or starting to go to college, getting everything settled and I ended up living with my uncle again for a few months and then me and my sister just got an apartment that is close to campus and it's really nice so far and it's going good.

L - And just not with the boyfriend, just the sister. So how did you find your way to St. Kate's? If you're ready to get to that part.

M - I wanted to go to Parson's in New York.

L - School of design, yeah.

M - But I couldn't get the application in on time because I was in between places, I didn't have my portfolio and I couldn't submit...

L - Right, you didn't have all those materials.

M - So I ended up applying to the U and St. Kate's and Stout and Scad which is down in Georgia. I wanted...honestly I wanted to go to the U, St. Kate's was my fifth choice but it ended up that St. Kate's gave me the best financial aid, so I decided to go here. It had my major so that was the thing that I was looking for most and I'd make work.

L - So how's it working?

M - It's working really nice. I love the campus. I love being here. Just because I'm a commuter it's kind of hard to be on campus all the time and make new friends but now that I got a new apartment over close by here I could be more involved.

L - You can right, it's just easier to come back in the evening or do some of the fun stuff. Are you a first year or second?

M - First year.

L - So this is all...A lot of adjustment. So at this point, you're looking at 3 and a half more years but you feel like this is a place where you can get the education? When you think about your classmates, you think about your professors, the staff, do you think folks here are aware [of] or sensitive to issues of poverty and homelessness?

M - I wouldn't say they're aware of it per se, but I guess I'm not too sure. I notice a lot of times like in TRW when we're discussing...when we discuss issues like this, and read the articles, the students...some of them are strong opinionated and it was hard to hear what they had to say.

L - Can you give me an example?

M - One was about financial aid and how the...I forgot exactly the story but basically a girl was trying to get into St. Kate's but they didn't get enough financial aid and she tried to get more

financial aid, but they didn't provide it to her. Some of the students were saying "well it's not the school's job to provide her financial aid" and I was in a situation where I needed more financial aid.

L - Oh, so that really hit close to home and you just sat there keeping it in?

M - Yeah.

L - I'm not judging. But to hear that and to feel like you could be talking about me that is...

M - Sometimes I try to talk but it always gets to a point where I don't want to cry, so I stop talking.

L - Do you want to stop talking now?

M - No, it's ok.

L - It sounds like you feel like issues of poverty and homelessness come up but in an academic sense, that this isn't quite real world for some people maybe. What [about] your professors, do you think they assume everyone has money?

M - I don't think that they assume, honestly, my professors were the first people I ended up talking to when I was experiencing...

L - Housing insecurity?

M - Yeah, during college, the first part of college.

L - So how did that happen?

M - It was just me moving out of the old apartment with my boyfriend so I ended up with my uncle but it was very complicated because in a short while I wanted to try and get an apartment with my sister and make that work out and my uncle said that he only wanted me there for a month which was a huge time crunch so I had to go somewhere to find what I could do.

L - And you were able to connect with people in financial aid or professors?

M - Yeah.

L - And St. Kate's was able to come through?

M - Definitely.

L - In the time, was there a time between being at your uncle's and getting a place with your sister where you sleeping on someone's couch or your boyfriend's?

M - No. It was pretty much me at my uncle's and it was...the living situation was pretty bad because it was just a small little futon and it was very cramped up with boxes.

L - And you didn't feel like you were totally welcome or at least there were limits.

M - And I didn't feel comfortable eating over there, since his place was such a mess. It was pretty bad.

L - You were there because you didn't have different choices?

M - It was a shelter.

L - What do you wish people at St. Kate's in general knew? What do you feel they are not aware of?

M - I'm not too sure how to answer that.

L - Ok, well and maybe it's not a good question. Is there something that you want to be sure to say at this time so that people who may have no idea about your story or others like you that...?

M - I just wanted to get my story out there and...

L - Yeah, so anything from your story that we're missing?

M - Not really. I want people to know that there are a lot of resources but at the same time I want people to know those resources aren't always easily accessible or quick fixes. I was also thinking about getting another job just to supplement my job that I have now and just looking for a job and applying to all these places that are hiring that won't hire me just because I'm already working.

L - Where are you working?

M - I'm working at Macy's?

L - How many hours, about?

M - They schedule me 12 hours and if I'm lucky I'm able to pick up more hours and get up to 20 hours, some weeks I could get up to 30 but it's basically 12 hours-16 hours a week.

L - It's probably a reasonable amount with your school load but you need more income.

M - Yeah if I want to support myself or try to be living because... You know, like living on my own. Even if I tried to live on campus, I would have to work to pay off the loan as well.

L - Right, one way or another you've got to come up with it. Do you mind me asking what Macy's pays?

M - It's a little above minimum wage; \$7.75.

L - Ok, not much.

M - I'm thinking if I work full time minimum wage, I would be making more money but I don't know if I could keep up with my school work.

L - If you were doing this interview, I guess with yourself, is there something you would want to ask?

M - Not really. I feel like I said a lot of what I wanted to say. I would ask, what's next, like if I had a game plan or something. Which is kind of hard because I take things one step at a time and since I'm unpacking, I'm trying not to look for a job and then do all this other stuff that eventually I want to do like better take care of myself, like better hygiene, better clothes, better whatever...other little health necessities. Start one thing at a time and eventually...

L - Put that in place and...Your sister, is she still in high school?

M - Yes.

L - Does she work?

M - She works fulltime at McDonalds. She is definitely one of the pressures of me getting another job since she's making so much money and she could spend so much money and she has a high standard of living that I don't necessarily have or necessarily need.

L - And necessarily feel like you can afford.

M - Exactly. But she's expecting me to live to her high standard of living and I can't do all of that. I don't see how she's doing it all at once because I'm not too sure her grades at school and even attending school sometimes.

L - It sounds like she's one of the people you've been closest to and really with all along the way and so it sounds like you're one of the older siblings that feels some responsibility. But your story picked this...it's fashion design and apparel and what do you see yourself doing with that?

M - Well I have several dreams to go with that. One of my dreams is to come up with a line that promotes culture and similarities between culture and how cultures can...co-exist.

L - So how does that happen in fashion?

M - Well, I personally think of, I want to mix up western style with Asian style and try to bring some of the other...like some African styles over to the U.S. where it's already so diverse hoping that they would take an interest in it instead of just, pssssh, passing it by.

L - So you see yourself designing women's clothes?

M - Yeah.

L - And eventually working for yourself?

M - I would like to work for myself. Of course it will take me a while to get there.

L - Right that there will be some steps. So after graduation would you go work for a fashion house?

M - I'm thinking about it a lot. From what I hear a lot of people who go into fashion design in Minnesota they work for Target.

L - I bet. And Target is pretty fashion forward considering they are a discount store. So that's...you even have a potential employer.

M - Yeah. As well I heard that Macy's has some internships so if I keep working there...

L - Right you're building a track record. It sounds like you do all the things that you can that are in your control to try to keep yourself moving forward.

M - Yeah I try.

L - And that is an amazing accomplishment.

M - Thank you.

L - I really appreciate hearing your story because I think it's not an easy story but you're doing good.

M - Thank you.