

Interview with Marilyn Takaro
Interviewer, Bob Potter
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Bob: Would you tell me where you were born?

Marilyn: I was born in Algona, Iowa, which is in a county called Kossuth County, that I always thought was an Indian name. It ended up being in our wedding ceremony because this was an Hungarian patriot.

Bob: Isn't that interesting. How did it end up being in your wedding ceremony? How did you use it?

Marilyn: We didn't. Tim's father was the minister. He thought it ought to come into the story somehow or other.

Bob: I'd like to start by having you tell me about your childhood because one of the things that our children don't know is what it was like to grow up in places like Kossuth County, Iowa. What was the name of the town?

Marilyn: Algona.

Bob: That's not a small town is it?

Marilyn: It was about 5,000 -- it's probably seven now maybe.

Bob: Did you grow up right in the town or on a nearby farm?

Marilyn: No, on a farm. Until I was ten we lived in the country and that was fun. I had a great time but I knew that I didn't ever want to live in the country.

Bob: You knew that very early.

Marilyn: By the time I was ten.

Bob: Were you an only child?

Marilyn: No, I had a brother who is six years older and a sister who is 12 years older.

Bob: Were you the last child?

Marilyn: I was the brat of the family. It was great to live in the country until you're ten, and then to have the advantages of living in town. It was only three miles from town, but in those days that was a fair distance. We went to school in town, which my mother saw to even though we were supposed to go to a country school. She got us enrolled in town and then dragged us home at lunchtime, which was usually our big mail of the day.

Bob: She drove you to and from school?

Marilyn: And we used to get blocked off by the train every once in awhile and have to sit and wait at the crossing to get back to school. She just was determined that we were going to have the advantages of a town school. She'd been a teacher herself briefly in a country school. Her father was a doctor who was rather careful with his funds, and he said she had to learn the value of money before she could go to college. She taught school two or three years, I forget. Then she was allowed to go to college, but in the meantime she met my dad, so she only stayed in college one year, I think.

Bob: She'd met the letter of the law. How about your father? Why were you living out in the country?

Marilyn: Well, he was a farmer. He farmed with his dad.

Bob: What happened to cause him to move . . .

Marilyn: Well, they lost the farm and then they rented it for quite a number of years, I think. Then my grandfather finally died and then they gave it up.

Bob: What did your father do after that?

Marilyn: Well, he was sort of intermittently employed. He had a bunch of different jobs. By the time I was in high school he was the janitor of the high school. Then he went to the state college of Pennsylvania where my sister lived -- that was just before I graduated from nurses training -- and he worked on the campus patrol there at Penn State. So he never really had a job that was anything that he could do after he quit farming.

Bob: How did you choose to be a nursing student?

Marilyn: It was wartime.

Bob: World War II?

Marilyn: Yes. And my neighbor went off to nursing and my brother was in service by that time, he was in the navy, and all the fellows in my high school class -- I graduated in 1944 -- and all of those fellows were not even getting a chance to go to college, and I thought, well, what was the point of going to college if there weren't going to be any men around. It didn't seem like I needed to waste the money -- my folks didn't have any money to send me and I would have had to work. I had a little saved, because that was what you were always doing in those days.

Bob: Was your mother happy with your decision to go to nurses training.

Marilyn: Oh, she didn't mind. She didn't tell me until after I had decided to do that, that she had always wanted to be a nurse, and her father, who was a country doctor, had taken her along with him on cases and stuff because most of medicine was done in the home in those days, and he'd take her along, but when she told him she wanted to be a nurse that wasn't acceptable to him. It wasn't a good enough thing for her to do, and so he said no.

Bob: For goodness sakes.

Marilyn: But anyway during the war then there was this Cadet Nurse Corps business that paid your board, room, tuition, everything. That seemed like a good thing to do. The only thing you had to agree to do was to stay in nursing until the end of the war.

Bob: How did you get from Pennsylvania, was it, to . . .

Marilyn: No, my parents didn't move to Pennsylvania until after I was finished with nursing school.

Bob: Where did you go to nursing school?

Marilyn: St. Mary's in Rochester, Minnesota.

Bob: So you were very close to the Mayo Clinic from the beginning.

Marilyn: Yes, that hospital is associated with the Mayo Clinic. The clinic itself doesn't have hospital beds. It's just an office building. There are two big hospitals in that town.

Bob: St. Mary's . . .

Marilyn: And Rochester Methodist, it is now. There used to be some other little ones that were also associated with the clinic, but all our doctors were from the clinic.

Bob: Tim says that he first noticed you because of your eyes on top of the mask in the operating room. Is that just a story?

Marilyn: That's true, we did meet that way. As a student I was told to not pay any attention to those doctors, the fellows, they were called -- that's the same as a resident -- not to pay any attention to them because they were all married. So we sort of met with the nuns. This was a Catholic hospital. We got out of the habit of paying attention. You know, we were sociable, but most of us weren't looking for anything special.

Bob: Not going to be taken in the operating room.

Marilyn: No. Then one day he was complaining about not having any money because they didn't get paid very much, and the nurse anesthetist, who was much bolder than I, said, "oh, doesn't your wife work?" and he said, "well, I'm not married." A few weeks later the surgeon was kidding me about not making much noise in the choir, you know, as we were scrubbing up or getting ready to work, and he said, "oh, aren't you Catholic?" and I said no, I'm not Catholic. After that he called me for a date.

Bob: Tim did? Not the anesthetist?

Marilyn: No, that was a nurse, a woman.

Bob: He called you for a date. You say you were not a Catholic. What was your religious orientation in the beginning?

Marilyn: Methodist. Actually we were singing in the Presbyterian choir at that time, but my roommate and I were Methodists. We had a friend who sang in the Presbyterian choir, so we did too. And so did Jess Chapman, a big Baptist fellow here in town. I guess you wouldn't know him. He's been a friend of ours since residency at the Mayo Clinic. He's a general surgeon here in Asheville.

Bob: Your religious orientation then is quite eclectic.

Marilyn: I guess so. We spent three years as missionaries for the Presbyterians.

Bob: Would you like to speak about your own orientation to life, your philosophy of living?

Marilyn: I don't have much philosophy of living.

Bob: Women always claim that, I think, unnecessarily. What is your philosophy of rearing children?

Marilyn: Thank goodness it's over.

Bob: I didn't know that it was ever over.

Marilyn: Well, it really isn't. But I consider them adults, and they're their problems. Not that we don't get involved.

Bob: You went on this recent trip with one of your children.

Marilyn: Two of them.

Bob: Which ones?

Marilyn: The two younger boys.

Bob: Mark and Tim.

Marilyn: And Tim's wife, Aggie.

Bob: Did you all gather together?

Marilyn: We met in Utah from all over the country. A good friend of Mark's is at the University of Utah in charge of the outdoor recreation program there, and he arranged it with his friend. They had two other people, one of them who is a river rat from the university, who actually works in one of the laboratories there, but he almost got a Ph.D in Egyptology, and then he decided how am I going to make a living that way, and he ended up, I think chemistry was his other main interest, and he ended up getting a degree in chemistry instead, and ended up working in this lab. Anyway, he's a river rat and knows all the rivers around there. He grew up in Idaho.

Bob: Would you say that your interest in your four children is about even with all of them? Do you still have contact with all of them?

Marilyn: Oh, yes.

Bob: Three boys and one girl, is that right?

Marilyn: Yes.

Bob: Do you feel that you were closer to the girl or not?

Marilyn: No, not necessarily. We took those two older ones, Martha was the younger of the two, to India with us, so we have a lot of interests in common. I don't know, it's interesting about kids. I consider that they all had different parents, sort of, because we were different people when we were struggling with them and I think maybe the younger one knows us best because he was around the longest, and probably we may have had more time to make our philosophies known by that time.

Bob: Tim said that your family became very close in India.

Marilyn: Yes, I think so. We made very close friends there too because we were on our own sort of.

Bob: Being the wife of a doctor, and a researching doctor, did you find that the child rearing was pretty much your job.

Marilyn: Well, I didn't put it off until he got home, I mean, put off

punishments or anything like that. I didn't threaten the kids with his presence or anything, but he did go off for extended periods of time, and it was just sort of accepted that that was his privilege. We managed fairly well.

Bob: It kept you busy, four children.

Marilyn: It didn't like it was so bad. This was a nice neighborhood where people got out and walked in the afternoon and that kind of thing.

Bob: Right here. You've lived here since when, in this house?

Marilyn: Let's see, we came back from India in '57, and we lived around the corner for a year and, I guess, we moved here in '58.

Bob: But you had lived in this neighborhood a year or so before that? At that time the cut was not cut through.

Marilyn: Yes.

Bob: Was Kenilworth very separate then, kind of a separate community from Asheville?

Marilyn: No. It was no longer that. It had been originally, but it wasn't any longer, it was just that with the hospital on this side of the tunnel, Tim wanted to live on this side of the tunnel. We looked at some houses in north Asheville, and of course that was the more fashionable neighborhood to live in, but he didn't want to go through that tunnel traffic. It used to be quite bad, and I thought that he was just being silly because that problem will be solved within a year or so, and it something like 16 years before they put the cut through. Our kids used to give us static, especially Martha, about not living on the right side of town. They wanted to live over there where their friends lived.

Bob: Where did your children go to school then?

Marilyn: Right down here at Newton School, which was right across from the hospital. They tore it down recently. And that was through the 6th grade, and then the junior high has also been torn down. It was over just beyond the tunnel there.

Bob: On Charlotte?

Marilyn: Yes. That was David Miller Junior High, which was 7, 8 and 9.

Bob: Did all of your children go to that school?

Marilyn: No. The two younger boys didn't. I think Tim went to South French Broad, which is the present middle school, for probably one year. The boys all went away in 9th grade to Northfield, Montana. Martha went in the 10th grade because she was a big wheel in the junior high, cheerleader and all that good stuff, and she didn't want to give it up, but she didn't want to miss anything either, so she got on the bandwagon a little late.

Bob: Aside from the connections through your children to the community, did you have any other connections to major organizations, like AAUW or Women's International League for Peace and Freedom?

Marilyn: No, I'm not a college graduate so I couldn't belong to AAUW. This is just a three year diploma that you got for nursing.

Bob: What about the . . .

Marilyn: I belonged to the League of Women Voters for awhile. That's about all.

Bob: Would you say that you have been a politically active person?

Marilyn: No. I handed out a few pamphlets and stuff, but not recently.

Bob: Pamphlets about what?

Marilyn: I think that was the McGovern campaign that we worked hard on. I did. Tim couldn't do that because of his government job and the Hatch Act. That may have been all. I don't remember.

Bob: Tim took Russian from Helen Reed at one time. Did you practice that too?

Marilyn: No, I'm not a linguist at all.

Bob: What did you during the time that he went to Russia in 1962.

Marilyn: Nothing, just look after four kids. I think it was only three at that time.

Bob: How long was he gone?

Marilyn: He was gone three months or so. I think that's all.

Bob: So it was not a big wrench in your life, his being out of the country for a short period like that.

Marilyn: No, it was not.

Bob: Can you tell me about your experience of India?

Marilyn: I didn't really do anything except run a household, which was complicated enough. We were fortunate, we had a cook who spoke English, and didn't understand why he was doing things as he was doing. I wrote a big paper when I was at the University. After I quit work, I took some courses over there, and I wrote a paper about him because he was quite a character. His wife, who spoke no -- well, never spoke English to me. He spoke English and that was why we had him, and his wife did not. I did not have any trouble communicating with his wife. She helped in the house too, and looked after the kids some when I wasn't there, and we'd just go to some job and I'd explain it in English and she'd ask questions in Hindi, and it didn't matter, we got along fine because we understood what the other person was trying to get at. He had a lot of trouble with that. His English was fine, it was very good, because he had worked for some British family, but he was older and just had trouble with things.

Bob: Did he misunderstand things?

Marilyn: I think so. He didn't do things his way just to be mean or anything, but he just couldn't figure out what I wanted, even though there was no language problems. Interesting. You'd ask him, for instance, if dinner was ready in the evening, or when dinner would be ready. Oh, "right away". All you wanted to know for was whether you had time to go for a walk or something before he was ready to serve dinner, and he couldn't

answer. They have a lot of trouble answering a question. What they really want to know is what you want to hear before they answer.

Bob: We have that problem with the Mexicans. It isn't a language problem at all. It is, what do you want, massa.

Marilyn: Almost. I was a little young for that sort of thing, I think.

Bob: Young for it? You mean you didn't want to be the mistress of the house?

Marilyn: Well, I didn't know how to be. It was a transitional time we were there. When we arrived -- it must have been about six or seven years after partition, and they didn't have much time for the British at that point, but the Americans were all right. Actually our friends, many of whom were ministers, mostly had some other thing that they had graduated from college in, and then after they went to the service came back and went into the ministry. India didn't let in people who were just ministers . . .

Bob: Religious people.

Marilyn: Yes. But they were people who had agricultural know-how. One of our good friends graduated from Penn State in agriculture, and he was a minister, but he decided to become a minister after he had been in the war. Another friend ran an industrial school, which taught people how to sew or do auto mechanics and all kinds of things. They had a bunch of different programs for rural young people. His wife was Scottish, and she ran a creche program like the English have for village children, infants really, where the mothers came and got powdered milk and bathed their kids every day.

Bob: Did you do nursing while you were in India?

Marilyn: Not really, no. I worked a day or so in the operating room when they were short of help, and otherwise I really didn't.

Bob: When you came back from India, did you work as a nurse?

Marilyn: No, not for a good many years. Not until our kids were grown.

Bob: When the children were grown, what did you do?

Marilyn: When Mark was in the first or second grade I took a refresher course over at Mission. Some friends and I were in a sewing group and three of us in that sewing group decided that it would be fun to take this refresher course, and so we did. It was about six or seven weeks or so. I'm sure they were looking for people to go back into nursing. It was very interesting. It did bring us up to date, but it seemed like to me that the most important thing was to charge the patient, and then you can start looking after them after that, so I didn't go back to nursing then. But after about . . . just before Mark went away to school, I think the year before he went away, I just decided that things were too tight financially with Martha in school, Tim in school, and it was just a little too tight on a government salary.

Bob: What sorts of schools did they go to?

Marilyn: Well, it was a private secondary school.

Bob: What about colleges?

Marilyn: Tom went to Dartmouth, where his dad went. Martha went to Middlebury, which nobody around here ever heard of, and Tim went to Yale after a try at, I think it was Simon Frazier, the one British Columbia, where he wanted to live all the rest of his life, he was sure at that time. Then he found out that was going to grow while he would be there into a big city school. He liked it when he went there, but he just realized that their goals weren't his goals, so he dropped out and was a nurses' aide at the hospital for the rest of that year.

Bob: That's Tim? And he's the one who became a doctor and went to Nicaragua?

Marilyn: Yes. Anyway I decided it was just a little too tight. That was when papa Tim went off to Viet Nam, and I decided I could sit home and clean up the kitchen five times a day while people got up at different hours and did their own thing, or I could get out. So I got out, because they would clean it up if I wasn't there.

That was when I went back. And I didn't dream I'd end up working eleven years, but I enjoyed it. I was in urology and nephrology.

Bob: At Mission Hospital?

Marilyn: Yes.

Bob: Neurology?

Marilyn: No, urology -- plumbing. And nephrology, which was the dialysis. We had the dialysis patients while they were in the hospital. We didn't do the chemo-dialysis. There was a unit that did that, but if the patients were in the hospital they were on our floor and we ended up doing peritoneal dialysis on the floor, because that goes on for several days at a time.

Bob: Eleven years is quite a career.

Marilyn: Well, yes. It was worthwhile.

Bob: Well, maybe we ought to talk about the church. I am most interested to talk to anyone who remembers Dan Welch. I'm told he was a marvelous man and that he had a great deal of impact on the city, but there are very few people who knew him.

Marilyn: I don't remember that much about what he was doing in the city really. He was a very warmhearted man who just met people very readily, and gave a lot of himself to what went on at the church.

Bob: He was not a young man. He had retired before he ever came here.

Marilyn: He had retired, and I'm not sure he wasn't over -- I don't know how old he was when he came. Does anybody know?

Bob: I'm sure I can find that out. I'm interested in his level of energy.

Marilyn: He really had a lot of energy. Either that, or he needed to get out of his house. That may have been part of it. He had this wife who, you know, you could never casually ask how are you today, because she'd tell you, and that would take a long time. So it was a good lesson in psychology.

Bob: Is she the one who used to make clear that she was a Methodist?

Marilyn: I never heard that tale. I don't remember that she did that. She didn't try to run things, that's one thing about her. I mean, she didn't try to run anybody but Dan. Maybe she did him, I'm not sure. She was an interesting woman.

Bob: What was your involvement in the church when it was on Vermont?

Marilyn: I didn't do much with all these kids. I did go sometimes to the Women's Alliance, because they used to have that at night. I remember going over on Montford one time to the fellow who used to be the publisher of the Asheville Citizen-Times. I think he was the publisher. Anyway he was one of the editors.

Bob: Are you talking about Walter Adams?

Marilyn: Walter Adams, yes.

Bob: You went over to his house?

Marilyn: Yes. That was where the Alliance was meeting that night. I don't know what the meeting was about,

Bob: Did you ever hold an office in the church?

Marilyn: No, I'm not an office holder.

Bob: Did you ever teach in the Sunday School?

Marilyn: No. Oh, I guess I did have a class one time for awhile.

Bob: You have become close friends with the Stones and apparently you were friendly with the Reeds.

Marilyn: Yes, we knew them well.

Bob: Were most of your friends people who were associated with the Veterans' Administration?

Marilyn: Probably, I think so. But not all of them by a long shot. We never wanted to live out there, for instance, even though we probably could

have saved a little money. Once we got out of the residence mode we got out. We just don't like to have to say hello to people in the morning if you don't feel like it, and that kind of thing, not people you work with. We didn't have anything against anybody there, but we just weren't that social.

Bob: You like your privacy.

Marilyn: I guess so.

Bob: Making your own way of life. You and Tim are both hikers and walkers.

Marilyn: Yes, we've done a lot with our kids especially. When we used to come home from Vermont Avenue on Sundays, we went to the railway station on our way home, and the boys -- oh, I had a picture here I wanted to show you. We dressed up to go to Sunday School.

Bob: That's Martha and Tom?

Marilyn: Yes. His jacket is a little short. That was made in India. We had some old shirts of Tim's, white shirts, and I cut the colors off and we turned them around backwards and buttoned them up the back and let them wear that. There was an overpass, a walkway, just over the tracks down here. It may still be there, back down where the old railroad station used to be. We'd stand up on that and watch the trains. Of course, it was pretty sooty. The engineers got used to seeing these two kids up there in these white shirts. We just buttoned them on like smocks, you know. One time they did give the boys a ride down to Biltmore Station from the other station, the passenger station, in the engine.

Bob: Who was the railroad buff? Was that Tim?

Marilyn: No, the kids. It was sort of on the way home.

Bob: It was pretty active at that time too.

Marilyn: Oh, yes, busy.

Bob: They still had passenger trains at that time?

Marilyn: Yes, they did. We used to go to Old Fort on the passenger train, and the schools always went -- the classes would go down to Old Fort on the train.

Bob: As an excursion?

Marilyn: Yes, and the parents would meet them, and then on the way back you stopped for a picnic lunch.

Bob: Where would they stop, Swannanoa?

Marilyn: I don't know, but there are seven tunnels between here and Old Fort. That was the big thrill for the kids. We didn't picnic in Swannanoa. There was a picnic ground out on the highway there, just off the -- well, it wasn't interstate then. That highway down to Old Fort was built while we were in India, and there was a picnic area off of it. There is still a picnic area around on the old highway, but that wasn't the place we went.

Bob: Did you go up on the Blue Ridge Parkway for picnics and walks.

Marilyn: Yes.

Bob: Often?

Marilyn: At least once a week. When they were building the parkway from Asheville to Pisgah we went out there and hiked a lot with the kids on weekends. You could just go out and get on it somewhere along the way. I wish I could think of something more about Dan Welch, but I guess I was just too busy to know what all he was involved in the community. He was just a really conscientious person.

Bob: Perhaps you knew Puhlman better than you knew Welch. Is that true?

Marilyn: I think maybe.

Bob: I have a number of questions about the Puhlman era. I've heard that he attracted young married people, and that many joined the church in his early years. Do you recall that, who those people might have been?

Marilyn: Well, there were a lot of people who have moved away since then.

I don't know whether they were people we knew, the Drooz's -- I don't remember what Ernie did for a living. He might have worked for the weather, it might have been government work. They had two boys, I think. One of them was in Tim's class at Chapel Hill, but they didn't live in Chapel Hill. I think they moved to Charlotte.

Bob: Have you any knowledge about the gift made by Mrs. Sandburg to the church?

Marilyn: I don't know the details of that at all except, of course, that it was considerable.

Bob: Had you ever met Sandburg?

Marilyn: Not him, no.

Bob: You met her, though?

Marilyn: Oh, yes. She used to come regularly with the girls. She loved children and used to be happy to talk to children. I remember taking, I think it was Mark because he's the one who is interested in literature, and introducing him to her. Or maybe Martha, I can't remember now. But doing that in order that they could say that they met her, because she was a really nice person, and just enthusiastic about kids.

Bob: She must have been a unique person because she developed a strain of prize goats, internationally known.

Marilyn: Yes. But that was before they came here.

Bob: What would you say is the greatest reward you had from being in this Unitarian Church, the greatest pleasure, time of enjoyment?

Marilyn: I don't really know that it has played that vital a role in my life. It has, but nothing specifically. It was very nice when the new church was finished. That was a big deal, but that's just a building. It's not the people involved.

Bob: You got involved with the Stones because of Tim's interest in Nicaragua.

Marilyn: Yes, that was originally the interest, and then they just became good friends.

Bob: And since then you have frequently gone to Mexico with them, is that right?

Marilyn: Yes, we've made three trips now.

Bob: To where in Mexico?

Marilyn: Well, the first year we went to the colonial cities in central Mexico, and then the following year we went to Baja to watch whales on an Elderhostel program there, and went on down to the end of the Baja peninsula. This last year we went to Yucatan and got all interest in the Maya ruins.

Bob: I've been interested in that for maybe thirty years.

Marilyn: Well, you ought to take this Elderhostel. It was a lovely place that we stayed this last time.

Bob: Well, I think I have asked you all the questions that I can imagine. I appreciate this. Is there anything you'd like to say finally?

Marilyn: No. It's just that there were a lot of people who were important in the church, and important to us too.

We knew Henry and Sarah Walters. Their daughter lives in town.

Bob: I have heard that Sarah Walters was a very outspoken person.

Marilyn: She was. I'm not sure whether she was a mid-westerner, I think probably she was. There's a little difference in the regionalisms, and the south is supposed to be so friendly and so this and that, but it's not the same, you know. It's not a relaxed exchange, and mid-westerners are kind of that way -- or westerners maybe. So she didn't mind saying what she felt. She was a very intelligent woman who had a lot of opinions, and maybe she got a little opinionated in her declining years, but she was an interesting woman.

Bob: What were her chief interests, consuming interests?

Marilyn: I think that she read a lot and she was very into civic things too. They had graduated from Oberlin, both of them.

Bob: Was she the one that recommended that Mr. Gross, Reverent Gross, do some reading? I have heard that.

Marilyn: It might well have been. I wouldn't be surprised. I think she did get on his case for awhile. And he needed it. I think his upbringing was really narrow, and hers hadn't been.

Bob: Any other people that you'd like to remark about? People who were really important that you've met in this group.

Marilyn: Well, we've met a lot of really nice people in the church, and I suppose that's a disadvantage to the church getting larger, that it gets impersonal at the same time, but I'm glad it's growing. I don't know anybody anymore, but that's my fault. I'm just not all that outgoing.

Bob: The need you have changes with time.

Marilyn: Well, that's partly it. But I never have wanted to be an officer in anything or be in charge of anything, and I just figured I didn't have time. Somehow being in charge of that little floor over there at Mission at night was enough problem.

Bob: Did you usually work the nightshift.

Marilyn: It sounds crazy, but it worked out very well for us, because I don't like to get up at a quarter to five in the morning -- well, I guess 5:30 I would have had to get up to get to work by a quarter to seven, even though it's near, and if I worked three to eleven, that's a terrible shift to work because you don't have any dinner hour, and we always really used the dinner hour for family together. But another thing was when you come home at 11:00 you're not just able to throw yourself in bed and collapse. You have to unwind a little bit.

So working nights just suited our family arrangements at that time.

Bob: I appreciate this, Marilyn. Thank you very much for the interview.