

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET ERACLIO NIZOLEK

FOR THE

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Kathryn Tracy Rizzi: This begins an oral history interview with Margaret Nizolek, on October 3, 2022. I am Kate Rizzi, and I am located in Branchburg, New Jersey. Ms. Nizolek, thank you so much for joining me today to do this interview.

Margaret Nizolek: I'm looking forward to it.

KR: Can you please state for the record where you are located?

MN: In Hamilton Square--well, actually, Robbinsville, New Jersey.

KR: When and where were you born?

MN: I was born in Flushing, Queens a long time ago. [laughter]

KR: What year were you born?

MN: In 1954.

KR: We usually like to start off these interviews getting a sense of the family history of the interviewee. What would you like to share about your family history, starting on your mother's side of the family?

MN: Both of my parents were the children of Italian immigrants. You said my mother's side first, so her parents were from Catania, which is in Sicily. My mother was the youngest child. She was born in the United States. Her siblings were not. I think it was an interesting but difficult time for immigrant children then. They were made fun of and things like that, but they loved this country, both of my parents.

KR: What about your father's side of the family?

MN: My father's side of the family was from Bari, Italy, and my father was born there. He was one of six children. His youngest brother was the only child who was born in the United States, because the family immigrated in stages. They didn't all come to the United States together. I'm not sure if I have this right, but I think that my grandfather came over first with the eldest daughter to keep house for him wherever they settled. Then, my grandmother came over later with the other children. Actually, one of my uncles may have gone at the same time as my grandfather and aunt. But that's all history that's lost to me. It wasn't anything that I heard much about. My father didn't really talk about it. I've learned a little bit over the years by what my mother told me, but that's what, I think, my father's mother told her.

KR: Where did the family settle in the United States?

MN: They settled in New York. I believe it was Ozone Park, at least I know it was for a good part of their life. Whether that was the first place they ended up, I don't know, but that's where most of their time was spent, where they lived, in Ozone Park in New York.

KR: Did your parents tell you stories about their experiences during the Great Depression and World War II?

MN: No, not really. They didn't talk about those kinds of things. It wasn't until my father got a lot older, when he was in his eighties, mid-eighties, that suddenly it was all war stories. That's really the time when I heard his stories of what it was like--how he enlisted and what it was like in bootcamp and how he patrolled the border, the Texas-Mexico border, before he was shipped overseas. It's funny because I don't think he had ever been on a horse, but he ended up in the cavalry, learned how to ride, and then loved horseback riding after that. I don't think their horses were shipped with them once he went overseas, but he loved horseback riding as a result of that.

KR: Do you happen to know if your father served in the European or Pacific Theater and what branch he was in?

MN: Pacific, the Pacific Theater. He was in the cavalry. Gosh, I don't remember which--I know I had this at one point, but I gave all of that information to my brother--and my dad's memorabilia and things of that sort--because he was interested in it. I just asked him to make sure to leave them to my children, so those things will stay in the family through the years.

KR: How did your parents meet?

MN: Oh, boy, that's a really good question. I believe they met through work, but I don't think they worked together directly. My mother's older sister worked in the same place that my father did, and somehow, he met my mother. I don't know whether she came to visit one day for lunch with her sister or what it was, but they met through work.

KR: What else do you know about your parents' upbringings, education, careers, things like that?

MN: My father completed trade school. So, he did get a high school diploma, but it was trade oriented. He told me that he had the choice--his father gave him the choice--of being a butcher, which he did not want to be, and his other choice ended up being the fur business, the designer business. That was his choice. My mother probably did pretty much the same thing, inasmuch as her older sister was working in that field. When she graduated high school and it was time for her to work and help support the family, because her father died when she was sixteen, she went into that same line of work. She was a seamstress starting out. Then, over the years, she became an assistant designer.

KR: Your parents did that during your upbringing as well?

MN: Yes. My father had his own business for a while, when I was very young, and my mother was working from home in whatever way she could. I know when my father had his business, not that I saw this as a child, but I remember my mother mentioning that she used to sew the cloth patterns using the paper patterns he would bring home. I just remember her going--my father would be working really late--and her going to the train station, bundling us into the car to go to the train station to pick him up. After a while, he decided owning his own business

presented too many headaches, and he went back to working for someone else in another company. He did that through the years. He worked at a variety of firms.

KR: You were born in Flushing.

MN: Yes.

KR: Where did you grow up?

MN: When I was five, we moved from Flushing, and I grew up in Jericho, New York, which is on Long Island.

KR: I am curious, do you have any very early memories of your years in Flushing?

MN: I do. We lived in a two-story building. There was a family who lived downstairs, and we lived upstairs. There were more buildings scattered around a large courtyard. The way I remember it was, it had a lot of grass in the center, so we could run around and play. There was a tree in the center, which was great because when we would play tag, that would be the home base. I know that there were trees across the courtyard because my friend and I used to climb those. I have good memories of living there before we moved. I started kindergarten there but just for two months, because we moved into our house, I think, on October 30th or October 31st on Long Island, in Jericho.

KR: What prompted your parents to move to Jericho?

MN: Well, they wanted to buy a house. My father, in particular, wanted to have a house. I think my mother--not that I knew this until really later on, and it may have been my brother who told me this long after both parents died--my mother was apprehensive about it and my father talked her into it, and I think she was very glad that he did.

KR: What was Jericho like when you were growing up?

MN: Oh, it was great. We had the freedom to run around. There were a lot of kids my age, because it was a new development. There were a lot of people my age and also my brother's age. For us as children, it worked out really well, because we had a lot of fun. We could run around and enjoy ourselves. There were wooded areas where my friends and I would have adventures. We would go out. We'd say, "Bye, Mom," after breakfast, then she wouldn't see us until dinnertime. It was a really good place to be a kid.

KR: What was the town like in terms of the community? Was it a melting pot?

MN: No, actually, it was a largely Jewish community, and my family was Catholic. We were definitely in the minority there, but it wasn't that it mattered. It certainly didn't matter to kids. We would see the menorahs during Hanukkah, and the neighboring kids would see our Christmas lights. [laughter] We each enjoyed what the other families were doing. It was a nice place to grow up.

KR: How close was your family to the extended family?

MN: Very close to my mother's side of the family. Not as much to my father's side. Some of that was just distance. Plus, my mother and her sister were close, so all of our holidays were spent with my aunt's family. I remember when I was really young, when my other grandmother was still alive, before having dinner with my maternal aunt's family, we would visit my father's family first, which was further away, to go to whoever was hosting, so that we could say hello to everybody and my grandparents could see us briefly. My grandmother, I'm sure, was happy. My grandfather, I don't think he cared. It could be because of his hearing, he had a hearing aid, and my mom told me he used to turn it off when everybody was there. [laughter] Then, from there, we would go to my maternal aunt's house. We spent all of the big holidays with my mom's family, for sure, so we were close with our cousins on that side. But as we got older, we're getting a little closer, I think, with my cousins on my father's side. In fact, next week, I'm going to be going out to Long Island, and we're going to be visiting with some of them, which is nice. Retirement lets that happen. I retired in July, July 1st.

KR: Congratulations.

MN: Oh, thank you.

KR: What was language like when you were growing up? How much Italian was spoken in your household and in the extended family? What did you learn?

MN: I did not learn any Italian. My parents very rarely spoke it. The only time that they did was when they wanted to say something that they didn't want us to understand. Once I reached junior high and started taking foreign languages, I took French and Spanish, and Spanish especially, when I had started that, it was so similar. I could get the gist of what they were saying lots of times. Then, suddenly, it was like, oh, they can't do that anymore. [laughter] They didn't speak Italian in the house a lot, but they did on occasions.

They weren't interested, I guess, in having their children learn Italian. We were born in the United States, and they wanted us to speak English. That was the language of the country where we were born and grew up. That, I think, was important to them. I know my father said that when he was young and he started school in the United States, even though he came when he was around two, they were speaking Italian. I guess his father maybe knew a little English. I don't think his mother did at that point. That's what they spoke in the house. When he went to school, he had very little English, and he said the kids made fun of him. I imagine that stuck with him, and that's part of the reason why English is pretty much the only language that was spoken in our house.

KR: What Italian traditions got passed down, say, from your grandparents to your parents and then to you?

MN: I don't know if these are Italian traditions or not. I just know that they were our family traditions. Always big multicourse meals for the holidays. Thanksgiving, Christmas, New

Year's Day, Easter, those were four holidays that we were all assembled for. We would have, as I said, these huge multicourse meals, and so there were certain foods that appeared there. Now, how much of it was traditional Italian, I don't know. I think that it probably morphed over the years to things that we all ended up liking, but one of the things that had to be there and that I loved as a kid was dessert, which was Italian pastries. I guess that started my love of cannoli. Artichoke hearts and stuffed artichokes, but artichoke hearts especially that were breaded and then fried were a real treat. My mom only made them at the holidays, and I can understand why. When I tried to do it once I was grown up and married, it was like, "Oh, my gosh, this is a lot of work. I don't think I'll be doing this again." The holiday times were always fun. My brother had a cousin who was close enough with him in age. I had a cousin who was close enough with me in age, although he's actually closer in age to my brother, but since he was born later, by a little bit, I guess these relationships between the cousins were formed. My cousin John got stuck with me once I came along. [laughter] He's the nicest person.

KR: What was your education like?

MN: Normal, I would think. I went to kindergarten through twelfth grade in Jericho--I think I mentioned that we had moved in October--so all but my first two months of school in kindergarten. I loved school, except for kindergarten. I think kindergarten was the hardest grade I was in. I don't know why. Maybe because I was just starting school and whatever, but I remember thinking that that was the hardest. Once I got to first grade and second grade and all beyond that, I just loved it.

KR: You went through public schools?

MN: I did.

KR: Yes, okay. Just for the record, which schools did you go to?

MN: Robert Seaman Elementary School was K through six, Jericho Junior High was grades seven through nine, and then Jericho High School was ten through twelve.

KR: When you were in junior high and then high school, what were your academic interests?

MN: Nothing specific, I would say; I just liked school, although languages. There were the core classes that everybody had to take, including a foreign language. But I wanted to travel, and where we were located, where our house was, JFK Airport maybe was twenty miles away--I'm not really sure--I'd say twenty minutes, because everything was twenty minutes from where we lived, it seemed. We would see airplanes. I would see airplanes flying, some kind of high up, and sometimes, there would be some that were a little bit lower. I was always fascinated when I saw them, and I thought, "Oh, I want to go places. I want to be on a plane and travel." So, that was one of the things that, growing up, I wanted to do. I think that that's one of the reasons why I studied three languages, not that I can speak any of them now, or very little. [laughter]
[Editor's Note: John F. Kennedy Airport, or JFK Airport, is an international airport located in Jamaica, Queens.]

I did get a chance to go to France when I was sixteen. That was a wonderful experience. It was six weeks of being in a foreign country and studying the language while I was there too, which was good. It certainly helped me when I got to Rutgers and I continued studying French.

Yes, I wanted to travel. I haven't done the kind of travel that I had wanted to do. It's all pretty much been domestic or this sphere rather than Europe, but that was what I wanted to do when I retired. When my husband retired, we went on a nice trip where he wanted to go, and so when I retired, it was supposed to be a trip where I wanted to go and then COVID. It's like, "Really?" One of these days, we will take the trip. I've begun looking again to figure out how we can do this and where we would go. I think we're getting a little closer.

KR: This trip you took to France when you were sixteen, was this a high school exchange program?

MN: Not exactly. My French teacher would go to Europe in the summers. He was Italian, but he taught French, which was very interesting. He was quite a character. Actually, it was my sixteenth birthday present, but it was really last minute because my birthday is in June and we left either at the end of June or early July; I don't remember anymore. Suddenly, there was a lot we had to do so that I could go, including getting a passport, which I didn't have. That was interesting. It was like rushing to get all the things in place, the documents that were needed, and I don't remember if I needed to get inoculations or not. I just remember meeting my father in the city, in New York City, where he was working, and then the two of us went to the passport office together, so that I could get a rushed passport.

It was a wonderful experience. We got to spend time in Paris at the beginning, and then it was four weeks in Tour, which had a foreign student school. In the mornings, I'd walk there with a lot of other people and take French lessons in the morning, and then in the afternoons, we were free to do whatever we wanted. We took trips on the weekends to visit different areas in France, going to Mont Saint-Michel and other places, and ended up in Paris again before we went home. It was a really good experience. I got to visit so many *châteaux* on the weekends, and it was great. It was a wonderful trip. I was very appreciative that my parents made that happen for me. [Editor's Note: Mont Saint-Michel is a rocky tidal island and commune located in a bay in Normandy, France. It is a major tourist destination and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.]

KR: If my math is serving me right, was that 1970?

MN: I think it was.

KR: That was a big time in America and also in Europe of anti-war protests. Do you remember any protests going on?

MN: No, not in 1970. I think that that came a little bit later. Let me just think, I graduated in '72; my brother graduated in '68. No, I guess it wasn't later. It was probably around that time. No, I don't remember any protests when I was overseas, when I was on that trip, but certainly at home, I was aware of that. There were a lot of things going on. The nightly news, that was

always on during dinner. We were always kind of glued to the TV to see what was happening that day, which was strange, because we ended up having this little TV in the kitchen and we were never allowed to watch television during meals when we were growing up. That was like, "No, this is family time. You talk about your day. You tell us about school, things that are happening," that kind of thing. But that changed in the late '60s, early '70s.

KR: Was your family concerned about your brother with the Vietnam War draft? [Editor's Note: On December 1, 1969, the Selective Service System held a televised draft lottery to determine the draft order for 1970 during the Vietnam War. In the drawing, there 366 capsules, each possessing a date of the year. If one's birthday was drawn early, they possessed a low draft number, which increased the chances of being drafted.]

MN: Yes, yes, they were.

KR: What are your recollections of that?

MN: That it was stressful because his number wasn't extremely low, but it wasn't high. So, there was the possibility that he could perhaps be drafted. While he was in college, he was deferred, but after that there was the possibility he could be drafted. After that, it was like you didn't know what was going to happen. It was an anxious time in some respects because of what was happening in the world.

KR: Do you remember discussions, maybe at home, maybe at school, with your friends about the war or, more generally, about different movements that were going on in society?

MN: I don't remember discussions about the war very much. In terms of movements, I would say ecology, green, that started to become a big issue when I was in high school. Being more conscious of our environment and acting accordingly, I think that's the one that sticks with me, at least at my age. My brother was four-and-a-half years older than me. For him, I think it was very different. It was definitely war related.

KR: What about the civil rights movement? Do you have any recollections of the civil rights movement?

MN: Not really, because we lived in a very--I can't think of the right word, not homogenous community, although it kind of was, but, no. There weren't a lot of Black students in my school that I can recall. There was one child in elementary school who moved there sometime during the school year. I remember, we used to have lunch at tables, and friends could sit together, but within the classes. Somebody said something about this Black student, and I used to speak my mind in those days and I said something. I don't remember the words I said, but something like, "That's not nice. That's not right." Even in high school, I don't really recall any Black students. There may have been, but there were none in my classes.

In fact, it really wasn't until I went to work that I ended up working with Black people. I remember thinking this was new for me, not having had the exposure to all different kinds of people where I grew up. That was kind of interesting. It was like learning more about other

people, and people are people. It isn't color that defines--well, at least for me it didn't--that defines a person. It's the kind of person that individual is.

When I think back about my children now, I don't think that they probably had much exposure to other races or nationalities either, until high school. I think one of the benefits of college is the opportunity to meet a lot more people from all over. Not just learning studies but learning about other people.

KR: When you were growing up, what activities did you do, what clubs, what extracurriculars?

MN: Oh, my gosh, what did I do? Well, let's see, when I was in elementary school, safety patrol. [laughter] That was a big thing. I used to really like gymnastics. It wasn't a club, but there was a gym teacher willing to stay with a few interested students. So, I used to do that, apparatus and floor, not that I was any good when you see what people do today. It was just, "This was fun." Nothing competitive. It was just fun.

In high school, wow, oh, man, I'd have to get my yearbook out to see what the heck I was involved in, because, offhand, I really don't remember. Oh, swimming, let's see, I did synchronized swimming. I was on the swim team for a bit early on, I don't think anything past freshman year. I think I did it in junior high, and ninth grade was part of our junior high, although I did spend a lot of time my senior year diving. I really liked it, but I don't think I was any good at it really. [laughter] My mother was a swimmer and a diver, and so I was determined to try to learn how to let the board carry me into a dive. The gym teacher was fine with it. I was there, they were doing stuff in the other part of the pool, and I could dive to my heart's content. That was at least for the first semester of my senior year, and after that, gym swapped out with something else that I don't recall. Yes, my hair was always wet. I was drying it under those high-speed dryers that they would have, but luckily, it wasn't as frizzy then as it is now. I could never do that now. [laughter] It would be like [makes hand gestures to show frizzy hair].

KR: You said your mom was a swimmer and a diver. How did that come about? She definitely would have been of a generation where women being athletes was not exactly encouraged.

MN: I don't know. I just know that she did that in high school, and I think she had won some medals in their meets and things like that. Thank goodness, because as a result, my brother and I learned to swim. My father, forget it, he would get in the water, in the shallowest area, and then just relax there. [laughter] He was not a swimmer, but my mother was, so I learned how to swim at a young age and just loved it.

KR: You were growing up in the 1950s and in the 1960s. What messages were being sent to you as a young woman, by your family, by your community, by your friends, about what you could go on and do in your life?

MN: I think the messages that I got with my parents were different than the messages my cousins got, largely, from theirs, because my mother always regretted that she couldn't go to college and continue, that she had to work and help support the family. She definitely wanted her children to go to college. There was no question about that. I mean, that was something that

I think I knew from early on, and I would think, "Of course, I'm going to go to college." But not everybody had the opportunity to do so. It's strange though. On my mother's side of the family, my three cousins all went to college, and on my father's side of the family, that wasn't the case. Only some of them did and they were the ones who were closest in age to me, but the cousins who were older did not go to college. I was the youngest of all of my cousins on both sides of the family. So, my cousins on my father's side of the family were significantly older than I was or at least it seemed significantly older. It wasn't until now, until more recent years, that suddenly that gap in age just doesn't seem so significant, which is why we're going to see them next week, to catch up with them while we still can.

KR: We talked about your trip to France when you were sixteen. I am wondering, what other formative experiences shaped you when you were growing up?

MN: I can't think of anything that stands out, just that I was fortunate enough to have a mother who believed in education and wanted to make sure her children had the chances she did not, that my parents wanted more for us than what they had. We moved to a house when all of my other relatives were living in apartments. It wasn't until many years later that some of them then bought houses. It was all part of my parents' plan, my mother especially. I mean, with my dad, it was sure, "Connie thinks this is a good idea. Sure, we can do this." He was so easygoing. I was fortunate. I had wonderful parents and a great brother, too.

KR: As you were getting on in high school, it was the era of the protest movements, the student movements. I am wondering what you remember about cultural changes in society, the way people dressed, music, social trends. What do you remember?

MN: Oh, I just remember all of the war coverage in our house every night on the news. Kids starting to wear army jackets when I was in high school; it was just as a fashion statement kind of a thing, I guess. There may have been some anti-war--not rallies, I don't think they amounted to that level--at my high school, but nothing that was disruptive, I guess is the way to put it.

KR: My mother is a little bit older than you, and she remembers the first time she ever wore jeans to school. Do you remember things like that, the way there was a transformation, basically, in the way people dressed?

MN: Yes, from between junior high and high school, I would say, is when it happened. We could wear nice pants at first, jeans came a little bit later. That's all I wear now that I'm retired. It's so nice. [laughter] Yes, there was definitely a difference in what was acceptable to wear to school, because I remember I used to wear skirts and dresses when I was in elementary school, no jeans or pants. Things changed sometime between junior high and high school. My brother was in twelfth grade when I was in seventh, so I could remember some of the girls in high school wearing jeans. It must have happened around seventh grade that there was this change, or maybe it's just that they could as a special thing, who knows, as seniors. Maybe they could wear jeans one day a week, I don't know.

KR: Let us shift to talking about your college application process. When it came time for college, what sort of counseling were you getting in high school about options?

MN: Not really a lot. We had guidance counselors and I think there was an obligatory meeting with them, but I wouldn't say that we ever really got much guidance. It was really just a matter of where I decided I wanted to apply for school or where some of my friends were deciding to apply, and whether I decided, "Oh, yes, I think I'll do that." I applied to two New York State schools since I lived in New York and I could get a Regents scholarship. I was also accepted to Cornell. Rutgers came as a last-minute thing because I had a friend who was looking at schools and wanted to see Rutgers. So, I went along with her, and, wow, I liked the idea of being the first class of women at Rutgers--about changing an all-male school. [laughter] I guess there was a little bit of feminist in me. So, I applied there as well and ended up going as a result.

I'm trying to remember because I don't recall getting any kind of scholarship money from them, but certainly, the tuition was lower than Cornell, where I was going to get something. So, that's where I ended up going. Plus, I think my mom actually liked the idea that it wasn't that far away. My brother had gone to college in Florida, and then he lived in Florida for a number of years. I think she felt like she lost one child because of him going to school in a far-off state. As a result, I think I had a 250-mile radius imposed on me. I don't know that that was a great reason for choosing Rutgers, but it was. I think that was part of what made me decide to go there, that I could change something. Why should it be an all-male school?

KR: When I was looking at your pre-interview survey, what really stuck out is that you are from Nassau County and then ended up going to Rutgers. There were plenty of people from out of state who went to Rutgers. I am wondering how folks in Nassau County were getting word about Rutgers and how you knew that it was the first coed class. Do you think there was a recruitment effort?

MN: No, not that I'm aware of. My friend who wanted to see it, I don't know how she heard about it, although I was aware of Rutgers because a friend that I grew up with, who then moved out of state--she moved to Illinois--when she was in junior high or maybe ninth grade, something like that; her brother was going to Rutgers, so I had heard about it. We may even have visited and talked with him when I went with my friend who wanted to see Rutgers. Yes, I went from not even having applied there to suddenly applying and sending my application in. Actually, Rutgers was the first school that I heard back from. It was definitely an early acceptance.

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

MN: Oh, well, you know, interesting, fun. You go and you get there early, and there are events and things for the incoming freshman to attend, so they can get to meet each other and see a bit of campus. I had met someone, I can't remember how, but maybe it was the first day when we were attending something in these huge groups. Then, we met up with each other probably that day or the next day to go to Douglass--they were holding something over at Douglass--and so we went over there. Her high school boyfriend came to visit. He had a car, I think. We went there together, and unfortunately, I stepped on broken glass.

KR: Oh.

MN: Yes, and I was wearing sandals, but those were the days where the sandals were very thin and it went right through my sandal into my foot. I couldn't walk, it hurt like crazy, because the sandal would kind of move a little bit. Her poor boyfriend carried me to wherever the infirmary was. I don't know how we found out. I always felt so bad for him, although, luckily, I didn't weigh as much then. [laughter] That was an interesting start to my time at Rutgers, because then, when classes started, there I was limping for a while until my foot healed. You're walking all over. I had to take the bus, since I lived at Davidson, but some of my classes were on College Avenue. I had classes on Busch Campus. Is that what it's called now? It was called something, University Heights--I think it was called--when I went. I had some classes on Busch Campus, so that was okay, but I still had classes that were downtown as well, until I decided that I was going to be an English major. Then, everything was downtown, but that came later. My beginning at Rutgers was very memorable for me. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Davidson Hall is a complex of four buildings located on the Busch Campus of Rutgers in Piscataway. The Busch Campus was known as the University Heights Campus until 1971, when the campus was renamed in honor of donor Charles Busch.]

KR: What did you think of living at Davidson? I have heard mixed reviews from people who lived there just because it was removed from the College Avenue Campus and people had to travel to College Ave. What did you think?

MN: Yes, I don't think I was happy when I found out where I was going to be because I knew that I would have preferred to have been on the main campus because there'd be things to do there. Like I said, I had some classes there, so that certainly made some of it convenient. But, once I was there, it was fine. I met a nice group of people. Actually, I stayed there for all four years because I became a preceptor, and I'm trying to remember if I'd started that in my sophomore year or if it was my junior year. I think it was my junior year. So, I was a preceptor, which was great, because as an out-of-state student, my tuition was higher, so to have some of my room covered was significant. Actually, maybe all of the room was; I don't remember now. No board, no meals were covered. So, it was probably that all of the room was covered. That made it easier for my parents. It made it easier for me in terms of what I thought I was going to have to pay back. Plus, it taught me some things, too.

Sometimes, when I would look back on it, I'd think, "Oh, really?" There was one thing that I wasn't really happy about during the time I was a preceptor, and I thought, "You know, it could've been handled differently." You learn and you grow from experiences, and so I think that helped me learn and grow. Unfortunately, what I'm thinking about happened my very first year as a preceptor, and it's not like you got a lot of training. You did get a little bit, but there wasn't a lot. If a problem came up, that first year, the person who was--I don't remember what they were called. There were preceptors, and then there was somebody who sort of oversaw the preceptors--resident advisor maybe. The person that we had--it was a grad student usually, I think--that first year, it was her first year, she didn't know how to deal with problems, and so she wasn't a help. That was one of the things at Rutgers that I wish had been different because it would have been helpful as a new preceptor to have a resident advisor who knew something about overseeing preceptors and how things were supposed to work, but she didn't. That's okay because I learned.

KR: I know that Davidson was coed, but do you remember how it was coed? Was it by section, or was it just like every other room was coed? Do you remember?

MN: Yes. There were four buildings, A, B, C and D. C and D were the coed buildings, and the buildings were formed as H's. So, the center was where the lounge was, and then each of the sidebars were where the rooms were. I think there were twenty-four rooms on each side. One side was female and the other side was male in buildings C and D. The bathrooms, there were bathrooms on each side, so the bathrooms weren't shared. However, our bathrooms had urinals in them, because it had been an all-male school. So, that was very interesting. People used to decorate them sometimes, put something, a plant or something, in there, but it was fine. I didn't mind being there, and after that, I just had no desire to go back to the main campus because I was able to get the preceptorship where I was. That helped financially.

KR: Did you eat at Davidson, or did you go to Brower Commons and eat, or a mix of both?

MN: A mixture of both depending on where my classes were. It would be more likely that I would have lunch on the main campus when I had a full meal plan. I didn't continue to do that through the four years, but maybe some meals. Not breakfast, I would have had breakfast where I lived. It was more convenient. You'd walk out of the dining hall, and that's where you'd wait for the bus. So, it just made sense. Dinners I usually had back at the dorm because there were a group of us that would all sit together. It was fun to meet up and just talk and joke and have fun.

KR: Your freshman year, what were your initial impressions of Rutgers having just gone coed?

MN: My classes, as far as I can recall, had a mixture of males and females. My classes didn't strike me as being unusual, because there were enough females who were there, especially in introductory classes when you have an incoming class of females. I don't know how Rutgers handled it, in terms of how many women and how many men, for that class. I don't know whether it was balanced like fifty/fifty or if it was twenty-five/seventy-five. I have no idea. I just know that my overall recollection is that I didn't feel like, "Oh, I'm the only woman in the class." [Editor's Note: When Rutgers College became coed and enrolled women for the first time in the fall of 1972, there were six hundred women and 4,800 men (Cindy Cohen Paul, "The Trailblazers," *Rutgers Magazine*, Winter 2013).]

KR: Some of your classmates have talked about the Big Brother-Little Sister Program. Do you remember anything about that?

MN: No, I don't at all.

KR: Okay. It was this program where freshmen would be paired with a big brother who would kind of show them the ropes.

MN: Gee, was that just a main campus thing? [laughter]

KR: Not everybody has talked about it, but I have heard about it.

MN: No, I don't remember hearing about that at all.

KR: What are your impressions of the faculty at Rutgers? How do you think they treated the women students?

MN: I have good memories of my classes and my professors. I don't remember feeling like I was being treated differently. Yes, it just seemed normal to me.

KR: Who are some professors who stick out in your mind?

MN: Barry Qualls. He was my favorite professor. He was just wonderful, and I had him for a number of classes. I had hoped to have him for my senior thesis, but he was on sabbatical, I guess, or when the teachers get that chunk of time where they can do their research. What was it called? Was it sabbatical or something else? [Editor's Note: Barry Qualls is a Professor Emeritus of English who served as a professor and administrator at Rutgers from 1971 to 2017. He served as the Vice President for Undergraduate Education and Dean of Humanities in the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences.]

KR: Yes, sabbatical.

MN: Yes. He wasn't there. He was supposed to be; at least in my mind, he was supposed to be. He was like, "Oh, I'm not going to be here that semester." That was disappointing, but he was great. He was such a wonderful teacher and so enthusiastic, and that enthusiasm was so nice. It makes you enthused as a student when your professor has such a love of the subject that was being taught, and so, yes, he definitely stands out.

When my son graduated, James, my oldest son, when he graduated, my husband was taking videos of the graduation ceremony. What was great was that Barry Qualls handed him his diploma, and I was like, "Oh, how wonderful!" My son graduated and my younger son then started at Rutgers. We had one day with no kids at home! What Jason ended up doing, I guess it was his second year--I think the first year he had to live on campus, but after that, he lived off campus--he took this big video recorder, as they were in those days, to video the apartment, so there was proof the broken screen was there before they moved in, so they wouldn't get charged afterwards. I think that was advice from his older brother. [laughter] A while later, we wanted to look at my older son's graduation. It had barely started, and then we're seeing this terrible, decrepit apartment because my younger son had taped over it. It's like, "But you taped over Barry Qualls!" [laughter] That was the thing that had me upset, that this professor I liked so much, he wasn't there handing my older son his diploma. Yes, Jason will never live that down. [laughter]

KR: How about other professors, either in your major or outside your major, or are there any classes that are particularly memorable to you?

MN: I'm trying to think of other professors. My other professors were okay. I believe I liked most of my professors. No one's standing out as like, "Oh, gosh, he was terrible," or, "She was terrible." No, I'm sorry, but Barry Qualls just blows everybody else out of the water. [laughter]

KR: Did you have many women professors?

MN: Oh, that's an interesting question. I had Bridget Lyons, who was doing the Shakespeare classes. I'm trying to remember if I had any others. Maybe not. I'm not sure that there was anyone else. It may have just been one, because the introductory classes were all men, as far as I can recall. I may have had a TA [teaching assistant] that was a female for one of the science classes, because I wasn't an English major right away. I was taking science classes as well--and math--so there may have been a TA that was a female, but I don't recall any other female professors. I don't know, maybe if I dug out my old report cards or something--because I still have them somewhere--they might have the professor's name, but I think it was just Bridget Lyons. [Editor's Note: Bridget Lyons is a Professor of English who taught at Rutgers University from 1965 to 1990. During that time, she held a variety of positions such as the Dean for the Humanities and the Director of Graduate Studies.]

KR: I was curious if you had as a professor Nancy Topping Bazin.

MN: No.

KR: Okay. She was in the Rutgers College English Department between about 1970 and 1977. [Editor's Note: Nancy Topping Bazin served as an assistant professor in the Rutgers College English Department from 1970 to 1977. During her time at Rutgers, Bazin helped found the Institute for Research on Women (then called the Women's Studies Institute) and served as its director in 1974. She went on to a career as a scholar and professor at Old Dominion University. Her oral history interview is available on the ROHA website.]

MN: Oh, okay. It would've been the right time, but, no, her name isn't familiar. What was her area that she taught in English? What type of English courses?

KR: She ended up doing feminist literary criticism, and at Rutgers College, she did start the very early women's studies curriculum.

MN: Okay. No, nope.

KR: What prompted you to become an English major?

MN: When I was applying to universities, I was thinking that I was going to major in geology, and Rutgers had a geology program. That's the reason that I chose it, in addition to other schools I had applied to. However, by the time I was actually graduating high school, I wasn't really interested in geology. I didn't take a single geology class when I registered for my courses. So, geology got me there, but it turned out not to be, although I did always like it. I was always interested in it, but for some reason, that wasn't what I wanted to major in when it was actually time to go off to college.

KR: What sorts of traditions do you remember at Rutgers?

MN: Ooh. Oh, a big one was the Rutgers-Princeton football game. That was always, I think, the last Saturday in September, I believe, and it was a big thing. Caravans of students would drive to Princeton for the game. We'd cook out in the parking area, barbecue and other things. Yes, so, that's the big tradition that jumps out to me, and that happened even after we graduated. [Editor's Note: Rutgers and Princeton played the first intercollegiate football game on November 6, 1869 at a field in New Brunswick where the College Avenue Gymnasium now stands. Rutgers won 6-4.]

We continued to do that, which was nice because it kept us together, this core group of people. Once Rutgers stopped playing Princeton, that fell by the wayside, and you just didn't see people anymore on at least a once-a-year basis. People got married, people moved all over the state, out of the state. I had been thinking about this recently, as a result of this interview coming up, and I thought, "Yes, that was something that held us together for a while post-graduation," and when they stopped it, that was it. We weren't seeing people the way we used to, and of course, as I said, people got married. They started to have children. Things happen. You're not as mobile, I guess.

KR: What else did you do for fun when you were an undergraduate? What was your social life like?

MN: My social life was very tied to the dorm area where I was, because buses stopped running. Going down to main campus to see a movie or something like that, every now and then, if it was something that I was really interested in, something that they were holding, I would do that. But you always had to be conscious of the buses to make sure that you would be able to get a bus back and not be stranded. Really, I think Davidson kind of had its own sort of social life. There were dances--no, I don't want to say dances, [laughter] I don't remember anybody ever actually dancing--so it was really just what we came up with among the dorms and the people who lived there.

A lot of the upper class guys had cars when we arrived as freshmen. I don't know if freshmen were allowed to have cars or not. There was this one guy who would go up and down the halls seeing who wanted cheesesteaks, I think it was, but there was something special about them. They were from Clancy's on the main campus; they were really good, whatever they did with it. No, it was roast beef, not cheesesteaks. It was roast beef and cheese with all kinds of things in it, really good. So, he would take orders, and that way, he would end up getting a free sandwich for himself, which was fine because he had a car. He could bring us food that we couldn't get. That kind of sticks in my mind as one of the things that was probably different. I don't know, maybe it wasn't, but I figured on the main campus, people could just go out and get what they want. They could have walked any place they wanted to get food and not worry about getting home on time-- catching the last bus.

I think there was a camaraderie among the people who lived at Davidson, because these were the people that we lived with. These were the people who, really, we were seeing all the time. It was a relatively small group of people. We didn't live in an eight-story dorm or something like that. It was one level, and so it was a small group of students. We made fun where we could,

too. That was the other thing. There were a lot of good times there because when you have people that you like, you can make your own good times. That's pretty much what we did.

KR: How about speakers or music groups or bands that came to campus?

MN: Ooh. Oh, gosh, there were a number of them. I don't know if I can remember them. Arlo Guthrie came. Phoebe Snow, but I'm not sure if she was the main act or not. Jackson Browne. Oh, there had to be more, but those are the only ones that pop into my mind. [Editor's Note: Arlo Guthrie is an American folk singer and songwriter who was born in 1947. Phoebe Snow was an American singer and songwriter who lived from 1950 to 2011.]

KR: Did you meet your husband when you were an undergrad?

MN: I did.

KR: How did you meet?

MN: How did we meet? I heard about him before we met. His last name is Nizolek. Neeze was what people called him, and I was thinking, "Knees? Who is this kid Knees that everybody is talking about? Is there something wrong with his knees or something?" [laughter] I met him, I guess, a few days later, and we've been together ever since.

KR: Is he a New Jerseyan originally?

MN: Yes. Trenton, New Jersey, or Lawrence Township, New Jersey. That's why we're still in this area. I never thought that would be the case. I thought once I graduated, who knows where I would end up, but someplace different. I think John did too, to a certain extent, as a possibility, when he graduated. Actually, I thought, "Oh, maybe it'll be Long Island," because he had applied for a job there, and I believe he got it. He also had applied for a job with the State of New Jersey in the Department of Transportation as an electrical engineer. He was hired. He graduated two years before me, so he was established by that point, by the time I graduated. So, we live in New Jersey, which is fine. Are you a New Jersey native?

KR: I am, yes. I was born and raised in New Jersey. I have only lived outside of New Jersey one year of my life. [laughter] My entire life, I have lived in New Jersey.

MN: Yes, a lot of people have. [laughter]

KR: My mom is a New Yorker, though, originally and then has spent her entire adult life in New Jersey and has become a proper New Jerseyan.

MN: [laughter] Now, what is a proper New Jerseyan?

KR: Lots of Jersey pride.

MN: Okay, all right. [laughter] I can get behind that.

KR: Yes.

MN: Can't let anybody trash talk New Jersey.

KR: Exactly, yes. What was the campus climate like in terms of activism while you were an undergrad?

MN: I think I was too removed from it. Not being on the main campus, I really don't have recollections of activism. I know that there was around the world in general, but in terms of campus activism, I don't recall that. I was in classes or else I was on Busch Campus. There wasn't a lot of radicalism in the Davidson Dorms that I can recall, certainly not where the females were. No, I don't remember any protests on Rutgers Campus. I think there were some on Livingston Campus because they were different schools at the time. No, I don't remember any marches down College Avenue or whatever, but then, again, I wasn't on College Avenue, so who knows.

KR: Was there much diversity in your class when you were an undergrad?

MN: I don't think so. I don't really think that there was, and I don't know if it was a matter of the courses that I was taking or that there just weren't students who had been accepted to go to Rutgers or who chose to go to Rutgers if they were accepted. My recollection is that Livingston probably is where the diversity was, but I don't really think at Rutgers that it was at all. I think that their first big step was having women on campus.

KR: How do you think your years at Rutgers overall shaped you?

MN: I think that I received a good general education. The courses that I took were courses that I enjoyed. Were they going to help me in my future life? Probably not. I guess I could talk about Shakespeare with people, and other authors, but I enjoyed those classes. They were challenging at times, some more than others, which is always nice. How did it shape me? Being away from home for the first time, living with other people, being exposed to some people, although I said there wasn't a lot of diversity, they came from different places. For me, they all came from different places if they came from New Jersey. [laughter] There were people from other states as well. That was kind of interesting.

Then, the guys were from different places, too. A lot of them were either engineering or pharmacy students because they were living on Busch Campus, and that's where those schools were. That was kind of interesting, because it's a different mindset than English majors, the science centered-focused students. It exposed me to a wider variety of people from different places. There were people from outside of New Jersey who were also living in the Davidson Dorms. Chicago is one that pops into my mind offhand. Colorado, I think, too, and of course, New York, a few people from New York.

It's a time of life where you're away from home, you're with other people of your age or around your age, and just being responsible for yourselves. It's definitely a major learning experience, I

think, when the apron strings are cut, and you have to make decisions, decide what's right and wrong sometimes, or what makes sense and what doesn't, and not necessarily calling up and saying, "Hey, Mom, what do you think?" No, none of that. You make the decisions. It's a time of growth in a lot of ways.

KR: What was graduation like?

MN: Oh, graduation. It was held on the main campus in that quadrangle where Scott Hall is and Willie the Silent is. [Editor's Note: Willie the Silent refers to the statue of William the Silent, officially William I, Count of Nassau, Prince of Orange, that was erected on Voorhees Mall in 1928.]

KR: Voorhees Mall.

MN: Voorhees Mall, thank you. Yes, that's where graduation was. My parents came, and my future husband was there as well. It was nice finally graduating. I had actually graduated in January a semester early, but I attended the spring graduation because I was still living in the dorm. I had started my graduate work in January, a semester early, because I knew I was getting married and I wanted to make sure that I could get as much done as I could before that. Then, I only had one semester of grad school left after I got married, so I finished that in January. I had taken two classes at the library school while I was still an undergraduate to see if I would like it. Once I got married, I only had the one semester left to finish, before I got gainfully employed. [laughter]

KR: What influenced your decision to go to library school? At that point, what were you thinking about in terms of career options?

MN: I had been thinking about law school when I was a sophomore, maybe first semester junior year, and I remember I had gone to something that was being held concerning that. So, I was thinking about doing that, but after that next semester, I just thought, "You know, I can't do another three years of school at this point in my life. That's all I've been doing," and doubling up on things so that I could finish early, or at least maybe that was when I decided to double up, I don't know. I couldn't face another three years at that point. I guess I was getting burned out. I figured, "Okay, but what am I going to do with an English degree? Oh, okay, publishing." That was the big thing everybody would think of. I thought, "Yes, well, everybody and his mother is going to be looking for a publishing job." The pay certainly wasn't good; I knew that.

I had started working in the library, Alexander Library, as an undergraduate, and I'm trying to remember now if I did that so that I could make some money or if I did that because I was thinking about library school. I don't remember which now. I do know that by doing that, it did make me decide to go to library school. So, that's what I ended up doing. I worked at the Alexander Library, I think, for two semesters, two semesters, yes, maybe three, I don't know. That helped me decide what I was going to do, that this was something that I would be interested in.

When I went to library school, I knew that it was reference that I was really interested in, reference work, because it changes all the time. You're not doing the same thing. People always have different--they don't always have different questions; sometimes, they repeat--but generally speaking, they have different questions. It was always rewarding. It was always interesting, because I would learn things that I didn't know before. Every question was an adventure. I remember, one time, saying to someone, "It's like being a detective. You're hunting down information." So, I really enjoyed doing that.

KR: What was your course of study like at library school?

MN: There were some required courses, but then you did have some flexibility. I took reference-related courses. I also took database courses, because in those days, if you were going to be searching a database, you had to know a computer language to do it. So, I took those courses. "Foreign Bibliography," I remember taking that one. I'm not sure why I did, but it was interesting. Maybe it was because I was working in the Rutgers library at that point and some of the things I was working on or searching for--I was doing pre-bibliographic work--were in other languages. I was like, "Oh, it'd be better to know some of the resources that would be handy for this." That's where my interests shifted to, something where I knew that, "Okay, when I graduate, I am going to be looking for a specific type of job. I don't have to think publishing like every other English major. Now, I am going to be looking for a job in a library, some type of library," and there are a lot of different types of libraries.

Of course, though, I ended up graduating when there was a slump in library jobs. I was really fortunate because my husband-to-be had told me, "There is this New Jersey Civil Service bulletin that comes out every month, and it has jobs." He said, "And there's a job here for a librarian, an entry-level librarian, at the New Jersey State Library." I said, "Oh, yes," but I think I had only had two library courses then, the ones that I took as an undergraduate. I hadn't even started my actual studies. I said, "I'm not going to have my degree." He said, "Yes, but it always takes so long before they actually fill the position that you'll probably have graduated by that time." [laughter] I said, "Oh, okay." I took it, and, yes, I graduated January of '77 from library school and started my job at the State Library a few days later. I interviewed while I was still in library school. I was graduating within a few weeks, and that was fine with them because the job wasn't going to start until then. I went right from graduate school to my job at the State Library, where I stayed for forty-five years.

KR: My cousin is a librarian in Upstate New York, and she had to take the civil service test. Did you have to go through that process?

MN: I did, yes. I took that while I had only had two library classes, but I did okay apparently. By the time they were actually ready to fill a position, I had graduated, or I was about to graduate, so it was just perfect timing.

KR: Before we go into your job at the New Jersey State Library, are there any other things about library school that you would like to share?

MN: It was so long ago. [laughter] Some of the classes were really interesting, some not so much. As I said, you had to take certain courses, and then you had a little bit of flexibility where you could fill in with classes that were of interest to you. I found it interesting. I was working part time at Alexander Library by then, and so I had this whole library to use there. I had gotten to know some of it a lot better as a result of working there. It just helped. Working there helped me while I was in grad school. Plus, I had experience to put on my résumé, which was helpful as well.

KR: Your first job at the New Jersey State Library, you were in New Jersey Reference.

MN: Yes.

KR: Tell me about that. What did you do?

MN: Well, I learned a lot about New Jersey history, which I knew nothing about, having gone to school in New York. That was kind of interesting. What was even more interesting, I think, is that the other two librarians, who were there, in that unit, were also not native New Jerseyans. Yes, one was from New York as well but a different area of the state, and the other person was from Pennsylvania. I think a lot of people in the library, at that time, actually had come from other states. They weren't native New Jerseyans, which was kind of interesting. It gave me an opportunity to learn about New Jersey, and I found it all interesting since I was learning as a result, too. It's not that, "Oh, yes, I know what this is right off the bat," because I studied it in fourth grade history or whatever. Each question that I had was something that was new to me, and so it could be challenging, which was nice. In fact, when it stopped being challenging, in about three years, I think, that's when I was interested in moving elsewhere in the library, so I could learn something else and do database searching, which was just starting. That's the unit that was doing it, where I moved to. That's why I spent only about three years, maybe three-and-a-half years, in the New Jersey section, but it was definitely very interesting.

That was a time where there were computers, but there were big mainframes, like in California or whatever, so you would have a dumb terminal that you would log into in order to get access to a database. Dialog was one of the big ones at that time, and it had four or five hundred different subject categories or databases that dealt with different subject categories. That was something that really interested me, so that was another reason why I wanted to then move on from the New Jersey section, although at that time, the only way to find information was to walk into a library or call a librarian. So, we had a lot of people who would be there in person, when I was in the New Jersey area. Legislative aides would come in and we would work with them on questions to get the information they needed. I mean, it was rewarding, and you could see where it was going because we used to clip newspapers. We had a huge clipping file because that's part of how we were able to come up with information on subjects that were of interest to the legislators or the other state government workers. We used to go through and clip those. I just lost my train of thought; I'm sorry. [Editor's Note: Dialog Information Services was a database that was a precursor to the modern search engine.]

KR: You were talking about the legislative aides who would come into the library and how you would track what they were researching.

MN: Oh, yes. Since we were clipping newspapers, a week later or whatever, I'd be looking at a newspaper and I'd see an article which I was about to clip, and it's like, "Oh, yes, I helped him with that. That's where the information came from." It was rewarding in that respect as well. Eventually, I wanted to really have the opportunity to do database searching, so I transferred to a different department and then pretty much spent most of my time there in one way or another. I mean, there were reorganizations within the library, things changed, and they changed the configuration of different units. Sometimes, they split them out, sometimes they merged them, but basically, that's what I ended up doing for quite a long time with reference, in one form or another. I was the health liaison librarian for a number of years. I was a funding information librarian for a number of years, all while still doing basic general reference. Then, I became the head of sections and then moved my way up the chain.

KR: What did you do as the health specialist? What was that area like?

MN: Well, we had a special agreement. We had a memorandum of understanding with the New Jersey State Department of Health. There used to be branch libraries in a lot of departments in the state government, and then they went through cutbacks where they chopped them, where they started closing all of them. Money was an issue, and so the health department was one of the ones that lost their library. I don't remember how this came up actually, how the idea arose, but what they decided was that since they don't have their own library anymore, they needed special health-oriented journals, some of them very specific topics, which we didn't have in our collection because we had a broad range of journals that would cover the needs of all state government. We had medical ones, too, but not these really technical ones. So, they wanted us to order them for them. We came up with an agreement where we would do that, and that we would also have a librarian who would be their liaison. I ended up doing that for three years, and I think after that, we stopped the program, which meant that that was a time where a lot of database searching had to be done in databases that ordinary people didn't have access to.

For medical data, MEDLINE was a big medical database. It was probably called MEDLARS then. So, I had to go for a week of training in Maryland at the National Library of Medicine to learn how to use that database, because it wasn't the same as other databases that were used. It had its own structure and vocabulary and method of searching, methodology. I went for training for that, so that I could do the searches they needed done. I used to do tons of searches, and searches were by-the-minute charges at that time. You wanted to work out your search strategy beforehand with these three big books of the medical terminology that was used, so that you could develop your search beforehand, figure out what you think is going to be the best way to do it, so that you'd sit down and you'd run your search and print what you needed, too, and then you could get off. [Editor's Note: MEDLINE is the National Library of Medicine's premier bibliographic database that contains references to journal articles in life sciences and biomedicine. MEDLINE is the online counterpart to the MEDical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLARS). MEDLINE includes literature published from 1966 to the present.]

We used to run out of funds before the fiscal year almost always because of the cost of database searching, and we'd have to put a stop on it. It was very nice when they changed how database

searching fees worked. Early on, it was you're paying by the second or at least the minute and some fractions of seconds.

That was something that I really enjoyed doing. Then, once that program ended, I worked with the Funding Information special collection and general reference. Then, after that, it was just governmental reference as a whole, and I became the supervisor of that unit.

KR: What did you do when you were associate director and then director of the State Library Information Center?

MN: Oh, okay, as associate director, it included a lot of different collections in the library. It was general reference things, U.S. documents, New Jersey state documents, Jerseyana (things about New Jersey not published by state government). Did I say genealogy? Genealogy, maps and atlases, rare books. I think there are thirteen, but I can't think of them offhand. That came under my purview and the staff who worked in those various areas as well. It's the largest part of the New Jersey State Library, the State Library Information Center. I mean, the State Library also has a library development area, and those are librarians who work with the other libraries in the state, primarily public libraries, but to a lesser degree special libraries. So, the State Library Information Center is the main component, and we have a law library, too. That wasn't under my purview when I was associate director, but when I became director, that was added. All of the State Library reference units and collections and things came under me as the director.

KR: I am curious what challenges you faced when you were the director.

MN: Oh, funding. When you become director, it's not fun anymore because you're not doing reference questions. [laughter] Even as associate director, I still got to do a few reference questions, not as much because I was busy with other things. But as director, it's all management stuff, the funding for the unit, how to fund the different areas, what kind of budget they can have, what kind of budget we can hope to get from the state, or request and not get, although we did really well right before I left. That budget was really good. So, my successor has a lot to work with, which is nice. I only wish I had it. [laughter]

That was always a concern because you never knew what your budget would be. I would have a budget request, basically, but the State Library as a whole would have one as well, and that would be part of it. That goes through state government channels, but then the budget is voted on by the legislature. So, you never really know what the budget is going to be until, generally, sometime in July, sometimes even in August, by the time the State Library gets its full budget and then figures out, "How are we going to distribute this within the library as a whole?" because there were some different parts of the library. The State Library Information Center is just one part, the part that provides library services.

Funds weren't always there. We went through budget cuts, especially during COVID, when there was a five-quarter budget. It was really bizarre, but we had to figure it out and keep what we could, the things that were vitally important, and then go from there. Then, more funds became available, were released, so that was good because then we could add back a few things that were important that we hadn't been able to do with the first numbers we were given. Being

the director, you have those kinds of headaches, of figuring out how to make everything work, having the funds to make everything work the way it should.

Also, making sure that the collections are taken care of, because we have a rare book collection, and we have other collections as well. Everything needs some TLC [tender loving care], and we have to make sure that we're doing that, taking care of things, preserving things like maps, sending them for encapsulation or things like that. That can be very expensive to do when a budget isn't very big to start with. So, it's the challenges of balancing the needs of different collections, the needs of staff, having the staff that we need in order to be able to operate in the best way possible, making changes. That's one of the things that I did when I became director.

It was time to reevaluate every position we had, because needs change over time, so I wanted to make sure that every new hire that we had going forward was also involved in digitization efforts. That way, we have a lot of people who can give a percentage of their time to help move the digitization projects forward. So, that's something that I had focused on as the director because there wasn't much digitization going on before that. We were able to get equipment that we needed to be able to digitize fragile items, which was huge. That was one of the most satisfying aspects of my job as director, being able to get the funds to do those things and to purchase the equipment that we needed and hire the staff that we needed to be able to do that as a major responsibility of the State Library.

KR: In terms of time, are you okay if we keep going? I have a handful of questions left.

MN: Okay. I have nothing else on my schedule for today except going shopping.

KR: Do you want to take like a quick five-minute break, or are you okay?

MN: No, I'm okay.

KR: Okay, great. Over your forty-five years as a librarian, what were the biggest changes that you saw happen in the field?

MN: Oh, automation, computers, that was huge. I mean, that just changed everything, because until then, the reference collections would be huge, just books, all kinds of books, because that was the only way that you could search for information. Being a state agency, we were limited in the phone calls that we could make. So, it wasn't like we could call Australia, even though we knew that this author wrote this article and can answer this question. You couldn't do that, and there was no email. It was very, very different. As a starting librarian, it was very different than things were by the time I retired, such a huge change in the information field really. It was great.

I remember the first time that actually there was somebody in Australia that I needed to contact for a question, and I was like, "I can email him!" [laughter] I got a response back--there was a time difference--so maybe it was the next day for me, but, heck, that's a lot faster than a letter would have gone. [laughter] The change that computers brought to the field was really significant. I used to hate doing quotation questions when somebody was looking for a particular quote. We had shelves and shelves and shelves and shelves and shelves of quotation books. It's

one thing if it was a simple one, but if it was obscure, you'd be looking through every single book and maybe not find it. Having computers, that helped because we had access to *The New York Times*, I think, on one of our earlier databases when we got a computer. You could search by words, keywords, and it could pull something up in *The New York Times* that would often have the quote and where it came from, who said this or whatever. So, I remember that being the most significant thing. I thought, "Oh, my gosh, I love this. I love having computers. I love doing database searching. I want to do more." [laughter] That changed my focus. I just embraced it. A lot of people who were there, at the time, were further along in their careers and, "No, computers ..." and not really interested. That really made a huge difference in the information field.

KR: Did you have any involvement in professional organizations?

MN: Not a tremendous amount. Oh, gosh, I belonged to the Special Libraries Association earlier on in my career. The New Jersey Documents Association, also earlier on. The New Jersey Library Association, I think once I became director, that became a more important general statewide organization for me to be a part of, so I joined that. Not the American Library Association though, because it was so public library-oriented. I mean, it has other things, too. It does special libraries and other things as well, but, no, I was just more interested in the ones that were New Jersey related. There was a health science library association in New Jersey that I had been a member of when I was a health librarian. I don't know; there were a few that were New Jersey centric especially that I had been a member of when it was relevant to my positions. [Editor's Note: The Special Libraries Association is a global nonprofit organization for library and information professionals that was founded in 1909. The Documents Association of New Jersey is an organization that promotes the use of and access to government publications in libraries in the New Jersey area. Established in 1890, the New Jersey Library Association is the oldest library association in the state. The American Library Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development, promotion and improvement of library and information services. It was founded in 1876.]

KR: In terms of your family, you have two sons.

MN: Yes.

KR: What was it like for you as a working parent?

MN: Oh, wow. It could be difficult at times. If one of them got sick, that was probably the hardest thing because then my husband and I had to figure out how we were going to cover the time while the child was sick, depending on what it was. Sometimes, if it was just a cold or something, then maybe he would stay home. He had a lot more sick time than I did. But if it was something more significant, boy, I could be out for a week sometimes with a child. That's pretty difficult if you're working in a unit where they feel the lack of your presence, but it's all part of being a working mother.

KR: I want to ask you about the pandemic and your time at the New Jersey State Library. You talked about the funding challenges. How else do you think the pandemic affected your work and the library in general? What was done to adapt?

MN: Oh, wow, the pandemic had such a huge impact on everybody. The library is a place that's open, physically open, to library users. There are a lot of physical materials on the shelves that they utilize, or in map drawers or on microfilm or microfiche. A lot of U.S. documents are on microfiche--not that they do that anymore--but we have a huge collection of those. People come in to use back runs of newspapers and journals. Not being physically open, people couldn't come in and do the things that they usually would do for research. Our staff wasn't there either for a time.

Oh, and our budget, the budget was an issue too because there wasn't a state budget in place. So, we were cutting things. I was having endless Zoom meetings and phone conversations with the head of reference services and the head of the law library because we had to figure out what to cut and what they absolutely had to maintain. Then, we implemented the cuts. Luckily, come October or November, some of those funds were distributed to us. We were able to add back a few things that we had cut, not all of them, but things that were really key resources that we should have, so that was helpful.

We closed in March 2020 and started working remotely. The budget came up a little bit later, probably in April or so. In March, we were concerned about how we were going to provide services and access to resources when we didn't have anybody in the building. A lot of the things we potentially needed were there. We had access to our databases, luckily, because we do a lot of our research that way, so we were still able to utilize those to answer questions. But there were some things, especially in the beginning, that the legislature, attorneys general and department commissioners needed in order to deal with the issues they were facing, that were only available in print.

We had to send people on site in order to get those print materials, and so we ended up setting up a rotation schedule where people would go in. I don't even remember what we decided on, but I think different days of the week, there were different people who would go in who lived close by and who said, "Yes, we can do this." They would go in. They would find the item that was necessary. They would scan the pages that the librarian needed, either to answer a question or that the person who asked said, "This is what I need."

We did a lot of scanning during that time period, on-site scanning, in order to fill requests that couldn't be done just electronically. Once we had the scans, then it could be sent to the person and they would have what they needed, or we would just provide them with the information, depending on how the question was phrased. We had certain people who were going on site and others who weren't. So, you had to be concerned too about a disparity between what people were doing. We were fortunate that most jobs had tasks that could be done from home. We were trying to utilize people's skill sets in the best way that we could.

Our reference, that went on the way it always did, because phone calls got forwarded, or people had it arranged differently. Either the call got transferred to them, the actual call, or it came

through as a voicemail message. Our reference continued, and we were able to provide the services that people needed remotely. Then, when the time comes that the library can reopen, some people say, "Oh, well, can't I work from home?" [laughter] I was like, "No, the library is open on site. We need people on site." [laughter]

KR: I have a couple reflection questions going back to your Rutgers years. When you initially visited Rutgers College, you knew that potentially you were going to be in the first coed class. We are calling this project the Pioneering Women of Rutgers College Oral History Project. Now, looking back, how do you feel about being a pioneer at Rutgers College?

MN: I feel proud of being part of that first class because it was groundbreaking, so I'm glad that I was part of it, but it was also rewarding. I received a good education at Rutgers, and I enjoyed my time there, both academically and with the people that I met. So, it was a rewarding experience in many ways.

KR: You talked about when you were an early alum going to football games and how that kind of dissipated over the years. Have you had much alumni involvement since then?

MN: No, not much. We did go to a few football games at Rutgers early on and even a little bit later. My husband and I had gone to some games, but that petered out. It's like, "Well, we can watch them on television now." It's a lot more convenient and warmer. [laughter] Oh, I have gone to several annual Rutgers Days to meet up with my former classmates.

KR: I have reached the end of my questions. At this point, I would like to ask what did we skip over, or what would you like to add?

MN: Oh, gosh, I don't know if you skipped over anything. I think we've been talking for a really long time. I'm thinking, "Oh, I probably talked too much." [laughter] It was nice, I think, to do this. It gave me an opportunity to reminisce, to think about past times at Rutgers, to think about how Rutgers impacted my life going forward. I'm glad that Janice told me about this, even though this morning I was thinking, "Why did I contact Kate?" I'm glad I did.

KR: I will thank you on the record, and then is it okay if we just talk for two minutes off the record?

MN: Sure.

KR: Okay, great. Thank you so much for doing this oral history interview. I really appreciate it.

MN: It was my pleasure.

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

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