

Interview with Margie Sved
By Jennifer Donnally
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Jennifer: Where did you grow up and what was your childhood like?

Margie: I was born in New York City and I grew up since age two in New Brunswick, New Jersey area. In many ways it was an unusual family because my mother was a physician. She went to medical school just after World War II in the late forties. So many things sort of in my family happened a generation earlier than happened with many other people with that. My mom was a physician; my dad was an orthodontist. I rotated to New Brunswick NJ area because my father's best friend from dental school had grown up there and childhood was easy. I remember primarily my mother not working and my mother being home and learnt many years later that during the time my mother was actually at home, she was working very part time but very much working. When my youngest brother was born, he is five years younger than me, when he went into what we then called nursery school but what we call pre-school now, she quote "went back to work." So grew up with two working parents, good income, things were just easy. A very close-knit neighborhood, we moved to the actual town Highland Park in the middle of my kindergarten year. And the day I walked into kindergarten I met Debbie and Debbie stayed my best friend through all of elementary school, same group of friends through Junior year - high, what we call middle school - high school and am still very close friends with her. She married the son of my parents' best friends. So we have stayed very close, his younger sister married my brother's college roommate, so there is this just fabric that was just interwoven growing up. For the most part all of us just remember childhood being fairly idyllic. You know we would just meet groups of kids somewhere between our houses and just play and play and play, a lot of fantasy play. Somehow, even though my mother was the one who was the full time

working mother, somehow we often managed to be at our house. Me, my brothers, my close friends, were all very good scholastically, so there was a lot of focus on school.

Family Dinners

JMD: Out of curiosity, coming from an intellectual family as well, were a lot of the discussions geared towards your life or sort of broader questions about the outside world?

MBS: Oh, outside world, a lot of outside world. You know Vietnam started probably early High School for me and being able to talk about the affects of that. My parents were both very involved in their professional lives, but in other things. I remember that my mom was also our Girls Scout leader. I remember early on learning from my mother that if you want to ask somebody to do something, you find the busiest person already. They are the most likely person to already do. My mom marched on state house in New Jersey for abortion rights. My mom, before *Roe v. Wade*, arranged abortions for her college students in other parts of the county. So there wasn't, during some of that time I fantasized that I had been in marches because she connected to Margaret Sanger. That wasn't true but that was some of my high school fantasy. I had issues during my high school years because my mom got quite involved with a lot of her patients. A lot of that was the early lesbian community at Rutgers and it was an interesting thing for me when I kind of still needed a parent, seeing her parent other people. You know we made peace with this many times since but it really was a very difficult time for me in many ways. I experienced most of my adolescence as being different and did not know what that difference was about. I had a very close-knit group of friends that I never totally felt part of. I started being sexual early; I started drugs early. So a fair amount of high school was sex, drugs, and rock n'roll, which nobody ever picked up because I was still an excellent student. They only focused in on people whose grades were falling and things like that.

Difference and Growing Up

. . . Though the first depression in sixth grade was prob – was very much my friend Debbie who was a close friend forever decided to start walking home from school with a boy instead of with me. And we never backed then processed any of it but that loss of that absolute connection with somebody else that had been there. I mean we spent weekends at each others' houses one or the other frequently. I mean people got us confused because we looked a like. The number of stories Debbie and I can sit down and start telling other people about what went on between us when we were young. So I think there was that piece and some of the importance of that you only go back and look at as an adult lesbian. I don't know that I had any awareness that that was what happened when Debbie and I broke up or what that was that made me feel different than everybody else. I told my kids - I've got a thirteen-year-old right now who is in seventh grade - when I was in seventh grade I made up a boyfriend. Because everyone starting getting crushes on people and started to have boyfriends and I made a boyfriend that I met that was one of the other local schools. Therefore I could talk about him because he wasn't one of us. I don't remember that as being particularly painful I just remember that as something that I did.

I am still in touch with my high school biology teacher. She was a very important figure in a whole group of our lives. She clearly was one who made it very clear that those of us who were female and bright could go on to do whatever we wanted to do. She was going to open whatever doors for all of us she could.

JMD: Give me a time frame, approximately when did you go to high school?

MBS: This was '67 to '70. Graduated high school in 70.

JMD: So much is going on culturally at the time. When, I'm trying to figure out when is the best time to ask this question. When did your coming out process begin?

MBS: On and off for many, many years. I had, I was very involved in my temple youth group. That is where all my early political stuff was. My very first political thing was passing out leaflets to boycott grapes at local stores that I used the temple mimeograph machine. It was other people from my youth group that were doing it with me and our rabbi was very supportive of us being out in the world doing social justice things. That rabbi left, we sort of had a year that we were sort of rabbi-less, and then a new rabbi came in my senior year of high school. And one of my first challenges to him was what did he think about homosexuality. So that I had some awareness but it sure didn't have anything to do with me because I was at that point already sleeping with a fair number of men - boys, none of them were men.

The summer between my junior and senior year of high school, I went to a national science foundation program in Kalamazoo Michigan at Western Michigan University that I got kicked out of. Four of us, two boys, two girls, got kicked out together for cohabiting. When my parents decided that I set up for me to get kicked out because I was unhappy there - that was how they processed things - I had very strongly fallen in love with another girl in the program who was not one of the ones who got kicked out. When they were putting us in the cars to take us away to send us home, she and I kissed. It was clearly a very strong, emotional kiss for me. That was one of those moments that maybe this is what I'm supposed to be doing. But I still didn't think of myself as a lesbian. During senior year of high school, I allowed a rumor to go around that I had gotten kicked out of this program because I was involved with another girl. I enjoyed that that was the rumor that went around about me, but I still wasn't quite connecting it to who I was.

(865)

And that sort of happened for the next couple of years. I came down here to Duke to go to college. I kept having very unemotional sex with guys. I became very emotionally attached to a woman in my dorm. The precursor of TALF – Triangle Area Lesbian Feminist - that had been started about the time, you might even have read, but 73-74 somewhere in there. But before TALF existed there was Duke Gay Alliance or something like that. I don't remember the actual name was but it only had gay, and Janette and I went to a meeting that it happened to be that no women were there because they were off starting TALF. So we had this funny thing of walking in and there being no women and then this group of women coming in afterwards after this other separate meeting. Both she and I, you know it took us many years until she and I were sexual, very much identified ourselves at that point as bi-sexual and we were therefore not a part of this community.

My struggles from Junior Year of college until I graduated medical school was that I never fit what the local lesbian community wanted me to be. Struggled for years about well was I then a lesbian or not if I didn't meet their - I still was having sex with men. We had a thing early on when I decided to apply to medical school and go to medical school, I wanted to join in the patriarchy and I couldn't be a lesbian. A window that happened around the country during those same few years and I know people in Ann Arbor, and Boston and San Francisco, that got that same thing. You can't be a lesbian if you went to medical school because you are joining the patriarchy. Literally during the years of medical school was when that changed. So by the time I finished medical school, the local community wanted me to stay and be their doctor.

JMD: That is tough to negotiate after having been excluded and.

MBS: The person who I became later wonders well why didn't I just say this is who I am you know and I'm going to be where I'm gonna be and call myself what I want to call myself. But I think that is not an unusual thing for women to need some community to help define who they are. So I didn't have that community. It wasn't until I left after medical school and went and did my residency in Charleston, South Carolina. A much more conservative area but where there were lesbians who wore lipstick and dressed nice and were part of the social hierarchy of the city that I was able to separate it out that inside I was core lesbian and there were some trimmings outside that were never going to fit with what a local lesbian community wanted me to be . . .

From '73 til '79 really it was very much a confusing piece of what my sexual orientation was, who was I. Some of that was my own inner stuff, some of it was attitude by what was around me. Clearly very woman centered during most of that time, clearly still having sex with men during most of that time, having very, very close friendships with women and not being sexual with them; having very unemotional sexual relationships with men and that is where I was. Didn't have, was sexual with some women during that time but they were all out of town. I had long distance relationships with women that persisted over time and distance, but so. And that then overlaps with a whole lot of the next step you are going to want to talk about because it is those same years . . .

JMD: Same years, very formative years in your life.

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Duke University Undergraduate Years

JMD: What sort of activities did you participate in on the Duke campus? You said that you found a niche, which was what your and your friends . . .

MBS: I don't know what they call some of these things now but Duke University Union, which did all of the social stuff, so. But I quickly got to where I was on the board of that so I wasn't even any longer major attractions with the bands and major speakers and freewater () films. But I was when of the overseeing students with all that at least by my Junior Year. I started off writing for the newspaper my freshmen year but I've always had trouble writing so I didn't stick with that even though probably politically that is where I fit best . . .

The summer between my junior year and senior year at Duke I worked on the grounds crew. There is so much of this that is now hard to tease out and play together. But there were, they hired a group of women for the first time, women students. They always hire more students to work on the grounds crew during the summer because that is when the grounds needed the most attending and that was the summer that they ended up hiring a group of female students to work on the grounds crew. So I was in that group. So was Teresa Troll, who went on to be one of the big singers with Olivia music and a couple of other. So it was a very clear feminist statement to be one of the people working there. We used to have big things about things like you know the guys could wear overalls without shirts under it and we tried going in without wearing anything under our overalls and they decided that everyone had to wear a shirt under their overalls. (999) I really, really liked working on the grounds with the older black men that summer. That is actually, before that I had been planning, I was a Chemistry major and I was going to go to graduate school in Bio Chem and develop pharmaceuticals. I was not going to follow in my mother's footsteps being a doctor. That summer, sort of a mixture of the feminism,

working with these older black men, the gentleness of them, the privilege that I had that they didn't have, sort of all coalesced that I was going to need to go to medical school. I made a decision not to apply right then. I didn't actually have all the classes that I was going to need so I was going to take a year off, work, pick up the two classes that I needed and apply to medical school the year after. I'd become a North Carolina resident so I could apply to UNC as an in-state student.

Women's Health Initiatives

MBS: . . . Janette who I lived with and was the woman at the time that I was totally attached to, was one of them. And they had gotten, there were two different groups, and they had gotten to the point where they said they didn't need their consciousness raised anymore they needed to go out and do activity. They then formed what then became the original rape crisis center here and the Women's Health Collective, Durham Women's Health Cooperative we were, cooperative, we were not a collective. So that women from the two different groups came together and they re-divided so that one group was going to do the rape crisis and one group was going to do the women's health. Janette went off to do the rape crisis and told me she thought that I would like doing the women's health. So very early, I wasn't one of the true, the people from the CR (consciousness-raising) group who branched off, I wasn't one of them. But I got involved before it really became an entity. . .

YWCA

MBS: . . . Very quickly, see Gilna, I think where Gilna starts is that Gilna was a social worker intern at UNC, was in social school at UNC. And for her internship she did a placement at the YWCA in Durham.

JMD: Which is that house, the women's cooperative is right?

MBS: Right and under Gilna, I mean everything feminist related or women's related ended up happening under Gilna at the old YWCA which was where the Durham police department is now. They tore down the building at one point and the big police building is there now. But, Gilna managed from going to be an intern to going to be hired and sort of got hired as women's project or something. So she made it possible for all of us to start meeting in the Y and using space at the Y to do whatever it was we wanted to do. So even though she was probably just like a year or two older than most of us, she sort of became the figure that kind of was the glue for many of it. You know that just made sure that once it got started it kept going, that there was a phone that you could use, there was a – she did whatever negotiations needed to be done with the rest of the Y staff and the Y board and all of that. She was sort of the one that shepherded all the other things that, that happened.

I know one of the very, the early things we started doing with the Durham Women's Collective - we were doing pregnancy testing so that women would not have to go to the Doctors offices and go through that. We were driving women to Virginia for abortions cause you couldn't get one in North Carolina even after *Roe v. Wade*. We were running a problem pregnancy line, birth control information, a lot of stuff like that like the other, similar things that were happening

in other places. We had whatever year the first *Our Bodies Ourselves* came out, we had a prepublication copy so that is sort of where the timing was.

JMD: Did it become sort of your bible?

MBS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah we were aware of similar things happening in other places. Mostly in the big cities. It was, we were sort of unusual for it to be happening in a place that most of the other thought was as backwards as Durham was. But very parallel with what was happening in other cities was the initial stuff.

Another women tells a story, a year in between, of college and medical school for me so it would have been 75, but she was a freshmen at Duke and she heard about the Women's Health Cooperative. She decided that that was what she was going to volunteer doing and her she was a freshmen on campus and didn't have a ride so she called the number and they had told her that someone would pick her up. So there she was waiting on at the bus stop and Margie came and picked her up. And you know she has this incredible memory of being told that there would be this women Margie and you know (laughter). She is a therapist in Charlotte now that I have stayed in touch with. She married a Duke optomologist. In turns out that there was time, her name was Heidi, and I was very much, Heidi was who I was attracted to and actually asking her out on actual dates. She was very uh, she had these real clear boundaries, and you know you didn't just go hang out you know. A guy I had been involved with on and off, and I unbeknownst to each other at the time were both dating her at the same time. (Laughter) So things like that. It was a weird time. But it was a good time . . .

UNC Medical School (123)

MBS; During my first year of medical school is when a group of us that a subgroup of the Durham Women's Health Collective, that became then was the Women's Health Teaching

Group and now has another name, to teach pelvic exams. So this is what Gilna was talking to (?). And we were, that happened because Brigitte Hamilton, one of the women involved in the Health Collective, was married to a man named Michael Hamilton, who was the physician director of the physician's associate assistant program at Duke. And Michael had, it wasn't even an article in a journal yet it was something he had heard about at a conference, women model's being used to teach pelvic exams. So he asked Brigitte to talk to us about was this something we could do. So we talked and a group of us decided and the names, and I don't know, some of these are people you can't find because we've tried to find them recently. Jan Tedder was a feminist practitioner, I think she is still in Apex, was the woman who agreed to teach us all how to do pelvics. We met in the basement of Claudia Chanlett's parent's house in Chapel Hill, learning how to do pelvic exams on each other. We used, there were tables we used piles of books to make stirrups. We had Jane had been able to buy us old plastic speculums and it was one of those things one direction or another happened in twenty places around the country sort of spontaneously at the same time. We weren't hearing about from each other but we sort of all did it. But that somehow had to be the next step was teaching physicians how to do a more women sensitive pelvic exam. As models and teachers we could be the teachers as a model.

I continued doing that all through medical school. They wouldn't let me model in my own class but I could model in the other classes. So we did it for UNC medical students, we did it for Duke medical students, we did it for Duke PA students. It started with the Duke PA program, with the first in family nurse practitioner students. We ended up going a little further. We did a presentation at a PA thing, a nurse practitioner program – my actual first professional presentation was in Ashville at a family nurse practitioner and physician assistant conference – where we demonstrated how we taught pelvics.

And those were just, even though they were along the same time as I was still confused as to who I was - who was I going to partner with; I was probably going to be single; I was probably going to keep having sex with men and emotional relationships with women; well maybe I could be involved with a women as long as it was long distance - but sort of, while that was going on I was being a very good successful medical student and being one of these group of women who continued the women's health collective during all those, cooperative during all those years, started Women's Health Teaching Group, kept that going.

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. . . Susie Woodard, Connie Winstead and me had dinner together every Sunday night for all four years of medical school with me with, usually it was about six women, and the other rotated but the three of us were always there. We uh, some of the other women were in went back to nursing school, social work school, we were all sharing what we were learning in the different things. You know, we were being cooperative about our live. Until, and I remember this so vividly, in my third year of medical school when you start being on call and doing rotations I couldn't eat with them every Sunday night because sometimes I was on call.

. . . I had been on my surgery rotation and I was having dinner with them and I told them some of the things that had happened. And they said that is not true Margie you are making that up. . . . A Hispanic male surgery resident was chief resident who was obnoxious, absolutely horrible, mean, nasty to almost everybody, very very homophobic and one thing came after another and I don't know the order in which things actually happened. There was a hairdresser who was very stereotypically gay who was in for a liver transplant and we were standing outside of his room on rounds and he said, "I'm not going in there, he disgusts me. We shouldn't be putting a liver into him." I remember being a livid and I remember saying, "I don't want you

going into that room, don't you dare step foot into that room. I'm going to take care of this guy."

(She nervously laughs)

. . . On this particular day a fairly young guy came in for emergency surgery that was clouting with everything bloody (), I don't quite remember, we were on a () team. I was, we started the surgery before an attending came so it was (), another resident and me. And as they were doing the stuff, you know pulling the retractions and other things, they were trying to make these guy's blood squirt at my breasts. They were sort of being competitive in terms of who could hit me closest to my nipple and uhm. Yeah.

JMD: And you were the only female in the room?

MBS: Yeah I am but there had to be a nurse in there of something, but clearly of the medical team. And finally, you know there is sort of like nothing you can do, you know. An attending finally came and came in and the guy ended up dying. Uhm, they wouldn't let me talk to the guy's wife. This was sort of the first patient I had that had died and had me go off and do other things. I remember being angry enough that I talked to the attending. And he said it must have been accidental and I said no, this was literally what they were doing and saying. And he did say that that was unacceptable, and after that the guy made it really, really hard for me and I flunked that three weeks of surgery. But in the context I ended up doing fine in the long run and never really showed up in any way.