

JULIA MEEHLING TRANSCRIPT

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DAMIAN MACEY Interviewer

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D: Today on behalf of the Marshall Friends of the Library Oral History Project I am in the home of Julia Meehling. Julia did not grow up in Marshall but she did have an interesting family background and has now been here for a number of years. So with that, I will introduce you to Julia.

J: Hello, this is going to be fun, I think, I have been pondering on those things that have happened in my life to share and I guess I will just start at the beginning. My mom and dad met in St. Petersburg, Florida. Mom was originally from Brazil, Indiana and dad settled there, his dad travelled a lot, he was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Mom's parents moved to St. Pete to build a motel, it was called The Patrician after my mother and they ran that motel for several years. It was near the dog track there and mom and dad went to the same high school there in St. Pete. Dad was a track runner, he liked track and they also went to the same church. That was the Presbyterian Church in St. Pete. That is where they met and where they got married. Dad went into the Navy mom had married and divorced at one time, and she was having a hard time deciding what to do with her life and dad invited her down to Key West, that is where he was stationed. (This was before they were married.) And dad was thrilled when she came down there, they had known each other but had never dated. My mother made a comment once, "Spud" do you remember the time when you said you would never ask another woman to marry you? And he said "Yeah" and my mother said well, here I am. So basically, my mother proposed to my dad which thrilled dad because he had been infatuated with my mother forever. So that is kinda how they got together. They had been best friends for years.

They were married on August 24, 1958 and I was born in September 1959. My birthday is one of those historic days in history, it wasn't when I was born but it is now. I was born on September 11th. Then in 1966 on May 6th, my sister was born. We had lived in military housing there in Key West, I went to school in Bixby Park, and my parents decided that we needed a bigger home and so we ended up renting a house on Harris Street and after a while my dad got a promotion in the Navy, dad was never very ambitious in the Navy, mom wanted him to be but he was very comfortable just living a very simple life, but he did get the promotion and had the opportunity to do something else and that was to become a recruiter for the Navy. So while he did some schooling, we did a vacation in St. Pete with my grandmother. Then dad was to work in either Valdosta, GA or Atlanta, Ga, my mother really wanted Valdosta because it was closer to Florida which she really loved, but the order assigned him to Atlanta. So I went to fourth grade in Atlanta at a school there called Super Alexander.

D: What were your mom and dad's names?

J: Howard and Patricia Rasmussen. That's a good old Norwegian name. We lived in an apartment until a house was built, they had decided to build a house. It was in the area of Stone Mountain.

That was a neat house, we had a full basement, three bedrooms, one and a half bath which was later remodeled, and a mother-in-law quarter built later on. So I began fifth grade at Roland Elementary. I usually did not walk to school but I did walk home from school. We didn't have snow storms but we did have ice storms and we did have a gas heater put in because all the power would go out and the city would just lock up. We had a camping stove when the electricity would go out...camping was kind of our vacation. In my fifth grade year, my mom became a girl scout leader and that was something that my mother and I could do together and my sister would, of course, tag along. Dad eventually became a registered girl scout, he was very proud of that, he was a boy scout but he became also a registered girl scout. So we had girl scout meetings in our basement and mom was always very creative in her manner of teaching us things. We had lessons in poise and etiquette and all that kind of stuff and we weren't afraid to try new adventures. And mother loved to cook so she taught us cooking and that sort of stuff too. So my fifth, sixth and seventh grade years were years when I was kinda getting established, making friends in the Atlanta area. I did a couple trips to Savannah to meet a friend I had kept from fourth grade. I learned from her family how to go crabbing.

D: Have you kept in touch with that friend?

J: Her name was Dottie Bell, and I did not stay in touch with her but I learned a lot about Savannah life. But I did start having really good friends in that time at Roland. Then high school began with eighth grade. A lot of the girls in 7th grade went to a place called Midway Park School and it had football and baseball and I always saw these girls doing cheerleading like out on the playground and I thought that was pretty interesting and I was pretty athletic at that time. Another friend of mine, Carrie Logan, we were pretty athletic and we enjoyed playing with the boys, like kickball and baseball. But I kept seeing these girls doing their cheers and I thought that looked like fun and so when I got to eighth grade I tried out for cheerleading and I surprisingly, made it.

So cheerleading became a big part of my life in high school, it was not always easy, my mom told me that I would have to watch out for those girls, and she was right. So I learned a lot about life during that time. But I loved the cheerleading, loved the games, pep rallies, but I had to deal with all the other girls on the squad. But what saved me during that time was that I joined the eighth grade girls' chorus. My mother had always been a singer so music was pretty popular in our household. So when I joined the chorus I actually had fun and there was contests and things that we did. It was kind of another avenue that I explored and ended up being very involved in the choral part of it. We did musicals in our school and the director was Steven Burton and he would entertain us very well with the music that he involved us in. He would get us pieces of music that we never thought we could master, but when we did master it, it was euphoric for all of us. And we did that in a contest at one point and got first ratings in every category and we were really walking on cloud 9. The friends that I had in chorus are the friends that I grew very very close to. One of them was a black boy whose mom was a teacher in my elementary school and Victor and I became very close. His name was Victor Wilson. In the area where I lived there weren't many blacks, Victor was the only black kid in our elementary school. Victor was very very wise before his time.

D: He must have been very well accepted in your school.

J: Yes, he was, you couldn't help but love Victor. And his mom was a jewel. And he really liked to sing too and he was very very good. So my best friends were kids from the music department. When we would work on musicals we would get really close to each other and there were so many people involved in producing these musicals.

D: Was there a favorite musical that you did?

J: Well, we did Camelot, and Oklahoma and I played Liesel in The Sound of Music and that one probably really got "my feet wet." And Sound of Music was my favorite movie. My senior year we did South Pacific and I had the lead role in that and that one was really fun. So like I said, music was just always very important. When my mother was very young she began voice lessons and developed her voice very well, she was a mezzo-soprano, she as a very very strong soprano and at one time in her life, she had the opportunity to go to New York and sing opera, she had her bags packed, her train ticket, and she got scared and backed out. And so with that happening, that was probably the one regret of my mother's life. And she has always wondered what would her life have been had she followed through. So in raising my sister and I, she always taught us that if we had opportunism to grab onto them and not be afraid of doing those things that we are fearful of. So in turn, I raised my kids to not fear opportunities and "take it and run."

When I graduated from high school, I was pretty sick of school and I really did not know what I wanted to do, I tossed around things from being a dental hygienist to a PE teacher, to really nothing at all, because I really didn't know what I wanted to do. So I ended up working at a little business that was fairly new to the area called Atlanta Cutlery and they were located in Conyers, GA. They were more catalog sales and eventually they opened up a showroom. But it was mostly just packaging up parts to make knives etc. The only other job I really had was lifeguarding. I had gotten a job at an apartment complex and that job was interesting because that job was in a mostly black neighborhood. I wasn't afraid of the people but it was a little intimidating because I was there at the pool and I opened it up and all of a sudden there were all these black people, I found out for the first time, what it was like to be the minority. But I was a tough one and they didn't like me because I was tough and they had never had a lifeguard there before to watch them.

But it was a good job and I learned a lot there too. And the kids learned that if they abided by the rules, everything would be fine. And then after doing that for a while, I decided to go back to school so I enrolled in a Jr College there as a stepping stone to a bigger university. It was a small local school, and I went to school in addition to working because I did have expenses, I had bought a car and I had car insurance. Then I switched it around and worked all day and went to school at night.

But it turned out that we were a little closer to my mom's family, we would come up and visit with my great aunt Florence Baldwin in Brazil and the cousin's would gather and we would have like a mini family reunion and a lot of times the older folks would tell the old stories from long ago and it would get boring for a young kid, so my mom would call up her cousin, that would be Deloris Meehling, better known as Dodi, and she said I got a girl here who needs to come to the farm. So I would come to the farm and I would visit with my cousins here, my cousins being Beth, Fred, Amy and Allan. And it was always

interesting because I usually hung out with Amy and Fred, they were the closest in age, so we would do bike riding, swim in the gravel pit. Did a lot of fun things. I remember playing hide and seek and I would hide in the corn because it was tall, and playing in the sand pile. Fred and Amy's dad, John, would scold us, but I didn't really think he would do anything to us. But then I got a look at his face and decided he meant it. I got to see a cow being milked and I got to see the eggs being taken out of the nest, and there were chickens there, just fun things for kids to do. It was always intriguing to see things grow and watch and play with the animals. I thought I had always considered myself an "outdoorsy" girl but there more of a simple life here on the farm.

So I just always enjoyed coming over here in the summers. And then one summer, the summer of 1979, Amy was getting married and she had asked my mother to come sing at the wedding, and my mother had at that time a catering business. She also worked at the school but any free time she catered, so she had to decline singing at the wedding because she had weddings scheduled for that time. So my mom suggested me instead, next thing I know I am told that I am singing for a wedding. I don't know who picked out the music, it was music I was not used to singing, more classical or "churchy". So that was a new challenge for me. So, I came up here for that wedding. Beth came and picked me up from the airport and the next morning I found out that the family had just finished up their planting which I knew nothing about.

And of course Fred and I had always been really close and my mom asked me before I came up, "Well, you will be seeing Fred, won't you?" She knew that Fred and I had become really close. But I had been dating at home and was pretty interested in a gentlemen there. Well, next thing I know, Amy is busy with her stuff and Fred was the one to see that I was where I needed to be and so forth. Well, by the time it was time to go home, he would ask me "Why don't you move up here?". And I am thinking "Why do I need to move here?". And Fred had said in one of our conversations. "I think I could marry you." And I told him we couldn't get married, we are cousins. And he said "Sure we can, we can get married, because you see, my mother and Dodi, Fred's mother, were first cousins". Their dads were brothers, so the common name there was Bradshaw. So there were seven Bradshaw brothers and turns out that my mom and Dodi were first cousins. Apparently Fred had checked this all out, and he just kept pushing for me to move here. And I said "What would your mom and dad think?" And he said well, it's my life, but I had not really pondered on that thing. And when I get home, this boyfriend of mine picks me up and the way he behaved that time was not very becoming and that upset me and then he did other things I didn't like and so I broke up with that guy. Well, I called up Fred and Boo-hoed for a while and he reassured me that it would be alright. And I thought that was really cool that he was being so supportive of me. And before I know it, he is asking me again to move up here. And I start thinking that I am not tied to anything there and I could go to school and get a job up here. So Fred rented an apartment and we were coming up for a mini reunion in July so we brought some of my stuff then and put it in the apartment and I planned to move in after Labor Day. So I did the official move in September 1979, Fred comes down to move me, his friend helps. So I move into this apartment on Fourth Street, well, it was a different situation because when Fred came down to move me, he came to my work, so I introduced him to my co-workers, and he proposes to me, I don't know if it was a weak moment, a smart moment, and I accepted the proposal !! So, I was moving to

Marshall, IL as an engaged woman. And my mother, since she was a planner, catered, always thinking ahead, said wouldn't it be nice if you got married in November? So I ended up getting married November 24, 1979. Only 24 weeks after Amy had gotten married. So there was a lot of preparation to do, since I wasn't Catholic, I had to learn that. And that basically moved me towards an area that I had never really explored much. I had gone to church, believed in God, just didn't know if I had what everybody else had. But I had always admired the Catholic faith, I had friends who had talked about giving up something for Lent, well, I didn't really know what that meant, and they would go to mass and confession, well, I didn't know what that was.

But after meeting with Father Auda, I fell in love with the Catholic faith, and I became Catholic. So when we planned our wedding, we planned a Catholic service in Atlanta, and Fred was very understanding because a lot of planning had to be done. So, my mother planned that we do it Thanksgiving Weekend because my friends would be out of school. So, in Marshall, IL, they ended up chartering a bus, loaded up this bus, friends, relatives, and travelled to Atlanta on Thanksgiving Day. So my mom planned a Thanksgiving Dinner at the hotel where all were staying and when the bus arrived, we all had our jobs, and we took all the fixings to the hotel and had dinner with our guests. So that began our wedding extravaganza for that weekend. We got married on that Saturday afternoon and had a nice reception in Avondale Estates, and Fred and I spent our honeymoon in Helen, GA where there is a little German alpine village. But it rained the whole weekend so we cut our honeymoon short and headed back to Atlanta to pick up our gifts and then headed to Marshall to begin our lives together. It was a very busy time.

Then my mother wanted me to come back in December for Christmas and by this point, I was exhausted because so much had happened since I had come to Marshall in June for Amy's wedding and I told my mom that it was time for me to just stay put and my mom cried and cried and cried and just couldn't believe that I wasn't coming home for Christmas and she said she would never let that happen again ..to be apart at Christmas.. so she kind of made it her job to see that we were together at Christmas. So Fred and I did have an agreement that we would have to go back to Georgia everyone in a while but in that first year, I had our first son, Matthew, he was named after my mom's dad. I had never known him, but always thought that was a good strong name and wanted to name my first son Matthew. I always say that Matt and I grew up together because I was only 20 years old when I had him, I had a lot of growing up to do. So in that time I was learning about the area, my mom couldn't believe that I was going to live in this small town. She said she had lived in a small town and she said that everybody will know your business. I told her I could handle it, I would just have to be a good person. And I found out quickly that I had become Fred's wife to people and I didn't really have a name at that point. But eventually they did ask what my actual name was. So then I became Julia, the one that sings. I have Ed Pearce to thank for people knowing my name because he had me sing at funerals and people got to know my name. And I sang for a few weddings and sometimes at Burnside Nursing Home then later on Karen Ellshoff and I would perform at different things.

I learned how to garden from Eleanor Macey, Fred's aunt, and she really knows how to put out a garden!! I didn't believe what a large garden we could have, she was usually the one working and I was dealing with a little kid but when it came time to harvest the produce, we would can stuff or freeze

it. I never really fell in love with canning or freezing, but I knew it had to be done. So Fred and I decided we wanted another child, so four years later, we had Amanda, and was a little concerned because it looked like she was going to be born on the same day as Matt. But Amanda, being the strong child that she is, decided to come the day before Matt's day. We moved out of that first apartment just a few months after we were married. We moved into a house that John and Dodi had as a rental property. That house was on Lower Park Road. It was known as the Drummond Place. The Drummond's had several kids and raised them in that tiny little house. I do not know how that was done !! And as our family grew we saw that we needed a place of our own so we had been looking for a while and eventually we found the house that we have lived in since 1986. And in those years I became a mother, and a wife, and a singer.

Then eventually I decided that I needed to help with the income. So I decided to sell Tupperware. I became a manager with them, had a car, I started dealing with working for a sales business which I had not done before. And I tried to recruit new dealers in the area. It was a snow storm that took me to a new area (Charleston) and a huge snow storm took place and I am trying to drive home in this snowstorm because my kid was getting off the bus and he waited for me in the barn for about a half an hour because I just could not get there any quicker. And I vowed that day that that was never going to happen again!!

That day changed a lot of things and I vowed I would never work out of Marshall again. But, funny how things work, because Pizza Hut was advertising for people to come work and I thought, well, that is at least in town. My mother encouraged me that I could wait on tables which I had never done, so I took the job and found out that I could do it !! Next thing I know I am working there and doing very well and two ladies (Anne Sutton and Sandy Atkins) came in and they both worked at First National Bank. And they said that they had had someone who had just quit and asked if I would be interested working there. I was cleaning the floor and cleaning up after the lunch group and they said "You are a hard worker, have you ever thought or working at a bank?". And I thought Really? I was astounded because here I was working in a pizza place and they thought I could work in a bank!! And they talked me into coming in and filling out an application and they wanted to do an interview right away and we set up a time.

So I dressed up for the interview, and it was funny because the president of the bank at that time, Dale Adams, said he wanted me to meet the person who I would be working with, Phyllis Burrell, the head of accounting, I think he was trying to get a feeling for a connection between the two of us. And when she comes in, I recognize her and she recognizes me, and she remembers being at a Tupperware party and I was very pregnant and she remembers that I had a hard time getting up off the couch !! She helped me up off the couch. So we just really hit it off. I remember she asked me if I had ever run a ten key, and I said I didn't know what that was. And she said, well do you know how to work a calculator? and I said I did and she said, you'll be fine, we will teach you. She asked if I type, and I didn't really have any need to learn typing after I moved to Marshall but I had taken one typing class in college and she said, don't worry, we will teach you !! Well then I got petrified because I actually got that job, I was as nervous as nervous can be.

But I'll tell you what ...Phyllis Burress was an awesome friend, boss and teacher. I remember her sitting me down in front of a CRT keyboard and she said keep in mind anything that goes in here we can fix. She was trying to calm my nerves, but you know what.. I learned it, became very comfortable with it. And she wanted me to use all ten fingers on the adding machine, so I watched her, and I became pretty good at using all my fingers. And then that led me to the proof machine, so you were inputting all these numbers and I got pretty good at running that machine too. But I felt like that job eventually became too political and so I left that job and soon went back to Pizza Hut but that wasn't enough income so I ended up working full time at Walmart then. I did anything from scanning to working the cash register, to working layaways, returns, that was another place where I learned a lot. So I worked full time at Walmart and part time at Pizza Hut. Then Pam Masuga asked me if I would be interesting in being assistant manager at Pizza Hut. So I chose to work only one place, Pizza Hut and learned a lot about business there. And learned a lot about the process of running a restaurant.

It was a fun place to work and I decided it would be funny to tell Pam, on April Fool's Day, that I was pregnant but then I thought better of it. Well then that Easter I am singing at the Easter Vigil and I all of a sudden passed out, and George Macey leans into my ear and whispers "Julia, are you pregnant?" And I remember lifting my head and saying "I don't know." So sure enough, I was pregnant with our third child and I told Fred that he hadn't gotten his farmer yet, so he had better work a little harder in that area. And when we found out that it was a boy, I thought that was a start. And little did I know that my little boy was going to be a walking image of my husband. So, God has a way of being very humorous. And this kid was always climbing, playing with tractors, or in the dirt, and as he has grown, he walks and talks like Fred, he acts like Fred, and Fred got his farmer, because Adam does have a love of farming. So at this point, Fred and I have three kids and obviously it was very important for me to be in my kids' lives when they were infants, but since I was working at Pizza Hut, I didn't know how to shuffle lives with jobs and kids. So I went back to being just mom and quit my job at Pizza Hut. And the two older kids loved it because I was around a little bit more, and Fred was very supportive, he said we will make it, it will be fine. My mother was very concerned that I wasn't prepared because I had gotten rid of all the "baby stuff" and she said I have to do something to get ready for this baby. So the family put together a shower for me so I got a start in having all those baby things again. So Matt was 14 and Amanda was 10 and remember Matt coming home from school and saying they were studying the reproductive system and everybody just kept looking at him and saying, your mom and dad are having a baby, so that was Matt's first time of learning about the birds and the bees !! But he was really very supportive of Adam coming into our family, Amanda had been a very determined child, very set in her opinions which has worked for her now, she has done very well for herself.

D: You went back into banking for a while, didn't you?

J: I did, I wanted a little bit of pocket money, just to buy something for the kids now and then, so I ended up cleaning the church and rectory, and then it was getting to be time that we needed more money back in so I had an opportunity to go back into banking, then at First Bank and Trust, so I filled out an application, got hired on and very quickly learned their systems and worked in the new accounts office and really loved that job but then again, I don't do very well with the politics of offices, I did very well working with my immediate coworkers but didn't agree with the higher up people. So very quickly

I chose to leave there. That was about seven or eight years ago, and at the time when I was preparing to leave the bank, I was watching and listening for another opportunity for me, and I had word that friends or ours, Bill and Lori King, Dr. King, the chiropractor in Marshall, and they were surprised by a pregnancy, their third child, and she came into the bank and said that they were looking for someone to work when she was off to have the baby, and I asked what kind of person were they looking for, she said someone who is positive, easy to work with.

And so I went home and told Fred, that I thought I could do Lori's job, so Fred sees Bill and tells him I might be interested in the job. And he said, "well we would like to talk to her". So we met for lunch and talked about it and he offered me the job and I said I think I could do that. So, once again I am learning a new area of business. I had gotten my insurance license when I worked at the bank, life and health insurance, so I had a little bit of an idea how insurance worked. I had a month of Lori's instruction before she left, and I am still doing their billing and insurance for them. I really love my job, we all get along so well. They are good good people. So that is our story.

D: How many acres does Fred farm?

J: You know, I never really know, I know that sounds stupid and I probably should know that. When I learned the little that I know about farming, I knew that it was not my expertise. Fred would always tell me what he was doing, and I would shake my head in agreement, whenever he makes decision about farming, I just agree with him. He has good intuition, knowledge, has done very well for himself. He and his brother, Allan, and Adam farm together. And it has worked over the years.

D: Have you had hobbies through the years, other than music?

J: I became active in the church, mainly because I wanted to be close to my kids. And I kinda picked up where my mom left off in the Girl Scouts, she was my leader for years, so my daughter was in Girl Scouts for years, and she was active in volleyball, track, cheerleading, she was always very active. Matt was always involved with the theater here in town, he was one of the teens who started up TNT, Teens in Theater, and was very active with the Phoenix Theater here in town, and was in marching and concert band, pep and jazz band, he played trumpet and was very good. When Matt went off to Rose Hulman, he became very active in the theater over there. I had kinda got involved with the Melodramas here in town, and I have helped with the youth at church. I saw that the youth needed a place to go and talk about church and about life in general, so I got involved with that when Matt and Amanda were that age. And in 2000 Sister Therese McKinnon said we need to take kids to a World Youth Day, which I didn't know anything about. Inquired what and where is it? And she said it's in Rome, Italy this year. And I just looked at her like she was crazy, how were we going to do that? I think it was in July that year, and it was already January. She told me we could maybe tag along with a group in St. Louis. So she started working on it and I learned more about it. And I can say that God had his hand in that because no other way could three youth and three mothers attend this. So we did go with the St. Louis group. We learned a lot about World Youth Day and being in a foreign country.

D: How many youth trips have you gone on?

J: I missed the one in Toronto, in 2003, just had too many church things going on here. Father Chris Bry came in as the new priest and I remembering thinking it was time for me to back away being involved in the youth in our church and he had this way of reading me and he threw this packet down and said, look at this and it was information on the next Youth Day in Cologne, Germany. While reading through it, I basically cursed him and said damn you, and I went in to see him and I told him that he knew that I was coming in to let him know that I was quitting as director. Well, that inspired me to continue working with the youth, plan another Youth Day, and so we went to that Youth Day in Germany which was another awesome experience. Father Chris was not your typical priest.

Then in 2008 we did Sydney, Australia, another awesome experience. And then Father Christ moved on to another area and I was left on my own to plan the next one. We did Madrid, Spain in 2011 where we rented apartments with his group. Worked out great. In all the World Youth Days that I have attended, I got to experience three different popes. And there is nothing like being in the presence of a pope. And it doesn't matter if he is a half mile away. There is just an awesome presence.

D: Julia, with all the modern conveniences we have today, is there one that you just couldn't live without?

J: Oh my, interesting question, well, black and white TV's went to color, you never heard of computers back when I was young, I would have to say probably the computer. Particularly because the two older children live away and the convenience of computer and technology.

D: Let's say you are in Spain, what would be tell about Marshall and why you live here?

J: When we have been in a foreign country and we tell people we are from the USA we have gotten mixed responses on that. Some people embrace the USA and other say Yuck. They assume we mean Chicago but we tell them no ... not Chicago we live in downstate Illinois. We are a little farming community. But I tell you, Marshall, since I have lived here has grown, more businesses have come in, but I like what we have here, I have grown to love this small town. When I travel back from the places I have travelled, I just like coming home, it's like putting on a comfortable pair of shoes, its where I feel comfortable now. And Marshall has a lot, we have a little theater, we have an active school system, girl scouts, boy scouts, the Friday night band concerts, clubs that bring people together, there is just something for everybody.

D: Julia, you have given a very interesting taste of your background and this is not just for now but people in the future who are interested in the oral histories of our citizens. We certainly appreciate the time you have taken for the Friends of the Library oral history project.