

American Culture Mother Interview: Cathy Casey

Interviewed by: Megan Maurice

“Women are screwed until we really have rights and know how to exercise them.”

Occupation: Life Skills Coaching & Alcoholism / Chemical Dependency Counseling

Background: Catholic, Alcoholic family (her dad), wealthy, educated

Cathy was the second oldest of six kids, and she had two brothers. She went to St. Margaret's Academy, a Catholic school for girls, and she had nuns for her teachers. She was closest to her younger sisters, but her oldest sister was her favorite sibling. There were no sports for women when she was growing up in high school, but she ran in college. In addition, she finally found out that she was good at basketball when she was teaching special education students in their middle school years.

She said that she was not taken seriously as a child, and no one listened to her opinions. She felt “invisible” and subsequently “grew up having children” and raising them. At the age of 35, she commented that she finally felt like an adult. At this point, she was on her own; in the years since then, she has struggled to achieve her economic independence, finally.

In high school, Cathy worked as a dental assistant in her father's dentistry firm in high school. His dental partner, who was 15 years younger than her dad, bought her swim-suits on three different occasions. Finally, he asked her to model one of the swim-suits on top of his desk, which she replied, “No.” However, she commented that this incident made her feel shameful about her body. Currently, he has kept in touch with her, and sent her \$50 on three different occasions. He mentioned that she should use this money to work out. Cathy said that she is thinking about possibly joining a gym, even though she already does yoga. And she is in remarkably good shape.

When I went to do this interview, I ended up staying at her lovely home for eight hours. Cathy is very hospitable: she made a great dinner, and apple pie. I really enjoyed talking with her, and also sharing my story. We came to an understanding of close intimacy, sharing emotions and stories. I told her that she was like my adopted grandmother now, and she felt the same way. I called her back twice for about an hour to follow up on some questions that were similar to the Nigerian women interviews.

Demographics

Age: 70

Age at which married: Cathy knew that she wanted to marry Tom after three months of dating him, at the age of 21. They were in love, but her mother objected to the marriage. They had been dating for only about one year.

First Marriage: Tom went to the University of Iowa, and had a degree in engineering. Tom was intelligent, had a good occupation, and offered means for Cathy's survival. Cathy was excited to have a family, and glad that she was pregnant. She became pregnant nine times before she was 29! Cathy is very domestic and played the role of housewife, doing most of the cooking and cleaning among other household duties. Tom handled the finances, budget, and business.

However, Cathy became dependant upon Tom. At age 35, she realized that Tom was an alcoholic. She went to Al-Anon for about a year, but this escalated the situation. Tom became even more angry at her and somewhat abusive. He withdrew Cathy's grocery money during that year. More importantly, she had no money because she did not want [the social stigma] of having a low paying service job while her husband was well-off. In fact, during the first six months where she went to Al-Anon she did not speak one word. She also recalls sleeping on the couch for three months. Tom called Cathy a "cold fish" in bed and a lesbian.

Cathy describes the triangular relationship that existed between Tom, her and her daughter Colleen. At the time, Colleen was 13, and instead Tom went and took her grocery shopping. Cathy said that the relationship was unhealthy, and that he was treating Colleen like a wife. Colleen developed bulimia in high school. I thought that this was interesting, because oftentimes girls with eating disorders are attached to the image of their childhood bodies, and due to the malnutrition would subsequently not grow and develop in the proper fashion.

Cathy wanted Tom to stop drinking or get a divorce. Moreover, he was dating the neighbor lady. The custody lady from the St. Paul court did not believe that Tom was an alcoholic and warned Cathy that she would lose her kids if she tried to fight for them. Since Tom worked in upper-management as a high-powered engineer, he looked quite capable of raising the children. Cathy mentioned that she was depressed at the time, and that she could not speak well. Finally, it was up to the two oldest daughters, when they were at the ages of 10 and 13, who made the decision for all of the children to live with their father. The other two kids were too young to have a say in the matter, at the ages of 6 and 8 years old.

She was forced to leave her family and Tom was given temporary custody, as the drinking continued. One year later, the neighbor lady became their step-mom. Meanwhile, Cathy had gone back to school to continue her education in an attempt to establish her-self financially. She was inspired by the women's movement in the 1970's. Later on, she was hoping to get her kids back but she never could – the kids chose to stay with their father. “You never know what is going to happen.”

Tom presented a distorted perspective of the situation to her children, saying that they were “too young to get married” in the first place. More importantly, he explained that “she wanted a life of her own.” This couldn't have been further from the truth, as she enjoyed very

much and took pride in being a mother and a domestic housewife. Cathy was married for 15 years, where all she tried to do was be the perfect wife and mother.

Cathy believes that raising children is a huge responsibility, and worries about current issues of neglected generations. “It is a problem when women do not take full responsibility of their children. It has affected the current Generation X, and the generation before with drug addiction and alcohol dependency.” She also worries about the “prostitute fashion” that is popular these days, especially when she sees it worn by middle school girls.

Children: *Age at which had first child:* 6 months later, lost premature (5 and half months)

2x other miscarriages, and she also lost twin girls (6 and a half months)

Children’s ages: Colleen – 48, Marie Claire – 43, Andy – 40, Sarah – 40

Johnny died at age six.

What are things you taught your girl children? Puberty – Sarah was only six though, and Andy was 8 when Tom and Cathy got divorced.

Relationships with her children: “My kids don’t talk to me.” Cathy and her oldest daughter Colleen have nothing to do with each other. She has “superficial communication, if any” with her youngest daughter, Sarah. She explained that her children are deeply affected by anger, addictive behaviors, defense mechanisms, secrets, isolation, and confusion.

Complications: When Marie-Claire was 29, and when Colleen was 32 (during her one year period in the psych. Ward) they both uncovered memories of being molested by their father. Marie Claire was sent to the mental institution after slitting her throat and stabbing her heart; she was diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder, Paranoid Schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder, and Bi-polar. She is current still there, and Cathy described her as a

“vegetable,” due to all of the medications that she is prescribed. Cathy also worked for a short time in a Sexual Recovery Program with people who had been abused.

Number of grandchildren: 8, the oldest one is 24 (Miranda)

When Marie-Claire was taken to the mental institution, Miranda lived with Cathy for about six months. There were mice in Cathy’s trailer, and she recalls feeling humiliated that her ex-husband came and saw her living like that. Christmas came, and Cathy had no money to buy presents, but they had a tree and her eleven year old grand-daughter was given free toys. After this time, Miranda lived with Cathy’s sister, Joanie, and attended Waldorf School.

Cathy rode her bike to work, even in winter, teaching special education at Fairfield Middle School. She was fired from this job because she had witnessed the elementary principal “molest” several students. Considering her position, she was blackmailed from attending a community meeting on the subject of these incidents.

Education: Cathy went back to school three times, after an initial two years of college.

Degrees: Therapeutic Recreation, Communication, Alcoholism Counseling, Chemical Dependency Counseling, and a Masters in Life Skills Coaching

“I thought that I was too stupid to get through one class in college.” [7 years total]

What is your daily schedule? “I wake up at six, shower every other day, make the bed, and straighten the house. Then I go to the dome to meditate, twice a day.”

*What activities do you spend the **most time** on each day?* “Meditation. It is a scientifically proven method of changing the human physiology. I practice karma yoga, an advanced technique where you lift off the ground. It is shown that if 1% of the population does this, it improves world peace.” She also commented that meditation helped her become more aware, and solve her own life problems.

What are the activities that you regularly do, but not everyday? “Breakthrough Counseling”
Business: Addictions Counselor, about once a week; however, she would like to have a client every day.

How do you celebrate festivals? St. Patty’s Day – Irish Pub

“I didn’t celebrate my birthday for years.” Cathy is not still Catholic, but she does celebrate Christmas. She is Christian, but she also believes that “all human beings are united on a spiritual level. Our differences are only an illusion.”

For major holiday celebrations, what role do you have in the ceremonies? cooking

How do you earn money? Meditation grant – professional yogi

What do you spend money on? Bills (Also saving money for a Caribbean Cruise, only \$400)

What makes a good woman? Respect, Empowerment, taking care of own needs, or asking for what we want, and exercising our right. “We can’t expect men to understand us. We must teach men how to be in a relationship, which involves communication and trust.”

What makes a good man? Respect, listening, doing what you say, consistency

Do you think it is better to be a man or a woman? Woman

*Edge, in-touch with our emotions, multi-tasking, and ability to have children

When is a girl considered an adult? 18

How did your life change once you became an adult? College, “I was on my own, and I had to make my own decisions.”

Did you look forward to marriage? Not really, but I expected to get married a have a family.

How did you find your husband? Bar; dance floor

Community: *Who are your good women friends?* 6 friends from meditation (dome)

How did you meet your women friends? The (all women’s) dome.

Cathy also worked at the YMCA, with a program for homeless women and children. In 1989, Cathy owned a clothing store called The Velveteen Rabbit. She couldn't keep it open so she worked in Cedar Rapids fundraising for the health care bill. However, her car caught fire and she lived in Solon. For three months, she stayed at the women's crisis center in Iowa City. Her mother sent some cash, and she soon met Derrick, whom she married after only knowing him for about three months. She explained that she was in "survival mode," and used this time period in her life to go back to school.

Cathy was married to Derrick for two years, and describes it as "surreal." Derrick was "shut-down emotionally," he would not say hello to her, and eventually they slept in separate bedrooms. He grew up in London, during the bombings, where he would do his homework and "laugh in other people's fear." They lived underground, and suffered from a terrible mold problem. Cathy was experiencing symptoms, but he did not acknowledge the situation. The marriage went downhill quickly, and he was mean to her in the end. He came to a conclusion saying, "I don't like America or American women." Currently, Cathy has a new love interest, whose name is Rob. She says that right now is "the best time of her life."