

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's Herstory Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 706

MARLENE FARKAS SCHULTZ

Interviewed

by

Deborah Pesce

on

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INTERVIEWEE: MARLENE FARKAS SCHULTZ

INTERVIEWER: Deborah Pesce

SUBJECT: beautician experiences, mother-son relationships,
male-female relationships, discrimination

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P: This is an interview with Marlene Farkas on Women's Herstory for the Women's Resource Center in conjunction with the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Deborah Pesce. This interview is being conducted at Marlene's house on Broadway on October 16, 1987, at approximately eight-thirty p.m.

Marlene, what do you remember about your parents and family?

F: There were a lot of girls in our family. So there was always a lot of quarreling about clothes and phone rights. I was the baby of the family. I saw a lot of time pass with music and styles of clothes. I have a sister who is almost fifty years old. There is a big gap in my family. I was always thinking a lot about family because I guess that is what I have always wanted. I never understood that but I am very family oriented. I think when you are young, you run away from that and once you find yourself, you go back to that.

P: How many older sisters?

F: Three and an older brother who was out of the house, married and had a child my age when I was a baby.

P: How did you get along with your parents?

F: I was the rebellious one. I got along with them. I am a lot like my father and my mother. People always tell me I smile like my mom and I have my father's temper. I think I have a little of both. I got along with them well, but

I was always the one that taught them new trends, opening their minds. Like right now, my mother is almost seventy and I am thirty-one. I think that she admires me a lot. I have a child out of wedlock and I have been married before. I think my going through a divorce and saying, "I will not live like this," and I am not going to allow a man to do the things that she allowed a man to do to her life--control it, make her a homebody, and make important decisions for her-- and I think my decision about having my son, changed our relationship; she admires and respects me. It is a very good feeling. It was real hard for me for a long time to be able to express my feelings to her about how I felt she would think about the whole situation. When I look at her, she smiles at me. I think she is very pleased. My father is deceased now, but I think he would feel the same way. They were a little old-world, but I brought them around a little bit with their thinking.

P: Your mother, you feel, respects you now?

F: Yes, I know she does. I have the same respect for her. I think that of all the kids in the family, I was the one who wanted to grow up really fast so that I could be like my big sisters. It gave me a lot of street knowledge. Then later in life I got book knowledge. So I try to combine the two.

P: That is interesting. Do you remember what school was like?

F: Yes, I remember it. At school in the early seventies, it was still pretty rebellious from the sixties. I think it was because I grew up in a smaller town. It was a delayed reaction. In my freshman year in high school, we were allowed to wear jeans. When I was in fifth grade, I played violin for eight years. I did not want to play cello because I did not want to sit with my legs like that with a dress on. Then as I got older I remembered thinking--If only they would have let me wear jeans when I was in grade school, would I have been a great celloist? I remember it vividly; we were really rebellious with the pot smoking and cutting classes. I was a real good student. I used to feel when I was with my friends that I was one character, the rebellious girl who wanted to wear the torn up jeans. I would go to school and have another image for my teachers and fellow students who were not within the clique outside the school. I was on the school newspaper at school; I was in the orchestra; I was involved in thespians, but I never acted; I just was a prop girl. It was like I wanted to do that, but I did not have the nerve yet. It was like my growing period. I would see myself trying, but I would shy away from things because I thought it might be uncool. It was still that period in my life where I was uncertain of my self image.

P: These were your street friends?

F: Right. In my senior year, I was graduating; I had a part-time job, and I had a boyfriend who was out of school. I just wanted to be rid of the whole thing. I never thought that I would ever want to go to college or ever go. In my senior year, my English teacher was going to fail me for attendance conduct. I had a "C" average in her class and a majority of my classes, but I had cut one hundred and thirty-five days. She told me I was not going to get my diploma. I was like, "Oh yeah, I heard there was a test I could take for twenty-five dollars. I will show you."

P: What school was that?

F: Rayen High School. In fact, our mayor of Youngstown was our guidance counselor; he was younger man; he was the coach. It was really funny because he had a way of relating to us that we would appreciate him. He would say, "Look, don't pull this shit on me." It was like he knew. We knew that he knew. You were talking about our families.

You were talking about our families. We had a mantel in my mother's living room with all of the kid's graduation pictures. I was the only one without one. I really would not have gotten that done whether I graduated or not. That was uncool. They have one picture of me over on the side of the wall away from that mantel that I got when I graduated from hair school when I was twenty. I presented that to my dad and I said, "I have gotten my diploma from taking the GED test and here's my graduation picture," just to please him.

P: When you were eighteen?

F: Yes, when I was eighteen. I got it right away. I would have graduated when I was seventeen. My dad was always saying "Oh, she is the wisecracker. She can take this test and get that piece of paper." I think that he saw that in me. Also, there were a lot of racial problems at my school. It was seventy-five percent black and a lot of those kids I knew all through junior high. I did not have a problem with them and they did not have a problem with me. It was our society. There were still struggles going on like that.

P: What made you decide to go to hairdressing school?

F: When they quit teasing hair. I used to always cut hair in my neighborhood when I was thirteen. My best friend's mother and sister were hairdressers, but it was different then. It was the weekly neighborhood shop with the women all chatting and getting their hair bleached. I graduated in 1977 from hair school. It was different then. It was cutting and styling,

very natural, and conditioning hair. That kind of changed me. I think that I resented the fact that it was a woman's profession basically. It was like being in high school and they would try and get you to take stenography classes and typing. I would say, "Oh, I am not sitting on any bosses' lap or getting coffee." I just resented all of that. It was a beginning. There was not any real women's movement when we were in high school, but we had college friends or kids who went to other schools who were telling us about things that were going on. It made you think a lot. I know that people have natural talents for things that they are capable of. I think that you are inspired a little on your own and by people around you.

P: So you enjoy your profession?

F: Yes, I love my profession.

P: Do you recall your training period?

F: Yes, very vividly. I made a lot of good friends there and a lot of my friends own salons now. I see them occasionally. It is like if you see musicians, artists, and dancers together, there is a common bond there and they attract. Going to hair shows, it could look like a convention of prostitutes who are all painted up and their hair is done. They have fun together. They are people people; they like people. It is like the old cliché--The man's bartender is his best friend, and the woman's--hairstylist. Now it is unisex. It has changed. Men confide in me just as readily.

P: A particular decade for you, let us say the sixties . . .

F: I remember the sixties. I was a young kid. It was a lot of music. A lot of the history I think was in the music then. I have a lot of black music in my background which I like a lot. I remember the Beatles and just trendy things like Beatle boots, haircuts, et cetera. I believe it was . . . When I was nine years old, we went out West to visit my older brother who lives out there. The Beatles were playing at the Holiday Bowl the day after we were leaving Los Angeles. We were all whining all the way home. We would not have been able to get tickets anyhow. I remember that we came back with bell-bottom pants that no one had ever seen in this area. Things like that I remember so vividly, just the changes. I remember being a young girl and my mother saying, "You have to wear nylons." I said, "Why?" It was the girl thing. Especially since I was in the orchestra, we had to dress up in a black jacket and skirt.

P: What orchestra is that?

F: It was throughout grade school, and Hayes Junior High School

Orchestra and Rayen. Then in high school it was with the same things that I was telling you before. There was a point where I was embarrassed to carry my violin. I would just play it at home.

P: Do you still play?

F: I don't play anymore. I played with friends who were rock'n'rollers and all I knew how to play was classical music.

P: Did you hide that from your rock'n'roll friends?

P: No, they would try and get me to jam with them. They would record. They would say I did okay. We would get high. Who knows if I did all right or not? I tried and it confused me. They had a natural way of listening to it and they could play music by ear. My father was that way. He could play the harmonica, accordion, or piano by ear. All I knew was to learn to read it. I could not just make up a song in my head.

P: You don't play now?

F: No, not at all. I try to play the piano a little bit with my son. We just do it for fun. I am trying to teach my son. It is funny because your parents tell you when you are a kid that they want you to do all of the things that they did not have the opportunity to do. Well, I am teaching my son to play the piano without sheet music. He bangs away on it. He went from a Mickey Mouse piano to an upright. He even has an electric keyboard now. I just want him to have an interest. I don't care what instrument.

P: How old is your son?

F: He will be three in April.

P: So what is a typical day like for you now?

F: My son is a big part of it and my work is too. For a long time it was hard with my son. When he was an infant I could not really work the way I wanted to or socialize. We are getting back at that. A work day would be I get up in the morning; we hang around together and we have breakfast together. If it is nice enough and if I have the morning off and don't start until noon, we go to the park. We see friends. This is the neighborhood where I grew up. Then I would get ready for work and prepare for my day there. Then in the evenings I did pretty much the same. After work I would come home and have dinner, et cetera. My son is a diversion from my work and my work is a diversion from my son.

P: Do you find it hard with baby-sitters?

F: At first it was. You don't trust anyone. You have the guilt that you don't want anyone else to touch or be with your son or care for him. I don't know a solution. It is hard and it is especially hard for women on their own with children. I knew it before I had him and I especially know it now. I live it. I see women that have husbands or their maid with them. It is more on the woman. The woman bears the child and they care for them. There are exceptions, but I think generally, if a child gets hurt, they are going to run for their mother. It is even now. I am older and if I have a problem, I still call my mother. There was a time when I hid my problems from her. Now I am more honest with her than I have ever been in my life.

P: With everything?

F: Yes.

P: When you became pregnant did you know that you wanted to do that on your own?

F: Yes, I knew.

P: Were you scared?

F: I think I would lie to say I was not, but I think that something in the back of my mind from being married before, I resented the regiment of--Yes, you can have your career honey, and you can go and do your women's groups. I like theater and I like the arts. The best thing for me now is my son has got enough humane habits that I can take him into an art show without him climbing the walls or screaming. I think that I put it in my mind that I was just going to do it. I could deal with my child and not with a man. I think that I have always felt guilty about that. I think that his father always knew that too. I am glad that I did it. As far as supporting us, it would be that I would support all three of us. He is a musician and he does not make a lot of money and he does not have much gumption with it. My son was two months old; it was real silly, but I looked up on the wall; my son's father's picture was on the wall; this is a true story; I was watching a soap opera. I thought--Oh isn't life a soap opera. I was saying--I wish that I could work full-time. I wish this guy would help me out. I just did some soul-searching and said--You know that he is not going to. He cannot do this. He is not capable of doing this and make up your mind. His picture fell off the wall and I made up my mind. I asked him to move out. I have been doing it ever since on my own without any financial help or real moral support from his dad. I think that those things make you stronger. My son and I are so close that I see that I am more than just his mom. I am his friend and a few other things. It is more than that. I really enjoy

him and I know that he enjoys me too. I think that no matter what decisions you make, you always wonder. Even if I got married, I think you still wonder--What if?

P: Looking back, what changes would you have liked to have seen instituted in your life? What would you have done differently?

F: When I was a real young girl, my sisters were all very shy and I was the one who would say, "Hey, we are not taking this anymore." I think that I instituted that into every aspect of my life. I just made up my mind that I wanted to say what I had to say and whatever I felt I needed to do I was going to do it no matter what. It is like making decisions that I have, like having my child and my career. I have left so many jobs. I have worked for men who have no idea about the things that women go through in everyday life. They say they do, but they don't. I was nine months pregnant to the day and expecting my son and my boss was telling me he knew how hard it was. He didn't know how hard it was. The man I lived with and the man I worked for, they were both telling me, "Yeah, you are really trucking along." They don't understand that it is more than a need for money. It is more than loyalty to your job and your clients or your son and your life, your livelihood. It is more than that. It is something that comes from very deep. One thing I would like to change, and I always make a joke, I don't think I will ever get married, but I don't think I really feel that way. I think it is because I am frightened that I might get in the situation that old, outspoken me is never going to change. I look at those men and they talk to me and they tell me, "I love it that you are outspoken." After awhile they really don't. They want to have a say-so and they resent that you stand up for yourself and how you feel. All men are like that. I don't like to say that. I do say that. Most men are like that and they will lie to you and say, "No, I am not like that." It is not true. If they can get you to work for a buck less, they will. They will con you and make you feel that you are the best worker on earth.

Even within school, I wore reading glasses the first week I was in school because I needed them. The other reason I did it was because I have long, blonde hair. They look at me and they think--a dumb blonde, you are looking for a husband. I would like to change the image-making; it's commercials; it's ad people, and all of that. The image, they put women as sex objects first. They should go from the neck up instead of the waist down. The work that I do, I look at it and I say--Wow, there are a lot of people that do it and they are not very brainy people. I am a little bit smarter than them, but I think that I have made a business out of it and my life out of it. I am supporting my son and myself through it. I would like to be respected for it, not just said that, but shown it!

Especially in relationships, that is where it really counts. I felt when I was married that all of a sudden I had this nice, little home. I first started college when I was married. That is one thing that I can say that I got that was positive through my marriage.

P: What were you studying?

F: Psychology and that is what I will study again. I had to sacrifice some time with my schooling because of my son and it was a decision that I made because I needed my work and I needed my time with my son. I had a problem with that. Before when I was married I was going to work and I was going to school. He did the same, but I was still the haus frau. I really resented that. My friends would come to see me and say, "We never see you," because I was truly devoted to it. I wanted my home to be nice and I wanted my school to work out and I wanted my job to stay the same. I did not want to have to sacrifice anything. He did not want to sacrifice anything. So it was both of us just standing there like two children saying, "No." I understand now; it has been a few years, but I understand from other relationships and even living with my son, you sacrifice and you give, but you have to also receive. You could both be very bratty about it because you do have to give. It is not fifty-fifty. That is never going to be true. I would like to some day meet a nice man that says, "I like the way you are. Don't change one bit," and really mean that. When I was married, my husband told me that, but the next day he said, "You know, you should do this." He asked me one day, "Why do you paint your toenails?" I said, "Because feet are really ugly. I like the way my toenails look with hot pink on them or orange. I don't have time to do that stuff anymore. Do you think you can do five minutes of work around here?" He just could not understand that. My mother brought us up like that. That does not have anything to do with the work I do. My mother taught us to be little ladies. We had the gloves, the white stockings, and the hats. She would paint our nails. If I had a little girl, I would do the same thing I think. It is kind of natural too. I think some women look down on that and some women are more into that. It is just the way you are. If he wanted to paint on a little mustache every morning and try to be more of a man, I wouldn't care. I guess I just have a problem when someone picks at some little, small thing like that. That makes me feel special about the way I am and they laugh at it. I guess it hurt me a lot. I remember the conversation like it is happening right now. Just to think of it, it kind of irritates me still.

P: How long were you married?

F: Just a year and a half.

P: Are you friends now?

F: Basically, I would say that we are . . . not best friends. I see something strange though. It has been long enough now. I had a child from someone else that I know there was a lot of hurt there. He had a very big trauma, an injury that he had, an accident, an injury that happened to him that I think changed us. I think we thought--we have got to stop this nonsense. We were once in love. We shared our life. We could at least be cordial and friendly. We do that, but I see something strange even within the last few months. We don't see each other often, but when we do, we always talk to each other. It is strange because I see we have an appreciation of each other, more than when we were married. The things that attracted us to each other are still there. There is an admiration. It is strange because there was a time when we despised each other because we gave each other such a hard time.

My husband was in the Navy. It was very hard for me to have that regimental life style. I never had it and I never wanted to have it, but I am very disciplined. I am prompt with my work and anything I need to do within my life. I cannot go to work, go to school, go to bed at 10:00, have sex at 10:15, wake up at 8:00, and God forbid if I brush my teeth too long at night. I just cannot live like that, the pressures. My father died from an ulcer that was let go. He was a very uptight guy and it was through himself, he had a hard time. I am very laid back because of that. That bothered me. I cannot do that to myself. If it has to be so regimental, then I need to change it or eliminate something. That is why I made the choices that I did with my schooling. I plan on going back to school in the Fall.

P: Part-time then?

F: No, full-time. That is why I have put it off. My son and I are going to both go back to school together. When he starts preschool, then I will start school again.

P: You were in a play once?

F: Yes.

P: I did not see it, but I heard you were wonderful.

F: Thank you. I enjoyed that a lot. That was like a dream for me. I always wanted to try it. A real good friend conned me into it. I was an ex-con in the play. They were writing me notes at work and they were telling me that my warden was calling me. The character's name was Arlene. She was from down South. They would tell me my next client was there. They would say, "Arlene." I read the script and I said,

"I think that I relate to this character." She was a woman who had a really hard life and had just really gotten the screws from men. She was an attractive woman. She went to beauty school and she was a beauty school dropout, which I loved, because I knew a lot of those girls.

P: That is too wierd.

F: It was a good script and there were a lot of good friends in it, people who I knew, and there were a lot of people who were new to the theater. So it was like we had this baby. It was like we had this brand new thing that we were all starting together. It was like a group effort. That is why I think it was so successful, but I loved it. I loved every night of it. I was so nervous. I had friends who were drinking wine spritzers and going outside to do their nonsense. They would invite me and I would say, "No." I was so sincere about it. I just did not want anything to interfere with it. I had one of those old, big bathtubs. All around the edges I wrote my script, any page that I had a problem with. If I write something, I am able to memorize it. So I would just stare at it while I was bathing getting ready to go to rehearsals. I had a really hard section in the play. I had four pages that were all me. I was supposed to burst out into tears. I have had so many things go on in my life that could make me cry or make me sad, but they are over. They are not as painful for me. So I was thinking--What can hurt me? I thought of my father's death, but that has been awhile so that does not really affect me as much. For some reason, the night of dress rehearsal, it was the end of the play and we were supposed to put it on the next day; I just bursted out into tears. They were all applauding me. Everyone was so pleased. I realized that it was just that I was able to do it. I said, "I am doing this. I am going to do it really good." All of these people helped me, but it is me. I am the one who stood up here and did it. I did not have one moment where I was not on that stage and I kept telling myself--You are going to die. You are not going to be able to do it. Then my other stronger person would say, "Yes you will, oh yes you will, you can do it." I did it and I loved it. I had a very special person teaching me. The only reason I have not done another was I became pregnant and they did not have any parts for whales. I just never have gotten back to it, but I would love to.

P: You probably will then?

F: Yes, I think I will. I would like to get my son involved with it. It is a good ego builder. I loved it. It was really exciting.

P: Is there anything else that you think is important to add

to this that we have not covered?

F: No, I think we have covered pretty much. I just would like to add that I plan on finishing school and getting my degree. I know that is going to change me a lot. I just see that through the course of my life, the changes that I made when I really put my heart into them and in my head they are always right. I think that it will be interesting to talk again in ten years. I think it is all going to change again. Maybe by then, things will change in the world. I just think that it is really important to realize the struggle that women do go through because we are not paid as much as men are and we are not treated quite the same. I especially want my son to understand and respect women. I talked to a little, old, black woman today on the bus. She was so interesting to me. She had to be seventy years old. She was talking about her great-grandchildren. I look at her and I think to myself--She is a triple minority because she is a woman; she was a housewife (that is a minority to me), and she is black. She has a smile on her face. She is so proud of her granddaughter who I happen to know. It was a coincidence--we went to school together. Her granddaughter owns a condo in Akron and works in a medical center. That is an amazing feat to me. To me, my life is normal because it is my own, but for a woman and a black, period, it is very hard for both. I know that it is very hard for men. Life, itself, is a struggle. I read somewhere . . . I wrote it down too and I am trying to remember the exact words--If it takes up part of your life, then it is very important and if you allow it to, in other words. It is true. My son has taken up so much of my time in the last few years. I look and I think--Wow, you had no idea. I had no idea, but it is very well worth it. It shows every single day. I sacrifice my work, my school, and sometimes my personal life and beliefs, but I like it. I look at my mother who had five children and did that. That was her life. That was all she ever did. I have a lot of friends; you are a good example too, a woman just trying to make it. They have kids. The main thing is you keep yourself going. If you keep yourself . . . like myself, when I go out and I dress up and I have heels on, I feel great. I might get some idiot who makes a wisecrack about the way I look. He thinks that I dressed up like that for him, but I did not, I dressed up like that for me.

P: Yes. I want to tell you, you have been an inspiration to me.

F: Great.

P: Really, and to help me get over what I am going through.

F: I know it is hard.

P: So I am really glad that we had this chance in sharing your story. It is wonderful.

F: I am glad too.

P: Can you think of anything else?

F: Not really. I just want to add, I have found the book that I had written that in. When I find interesting things I write them down--"The true value of something is the amount of life it consumes." I think that is a very true statement.

END OF INTERVIEW