

Ethnographic Research on an Orally Narrated Catholic Floridian Love Story

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Orally narrated love stories are an effective way for people to recount their life experiences and convey information about their past. Love stories are all centered around the same basic human emotion, but their content and messages can vary dramatically depending on the cultural context in which they are found and the method by which they are told. Steven J. Zeitlin, Amy J. Kotkin, and Holly Cutting Baker's "Family Stories" emphasizes the importance of the process of storytelling. It claims that storytelling "stimulates healthy family interaction, it provides a technique for influencing and managing family members, it serves as a 'family engineered canal' through which culture flows from one generation to the next" (19). The act of telling stories about the past conveys information as to what the culture valued at the time, providing a conduit "through which culture flows from one generation to the next." This culture is vitally important to both the context of the story and many of the characteristics of the storyteller. To understand the implications of this, one must first understand what culture is. In his book *Mirror for Man*, Clyde Kluckhohn defines culture rather succinctly, describing it as "the total life way of a people, the social legacy individuals acquire from their group" (7). Kluckhohn views culture as a "social legacy" which people gain via the influence of the society they live in. A large part of this influence comes from family members' viewpoints, as they play a key role in the formative process of becoming an adult. This view of culture fits perfectly with Zeitlin's concept of culture being passed from generation to generation. Oral stories show and discuss the traits individuals acquire from their culture and consequently influence the social legacy of the next generation. This results in cultures that have well-defined, traditional notions of things like love, which are defined at least in part by the oral stories that convey them. I have

conducted research on one such oral story, with Margo Owen narrating her personal love story set in 1970s Florida within a devout Catholic culture.

Scholars have conducted a number of studies on the romantic ideals of the Catholic faith in modern society. One concept that is key to understanding traditional Catholic relationships is that women are expected to fulfill the role of the subservient housewife. In her 2008 article “Women, Reproductive Rights, and the Catholic Church,” Rosemary Radford Ruether explains the Catholic Church’s stance on women in modern times, saying that “The earlier view of women as inferior, incomplete human beings was replaced by complementarity. [...] Women, it was claimed, are ‘naturally’ more spiritual, moral and loving than men, but they maintain this feminine nature only by remaining in their traditional roles in the home” (185). Defining women as fundamentally different than men functions as a way to encourage women to stay in “their traditional roles in the home,” and therefore serves the same purpose as the previous view of women as “incomplete human beings.” Modern feminism has heavily criticized these concepts, and women in today’s society are increasingly rejecting this role to lead the lives they desire. In my research, I have found that Margo Owen’s story serves as a perfect example of this, as she disregarded the cultural pressure to become a housewife and opted instead to become a career woman at an engineering firm.

Margo told her love story by describing how she met her now-husband Ben Owen, bonded over common interests such as surfing and soccer, and started dating. After several years, they went to Hawaii and got married without telling their parents. I propose that through her storytelling and responses to interview questions, Margo Owen shows how she grew up within a deeply conservative Catholic culture in 1970s Tampa that emphasized the importance of dating a

white Christian man with a high socioeconomic status, who would be the head of the family, and with whom she would have a large Catholic church wedding; however in her story, she met an engineering colleague with whom she shared an equal status and, with his support, rejected her Catholic culture in favor of being a progressive career woman, pursuing a free-thinking surfer lifestyle, and marrying without her family's knowledge. She expands on this theme by talking about her *cultural background* of growing up in a large Catholic family, developing the *plot* of how she met and married Ben, *characterizing* both herself and Ben as perceptive nonconformists, and conveying an overall *tone* of contentedness throughout the story, secure in the knowledge that she made the best decision for her happiness.

Margo describes her *cultural background* as deeply Catholic in order to highlight her culture's rigid ideals for dating and marriage, which included marrying within the church, serving as a housewife to a breadwinner husband, and bearing children. During the interview process, she talked about the process of dating and marriage in her culture, saying the following:

Well, I guess [my parents] expected me to date a white, or Caucasian, male. They never really said it had to be the same religion as us. My older siblings married people that were from other denominations, some of them, Methodists and stuff... but all of them, when they got married, got married in the Catholic church, and they had to go to classes required [...] There's like, stuff you do when you want to get married in the Catholic church that helps you get to know your future spouse, to make sure you're compatible with each other and whatever. Since divorce is not recognized in the Catholic church, they want to make sure the two people are truly ready for marriage and truly committed to each other... things like that. It's kind of your 'last chance to get out' [...] That was actually one of the reasons I didn't want to get married in the church, because I didn't like that. [...] I didn't really like the rigidity of the religion, with the whole "only men can be priests, they can't be married..." you know, there's a lot of rules like "you can't use birth control..." There's all sorts of edicts handed down that say how you can behave, what you can and can't do, and I didn't agree with a lot of them...

Cultural Interview by Margo Owen, October 28, 2018

By discussing the rigamarole of marriage in the Catholic church, the narrator explains that getting married within the church is one of the most important parts of being Catholic. Margo's description of the marriage process shows just how structured and complicated things ~~really~~ are in the church, to the point where people getting married must take classes to acquaint themselves with the church's customs. In addition to this, Margo's explanation of the kind of person it was permissible to date showcases the stringent expectations put upon her by her culture. She begins the excerpt by explaining that her parents "expected me to date a white, or Caucasian, male," and that he also had to be Christian. Anything other than that was not acceptable. In addition to the type of person it is acceptable to date, the Margo says that the doctrine of Catholicism has "all sorts of edicts handed down that say how you can behave," which among other things prohibit the use of birth control, the practice of divorce, and the anointment of female pastors. These laws and regulations serve to reinforce the traditional gender roles of women, as the prohibition of divorce and birth control promotes women's roles as a mother and wife, and the prohibition of female pastors stops women from holding a job that is traditionally practiced by men. Margo's comments on these ideals provide an effective picture of the kind of culture she was raised in and the expectations that culture had of her.

These cultural ideals, which Margo eventually chose to reject, are present throughout Margo's storytelling. In developing her story, Margo builds a *plot* that conveys the idea that Ben empowered her to define herself as independent of the culture she was raised in, and pursue what she was truly passionate about in life. In Ben, she found a colleague who shared many of her hobbies and ideals. This allowed her to fully form her own values and gave her the validation of her passions that her culture failed to offer. She recounts their story as follows:

I got introduced to Ben Owen, who was in that aisle, and he was assigned to work on the same project as me. [...] There was something at his desk that said he liked to surf, so I said “OH! I like to surf! I’ve surfed too!” [...] So he said, “No way, you surf?” and I said “Yeah I surf!” and he said “We should go surfing sometime!” and I said, “Yeah we should go surfing sometime!” [Margo and Ben went surfing and hit it off. They started dating, but Ben had to leave for several months to take care of his ailing father.] After he got back, we moved to the same street, but two separate apartments, in North Palm Beach. [...] We lived like that for about another year or so, and then [...] we wanted to go surfing in Hawaii, and Dad said “Why don’t we just go ahead and get married while we’re in Hawaii?” and I said “Ok.” [...] We went to Hawaii in February, which is the off-season, and we pre-arranged the ceremony, which was just the Reverend John Roller and a photographer, to marry us at Waimea Falls Park on the north shore of Oahu. [After the ceremony, they had a wonderful honeymoon in Hawaii. However, they still hadn’t told Margo’s parents.] I waited until we were about to leave Hawaii, we were at the airport, maybe, and then I said to [Ben] “I’m gonna call my parents now, because I know they’ll be eating dinner” - cause I knew they always ate dinner at six o’clock, at the same time every night. Um, so I called my house, and my dad answered, and I said “Dad, Ben and I just got married, and we’re in Hawaii on our honeymoon.” and he said, out loud, he said to grandma “Yew and Ben just got married.” and then he said to me, “Your mother just dropped the spaghetti.” So, (chuckles), he told me that night when they sat down to eat dinner, he looked at her and she said “There’s so much to think about!” and he said to her “No, there’s nothing to think about. It’s done, it’s over.”

Storytelling by Margo Owen, October 21, 2018

Margo makes it clear in the *opening circumstances* of the story that she and Ben share many common interests, which allows them to begin a relationship on equal footing. Ben had “something at his desk that said he liked to surf,” which is the impetus for their entire relationship. As a result of this and their mutual status as engineers, their relationship was established as one of equal colleagues, defying the traditional gender roles promoted by Margo’s culture. The *rising action* of this story comes when, after dating for several years, Margo and Ben decide to get married. They didn’t see marriage as a possibility but an eventuality, with Ben saying “why don’t we just go ahead and get married while we’re in Hawaii?” Marriage to them is something to “go ahead and do,” and is not regarded with the same sanctity as in the Catholic

church. They certainly don't take any classes required to train them in marriage customs. Margo also describes their actual wedding as decidedly non-Catholic, with a tiny ceremony and none of the usual fanfare. Margo's revelation of her marriage to her parents serves as the *climax* of the story and makes the rejection of her culture official. By telling her parents, Margo passes the point of no return, as she is revealing that she failed to fulfill one of the core practices of Catholicism. However, her separation from this culture enabled her to pursue a life other than the one defined by the Catholic church. Margo was able to fully embrace her desired life of living on the beach and pursuing her passions, without the societal expectations to fulfill her traditional duties as a woman. This process of becoming independent from her culture resulted from Margo's dissenting views of many Catholic traditions imposed upon her, and was made possible as a result of her and Ben's atypical relationship and status as equal partners.

To highlight this idea that she and Ben were of an equal status, which enabled her to pursue her desired lifestyle of surfing and working as a career woman, Margo *characterizes* Ben as perceptive and kind, herself as quiet yet insightful, and both of them as strikingly similar in many ways. In her storytelling, she describes Ben as follows:

He was quiet, but he had a twinkle in his eye. He was very witty, and, um, very good-looking. But, he had a humility about him that I liked. He just seemed, like, humble. He had a hard upbringing, and he wasn't brash, or whatever. He wasn't full of pride and ego, like so many other guys in their 20s. He was really kind, and smart, and we seemed to have common interests. We were both pretty quiet... [...] We played soccer together, too. One day, [Ben] and I found out that the engineers had a pick-up soccer game, like, once a week, so we just showed up one day, to the pick-up soccer game with all these people that we worked with. They let us be on the same team, and we scored, like, 10 goals! We just like crushed everybody, we like, passed in and out, and it was amazing! It made them so mad, that the next time we came out they made us be on separate teams [...] After they wouldn't let us play on the same team, we said "ok, whatever" and stopped going.

Follow-Up Storytelling by Margo Owen, October 28, 2018

Margo uses detailed *descriptions* of Ben to portray him as smart and humble. Her descriptions of Ben are indicative of what drew her to him in the first place, and demonstrates how she perceives him as different from “so many other guys in their 20s.” These descriptions of Ben characterize him as separate from the culture that was her norm and similar to Margo herself. In addition to Margo’s descriptions, the *actions* Margo and Ben take in the excerpt show how they form an equal, cohesive team, and greatly enjoy spending time together. Margo says “we like, passed in and out, and it was amazing!” showing how when they are together, they form a cohesive unit that accentuates both of their strong suits. Additionally, the fact that they stopped playing once they couldn’t be on the same team shows how even then, they were only interested in being together. Margo’s characterization of both Ben and herself during this time period comes across as fun and full of possibility, which contrasts with her depiction of the culture she was raised in and emphasizes the idea that their relationship allowed her to live a life she was satisfied with.

In addition to Margo’s *characterization* of her and Ben as equal colleagues with common interests, Margo communicates an overall *tone* that shifts from uncertain to fulfilled and happy, which indicates that she is satisfied with her decision to leave the culture in which she was raised in favor of a life with Ben. This shift in tone occurs after their first date, which Margo describes as follows:

One day we decided to meet at Juno beach park after work. I drove my car, he drove his car, we both had our surfboards in our own car... [...] I remember that dad - oops, sorry - that Ben and I walked across the parking lot with our surfboards, and we jumped into the ocean and started to paddle out, and I just scrapped and scrapped and got outside past where the break was, and I turned around and looked back and he was just sitting on the shore. (expression of surprise, she motions with her hands in disbelief) and I thought, “WHAT’S GOING ON,” so I stayed out there for a bit and then paddled back in, and I said “What’s going on are you ok” and he said, “Oh, I, I ate Lebanese bologna for lunch today, I don’t feel good.” [Margo later ended her story with the following:] So, yeah,

we've had a really full and lovely life together. We've really come a long way. We've had fantastic children, and great vacations, and - man we're so blessed!

Storytelling by Margo Owen, October 21, 2018

Through her nonverbal expressions, Margo emphasizes that she and Ben were initially separate, but eventually came together. She begins this excerpt, which describes their first date, by saying “we both had our own surfboards in our own car.” Her repetition of the word “own” makes it clear that they are both independent of each other at the beginning of this story. Margo’s mannerisms and intonation during this description of her and Ben’s first date very clearly set the tone to be uncertain and nervous. As she described seeing Ben sitting on the shore and thinking “WHAT’S GOING ON,” she was clearly remembering her emotions in the moment, as her voice increased in volume and pitch, and she gestured erratically with her hands. From this point onwards in the plot, Margo and Ben are together, and Margo’s narration becomes accordingly more certain and happy. This is evident in the following lines through her use of humor when she describes how Ben doesn’t feel good because he “ate Lebanese bologna for lunch.” This shift in tone emphasizes the story’s description of the positive effect Ben had on her life. She ended her narration with a wistful comment on how wonderful their life together has been, cementing the tone as satisfied and happy, and showing how she believes her decision to reject her culture was the correct one.

Margo establishes the traditional gender roles emphasized by the deeply Catholic culture she was brought up in and uses that as a foil to accentuate the freedom she has enjoyed in her life with Ben. She does this by talking about the views her culture had on things like marriage and birth control, and depicting the events of meeting and marrying Ben as allowing her to fully distance herself from that culture. She also characterizes both herself and Ben as equals with

strikingly similar interests and conveys an overall tone of contentedness when they are together throughout the story. This story effectively corroborates a fact that is becoming more and more prevalent in today's society: many of the Catholic church's customs are incompatible with modern life. In his "Theology of Christian Marriage," the Cardinal Walter Kasper touches on this point in the context of marriage customs, saying "we are bound to ask today whether many of the arguments [for traditional marriage ceremonies] used by the Church have not become anachronistic" (75). The Cardinal is saying that "many of the arguments" used to justify the Catholic church's stance on marriage ceremonies are no longer relevant, which undermines the custom to no small degree. This same trend is present in many of the church's other traditions: the reasons used to justify their institution aren't applicable in modern society. As a result, the customs are undermined to the point of irrelevance. Take, for example, the Catholic church's condemnation of premarital sex. Despite this being an important tenet in the Catholic faith, according to Lawrence B. Finer's "Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States," 91% of American women who were teenagers between 1964 and 1993 had premarital sex before turning 30. Since about 20% of Americans are Catholic, it can be concluded that many practicing Catholics do not adhere to their religious tenets, which backs the growing irrelevance of this tradition. In my opinion, the Catholic church will have to significantly adapt if they aim to remain pertinent in modern society.

In addition to contributing to the larger field of ethnographic research on the Catholic Floridian culture, Margo's story has had quite an impact on my personal view of life. Margo and Ben, or Mom and Dad, as I know them, seem to be perfectly suited for each other, and play off of each other's abilities so well that they seem unstoppable at times. As a result, they've been

happily married for 26 years now, and seem to be truly enjoying the lives they're leading. To me, their story says that you should always strive to lead a life you can be happy with, even if that means having to reject part or all of the culture you're raised in. Of course, making this work requires dedication and hard work, which Margo has both of in multitudes. This oral love story functioned exactly as Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Baker described, serving as a "family engineered canal" through which my mother's culture and personal ideals were conveyed, and have subsequently influenced my view on life. The idea of leading a fulfilling life imparted by their story is hugely important to me, and something I strive for every day.

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Appendix A

Fieldnotes-with-Stories

Sketch: Margo told her story to the narrator over Skype, while she was sitting on the living room couch of her house. Ben was present, but did not comment during her story.

Summary: Margo had just graduated from college, and gotten a job at Pratt & Whitney as an electrical engineer in the controls engineering department.

Narrator: I remember the day I went upstairs, I wasn't dating anyone at the time, so I went upstairs with my boss, and we went down this aisle, and I was trying not to be... to look around too much, and just trying to pay attention to who my boss was introducing me to, and pay attention to what they were saying. And then, I left the area, but I remember when I got downstairs to my own desk, I thought "something... there was something going on upstairs, in that aisle. There was like a cute guy, or something. I gotta go back up there," I just sensed it.

Researcher: Something's up.

Narrator: Something's up. So, I really didn't even have to go back up there, because it turns out the next time I went back, I got introduced to Ben Owen, who was in that aisle, and he was assigned to work on the same project as me. I recall that he had, at his desk, a little uh, I think it was a surfing poster? There was something at his desk that said he liked to surf, so I said "OH! I like to surf! I've surfed too!" So he said, "No way, you surf?" and I said "Yeah I surf" and he said "We should go surfing sometime!" and I said "Yeah we should go surfing sometime!" So, one day we decided to meet at Juno beach park after work. I drove my car, he drove his car, we both had our surfboards in our own car, and.... It wasn't very good waves that day, it was like choppy, waist-high waves, but the wind was blowing really hard. I remember that dad - oops, sorry - that ben and I walked across the parking lot with our surfboards, and we jumped into the ocean and started to paddle out, and I just scrapped and scrapped and got outside past where the break was, and I turned around and looked back and he was just sitting on the shore. (expression of surprise, she motions with her hands in disbelief) and I thought, "WHAT'S GOING ON," so I stayed out there for a bit and then paddled back in, and I said "what's going on are you ok" and he said "oh, I, I ate Lebanese bologna for lunch today, I don't feel good."

Summary: After that, they started dating and went surfing together all the time. They lived about 15 minutes apart from each other in West Palm Beach/North Palm Beach, and dated for a couple years. Margo actually lived down the street from Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort. Ben's dad got really sick, so he took a leave of absence and went to Homosassa Springs, FL to take care of him for about four months. Margo wrote him a bunch of letters that he still has to this day, and he eventually came back. After he returned, they moved closer together, and were living on the same street but in different apartments. They spent all their time together and hung out at each other's apartments. After a couple years, they wanted to go surfing in Hawaii together, and decided to get married when they went. They didn't tell their families until afterwards, so nobody was at their wedding except for them, the pastor, and the photographer. For their honeymoon, they surfed all over Hawaii.

Narrator: I waited until we were about to leave Hawaii - we were at the airport, maybe, and then I said to dad, "I'm gonna call my parents now, because I know they'll be eating dinner" - cause I knew they always ate dinner at six o'clock, at the same time every night. Um, so I called my house, and my dad answered, and I said "Dad, Ben and I just got married, and we're in Hawaii on our honeymoon." and he said, out loud, he said to grandma "Yew and Ben just got married." and then he said to me, "Your mother just dropped the spaghetti." (All laughing) So, (chuckles), he told me that night when they sat down to eat dinner, he looked at her and she said "There's so much to think about!" and he said to her "No, there's nothing to think about. It's done, It's over." So, that was their reaction at first, and then they offered to throw us a party so our families could meet.

Summary: They had their party, and some time was spent talking about how their families interacted. Ben's dad passed away about 8 months later. Their eloping wasn't a huge surprise to anyone, as they had been dating for several years and both Ben and Margo were accepted into and liked by each other's families. They didn't originally intend to have kids, but realized after several years that they really wanted to, so they decided to move to Nashville and start a family.

Right after they moved, Margo had a miscarriage. They said that it worked out in the end, however, because they had their first kid (me) shortly afterwards.

Researcher: But you overcame it.

Narrator: Yeah. Well it was worth it, and, um, we did... we did the therapy, and we did the work on ourselves, and I'm so glad we did.

Researcher: Yeah.

Narrator: Yeah! And, I'll tell you, things got better and better - (snaps her fingers)

Ginger's scratching the furniture - So, yeah, and we've had a really full and lovely life together. We've really, come along way. We've had fantastic children, and great vacations, and - man we're so blessed!

Researcher: Good. I'm glad that you're happy.

Narrator: Yeah!

Sketch: After the story concluded, things were much the same as when they started. Margo pet her cats and hung up to go to bed.

Follow-Up Storytelling

Researcher: How would you describe dad when you guys first met, and got together? What was he like, and what drew you to him?

Narrator: He was quiet, but he had a twinkle in his eye. He was very witty, and, um, very good-looking. But, he had a humility about him that I liked. He just seemed, like, humble. He had a hard upbringing, and he wasn't brash, or whatever. He wasn't full of pride and ego, like so many other guys in their 20s. He was really kind, and smart, and we seemed to have common interests. [...] We played soccer together, too. One day, Dad and I found out that the engineers had a pick-up soccer game, like, once a week, so we just showed up one day, to the pick-up soccer game with all these people that we worked with. They let us be on the same team, and we scored, like, 10 goals! We just like crushed everybody, we like, passed in and out, and it was amazing! It made them so mad, that the next time we came out they made us be on separate teams... (laughs) They wouldn't let us be on the same team!

Researcher: cause you guys were just, like, the dynamic duo

Narrator: Yeah, we were just like dancing around through everybody, scoring again and again... They were like "gahhhh!"... kinda spoiled their fun, so we only went out a couple times. After they wouldn't let us play on the same team, we said "ok, whatever."

Researcher: cause you guys wanted to play together

Narrator: we did! it was fun.

Appendix B

Cultural Interview Report

Question: What kind of person did your culture expect you to date? Like, what was expected of someone that you were going to date?

Well, I guess they expected me to date a white, or caucasian, male. they never really said it had to be the same religion as us. My older siblings married people that were from other religions, some of them, Methodists and stuff... but all of them, when they got married, got married in the Catholic church, and they had to go to classes required... there's some sort of preparatory interviews and classes - I'm calling them classes because I don't know what else to call them. There's like, stuff you do when you want to get married in the catholic church that helps you get to know your future spouse, to make sure you're compatible with each other and whatever. The point is, since divorce is not recognized in the catholic church, they want to make sure the two people are truly ready for marriage and truly committed to each other... things like that. It's kind of your 'last chance to get out', kind of thing, because once you're married there's no divorce in the Catholic church. So that's the idea behind it. That was actually one of the reasons I didn't want to get married in the church, because I didn't like that.

Question: Were your parents upset that you didn't get married in the catholic church?

Probably, but they didn't ever talk about it. It was a done deal when they found out, so there was no going back. They were generally very supportive of their kids' choices.

[Summary: Margo stopped going to church when she went to college, and only went when she was at home to honor her parents. She became religious again when they were expecting their first child, and they became Episcopalian (because of Ben). Eventually, they switched churches and became Presbyterian, and are still devout Presbyterians to this day.]

Question: When you started going back to church, did you consider joining a Catholic church?

[No]

I didn't really connect emotionally with the catholic church. I didn't really like the rigidity of the religion, with the whole "only men can be priests, they can't be married..." you know, there's a lot of rules like "you can't use birth control..." There's all sorts of

edicts handed down that say how you can behave, what you can and can't do, and I didn't agree with a lot of them...

G: Even though that's how you were raised.

M: Right.

G: So, you kind of rejected your culture then.

M: Yes, I did. I definitely rejected that. That was part of me breaking free of the rules put in place by my parents, was me rejecting their religion. So, I didn't really want to go back to it when I became religious again.

[She rejected her culture when she went to college, and never went back. She dated a cynical atheist throughout high school and was strongly influenced by him.]

Question: What was your family's socioeconomic status, and how did that affect who they wanted you to date?

[Summary: Margo's family was solidly upper middle class, so they were expected to date other people of similar solvency. This coincidentally meant they shouldn't date non-white people.]

They didn't want me to go to the movies with, it was like, me, one of my friends who was a white girl, and a boy who was a white boy, and another boy who was a black boy. She didn't want the four of us to go to the movies. I remember confronting her, and accused her of being racist, basically, saying "You're worried your friends are gonna see us out and think that, you know, I'm dating a black boy."

G: And that wouldn't have been ok?

M: I... Yeah, I would say that probably wouldn't have been ok. I think she would've been upset about that.

[Summary: The interviewer mentions Margo's brother, who became a Baptist after marrying his Baptist wife]

M: He's still Christian, which I think is really the important piece. If he became Muslim or Jewish, that might have been a problem.

G: You guys are still Christian too, but if you had decided to not be, what do you think would have happened?

M: I don't know! I think my parents would've been upset if that happened while I still lived with them, but they had a pretty good ability to let their kids be who they wanted to be once they were out of the house. They were pretty accepting of the kid's choices, which I think, you know, showed a lot of love on their part, and that also helped aid in the success of each of their kids. They just loved them how they were after they left the

house, so all of their kids felt supported by their parents, because they weren't criticized for their choices.

[Margo talks further about growing up in a Catholic household, leading to the following:]

Really, I grew up in a culture that was “don’t ask, don’t tell.” We didn’t talk about any kind of deep and meaningful things, no one ever said ‘I love you’ to each other when I was a kid. My parents didn’t say that to me! There were no, like, huggy, kissy moments with my parents and me. No one gave affection, no one gave praise that wasn’t really worked for. There was no - i forget what they call it - unconditional love. There was a lot of conditional love, like, you have to do well, kind of like you have to be perfect or we won’t love you. That was the unspoken thing. Like, once I got all As and a B on my report card, and I was so excited, you know, because I had a lot of hard classes and lots of AP classes in High School. I remember we always brought our report cards home and put them on the table, and my dad would sit down to dinner and look at our report cards that night, and I remember anticipating him looking at mine, because I was so excited that he was gonna say something good, and he looked at it and he said “Oh, all As and a B. Well, we can see there’s some room for improvement.” And that’s all he said! I’m sure it was tongue-in-cheek, you know, but it didn’t feel like that to a 16-year-old who was thinking that was a really good report card. Praise was never really given, that was my culture. We were just expected to behave, follow the rules, do all the sacraments, go to church, go to confession, do confirmation, you’re just expected to do these things. You’re expected to go to church every sunday, and you’re not to miss!

Question: What did a typical, good Catholic relationship look like?

[Margo says that you’re supposed to date for at least 2-3 years before getting married, and you would absolutely never move in together before getting married. The couple would go through the Catholic indoctrination, and then they would get married and live together. Additionally, you were absolutely not supposed to have premarital sex (though she didn’t abide by that). Her parents never talked to her about sex at all. They relied on the school to tell her things, which was not sufficient.]

Question: How involved were the parents in the dating process?

[The parents weren't really involved in the dating process, once Margo left the house. She says she didn't need their approval to get married. She did introduce them to Ben before they got married and they liked him, though, so it was less risky to elope. Even if they didn't like him, however, Margo doubts her mom would have truly spoken out.]

Question: Do you feel like the Catholic culture has significantly changed since you were a kid?

[Summary: Not really. At least, not in many important ways, and not within her family at all.]

[My mother] really doesn't say anything negative about the choices her kids make as adults, which I find good. As far as her viewpoints on, I don't know, birth control, abortion, premarital sex, all that, I would say it's still the same [e.g. very conservative]. It seems to me like the Catholic church, although they have these doctrines that are in place that say you can't, use birth control for instance, I think everyone looks the other way, because that's such a tall order for most people. My guess is that people just kind of pick and choose which parts of the Catholic faith they want to adhere to, and then they're Catholic. That seems like part of how it is.