

"Now it's really hard for me to hold on to that little bit of Margaret that my mother had, that my mother raised, and still be this drug person. . . . I'm trying to be two people at one time. You know, I'm trying to be a decent person and a drug addict at the same time. And I've started to believe that you have to be one way or the other. . . . You can't straddle the fence."

Margaret

When I was growing up, my mother wanted me to grow up and meet a nice guy, marry him and have babies and be happy. I feel I disappointed her. I'm sorry if she's hurt, but I've already done that now. When I sit down and give it serious thought, I feel real bad because I know better, and because I know better, I know that she knows I know better because she taught me better. Sometimes I sit down and think about, well, maybe I need to change my life so she could at least see me in a different light before she goes. Now all I need is the. . . . How do you do this? What is the first step? What do you do first? To start changing it, you know, what do you do? Except for just trying to just do it on your own, 'cause I'm not good at that at all.

When I was growing up, I thought I wanted to be a nurse for a long time, but I never went into that. I never went that way. So when I started working, I was a secretary. I liked that line of work, but my dreams and stuff, if I had any, I think they died. I don't know when those dreams died because, after I grew up and started working, I wasn't really working towards anything. I just went and picked up a skill and I used it. So I never really set out to become anything other than what I was being at the time.

So I wanted to be a nurse, and no, I never said I was gonna be a drug addict. What I did want to be coming up as a child was to get married and have a husband and have my own house. I did want that. I wanted to be a married person with kids, just happily married at home with my husband, living the

homey type life. It's what my mother wanted too, you know. My mother thought that if you were good enough for a man to go to bed with him, then you should be good enough to marry him and have his kids, and that's how she raised us. That's not how all of us turned out to be, but that is how she raised us. To be faithful to a man. Be a good wife to him. Be a good mother.

I admired the type of person that my mother is. But when I was growing up, I didn't say that. My mother . . . seem like she wasn't aware of the bad things, you know, because she never lived in the world. She never mingled with the worldly people. So that's the only thing I would want to be different between me and my mother, to be aware of all the bad ways people can be and things that people can do to you. She told us all how to be good and how to live right, but she never told us how . . . what not living right was.

My mother is very religious. So religious. That's how she survived. That's the only thing that's been in her life since my father. See, she's obsessed with religion, but it's not a bad thing, but that's how she lives. She goes Tuesdays, Thursdays, and all day on Sundays, unless they're having a revival. Then she go every night. When I was born she did the same thing. We went Tuesdays, Thursdays, and all day Sundays, unless there was revival. When I was coming up, we had Joy Night on Saturdays. So we went on Saturdays, and if it was revival, we went every night too.

She's a Christian, you know, holy sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost, jumping and shouting, those kinda people. She's one of them. She raised us by the Bible instead of any other kinda way. She'd tell us that we shouldn't tell lies. We shouldn't bother other people's kids. We shouldn't steal. She grew us up. My father wasn't religious at all. He didn't even believe in God—at least that's how he talked.

My mother was beyond strict. We couldn't wear pants. We couldn't dance. We couldn't listen to rock and roll. We couldn't go to the movies. We couldn't go bowling. We wore dresses all the time, even as kids. So we couldn't like jump and run in the streets. We couldn't do that because we had on dresses. And then if our dresses were up over our head, you get your behind beat, you know. You have to sit down like a lady when I was a child. We jumped a little rope, played a little hop-scotch, but that was about it. We couldn't get in the water plug, you know.

As far as I know, my mother didn't go to school at all. I don't know about my father, but I don't think he went either. My mother did domestic work, you know, washing white people's clothing and cleaning their houses and stuff like that. And then she worked on a farm a couple times picking blueberries and stuff like that.

They were born in Phillipsburg, South Carolina. My mother came to Jefferson when her and my father separated. My father never came to Jefferson, though. We came here because my oldest sister was living here.

I was six when my mother and my father separated. I don't remember much about him when we were all living together as a family. Only thing I know is what I heard. So I don't really have any feelings about the times my mother and my father lived together. But after we came up here, he used to come and visit. He would seem to be the same mean, grouchy old man that I heard about. So I was fine not having him in the house. I would rather not be with him than to be with him. He wasn't willing to take care of her or us.

My dad was an alcoholic. He drank every day. He made corn liquor. When they were together they fought all the time. They fought about my father coming home, feeling guilty 'cause he done did what he done did. And my mother would be sitting there meek and humble, and he would take it out on her or one of the kids. He just was used to find reasons to argue from what I hear. Then after they was separated, we go back down there, he still be the same way. He would find things to argue about. Argue about her taking us away. Like he didn't really care about that, you know. And he would just be the type that would get drunk and wanted to fight.

I know my father has been in jail for shooting someone, and for making liquor. Different times, of course. He shot this guy and the guy didn't die right away, but it was because of this, you know, because of the gun wound that he did die eventually. So my father got charged with homicide and went to the chain gang.

I really don't know how I felt about my father. I don't . . . I don't hate him because I don't feel no hateful hate, but I don't feel anything else either. What I hear about him, I don't know how anybody can love him. I think I was twenty-one when my father died. He had lots of illnesses. He had cancer. He was a diabetic. He had syphilis. He had a lotta diseases when he died.

Well, he was sick for a long period of time, you know. My mother had moved back down there to stay with him. He was diagnosed as terminal in the middle of the summer, and in October he passed away. When he died, I went to the funeral because he was my father. I don't remember crying, you know. He was my father only in the sense that he made me.

My mother never got into another relationship. She just went to church. I have never seen another man in my mother's house other than my brother's friends or my brother-in-law and his friends, my nephews and their friends. I don't even remember a deacon coming over for no reason at all. So even now that all the kids are gone, it's still no man coming around. There must be some kind of dark family secret because from what I hear about how bad my father treated my mother, it's like she had to do something sometime. I never heard her curse. I've never seen her do anything wrong. I mean, it was just incredible for her to be like how I describe her.

My mother raised us by the Bible, like that. She told us what was a sin and what wasn't a sin. How to treat people, treat people right, and . . . you know . . . she raised us like that, which wasn't really the real world, after I got out into it, 'cause you can't love everybody. You have to don't like somebody, okay? 'Cause if you love everybody, then everybody and things they do will be all right with you. And it's not that way. She didn't tell me about, you know, how people . . . how strong some people's minds are and how wicked some people's minds are and how some people would treat you like you're dirt and you don't have to be doing nothing to nobody. All she told me was to love everybody and treat people right and what was a sin and what wasn't a sin, and you shouldn't, you know . . . she never said what you don't let people do to you. It's just what you don't do to people, you know.

I had eight sisters and three brothers. Three sisters who are dead now, so that leaves me five sisters. Two brothers are dead. One passed away in '72, and my other brother passed away in '73. My brother got stabbed in the heart. His girlfriend stabbed him because he was cheating on her. She was charged with involuntary manslaughter and she got probation. The one that died in '73 we found him in a river. So we never knew what he died from . . . I mean, how he got in the river. They just wrote it down as suicide, 'cause they said he didn't have any bruises or anything like that.

Three of my sisters have died too. One died in '81, I think it was. One died in '82. And one died a couple years ago. Two died of cancer and the other one had lupus. One of my sisters that is living now has some kind of infection on her spine and it caused her to be paralyzed. I wasn't that close to the three sisters that died. I'm more close to the one that's ill now.

All eleven kids didn't come to Jefferson. Most of them were grown when I came up here. My mother brought . . . let's see, five girls and one boy? No, wait a minute, she brought me, Mildred, Carol, Trudy, and Tommy. She brought five of us with her. And she left Marilyn, Slim, Frank, and John Boy down there. So that's nine, and my other three sisters were already grown and married and one was living in Philadelphia, one was in New York, and one was living in Jefferson.

Well, when we came to Jefferson, we moved onto Hering Street. When we left Hering Street, we moved to Barr Street. Lots of crime. I grew up around Twenty-second and Barr. A lotta gang wars, a lotta burglaries, a lotta dope selling, a lotta dope doing. Cars and clothes, materialistic things, were important to the people in the neighborhood I lived in. When we left Barr Street, we moved to Baker Street. When we left Baker Street, we moved to Oberholzer Street, and from Oberholzer back to Barr, and then I got married out of that house.

My mother was very clean. The house was very important to her. Because we all had to do it. And we had to do it. She was also a good cook, as long as there was something to cook. You know, say, if we was doing a little bad and we had to eat something like cornbread and fatback, I don't think she enjoyed that. But when she . . . you can tell how people feel about cooking 'cause it's the meals that they make, and we always had big meals, lots of meat, lots of vegetables.

When I was coming up, she couldn't afford to dress nice. So she was more particular about how we looked than how she looked. She tried. She looked the best what she could. But we came first. If it was between her getting a pair of shoes and us having a pair of shoes, we got the shoes and she would wear a pair of my other sister's shoes, you know.

We had to wash clothes by hand. We had to mop the floors. We had to wash dishes, scrub the woodwork, ordinary chores. Nobody had they own

room. So everybody had to clean up the rooms. You come out from school, you do your homework. You change your clothes and you go outside and sit on the steps or whatever, unless you're going to church, unless it was a Tuesday and church night. If it was church night, you ate and got ready for church. And when you finish eating, whosever turn it was to wash the dishes, washed the dishes. Got your school clothes ready for the next day. And that was the day. We used to have prayer meetings in the street and stuff sometimes, but that wasn't very often.

As for school, I didn't play hooky until after I went to high school, mostly when I was a senior. If I went to school and I didn't feel like staying, I went home. She asked why, I would tell her why. And that would be that.

Well, once I got suspended—I was in junior high school—'cause they told my mother that I had got drunk in school, right? Which was the truth, but because my mother raised us like she raised us, and she never seen no signs of it, she didn't believe it. And they couldn't smell anything on my breath because I had squeezed lemons and stuff, sucked lemons and stuff. So she didn't believe them, she believed me. But it was the truth. I did get drunk in school.

I didn't get into any fights in school. Hardly none until I got in junior high school. Not often at all. Maybe six or seven fights. Girls that didn't like me, 'cause I always wore dresses or something. They used to talk about me.

My older sisters went to school to see how I was doing, but my mother never went. I didn't receive bad grades. I mean, I got C's, but I never got E's and F's. I did when I got in high school in gym. I failed gym for two years. My mother didn't say nothing. I used to think up lies and tell her that I didn't want to take off my clothes in front of people when I got in high school. I really didn't feel like jumping up and down and all like that. I did used to have a lot of trouble with my stomach, which I found out later why it was, and so she didn't really jump on me about gym. Just when I got in twelfth grade.

I was disciplined sometimes with an extension cord. But she would always tell us why she was beating us. I didn't get beatings that often. Not with an extension cord, though. She might pick up a shoe and hit us, or something, but then my mother, she's real religious, plus she's countrified, all right? So