

Alexandra Moore (Wartburg Partner: Mary Alice)  
Professor Emily Bloom  
Objects & Memory  
December 13, 2021

[00:00:00] - [00:00:16]: Music + Biographical Information

**Alexandra:** Where were you born?

**Mary Alice:** Well, first my name.

**Alexandra:** Oh, yes, first your name. What is your name?

**Mary Alice:** My name is Mary Alice O'Brien. Religious life for a while it was Rita Maureen. I was very lucky getting that name because I had a mother and a sister called Rita. So Rita Maureen is a female name. And so when I went back to my name given at birth, people are like, what's going on?

I grew up in Troy, New York. I remember the family home. I would say about five of us grew up there and then later my parents moved to the country and, and built a house and the two youngest grew up there.

**Mary Alice:** I'm the oldest of seven.

**Alexandra:** Wow!

**Mary Alice:** There's four girls and three boys. I lost one of my brothers about a year ago, the sixth child, to brain cancer.

**Alexandra:** I'm sorry.

**Mary Alice:** If you had asked me who was the strongest in the family and healthiest, I would have said him.

[Mary Alice's Time At Wartburg]

**Alexandra:** How long have you lived at Wartburg?

**Mary Alice:** I've lived here at Wartburg since, I believe 2019. This is the first time I've lived alone. Because I boarded at college, and then I went home and taught for a year. So I went right from home into the convent. So I've adjusted.

I mean I have blessed to have all this space. I mean, its really lovely.

**Alexandra:** It's lovely.

**Mary Alice:** Except when I clutter it! Anyway!

**Alexandra:** And right now we're sitting in Loman Village?

**Mary Alice:** We're sitting in Loman Village, in my living room.

Transition [Mary Alice's Hobbies] [00:01:48]

**Alexandra:** What would you say that your interests are?

**Mary Alice:** I love plants, music, and photography. I taught photography in this, uh, communications course. That was in the high school from '67 to 2015 doing, it was an all girl school, 9 to 12.

P.S. on the photography: I exhibited like just one photograph maybe once or twice

**Alexandra:** Wow!

**Mary Alice:** — that I took at Rockville Preserve that I can show you.

Alexandra: I'd love to see it!

**Mary Alice:** And, um, but you know, I never had the time or the money, you know, I mean, with photography it's the frame is critical and the enlarging and the resolution. And some of that, I knew just a little.

Transition [Mary Alice's Photographs] [00:02:44]

**Alexandra:** Have you found that since technology has become so advanced that have being able to take pictures on the phone has been useful?

**Mary Alice:** Yes. You know, I never, I can remember before I had an iPhone and watching the students go a hundred miles an hour texting, and I thought, oh, I'll never do that. But it, I think it has so many advantages.

**Alexandra:** So now we're going to switch gears a bit, I wanted to know about in terms of reflecting in the past, are there things or moments or trips that you maybe wish you documented?

**Mary Alice:** I was lucky enough to go on many trips. Paris, France, I was in a gondola — Rome, Trevi Fountain and the Colosseum. I just had so many excellent ventures.

**Alexandra:** Wow.

**Mary Alice:** Photographs are — when we talk about memory and objects, they are just so helpful. You know? Its fun to recall good times, I mean maybe as a result of this interview I'll start going through photographs. At one point when I was moving, you know I had a lot of loose photographs and I gave them to him to digitize. I don't know how many he has but I have a lot and as you can see in my closet, I have boxes of prints.

**Alexandra:** Right! It is fun. And it's a nice way to connect with each other, right?

**Mary Alice:** Right, it is.

**Mary Alice:** I have black and white photos of when I was little—

**Alexandra:** Wow.

Subject Change [Mary Alice's Family in Photographs] [00:06:14]

**Mary Alice:** A lot of my photographs that have become meaningful — I just have so many, but I have a story surrounding Falmouth, Massachusetts and my sisters.

**Mary Alice:** My parents, my father was in I think they were in Falmouth maybe before they were married. And he was in the air force. I think Otis Air Force base was down there.

I think he was an instructor. I don't think he ever actually flew out of the country, but he was an instructor. My mom would go down to visit in Falmouth, and then as years passed, when they had a family, they rented a house down in, um, in Falmouth after the children were in college or grown up, and not going there.

My mother and father would go up there. And then when they got too old to do that by themselves, my sister Barbara and I — she would find a rental place and we would take them.

And then after they passed away, my three sisters and I every year try to take like just four days, a short trip to Cape Cod.

**Alexandra:** Wow!

**Mary Alice:** And we didn't, we've done it for a number of years. So sometimes like I frame those pictures. I can show you. I did recently. There's one hanging in the, in the sunroom and I made four one for me and one for each of my sisters. Um, from one particular summer there.

I liked to do those things. I do think I'm creative — I feel like Virginia Woolf stream of consciousness, moving from one thing to the other.

Anyway, we didn't go the summer of COVID. And this summer we didn't know rather or not we were going to go or not.

**Mary Alice:** This is one of me with my dad when I was a baby. I'm not good at guessing ages. So I was a baby.

I think I weighed seven something, but, um, I was, I was pretty junky. I was chunky, I wouldn't say I was fat growing up, but I would say I was chunky and I never lost my baby fat.

Anyway, it's a picture of me. It looks like I'm in a little, it's a black and white photograph. It looks like I have a little dress on, I think I see my toes without socks on them.

My dad is holding me and he is in his looks like his air force uniform. He's a very striking, handsome man. Looks like I might be reaching up to his cheek with one of my hands and he sold him my other hand with his with his hand.

A little story I was due in March and I didn't, I wasn't born until April 16th and my dad was on leave, I think in March.

And he and my mom would go out for, I don't think he was home for too long. He would, they would go out for a ride on bumpy roads and the little stinker I was, he had to go back, um, I guess, to Otis Air Force Base. And by the time he got back, he received a telegram that I was born. But would I cooperate when he was on site? I didn't! Plus I can see here, my ears are sticking out a little and my head is pretty bald.

I think my mom, the story goes, my mom worried for a long time that I wouldn't have any hair that I'd remain bald. So that's the story of that picture!

This is, it's a blue frame with a nautical rope on top and it's my four sisters were sitting in low beach chairs with a red, white, and blue umbrella.

And we're all turning around, looking over our shoulder. You can see the water and the beach and a woman sitting up on a concrete wall offered to take our photograph. So that's how that occurred. And I put it in a frame. I believe I did one of these for each of my sisters.

**Mary Alice:** Unfortunately, I don't know what year this was. If I did research, I might be able to.

Here's the stupid story that I shouldn't reveal. But one day I sent a one year, I'd like to think I was really young, but I sent a postcard to one of my siblings and said either the waters right near the beach, which was really pretty stupid (*laughter*).

Anyway, this other photograph is it's three wooden panels, and each panel has a little heart and the first one says live and the next panel says laugh and the bottom one says love.

At the top. I framed a card, which is an aerial view of Cape Cod, you can see Cape Cod outlined. It was a card we all picked up in some store, but I thought that was significant to this trip.

Alexandra: Absolutely!

Mary Alice: And then I think I did Wordles in high school. So I know how to, I haven't thought of Wordles in a long time. But I made a Wordle, uh, of everything that we did, like where we ate, people we saw, funny things we saw — actually it says Cape Cod 2018!

**Mary Alice:** So luckily I did--

**Alexandra:** have a date?

Mary Alice: I did date this one!

**Mary Alice:** You know, I used to be an archivist and everything should be dated, it was one of my side jobs.

And then there's a picture of us. The four of us, one of my sister has a hat, Rita, myself, Barbara and Helen, at a restaurant.

**Alexandra:** that's in cape Cod?

**Mary Alice:** And that's in Cape Cod.

**Alexandra:** Wow.

**Mary Alice:** Yeah, that's in Cape Cod. So there are a couple there's many more that have stories, but there are a couple that I chose just of photographs that were framed and I had easy access to.

**Alexandra:** Well, those are great photos. So thank you for sharing them with me.

**Mary Alice:** Oh, you're welcome. You're very welcome.

**Alexandra:** And I'm really appreciative of this conversation that we've had today.

**Mary Alice:** I really enjoyed it Alexandra it brought back a lot of memories of really good times and good objects and good things that, um, I hadn't thought about. So thank you! I love doing this because it recalls all the wonderful experiences I had, which I don't really reflect on. So thank you!

**Alexandra:** Thank you. I'm so glad!

[Transition to End] [00:12:05] to [00:12:50]