

There is a glossy black-and-white photograph of NB that she keeps hidden in a box she hasn't unpacked in years. She is 16 years old, glowing with youth, her high cheekbones, modest smile and sparkling tiara all giving her the air of a privileged princess. Add the bouquet of red roses in her arms and the good-looking quarterback boyfriend by her side and, from the outside, NB's life looks simple, easy, charmed. Forty-three years later, NB prefers not to talk about her high school days. Her memory is much darker than that photograph and she hardly recognizes that girl anymore. NB still has the high cheekbones and the shy smile but this once popular, devout Catholic girl from an all-white working class neighborhood in Michigan is now a social worker living in the 6th ward in New Orleans. She has married three times, had five children with four different fathers, two out of wedlock and two with home births. As a single mother, she spent about four years on public assistance and struggled to complete college. Together, depending on their father, her adult children are: Jewish, Irish, Native-American, African-American and Chinese. An old neighbor and friend of NB's, MG, once called NB an "outlier." In some ways, Mark is right. Taken out of context, NB's life can read like an over-plotted novel about a highly unconventional woman. But put in the context of historical events and their timing in her development, NB is suddenly grounded in time and place--the chapters of her life are full of action, but they also make sense. NB's life requires a multifaceted exploration, but it does not defy explanation.

The concepts of the Developmental Life Course presented by Hutchinson (2012), Bronfenbrenner (1977) and Bengtson (2005) take that multifaceted approach. NB has existed and interacted with a complex web of historical events and a distinct community of cohorts. She was also impacted by the timing in her development of those historical events, government legislation and welfare policy. In exploring her life, theories of risk and resilience are also key elements, including the moments when her well-honed survival instincts backfired on her. History and Timing Born in 1946, NB's adolescence and early adulthood collided with major political movements in the United States. Ronald Dahl (2004) describes the adolescent brain as a "natural tinderbox" (p. 20), poised for new experiences and high levels of stimulus. It also marks the time of shifting away from the home to the outside world. NB hit this developmental, brain-on-fire period in her life during the upheavals of the 1960s.

The 1960s encompassed three major social movements: civil rights, the women's movement and the anti-War movement (Blau & Abramovitz, 2010). As a young adult, NB responded to the roots of these movements and the possibilities they opened up. In the years between starting high school and dropping out of college at 19, NB went through a quick succession of changes, taking her from an eager-to-please, devout Catholic girl to an unmarried atheist raising children outside of marriage. To put this dizzying account in perspective, a thorough exploration of NB's childhood is needed. These early experiences had a strong impact on her relationship with the broader historical events taking place in her adolescence and her natural inclination to seek and manage chaos. According to Karatoreos and McEwen (2013), children who live under chronic pressure and stress in the home quickly develop ways to adapt and function in a dysfunctional environment. NB certainly learned how to adapt to adversity and stress at a young age. NB grew up in an all white, working class neighborhood in Lansing, Michigan with her constantly fighting parents and two younger brothers. NB described her mother's prolonged periods of silence and the way she would suddenly snap out of it, talking incessantly to no one

inparticular. Once, when she was in high school, NB came home to find her mother with her head in the oven. And at least one time in her childhood, her mother was hospitalized. NB's father was fairly mild in the very early part of her life, as long as he didn't drink. He worked at the local milk factory, caring for the horses that were still used to deliver milk. When he drank, though, he became a completely different person. NB remembers being highly attuned to her father's moods by the time she was eight years old and, once she evaluated his mood, she knew how to get away. Her brothers, she said, didn't get away so easily. As a girl, she counted herself lucky. The boys were the main targets of her father's physical abuse.

A turning point for the family came when the milk factory replaced horse-drawn milk wagons with milk trucks. Forced to work in the factory instead of a stable, her father drank more heavily and her parents continued to fight until she entered high school. As she grew older, and she hit adolescence, NB relied on two protective factors to counterbalance her risk at home: school and church. School became a place of refuge and the social awareness she relied on at home served her well with friends. NB quickly found a boyfriend and joined the glee club. Her classmates wrote words like "sweet" and "nice" and "kind" in her junior yearbook. All the adoration, support and fun she lacked at home, NB created in her school environment. The summer after NB's junior year of high school, she went to live with her grandmother in Chicago, a major turning point in her own development. When she talks about those months, you can still hear the happiness in her voice, the relief she felt when she discovered a world that was bigger than Lansing. This is when her "tinder box" adolescent brain, craving more experience, more connection, more meaning, first met city life and the civil rights movement. The beginning of the summer was pure joy. Her grandmother was stable, organized and communicative. NB loved the hustle of the city and the freedom she felt walking on the streets.

Quickly, she met a 24-year-old and began a fling with him. A voracious reader, NB knew all about sex but back home, in her Catholic school and with her Catholic boyfriend, sex was highly stigmatized. Now away from Lansing, NB didn't care about stigma. She went with her boyfriend to plays and concerts and nightclubs. When she got a job as a waitress, she met another boy she describes as her first "Beatnick." They would go to the lake and have long conversations about books and politics. Life that summer was big and interesting and wild and exciting. She embraced it all. At the end of the summer, NB experienced her second turning point. In 1946, when she was born, Americans didn't have televisions in their homes. By 1963, 96% of Americans owned televisions (Nielsen, 2009). Access to television increased NB's access to the world, particularly to the civil rights movements. On August 28, NB found herself in her grandmother's living room watching Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have A Dream" speech and the march on Washington. This wasn't the first time NB had seen inequality, but it was the first time she was able to put a label on it. As a child she had a friend who was Mexican who lived in a home with dirt floors. She was also friends with her school's only black student. She also saw inequality in Chicago, one of American's most segregated cities (Coates, 2014). NB took note, walking through Chicago's south side that summer, of the housing conditions in the black community, she just didn't quite know how to process what she saw. Listening to Martin Luther Jr.'s speech, her observations suddenly had a name. NB knew, in one way or another, she would fight against injustice. Back home in Lansing that fall, NB's world clamped down on her hard and fast. She had changed in Chicago but back in Lansing, the once

sunny, popular girl now felt like an alien among her friends. NB immediately joined a local civil rights organization, but that didn't do much to counterbalance her challenges. Her parents fought harder than ever, her mother decompensated and her father continued to drink. NB retreated into herself. At the deepest point in her depression, NB grabbed for another lifeline, her second protective factor: religion. She attended and met with her priest regularly; replacing the structure she once sought at school with the structure of the church. When she finally finished high school, the same resilience that sent her to the church for help now told her to run away as quickly as she could from Lansing, committing her life to religion and fighting injustice. NB got all the way to a convent in Massachusetts where prepared for life as a nun. Within six months, it was clear that NB had run to the wrong place. The convent was isolating and constricting. Even the books she read, one of her main sources of solace throughout her life, were monitored. Looking back at her decision to join a convent, NB laughed.

"Maybe I thought it was going to be like college," she said. "A free college." Away from her parents' house, NB also realized the church had brought her peace at a crucial time but that need just wasn't there for her anymore. She didn't even believe in God anymore. NB left the convent and moved back to Michigan where she attended Michigan State and worked in an office. Campus buzzed as NB's closest cohorts got involved in organizations like SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). They also took part in protests against the war. These movements led to the passage of legislation on a national level. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act had passed, outlawing discrimination and ending segregation in public schools. In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled on *Loving vs. Virginia* and deemed anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional. These dramatic legislative changes opened up NB's social world. NB met her first husband, Ed, at a café on campus shortly after interracial marriage was declared legal on a federal level. Ed was tall, handsome, smart and passionate about his writing. NB, still technically a teenager, was 18 years old. She fell head over heels in love and married Ed a year later. Interracial marriages were now legal and, according to a Gallup poll, approval ratings for interracial marriage took a significant jump from 4% in 1958 to 20% in 1969.

On the other hand, this still left 80% of the population uneasy about a union like NB and Ed's. NB dropped out of college to follow Ed to Sacramento, California, where he got a job as a reporter at the *Sacramento Bee*. A colleague of Ed's recommended he apply to rent in his apartment building. The landlord refused his application. When Ed told NB what happened, she was furious. But the talk stopped there. Looking back, NB acknowledged that Ed must have continued to look for apartments and continued to be turned down but kept it all to himself. Unless directly confronted with it, NB and Ed rarely discussed race openly. NB didn't want Ed to be embarrassed around her. They may not have discussed it directly, but they were both aware of the pervasive housing discrimination in the United States. What NB saw in Chicago's south wasn't isolated to that city. In the 1960s, largely due to redlining, cities had two housing markets: a white market, buoyed by FHA-backed mortgages and black market where mainstream mortgages were pipe dreams (Coates, 2014). Ed and NB finally found a place that would accept them: Oak Park, a once-affluent area now crumbling and full of crime and poverty. NB actually enjoyed living Oak Park. The discrimination still burns. Nine months after moving to Sacramento, NB gave birth to her first child, a baby girl. A year later, NB and Ed moved Berkeley, where he worked at *The San Francisco Chronicle*. Their friends and cohorts spent their time protesting,

smoking pot, joining communes, fleeing the draft in Canada and rotating partners. Before long, their marriage was over. Ed went off with another woman, leaving NB pregnant with her second child. NB, almost completely broke, lived on a glassed-in porch with a group of other friends, a situation that might seem dire today but wasn't all that concerning to her at the time. Her relatively calm response can be partially explained by the natural resilience she developed as a young girl in Lansing. In the face of chaos, survival came naturally to NB. It can also be explained by the fact that the people around her embraced communal living. She wasn't alone. Linked Lives Linked Lives are an important element of the Developmental Life Course Perspective and they played a huge part in NB's life.

The three important linked lives in NB's timeline include her children, her immediate community and government support and education. NB never moved back to Lansing and rarely went home to visit. Her parents both died at young ages from alcohol-related diseases. NB replaced her birth family by giving birth to children of her own. Throughout her adult life, NB's children grounded her. They also held her back from completing her education and kept her in poverty. NB felt she never needed a man at the head of her family. "In my experience," she explained. "Fathers have not been all that helpful. As much as people have tried to make things more equal, it's just not." And yet, even without a man in the house, it isn't quite accurate to say she raised her children completely alone. She raised them with other single mothers in the community. By 1972, NB lived in Manhattan with her children. Her youngest child's father had just moved out of their apartment on 107th street. Luckily, in that building alone, there were three other single mothers NB relied on two swap childcare and emotional support. NB also relied on public assistance, programs enacted through Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, and the City College system.

Together, these programs provided NB with childcare subsidies for her youngest child, Head Start for her school-age children, free college tuition as well as food stamps. She was particularly grateful for Head Start, which she viewed as a high quality program. Children who attended Head Start were more likely to finish high school than other poor children who didn't have that opportunity (Cassidy, 2006) and education was always important to NB. Unfortunately, within a year, the welfare restrictions changed, cutting the childcare subsidy. NB dropped out of City College and found a union job at the General Motors factory in Ossining, New York. She worked the night shift and friends stayed over with her kids. Three years later, NB moved, landing in a poor but tight-knit, politically active community. Pregnant with her fourth child, NB left her job at General Motors and moved to Washington Heights. Her new apartment building, The Grinnell, was a particularly unique place. A massive prewar building stretching an entire city block at 157th street, The Grinnell was originally built in 1911 for an upper class, genteel crowd. The building had porters, doormen and classical music concerts on the roof. When NB moved in, The Grinnell was falling apart. In 1977, landlords in Washington Heights cut services and allowed their buildings to fall into disrepair, forcing white tenants to flee. They then cut the apartments up and re-rented them at higher prices to African-Americans (Spady & Thaw, 2011). The Tenants Association at the Grinnell fought back. During NB's first winter at The Grinnell, there was no heat, broken windows, a garbage strike, a murder, a rape and even the mailmen refused to deliver the mail. An active group of people who stayed--teachers, activists, artists, librarians and, of course, single mothers--sued the landlord and gained ownership of the building. Through this community, NB's children had access to

countless apartments full of kids and engaged parents. Mark Gordon, NB's old neighbor, ran a stamp club, took group trips to the library and supervised a Teenager's For Peace club. Another neighbor taught piano and another took children on trips to her farm upstate. For three years another mother at The Grinnell and her son lived with NB and her children. With the extra help, NB was able to go back to school. She attended a program for single mothers through Goddard College and was even able to bring her newborn to her Saturday classes. Shortly after getting her degree, NB got the first job she was ever proud. She worked in the admissions office at Columbia University. The job came with an important perk: university housing. NB left The Grinnell and moved downtown to 111th Street. After two years there, NB met a lawyer named Charles, married him and moved her entire family to a New Jersey suburb where she had her fifth, and final, child.