

Q: [00:00:09] So, was there something that we had to do to officially start this interview? Let's do this, then. Can you say your name and what is your Salt year and cohort?

Marina Henke: [0000:26] Yeah, totally. My name's Marina Henke ... I was a Salt radio student in the fall of 2021.

Q: [00:01:04] So, let's start. I'm grateful for all the questionnaire stuff that you filled out as well, but I'm curious about where you grew up, how you feel that formed the foundations of what you were interested in?

MH: [00:01:25] Yeah, it's a good question. It's a big question. So, I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri. My parents are both professors at Washington University in St. Louis, and so we grew up pretty close to the campus and very much had – I don't know if either of you, whenever you've been in school, know those professors who have kids who are just always around, like a campus kid. I was totally one of those. I grew up in a very academic world, and my parents both do very different things. My dad's a Renaissance drama professor who studies Shakespeare, and my mom teaches environmental history and science communication. So, two very different worlds. But I think that shaped me a lot. I think increasingly I realize growing up in that environment, it just made me – I think, for one thing, I always say that I think I'll probably have had a cooler childhood than I can ever give my kids because I'm not in academia, and we always ended up – we went on sabbatical for a year for my dad's work, and he would drag us to these different month-long courses that he would teach on Shakespeare. It was this very rich part of my life. I think the other thing I would just add, too, is I'm a twin. I have a twin sister, and we are obsessed with each other. That is a very fundamental part of who I am. You grow up with a best friend, and it really becomes part of – I always say the first day of school for every year I ever went to school, I would go into school with my best friend next to me.

Q: [00:03:18] There's so many different ways we can go. How did being a twin form your sense of your own identity and the identity that you had within your family?

MH: [00:03:33] Yeah. My sister's name is Gwyne, and Gwyne and I were, I think, like a lot of twins, kind of a unit. It was always like, "Oh, the Henke girls." I think that was both a great thing and again, a handicap, probably, but also, at times, a very hard thing. I always say that being a twin is a little bit like having a mirror up to you your entire childhood. Everything you are doing, they are doing at the same time, in maybe a slightly different way. I'm a little competitive, and so we would struggle with that, although she is not competitive at all.

Q: [00:04:22] That competition, or that just idea of having a mirror, or whatever you want to take from that, did that form what you explored as a kid, what subjects, whatever your interests were? How did that mirror shape you or drive you to different things?

MH: [00:04:45] Yeah. I would say that we were a parallel path until about late middle school. So, I guess, twelve/thirteen, and very arbitrarily – my parents, in general, are sort of hands-off parents. But my mom told us this one summer, she was like, "You girls need to pick two different summer camps to go to. Whatever it is, just pick two different things." My sister went

off to this two-week summer camp in Michigan that I think ended up being a dud. So, I always feel bad for her in this, but I had a friend who, that summer, was going out to this summer camp that her dad had gone to in New Mexico. She was like, “Well, you want to come with me?” And I was like, “Yeah, sure. That's going to be my – yeah, I'll do that, and Gwyne will go off to this Michigan summer camp on a lake.” I feel like Gwyne went to the most classic, what you imagine of summer [camp]. They made friendship bracelets on this lake. Then I went out to this place called the Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions. It is a bizarre little summer camp in Northwest New Mexico, and was really the first thing that I did that was just my thing. And I think because of that, I especially just loved it. And without sounding maybe a little too grandiose, but going out there was a huge – it set into place a lot of what would follow. As I sit here right now, I'm an environmental reporter and producer on a show about the outdoors, and I would say that being out in New Mexico is sort of the start of that.

Q: [00:06:35] Where else did that take you, in terms of forming those environmental interests? How did you take that thing that you've decided, “Oh, this is, this is my thing, and Gwyne did this” – where else did that lead you? I guess you said the path stopped being parallel around middle school. Where else did that lead you in high school, college?

MH: [00:06:55] Yeah, high school is a good – well, for one thing, I became that insufferable kid that everybody hates that talks about summer camp all the time, and then who always is like, “Oh, no, but my summer camp is so different.” I think everyone maybe says that, but I would say this place was different. But the big thing – I think the big next life step in my personal history that it did is I went out there and really came to adore a lot of the staff members that were out there, and I blindly trusted – whatever they thought was a good idea for me, I was like, “That sounds like a perfect idea.” And a staff member out there let me know one day about this high school program where he was like, “Marina, you can apply to the school where, if you get in, it's totally free. And you go up to the basically very rural northern section of Wisconsin. It's a thing called a semester school, and you go and you do outdoor stuff for a whole semester.” So, I applied without really talking to my parents about this. I think I was just like, “Yeah, I'm going to apply. It doesn't cost them any money, so this will go great.” I got in and went. So, I spent the second half of my junior year in high school up at the school in Wisconsin. That was crazy. It's free. I mean, they've since went bankrupt and don't exist anymore, because, as it turns out, that's not a great business model, but that was super formative. That was the next step of a very formative place for me.

Q: [00:08:40] Maybe this is diverging a little bit, but was that common? Were you just like, “I'm just going to do this. I don't need to talk to my parents about this,” or was that the first time you're like, I don't need to?”

MH: [00:08:50] Yeah. Like I said, my parents were just not – they weren't really helicopter parents at all. I do remember there was a moment there where we had – I went to a public school, and everyone would meet with the college counselor once our junior year, just like, “Okay, we're about to do this.” It was in that meeting that I turned to my college counselor, and I was like, “Well, I applied to this school, and so if I get in, I'm going to go.” I'd mentioned to my parents that I'd applied, but I think they'd been like, “Oh, okay, that's not really real.” And it was in that room where my parents were like, “Oh shit, I think she's going to do this.” But that was the first

– I guess to answer your question, that was the first time, I think I really was like, “Yeah, I’m going to do this.”

Q: [00:09:40] “This is my path.”

MH: [00:09:42] Yeah. And then I remember we were driving up. My parents drove me up to Wisconsin, and I think that was – we all got in the car. I had talked to nobody that had gone to this school. There wasn't a lot of information about it online. We were driving up north through Illinois, which, oh, man, the Midwest in the winter, the highways, it is so cold and so desolate. I remember all of us – just suddenly, there was a silence in the car, I think where we all were, like, “Is Marina about to have been scammed?” [laughter] It just felt really unsure, but it was a real school.

Q: [00:10:22] [laughter] I'm curious, with all of these different schooling experiences, as well as your parents both being professors, how did that form what you sought out for undergrad, for continuing education?

MH: [00:10:39] Yeah. So, I went to this place called Conserve School. I don't know if I said that. So, I went to Conserve School, and I came back, and I was also – I had a healthy degree of obsession with school. I say that in the most ironic way. I wanted to go to a school – I definitely wanted to go to what I thought at the time was a prestigious school, which now I sort of think means nothing. So, I had a couple of schools on the list, but I ended up going to Bowdoin College up in Maine. I applied to Bowdoin because I knew that I wanted to do environmental studies. I don't really know if I knew what that meant, but I was just like, “Yes, I want to do environmental studies.” And I was like, “I think Bowdoin has a good environmental studies program,” which, yeah, it does. It's not the world's best. I don't really know what a good undergraduate program is anymore, but I applied to Bowdoin, and there was something about the idea of being up in Maine, where we'd spent a little bit of time as a family growing up, that felt very – it just made a lot of sense in my mind, where I was like, “Ah, yes, New Mexico to Conserve School, Conserve School to a good environmental studies program on the coast of Maine.” That made sense.

Q: [00:12:11] If I'm getting this right, you had a lot of agency in what path you were choosing for your own education, and that came from your family. You said they weren't helicopter parents, but you had that level of agency, and “This is what I was going to do. This is my path.”

MH: [00:12:25] Yeah, which I also think about a lot now. A big part of our – me and my siblings – ability to choose different colleges, I mean, for one, my parents are both professors, and we're comfortably upper middle class. And if you're a university professor, I feel like people don't talk enough about how there's this whole other world of privilege of being in a university system where us going to school, WashU [Washington University] would pay half of its tuition to any school that any child of a professor goes to. So, you're walking into any school saying, “Okay, I already have a ...” And WashU was very expensive. So, I basically already have a fifty percent or more just cut off of the tuition. I always think about that when I talk about what college I chose. It's out of such lofty and dreamy ideas, and what a privilege.

Q: [00:13:24] Those lofty and dreamy ideas of environmental studies, what did you hope to do with it?

MH: [00:13:33] It's really funny. I think at the time – I remember going to college, and I wasn't quite sure. At one point, I remember, I was [like], “I want to be an environmental lawyer.” I didn't know what that meant. Then, I started to work out in this place in New Mexico and get really interested in the idea of outdoor education. I thought that maybe that's what I wanted to do. But lingering in all of this, which is what, in a way, I ended up coming back to, but I think what I really wanted to do was be – in my most dreamy of dreams, I wanted to be an environmental writer, but I think I realized I didn't really want to be a journalist. I couldn't really tell, but the idea of writing about the outdoors just felt very important to me. I then got to college, and then became really interested in more education, and then specifically doing behavioral work with kids. I wanted to do therapeutic work, which came from doing a bunch of outdoor guiding.

Q: [00:14:43] So, that outdoor guiding, for clarification, was happening alongside your undergrad studies?

MH: [00:14:51] Yeah, I spent summers. So I'd be at Bowdoin, and then I spent summers going out to New Mexico to work at – the Gulch is what we call it. Those would be these really long summers where I worked on this group called the Turquoise Trail. It was an all-girls group that was teenagers, eighth to tenth graders, so young high schoolers. That's just such a sweet age, I think. We would take them for five weeks. They would come out for five weeks, and then we would go on these – someone once called them, at the Gulch, they said we would basically all just go on these odyssean road trips, which is totally what it felt like. We would always get in a van and just drive through the Four Corners and stop and camp and stop and backpack. It was incredible. It was in there, as I'm working with these young girls that I really – it's probably, to this day, the most meaningful work that I've done, although I decided I didn't want to actually do it.

Q: [00:15:57] What was that decision like? Because I know you were also a teacher, as well. Did that experience say, “Oh, I'm going to be an educator now?” If it's meaningful, what was the decision to stop doing it?

MH: [00:16:13] Yeah. The first decision was like, “Okay, do I want to be an outdoor educator?” And then, for one thing, I love stability in my life, and there's a whole world of outdoor educators that was not quite my jam. I remember coming up against that friction a little bit. But then, really, I had this whole experience of not becoming – I held a lot of anxiety with being outdoors with kids and what that meant, and the risk of that. I don't know if it's something that I've totally worked my way through, but I think I realized that I didn't want to be constantly in a job where you have this pretty deep assumption of risk in the outdoors with kids. I think I was becoming not sure that the outdoors was maybe the best place to – I don't think I ended up wanting to do outdoor therapy. I think I started to be like, “I don't know if I really think that's the best space to do directive therapy work.” And now I really agree with that. That's when I was like, “Well, maybe then I'll become a normal therapist that loves the outdoors.” And that is where I was when I ended college.

Q: [00:17:31] After college, what came next? Because we're building.

MH: [00:17:38] We're building. Yeah, yeah. We're totally building.

Q: [00:17:42] What came next in terms of what you chose to do, or what kind of career you were looking to build right after college [inaudible] place?

MH: [00:17:50] If you talked to me right after college, I would have said, "I want to be a child therapist. I want to do psychodynamic ..." I got obsessed with psychoanalysis. I took a year off of college and became obsessed with psychoanalysis. It was a wild time. I was like, "That's what I want to do, and I'm going to just get experience for the first couple of years, and then I'm going to get into an MSW [Master of Social Work] program, and I'll be on my way." I had plans to do that in New Mexico. I was just going to move to New Mexico after graduation, which continues a now ten-plus-year experience of me constantly saying I'm about to move to New Mexico, which I still am sort of living in. So, I graduated, but I had taken a year off, and then COVID hit in 2020 when I graduated. I basically was in St. Louis when that happened, and then I was like, "Well, I guess I'm staying in St. Louis for the next year. I don't think I want to move across the country right now." I got a job at a middle school in St. Louis that was accepting whoever, but it was a small, really cool school. It's a small Montessori Charter School that was also in the city of St. Louis, where I was living in an apartment. Really cool school. Really diverse group of students. My plan was just like, "I'm going to get one-on-one experience with kids, and then I'll go and become a therapist," which was a wild experience, also because it was COVID, and we were teaching remotely. So, my first experience teaching was teaching – we had a group of thirty students, and me and two teachers were their entire school for the year.

Q: [00:20:02] I guess I'm thinking now because you were the 2021 cohort, let's transition into this thinking about media and discovering Salt, making that decision. Then I'll pass it off to this [inaudible] during Salt, but I'd love to hear more about what spurred that decision or that examination of media.

MH: [00:20:30] Yeah, so I should say during all of this time, starting in probably late high school, I have this love of audio. I'm like, "I love a podcast." I would listen to podcasts, and I would be like, "Who gets to make that? Who does that?" But it would always be this crazy pie-in-the-sky thing where I was like, "Who does that? How do they do that?" And it was always just this thing that I had in my mind where I was like, "Well, that would be so cool, but that's not possible. That would be so cool, though." And then I started teaching at this school, which was called City Garden, the cutest name for a school that ever was. I would just send my kid to that school just based on its name. I wanted to teach an enrichment class for my kids, and so I taught a podcasting class, knowing nothing about how to make podcasts, but I was like, "Come to Marina's podcasting class, and we'll all make podcasts." I was teaching a group of ten students for a year about podcasting. We used a children's podcast program called Soundtrap." Is it Soundtrap or Soundpath? It's one of those. No, I think it is Soundtrap. They were some of the most low-quality audio things that have ever come out of a Chromebook, a ninety-five-dollar Chromebook that all these students were using. They were so sweet. I mean, these kids made the sweetest, the sweetest things. I made them all interview their parents during COVID. They made soundscapes of things that they missed during the pandemic. I just remember this one kid made a

two-minute soundscape. He built the sound of just being in a Target. He was like, “I just miss being able to walk through a Target and be kind of bored but walk through a Target.” It was just so sweet. There was something about doing that class where I remember just being way more excited about that and the prep that I would do for those classes. Then I would be in school world and just not love it as much. I found out about Salt in some crazy way. I think I just Googled, “Well, how do you ...?” It wasn't serious, but I Googled “how do people make podcasts?” I saw it, and I was flippantly talking to a friend of mine. I was like, “Oh, my God, there's such a cool program.” And then I kind of kept talking. She was a little bit older than me, and she was like, “Well, why don't you just do it?” And I remember being like, “I can't do that. That would be crazy.” And she was like, “No, let me just tell you, as someone who's older than you, this is exactly when you should just do this kind of thing.” So, I applied, and I got in, and all of my materials came from using this children's podcasting program, which is so silly and really speaks to that I knew nothing. I told myself, as I got accepted – and then this also meant that I'd be moving back up to Maine. I basically said that I would give myself two years not to see if I made it in audio, but two years to see if I liked it, and if I didn't like it in two years, then I would go and I would go get my MSW in children's counseling. If I liked it, then I would stay and do it. So, that's what gets me to Salt.

Q: [00:24:31] What were your hopes and goals coming into Salt? Did you have any specific things in mind, or were you just open to the experience?

MH: [00:24:44] Well, okay, I had – I think, going into Salt – I will say this, and it is so embarrassing for the record, but it is so true that I will say it for the record. I think I knew, especially at that time, I was like, “Oh, it seems a little harder to be in audio right now.” This was even before things really seemed to get rockier. But I knew that it was going to be an uphill climb. I also told myself that you have two years to treat podcast school, quote, “like med school.” That is what I would not tell any people in my cohort because that's the weirdest, most off-putting sentence anyone can say. But in my head, I think I just came in being like, “If this doesn't work, I want to know that I really tried to make it work. So, I am just going to grab it by the” – whatever that phrase is – “the shoulders.” What is that? Grab it by the –?

Q: [00:25:53] Reins?

MH [00:25:54] Grab it by the reins. Yeah, I was going to grab it by the reins. So, I think that was one thing, just going in, that I was really just obsessed with it. I was going to live and breathe Salt for the semester that I was there. I also knew that in coming back to Maine, I was really excited to do stories about Maine. It felt like this coming back to this place that was increasingly feeling like a very important place to me.

Q: [00:26:22] Could you tell us about some of your first impressions of Salt? Did you do research for projects beforehand? What was your early thinking, or some of your early experiences in Salt, that were memorable?

MH: [0026:38] Yeah, I didn't do that much. I remember the summer before, I read this collection of radio essays. And I was like, “This will prepare me.” It was a great collection of little essays. It was great. But I don't think I really came in having much idea of the sort of stories that I

wanted to tell, except I knew that I wanted it to be about – clearly, they were going to be about Maine. But I was really intent on I want these stories to really revolve around this place. I think there's something funny at Salt – and I was part of a really big cohort. There were twenty-four of us because we were the post-COVID cohort, where some people had, I think, pushed their acceptance to then, or they suddenly were ready to move a couple of states away as the pandemic got less in our face. But I did feel, in these first couple weeks of Salt, a little bit of everyone sort of vying each other out in the kindest of ways, but vying each other out for like, “How much experience do we all have? Who of us are capital J journalists? Who of us are not at all?” I have a very distinct memory of the day that we all got our kits. We were all in a room, and our professor asked us, “Raise your hand if you've never used any of this equipment?” I had not used any of this equipment. But I remember I was too – I didn't want to raise my hand. And Caroline Davis, who did Salt with me, and is now a really close friend of mine here – I just remember that she was the only person in the room who raised her hand and was like, “I have not used them.” I remember looking at her and being like, “Damn. I wish I was that brave because right now I actually feel like I'm trying to pretend like I know what I'm doing.” So, yeah, that's my early Salt feelings.

Q: [00:28:51] I'm curious about how that attitude shifted over time. Did you feel more comfortable not knowing things or asking for help? Also, I'm curious how that med school attitude towards it changed over time, too. How did your attitude change as time went on?

MH: [00:29:17] Yeah. I think that I – I really want to think about that. I think actually the beauty of Salt is that it actually let me be for that entire semester, pretty new. I think that the most I felt like, “Oh, I have to sort of show that I know I'm doing,” was really early on, and then I realized, “I don't need to do that. And actually, that's going to be a great disservice to me in this space because this is actually a space where I can pretty honestly be like, I've never opened a ProTools session. I remember opening my first ProTools session and literally almost being – I felt like an eighty-year-old woman. I was kind of like, “I don't know how to move the mouse around all these tracks.” It was so daunting. I made a choice to be like, “I'm just going to ask every single question that I can.” There's even a really specific moment I got obsessed with understanding exactly why, in a ProTools session, you need to copy your audio files into the session itself. It just blew my mind, and it made me really understand something. I don't know. So, yeah, I think that I didn't – the only thing, I guess, is that when you actually go to report stories as a student journalist, I would feel like I had to pretend I knew a little bit more than I did. That felt like I was literally putting on a costume sometimes. I remember driving up this woman's house and being like, “She doesn't know this is the first time I've ever done this.” But then, of course, I don't think people actually – I don't think people care as much as I thought they would. And I was so scared at the beginning. I mean, my vox pop that I did – I did a vox pop where I walked along Willard Beach, and I just remember walking laps to psych myself up before I went and talked to people, which I think I still do because Vox pops are horrifying. Then, I guess, to your med school question, that energy stuck around, but in a cool, calm, and collected way. I started applying to jobs really early on into Salt. For better, for worse, I applied to so many jobs.

Q: [00:32:03] I want to ask a follow-up question about [inaudible] the job. So, I'm curious how you were thinking about your final project with the school children, and also projects before that. Did you have a specific topic in mind? What was your approach to finding stories at Salt?

MH: [00:32:29] Especially when I think of my profile and my future piece, I love a serious story, which is something I grappled [with] a little bit because I think I, at times, can be a goofier person. But I think at my heart, I love serious stuff. My friends make fun of me because I don't like comedy TV shows at all, and they say I'm a Grinch. But I did want to, I think, tackle stories that just were a little bit heavier. My future story is a story about a bunch of children who drowned in a really small town in Maine. It's clearly a very sad story. I think that that was weirdly a pretty deep intent of mine.

Q: [00:33:31] As you were doing that final project, what did you learn about yourself, or what did you learn about podcasting? What were some things that stood out to you in that process?

MH: [00:33:44] I think one thing – and it suddenly felt just very clear to me as Salt progressed, which is if I came into Salt and I was like, “Okay, I'm giving myself two years to know if I like this or not,” it became very clear to me that I loved it. That was very, very apparent. I think I was incredibly nervous. I remember driving up to Lubec, where I reported this story, and I was so nervous. The night before – you know those nights you think back, and you're like, “I'm so glad I'm not there.” I just remember the night before being that total anticipatory dread, where I was like, maybe it just won't happen, which is crazy, because I made a page-protected binder of my entire plan for the week. I was very prepared for it, but it just felt great. There was another part of me that, even if some things didn't feel totally natural, I felt sort of gawky to walk around with the audio recorder, and I felt silly. There were also moments where I was like, “Oh no, I think I'm going to figure out how to be good at this” in the most neutral way of good, of I can do it. There was a moment in Lubec where this interview had fallen through that was going to be pretty important for the story. So, I just aimlessly drove to a site where a second drowning had happened in this town, and I got out of my car, and I knocked on the door of the house. This woman came out, who was a family – they're vacationing. This poor family was trying to have a nice vacation in Lubec, and they came to this house all the time. I was like, “Do you know that a drowning happened on that beach years ago?” She walked down to the beach with me and showed me. She had kids with her. They came with her. There was this great moment where I pulled out my psychopath binder of these page-protected primary sources, and these kids, I remember, kneeling down, and they were interested in it. And that was the moment I was like, “Oh, I know how to do this. I can do this.” Yeah, so that was like a really big feeling during that time.

Q: [00:36:08] How did you find that story?

MH: [00:36:10] I looked through – I think Isaac, the director of Salt, told us to look through *The Quoddy Tides*, which is this newsletter of Downeast Maine. I just went blindly through the old archives of *The Quoddy Tides* online and found a two-paragraph description of this plaque ceremony that had happened for this drowning. I think that the drowning piqued my interest. And then it also was that –they said, like, two hundred people showed up to it. And I was, like, in Lubec? That's a small town. Why did two hundred people show up in this town? So, that's how I found it.



Q: [00:36:55] Did your draw towards more serious stories, like the Lubec story, carry through in your time after Salt? Did you continue to seek those kinds of stories?

MH [00:37:09] Yeah, I think I sought them out in probably my personal work in general. I think the personal work that I've done has been at least, if not sad, not goofy, silly, or light-hearted. I think after Salt, I really, in a similar med school energy of like, "I'll take whatever's out there," I did so many different things that were not – one of them was. I worked on a show that had a good amount of seriousness to it. If I list all the stuff I did right after Salt, the tone of it is just all over the place.

Q: [00:37:52] What are some things that you learned at Salt that you still find yourself using today?

MH: [00:37:59] From a technical standpoint, I would say that everything that Salt taught me is foundational to the work that I do every day, which is crazy. I don't know how often people can say that about a grad program, that the bulk of what I learned I use all the time. Honestly, that's the biggest one. The second thing is our cohort became incredibly close, and we're all still really close. It is so sweet. We just all hang out. New York had this whole Salt contingent. I think, to that point, it just made me really realize there's a whole world of radio and documentary community that I felt really a part of.

Q: [00:38:46] What is your strongest non-podcast Salt memory?

MH: [00:38:51] The night of our graduation, our cohort did a variety show where we all – it was in MECA [Maine College of Art], and we all performed different talents of ours. It really felt like we had all returned to high school, but the group of the most enthusiastic high school students you could ever imagine. It was maybe one of the most fun nights I had that whole year. It just was so sweet. For part of my storytelling night, I had talked about this ridiculous children's book I'd written in fourth grade. My act was that I went and I found that book, and read it aloud. It's so melodramatic and sad, and was really funny. A group of people played incredible music, and some folks just did some really weird things. Then the kicker is that there were twenty-six people in that room, and then twenty-four of us all got COVID. Then, our whole cohort was quarantined during Christmas and so that's also why I think we got really close, because we were all separately quarantined. We are the famous Salt cohort. We gave Isaac COVID. We gave Michaela COVID. It was so bad, so bad, so bad. The super spreader event that will go down in history.

Q: [00:40:20] Oh my gosh. We've definitely heard about that. We've heard the whisperings – oh, that's the cohort that ...

MH: [00:40:26] Well, let it be put into this whole archive now that it happened. We are very apologetic, although we didn't know. We didn't know. For the record, we also didn't know, and no one came in – we actually were really conscious as a group about COVID. But it happens.

Q: [00:40:43] You mentioned that you were applying to a lot of jobs during Salt from the beginning. What were you thinking as Salt went on? How were you thinking about life after Salt, and what kind of jobs were you applying to?

MH: [00:41:02] Yeah, I think I just knew that I wanted to get a – any place that would have me as assistant producer and associate producer, I was like, pretty game to do. I was really applying to any job that I saw that was that. I had this insane spreadsheet, and it was also a tough time in the – it was starting to be a pretty tough time in the industry, and I was just getting rejected left and right. I mean, just so many rejections. Honestly, I think my bar was pretty low for what I wanted. I thought, I'm not at a point where I get to have preference over the type of work that I'm doing. I can just have preference of the medium that I'm working in. That really played out. In that spring, I freelanced. I did some transcription work. I ended up getting a contract producer job with Gimlet at the time, which was a very – I'm blanking on the word, but it was very beneficial, I think, to have done that and get that experience. I helped make this insane show about the podcasting industry with this woman who just totally took a chance on me. That was my first substantial thing that I got.

Q: [00:42:31] What did you learn about podcasting or producing at this job that you didn't know previously?

MH: [00:42:38] I do think that – in general, just in that period, I think what I learned is I was going to have to be pretty forward, and to get rejected – I mean, I think I applied to sixty jobs, and the job that I ended up getting where I stayed then for two years, I applied to apprentice once, and I got rejected. I applied for an associate producer there, and I got rejected. And then I applied for an apprenticeship a second time, and I got it. I don't know if I have the level of intrepidity that I had then now. You know what I mean? I'm like, wow, that was an era where I just was really ready to do that, which makes it sound like I'm saying this was ten years ago. This was two years ago, but it was a moment. I guess the other thing too is that I did realize, as it kept going, that I did continue to keep loving it also, and I was getting a real hunger to do the actual produce – the voice – I think some people, as they're doing radio stuff, they're trying to figure out do I want to be behind the scenes or in the scene? I was realizing, “Oh, I have a hunger for that,” but that would take a little bit of time.

Q: [00:43:54] I'm curious. You were talking about the difference in your personal work versus professional work. What does your personal practice look like for audio, or what has it looked like post Salt, especially that you have been an audio producer full-time after Salt?

MH: [00:44:11] Yeah. I am someone that if I don't have a personal project going on, I feel crazy. I think some people are like, “Oh, I have to really motivate to do things.” I definitely have to motivate to work on them. But I don't have to motivate to have something. But in that sense too, I think, at different points for working and then trying to do creative stuff, I always am really realistic time-wise what I can and cannot do. It's not that I'm like, “Ah, yes. I wake up and spend two and a half hours writing silently in my bedroom.” But I was really slowly chugging away at certain things. I wrote my thesis in college about this river in St. Louis that I was obsessed with. I knew that as I was building all these radio skills, I also wanted to be working on my writing skills. I ended up pitching a magazine piece about this river in St. Louis. So, there was a moment

where I was working on – I ended up working in a studio called Pineapple Street Studios. I was working there, and then I was so slowly chugging away at this writing piece that I was just psyched about. It was so easy to do something that I loved, as I was also doing a branded podcast for MailChimp, the email marketing company.

Q: [00:45:48] So that personal work, that's not something you're actively like, "Oh, I need to do." This is something that just feels natural to do because you got [inaudible].

MH: [00:45:56] I don't want to sugarcoat it too much of – and then there are moments of – I was doing this magazine piece or something, I then would – I would have deadlines. Once it became a real thing – I remember there was this one week where I was so stressed because I was trying to do two things at once, and it was stressful. I didn't really have the time, and I procrastinated a bunch.

Q: [00:46:21] Still, I love to hear that there's a personal practice and the professional practice, and that keeps going and that all comes from [inaudible].

MH: [00:46:31] Well, and then it became something that became even more, I think, important when I – I spent two years at this podcast studio, and for one of those years, the second year, I was working on a celebrity talk show. I was working on – I helped launch Trevor Noah's podcast. I learned so much from that role, and I actively really chose to do it and to be part of it. There were clearly creative things that I wasn't going to be getting out of that. So that's when it became really important to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel of where I wanted to be, and to get there, I was going to be doing this Trevor Noah thing, and then also doing these other things that would ultimately help me get to where I – a complex chess game.

Q: [00:47:28] Yeah. Could you tell me more about working –? Your current job is at New Hampshire Public Radio, right?

MH: [00:47:35] Yeah.

Q: [00:47:36] Could you tell me more about [inaudible] what that looks like? How did you arrive there? How has that contrasted from your other jobs?

MH: [00:47:47] Yeah. I started at New Hampshire Public Radio, where I am now, not that long ago. I started in July, and so before that, I'd been at Pineapple Street for a year and a half. Then I'd worked directly under Trevor Noah's production company. I would say it is – especially contrasting the celebrity talk show to what I'm doing now, it is a very different job. The show that I mainly work on is called *Outside/In*; it's a weekly environmental show about science and the environment, and we get a lot of leeway to do the stories that we want to do. I think for me, it is an incredibly perfect fit right now because I'm getting to learn so much in a very real way. It is outside of the walls of a classroom, but I'm still pretty new, and so I am really learning to – and maybe to back up a little bit – what a day in the life is. We basically work on episodes. We each have our own episodes that we're working on, and we do everything for those episodes, a lot like what we did in Salt with a feature piece. You come up with an idea. You have an ideas meeting, you pitch it, that idea gets green lit, and then you go and you report, and then you put your script

together, and then you assemble, and then you mix, and you sound design, and then it launches. To get specific, I just actually released my first episode for the show yesterday, and it is a very silly piece of audio, which is funny. It is about what is going on underneath your porches, and so I interviewed all these animal control agents and crawled under a bunch of porches. It's very goofy.

Q: [00:49:44] That's exciting.

M: [00:49:46] Yeah.

Q: [00:49:49] [inaudible] You were talking about the leeway you get and the kind of stories you want to do. What are the stories you want to do? What are the stories you want to – that are these environment –? Feels like we're coming back to environmental storytelling. What are those dream stories, whether or not –? I mean, you don't have to give up the pitch or anything you're going to do here. But if someone asked, all right, what's the kind of story you want to tell, what would that answer be?

MH: [00:50:14] Yeah, I think for a long time I said, “Oh, I love environmental journalism.” And it's funny. I actually don't know if I innately love environmental journalism that is really just focused only on a place without the people. I think there are journalists who really do that work and do it very well, to talk about what is going on in this particular area of land right now as we look at climate policy and what's happening there. I can love that, but I don't know if I always want to make it. I think what I would say is the kind of environmental journalism I want to make is – I know it is many people's – at least audio-loving people love, love, love – and they should for a reason – *Rumble Strip* by Erica Heilman, and I guess why I bring her up is I actually think that her work, in a lot of ways, is the best of environmental journalism. It's audio that makes you feel really deeply connected to a place. I think anyone that's listened to a couple episodes of her shows feels suddenly like, “Oh yeah, the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, I know what it is there.” I've never been there, but I weirdly know what it is there. I feel right now, at least, that I am really looking to tell maybe some stories that are a little bit heavier on the show, and we'll see if that happens. I mean, *Outside/In* is not the only place that I'll make audio, but I think stories that can really focus in on not that many people, I actually think, weirdly, make the best audio about places, if that makes any sense.

Q: [00:52:21] Yeah. I'm picking up what you're putting down.

MH: [00:52:24] Yeah, yeah.

Q: [00:52:29] [inaudible] Salt. I'm just looking at the list that you wonderfully generated. [laughter]

Q: [00:52:34] Yeah, I'm curious about – going back to that med school mindset, at what point did that transition into this is what I wanted, I made it, this is what I want to do? How are you thinking about your career now? Is this something that you want to keep doing?

MH: [00:52:56] Yeah, yeah. I think that I'm probably actually at a really nice point where I do feel like I can take a breath for the first time in a couple of years, where I have this job that I feel really lucky to have gotten. It's as stable as anything in the industry can be right now. But I'm not looking towards what's next at all. I'm actually like, "Oh, this is a place where I'm going to be able to grow a ton. This is a place where I'm going to be able to get to do all the things that I've wanted to do," which also is like, "Oh, yeah, I want to also keep doing those things forever." Yeah, yeah.

Q: [00:53:46] Just that feeling of taking a breath, that comes from this job, the environment, or just the lack of necessarily freelancing? I'm curious. What's the contrast with this position, feeling like you can breathe, versus your prior career experience?

MH: [00:54:06] You know what's so funny is the irony of being on the hunt to do the environmental audio journalism that I wanted to do, it also meant that for two years-plus, my time at Salt also, I didn't spend any time outside. I moved to New York City for work, and when I was in Maine last, I was just like a workhorse all the time. A really beautiful part of even just the past six months being back in Maine is like, "Oh, I'm totally re-engaging with the outdoors because A, I'm giving myself a little more time to do that, and then it also just feels like such a joyous connection now that I'm also getting to work in and around those themes too. But that is a big thing that has been part of this fall and summer for me, and I feel just ten times more like myself, which is great.

Q: [00:55:00] I guess that answers the question of what drew you back to Maine.

MH: [00:55:03] Yeah. I basically got the job, and they're like, "You have to live in New England." I said, "I'm going back to Maine."

Q: [00:55:13] Yeah, I guess as a little reflection, what would you tell your Salt self, knowing what you know now, and what would you tell that younger self who's like, "Should I do outdoor [therapy] ...?" when you were entertaining that idea of an MSW, and you didn't really know where you were going to go yet?

MH: [00:55:41] I think that earlier me, MSW/child therapy me, I think I would really tell myself, "Wow, trust your gut that something doesn't quite feel right about this future you're imagining," because I think I even knew then that it didn't – I think I knew that there was a piece that was missing. I think I was just probably scared to – it felt very scary to be like, "Wait, how do you become a journalist of some kind?" So that's what I'd tell her. Early Salt self, I think – I don't know if I would – man, I really want to say something that actually feels like really what I do feel. It's funny. I think there's maybe a part of me that – I think if you told my Salt self that I would be working the next year on a celebrity talk show and a branded podcast, and whatever, whatever, I think I would be like, "Oh, no. What happened?" Now, for one thing, I've just become a geek to understanding the industry and what's going on. So, there's that very practical side of me where I think I would be like, "Oh, you need to understand what you're learning now. It's a medium that is going to play out in lots of different types of content." But that's the boring part of me, I guess. I think that there's the other part of me that would just be like, "Trust the process," which is a very cliché saying. I almost moved to Cody, Wyoming, for a job at

Wyoming Public Radio. I was deciding between working for the Trevor Noah celebrity talk show and moving to Cody, Wyoming. I was worried that, in that moment, if I didn't choose Cody, Wyoming, I wouldn't get to do environmental journalism, and if I chose Trevor Noah, I would just become a talk show producer for the rest of my life. In fact, working at the celebrity talk show really helped [me] get to where I am now. Thank goodness that I didn't move to Cody, Wyoming, and I was able to have the – not even foresight. I think I also just took another leap of faith. That's what I would say to her. I think she'd be a little confused and be like, “A celebrity talk show? What? You don't know who celebrities are?” [laughter]

Q: [00:58:47] Which celebrities? [laughter] I'm wondering if there's anything else about where you are or looking towards the future that you want to share that we haven't asked about? Or anything that we talked about. I'm more than happy to keep talking about [inaudible]. [laughter]

MH : [00:59:09] No, I've gladly learned to not just talk too much about summer camp. I've realized people tune away when that happens, although, ironically, I am going to New Mexico tomorrow, so it does still really – yeah, I keep at it in my life.

Q: [00:59:26] We got you at the right day.

MH: [00:59:28] You got me at the –

Q: [00:59:29] You're going to New Mexico tomorrow. You released your first show ever yesterday.

MH: [00:59:31] That is really true. No, I don't think so. I guess one thing maybe I would say, and I don't mean this to be – I know that this is part of the Salt oral history work, and I don't want to sound too promotional to Salt or to the Salt oral history, whatever. But I am increasingly so grateful for my time at Salt. I think I feel that more and more as I live in Maine again. I don't know. For being at a place for such a short time, I do feel deeply connected to it, and I'm just really glad that I took a crazy stab at not being a middle school teacher and doing it. Yeah.

Q: [01:00:20] The thing is, with this, there are so many different paths that we could go down for every single thing that I'm curious about. [inaudible]

MH: [1:00:29] No, you're good. [inaudible]

Q: [01:00:33] Is there anything else that you had in mind?

Q: [01:00:37] I was going to ask [inaudible] –

Q: [01:00:38] Yeah, anything else we didn't ask? What didn't we ask you? What do you want on the record? This is going in the archive forever. No, thank you so much for making this time.

MH: [01:00:49] Oh my gosh, my pleasure.

Q: [01:00:52] This is fun. I like doing this.

Q: [01:00:54] Yeah, it was great learning more about you. I like how you circled back to what you were thinking about at the beginning.

MH: [01:01:01] Yeah. I will say also this feels like it's an oddly circular time right now in my life, which is a good feeling. If you'd asked me a year ago if it felt like a circular time, I would say, "Sure doesn't."

Q: [01:01:14] Well, there's something that I see with a lot of people being drawn back here. I wonder that it's not necessarily just about me, but it is about the specific transformative months that you have in Salt.

MH: [01:01:26] Yeah.

Q: [01:01:28] I think a lot of people – learning how many people stay here after Salt has been fascinating or return here.

MH: [01:01:34] Or return, yeah, yeah. Cool.

Q: [01:01:37] Thank you for making this time.

MH: [01:01:39] Oh my gosh, totally. Should I take this little fella off?

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Transcribed by Molly Graham 9/3/2025

Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/26/2025

Reviewed by Marina Henke 9/29/2025

Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/29/2025