

Introduction: Theresa Harmon interviewing Carolyn Hershberger on February 23, 1993 at Olympic College.

Question: When and where were you born?

Answer: March 17, 1945 in San Diego, California

Question: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Answer: Yes, I have an older sister, 4 years older and 2 younger brothers, twin brothers.

Question: Where did you grow up?

Answer: I grew up in Bremerton.

Question: When did you come here?

Answer: At 3 months of age, so I have been here all my life.

Question: What was your childhood like in general?

Answer: I had a happy childhood, which is unusual I know but I did.

Question: What were your family values, such as religion and education, like?

Answer: Well my family were Jewish. We were raised to be educated and to be independent.

Question: Was there a lot of volunteering in your family?

Answer: Well that's interesting. I don't know that a whole lot of volunteering went on until I got older but there was certainly concern about others in the community.

Question: What do you feel the biggest influences in your life have been.

Answer: My mother.

Question: How did she influence you?

Answer: In a very positive way. She's a great positive role model for me. My family, I think, instilled in me very good values.

Question: Do you have any children?

Answer: Yes, I have a daughter, 18, Anna. I'm a grandmother. I have a two-month old granddaughter.

Question: What is your social background in the clubs you belong to or any other volunteer work that you have done?

Answer: How far back are we going here?

Question: As far back as you would want to go.

Answer: In high school I was involved in sports. In college I never ran for any offices but I was involved in social organizations. At work, when I started teaching here [Olympic College], I was involved in the what used to be called the Associated Women Students. They had the Associated Students and they had Associated Women Students and I was their adviser for a number of years. I and two other women were instrumental in forming what was called the Olympic Women's Commission which became what is now called the Office of Women's Programs. I have been a union negotiator for years.

Question: Here at the college?

Answer: Yes, here at the college. So a lot of involvement particularly at the college and various associations.

Question: How did you discover the need for a Domestic Violence Shelter?

Answer: Well, part of it was [because of the] formerly Olympic Women's Commission here at the college. We started doing Women's Week. We would schedule various topics and have people come in and do presentations. One of those presentations was by a group out of Seattle talking about Domestic Violence. [Karil Klingbeil, Director of the Social Work Department at Harborview Medical Center and Vicki Boyd, clinical psychologist at Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, Seminar on Violent Crimes Against Women, May 25, 1977]. That one presentation was what started us on the road to the ALIVE [Alternate to Living in a Violent Environment] shelter.

Question: How did you get the project off the ground?

Answer: Well, myself and a woman named Jean Kruse, who also worked at the college, went to Seattle and met with Karil Klingbeil who had started the Domestic Violence Program at Harborview. We met with her and said, how do you do this. [We then] came back and put an ad in the Bremerton Sun, [asking] anybody interested in doing this? In July a friend and I advertised in the local newspaper for anyone interested in this issue to show up at a meeting we scheduled. It was the hottest day of the summer. We had 40 people show up from the community [and] basically laid out committees like research, funding, [and] community relations. We got people to sign up for those committees and out of 40 people, we ended up with a basic core of 8 women who went on to do all the work. Some of them are still in the area. Gerry Littlewood, is a management instructor here and has been active over the years. She did all the literature research. At that time there was not a lot of literature on battered women. What she came up with was remarkable. She had a Master's in Librarianship along with her other degrees in business and she found stuff from all over the country. We had a woman named Glee Phelps, who was Grants Coordinator for Kitsap County, so she had a lot of access to potential grants for getting money. Again, Jean Kruse was kind of the community connection person. [Another was] a woman named Jane Langenes who's a counselor over in the Seattle area. Those are the women I remember as the

core and I have forgotten a couple. It's been a long time. We sat around and we said "How are we going to do this?" We had no money. It was all volunteer and we just thought it was an important thing to have in this area. So we did it. We started out, made connections with the police department, and got on a beeper system. We would take turns carrying the beeper, so if a Domestic Violence call would come in to 911 we would get beeped. Whoever was on duty would go to the scene. I remember going and a woman had been abused by her husband and her son. She was removed from the home, she and her dog. She came home and stayed with me. We had connections to other shelters because we did not have one at that time. [We made] connections to get them over to a Seattle Shelter or [a] Tacoma Shelter We kind of got them into the underground and out of town.

Question: What year was this that you started then?

Answer: 1977.

Question: You took them into your homes as safe houses?

Answer: Yes, we had a series of safe houses, that's how we had to start. We didn't have a shelter so we had safe houses here that they could stay [in] until we could get them into a shelter network that existed elsewhere.

Question: Did you have trouble getting people interested in this idea or did these women seem to really want to help a lot?

Answer: Oh, there was no problem, and it was real evident that it was no problem. I remember back then, and it may still be true, but the major cause of death of law enforcement people were around Domestic Violence issues. The law enforcement community embraced us immediately because they saw us as a way of separating the combatants and moving in the right direction. So law enforcement was pretty supportive of us getting going.

Question: And how long was it between the thinking of the idea and actually getting it to the point where you were beeper responding?

Answer: Well, what we found, particularly in going after grants, [that] we needed nonprofit status. The first time we approached the YWCA they were not interested in connecting with us. If you are doing the history you understand that it was a home for Dotsy Fine and for about three or four classes that she did for whatever.....and was not an open facility for women coming into the community. I remember Jean Kruse, the other co-founder, [telling me about] when she first came to Bremerton and had gotten a job here. She went to the YWCA thinking she could stay and Dotsy came to the door and said "What do you want?" Jean, because in other places in the country that's a place for women to seek overnight housing, said, "Well, I came to see what's available and maybe stay." She got the door slammed in her face. It was a very closed club at that point. So then we started looking wherever else we could attach ourselves to some other nonprofit organization? About the time we were pursuing other ideas, the National YWCA put this local YWCA on the carpet and said, "Either you do the review or evaluation process; either you start acting like a YWCA or we're going to pull your charter." At that point, two other

board members, Sherry Soule and Margaret Wagner came to us, sought ALIVE out and said, "How would you like to become part of the YWCA?" It was advantageous for us because we got the nonprofit status: it was advantageous for them because they got to keep their affiliation with the National [YWCA]. We did it though, in a very structured way. ALIVE had their own board initially when we went with the YWCA and the YWCA had their own board. Eventually a lot of the ALIVE supporters got onto the main YWCA board and then we started to move forward. It was at that point that we converted the [Kimball House] into a shelter. I think she [Dotsy Fine] moved out and we turned the upstairs into a shelter and the downstairs into [an] office and [it was then] a functioning place.

Question: So the original financing came before you joined the YWCA, from grants, that you got?

Answer: And some community donations. It was interesting. There was publicity that went out, "This is what we're doing." Just heart wrenching letters from women who were abused. I'll never forget. There was one from a wife of a very high community leader in Poulsbo saying "My husband has abused me everyday for umpteen years and I'm sending you this money. I will never be able to get out of it." She couldn't view herself as getting out of that situation but she sent us money. We got personal donations; we got United Way; we went after CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act]. You remember the CETA program? We got lots of our early on staffing and a lot of the programs, particularly related to dealing with the kids, and stuff from CETA. It was a major hurt when Nixon or Reagan cut that program. It really killed us when they pulled that CETA program.

Question: Is there any other way besides the police that you let the community know that there was a safe house available,; that there was some place to go, before you got the YWCA?

Answer: We had a lot of support with a lot of the women's other community organizations. We went to community women based organizations like Federally Employed Women [and] Business and Professional Women; those kind of places to seek funding [and] also to seek their support. The main way that we got out that we existed, [was that] the police knew that we existed. We did a lot of community [outreach] through the newspaper and through other organized women's groups.

Question: They couldn't reach you directly?

Answer: No, not in the very beginning. Once we became affiliated with the YWCA, then it became evident [that] nobody knew the shelter was there, although taxi drivers told me they all knew it was there. We tried to keep it as anonymous as possible so they could call the YWCA and have access to ALIVE.

Question: What was the first response before you became the YWCA, when you first got started and these women found out there was some place that they could go. What were some of their reactions [when they found out] that they didn't have to stay there [in a violent situation].

Answer: I lost my sense of humor during that [time], in fact. I moved to the [ALIVE] board away from kind of the direct line of [fire]. First of all, every man that I saw walking down the street was a batterer. I was amazed that it just transcended all economic backgrounds, age, name it. In fact, we had police officers that battered. Those were the cases where we had to get them out of town because the police knew where we were. We had some interesting [cases]. [These women] probably live in an underground network all across the country that stay connected with each other. The college here and the Office of Women's Programs stayed very connected and were advocates for the shelter too. We didn't have to do that too long. We pretty much got it in gear [and then turned it over to the YWCA].

Question: This was a new concept in Bremerton; to actually have a new safe house. Did the women trust you implicitly, or did they have some problems with acceptance of that?

Answer: Not at all. You know traditionally they would come and at least cool off and then most of them would turn around and go back home to that whole scene. That's what also depressed me; when you saw what you what you were getting the women out of and what had been done [to them]; to see them go back was hard to watch.

Question: What were the major differences when the YWCA took over.

Answer: The Y didn't take over! We took over the Y! They were pretty much a dysfunctional organization and we were their savior. Our operation was more organized and had more leadership; more ability to get the job done. I think that was the other way around and I think they probably would believe that too.

Question: Then how did you tell the community that you were at a different location, (only) the police would know. Did you start furnishing a telephone number then?

Answer: Yes, once we got connected with ALIVE. I think they still have it, 479-1980.

Question: Did you start printing brochures at that time with it (the telephone number) on there?

Answer: [yes, we printed] Brochures, [and] cards that we could pass out wherever we went. The Bremerton Sun at that point had that list of agencies of where to call and we got listed in that and we just got [started] disseminating [information].

Question: Once you got connected with the YWCA how did your financial picture change?

Answer: We had nonprofit status and that gave us the ability to go after Federal grants or state grants or city grants. It gave us legitimacy so we could look to United Way. We could go anywhere and say we were the YWCA and they would say "Oh yeah, I know that organization". The YWCA really did hand

us a legitimate umbrella organization to push through getting funding and donations. I think the rest is history. People flooded to help us out. There was a real need. I don't know if this is still true but, initially, the two larger shelters in the state were once connected in military towns. It was Tacoma because of Fort Lewis and Bremerton because of the military bases around here. There seemed to be a real correlation so I know our shelter and Tacoma shelter were larger shelters in terms of the people that we are handling than Seattle. We worked a lot with the military. They wanted to "handle it internally" and it took a long time for them to open up and work with us.

Question: Did you have any problems with the YWCA Board of Directors with relation to the shelter?

Answer: [laughing] Not once we got on the board. Sherry Soule was wonderful [and so was] Margaret Wagner. There was a very old school, very old conservative board who met. They had their..... I don't know what they did. They offered two or three classes of whatever and that's what they did. To have a group of what I would label extremely dynamic, get up and go, women, who saw a real need to be met, come in; I think they were overwhelmed. Then, like I said, some of them chose to deal with that by resigning. It wasn't the old YWCA anymore so they left; resigned from the Board. We began to add "ALIVE" people to the Board so there was more balance and it turned out to be pretty much okay after that. Both myself and Jean got on the YWCA board as soon as we could to provide that transition and a very new kind of way of viewing that organization and helping their transition. There was some old.... Greer.....who's the woman you talked to? Lillian Walker?

Question: I talked to Mrs. Walker, yes.

Answer: She was neat but there was another..... Greer..... [an] African American woman that was on the board, and they had kind of a separate little club. They had little pockets of like social kinds of things. They had one out towards Hood Canal or that way and they had one in West Bremerton. We had to get more structured in how we kept our books and kept a handle on things. It was a rough time for people, particularly for those women that just saw us as intruders.

Question: What kind of time frame are we talking to get pretty smooth?

Answer: Probably a good year or two to make a complete transition. We really are one and the same organization.

Question: What difference do you see in the shelter from when the YWCA first took over and where it is now?

Answer: I'm not involved anymore. I know that for a long time it was very difficult. There are a couple of things that were [especially] difficult. One [was] taking that absolutely beautiful home [that] we used to do fund raisers [in] especially around Christmas; to take that beauty and turn it, especially the downstairs, into a functioning office area. That was kind of sad but probably something that had to be done. It was very hard to have the shelter

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and women staying upstairs and conduct meetings and stuff downstairs. While the shelter and the offices were together it was difficult. The shelter got moved out to 4th Street for a while. It kind of made it easier to function where they separated the administrative [from the actual shelter]. (Before that) Both the ALIVE and the YWCA functioned from the actual shelter.

Question: The shelter moved down there?

Answer: It moved to, remember where Kahn's was on 4th street and kind of that restaurant and right upstairs in this building, the shelter was there. [According to Margaret Wagner, early YWCA board member, the shelter first opened in the downtown location in July of 1978. It moved to the Kimball House location within a year. No exact date can be found.]

Question: I didn't know it left.

Answer: Yes, it left for a while. So how is it different? It's much more formalized I'm sure and many more programs for children and again that was one thing that hurt us when we lost the CETA funding. We had gotten into some anger control for men, classes to do that, some child care and programs for children, (and) for battered women. We lost a whole lot of that when [with] the federal cutbacks in the 1980's. It was a real rough time.

Question: So, at this point you're no longer involved with the YWCA and the shelter?

Answer: I just pay my dues, support them, certainly, [and] still refer people. I got burned out. Like I said it was a very intense [time], once we kind of got it up and going and I was on the YWCA board for a while, I couldn't tell you what years but I was president of the board for a while. I left the board for a while and then I came back. In the interim Jean Cruz was on it when I was gone, so we hung in there for quite a while making sure that our child survived and (was) growing and it obviously has. It's alive and well how many years? Let's see we started in 1977. Fifteen years, so we did something right.

Question: Well, I thank you very much for the interview. I learned quite a bit and I really enjoyed it.