

**Sara Nordlie McCormick**  
**Narrator**

**Betty DeKrey[sp?]**  
**Interviewer**

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**Heritage Education Commission Oral History Project**  
**Moorhead State University Library**  
**Audiovisual Department**  
**Moorhead, Minnesota**

**BD:** Today is July 18, 1985. Sara McCormick, who is a long time member of the Moorhead Altrusa, is here as a donor for the Oral History Project of Moorhead State University's Heritage Education Commission. I am Betty DeKrey[sp?] of 2311 South Rivershore Drive, Moorhead, and will act as the interviewer. We are having this rather informal dialogue at the Audiovisual Department in the Library of Moorhead State University [MSU]. Sara, would you start by giving your name, address, length of time you have lived in Moorhead, your age if you wish, and your phone number?

**SM:** [Chuckles] My name is Sara McCormick. I live at 503 Sixth Street South in Moorhead. It's a home in which I grew up and came back to after I started working in the area. Hmmm, my telephone number is 233-0215. Hmmm, my age...I've just lived a good long time.

**BD:** [Chuckles]

**SM:** I've been retired for almost...hmmm, beginning for five years now. So you can figure out...[Chuckles]

**BD:** Do you remember the approximate date you joined Altrusa, where the meeting was held, some of the people who were there, and any other things you can recall of your first meeting?

**SM:** Well, ah, I first joined the Fargo Altrusa Club, because I was working at the Cass County Children's Center. And so hmmm, we met at what was then the Hotel Graver...excuse me, the Gardner Hotel. Ah, that...that was in 1962. So I was in Fargo until 1965, when I transferred to the Moorhead Altrusa Club. And I think my first meeting was in...we met one...we met once a month in the homes. And I believe the first meeting that I attended was held at the home of Dr. Olga Johnson, and that was a business meeting.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. I'm sure that people would be interested to know what your position was in Fargo, and what you changed to when you came to Moorhead.

**SM:** As far as job-wise?

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SM:** Okay. Ah, I am a social worker, and I worked as a social worker at the Cass County Children's Center, which was a center for behavior problems and emotional problems of children, working with parents and the children. Hmmm, I can...when I moved to Moorhead...ah, not moved to Moorhead, but when I changed jobs in Moorhead, I went in as a school social worker in the Moorhead Public Schools part time for the first year, and the other half of my time was spent as a counselor at the Family Service Association. Then for...until I retired, I was the school social worker.

**BD:** Let's go back to Altrusa. What can you tell us about your present membership as to who belongs? Not necessarily names, but perhaps categories, how many members? What membership criteria is? And would you say that the status of women in Altrusa...is it only women as members? Or...what else can you tell us about that?

**SM:** Well, members of Altrusa come in by classification and by invitation. Hmmm, we have a wide variety of classifications. Do you want me to just name some of them or what?

**BD:** I think that would be interesting.

**SM:** We have some in agriculture, who have farms or farming interests, animal husbandry, funeral home, homemaking, insurance, medicine...hmmm, we have a curator of a museum, and people from the public schools, teachers, a principal, that sort of thing, real estate, refrigeration, resorts, retirement homes, other social service organizations. So there's a...a travel agent, a volunteer in public service...so we have a wide variety, really, of members. We are allowed only...hmmm, I think we are allowed three members from each category. At this point we have, I think, thirty-two or thirty-three members, I'm not too sure.

**BD:** Have they ever considered having any men in Altrusa? Or it's strictly female, isn't it?

**SM:** Well, it's been female, but I don't think that men are excluded. I should have checked on that before. But it seems to me that we don't have any, and I don't know if there are any that do. But whether...it may not...I think it's been discussed on the international level, I'm sure, and I don't know whether there is any policy at this point or not.

**BD:** What do you see as the main goals and purposes of Altrusa? And what services do you provide?

**SM:** Well, the motto of international Altrusa is Patriotism, Efficiency, and Service. And as a service club, we do want to partake in service projects in the community, and do what we can there, and we've had quite a number of them. Hmmm, it certainly is not a social organization, although it...there is sociability there and...and we've become, certainly, good friends. But the main goal is to provide a needed service in our community.

**BD:** What kind of services do you mainly do? Are they financial help? Or do you go in and give people actual help?

**SM:** There's...oh, some of each. Hmmm. One of our long range or long-term projects has been supporting the square dancing for the retarded. And we go there and help them with it, but we also...we have provided the financial support for it, paying for the rent of the facilities, and also serving at some of their special parties, and that sort of thing.

Ah...the international has some scholarship types of things, grants and aid. Ah, and we have had quite a number of those women in the community, probably displaced homemakers type of thing, who either want to go back to school and get more training, or need something to help them earn money, that sort of thing. And we have gotten financial help for them. Ah, some have gone to beauty school, to business college, to MSU...Hmmm, we've bought things such as a sewing machine for a woman who was a drapery maker and could not be out of the home because of the illness of her husband. So we provided her with a sewing machine. We've even provided dentures for a person so that she could...and what she did was go back to school.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. Well, it sounds like you really do a very fine service. Hmmm, have you...would you say that your service goals have changed at all over the years?

**SM:** I don't think so. I think...hmmm, I think what we're finding is there are more and more places to put our money that...that are really worthwhile, and that we'd like to do. Ah, the last...since the...hmmm, for example, the Center for Parents and Children came into existence, we have supported them quite...quite a bit. So those kind of new things that...services that come into the community, I suppose that has made a change in where we give; the Rape and Abuse Center, the same way.

**BD:** How do you choose where you put your help? Do you have a committee, or do you vote on it, or...?

**SM:** It's pretty much decided by the whole group. Ah, if someone has a need, hmmm, that they know of, and they look into it, and research it, and bring it back to the group...and, hmmm...the group will decide. Hmmm...I'm trying to think...one of our later projects was brought to us by a member who is a public health nurse. And it was a...it was several dolls that were needed to use in therapy, and to the tune of between a hundred and two hundred dollars, and we felt that was a good project, so we approved that. Ah, we give to the Y, and the Dorothy Day House, and some of those, too.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SM:** And give both goods as well as money. I think at every meeting, we...those that want to bring either foodstuffs or whatever for either the Y or the Dorothy Day House.

**BD:** Your Altrusa has sponsored many different projects. How do you fund these? Do you each donate from your own pocket, or do you have fundraising activities?

**SM:** We have one fundraising activity a year, and that's the annual bazaar, which we've had for...I suppose it was probably since it was organized. And from that we are able to handle the projects that we have.

**BD:** Is that something that the community comes to quite...hmmm...?

**SM:** Very much so. I think...I think we have a good reputation, as far as our bazaar is concerned. And over the years we...the same people come back, too, which I think indicates a...I think it's okay! [Chuckles]

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SM:** But we may...we...then and each member then makes a certain amount...of what it would sell for, a certain amount. And so it's all handcrafted.

**BD:** Mmmm.

**SM:** Yes.

**BD:** Hmmm, do you have any idea of what, approximately, you make at...oh, your annual bazaar?

**SM:** Well, we've made...I think we've made as much as twenty three hundred [dollars]. And it usually...it runs...it has been running around two thousand the last years.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. So when you supplement that with the...with your own funds, you've really got a pretty good amount to work with, haven't you?

**SM:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**BD:** Hmmm, do you have dues or...in the...?

**SM:** Yes.

**BD:** And you mentioned grants. Do you get them for your own organization and then pass it on? Or do you help other people get their own?

**SM:** Well, hmmm, we have dues. And part of the dues goes to the international organization, part to the district, and then part local. Then international has its grants and aid, and there's one other...ah, two...two scholarship funds, which are available to any local club. So we, I think, send a dollar per member to each of these funds on the international level. Then we can, in turn, apply for a scholarship, which can be up to...it was five hundred, I think it's higher than that now.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SM:** And it can be either for people in the local area going back to school or whatever, or it can be...the other fund is for foreign women who are in the United States going to school, and will be going back to their own country, but who are running short of money. And I think we have...we have not had any application. We've made an application for that locally, but did not get it.

**BD:** I suppose there's plenty of competition for those funds.

**SM:** Yeah.

**BD:** Where does your Altrusa hold its meetings? Have you met in a variety of other places?

**SM:** We meet twice a month. And for the last several years, we have met here at the...at MSU, where they have the best food in town. [Chuckles]

**BD:** [Chuckling] Yeah, right.

**SM:** Ah, we have a very nice meeting room here. And so our dinner meeting is here, and then the business meeting is held in the homes. But at this point we're...with over thirty members, we're having a little bit of trouble finding homes big enough.

**BD:** Yes.

**SM:** But, hmmm, otherwise we have met at various restaurants or hotels.

**BD:** What kind of programs do you have?

**SM:** The international puts out a theme for every two years. And so we try and follow that. Hmmm...and do you know, I don't remember what the theme was for this year? But anyhow, our four local committees try...each have a program or two, and try and work it around the main theme. We have committees on international relations, and Altrusa information, and vocational services, and community services. And we usually try and get an outside speaker, ah, a local speaker. And hmmm...for example, one of our meetings was on the Heritage Center locally. And we have decided to contribute to that. Hmmm, so I think the programs that we have had are all really of local interest, I mean, things in the community. New programs, new services, we've had hospice, we've had someone from Dorothy Day, we've had, you know, someone from the Center for Parents and Children, and from the local school district on trends in education, and that sort of thing. So at our dinner meetings we have a speaker.

**BD:** And then you ignore your business until your next meeting?

**SM:** Right. Right.

**BD:** And is there any program that you particularly enjoyed or thought was helpful?

**SM:** Well, I...oh...that's hard to pull out. [Laughs] I think this year we have had some really excellent meetings. Hmmm...it's hard to...to pinpoint any one.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. It's hard to pinpoint, isn't it?

**SM:** Yeah.

**BD:** As you think of the leadership in Altrusa through the years, are there any key people who come to mind that have really furthered the programs of Altrusa?

**SM:** Well, I have...one thing I think about Altrusa is that...that all the members really are interested, seem to be interested in it. Ah, I think one of...one of the persons who really, *really* was good and...and built up the organization was Evelyn Selby, who is now living in Burnsville. She also was our district governor for Altrusa. But very hardworking and...and really built up the group. She was, I think, one of the charter members. Hmmm, another one, Phyllis Wegeslund[sp?], who is now, who died two...a couple years ago now, also was an extremely hard worker for Altrusa and...and did an awful lot. But there certainly have been others, too, that have been...have really pitched in. And around bazaar time, we just have to do that, or we're going to be in bad shape. [Chuckles] And I think we've had real good response.

**BD:** Have members in this area played important roles in the community other than Altrusa? Maybe you can recall some particular things that you have in mind, or that come to mind?

**SM:** Well, I think all of our members really are active in the community. Hmmm...I don't...it's hard to pinpoint them, too, but by virtue of their work and all, they are in their own, you know, professional organizations, and so forth. So I think that...that I don't think we have any members that aren't.

**BD:** Alright. From ones that I know of them, I think that's probably true. Has Moorhead Altrusa provided officers for the district or the state?

**SM:** We've had some on district committees. And then...hmmm...as I said, Evelyn Selby was district governor, and that includes seven states, and two...two or three provinces.

**BD:** That's really a big job, isn't it?

**SM:** So that's going on. That's very much of an honor and also a big job.

**BD:** What unique niche does Altrusa fill in the organization of the community? Do you think they have any special place that no other organization contributes?

**SM:** I think that's pretty hard, because of the number of service clubs in the area. And hmmm...I think all of them do a great deal of...of things in the community. And I don't know that...I can't

say that...that we're any special...you know, hmmm...area that we serve. Perhaps we have...have served more in the area of handicapped, retarded and that whole area. But hmmm...I think we're one of several service clubs that, hopefully, contribute quite a bit in the community.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. Well, your square dance for the handicapped is unique, isn't it?

**SM:** Yeah. That...that...

**BD:** What is the image, do you think, that Altrusa seeks in the community?

**SM:** Oh...Well, I...I really think that...I don't know how...how well known we are. So we certainly run into people that say, "Well, what's Altrusa?" And I suppose every service club maybe runs into that, too. But I do think we must have somewhat of a reputation, because of some of the requests that we get from either agencies or professional people in the community that...and the school district. We've helped quite a number of handicapped children in the school district, and so they...they come to us asking, and...hmmm, maybe that says something in terms of our being known.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. So the community must look at you as the organization to think about when they have handicapped people that...to take care of?

**SM:** Yeah, probably. Yeah.

**BD:** Do you think the community sees Altrusa in the way that you would like it to?

**SM:** I think so. Hmmm...I think we've...we've gotten real positive vibes. [Laughs]

**BD:** Has Altrusa changed as Moorhead has grown and changed?

**SM:** I suppose you change with the times, to some extent. There are different problems that are coming along in different areas and that sort of thing, but basically, it's...it's being of service, and helping people, and that doesn't change, really.

**BD:** No, they always need help, don't they?

**SM:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**BD:** Let's talk about your own experience as a member of Altrusa. We know you're a longtime member. Can you tell us why you joined?

**SM:** Well, hmmm, as I say, I joined the Fargo club. And I was approached by a coworker...hmmm, had never heard of Altrusa before, but thinking about it, decided that it would be a good experience. Hmmm, so I...that's why I joined the Fargo club, and I think that's one of the real pluses that I have found in being in a service club, is that you'll meet and work with

people in all walks of life, and that you probably wouldn't have maybe even run into otherwise, and have become very good friends.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SM:** So the variety of people in the group, I think, has been just really very, very interesting.

**BD:** It would be quite different from your education groups.

**SM:** Right.

**BD:** Because in there you have all of the same...

**SM:** Right. All education, or in the church groups, it's all geared to a...you know, one...one area. In this, you get the whole spectrum of...Here I'm using my hands, and...[Laughs]

**BD:** [Chuckles] They won't show on the tape!

**SM:** [Chuckles]

**BD:** I'm sure you've held offices. Can you tell us which ones?

**SM:** Well, just in the local. I've been secretary, and vice president, and president, and on committees and so forth—never treasurer, because I can't keep track of money. [Chuckles]

**BD:** [Chuckles] Did you feel you've made any special contribution to the group as an officer? That you put them on a new track or anything?

**SM:** I don't think so, any more than anybody else who has been in those positions.

**BD:** I think you've already answered my next question, which was: what has Altrusa meant to you through the years? Unless you can think of something to add?

**SM:** No, I...I don't think so. It's just been a good experience, really.

**BD:** What...? And we've sort of covered the next question, which was: what aspect of the program do you consider to be most important? And that probably would be the handicap area.

**SM:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**BD:** Can you think of any interesting or unusual thing that might have come up through the years that...that you remember particularly?

**SM:** Hmmm. [Pauses] I really can't. [Laughs]

**BD:** [Laughs] One month's just like the next, hmmm?

**SM:** Yeah. Hmmm. I think one thing about the group and the club is that...we find that the more projects that we get, the more inspired we are to really do this, and really make enough money so we can expand what we're giving, and that sort of thing. So that...and that has certainly not decreased over the years. I think it's rather increased.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. Have you in mind anything that you think was a serious obstacle that you encountered as a group?

**SM:** No. Hmmm. I guess maybe the only...and it really isn't an obstacle, I don't think...I think we are running into it in...in terms of getting new members. Everybody is so busy now. And including our own members, that...ah...it's really hard...hard for some even to make the meetings because of other commitments. And that...I guess that's the only thing that...whether it's an obstacle or not, I don't know. But, hmmm, people are so scheduled, and so busy, that you really have to work to keep up the interest, and keep them coming. We haven't had a serious problem on it, but I think we...we've seen that...that it's somewhat there.

**BD:** Mmmm-hmmm. There's an awful lot of competition for that volunteer time.

**SM:** Yeah. Right. Right.

**BD:** What aspect of Altrusa has given you the most personal satisfaction?

**SM:** Well...my most personal satisfaction...I guess the friendships, for one thing, would be way at the top, hmmm, that have...that have developed, and also the satisfaction of helping some of the individuals that we have helped; that really has been a satisfaction. And we've had...we give scholarships, too, two scholarships each year to Moorhead High School girls going on. And that's been a real delight, because the girls and their mother are entertained then at one of our meetings, dinner meetings. And they've been just such wonderful young people. And some have...have kept in contact somewhat, so we kind of know what's happened to them. And that's been a real satisfaction.

**BD:** What are some of the fields they've gone into?

**SM:** Ah, teaching, and nursing, business...hmmm...I think we've only had one dental assistant or...that area. And hmmm...yeah.

**BD:** [Unclear].

**SM:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**BD:** Well, that pretty well covers my questions, Sara. Do you have anything you'd like to add that we maybe have missed?

**SM:** [Sighs] I don't think so! [Laughs]

**BD:** [Laughs] Well, then I think we'll say this is the end of our interview.

**SM:** Okay.

[End of interview]