

**Margaret Reed  
Narrator**

**Sandy Scheel[sp?]  
Interviewer**

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**SS:** My name is Sandy Scheel[sp?] and I am interviewing Margaret Reed about Volunteers for Community Service [VCS]. We're at the Moorhead State University Audiovisual Studio.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Hi Margaret. [Chuckles]

**MR:** Hi Sandy.

**SS:** It's kind of fun that, since we're on the same committee, I get to interview you. I thought that was kind of special.

**MR:** [Chuckles] I'm enjoying it, too.

**SS:** Now, hmmm, I understand that you were around at the very beginning of the Volunteers for Community Service.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Would you give me a little history on that?

**MR:** Yes, I would be glad to. Hmmm, back in September of 1966, Moorhead State (it was called College then) received a Title I community services grant under the Higher Education Act. And that was through the efforts of then president Dr. John Neumaier, and then, hmmm, what was he, associate academic dean...? Ah...no, associate dean of academic affairs, Dr. Roland Dille, who is, as you know now, president.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And...and I was at that time chair of the program, which later became the department of social work at Moorhead State. And we received this grant, the purpose of which was to organize

a volunteer service bureau for the City of Moorhead, and to provide a training program under...basically under my direction, for volunteers who would embark upon volunteer service. Well, the first thing we did, Sandy, was to...we hired Dr. Arthur Harkins who was then a professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, to do a community survey to determine whether citizens in this community were aware of social service needs and what they thought about the possibility of having a coordinated volunteer program. Well, he did...he ran the survey, and we kind of collated the data and whatnot. And hmmm, he published a little book about yea big that was entitled: "Conservatism in a Small Midwestern Town."

**SS:** [Huffs]

**MR:** [Chuckles] And his...ah, findings were that there were a good many needs of people in the community, but that there was a considerable amount of apathy in terms of citizen interest in doing anything very much about it. So we wondered, Dr. Neumeier, and Dr. Dille, and I, what should we do? I mean, Dr. Harkin said this was going to be a really tough program to get going, to get any kind of support. And we decided, well, let's give it a try. So we organized a one-day workshop and had people who were volunteer coordinators from all over the state come. And we had no idea how many people would attend, and we had a hundred and thirty-some people come. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Oh, my gosh!

**MR:** Which was really very startling to us, and very gratifying. We met in the...one of the dormitories on the campus here. And then we said, at the end of that meeting, that we were going to have a seven-week training program. And fifty-some people signed up for that. And so we designed a seven-week training program. We met for two hours every Monday...or every Wednesday for seven weeks. And we had people come in and discuss what agency needs were, and how they could use volunteers, and we had a man from the community mental health center up in...hmmm...oh, where was that? Hmmm, it's called the Northland...ah...up in Grand Rapids...Northland Mental Health Center came.

**SS:** Mmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And he had been using volunteers for years. And hmmm...we went on two field trips. We chartered a bus and we went to Fergus Falls State Hospital and talked to the volunteer coordinator then, and were shown how volunteers...and *right there* how volunteers were used in the hospital. I was amazed at the number of people who had never even *been* to the Fergus Falls State Hospital though they'd lived here all their lives.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then we took another bus and went to the St. Francis Nursing Home, where they...in Breckenridge, where they have...just have a tremendous program for volunteer work. And our group became very excited about it. So at the last meeting when we talked about what a

volunteer really does, I think most people's idea of volunteers were...was that a volunteer is a kind of a lady bountiful, you know, running around with baskets at Christmas time.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. [Chuckles]

**MR:** And hmmm...we found there were many, many opportunities for volunteer work. One of our major projects was to work as volunteers with people coming home from...back into the community from having been in a state hospital, for example.

**SS:** I see.

**MR:** That's really hard for them to make an adjustment to community living again, and it's hard for their families, and things of that sort. Well, anyway, so we decided, a group of us, that it would be fun to become an organization. So we met out at Gladys Coast's[sp?] home out in Glyndon. And hmmm...she had a very nice supper for us and there were about forty-five...three men and the rest women.

**SS:** Oh, gosh.

**MR:** And...we decided we would call ourselves the Volunteers for Community Service, and that Gladys would be our first president. And Mr. McMullen[sp?], who was then the director of...it was then called Clay County Public Welfare. And he'd been very supportive of our group. Hmmm, he was given a grant from the state under the Department of Public Welfare, to have one of his people coordinate the work of the volunteers. So, well that was just fine, except that this woman, bless her heart, was *way* too busy to do anything like that. So we just kind of fumbled around the first year, which is a *very* bad thing, to train volunteers and then not have them do anything very much.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** So...ah, but we hung in there. And the next year, we went down to the United Way, and ah...it was then the United Fund, and asked them...told them what we were trying to do, and asked them for their support. [Chuckles] And...hmmm...Paul Hanson was on the board at that time, and a former senior pastor at Trinity.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And he thought it was wonderful, what we were trying to do. Well anyway, he called...[Laughs] He called me up and he said, "Margaret, your agency has been approved as a United Way agency, but you haven't any money." So...[Laughs]

**SS:** [Laughs]

**MR:** Well, that's grand. So he pulled together a group of very impressive people, men who were with various funding agencies. And we had lunch together, which is the way things get done,

apparently. And we, Gladys and I, tried to explain what we really had in mind about volunteer work. And some of these men were really quite surprised, because again, they...somebody would say, “Well, my wife, you know, she works at the VA Hospital...”

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Or at St. Luke’s or something. But they had no concept of the kinds of things we were trying to do. So as a result of that luncheon meeting, we were given three thousand dollars for the first year. So with that three thousand dollars, we hired Dorla Bernu, D-O-R-L-A B-E-R-N-U. And Dorla had five children, and really had no training, but she had been a very active community service person active in scouting and that kind of thing. So our first office was in her house, along with her five children and her husband.

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** And hmmm...we had three thousand dollars with which we had to buy our stationery, and pay Dorla, and have a telephone. [Chuckles] It was really something. And most of the...

**SS:** Tight budget. [Chuckles]

**MR:** Oh, really...!

**SS:** A tight budget!

**MR:** [Chuckles] Really!

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** And the first board was then really made up of the volunteers, all of us who were doing volunteer work.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Well, that went along for a while. Actually, the first emergency food pantry was in her basement, when a farmer came and offered her...offered us, I should say, a load of potatoes. And she would take in people who were...who had no place to spend the night.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** It was really remarkable, what she and her family were doing for the community. But you see, Sandy, what it was doing was...our program, it was beginning to open the eyes of the community to some serious needs.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Needs for the homeless. Where could they go? To jail, and that was it.

**SS:** Right.

**MR:** Needs for the mentally handicapped. Where...what kinds of services were...? Remember, back in those days, we had no mental health service here except the one in Fergus Falls, which is sixty miles away.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And it showed us the need for emergency food, because there were no places. If people weren't eligible for county welfare, they had nothing.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** So it began to identify, as volunteer programs always do, some of the needs that should be met in the community. Well, we stayed in Dorla's house, and then we went...Trinity Church offered us and gave us a room. And again, we had supplies of food come into there. Ah, then...oh, we first went to the Congregational Church and they gave us a room, and we outgrew that, and then we went to Trinity. And then Lutheran Social Services over in Fargo gave us a place for no rent...because we had no money! [Chuckles]

**SS:** Had no money.

**MR:** And one of the things we did was...and this started in our living room at home. Ah, we decided that one of the things we might be able to do to help sustain us was to have a store that would sell rummage, you know. It's a great rummage town, as you know. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. I sure do.

**MR:** So, hmmm, my mother happened to be visiting us at the time, and she suggested that we call it the This and That Shop. And she gave us our first hundred dollars with which we bought some hangers to put the clothes on. And we started out over near where Dr...hmmm...is it Duncan?...had an office. Anyway, it was in the area which has subsequently been developed under urban renewal.

**SS:** Okay.

**MR:** But we got...hmmm...[laughs] a real dark, little room over there.

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** And we hung up our merchandise and began to serve...that...really, these volunteers were *fantastic* people. They would just...hmmm...I just can't tell you the kinds of things that we got ourselves into. [Chuckles] Well, anyway, so we began that kind of a shop. And then after a

number of moves, we...one of our moves was to the Bluebird Café (which is no longer) but our ladies were over there, scrubbing down greasy walls and whatnot to make that place presentable.

**SS:** [Laughs] [Coughs]

**MR:** And we again paid a dollar a year for rent. And then...

**SS:** A dollar a year?

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** See, this was all in the urban renewal area.

**SS:** Oh, gosh.

**MR:** And then when the urban renewal really came through, then we did...and by that time we were...we were a going concern, and then we had a shop for which we had to pay.

**SS:** So that was your first fundraiser then, really, was This and That.

**MR:** That's right. And now we are located, as you may know...

**SS:** Right.

**MR:** And...and in a very nice location, and we do a tremendous job for the community.

**SS:** It's Center Avenue?

**MR:** Yes, that's right.

**SS:** Yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And we...but you see, the Furniture Bank started there, hmmm, the Emergency Food Service, as I say, and so on. So it really...hmmm...expanded. Then, a little later on, under...actually, under Mrs. Nixon...ah, she became very much interested in volunteer work, and she and her group started what they called the Voluntary Action Centers. And Dorla and I went to a meeting...oh, in, hmmm, Atlanta, Georgia. We were sent there under some funding, that I don't remember how we got it! [Chuckles] And we were the smallest community, and the only one that crossed state lines to be participating in this.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then we became what is known as a VAC center, that was a Voluntary Action Center. And that necessitated that we have a full citizen...hmmm...participation on a board.

**SS:** I see.

**MR:** So that's when we began to get lawyers, and doctors, and people from the Junior League, and all kinds of folks were on that VAC board. And it *really* began to grow then. And hmmm, then we eventually moved to, hmmm, headquarters in the Red Cross Building in Fargo, which is where we're located right now.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** But in the meantime, hmmm, we have started under that...under the Volunteers for Community Service, we had a two-year program for...hmmm...called Mobilizing Youth for Community Services, which...a young woman, Billie Lazar was her name, L-A-Z-A-R, and she started...hmmm...it was the second year of this grant, and she started training young people in junior and senior high school to do volunteer work. And we went to all the high schools, and got groups of kids who were interested in that sort of business, and that went on for several years. We had a newsletter. Mary Ellen Diercks[sp?] was the first editor of our newsletter.

**SS:** I know Mary Ellen.

**MR:** And then hmmm, we merged with an organization called FISH, which was a...out of many of the churches at that time, that was in 1971. And hmmm, then we formed the Emergency Food Pantry, and that has since spun off to the churches. That was one of the things we wanted to do.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** [Unclear] programs and then spin them off. So the Emergency Food Pantry is still a very viable organization run by churches.

**SS:** Yes. Yes, yeah.

**MR:** And I'm sure youth...

**SS:** They take turns.

**MR:** Yes, that's right. They do.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And they have provided, and continue to provide a very necessary service for a very many people. And hmmm, we are...organized the Holiday Clearing Bureau, which you also know about.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And that is still a big program every Christmas.

**SS:** That's...that's a wonderful program.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** I wish more people knew about it, understood what it was.

**MR:** Yeah. Yeah, that has...well, they have to go into the Armory; they have so many things to distribute. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** But it really has been a wonderful idea. Many, many people seem to want to give something, but it's always at Christmas time.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And so that Holiday Clearing Bureau has...oh, the staff at VCS just spends a great deal of time around Christmas time getting that thing coordinated. And that's been a wonderful thing. Hmmm, we started an Adopt a Grandparent program.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And that is now on its own over at the Village. Hmmm...it's just real interesting, the kinds of things that...that have come out of here, and as I say, we...we have identified a great many needs.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Ah, then we...one of the services we were providing was the information and referral service, although we didn't call it that. The staff put together—and you may have seen copies of it, Sandy—a book about...well, a notebook-sized book.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And I would say it's at least two inches thick, hmmm, of all of the services that are offered in this town, in these towns.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** It's become a Fargo-Moorhead, West Fargo, hmmm, particularly...

**SS:** Right.

**MR:** ...and Dilworth, under the United Way. But that is a handbook of agencies, and services, and who's the director, and where are they located. Because we found so many people would just wander from service to service, and didn't have the dimes and quarters that it took to get to these various agencies.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then, as a result of that, we really served as an information and referral service. And then in 1976, I think it was, the United Way gave us that as the job to do under their auspices.

**SS:** I see.

**MR:** And to serve as an information or I&R service. And that is...ah, we hired an I&R specialist to work, and that was...that became a full time service that we gave. And we had to bring it up to national standards and all kinds of things like that.

**SS:** Of course.

**MR:** And so that is kind of...in a very brief nutshell, something of the history. I think it started out with a group of *very* dedicated people. And it has ended up...hmmm...and is still serving. And it has...it was one of the top priority agencies on the United Way when they did a study of the agencies that...in terms of funding and that kind of business.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Hmmm, I've been on that board up until...I think it was three years ago.

**SS:** Is that right?

**MR:** And hmmm, so it's been a...to me, it's been *very* gratifying. It's been an *awful* lot of hard work! [Chuckles]

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** Ah, to get this going. When we first moved to town, Sandy, I asked for a...and did these two towns have any kind of directory of social services and any kind of a council of social agencies? And hmmm, Reverend Belgum[sp?], who was then with Lutheran Social Services...

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** ...gave us a publication. And it was about...[Laughs] Well, it was...it was like a little, tiny notebook. The Junior League had put it out.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And it was the first, as far as I know, of any kind of a directory of community services.

**SS:** Is that right?

**MR:** It was maybe a quarter of an inch thick! [Laughs]

**SS:** Oh, gosh.

**MR:** And maybe seven by ten, or seven by five, or something.

**SS:** And...and you look at the book now...

**MR:** And when you look at it now, you can see the kinds of things that have really occurred in this twenty-year period.

**SS:** Oh, and so...

**MR:** Yeah, that we've been in Fargo-Moorhead. So...

**SS:** So this started with MS [Moorhead State] then in...

**MR:** Yes.

**SS:** And a grant.

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** To survey the social services.

**MR:** That's right. And to...and to develop a training program.

**SS:** [Sighs]

**MR:** It was a five thousand dollar grant.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And Dr. Dille was the...I think he was called a co-...the director and I was the coordinator.

**SS:** You were the coordinator. And did most of the people who came to those first seminars, were they just community people?

**MR:** Yes.

**SS:** That were interested in volunteering?

**MR:** Yes. That's right. There were...hmmm...quite a few people, quite a few Sisters from St. Ansgar Hospital who came.

**SS:** Oh, sure.

**MR:** And then there were other agency people, like Mr. McMullen sent several of his staff, hmmm, and some other agencies. But, basically, it was people who were interested in community work.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. Well, now that it's sort of grown over all these years now, is this a national kind of organization?

**MR:** Yes.

**SS:** Are you hooked up with other organizations nationally?

**MR:** Yes. That is hooked up, you see, with this Voluntary Action, and then that...that whole national business.

**SS:** Okay.

**MR:** And out of this has come an organization called DOVS.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** D-O-V-S, and that's Directors of Volunteer Services.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. Okay. Sure.

**MR:** That was one of the things that Gladys Cairns, who was then the director of Volunteers for Community Service, the paid staff, got going in North Dakota. And hmmm, it's been an interesting...I think you...there is no question that Dr. Harkin's statement that it would be very difficult to do is true.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** It...it was very hard to...but on the other hand, it was very exciting, because we saw this whole program grow.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And it...it covers so many kinds of services; all ages, all kinds of economic backgrounds. We've done a tremendous amount of work in transporting people to clinics, and to hospitals, and things of that sort. Hmmm. We got in the paper—and you may notice it every Sunday—“Can you help?”

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** Well, that...that we got that put in.

**SS:** Mmmm.

**MR:** And ah...hmmm...

**SS:** [Coughs] Excuse me. You mentioned your paid staff. How large is the staff now?

**MR:** I honestly don't know right now, Sandy. There is...there was quite a change. And I think you perhaps would want to talk with somebody who is over there now. But...hmmm...a couple of years ago...see, HotLine was a relatively new agency also.

**SS:** Ah.

**MR:** And hmmm, under...I believe it was under the United Way direction...

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And his was after I got off the board of HotLine and VCS. [Chuckles] Hmmm...

**SS:** They combined.

**MR:** Combined.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And hmmm...but I have no...and it was then called HotLine Community Services, but I have noticed recently, and I have not touched base with these people, that, hmmm, they are apparently two different agencies now, because HotLine is advertising as HotLine.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And VCS is under...hmmm...Hahn[sp?]?...what's her first name? [Laughs] I can't think of it right now. See...or...Mel...? Anyway, she is doing...she did a lot of the work for the Holiday Clearing Office.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** But you could...you could check that out, because I think they've gone through several changes.

**SS:** Well, they historically have a pretty small staff though...

**MR:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**SS:** And I...when I was up with the Holiday Clearing House, I don't think there were but maybe three people.

**MR:** Oh, that...that would be a lot.

**SS:** Yeah. And...

**MR:** They had the director. The first director was Dorla Bernu.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then Gladys Cairns, and then Janice Jones, and...hmmm...yeah. [Chuckles] Though the two...the last two people, Gladys and Janice were both graduates of our social work program at Moorhead State, and *many* of the staff have been graduates of our social work program here.

**SS:** Oh, I see.

**MR:** And we have used VCS as one of the places where we have had interns.

**SS:** Mmmm.

**MR:** See, under our program here, hmmm, you have to have a full quarter of internship.

**SS:** I see.

**MR:** And VCS was a wonderful place for an intern to learn...

**SS:** Wonderful place.

**MR:** ...about the community.

**SS:** So all the rest of the work that's being done is being done by volunteers then?

**MR:** Yes.

**SS:** And anybody that is interested in volunteering can just call?

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** And are they trained or...?

**MR:** They have some training program, and they try to match the volunteer with his or her interests and his or her skills. And of course, since that time, a number of the other agencies have developed training programs.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** For example, the...hmmm...what's it called? The Touch Program out of LSS [Lutheran Social Services].

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** And the Friends Program out of LSS. Those are all volunteer programs.

**SS:** Is Friends from Lutheran Social Services?

**MR:** I believe so.

**SS:** Hmmm. Yeah.

**MR:** And then, hmmm, of course another tremendous program that's developed is the Hospice Program.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And a lot of that is volunteer work, and with an extensive training program. HotLine has an extensive training program. Another program we got started from Moorhead State was the Center for Parents and Children. And they train volunteers, too, you see.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And use volunteers extensively. So it...it sort of was a forerunner, up until VCS time. We had hospital volunteers. Hmmm. But as far as I know...that...that was about it.

**SS:** Mmmm. Okay.

**MR:** And so it really...[chuckles] has been fun to see it grow.

**SS:** Now you mentioned that when the first group that signed up for training, there were only three men.

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** Are they more actively involved now? Or is it still a lot of...?

**MR:** Well, it's basically more...

**SS:** Primarily women.

**MR:** ...more women than men.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** But hmmm...on the board now, at least when I left, there were almost as many men as women.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Hmmm. I saw the write up in Howard Binford's guide of Scott Kildahl[sp?].

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** He was one of our...our presidents, and well, there have been some very fine people who have worked as volunteers and on that board.

**SS:** Now...

**MR:** And...

**SS:** How do they get new programs started? Does somebody just come to you with an idea? Or does it usually evolve out of the staff?

**MR:** It evolves, basically...or it has, anyway, out of the identification of needs by the volunteers and by the board.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Of course, the staff sees that, too. But if you have a board of twenty-some people in all phases of community life, you...you really have a beautiful way of identifying community needs.

**SS:** Hmmm, have a good overview of the whole thing.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. And many of those volunteer board members are also...have done volunteer work as well.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Now for your funding now, are you still a United Way Agency?

**MR:** Oh, yes. Yes.

**SS:** And the United Way and the This And That Shop?

**MR:** Well, actually, the basic part of the funding is the United Way.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And the This and That Shop is...is...I am not sure how that works now, Sandy. But I do know that it's one of its major functions is to serve the community.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** And hmmm...that money...I really don't know where that goes. Ah, that has been a part of VCS.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And VCS has always helped us sponsor it and, hmmm, as far as I know, still does.

**SS:** Right.

**MR:** But exactly how the funding works at this moment, I really don't know.

**SS:** Well, they...they provide quite a service.

**MR:** Oh, yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Because it's a lot of quality clothing and things at a very inexpensive price.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Hmmm, did you ever have then meetings as boards? Or do you ever meet with the volunteers, do you get together as a group?

**MR:** Yes, they...they have. [Chuckles] I have here...it was fun for me to reread it. This was a...hmmm...celebrating our tenth anniversary.

**SS:** Oh!

**MR:** And for a long time, I served as what they called a consultant. That was an arrangement that we had with VCS...with the United Way, basically, because back in those days, until we became a VAC agency, hmmm, we really had no trained staff. We couldn't afford them.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** So in order to get United Way funding, I served as a consultant.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And so, anyway, we used to have meetings. Hmmm, I don't know, again, just how they're doing that. But one of the things they do have is...is I know they have orientation meetings for new board members.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** I know the This and That Shop staff gets together. They used to meet, I think, once a month and have lunch, too, or something like that, together with some of the board members of VCS and some of the staff. And...how else they're doing that right now, I really don't know.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** There have been a lot of changes since I went off the board.

**SS:** Well, it sounds like it functioned a lot like Junior League, that you got a lot of things done over lunch! [Chuckles]

**MR:** [Laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

**SS:** It puts people at ease, they seem to do well.

**MR:** Yeah. Yes.

**SS:** Hmmm, now the leadership...has this...? It's...has it evolved from inside? Or have you tended to hire, you know, professional people? Or do they tend...? Hmmm, you mentioned the internship. Do...?

**MR:** Well, they have...and Melinda Hahn[sp?] is the name I was trying to find. Hmmm...she, for example, I believe, did her internships there. And then after she received her bachelor of social work degree...hmmm...they have...a regular procedure, I mean, a search procedure.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** They didn't used to. I mean...[Chuckles]

**SS:** Oh, sure.

**MR:** We just hired Dorla like *that!*

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** But now they have to go through any kind of staff hiring through the personnel committee of the board, and it has to be open and equal opportunity, and all that kind of business.

**SS:** [Coughs]

**MR:** But they are trying to hire people who are qualified who have at least had a bachelor of social work degree.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then they have a bookkeeper and a secretary. And hmmm, of course, those are different skills, but...

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** They used to have the director and then they had a volunteer coordinator. Hmmm, and those were the two main staff people. And hmmm...boy, those people really worked hard.  
[Chuckles]

**SS:** That's a tremendous amount of work that gets done.

**MR:** Oh...!

**SS:** With a minimal amount of staff.

**MR:** It really is. And so many things just kind of *flew* at us all at once, you know.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** I mean, it's...it's like opening a Pandora's box or whatever. Ah, you...as you begin to identify needs, they just *fly* at you! [Chuckles] I mean it.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And when you're the only one of the only very few agencies in town...hmmm...it really makes a big difference.

**SS:** What...? [Clears throat] Now is VCS set up as an immediate care service like the Red Cross then? Can someone come to you...and needs some help right now and...?

**MR:** Well, what we would do is refer you to the...refer the person to whatever agency would best serve your needs.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** We don't do any actual...hmmm...

**SS:** Hands on kind of...

**MR:** Hands on kind of thing. We are basically...

**SS:** [Coughs]

**MR:** ...basically there to help the client identify the services that would meet his or her needs.

**SS:** Okay.

**MR:** And then get them there. And then follow up to be sure that they are getting the kind of service they need. Ah, one of the things that we found in this community is that there was very little...at least back then, very little case finding and very little referral services available. Somebody would go into an agency and they would just, "You know, well, try over there," or, "Try over there." [Chuckles]

**SS:** They didn't...

**MR:** And these people are...you know, they don't have that kind of background or funding to spend the gas running around to find different places.

**SS:** Yeah. So even the agencies didn't know what the other agencies were doing?

**MR:** Exactly right. Yeah.

**SS:** Okay.

**MR:** And that's another thing we got started was...hmmm...an agency that...that pulled together the various agencies in the community.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And that kind of grew out of VCS, and the leadership from school, and that kind of thing. And hmmm, that has become, I think, a part of the United Way to help agencies meet together.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And then the National Association of Social Workers meets together once a month and they do the same sort of thing there.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. Well, you mentioned that Dorla ended up with people in her house.

**MR:** Yeah.

**SS:** Did you ever end up with anyone in your house?

**MR:** [Chuckles] Oh, sure. [Laughs]

**SS:** Did you?

**MR:** Yeah. But we didn't do that, hmmm, as much as Dorla did.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** I mean she...she really...And now, you see, we have the Dorothy Day House for the Homeless.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** And that just started a few...two years ago.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** But...well, no. One year ago, we just...

**SS:** I was going to say...

**MR:** I am on that board, and they...we just started...we just had our first anniversary. But again, it was an identified community need, and it takes a while to get support for that sort of thing, and...so that's another very viable agency. Well...

**SS:** Oh, it's...

**MR:** Just...it's remarkable to me, what's happened in just the years we've been here.

**SS:** Yeah. Well, and the Dorothy Day House is...that's a marvelous idea.

**MR:** Oh, yes.

**SS:** I...I walk every day.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** And that's on my route. I walk past there.

**MR:** Oh, yes.

**SS:** And I have seen I don't know how many people coming and going from there that I know have gone there because of a need.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah.

**SS:** So I...I mean, I, personally, have seen how many people are using that facility.

**MR:** Seen it, yeah. Yeah. Oh, yes. And it's...right this time of the year, it gets to be full to overflowing. They are overflowing into the Newman Center right now.

**SS:** Is that right?

**MR:** In sleeping bags, yeah.

**SS:** Mmmm.

**MR:** And it's...you know, some of these people are families with little kids.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** And I was over there just a couple days ago, and there was a mother and two little children. And they had absolutely no place to go.

**SS:** And no money. And...

**MR:** And no money. No.

**SS:** Yeah. Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And they weren't eligible to get any money from the county social services, so...

**SS:** Right. Yeah, you have...

**MR:** That's filling a *real* need.

**SS:** It is, I know.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** In order to be eligible for assistance, you have to [have] established a residence.

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** But to do that you have to have some money to get you started.

**MR:** That's right. That's right.

**SS:** Yeah. Hmm...is it...? Ah, one of the questions is that...have you held office? Well, you...you have virtually held office with VCS for most of the last twenty years.

**MR:** Well, it started in 1960-....we got it off the ground and wrote the grant in 1966, and got the organization going in 1967. And I was with it up until...when did I retire? 1982. [Laughs]

**SS:** That's a long time.

**MR:** Yeah! And...

**SS:** So you really have seen it through all its growing pains and...

**MR:** Yeah. Yeah, I have. And it's been very interesting to watch. Very...very frustrating at first, because we simply could not get across to the funding sources the idea of what volunteerism was all about. They...they just had a very limited notion. And furthermore, hmmm, it's been my...well, I used to say that the biggest social problem we have in this community is apathy.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** We just don't like to recognize that we have any problems. Now I don't think that's unique to this community, by any means, but it is a very difficult thing to deal with if you're trying to get help for people who need it.

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** And when people just, "Well, that doesn't happen in Fargo-Moorhead!" Well, yes, it does! [Laughs]

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And hmmm, so I think...when people in the community from all walks of life begin to do volunteer work, they begin to see exactly what is going on.

**SS:** That's right. And...and the education...

**MR:** And they're just appalled at...

**SS:** Yeah, the education of volunteers.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Or to educate people to what volunteers are is still...it's still difficult.

**MR:** Oh, yes. Yes, it is.

**SS:** Yeah, it's a struggle for people to realize how much can be done, I think, by an unpaid person.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. And how *tremendously* satisfying that is to the volunteer.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm. That's right.

**MR:** I think one of the things I tried to do when I would talk to groups of volunteers, was really to let people know how very special they are.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And they are!

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** Because they are in...They don't have a *position*, they don't have a title, they don't have a salary; they are doing it because they *want* to.

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** And that takes a very special kind of person.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And so...and they...I have yet to run into a person who really was devoted to volunteer work who didn't feel that he or she was getting more out of it than he or she gave.

**SS:** Isn't that true?

**MR:** Yeah. That's...that's really very true.

**SS:** Yeah. Really is, as you talk to people about rounding out their lives by volunteer placement.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Now you've...the ones that just love it have done everything!

**MR:** That's right. [Chuckles] That's right.

**SS:** You know, they try a little bit of everything.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Are there any particular events that you remember? Hmmm, any milestones? You know, was there a certain point you had to get past in the development of the program before you felt real confident that it was here to stay kind of thing?

**MR:** Well, I think, of course, when we became a United Way agency, that was a...that was a milestone, even though we...

**SS:** Had no money. [Chuckles]

**MR:** ...had no money. [Chuckles] But it still meant a sort of a vague kind of community acceptance.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Oh, Sandy, if you could have...[Chuckles] I've sat on both sides of the table at the United Way. I've been on their board and I've also gone down to plead for funds.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** [Laughs] And we almost literally got down on our hands and knees. I remember going down one time with nine volunteers. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Oh...

**MR:** To talk to the...hmmm...

**SS:** The United Way board?

**MR:** United Way Funding Committee. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And we...each one, I primed them, I trained them! [Laughs]

**SS:** [Laughs]

**MR:** [Laughing] Tell what they did.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** You know. And I...you know, we were...they were doing this and this with the elderly, they were doing this and this with the mentally ill, and blah, blah, blah, up and down the line. And I think that poor committee thought we were...you know, it was sort of a chorus line approach!  
[Laughs]

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** Which they weren't used to! [Laughs]

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** But, hmmm, anyway, every year we got a tiny bit more. And then...then when we became a VAC agency, that gave us national recognition. And then the United Way really did pick up its ears and see that there was something serious going on here.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And hmmm, then as we began to...that began to help spread us out into the community, because up until then our board was just our volunteers.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** And now we...we went out and really got people from...I mean, I can name you names of people I suspect you know very well.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** Leaders in the community on our board. And that meant a great deal of difference, of course.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Because they tapped into and knew funding sources and that kind of business.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** So it's...there have been a number of milestones that...I mean, our tenth anniversary was terrific, and we...now we've had our twentieth...no, we haven't. But we will have in a couple three years.

**SS:** Very soon, yeah.

**MR:** Yeah, that's right.

**SS:** You know, I did not even realize you could become a United Way agency and not get any money! [Chuckles]

**MR:** Well, I think that was very unusual. [Laughs]

**SS:** [Laughs]

**MR:** But it did happen that way.

**SS:** Oh...they got you on their roster though.

**MR:** Right. They got us on the roster.

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** And it...and then, I think Paul Hanson, as I say, hmmm, he pulled together these leaders who were on the United Way board. And one of them took us to lunch at the Fargo Country Club, and that did it.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** I mean, then when we...when Gladys and I were able to say, "Look, this...Gentlemen, this is what we're doing, this is what we're trying to do."

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** *Oh.* Because they hadn't really...I mean, why do you need to coordinate a bunch of ladies who do good deeds, you know?

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** And I mean that's exactly the attitude they had. But when they saw what we were doing, we...we were one of the first ones to start taking retarded kids swimming, for instance.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** Ah, we worked with cerebral palsy children doing that patterning business.

**SS:** Oh.

**MR:** Some of our volunteers did that.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** Hmm, and you know, we worked with people who were coming back, as I say, from Fergus Falls or from private hospitals where they had had treatment for mental illness. Hmm, that takes a lot of training.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** It takes a lot of courage. But that's what we did.

**SS:** A real commitment, too.

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And so we weren't...I am not running down hospital volunteers. I think they do a terrific job, and don't misunderstand me, but there is *more*.

**SS:** There is more.

**MR:** [Chuckles] That's right. And...

**SS:** It's...it's hard to teach people the difference between being Lady Bountiful and being willing to get your hands dirty.

**MR:** Yeah. That's right.

**SS:** And once they see you are, I think it makes a difference in how they feel about the group.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Yeah. And I think that the aid...the hospitals have increased their use of volunteers recently, too.

**SS:** Oh, absolutely.

**MR:** Tremendously.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And so all of that kind of snowballs as you begin to take off.

**SS:** Well, and now when you went to this first conference for VAC in Florida...

**MR:** Yeah.

**SS:** And we were the smallest community represented there.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Was...it's been my experience that that happens even now, frequently.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** That we...we are ahead of our time, a little bit, by size.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** And I think, you know, that that's a tribute to our leaders, and to someone like you, that there...we have people like you here who see these needs and are willing to put in the time. You've put in a lot of time and effort on that to get it going.

**MR:** Yeah, well, that was an exciting meeting to go to. We...Dorla and I went, and Sylvia Hove from the agency across there...now the Citizen's Actions Program...and...hmmm...Earl Stewart, and Jim Baccus, who was then head of United Way.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** We all went. And it was exciting to see how this wee, little, funny agency...

**SS:** Yeah. [Chuckles]

**MR:** ...that we were struggling so hard to get going [laughs] stood up proudly and told the world what we were doing. And I mean these...that this was in Atlanta and all these people were from New York, and Chicago, and Detroit, and so on.

**SS:** Oh. Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** [Chuckles] And they were doing the same thing we were.

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** Only at a whole different level. It also showed us some very distinct needs that...that I was glad to see raised. And one of them was for some kind of a council of social agencies or something that pulled this community together.

**SS:** Right.

**MR:** And hmmm, then that was before, you see, we had any mental health program here. And I think that helped, because we worked on that, too. And so now we're tied in, as you know, with Lakeland. But...and have people right here at St. Ansgar.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** But that was...none of that was here then.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And so it's...it's...you can do it in a small community if you get a few people really gung ho and really ready to devote a lot of time.

**SS:** Yeah. It's...and it's a real help to you when you can hook up with like nationwide...

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** With all these other....

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** A lot of the things you're struggling with, they have already gone through it.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** Can help speed you up a little bit for...benefit from their knowledge.

**MR:** Yeah. And they set standards, too, which I think are very important for a community.

**SS:** Yes.

**MR:** To know that their agency is meeting national standards.

**SS:** That's right.

**MR:** And that's important.

**SS:** Now the Volunteer Bureau still operates...

**MR:** Volunteer...

**SS:** ...basically independently, doesn't it? Volunteers for Community Service is still an independent agency?

**MR:** Yeah.

**SS:** You're not...? You work...?

**MR:** It's a United Way agency.

**SS:** It's...yeah, a United Way agency.

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** But...and you collate with different groups on different things.

**MR:** That's right.

**SS:** But you're an entity of your own.

**MR:** Unto ourselves. Yes. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** And you're still an information and referral kind of service.

**MR:** As far as I know. [Chuckles]

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And remember, I go...

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** I retired three years.

**SS:** A couple years ago, yeah.

**MR:** Or two years, whenever, three in May.

**SS:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**MR:** Okay.

**SS:** But are there any other stories or information that you'd like us to get recorded?

**MR:** Well...

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** I think maybe one of the things that I would really want to emphasize, and that is how important these volunteers are to each other, at...certainly during the beginnings of this thing. I mean, the friendships that evolved from this were really quite wonderful.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And I mean, it pulled together a bunch of people who had never seen each other before in their lives. [Chuckles] Different churches, different all kinds of backgrounds, and to see what happened with those of us who were...who were really to do this, was...was very exciting. Then I...I think it has helped a lot to overcome some of the apathy in the community. I really do think so.

**SS:** I think so, too.

**MR:** And, hmmm, lots, and lots, and lots of people have worked very, very hard on this. And hmmm, I feel, you know, it's kind of like watching a child grow up, you know.

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** You see this [chuckles] this wobbly little infant, and all of a sudden they are going through all kinds of exciting changes.

**SS:** Uh huh.

**MR:** And it's...it's been fun to watch.

**SS:** Oh, again, I'd like...you know, I do think it's a tribute to you though that in the beginning where you had only a concept to talk to people about, you had a hundred and thirty people show up.

**MR:** Yeah.

**SS:** And out of that, fifty of them stayed on for a seven-week training!

**MR:** Mmmm-hmmm. Mmmm-hmmm.

**SS:** You had to have a pretty impressive philosophy to get over one third of the people to stay with you for a seven-week training period! So...

**MR:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That was...I was amazed, really.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** I think they...I think we hit right at a very good time in this community's life. And hmmm...so and we did have a good program.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** We had...[chuckles] trying to get publicity out on this...I had no help! I mean...

**SS:** [Chuckles] No.

**MR:** Really, I didn't have a secretary even for my own program, much less for this thing.

**SS:** Sure.

**MR:** [Chuckles] And I...I got my family over here, I got my mother-in-law...

**SS:** [Laughs]

**MR:** I got everybody under the sun! And I used the Spurs, which is a sophomore girls group here who do volunteer work.

**SS:** Mmmm-hmmm.

**MR:** And that was...

**SS:** Everybody got in the act.

**MR:** [Laughs] That was...everybody got in the act, that...that's for sure.

**SS:** [Chuckles]

**MR:** But it went well. I didn't know, you know. I thought, well, maybe thirty people would come.

**SS:** Yeah.

**MR:** And here was this mob. We ran out of food! We didn't have...[Laughs]

**SS:** Oh...that's nice though.

**MR:** Yeah, that was...

**SS:** That's a great turnout.

**MR:** That was good. Yeah, that was fun.

**SS:** Well, thank you very much.

**MR:** Oh, I enjoyed talking about this!

**SS:** I appreciate the time.

**MR:** And thank you very much.

**SS:** Thanks, Margaret!

**MR:** Bye.

[End of interview]

Transcription by Marilyn Olson-Trembl  
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