

Interview with Kathy Peters

No Date/Location Given

Marquette Women's Center Series

Interviewed by Jane Ryan

Jane Ryan (JR): I'd like to welcome Kathy Peters who will share her involvement with the development and carrying out of plans for the Women's Center in Marquette, Michigan. The Women's Center got underway in the mid-70s and is still active to this day in 2014. Kathy, welcome.

Kathy Peters (KP): Hi. Well I came here to Marquette first, as a young bride. My husband, Doug Vielmetti had just finished Law School in '63 and we came up here so he could practice law. And he grew up in Marquette. So everything went well for quite a few years and we lived in Ishpeming for a while and then we moved back to Marquette, and then unfortunately, he died. And at that point I was a young mother with three young children. My oldest child was in Graveraet and my youngest one was probably in Kindergarten. And at some point somebody said, "Well maybe you should go back and get your Teaching Certificate?" I had a Master's Degree and I hadn't taken any education classes and they'd thought that would be wise. So I ended up at the Women's Center at Northern and they found some scholarship money and so I took a couple of classes with Jean Rutherford, I remember, and then there was a really boring one I thought was useless. [Chuckles] And those kinds of things happened with that program. As a consequence of being a young widow I also was taking some class, time, spending some time with a group psychologist. And she was the one that ended up getting me involved in the displaced program, the Displaced Homemaker Program, initially. Frances Vandeboro.

JR: Can you describe what that meant, Displaced Homemaker?

KP: Well, Displaced Homemakers are people who would normally be sitting at home, you know, in the old days doing their wifely things. And something had happened so that instead of being just the wife and mother they were thrust out into the working world. And for many of those ladies that was a real hard blow, whether it was from divorce or widowhood. And so I thought it was a really neat program, and somehow I've transferred from that idea into teaching some Assertive Training classes. I must have been taking that when I was doing that program, I don't remember that.

JR: And so you were a beneficiary and a...

KP: And they turned me into a teacher.

JR: And a teaching volunteer, wow.

KP: And I know I did that with Laurel Nuckman for quite a, for a number of years. And I don't remember year-wise, I remember trips we took together down to Escanaba, one time in a snow storm. We were crazy to do that. But we're keeping track of the side of the road on the way back, you know, one of those kind of trips.

JR: And this was related to your...

KP: To Assertive Training...

JR: So you went beyond the Marquette area?

KP: Yeah to Assertive Training class. I know we were teaching some at the Methodist Church, I think, we had some classes there. And those were more adult, those were adult classes, they weren't for kids. And then at some point I was working with Sherry Meyers and I think she was on the board of the Women's Center, or somehow involved. And she asked if I'd be doing things with young people. And so through the Probate Court, through the Diversion Program of the Probate Court. And I think Frances was also working on that program then, so she conned me into doing that.

JR Was that connected directly to the Women's Center or was that a separate program?

KP: I think it was separate. I think it was separate, I'm not quite sure. But I don't know, the materials might have been similar. I've got a stack of materials and I don't quite know which ones went where.

JR: But maybe again, an example of this linking up of different communities.

KP: Yeah, linking. Thinking, "Oh this will be good for kids." And we had probably eight or ten kids that we had come for several weeks. I don't remember. I know Dwight Johnson's name showed up on some of the information. There were a couple of other people that were involved in that, and I don't remember their names now. But that was pretty interesting because probably at the same I was subbing at the High School for somebody who was on maternity leave. And so, because I then had my teaching certificate, I was subbing. And there was a student that in one of my classes who was also in this diversion program. And I remember at the end of one class she said, I was Mrs., probably Mrs. Peters by that time I had married Lou Peters. And she said, "Well Mrs. Peters," she said, "You said, 'You don't always have to answer everybody that asks you a question!'" Well, she was getting into trouble on the school yard, or on playground, or whatever you call it because she was responding to everybody who was heckling, teasing, annoying, whatever word you want to use. And I was just answering a classroom question, so I had to explain to her there's a little difference there. And if you don't respond to everybody, what does that do to them? They're not getting any rise out of you. You can diminish their effectiveness by not responding. So I think that was pretty neat that she had really picked up on that and it really applied to what her problem was.

JR: And had some assertiveness to talk to you about it?

KP: And had assertiveness to ask me because I was the one that was doing the teaching in this other class, so that was pretty neat. There was another student who was in one of those classes and she was an ornery one. And I remember going to a restaurant in town and she was the waitress, she was waiting on us. And I was just dumbfounded because she was so nice and so sweet, and I thought, "Who is the person who is teaching her those things?" Well, it was the guy that owned Bonanza. He apparently had pretty high standards for his staff and he must have been telling them how to do this. And by golly she was doing it. And so I thought, I think she was in that class, I don't have any reason to know why I would have known her otherwise. But I had thought that was pretty neat too, so there were are other people in the community maybe these hiring young students to work in their businesses, it also had a pretty good impact on some of these kids.

JR: Again the community support and consistency. That's been a theme throughout, Kathy, is what, how the different organizations supported one another and interlock. That's great.

KP: So I don't know, your list? Other?

JR: Well I would ask you, have you kept track or been aware of Women's Center activities since then? I know you've gone on to some other organizations?

KP: Not particularly, not particularly gotten involved in a lot of things.

JR: Okay, okay. Tell us about what you got?

KP: Moving out to the townships, there are always township issues. And we show up at the township meetings and express our opinion about certain things. I've gotten involved in quilting, that's a pretty neat group of people I do things with and have good conversations with. Spent the morning with them laughing and trying to figure things out, being challenging to each other and that's fun to do.

JR: And you've also contributed to the development of the Heritage Trail didn't you?

KP: Oh yeah. That's the other, that's one of my big things is doing the research for a lot of the signage for the trail. And again, it's getting together with some people and having different opinions. And you know, the things you learn when you're not afraid to speak up and not afraid to say, "No, I disagree with you on that." And not feel you're being angry with them or putting them down, they have the right to an opinion too, but maybe you'd like to have your opinion heard too.

JR: And in that process, we've talked with other women who have said it's a modeling process too. If other young women see you doing that with some courage and appropriately, that's the assertive versus the aggressive. It's an important role and this community is so full of women doing that, that again, the young people...

KP: What strikes me as really interesting, because as a Graduate student I was teaching labs at University of Michigan. I was a lab teacher in the zoology department and I don't remember before that ever having the courage to do something like that. And somehow I got given that job and I stepped up to the plate and did it. I probably did a pretty good job because I knew my material. And I wasn't afraid!

JR: So they wouldn't have...

KP: And I remember some...and I remember that one distinctly a parent of one of those students coming in and wanted to talk to me because I was the teacher and his son wasn't getting a good grade. "Woah, woah!" You know, I was probably three years older than his son. You know, what this young twig is doing, telling, and but I went through the stuff and I didn't have a disagreement with him, I told him what was going on.

JR: He hadn't earned?

KP: He hadn't earned it.

JR: Did...Now you're saying in a way then, you were blossoming as a college student, but would you say the activities that you did for yourself at the Women's Center had some role to play? They helped you through that period?

KP: Oh absolutely, it helped me through that period of being a displaced homemaker, for sure. And I don't know what else I was doing during that time. Oh! I was helping over at Parkview School, I got involved in and I was a plant-lady over at Parkview School

JR: Well you were raising three children too which is...

KP: _____and taking them various places and doing activities with them so.

JR: Well this is good. If there is anything you'd like to add just from the perspective of the woman's role and changing women's role over time. Have you noted that with say your own daughter, a homemaker now.

KP: I would say my daughter and daughter-in-laws are pretty assertive people.

JR: And it's hard to trace whether it comes from the DNA or environment, but we're seeing more of that with young women in the workplace.

KP: And maybe they were, and I know particularly with my daughter, I think she was doing, she was doing stuff with horses. And Julie _____certainly an assertive woman, an appropriately assertive woman. And I think Ann learned things from being around her.

JR: And so the modeling makes a difference?

KP: So they're modeling some other adult or a community member. Like Carol MacDonald she was one of the, her daughter was one of my Ann's best friends. They did fun things together

JR: They were learning the same things then from their mothers?

KP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JR: Okay well thank you very much for your contribution to the Women's Center and for doing the interview. We learn from these. Thank you.

KP: Oh you're welcome

END OF INTERVIEW