

Title: Interview with Carolyn McDonald  
Location: Marquette, Michigan  
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Subject: Women's Center

#### START OF INTERVIEW

JR (Jane Ryan): I'm welcoming Carolyn McDonald, who is instrumental in various phases of the Women's Center. And we are adding to our list of women who have been involved so that we are compiling a history of the women's center in Marquette. Welcome, Carolyn, and if you give us just a little bit of your background and what led you to the women's center?

CM (Carolyn McDonald): Sure. Thank you, nice to be here. I came to Marquette in the early 60s, I transferred from Ohio University. And I thought why would I ever want to go anywhere else to live? I could ski, and sail and fish and hunt, and just be, raised two children here. And the only thing I ever missed was museums and the opera, and the ballet. Otherwise, I'm content to be here, married a Marquette Native and I just never left.

JR: Good decision, good decision. Okay. What drew you to the women's movement and ultimately the women's center?

CM: Well, I was actually going through a divorce. I was separated at the time from my husband. I had a brand-new baby, and a three and a half year old. And I was a school teacher, but they didn't have maternity leave at that time. So I just was off for a year. And a friend called me and said that she was a part of a consciousness-raising group, and she thought I needed it. And I said I so needy right now, I'm sure I do. So they all came to my house, cause I couldn't get a babysitter. That was money I certainly didn't have. And I remember thinking how am I going to buy refreshment for this group? So I just called my friend back and said, bring your own beverages. And got involved consciousness-raising more and more, became more and more involved, and made a lot of good friends, and then, the consciousness-raising groups met at a local church. And then we divided it into small groups, and I really don't remember how that worked exactly. But then at some point, our group joined with another group. And my lifelong friends have come from that experience.

JR: Was that an ongoing thing over months, years... How did that...?

CM: Months, possibly a year also. I can remember various people, many of whom are gone now, and we just talked about different things and there were different issues that came up for action. The one I remember most clearly is the one with the group wanted to pick at the library. Because you couldn't get a library card in your husband's name, so my name was Mrs. Paul Grant. And I really didn't care whose name was on it, as long as I could go and get a book. Well, they were ready to drum me out because I didn't have enough passion about the whole consciousness-raising experience and I just said, "Have at it, and I'll be home with my kids." You know? It's doubly a very important thing but it just wasn't to me at that.

JR: And this seems to follow, individual women had certain concerns and again, when you at home, raising children, you only have so much energy.

CM: The second rallying point that I recalled that was really significant I mean there were many but the Hotel Northland had restaurant called Crow's Nest. And they wanted all the waitresses to wear mini-skirts. It was a mini-skirt time. First of all, being a waitress in a mini-skirt is difficult. We have to learn to do the playboy dip. And a lot of the waitresses there were professional waitresses, were older and they were not going to make the mini-skirt routine at all. So that one I did get involved in, I remembered talking to Ted Bogdan and saying, "Would you want your mother in a mini-skirt? Would your mother want to wear one?" And we were all prepared, in a non-violent way, just to say, we're never coming here again. And you do what you need to do, but it's just important for you to know many of us feel very strongly against new mini-skirt plan.

JR: Did they adjust?

CM: He adjusted at it which was really good. So that was empowering.

JR: Okay. What led from the consciousness raising then?

CM: Well, it was the beginning of the women's center. So they were groups set up to do things like role-model teams, peer group leader, we did goal setting teams, I remember being asked to do one called the women alone and I said, that's just horrible. That makes me feel terrible. How about the women in transition or something? I'm never calling at the women alone. And from that group, of goal setting, we talked about various skill sets and briefly where are you today? And then where do you want to be tomorrow? And how are you going to get there? What steps will you take? And I think we were all sort of needy in the way that we just didn't know what we, where we wanted to go. And it really empowered us. So in one of the goal setting sessions, my husband and I were on front street, renting a house. And the women in the group was, had been married for years and years and her husband decided he didn't want to be married anymore. So every goal-setting parameter – what you going to do today? What about tomorrow? What about next week? She wrote down sell my house, sell my house, sell my house. And it was so hard just to stay on track for the last of session because we were looking for a house. But I didn't want to use the goal setting time but the minute was over I said, where do you live? We are looking for a house. And we actually bought her house. So that was...

JR: Practical linking?

CM: Practical linking. Yeah, that's good expression.

JR: Now the groups share describing or all under the umbrella of the newly established women's center?

CM: They were. And we went into the churches and I remember one of the things I did once was I went to Negaunee and talked to a class of pregnant teenagers who were not allowed to be in school. But I think my recollection is little fuzzy. I think it was a part of the Marquette Alger Intermediate school district. But I met with all these pregnant teenagers and talked about, "Where do we go from here?" And "we" was used purposefully because we wanted them to know they're not alone in this and we had a lot of resources that we could share.

JR: So you were reaching all age groups, you were helping meet your own needs at the time and your skills as a teacher obviously played into right person at the right time.

CM: And then some of the groups were held, they were all held in different places but, I became aware of how many women would not go to Northern for a class of how to empower yourself.

JR: Because?

CM: Because I was involved in our project AAUW did. They had a script and we filmed at the university at the TV station. And I took a role in that along with Judy Smith, Sandra Michaels... I can't remember who I was. And the man who was my husband in this film, I don't remember his name but he was a married student at Northern. And it just talked about the women want to go back to school and get some education and how her family dealt with that. And I realized that many women would never go, they might go to community schools because you could say to your husband I want to take a class at community schools. His mindset might be education but it also might be there you're going to take Cake Decorating, which would be wonderful to let your wife go to school.

JR: So in that era many men still did not want to see their wife move on in education.

CM: Yeah. It hit all, I shall I say strata of society there were so many presumptions of what a woman should do, and what a man should allow his wife to do. So it was really interesting. And the community school's classes were much bigger than any of the other classes I ever did. And I can remember so many stories but the one, it stands out in my mind, is woman who said, "I'm here because I have two daughters. And we don't have much money. And they get made fun of at school offered the type of clothes they wear, and the shoes they wear." And so that brought it down to earth.

JR: The reality.

CM: That maybe we were, what we were doing before was important. But this was just monumental.

JR: And what you were mentioning with AAUW community schools, it shows again the links that once people knew the issues the collaboration or supporting one another and you touched a lot of different groups in that way. Excellent...

CM: Yes, all different ages too.

JR: Great. And then, you were involved in some of the organizational processes or just...?

CM: Not particularly. I was more a worker bee. My friends were the brains of it all, Holly and Pat and Gail and I think Sally was involved at that time. Forgive me if I'm leaving anyone out but, I remember when Dr. Berg talked to Holly we were able to get into Northern for the office. And I was teaching two days a week at the Marquette Co-Op Nursery and three days a week at Northern's child development center. So I have two little kids on the husband and I'm working full-time. And I don't even have a crockpot. So I needed to make some plans. And I thought, I need to get somebody come and clean my house. And I put a sign up at the women's center office. And this women named, I can say her name, was Rosie Allanzach. She was from the Traverse City area. She called me and she came to clean my house once a week. She left notes for my husband, it said, Dear Mr. McDonald, please move all the furniture in the living room, because I want to wash the walls and it's just too heavy for Ms. McDonald,

which cracked me up. And then she left notes for the children, saying, your mother pays me to clean. Not to pick up your stuff. So when I come here on Tuesday morning, I don't want to see a thing on your floor. I want everything on your bed. You have second floor laundry if you have dirty clothes, take them down the hall. She stayed with us for almost two years, and her last day she drove up in a brand-new white Mercedes-Benz, and my husband said, where did you get the car? And she said, Why I've always had it, I just store it. Because we'd called her on snow day and he said that we can pick you up, she said "No, I need the exercise." And he said, "Rosie, why do you clean our house?" And she said, "I love putting order to chaos." And it was like one of our family, we just loved her. And that came for women's center experience. Linking as you said.

JR: It's a great story. Are you still associated with the Women's Center?

CM: Every time I go, they refer to me as one of the mothers, and I go there probably half a dozen times a year. I was asked to be on the current board, but I just had survived a house fire, so there was no way I was going to do anything but unpack boxes, and thank Jesus every day that we're alive. So my involvement with women's center is monetary contributions. I belong to a study group that brings gifts for people at Harbor House at Christmas. I have a collection site at my home for little travel shampoos and that sort of things, I call the, I'm part of rotary and we were instrumental on our contributions committee getting Pat Micklow, drove crazy to write a grant. Because I knew we had the money to gift. And we would be able to do it. I think we gave them twelve thousand dollars last year. The other thing I do is I call different organizations that I will be having fund-raising activities because the members pay for the tickets. And then they are trying to sell them or give them away. And I've encouraged groups to give the tickets to the women's center. So people could go to the rotary pancake breakfast and just feel like they're like everybody else, instead of kind of hiding out at Harbor Hills.

JR: I sense the practical way you deal with things at the nitty-gritty of helping and from these other interviews, this is a community work people do that. It's not just headlining. It's getting the help?

CM: We just do what we have to do and we all take care of each other.

JR: And we've talked at length with other people about the current... we're in the year 2014 for your interview. Issue is funding because a lot of the grants, state-federal grants just aren't there anymore. So the kind of work, that you're doing is what's going to make it difference. This community does support, but there're still a lot out there to do. Do you have a vision for the women's center?

CM: My vision is that they would involve younger men and women to continue the support because right now, we used to call it regurgitating boards, but that's not really a good term. But we have a lot of the former members coming back and we have a new member Rosa Diddams is new. And I just hoped that we could involve some younger people of both genders to keep it going. To keep that energy, and that focus, and also to stop looking at how the funding occurs, I mean grants are pretty much dried out. So there have to be new ways to share the information and have people embraced the passion of it.

JR: And it would seem like you're a good person in that role, sharing the passion.

CM: Yes, I really feel comfortable with and being on that contribution's committee at Rotary it was huge. Because when Pat – you probably heard the story about when Sarah, Pat, Carl, and Holly went to the Rotary Club in Ishpeming?

JR: No, I didn't hear that story.

CM: Well, they went and one of the packet pieces of information does introducing the women's center to the community. So you've got the prepared speech they worked from. And I don't know who wrote it. But it's all typed-up. They went to Ishpeming rotary club when they were talking about spousal abuses and how it hits all kinds of people, varying social strata and economic abilities. And they finished talking and wanted them to know, share the information and hope for some financial support and one gentleman whose name I will not release ever. My lips are sealed, stood up and said, "I love my wife." And sat back down and you know it's just flummoxed by the whole thing. Why did you even need to address this issue because it wasn't anything that occurred in his house? And that's one we realized how huge this was going to be. Pat went out to get involved in the State. And then the women's center became recognized by Dr. Jackson at Northern Michigan University. Don Jackson was wonderful supporter of Holly.

JR: That whole coming together was perfect, and then as many of report, probably the transition out of Northern was well time to make it a broader commune. And then you mentioned men at every level and I've been impressed hearing the support that's come and the gentleman who ultimately sold the current building extremely supportive, union supportive and contributing, so...

CM: And the community groundswell supporter.

JR: Awesome. But like you said, it was a whole level, a cultural level of where men who worked exposed didn't realize and men who were involved figured it was part of what being a husband was all about. So, the educational component, I think it's still going on.

CM: It really is. I think that's a hard one. Because you don't show the women beaten to a pulp covered with bruises. Actually my own mother was married for very short time to a man. And she discovered that he had cashed in some of her dividends from stock. And when she asked him about it, he beat her up. This is a country club women, my mother used to joke in our house, saying, my mother's idea of things being slow was when room service was slow, when you dialed. She was a Waldoff girl all the way, and here she was married to this beautiful man living in this lovely house and everything on the outside looked great. Or he beat her, I saw the police picture. And you couldn't recognize her. So it happens everywhere. It was just amazing.

JR: The other point that's been made that you might want to elaborate too is that we need to keep this going much like other civil rights issues because young people, we're now in, well, the seventies and Betty Friedan, and forget... or not forget, they don't know the history. So they take it for granted that things are as they are now. And I think part of a founding mother's issue has been we've got to remind them that we need their input but the issues don't literally go away.

CM: True. And you are not could see the woman covered with bruises and bloody face. And crying children and leaving her home in the middle of the night or the minute her husband leaves for work. And actually I worked with a man who was the victim of spousal abuse. And he would comment, and I thought, God, he just seems like a clumsy person. But he's always got a black eye or looks like a big, I'm pretty non-judgmental but I thought, "God that looks like a big pinch mark." How I would recognize that I don't know, because I've never been pinched or pinched anybody. But he had a lot of things and finally I said one day, just privately, "Are you ok?" And he said "No. I'm not. My wife, it just turns into this

terror, demon.” And I was really shocked. Because at office parties they would come together and they just seemed like everyone else.

JR: That’s a very good point. And we haven’t hit on it too much. Is that there are man out there who need the support. And I think the Women’s Center – The Harbor House does address that. That’s not that common, and I’m sure as it is for women difficult to admit to that kind of treatment. But you were made aware of it.

CM: I was made aware of it.

JR: Are there any other areas that we haven’t talked that you’d like to comment on...or experiences to share?

CM: Well, I made some notes. Because I just didn’t want to forget anything. Sorry about the sunglasses. I think the other thing I did recently was I went to Washington D.C. on a bus. The Women’s Center had two buses. And it was a wonderful experience in so many ways. It was just time to, you know they have the standup for, whomever. And I thought it’s time to stand up for women, it’s this many years later and we still don’t get the same pay for same job. There still are so many gender issues. And mean... it crosses all sections of humanity in so many different ways. I have a friend who graduated from Stanford was in the first women’s MBA class at Harvard and went to work on Wall Street and she said honestly, she never had a single discriminatory issue. And I said, you know, you’re just unaware. You don’t even realize it. So I got on the bus and Jane if I ever see I’m taking a bus to Washington D.C. again. Drive your car over me back up on me to make sure I’m dead. It was the worst trip of my life in terms of time. It took forever. The bus driver had a little drinking issue, they didn’t pump out the bathrooms, it was just disgusting. We got to Washington and the march was tremendous. It was just overwhelming, the women and the men who came to stand up for equality. And one of the little side stories, there’s always a little side story that makes it an epiphany for you. We got into the hotel, I can’t remember if it was like Hilton or Sheraton. And we chose that because it was right near the metro or whatever it’s called. So we could walk there. And one of the young women didn’t have her luggage. Well it went from the bus to the hotel, so where it could be? And we’re tired. And the person at the desk said, “I don’t know where it is. You know, figure it out.” So...I’ve always been very assertive but I’m not really aggressive if you know what I mean, and something just snapped in me and I said, “Excuse me for interrupting. But I would like to talk to the manager.” And the clerks said, “The manager isn’t here.” And I said, “You need to find the manager.” Because I will find an eight hundred number for the hotel and I will find the manager on my own. And I think that might be little problem for you if I do that. So he gave me, he called the manager, and the manager said... You know, he was very professional. And I explained the issue, and he said, “I’ll have this taken care of in the next 20 minutes.” And the next morning he called our room and asked to meet with me and he wanted to buy me breakfast? I said, “I don’t need breakfast but I’d love to meet with you.” Because I really appreciated the way he handled it. Meanwhile, people get given the moment, underpants, soap and tooth brushes and the hotel had little emergency kit. Well, the manager handled the situation so well, that I wrote letter to the corporation which ever want it was. And I never had done, I’d never done that step before and thank you so much, and asked that the letter be put in his personnel file, because he was a star. And about two years later, my husband and I were at a local restaurant, and this woman came up to the table who looked vaguely familiar, she had her parents with her. She was graduated from Northern. She wanted them to meet me because I was the person who helped her, I thought. Well isn’t this one of those things for you, just do something. Cause it’s the right thing to do. And you don’t do it because anyone would say thank you but when it happens...

JR: That's wonderful.

CM: It's, just wonderful.

JR: Well, I knew your modeling a sort of behavior they'd paid off. And that's the other theme. There're so many themes that have come through these interviews. But women need mentoring, everybody needs mentoring, but in particular women need mentoring for some of the roles that they didn't feel comfortable taking in our, their culture.

CM: Sure.

JR: And exceptions stand out, Marquette has had its share of women who, way ahead of time were being assertive or doing unusual careers, but it's just really come truth to the theme through these interviews.

CM: Well, I've always felt with my friends that were in the upfront positions of the woman's that restaurant made me tear up a little bit down, so sweet. I always thought I'll stand in front of you if you need protection. And I'll stand beside you if you just need a little support. And I'll stand behind you if you need a big shove. So I've really admired what they have accomplished. It was fun being a worker bee, I only have responsibility to do assertive training class or peer group or goal setting, whatever was...but they really, they needed a lot of support. It was fun to see how our families reacted to others. Because...

JR: Did you have support in general?

CM: I had tremendous support.

JR: From your family.

CM: And my mother-in-law was the first woman on the St. Luke's hospital board. They never had a woman before. And I mean she could have taught us how to be assertive in a minute. So when the women's center decided, I don't know for its consciousness-raising group or the women's center group, But when the hospital's merged, they... consciousness-raising groups wanted to pass a petition asking the merger of the hospital merger which then became Marquette General, to allow termination of pregnancy, at least to discuss that issue and to...because some people would be opposed to pregnancy termination for religious reasons and, we certainly have to respect that, but they were other reasons for termination in cases of rape. Of course I had worked with that rape crisis team, and have gone into the emergency room, talked to women the day they were raped and then it was... we just had a horrendous time. So my mother-in-law encouraged me to pass one of the petitions, my father-in-law was a prominent judge. My husband was attorney. My mother-in-law was going to be on board or was on board. And I just didn't want to do anything to jeopardize their position. And they were all very supportive. And I carried that petition around and most people were very willing to sign it. One person shut the door in my face, and I thought, well, that's their privilege. I respect that too. But people were pretty willing to decide it and to sign it. And once that, chore was done I went on to the next one. I just kept that...

JR: Excellent, the nitty-gritty. I admire that. Can you go back a little bit I realized haven't touched on this, you as volunteer and were involved in this different programs. How did the women's center recruit

or did people just come because of their previously history and secondly did you get any specialized training through the women's center or did they utilize the talents you already had?

CM: I think in the beginning, they utilized the talents we had, even though a lot of us didn't realize we had those talents. Because I can remember someone said to me, you would be really good talking about assertive training. Would I? Wow, I think I knew my limitations but I really didn't know my abilities. And they said, "Yeah, you would be good at that. Because you're good listener, and you always say, what would you think?" Because people usually, when they ask you a question, they really want validation more than advice. At least that's my impression. So for example, if you said in assertive training talked about if you came to me and you said, "I'm having a problem with my husband or my best friend." I would say, "What would you do about that?" And you'd say, "Well, I said this." And that I say, "What do they say? Did you have a conversation about this?" And you know, it was a skill I didn't know I have.

JR: As opposed to giving them advice right off the top.

CM: Yes, so interested.

JR: Very good. Now, but did they end up doing some training?

CM: But they did some training as well, there were some trainings. Yeah, there was some training. And some of them was from our consciousness-group. I remember that. I remember Frances Lamb and Marie Marcantoni did a class since with us. And I think that those were kind of enrichment things for our group to grow. Our own little personal wounds, group to grow. Because I remember they talked about tell me about your favorite birthday party. And it was just a way to connect with what was important in the different times of your life, so...

JR: Well, anything else you want to add?

CM: I don't think so. It's just been the birth of the women's center. It's just been a boon to humanity, I would say.

JR: And do you have heard at least several people reported, we may be the longest ongoing women's center in the State if not the country which speaks again, a small community like Marquette has supported this through the ups and downs that all organizations go through.

CM: Yeah, true. And kudos to you, Jane, because when we had a house fire I thought all the files that I kept, they're so important. And fortunately, they were saved. I aired them out a little bit, because I don't want to bring the scent of the fire into your home, but all these files and the fact you're volunteering your time to put this story together from a different point of view. I really appreciate it.

JR: Well, thank you. It's been a total pleasure to do that. So thank you for your time, Carolyn. And we'll privately touch base again. Thank you.

CM: Great. That's good.

END OF INTERVIEW