

INTERVIEW WITH DR. MARION OLSON
by Mariane Kronk
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Marianne Kronk: Dr. Olson, could you tell me your full name?

Dr. Olson: Marian Edna Olson

MKronk: And, where were you born?

Dr. Olson: Newman Grove, Nebraska.

MK: Could you tell me your parents' names?

DO: My mother's name was Ethel Hougland and Edward Olson was my father's name.

MK: Where did you go to school?

DO: O'neil, Nebraska. That's where I went to grade school and high school.

MK: Where did you attend college?

DO: College, University of Nebraska for two degrees. I have a nursing diploma and a baccalaureate nursing from University of Nebraska. University of Iowa, I have a masters in nursing and a masters in psychology from there. And UCLA, I have a doctorate in psychology.

MK: How do you think that WW II changed your life and your college experience?

DO: Well one thing (laugh), it um, speeded up my nursing school because of the cadet nurse corps, and, it (ah), it changed our, our class scattered over the world. I didn't see any more of our class until the fifty year class reunion. Um, I lost a, I lost my fiance in the war. Um, let's see, what else. Just we became very involved in our careers and worked, worked hard afterwards.

MK: You said you lost your fiancee in the war?

DO: Yeah, I was engaged when I went into nursing school. It was a high school boyfriend (small laugh), and he... yeah.

MK: He went off to war?

DO: Yeah.

MK: Where did he get sent to?

DO: He got sent to Germany, I mean to Europe. Like a lot of others.

MK: Where were you at when you found out that he had been killed?

DO: In Omaha.

MK: In Omaha? And were you at...

DO: I was in school. Yeah. The war started three months, uh the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor three months after I entered nursing school, so I was there for three more years. Almost three more years.

MK: How did you find out?

DO: (clears throat) His parents, (cough) his parents were notified, and I, and they notified me.

MK: Yeah. (Pause)

DO: Its something I just forget.

MK: Yeah. Um, that's a big change.

DO: (Laugh)

MK: What was the, you, went into, as a result of WW II your nursing program changed and the United States Cadet Nurse Corps...

DO: Yes, yes right. The purpose was to bring more nurses into, into training, but also to speed us up, the ones that were in, so we could take over RN positons. Actually we were takin' over RN positions in the hospital itself before we were even at the end of our cadet period. Ah..., but then I went out as a, as a visiting nurse in Omaha for my senior cadet period.

MK: How many of the students in your school were in the cadet corps?

DO: Hundred percent, all of them.

MK: And did you, you served in the visiting nurses... were you associated with the hospital?

DO: No, no, no. Ah, I was, its a, its a visiting nurse association and they have a visiting nurse, ah, they had their own administrators, we were just assigned there as a nurse. And we worked there as RN's, I mean like RN's did, actually.

MK: I asked you this a little earlier, I asked if you followed international news before the war, how much you knew about what was going on in the world before the war.

DO: Well, I, yes I did. Because, shall I say why I followed the news?

MK: yes.

DO: Because I was the paper girl all the time I was in high school I delivered papers.

MK: What paper were you delivering?

DO: Omaha World Herald, and, and I read it every day, for one thing because I sold it on the streets (laugh) and everybody had to, (laugh) had to know what was in it. Um, but I was just interested. My father had been in the war, my father was interested. My father had been in the first world war, and he was interested, and I was just interested. So, yes, I kept ahead.

MK: How common was it to have paper girls? Were there many other paper girls?

DO: Well, ah no. I won a trip trip to Chicago, for getting new paper customers. There were 18 girls and 182 boys on that trip (laugh).

MK: (laugh) That's kind of a nice ratio I guess if you're a little girl looking for boys.

DO: (laugh) It was fun.

MK: Did you think that the US would be drawn into the conflict, into the world war?

DO: Ah, yeah. I was not an isolationist like a lot of people were. Yes I thought they'd be drawn in, they had to be.

MK: At what point did you think, early on that they'd be, before Pearl Harbor?

DO: Yeah, when, when ah, yeah we were kinda draggin' our feet before that. I, when ah, yeah, when England was gettin' it so badly, I thought we were lettin' 'em down.

MK: Yeah. Um, why did you serve in the United States, you said you were classified as an essential civilian, as opposed to working with the Army?

DO: Well, they classified the nurses the same way that men were classified, you know 4-F, or whatever, and I was classified by the government as an essential civilian, I couldn't, they wouldn't take me to Europe, well, the war was over in Europe anyway and people were, it was the people were, the nurses were being sent to the South Pacific at that point, so they didn't

really need us that badly by that time.

MK: This is kind of a broad question. How do you think that the war changed women's roles?

DO: (laugh) They went to work in the war factories, and my father taught what we called Rosie the Riveters that went to work building ships and things, and ah my Aunt was workin' in a factory that women never had worked in before... all of these kinds of things. And then they were, they were the only ones left at home to sorta take over the other kinda business and work. So, I would say it was the beginning of the change in roles in women as far as the responsibility for more things. Ah, industry and also managin' homes and managin' family and that sorta thing.

MK: Your life probably would've been very different if it weren't for the war, like a lot of women in that generation I guess.

DO: Yeah. Actually, I never had a problem with, with ah, lot of problems that women have with not being able to do things they wanted to do because they (inaudible), but then I was lucky. A lot of women did.

MK: I wanna do a quick check here. (Checked tape to make sure it was recording ok).

MK: What we're gonna talk about now is a little bit about the Red Cross because you've been involved a little bit with the Red Cross, I guess you've been on call for a number of years. When did you first become associated with the Red Cross?

DO: When I was a senior in training.

MK: So when you were in the cadet corps?

DO: Yeah. The cadet corps didn't really have anything to do with it, just most of our class were volunteering for Red Cross kinds of things, if, you know if they were needed, and this is like things that were in the United States, not necessarily war things, but other kinds of disasters or other kinds of problems that needed help.

MK: So what did you do for the Red Cross, you were on call for...

DO: Well, yeah. Right after, what I did for the Red Cross actually was right after I'd finished nurses training, and I got called to a hospital in Kearney, Nebraska (K-E-A-R-N-E-Y). The tuberculosis hospital because the staff were all on strike. So, we were sent out for a couple weeks, and then somebody else'd come and somebody else'd come...

MK: And you said that the patients in the hospital supported the...

DO: They supported the staff, they thought they should be on strike and gave us a really bad time for a while (laugh).

MK: What kinds of things did they do to make your life difficult (laugh)?

DO: (laugh) Well, um. They wouldn't do what you asked them to do, like one of, because they were so short of help, I had like a hundred and twenty patients, ah sixty patients on the unit, and we would ask them to take their own temperature, and we would time it for them, and they wouldn't do it. Ok or, take their own pulse and we would time it for 'em and they wouldn't do it, so you go around to get it and they hadn't done it then. You know, just, any kinda thing to sorta stop you. Also they would, they would fuss at us and talk nasty at us because we were foul'in' up their nurses, and ah I finally said, we, you know, I didn't come here to stop the strike, I didn't come here to replace the nurses because the strike, I can't stay here very long, I'm away from my own job, and, I only came to take care of you until they get things settled between themselves.

MK: Did you kind of empathize with the Marquette hospital over here on strike recently? (laugh)

DO: Yes, I did, yeah (laugh). Actually, when I was in Kauai my own nurses went on strike and I even empathized with them at the time, they should've, and they did, but it made life rough for a while (laugh).

MK: Yeah its a tough profession to go on strike, 'cause you're so needed.

DO: Well, I was the Director of Nursing so I wasn't on strike, I was tryin' (laugh) to run the hospital without any nurses.

MK: That put you in a pretty tough position. When you were at Northern Michigan University, were you still associated with the Red Cross then, years later?

DO: Ah, not really, ah I wouldn't say really, I would've gone if they'd wanted, if they called me, but I wasn't on their list at that point. The only kind of things that I did where the Red Cross was involved was the taking care of the typhoid patients, and this is while I was still a student at Omaha when the Missouri River flooded, then, ah, when I was in Texas, ah the Texas City Disaster, I was on the staff then I wasn't workin' for the Red Cross. The Red Cross came in, but we were already there. At the Texas City Disaster.

MK: So you may have worked with them, but you weren't working for the Red Cross?

DO: Yeah, and you know, (laugh) thank goodness they were like, that's how we ate (laugh), we'd go turn around and grab a

sandwich outta one of the Red Cross boxes on the way, and ah...

MK: Busy times.

DO: Yeah. This is just for your benefit, but its a letter I wrote home to my parents.

MK: Oh! It says Miss Marion Olson, R.N. tells of experiences in Galveston hospital after Texas City Disaster. This was in the...

DO: In the forties, forty-seven.

MK: Ok, and this was in the paper?

DO: Its in my hometown newspaper, yeah. I sent it, letter to my folks.

MK: This was the one you delivered for?

DO: No, this was just a little Hope County Independent, the little local paper.

MK: Wow, that's pretty neat, and they printed it in the paper. I'd like to make a copy of that if I could.

DO: Ok, as long as I get it back, its the only copy I have (laugh).

MK: Yes, definitely. Ok great, I wanna ask you about your time at Northern Michigan University, but leading up to that you were associated with nursing programs at several other universities before coming here. Do you wanna tell me a little bit about what led to coming up to Northern?

DO: Ok. When ah, yeah...

MK: Its a lot I know.

DO: (laugh) You mean what I did before I came to Northern or why I came to Northern?

MK: Um, maybe a little bit of both.

DO: Ok, let's start with why I came to Northern in the first place. I retired from the University of Hawaii, ah planned to stay retired and I came to the Upper Peninsula because this is where, we, you need to come back to the mainland to retire, and this is where we bought land and prepared to retire here. Um, be- my housemate originally came from the Upper Peninsula, so we were visiting and found the land and bought it,ok. So, I wasn't intending to go back to work, but I was still listed on a National Nursing Administration consultant list, ok. So, I went to work as a consultant first for NMU, for a couple years I worked as a consultant on, when I was with their continuing

education program, and I wrote a grant proposal, and these kinds of things, just whatever. Whatever they needed at that point. And at the same time I also taught some psychology courses in... well I taught a nursing course for them in Escanaba.

MK: Oh, you taught down in Escanaba?

DO: Yeah, this was a, an NMU course though. They were helping their associate degree nurses ah, get a baccalaureate degree and they needed a course to teach here and I taught it. I taught a couple courses actually, one was a psychology course they needed (laugh), and the other was a nursing course, and I taught a psychology course in Iron Mountain and I did that for Northern, just because.

MK: What year did you come to Northern?

DO: Ah, I came, I came to the Upper Peninsula in 1982, and then I went to work for Northern full time, I was a full time professor in '84, and in between I worked as a consultant. I also worked as a consultant in other places too. Ok?

MK: OK.

DO: But, before that I, I was at the Univ- , I, when I graduated I went to the University of Texas Medical Branch and then I came back to Iowa to work on my baccalaureate degree. And, um, I actually got my baccalaureate from Iowa, from Nebraska, but I took the liberal arts courses at Iowa, and I went there then. I was in Iowa for twelve years and during that time I, I got on the (laugh) I got on the Iowa Study, which is a study of nursing practice as a researcher, and (clock chimes in the background) and I also, and they tried, and the USPHS people decided I oughta go to graduate school, because I didn't have a degree in it. I didn't have a master at that point, so that's when I got my fellowship. They were trying to develop nurses at the PHD level so we could start PHD's in nursing, there weren't any at that point, so, I got two masters at Iowa. One in nursing, that was as far as you could go in nursing at that point, and then I knew I was going to get my doctorate in psychology so I got a masters in psychology.

MK: What made you decide to go for a doctorate in psychology?

DO: That was the closest thing, ah its in social psychology, and that was the closest thing to nursing administration, which is what I was doin' and the kind of research I was doing. That's what I thought. It was the most useful in what I was planning to do in the future (sound of fire popping in the background), which was nursing administration and nursing administration research. I'd never planned to be a professor (laugh). I got my PHD at UCLA and they had a very strong dean in the school of nursing at UCLA and she conned me into goin'...

MK: (laugh) Conned you?

DO: to work as a professor. So, then I decided I'd better keep at that for a while to see if I really liked it. And, ah, the dean at the University of Hawaii was ah, had been on the faculty with me at UCLA, and I went out to Hawaii first as a consultant for her, a curriculum consultant, and they recruited me, so I went to Hawaii and I was in Hawaii for fifteen years and eight of it on the faculty and seven of it as the director of nursing, in, on Kauai. Then, I retired.

MK: And you said it wasn't very comfortable to be there?

DO: No, it's not the place to be if you're gonna retire as a caucasian. And also the retirement pay is, it works better here (laugh). It's cheaper here. Alright. OK? But in the meantime while I was still in graduate school I was teachin' workshops all around the country in, in Texas and in, where, Texas and Kentucky, and ah, in Kansas, and then I went to, when I was at UCLA I also taught workshops in the midwest.

MK: The workshops were mainly on nursing administration?

DO: I ah, or something like that. I taught with the dean once in Arkansas, and I was teach-, actually I was teaching people who weren't, people who didn't have statistics and measurement background to do research without it in nursing practice. And then, ah I got my, alright I got recruited after UCLA, I taught at UCLA for two years after I got my doctorate. Then I went to Hawaii, and when I was in Hawaii I also came back to the mainland and did workshops, and I went to the South Pacific and did, well Micronesia, which is not really South Pacific, and did workshops. So, that's the kind of thing I did.

MK: Quite a bit of travelling.

DO: (laugh) Yeah, right. When I was in Hawaii, fifteen years, I made seventy -two trips to the mainland. Mileage plus is pretty good today.

MK: Wow. Frequent flier miles.

DO: I'm a United Airlines flier, so I'm mileage plus, and I always flew United 'cause it never went down in the water.

MK: (laugh) That's a good point when you're flying from Hawaii and to Micronesia.

DO: (laugh) Right.

MK: Ok, so NMU hired you to get that program started, the graduate program.

DO: Yeah, they did hire me to do that, and the first year I was

there I wrote the grant proposal to support it and also developed the, all the paperwork you have to develop and get ok'd through the graduate programs committee and all that stuff.

MK: And, who, what foundation or body gave you the...

DO: U.S. Public Health Service.

MK: U.S. Public Health Service gave you the ...

DO: Yeah, HHS, yeah.

MK: to, ah, to start the...

DO: Health and Human Services, mmhm. I had gotten grants from them before so they knew who I was.

MK: Yeah, I think that... Did they, ah, is that where the United States Cadet Nurse Corps came out of? From that branch of the government?

DO: To tell the truth I don't really know, that was so long ago I don't remember. Probably, yeah. But I had gotten a grant, I'd helped, I'd worked on a grant, I first met those people in Iowa when I was in Iowa and I'd helped write the grant for the Iowa study, then I had helped write a grant proposal for the University of Hawaii and I'd chaired that program when I was out there, and then again I wrote the, a grant to develop the nursing administration, they already had a graduate program, but they didn't have a nursing administration major, and I wrote the grant to develop that at the University of Hawaii, and those were all USPHS grants.

MK: Ok, and the program at Northern was nursing administration?

DO: It start, it was, no I was developing a nursing program but the first major was nursing administration 'cause at that point I was the only faculty member, and that's what I teach.

MK: What did the grant cover...

DO: Development of a masters program, total, and it was a three year grant, and in that three year grant we put in the administration the first year, then the next year we put in a med/surge major also.

MK: A what major?

DO: Medical surgical, and um, and that's, I left it with that. I was there for three more years through the grant, and I knew I was gonna retire again at the end of the grant, so before I retired again I wrote another grant for two years, but wrote myself out of it and left 'em with two years to continue running the program.

MK: And so by that time did they already have other faculty on?

DO: Oh yeah. Yeah, there several faculty before I left, had to be, I couldn't handle that all. Actually other faculty were helpin', were teachin' some of courses anyway, although they weren't considered to be on my faculty or on the graduate faculty, they were in...

MK: They got pulled in from other departments like you got pulled into psychology?

DO: Yeah (laugh), yeah right, right.

MK: So the grant was originally a four year grant and then you were

DO: Three year.

MK: Three year grant?

DO: Uh-huh, and then two more years. The first year they...

Note: The last few minutes of the tape were cut off by a mechanical malfunction.