

Interview with Carol Huntoon
21 March 1989
Marquette, Michigan

START OF INTERVIEW

Therese Greene (TG): Interview with Carol Huntoon, March 21st 1989. Marquette, Michigan. Alright, what was the purpose of the Job Corps and who started it here in Marquette?

Carol Huntoon (CH): Okay, the purpose of the Job Corps, it was a national program started in well, at least in the seams of the ideas were planned by John F. Kennedy when he was president and I believe it was Lyndon Johnson that actually coined the phrase “war on poverty” and developed, supported the development of job corps all over the nation. The purpose was to basically allow young people between the ages of 16 and 19 an opportunity to try to break the poverty cycle. Get out of their environment, get into a different environment where they weren’t being affected by perhaps abusive parents or difficult home life or difficult neighborhoods. Get a fresh start, get trained, and get a job. And the idea being if they did that, they would get off of welfare and when they grow up and have children and have babies, those babies will grow up and be educated and break that cycle of poverty that, we have in America.

TG: And what brought it to NMU specifically?

CH: Well I guess, specifically to answer question, since it was the only job corps located on a college campus, I think in 1966 and actually 1965 when it got started here, Northern was a small college suddenly getting very large, a lot larger. And I think the people here saw it as another way to expand the college. The university I guess it’s called now.

TG: And how were you involved directly with the job corps then?

CH: I was hired nationally as the Assistant Director of Recreation and became the Director of Recreation Services in about 3 months. I was also, I started an art program for the center and held art classes. That was basically my job for about a year and a half.

TG: And doing recreation, was that extra-curricular activities?

CH: Yep, I was completely in charge of everything that, well not everything, I was in charge of the whole recreation special program after 3 o’clock in the afternoon and every weekend.

TG: And what did the communities, did they accept the job corps? Or did they not want it to come to Northern?

CH: I don’t know, I don’t know I can’t answer that. I worked here on campus, I didn’t have a lot of community contact. I think people appreciated the business that it brought to the community. I can’t answer that. Most people were very nice to the girls, I don’t think there was, and if there were any subtle problems with that I wasn’t aware of that.

TG: How did the job corps women in themselves react to being brought out of their element and into a college campus?

CH: Well, a lot of them were very lonely and very home sick. There was a group of 6 students from Alaska, they were eskimo, they were brought in and they left halfway through our first winter, it was much colder here in Marquette than it was in Alaska and they couldn't stand it. So they went home. We had a lot of kids from the south that loved it, they just loved it. They loved the outdoors, the snow, and they loved going to Sugarloaf Mountain and going swimming out at Tourist Park and swimming on the beach. Of course I see all this from the recreation point of view. Lot of them earned their high school diplomas, which they didn't have. Basically they liked it here.

TG: Did they intermingle with the students on campus? Or were they kept separate from them?

CH: Okay, picture this. They took over Carey Hall that became their residence hall. They had all their classes out at the Birdseye Building, which is off of Big Bay Road. The military science now has some storage and the art department has some of the back rooms. Okay, so they lived on campus and they had classes out there. Some of those students, it was found they were very intelligent and they actually start taking, they were accepted into classes at Northern. Some of the students dated college students. But there were some 16 years old kids living in Carey Hall and they bussed them out to the Birdseye building because otherwise they couldn't get out there in time so they bussed them. And when those kids would get on that bus and ride down to the Birdseye Building at 8 o'clock in the morning or a quarter to 8, and the students from Magers and Meyland were walking up to come to classes up here and those 16 years old job corps kids were sticking their tongues out and making faces. There were some emotional, not emotional, but there were some stressful times when there was a lot of resentment. But generally speaking then, the job corps kids were younger and stayed pretty much to themselves.

TG: Okay. So when they did come up here they came up here to better their education and their background life, but I think they took it seriously. They came up here and did well at their school?

CH: Yeah, those that stayed and I don't know what the percentage didn't stay it wasn't very large, a few people didn't make it, you know just couldn't adjust but most of them adjusted. They earned their high school diplomas, they were trained. Some took a secretarial program, some took a clerical technical type of thing, and some took a sales and distribution kind of thing. There were others. When our girls left, when they finished their program and basically graduated, they were sent to a YWCA in one of the larger cities for job placement. Every single girl that would graduate from this program went out on OJT, on the job training, and from there got jobs. And before they came in they were unemployed and unemployable people. So obviously it worked.

TG: If it was working so well, why did they decide to cancel it?

CH: Well, again part of that was a federal decision. Funds were drying up, I'm not sure but there may have been a change from a democratic administration in Washington to a republican. So that

started, funds started drying up and the job corps program here was pretty expensive to operate, I'm not sure I was privy to some of that administrative information, But they started consolidating job corps centers, making fewer across the United States and putting more people in those places. And some one made the decision that the job corps here would be part of the cut back. I don't believe that, internally here at the university, that they ever made an absolute decision to cut the program but I don't think they tried to fight in order to keep it.

TG: Was there ever a possibility to move the job corps off the campus as a solution that?

CH: And have it someplace else in the community?

TG: Yeah in the community.

CH: I don't know, apparently not, at least that was ever brought...no. I don't know where their facilities would have been if it hadn't been on campus.

TG: Did the faculty get involved with the job corps?

CH: Mhm. quite a few people became a part of the program that I had at least. Helped with chaperoning, had special activities, get togethers. Church groups were particularly strong in helping the programs. Students that enrolled in the Northern classes were really, really encouraged by some of the faculty. But again it wasn't everybody. It was a few people that believe that every American has a right to try to have a better life.

TG: So a lot of them did go on to college?

CH: Not a lot that I know of. Probably, see at any given time there were 300 students at the job corps center. Out of that whole group I can't recall more than 5 or 6 that actually started taking classes here at Northern. Out of those people think 3 or 4 people went on and got degrees, you know undergraduate degrees and master's degrees.

TG: So when they decided, when they got here, was the dropout rate early? Was it mostly home sickness and being away from their family, loneliness? Or did they go on through part of the program and decided they just couldn't make it in the program?

CH: I think, if I recall correctly those that stayed at least a week stayed until they finished. The few, very few, that got here and just couldn't adjust were gone so quickly and I don't think there were very many. I don't know though, there must be records on that.

TG: I was reading about the FOBSA Committee? The Friends of Black Student Association, and how they organized a gathering to go down to Washington to try and reinstate the job corps here. Were they successful or did they, I mean obviously they weren't successful in reinstating it, but did they have any impact on the women here or the administration here to help keep it here?

CH: No, I think by the time those students went to Washington I think someone had already signed the closure papers. So I don't think there was anything they could do about that. By that

time I wasn't working at the job corps either so I wasn't very close with that part of it. I knew it was coming and I wanted to stay at Northern so I was able to get a different job on campus.

TG: Were they successful at that? At placing the administrators and teachers that were involved in the job corps and the women themselves, what did they do after it was ended?

CH: I know that all the people that worked for the job corps either ended up with jobs at the university or other places. Now you could talk to Ernie Young, he's in the library. Ernie was in charge of the supply depot for the job corps so that's another person whose still here. Who else is here, Rodger Brooks was our Director of Business Management and the health centers for years and now he's a director over at the hospital, one of the counselors. The program wasn't suddenly one day we're all done, it was phased out. It took 3 or 4 months, students who were still in the program were allowed to finish their program. I mean they didn't suddenly, well your done and go home. Everyone was phased out.

TG: And if they didn't finish within that 3 months where did they go?

CH: I'm guessing three months, 6 months, a year, whatever it took. Everybody that was on the program either completed the program or was allowed to transfer to another job corps. We didn't just kick them to the street. Some of the students kept contact with me through personal cards few years after. Two that stick out particularly in my mind had been, they were born Mexican-American families, I'm not sure whether they were in the United States legally or not, I think they were. But they were so poor that they were bean pickers, they were migrant workers. These two sisters, very very nice kids, both took a secretarial program here, both went back to California, got jobs as secretaries and became executive secretaries within a short period of time because their skills were so good and they were very intelligent. And the last cards I got in each case they had met fellas and got married. Both guys were med students and you know, maybe this maybe isn't a happy ever after but these were beans pickers that were able to get into meaningful jobs and met men of intelligence that matched their own and they sound like they're doing really well and that never would have happened to those two in particular. Another one that did go onto college and I think became a career person and is working on a couple _____. I'm sure there's others that may have just gone right back to picking because that's where their roots are on that's were their families are.

TG: Besides secretarial training, what other kind of training was offered to them?

CH: Okay, I'm not sure. I know they had a sales and distribution program, they had a computer program which started in '66/'67 so that's pretty early stuff. I thought there were about 6 different training programs that on top of being able to earn high school credits. I don't know, I can't remember the others. Did we cover most of the questions?

TG: I think so.

CH: One of the things that you may have read, and I've always fought against that. One of the things that a lot of people said about the job corps is well the reason it was closed was because none of the students were ever placed in jobs. And actually on paper in Washington that is

absolutely true. Every one of our, not everyone but almost in the state, all but maybe 3 or 4 of our students when they graduated were ready to go on to the on the job training program. They couldn't be placed in Marquette, they couldn't be placed in the UP. There weren't enough jobs around to make that kind of an opportunity available. So we connected with Chicago primarily, where the students lived in the YWCA and then had on the job training in the Chicago area. There were a couple other large cities, I think Cincinnati and another one. So they'd live at the Y, they'd go on their on the job and after I think 3 months or 6 months if they performed well they would get basically the stamp of approval. Our job corps never was allowed to count one single placement to our credit, the YWCA got to take the credit for the placement.

TG: You mean the on the job training?

CH: So on paper we did not place anybody. Whereas the Y's that we connected with did the actual placement. Really that was true, we did it but they got the credit. And that was one of the decisions, I think, that made it look like it was too expensive. They send 300 girls at a time, and of course people were constantly coming and going. It wasn't like the semester started and ends. There were new job corps kids coming into the program every week or two. Maybe 2, maybe 10, maybe 20 and others were completing the program so it was very flexible.

TG: How long did they have to complete the program?

CH: Up to 2 years.

TG: So they could just, if they finished in 3 months then they'd graduate and they'd switch to?

CH: Sure, the plan would kind of turn you out with a more kind of a high school diploma. Some had high school diplomas too, some just needed training. We had to teach a lot things. We had to teach bathing, some of these kids didn't really know had to do that. Some kids came without teeth. Nutrition, their income level was so low that they didn't have teeth so they got dentures. We taught some personal hygiene and sex education. We had lots of things that they just didn't get.

TG: So it really was like a family life thing? It's like you became their parents?

CH: Yeah, lots of us. There were about 40 staff members in different capacities. It was the best time of my life was when I had those kids in my life because they appreciated _____. They really came from some terrible parts of the country. Particularly Appalachia, you may have an impression that they were all back but it was about 55% white, 45% black. The white job corps kids were just like most of the college kids so they'd blend in walking down the streets and stuff. Any female that was black was assumed to be a job corps student. This made it hard on some of our more black women students who were here as college kids because they sometimes were, it was presumed when they went shopping at Jacks, which wasn't Jacks then, that they were job corps kids and they wouldn't like that either.

TG: But there wasn't much resentment towards each other in that way? Race wasn't a big issue?

CH: Race wasn't an issue because until the job corps came there wasn't a race consciousness because people didn't have anything to face. I mean there was racial consciousness but there wasn't prejudices as such. I think people come off to be prejudices. The job corps kids were really loud and obnoxious, really loud. The Marquette community hadn't been used to that kind of thing. Like the Marquette community in fact, I just talked to somebody today and I asked her do you remember the job corps, she's 86 and she said sure. She reminisces and can remember when Marquette was all excited because they were going to get the base, KI Sawyer and the town was really worried about this town being run over by soldiers, wondering if they were going to be safe at night. The base came and you notice it didn't change too much. So they already had the experience once of a new program and people coming in here. Maybe they realized life wouldn't really change that much.

TG: Were there other programs that took the place of the job corps? Did it influence people to start other programs and pick up where it left off?

CH: I don't think so. Actually, I think there are still job corps program in existence. Out at Clam Lake where the health tower is I wonder if there are still job corps programs. I don't know how many there are. But no that program was just basically a 3 year program.

TG: But it was in your eyes successful?

CH: Yeah, you know and I'm prejudice because I was a part of it. I saw a lot of personal growth and I saw a lot of really frightened young people come in with their heads down feeling pretty downtrodden almost. And maybe having a diploma, a high school diploma, and getting them to be proud about themselves and learning how to do something. We'd ask them if they feel confident and they'd be able to make more money and get ahead.

TG: So do you think there could ever be another job corps program reinstated up here? Or it was just a once in a lifetime thing?

CH: I don't know. It would be hard for me to think there would be a job corps program ahead of something to help the students. Maybe a job corps program that could help with _____. It seems to me, it's pretty much more _____ were people came in the last 8 years. _____ . It seems like our nation has a _____ in time. I think that maybe that will change that way when democrats are back in office, because that's where it was. Because this was 20 years ago, it really wasn't that long ago. These programs were started by democrats and they disappeared when the republican administration came in. So it's kind of, I guess it's a political thing right now.

TG: Would you be supportive to get one back at the university? Do you think we have the facilities here?

CH: We're at our max right now in housing, so that would be one of the problems. We can't support developing a new program if it puts our own college students in a crowding situation. When I started working after the job corps as the Assistant Director of Housing, at that time, every single room on this campus including Carey Spooner and Magers and Meyland had three

people in every single room, both guys and gals. And that was too hard on everybody. And so if the housing couldn't be taken care of that would put pressure on the college kids. You know I would support that to not push people back into that of ting

TG: With housing did the job corps women have to stay in Carey Hall or once they turned 18 or so could they look for their own apartments?

CH: Oh no, they had to stay in Carey Hall. They had curfew, they had double RAs. We had a lot responsibility in the least, we had 16 or 17 years old kids. So they all stayed in the same hall and they all had the same rooms. It was a real matriarchal society, or patriarchal. We really watched them, they had bed checks.

TG: Did they abide by those rules most of the time?

CH: Yeah. Sure, I used to take the kids out to the base for the airmen's dancing. Which is really nice, most of the girls if not the black students, and most of the guys that would show up at the base were airmen so obviously for social reasons it was a nice thing. After a few trips back and forth a few romances had stirred. When it was time for me to take the girls home sometimes I had break up a lot of clinches and goodnight kisses. You know I had to walk the train through saying let's go let's go! Let's get this kids on the bus and get them back there. They might kind of have growl at me a little bit, but they'd give me a hug and head back. You know what I mean, no one ever hid from me or wouldn't come back.

TG: So they had dances out the airbase? Did they also have dances here at the UC center or did they use the student's facilities around here?

CH: Yeah. In Carey Hall they used to have a dining room. That's now been taken by the art department. But they had their own food service over there, they had their own cooks. We used the dining room for dances and banquet parties. We use to go roller skating at the Baraga gym, we'd go out skiing.

TG: So would you keep that separate from the Northern students themselves, their dances and their activities? Or did some of the job corps women go to their dances and use like the, I guess it was Hedgecock's facilities.

CH: There wasn't a lot of social mixing. There weren't a lot of the _____ dances taking place on campus at that time. I don't know why they weren't doing that. There was a time that there was so many students using this building and there was some problems with some of the problems with people coming so they had to start checking ids. Either you had a student id, which the job corps students didn't have, or you were a guest of someone who had an id because it was starting to take over, this place was packed. If a student, if a girl went to a function it wasn't that she just showed up, it was a date. Some college student had asked her to take her out there as a date. Other than that there wasn't much inter mixing. There was a lot of young girls, I mean 16 and most college guys aren't gonna want to date 16 years old.

TG: Were the majority of them towards the younger age?

CH: Yeah, 16 or 17. Or if they came in, they could have been 19, high school drops out with no training. If they stayed 2 years then they'd be 21. But most of them were the younger ones.

TG: Okay well thank you for answering my questions.

CH: Who else are you in touch with?

TG: I'm gonna try to get ahold of Bill Ores [spelled phonetically], Dr. Whitehouse gave me his name.

CH: You should talk to Rodger Brooks, he's a good person to get a stance from.
_____ . It's just interesting that he came from that too, which is probably why
_____ .

TG: Have you kept in contact? Have all the members and staff kept in contact with him?

CH: I haven't kept in contact with anybody for years. But there are a few people in town that apparently have. If you're working on it _____. It'll mostly be a staff get together.

TG: Okay well thank you!

CH: Good luck on your article.

END OF INTERVIEW