

Interview with Holly Greer

January 14, 1981

Interview by Russell Magnaghi

Russell Magnaghi (RM): Interviewer Russell Magnaghi, interviewee Holly Greer, January 14, 1981. Ok, Holly, when did you come to Marquette?

Holly Greer (HG): Well, we moved to Marquette in 1966 from Grand Rapids where we had lived for nine years, and Bill was, my husband Bill was the rector, was called to be the rector of St. Paul's Church, and so we moved up here and I had four small children at the time, I guess my youngest was three years old, and, but, we had found it funny because we had lived in New York and then I thought I was going to a small town in Grand Rapids, when I came to Marquette I really thought I had come to the end of the world [laughs]. We flew up here and all we saw was trees and lakes and snow.

RM: Was that the first time you had been up here?

HG: We came up for an interview in January, about this time of year, and it was about 10 degrees below zero, beautiful day but it was just, you know, I just thought, "oh my heavens, what have I gotten in to?"

RM: Now, what were some of the, the first jobs that you had in Marquette?

HG: Well, for a couple of years, I really stayed home and kind of took care of the kids, and when Cathy went to kindergarten, actually, Dick Sonderegger called me, he had known me and we were friends, and one of the people in the history department had taken ill, and so he asked me to step in and teach a couple of courses in humanities, which I did that first year, and then I decided, I really had wanted to go on and get my master's anyway, and so I was a graduate assistant here for two years here at Northern. And then I taught humanities for, uh, two more years I guess after that, before –

RM: Excuse me, do you remember what year, what years you started?

HG: 1969. No, that's, no, 1968 is when I started teaching and then I did a graduate assistantship from '69 to '71 and got my master's in 1971, and then taught part time and then full time for a couple of years before I became director of the Women's Center, which was 1973.

RM: Ok, could you tell us something about the Women's Center and your role in it, maybe start from the beginning?

HG: Yeah, well, it was a really interesting experience because there were a lot of people in Marquette at that time, a lot of women, just, I think one thing about Marquette is that there are just a lot of very able, capable women here. And at that time the women's movement was, you know, kind of a big thing and still is hopefully, but there were a lot of people very interested in, a lot of things came together at the same time, one of the things that happened was that there was a

group of women, about 100 women, who met and they broke down into small consciousness-raising groups, the other thing was that a group of us went down to Michigan State University to a women's nonpolitical caucus, and came back and held one here, and also at the same time the division of continuing education under Don Jackson, Jack Brown, our _____ at the time, thought that maybe they ought to be doing more as far as women were concerned, so they had an advisory group of women throughout the U.P. who really decided that they weren't quite sure what women needed and so we held a conference, and I think this was in 1973, I guess, no, '72, I'm not sure, but anyway, and about 170, 180 women who attended that from all over the U.P., and we did things like broke up into small groups, like women and work, women and health, women and, you know, so on and so forth, but out of the whole thing came a resolution asking for a women's center in the U.P., and asking for Northern to sponsor it, and that's really how it all got started, and many of those women who were active getting it started are still active now, which is a neat thing. The other thing that came out of that, I think, well, maybe before that, but through this whole scene of women becoming more active was that a number of women in 1972, fall of 1972, ran for political office, Sally May ran for the county board of commissioners, I ran for the city commission, and it was the first time in the history of Marquette that women got elected to office, so it was a real, 1972 was a real turn-around year, I think, for women, and three women were elected to the county board, and I was elected to the city commission, which was, you know, a big thing for Marquette. A number of women had run before for the city commission, you know, maybe three or four, and never been elected, so it was a whole different thing.

RM: So were you the first woman to -?

HG: Yeah. I was the first woman to be on the city commission, right.

RM: Ok, could you tell us a little about your role on the city commission?

HG: Well, yeah, it was very interesting, it was very, to some extent it was difficult at first although I'm sure that would be true for the first woman on any board or whatever, and I never knew, I really never knew, and I will never say that it was because I was a woman, whether it was just the difference in my political philosophy or whatever, but it was very difficult that first year and it really, I think, took me a while to have a feeling that the other members of the commission really respected what I was thinking, what I said and what I felt, as a matter of fact, let's see, I had been on the commission for two years, and it just, as you know, you elect, the commission elects the mayor from within the commission, and just by tradition, there's nothing that says this in the charter, _____ the person that's been on the longest, the most seniority, is the one who gets elected mayor, and I guess I had been on for two years, how many, I, no, I'd been on more than... I did not get elected the first time around when I would have been on for two years, then in 1976, I guess, which would have been, you know, I'd been on for three years, I had the longevity and everything else, and it took 34 ballots before I was elected, as a matter of fact we had to go out and make new ballots because this has never happened, it always, you know, it's on the third or fourth ballot by the time they elect a mayor, and I had been teaching a class in assertiveness training for the Women's Center, otherwise, you know, my nature would have said, "oh, Hol, this is stupid, just give up, this is dumb." I went, no, I'm not going to do

that, I'm just not going to do that, I'm going to hang in there, and I hung in there and it was really embarrass – well, it got to be funny after, it was embarrassing and then it got to be funny, so I hung in there and after 34 ballots I was elected mayor, but I have to say Russ, it makes me feel better, because the next time around, the next year, I was elected unanimously on the first ballot, so that makes me feel a little better.

RM: So was there, did you feel there was any kind of a hesitation on the part of the commission?

HG: [laughs] There was a big hesitation! Yeah, there was. And there was a real split as there has been, I think, historically, at least since we've been here in the city commission. At that time, oh, was it, I guess it was five members of the commission, now it's seven members of the commission, but there's always been split, either three and two or four and three, and I think it reflects, maybe, the city of Marquette, I think there are very different opinions in the city of Marquette, and I think a lot of people, to some extent, resent the university, still resent the university after all these years, even though they have made their living off of the university, they still resent it and feel that somehow the university lords it over them, they don't pay taxes and so on and so forth, so anybody who has an association with the university is somehow tainted with that, I also think there's a real difference in political philosophies, that there's a really strong conservatism in this town, as there is throughout the nation, and there are also some people who are willing to look forward and think forward, and I'm not saying that's hard and fast because those positions change, but I think there is a definite split.

RM: Did this surface while you were on the city commission or while you were mayor?

HG: Oh yeah, by all means, it was there all the time I was on the city commission, um, Bill Malandrone was mayor for three years before I was, and I like Bill, I respected him, but he's very conservative, he and I did not agree on many, many things, we were friends but we did not agree. I think Bill was very, very hurt when he was not reelected to the city commission, and he was very upset about that, as you know, Bill has since died and...but I had a lot of respect for him, I think he was really honest, but, as I say, I think he was very conservative, and that's good, I really do think in some ways that's really good, you have to be conservative with the taxpayer's dollar, but you also have to have some vision as to what's going on, and I guess I feel, right now, I feel that maybe the vision isn't there, I may be all w_____, and I hope I am, but we're in a tough time now for the city, as is for every place else, and I think we've lost sight of some of the goals and we've said "well we're not gonna do that" and so on and so forth.

RM: Ok, were there any major events while you were mayor of Marquette that you'd like to comment on?

HG: Well, yeah, there were a lot of things, we built a new, well, we went into the new sewage system, we built a new water tank, we bought the lower harbor, the arena was put up, a lot of things happened and that was a period, it was a neat period to be mayor, because it was a period of growth and this is when all of, you know, the mines were expanding and everything was booming and there was no place to go but up, everything, you know, people complained about taxes and so on and so forth but we were really in a boom period, and everybody felt that, you know, Marquette was just gonna grow and grow and grow and a lot of growth took place, and

one of the difficult things, I think, for Marquette at that time, which seems funny now as you look back on it, but it was a difficulty at the time, was that Marquette had no place to expand, we were, annexation in the state of Michigan is almost impossible, we had, before I was on the city commission, we had annexed the property which a Holiday Inn was on, but there was no place, and we had attempted to annex some property out by Skandia, but there was no way we could do that, and the, so Marquette was really put in a bind, there was no place to grow and we looked like we were gonna grow forever, and all these people were out there taking advantage of the city services and not paying city taxes, and so that was a big problem. Another big problem, I think, was the growth in the power plant, there has always been, since the 1953 charter when the power plant was split off as a separate entity, there was always a problem between the city and the power plant over just how much control should the city have over the power plant and so on and so forth, and at that time the power plant just, the Board of Light and Power felt that they had to grow, I mean they were just, they were overextended, they just didn't know how they were going to do this, and so we went into a big deal with the power plant, and that was over a period of five years before it ever came to a vote of the people, and we hassled back and forth and so on and so forth, and of course we ended up building the new power plant, which we're in the process of now, and a lot of people that I've talked to lately say, you know, "why did we ever get into this? We're not using that kind of energy." Now, I don't know what the future of Marquette is, or Marquette County is, my guess is that, you know, this recessionary period is going to last for two or three years and that it will continue to expand, I think it will, as, you know, I think that they will build, continue building mines and then eventually we will need that power plant, but right now it is just, it's very difficult, because we're paying a whole lot for power we're not using, and so that's a big, that was a big question. The other thing I think, one of the, I guess the fights that I felt was important, is a lot of people felt that Marquette was spending too much on recreation, that we were just putting too much in the recreation department. I still feel, and I will continue to feel that the more you put into recreation the less you have to put into the police department. I think that if you give people a place to do things, to have fun, to enjoy their city, or you give tourists a place to come, you're going to have a lot less trouble than if there's nothing there for people to do, and as we get into the kind of budget cuts that we feel during the crunch, it's the recreation department that's going to take it, you know, in the neck, and I think that's, I really think that's a mistake.

RM: Now, how long were you on the city commission, or how long were you mayor?

HG: I was mayor for two years, and I was on the city commission for six years, which was as much as anybody can be, you could, at that time you could serve three two-year terms, now we have changed the charter and you can serve two three-year terms, so it's still six years, then you have to be off for two years before you can run again.

RM: If you were staying in Marquette would you try to get back on the city commission?

HG: [laughs] I don't know, Russ, I'm not at all sure about that, I don't even want you to ask me that question.

RG: Ok [laughs]. Now what do you think your effectiveness was on the city commission, were there certain improvements, were you able to get people to change their thinking on certain issues, what was your effect?

HG: Oh, I don't know, Russ, it's really hard to tell. I think on some things, one thing I think that I had a very good relationship with the city manager, and I really respected Tom McNabb, I thought he was an excellent city manager, and when I went on to the city commission, I didn't like him at all, I thought he was a hardnosed, and I really came to him, his ability, and particularly his fiscal responsibility, and I think one of the worst mistakes the city of Marquette made was to get rid of Tom McNabb. So I think that was a good relationship. The fact that I served on the Board of Trustees for the Michigan Municipal League also gave us some standing in the state as far as municipal concerns. I think...that...I'm not sure that I did anything that anybody else couldn't have done, I think one thing I did is make it easier for other women to run for city commission, they found I wasn't really a blithering idiot and I wasn't going to burst into tears at the first time somebody said no to me and I could handle the gavel at times, you know, so I think that made a difference, and I learned, I think, to get along with a lot of different kinds of people, and I guess I think people realized that I enjoyed what I was doing, maybe that was it as much as anything.

RG: Now, Holly, you mentioned that you were on the Board of Trustees of the Municipal League of Michigan, could you tell us something about your position or maybe the work of the league and then your position?

HG: Well, the Michigan Municipal League is really made up of all the cities, villages, of Michigan, and they meet several times a year, they also meet, well I guess they have three or four meetings a year, and then they also meet in regions, I was elected to the board of trustees, I think there are maybe 12 people on the board, and the board really presents to the league, which is made up, as I say, of all the officials, you each have two voting delegates from each of those cities and villages, and they make policy for the league, but the board is that one that h_____ or decides on what actions we might like to take and then the league itself votes on them. And I think one of the neat, neat things about that was that I got to know a lot of people from a lot of different cities and the interaction and the being able to reflect and the being able to compare and learning from one another was one of the greatest things, I think, that has, that happened to me, I was very sorry, I guess in 19-, well, whenever I was on the league, they had never had a woman as president of the league, and they had asked me if I would run for president of the league, and I would have loved to do it except that we were so far removed, and also I was going to be working full-time the next year, so I had to say no. Since then they have had a woman as president, which I'm really pleased with.

RM: Ok. Do you have any other sort of final comments about your participation in city government in Marquette?

HG: Well, I guess I could go on forever about that, Russ, because I think that just, I turned on the TV the other night and it seemed to me that they were saying, the same people were saying the same things that they were 10 years ago, but, um, you know, some of those things, they're never

going to get resolved, and it's just a matter of plodding along, doing your job, hopefully, I guess my feeling is, and I get discouraged about this sometimes, that good people will run for local government, because that's so necessary, really, you have more effect on a local level than you can county, state, nationwide. You can affect your local government, and if people will run for those positions, you know, they can have a great effect.

RM: Ok. Now, let's get back to your involvement with the Women's Center, or, maybe more generally, the women's movement in Marquette, and then maybe we can take a look at the women's center. Could you tell us a little about the, in the beginning of the tape we, you had talked about the women's movement in Marquette, could you maybe talk about the movement in terms of problems women face and a change that has come about?

HG: Yeah, I think, Russ, one of the things that came out, I talked about this conference that we had earlier, and one of the things that we heard over and over again was that, ok, there are going to be all these new things opening up for women, but how do we take advantage of them, you know, I've been in the home and I was in the home for 12, 15 years, how do we as women, we've been talking baby talk all this time, how do we function on an adult level, how do we gain the confidence to do the kinds of things that we want to do? And really it was on that premise, I think, more than anything, there were lots of other things involved, too, but that, more than anything, was the thing that the Women's Center evolved around, and we're still doing, the Women's Center is still doing that kind of thing, we're doing a lot of small group workshops to build self-confidence, assertiveness training and that kind of thing, but it's amazing how many women, and myself included at the time, when Sondy called me to come back and teach, I was just shaking, you know, I didn't, I hadn't been in school for 12 years, how was I going to teach, they'd read more than I did, you know, and I, I was scared stiff, and I think a lot of women feel that way, that, you know, they'd been out of it for a long time, how do they acquire those skills, and a lot of it is that they have the skills, but they don't have the confidence in themselves to use those skills, and one of the first workshops we did was to do a skill analyzation, you know, people would look at one another and say, "my heavens, you've got a lot of empathy" or "you have a lot of something or other" and I said, "I do?" Yeah, they just, I think a lot of women, I'm sure this is true of men but men have a little different situation, is that they, they really put themselves down, they don't realize what they have going for them, and so that was one of the things that we did. The other thing that I think people wanted was they wanted to have a repository for information about what jobs, what kinds of volunteer activities, what things were available to them, and a referral system, you know, "how do I go about getting on welfare", "where do I go for a lawyer", or so on and so forth, so we did a lot of that, a lot of people needed personal counseling and we've done that, too, and a lot of women just needed the support of other women to say, yeah in one sense being a fulltime homemaker is a very lonely job, even if you have five kids, you're very much cut off, and I think a lot of women felt the need for support from one another. So those are some of the kinds of things that the Women's Center was built around. I think that there were a great many women in Marquette who felt, and I still feel this way, that there just are an awful lot of, there's lot of talent in this community among women which is not being utilized and which should be utilized, because if you're going to really make a

first-class community you'd better use all those talents, and I think there's a lot of still talent and ability here that should be used.

RM: Now, you were director of the Women's Center?

HG: Right, mmhmm.

RM: How long were you director?

HG: Well, from 1973 until October 17th, 1980.

RM: And how did the position terminate?

HG: The position terminated because we were told that there was not going to be a Women's Center anymore because of budget cuts, and so the whole thing was terminated at that time.

RM: Because of the budget cuts?

HG: Uh huh.

RM: Now, could you tell us what's happening to the Women's Center now?

HG: Well, I think one of the amazing things, Russ, is that although we were terminated by Northern, and in those years when we were at Northern we had a number of different funding sources, not only through the university but we had also had grants from the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission and from the Federal Bureau of Education, and this last year we did not have additional monies, but we did have a number of seated positions, we had the Displaced Homemakers Group with us, Displaced Homemakers Act, which was a state act, but when it was terminated I think the neatest thing that ever happened was that there was this great surge of community support that said, "ok, you're terminated, we're mad, we're angry" I have a file that is that thick of people that have written to Dr. Jamrich and Governor Milliken saying, you know, why could you do this, how could you do this kind of thing, because this is the only women's center in the Upper Peninsula, why would you do this, but that didn't seem to make any difference, and as we were terminated a lot of people came forward and said "we want to work, we want to keep this thing going, we're gonna make it go" and so up from, let's see, I guess from mid-November, it's middle of January now, I think we've raised seven or eight thousand dollars and we're now located at the G _____ Hall, down in the basement of the G _____ Hall of Saint Paul's Church, and just, new faces, new blood, new enthusiasm, it may have been a really good thing for us, we're going to have to look for, Sally May is now the director by the way, but the Women's Center is going to have to look for longtime funding, because, you know, you can't nickel and dime people forever, but just the community support, there's an obvious need for it or there wouldn't have been that kind of support and those _____, so I'm feeling really good about it, you know, I think it was a bad mistake that the university cut it out.

RM: Ok, what direction do you see the women's movement, the whole movement in Marquette, taking?

HG: Well, I'm not sure, Russ, I think to some extent it's come of age, and in a way, in a way it's too bad because many of those people who were the most involved, the most enthusiastic have,

are now working fulltime, they don't have the energy, they don't have, you know, they just don't have the time to do that kind of thing, some of the younger women are really taking hold, but as I look at my own daughter, who's 18 and just off to college, they take for granted in one sense the kinds of things that I guess our, my generation worked so hard to get, and they don't see the problem. Now maybe they will when they get out in the work force, but they don't see it, and they, I think it's neat, but it also means that they're not going to work and keep at it, and I'm very worried, I really am really concerned, my sister was head of the movement in Iowa to, for, to get a state ERA, it was defeated at the last minute by very reactionary forces which showed pictures of homosexual men in all different poses and so on and so forth, they threw these on the TV, up until then the polls had said they were going to do it. I see that reaction coming, now I do not feel that we're going to get the ERA ratified, I think what's going to happen is that they're going to have to start all over again, with congress and then so on and so forth, I just think it's a shame. I don't know what to say about it, I think that so many of the young women have the freedom and feel that freedom, we're not ever going to go backwards to the 1950s or 1940s, but I think they don't realize what a hard battle that was.

RM: So what you're saying then, the battle isn't over.

HG: No, by no means.

RM: But many women feel that it is.

HG: Well, I don't even know if they feel that it is, it's that they just don't realize that there's a battle, you know.

RM: Because things are working out for them?

HG: Better, yeah, right. Well, I think about, you know, kids my daughter's age and the kinds of opportunities, for instance, they've had in athletics and school and that kind of thing. You know, they just don't see it. Now maybe when they get out in the work force they'll see this but for the most part they're not affected, and in one sense it's really so neat, it's really healthy, I just, I see the relationship between young men and young women is much more natural and much freer, being able to be friends, you don't have to be a date or a man and a woman, but we can just be friends, and I think that's just great, but I also think that sometimes that covers up a lot of things that still have to be done and still have to be won.

RM: Now you talk about things that have to be done, are you, do you have any plans for the future in terms of getting involved in the women's movement in Cortland, New York?

HG: I don't know, Russ, I haven't gotten there yet. I know that they do have a YWCA there and I know that the Y does some good things with, you know, spouse abuse, rape, so on and so forth, I haven't had a chance to look around, really, I'll just have to see. I do want to find a job when I get out there. One that pays money [laughs] because I have three kids in college, so I do have to find a job, but I'm sure I'll get involved somewhere.

RM: So in general do you think since your arrival in Marquette things have changed, have improved, have gotten better?

HG: Things have certainly changed, they've changed a lot. Whether they've improved I don't know. We went, you know, I've seen the cycle, when I first came here it was about 19,000 and now we're up to maybe 22, 23. We went through a period where we turned down urban renewal, that's before I was on the city commission, and then we went through a period of real growth and doing some very active things, now it seems to me we're back into a, pulling back again, and I think this is true of every place, we're in that kind of state of economy that we're going to see that happening to cities all over the United States, so it's, that doesn't surprise me, but I hope that, you know, Marquette is going to be able to see beyond this year and the next year, so on and so forth, because I think there's just a tremendous potential here. We have a big transportation problem, and that's always going to be a problem, but eventually I think Marquette is, you know, is really going to take off.

RM: Do you think part of the, part of the, part of Marquette's problem and many communities in the so-called Frost Belt of the north have problems because there isn't the type of economic growth that you have in the southwest in the Sun Belt?

HG: That's right, that's right. You know, and one of the things that we worked very hard on, which, I was on the economic development committee for the city after I got off the commission, that it's very, very difficult to attract industry here, one thing that in Michigan labor costs are very high, their fringe benefits are very high, transportation is impossible, every little town has its own industrial park, how do you, you know, how do we attract industry? We need to have some diversity appearance, need to have the mines, but you know, when the mines shut down you're through, and we need them. But it's very difficult to attract, it is all going south and southwest and I, I think that, of course, is what the medic (??) program is all about and what Tom McNabb is trying to do is to attract new small industry, hopefully that'll happen. One thing that I have seen is the tremendous growth in professional services. The hospital has grown, we have all the tremendous number of doctors, new doctors, and also attorneys, a lot of attorneys will leave Detroit or Ann Arbor, get out, come up here, and they all seem to be doing well, so, we are primarily a service town, but I think we do have to look, look beyond that to find some kind of industrial base, right now, as you probably know, the U.P. Power pays about 50 or 60% of the taxes to the city, as that depreciates that's going to be a lesser proportion, our taxes are going to have to go up, and that's going to be very, very difficult, so I think we have got to look for some other kinds of possibilities.

RM: Ok.