

University of Texas at San Antonio Archives and Special Collections

MS 317. Archives for Research on Women and Gender Oral History Project

Helen Cloud Austin Transcript, June 10, 1997

Tori Beckman-Wilson: Start talking....it's June tenth, nineteen ninety-seven. I'm sitting here talking with **Helen Cloud Austin**, and we're going to talk about volunteerism today, post-career volunteerism. So you retired from social work at the state hospital in what year?

Helen Cloud Austin: Nineteen eighty-seven.

TBW: Nineteen eighty-seven, and since then you have not stopped.

HCA: I have not stopped. No, no. Volunteerism has been the name of the game. However, this started very early in my life. My mother was a great volunteer worker in the community and I think this had a very great input, or impact on my life. Because I had no idea that I'd ever go into social work, but I think that was a good, fertile background preparing me, you know, to give and invest in other people and enhance their lives, and cause them to live much better.

TBW: So what kind of volunteer work did you do early on? What kinds of things did you do when you were much younger?

HCA: Much younger? O.K., I volunteered in my church. In Cincinnati, Ohio, before coming here, we had a social service department, and I was vice president of it so we had a lot of different programs going on at the same time. One was marital counseling, another was resources in the community and another one was self-esteem programs, and those are the three that I worked primarily with. But before leaving home, in college and what not, my mother had a clothing room, where she would gather clothing from anywhere in the city, and people always

knew if there was a need for clothing, they could go down to Ellen's house and get what they needed.

TBW: Did people come directly there, or did service organizations pick up the clothes and distribute them?

HCA: O.K., word of mouth. But, for the most part, she wanted them to be referred by someone. Knowing that there was a need. O.K. And in addition to that, there was always food at the house. Anyone who needed food to eat, and what not. And there was a lot of younger boys, this was in Louisville, Kentucky. Boys who were in school, boys who were having difficulties in life, they'd always come and know they'd have a meal.

TBW: At your house. It was like, "Come on over."

HCA: At my mother's house, yeah.

TBW: How very generous.

HCA: Yeah. So that really had a great impact on my life, and throughout, I have been interested in giving and sharing and making things happen for other people.

TBW: How did your father fit into this? What did he do?

HCA: O.K., my father was just as active as my mother, but in a quieter way. But he always cooperated, anything that was going on, he was right there. There was never any difficulty or anything. And people liked him, because he was always the warm one, and when we weren't home, he was there. So, he was a real cooperative spirit.

TBW: So not only did you get a real sense of social duty from your parents, but they were also very—working together very much in their marriage and in their life. That sounds like a very good set of role models.

HCA: Yeah, from the beginning. That's right.

TBW: So you work in the church, and what other kinds of other organizations have you volunteered for over the years?

HCA: In the community, because people know you are a social worker or a person who can help them to get something. People just come, just like now, I get more telephone calls from people who want to know, "Is this possible?" Right now, I do a lot of telephone work.

TBW: And how do you help them? What are they looking for?

HCA: They're looking for, for mostly the old people, they're looking for information about retirement, social security or anything they can gain as a result of their being retired. Is there anything else I can get? And then, I work with a group of older, depressed people. You'd be surprised, people who don't have any outlet, and I get them to going to different centers like the YMCA for exercise and things like that. Just boosting their self-esteem. Now you've worked and now you don't have anything, you think, but there's quite a bit out there.

TBW: You've got a thing or two to show people about what to do after retirement. And do you think that's kind of key to helping them cope with their lives?

HCA: And to feel much better about themselves. That's right. Because, some people, they just resort to staying in bed, I mean, that's easy. But once they get up and they get started, they feel much better. Isn't that something?

TBW: What a great thing to do for people.

HCA: Yeah. So, word of mouth also gets around. People say, "Miss Austin knows what that is. Miss Austin can do this. Miss Austin can do that." And I do, I don't turn anyone down. I just try to have a ray of hope in their lives.

TBW: So once a social worker, always a social worker. It's the people that keep you moving.

HCA: That's right.

TBW: So when you moved to San Antonio, did you immediately get involved in any volunteer work, or...

HCA: Well, when I first came to San Antonio in nineteen sixty-two, no, no volunteer work at that time. I was involved in my church, St. Paul United Methodist Church, I helped in some programs there. But I think until nineteen sixty-five, I was so busy trying to see what I was going to do [laughs] I tell you, I just didn't even go out. But after nineteen sixty-five, I settled down and was able to reach out again.

TBW: And what kinds of things were you involved in at that point?

HCA: Well, it's always been unearthing community resources, talking with people, helping them to really, you know, unburden themselves. Then through the sorority, I did a lot of work with the young people. And our sorority here, was the first one to have career day.

TBW: Where did that happen, at colleges or here?

HCA: No, we used to meet over to the Coca Cola Company. Over there right off of Commerce and Houston? Yeah, they had meeting rooms over there and we had annual career days over there, and we would invite children from throughout the city. We would have different professions set up, you know, social work, doctor, mechanics, you know, we kind of ran the gamut. But we were the first to have career day in San Antonio. And after that time, other groups got acquainted—but I had known of this in Cincinnati. So it was just something I kind of brought here to San Antonio. We had the first career day. And I've got pictures of that, where young people really participated, and I looked at those pictures not long ago, and some of them have gone to be very successful in life. And then also, my sorority had the first day care center for children in San Antonio.

TBW: Really? Was it public, or for members only, or how did that work?

HCA: It was public, it was public. We established ourselves on the east side, out on Corliss Street, C-o-r-l-i-s-s. And we had a team of sorors. We didn't have a house then, we were meeting home to home. But anyway, we established ourselves and nationally, our sorority got money to start the first day care center. And it was very successful. Lois White was president at that time, and I've got those pictures. And I was the social worker, and I went home to home, soliciting parents to send their children, because this was a new concept. And in addition to working with the children, we also had night programs for the parents, where they could come share and support us, and a lot of good things came out of that. And one of the things I always took pride in, there was one little boy, he and his mother, and his father, but I think the father worked all the time. But he and his mother had a nice relationship, close relationship. And the mother died one summer. And prior to that, he was an A student, an A B student. After his mother died, he was very depressed, very lonely and the school was wondering what was going on. So I interceded and told them his mother had died and he had no one at home. So as a result of that, he was sent to Gonzalez, I think, to live with relatives. But this child could have just dried up in the home and no one would have actually known it. So some of those things, you know, not spectacular, but there's some things that can be done.

TBW: Every life you can work on is important.

HCA: It makes a difference in somebody's life.

TBW: So this was the first day-care center, that's wonderful. What year was that?

HCA: That was probably in nineteen and sixty-eight. I think it was sixty-eight.

TBW: Now it's so common.

HCA: Right. Now, the national, you know, it's a federal program, but at that particular time our sorority in Washington had some money and they were sending it out to different cities,

different sorority groups. And I tell you one group that did continue was Los Angeles, they have a big day care program in Los Angeles.

TBW: Oh, your sorority.

HCA: Mm-hmm, my sorority sponsors it. Because they continued it. And I wish we had, but we didn't. But now I [unintelligible] us, against that big program in San Antonio.

TBW: So this sorority has probably done so much for so many people and probably many people don't even realize who's behind it and what's happening. You joined when you were in college.

HCA: I joined when I was in college. A sophomore in college. In nineteen forty-five, and this past July in Orlando, Florida, I got my fifty-year pin in Delta. And Delta has really been a very positive force in my life, let me say that. When I was in high school, you know, I had teachers used to tell stories about their dormitory lives and what not, you know, and I had one teacher, she always said, "You're going to be a Delta." I didn't understand what she was saying, then, but as time came along, it had more meaning for me. And my cousin, Fanny Ellen, she was a great Delta, and she always told me I was going to be a Delta. But so I went ahead and pledged, and one of the things my parents did for me, when I pledged that night and called back to say that I had made it, they sent me a telegram the next morning. And said "Don't take fame from Delta, take fame to Delta." It always impressed me. It was just a little thing, but I think I might still have that telegram, but I'm not sure. But anyway, don't take fame from Delta, take fame to Delta.

TBW: And so many members have. It's amazing, the achievers that have come out of that group.

HCA: Uh-huh. Deltas, that's right. It really helps you to think, you know. Once a Delta [unintelligible], there are certain standards, you know, that you had to live up to. It sort of just always kept you on your feet, and things like that.

TBW: And community service was one of the goals.

HCA: Yes, this is a public service organization. Public service organization, so we are mandated to work for others. And they're coming back—there for a while, during the sixties, you know, children got away from wanting to go into anything established, but right now, we had a line, we had some people coming into the sorority this spring. But one of the things, criteria was, how much community service have you done?

TBW: So you need to do it before, as well as while you're a Delta.

HCA: That's right. And back then in those days—also coming into the sorority in college, you had to have a B plus. A B plus average.

TBW: Not the usual C.

HCA: No. B plus, and that was a big thing. As I've said, my cousin, maternal cousin, Fanny was a Delta, and then my husband's mother was a Delta and his sister was the eighth national president of Delta.

TBW: So you have connections on both sides.

HCA: Yeah, so it's always been a real big thing for me.

TBW: Is that what encouraged him to join one of the major fraternities?

HCA: Well, back in those days I think, you know, I think a lot of people just got into fraternities and sororities, it was sort of the pinnacle to ascribe to it. His mother became a Delta later in life, but his sister, back at the time he was coming in, it was just one of those known things. So I'm going to say that Delta has had a great impact on my life, and that's the way I

met my husband, George. Yeah, through sororities. It's always through contacts, isn't it? His aunt, Aunt Jenny (sp?) was a very small person, she was about four feet eleven. And she always drove Cadillacs, this was her brand, you know. So anyway, we would pool rides going to [unintelligible] meetings in Cincinnati, Ohio. And Aunt Jenny, you can't even see her head above the steering wheel. [laughs]

TBW: All you can see are the knuckles up on the steering wheel.

HCA: No, she never had any wrecks. But I said, "Aunt Jenny..." no, at that time it was "Miss Fletcher, don't you want me to drive, I don't mind driving." So she readily allowed me to drive and pick up people, you know. And so then, after a while, she said, "I have someone I'd like you to meet." And it was my husband, her nephew. So you can see what impact, and you never know why something is happening.

TBW: You just have to kind of trust that it's the right thing.

HCA: Yeah.

TBW: Well, there are so many other women...Hattie Briscoe's a Delta, and who else?

HCA: Ruth Jones is a Delta, Joyce Sowell, Johnetta Slaughter, Gertrude Batiste...and there is just any number of outstanding women, women who are doing something who are Deltas. And Missus Norris, Lucille Norris, whose husband was the Dean of Saint Phillip's College for years. And she is also a fifty-year Delta.

TBW: When was this sorority founded? Early...

HCA: Nineteen and thirteen, at Howard University. And Myra Davis Hemmings, who this house is named for, was the first president, in nineteen and thirteen.

TBW: Which is why you named this house for her.

HCA: Yeah, she was a great dramatist. And also Shakespearean. An outstanding person.

But back in those days, you couldn't do as much as you would want to, and they were saying that if she had lived fifty years later, then she would have really been known throughout San Antonio.

TBW: You mean because of discrimination?

HCA: Yes, discrimination and segregation. Because she was very well-known, had all kinds of drama groups, and even now, some of her people are still living. But back then, they would have plays and everybody would come to them, and everybody would see them with Myra Davis Hemmings.

TBW: Did you ever get the chance to meet her?

HCA: I met her, yes. Oh yes, I knew Miss Hemmings.

TBW: How?

HCA: She was active here in the sorority.

TBW: Here?

HCA: Uh-huh, she was active here, she didn't die until nineteen sixty-eight.

TBW: And she lived here in San Antonio?

HCA: Yes, she lived over on Olive Street. Over on Olive Street. So a lot of us really had a chance to meet and work with her. She died in nineteen sixty-eight.

TBW: And how long did she live here?

HCA: Oh, San Antonio was her home. She went away to go to Howard, but she came back.

You never know about people do you?

TBW: This is such a lovely house, and it has an interesting history of it's own.

HCA: Yeah, I have some history on this house, too, and how it evolved from the YWCA of this, and it's the largest, it's located on the highest point on the east side. Yeah, so there's a history that I'll give to you, on this house.

TBW: Thank you very much.

HCA: And I became president of the board of directors of the Myra Davis Hemmings Resource Center in nineteen and ninety, nineteen ninety.

TBW: So you've been at this for about seven years. Straight?

HCA: Straight, without a break. And during this time, the house is paid for. We set up programs and my chairman of the board, Hattie Briscoe and the vice chairman and what not, so we had to really work together. But suffice it to say that we paid for this house in eleven years.

TBW: That's outstanding. Better than most people do with their homes.

HCA: Yes. And we are coming out of office by September. We have new board members and they've been elected, then they'll elect their officers.

TBW: Are they going to elect you again to chair?

HCA: No, no. [laughs] Things do move on.

TBW: Now this house, is the Hemmings Resource Center, as well as the house for the Deltas. Is there a difference between the two? How are they related?

HCA: O.K. The Deltas own this house, and we work under the sorority, but they are the main factors behind the house. In other words, they bought the house, and we just named it Myra Davis Hemmings Resource Center, after Miss Hemmings. But this is a product of Delta.

TBW: And the money used to build it, not build it, but pay for it and everything came from Delta. How does Delta go about raising funds? Is it from gifts, or...

HCA: We pay, we pay so much per year, every financial member of Delta pays so much per year for operation of the house, and then we have other fundraisers. O.K., to keep the house going. But fundamentally, we are responsible as financial members of Delta. And these fundraisers, you know, help. And then we get grants from the city. In fact, the city just gave us ten thousand dollars to get it painted. And so we're going to start that August fifteenth. And then the city gave us two hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars to get it refurbished. Because this was just a scary place, you know, like some of the houses down there on King Williams and places like that? You know, some people just tend to live in here and de-mark the place. But the city gave us two hundred and sixty-six thousand dollars to refurbish the place.

TBW: That's not now, is it?

HCA: No, that was in eighty-one. I think we got the grant in eighty-three.

TBW: I didn't think it was now, because the wood floors are beautiful, the walls are in good shape. It looks like you used the money to really work this place over.

HCA: Yeah, and then we put an elevator in, because so many people can't get to the second floor up the stairs. We tried to use it wisely. And we have a full kitchen, so it has a lot of accommodations. And we invite people to come in and use this facility. And we accept donations from them, but it is a community program.

TBW: That makes sense, the way Deltas relate to the community and their main mission. What kind of projects are the Deltas involved in now?

HCA: At this particular time, we have a program, Growing Up Female. This is an annual event and it happens at Saint Mary's University. Some of our people work out there and have connections. But we bring children in from throughout the city for one whole day, and they have a program. It's all centered around growing up females, and we just had one, I think it was

April twenty-second. It is a big program here in San Antonio with children, and parents and the teachers really look forward to that. Another program we have is voter registration, we just finished that, just before the election. Then, let's see, I'm trying to think of what we're doing right now. Computer programs for the children on Saturday mornings.

TBW: Where do you do that?

HCA: Back in the library area. We have computers and we have one or two people who work on computers quite well.

TBW: So the kids come in...

HCA: And they come in and work. So that's an ongoing program for us. Until this summer we had BCOIC program meeting here, five days a week. It's the Bexar County Industrial Center, and what they do, they work with at-risk children. And they have to take tests and have some training, but as a result of that, they're given a chance to really get jobs out in the community. That's the Bexar County Industrial Center, the BCOIC. And that really helped us to pay our home out quicker, because when they had their program here, there usually was a donation of fifty dollars per day, and for that, we were able to accumulate some money and go ahead with helping us to pay the house off sooner.

TBW: You've been a Delta for fifty years.

HCA: Fifty years, yes. I have a book in there for you.

TBW: Thank you.

HCA: You know, I've been going through this material, and I said, "I kept this? I kept that?"

TBW: It's a good thing.

HCA: A lot of things my mother kept, too, and I'll show you some of that. I've just built up all this stuff. College pictures, where I finished graduate school. And all that's history, isn't it?

TBW: Oh, yes, the best kind. The best kind.

HCA: Yeah.

TBW: Now in addition to working with the Deltas, in addition to everything else, you're also on the board of directors for, I do not remember the name of the organization...

HCA: Halfway House, is the one program I'm really interested in. It's called Cross Point, Incorporated, but it started out as the Halfway House. And the reason I got interested in the Halfway House was that we were getting patients out of the hospital, and some of them had been hospitalized for a long period of time and they needed just that help in getting back into the community. And someone was saying, "I bet they won't take people from State Hospital." And I said to myself, "I bet they will." [laughs] But anyway, I got on the board in nineteen sixty-eight, and I'm still on that board. And we started off with one house, and now we have six.

TBW: And how do procure these houses, where do you buy them? Where do they come from?

HCA: They come from money. Because you see, there's money in each one of these programs. And we accumulate money and accumulate money, and we just expand and buy another house.

TBW: Now are most of these houses set up for people from the mental hospital, from the state hospital, or are they for other groups of people as well?

HCA: O.K. Now we started off with mental health people. But the money somewhat dried up, so unfortunately now, we're only keeping people from the, I don't want to say penitentiary, uh, criminal or what?

TBW: We could say correctional facilities.

HCA: Correctional facilities, that's right. Including the VA.

TBW: Did those, that group of people coming from the correctional facilities, they're mainly younger people, or older people that have been in for a while, or what?

HCA: Well, I think they are people who can benefit from the program, so it's not the chronic patients. And that's what we kind of avoid, taking in, in any group, not the chronic people, but the people who have some potential, and we're able to help them. Now the halfway house program, as you know, you have bankers, lawyers and people who got into trouble, but they're coming back into the community, but they can't come until they serve community services or what not. So you have the whole gamut.

TBW: Oh, so they have to stay in the halfway houses for so long, and then they can move back.

HCA: That's right, and then they can move back. And they have to get jobs, I know Kelly Field has a program that they're able to go out there and work at their potentials and pretty much what they've been accustomed to doing. But they try to place them where they can get some experience and move back into the community. Now that's the halfway house. Now before that time, let's say the patients who were at the state hospital, back in the earlier days, we always sent patients who had some potential to move back into the community, they weren't chronic cases.

TBW: They went to the halfway house or straight home?

HCA: No, they had to go to the halfway houses, get some training and learn how to live in the community again.

TBW: In those houses you have to—how much responsibility do the people have for their own maintenance or upkeep, or whatever the term is.

HCA: Well, primarily, they have to have a job. We want them to get a job. And then they have to do regular household chores, just as if you're living at home. You're responsible for something, you know. But the whole gamut was to get them back into the community as quickly as possible. Most of them didn't have homes to go to, so they were set up in apartments, you know, and do things like that. But they were taught to be able to live a separate life in the community.

TBW: And were you kind of involved, since you were a social worker, were you involved in every step of that process?

HCA: Yes, on the board. On the board. I didn't work directly with patients, or with clients directly in the program, but on the board, we would set up policy and we would see that therapeutic programs were being established for them to learn from. Now this board has a cross gamut of people who served. Now, there are some of us who are interested in programs and, of course, administration and those kinds of things. [end of side one] [side two] You know, we would look at that group of people, so it's a cross section of people that belong to these boards, so you usually work according to your expertise. If something would come up legally, or something would come up in accounting, I'd listen and hopefully learn, but if something came up about the programs in the house, or with the people moving back into the community, well social workers, chaplains were very helpful and psychologists. So we all worked together.

TBW: So have you been volunteering for this, or are you elected, or how does that work?

HCA: O.K., you are elected. Once a year, they have the annual meeting, and then you have submitted material, or shown an interest. And then the board selects someone.

TBW: So you've been on there continuously?

HCA: Continuously, either directly on the board or the professional advisory board. Which means, the professional advisory board you're just called when a problem comes up. But then, when you're on the regular board meeting, when you're on the regular board, you must go to the monthly meetings. But everyone always knows about—when I'm on the professional advisory board, I might just pop in for a meeting sometimes. But it's irrelevant, I don't have to. But right now, I'm on the board, I'm active on the board.

TBW: Some people would say, "I've had enough. I'm going traveling or I'm going to go camp out down at the lake or whatever." What keeps you going? What makes you want to continue? You are a very busy woman. Most people would feel perfectly O.K. with putting their feet up and saying, "It's been great."

HCA: I guess it's just a part of me. Now, I don't belong to many social clubs. I don't play bridge. There's a group, when I first came here, I was asked to join bridge clubs, et cetera, which usually meet, I think, weekly or monthly. But I said, you know, I can't commit myself to really going to something like that at a set period of time or a set time. Because I might not want to. And in doing volunteer work, I think what you do is you kind of do it at your own pace. And do it when you want to, you see what I'm saying? But if you got to go to a bridge club let's say at one o'clock every Saturday, or commit yourself to something like that, you see, I don't want to. I said I might want to go and walk on the river, I might want to sleep, I might want to do something like that. People think that you are restricting yourself, but you're really not. You just know that something has to be done and you do it at your own pace.

TBW: That's something, restricting yourself, that's a very interesting point, because I think a lot of people do think that it's going to eat up my time, I don't have enough time.

HCA: That's true. You think that.

TBW: Well, what would you say to people who think like that?

HCA: I would say, no you don't because you're not making a commitment on time. You're not pinpointing, not saying, "Now, I got to go at ten o'clock and do this." But there is a lot of things that you plan in your mind and then when you go out there, it's just going to fall into place, because you've already thought about it. So it's no set time, just like I said about the bridge clubs, you got to go every Saturday at one o'clock and you don't come out until six. That's a big chunk of time. So we manage, my husband and I, to have a full social life, both of us belong to fraternal organizations, church, so we're not doing anything to be, as they say, stuck in the mud, because we're just as active as anybody else in the community.

TBW: Right. I don't think anybody could ever accuse you of being that. What kinds of things is your husband active in? What does he do?

HCA: O.K., he's active in his church, he's active in his fraternity, he also is a fifty-year man, in his fraternity. And then at one time, he used to bowl quite a bit. He's a swimmer, and most of all, he's a fisherman. He keeps himself pretty busy. And then he has a lot of hobbies, photography and electronics, you know, he tinkers. So he keeps himself pretty busy.

TBW: And so he can appreciate your efforts in all these volunteer organizations.

HCA: Yes. That's right. That's right. And he's somewhat like my father. You know, he supports, there's never any conflict, when Helen's doing something, Helen's doing it. You know, it's one of those things.

TBW: Does he help out?

HCA: Yeah, when there's a need.

TBW: That's wonderful. Did you notice those kind of traits in him when you first met him?

HCA: Mm-hmm. His aunt, you know—and he's been surrounded, his mother, his sister. His mother was a home ec teacher and his sister's an attorney. So they've been people people.

TBW: And I would assume that throughout your marriage that he's been real supportive of your work in your career field.

HCA: Very much so.

TBW: Would you say that would be unusual for the time when you started your career? Did most men at that time give their wives such a blessing and such support, day in and day out?

HCA: Well, let me say, I can't be truthful about that, but you got to, you know, when you're getting married, you got to know who is going to allow who to continue doing what you're accustomed to doing. So I couldn't have been married to everybody. It had to be a certain kind of person, you know, because so many men would be so needy themselves until they couldn't see you sharing yourself with everybody else. So once again, I had to select who I was going to get involved with.

TBW: Good thinking. You chose well.

HCA: Yeah. So it really makes a difference.

TBW: So what other volunteer activities are you involved with?

HCA: O.K., I'm on the Casey (sp?) Family Agency board now.

TBW: I remember that. Can you tell me a little bit about that for the benefit of our audience?

HCA: That's a long-term adoption agency. I'm sorry, a long-term foster care agency. Foster care agency where children are brought in from homes where they can't live at that particular time. This is a very rich agency, it was started in Seattle, Washington. By some people who worked for the postal service. I think that they probably had, you know, some mental illness in their family background. So they shared a great deal of money in that program, and now it's

just really sprung up throughout. And good staff, good resources to help the people, in fact, it's one of the better agencies I've seen. But they have money for every facet of life that this child needs, and most of the time, they do need psychiatric help and a lot of motivation.

TBW: So do you actually place them, or support the placement with this organization?

HCA: O.K., it can do both. It's long-term foster care, so for the most part, these children aren't going anywhere, until they reach eighteen. Now at the age of eighteen, hopefully, they have made enough resolution in their lives, they can go on. And they certainly get all the help from the agency that they can get. But, for the most part, they are not for adoption, that's not the purpose, it's long-term foster care. So you can get psychiatric help, all kinds of schooling, social work help, just any kind of help that that child may need in helping him to lead a better life. But for the most part, they like to get them around thirteen years of age, and then if they're in a program for five years, they're pretty well...

TBW: That sounds very beneficial. Now, I notice something that's very similar in every single one of these organizations. They're all very heavily involved with social work, and it's really not very surprising at all that you would want to be involved in those kind of things. How did you find out about this particular organization?

HCA: Casey (sp?)? Let's see, someone referred me to the board and wanted me to become a member, so they approached me.

TBW: So you became a member and eventually worked on the board?

HCA: Yeah, and I'm still on the board. I just signed up to continue another year. So I'll be on until May of eighty-eight.

TBW: And what was the first year you were on the board?

HCA: The first year, I need to find that out, it's in that material, but I think it was probably eighty-two or eighty-three.

TBW: So it's been over a decade, well over a decade, fifteen years almost.

HCA: No, no it hasn't. It's been around ten years, it's been around ten years, but I'll pinpoint that time for you when I really went in. But that's why I'm doing the latest board stuff. And of course I've worked in mental health boards like Bexar County MHMR, I've been on that board, Weston Community Center, that's a Methodist program, a United Methodist program. But all of it has social work involved. Let's see, what other board have I worked on, I guess that's it. As far as agencies in the community are concerned.

TBW: So where does, who, let me think about how I want to phrase this question. Is it across the board population that Casey serves? Or is it target populations or anybody who needs the help? And how do the referrals come in?

HCA: Anybody who needs the help. They come in through, usually through the Department of Human Resources. They have children who they think could benefit from long-term foster home programs. They come in from schools or any referring agency can refer a person. But of course, now, they don't have to take everyone who's referred. They have to see if they feel that that person can benefit from that program.

TBW: And have you ever been directly involved in meeting the clients?

HCA: No, I'm not involved in that area. I have been involved in selection of personnel. Because the board, you know, has different committees, and I was on the personnel committee.

TBW: It would be hard for the board to get involved in every single referral.

HCA: No. That's done by the staff. The board, the staff usually gives a report to the board, when we meet, but no, the hands on work is done by the staff.

TBW: And how many people per year go through that program?

HCA: Now, they have eighty-seven children in placement. Which is real high for San Antonio, but eighty-seven. They just had one girl go to the Navy, where was it, in Great Lakes this year. So they come in and out. But I'm very proud of the social work staff there. They really do quite a bit of work, not only with the client, but also with the families, the foster parents. It's a full-fledged program.

TBW: That seems like it would be hard, to accept a child in for long-term foster care and you'd get so attached, it seems like. Is that part of the program for parents?

HCA: That's a good—you know, you do like the child, but you know that this is not going to be a permanent placement, so you're there to help the child go through the process of maturing and moving out into the community. Now, I have worked in foster care, not foster care but adoption care.

TBW: Right, that was before you went to...

HCA: That was in Chicago. That was my second job. And that was a very interesting program. But sometimes the adoptive people did get attached to the children who were given to them while they awaited placement, so we had to watch that. So there's a difference, you know. But for the most part, foster care people. The child usually has a lot of needs, so you're so busy trying to get them back to the point where they can move out on their own.

TBW: The other question I had was during the eighties, budgets were cut dramatically for mental health services. How do you think that has kind of affected communities or individuals in the system? Has it had an effect on them?

HCA: Yes, it really has. And I think this is something we're struggling with right now, the cutback of federal funds or funds altogether. Now, when I went to State Hospital, there were

three thousand patients there. Now, it's down to five hundred eighty-one. However, the exception is, there are a lot of community centers in the community that have taken up some of the slack. But, what is good, if you're in a big facility, you get three meals a day, recreation, a feeling of being at home and what not, so it makes a difference. And when you come out into the community, you got to fend for yourself, and you don't get all that. You go to the clinic and get medication and probably referred to some other agency in the community, but you're not fully cared for. So the cutting out of money for not only mental health people, but welfare, you know, is just too drastic and I think you're really going to find that this is going to deprive people of things that they really need in their formative years. They're just not getting it like they used to. And all programs are being cut, and it's just unfortunate. You don't need to get dependent on a program, I'm not saying that, but you need to be helped to know that you can get something if there is a need. But now it's just cut to the bare bones.

TBW: Yeah, they're taking away even that.

HCA: Yeah. So I just don't think it's a good idea.

TBW: I was just curious about that because I know a lot of—it just seems to me that that was the wrong direction to go. That's not the best way to help people, to toss them out on the street and tell them to drop in once a day and get your pills and go on.

HCA: No. You know, you got to help people. They're not animals. They can't fly in and fly out. You got to give them a helping hand. But I'm of the opinion that you got to hold a person's hand as he crosses a bridge. Give a person a fish, like down at the Salvation Army, but if you teach him to fish, you know. Now one of my dreams would be to go down, let's say places like the Salvation Army, and some of the other places where you have a lot of people who have no motivation, no interest, they're just going from city to city, being, you know, dependent,

on agencies and what not. I think the cycle has to be broken. Because they can tell you just as good when something's going to happen in San Antonio, Houston, Dallas, they know the track. But someone just needs to work with those people down there and help them break that cycle. Just like people on welfare. You know, mama's on welfare, I'm going to be on welfare. It doesn't have to be that way, but you got to teach them, and help them, and hold their hands. Show them how.

TBW: What would be your advice to, especially young women, who might be facing a situation like that? Maybe didn't know any other way of doing things.

HCA: Well, I would advise them to get into some kind of training program and be as attentive and get as much out of the program as you can get. And then, hopefully the program would have people who would be able to help them move from A to Z.

TBW: Mm-hmm, job placement and things like that.

HCA: Yeah, move them back into the community. But accept help when you need it, and then when you don't need it, move on. Just like I used to tell orientation patients coming into the hospital. You need this hospital now, but there's going to come a time that you will not need the hospital, so you got to teach them, you got to teach them to go along the way. And my office used to be on the ward, and when a patient was first coming to the hospital, I would just let them come in my office, and we would do things and et cetera. But then as they began to get better, you know, I would wean them off. Then they would go and get in other programs, be with other people, but in the beginning, they weren't able to.

TBW: That's an incredible amount of understanding and patience it must take in all these things you do. In all these organizations you work for, that's another common thread.

HCA: Helping people to help themselves. And know when to move in and when to move out.

TBW: That probably takes a lifetime of experience to do well.

HCA: But don't make people dependent on you. And that's the difference, a trained social worker and someone who isn't. Because when you're a social worker, hopefully you won't have a need to have someone to just really hold on to you. But when you are just a regular worker, you have that need for that person to stand there and applaud you and do all those things, you know. So I think that's a great difference. But we are there to help you help yourself and move on. And you'd be surprised at how many people come back and give you credit, but that's not the aim of the game.

TBW: And I'm sure you have changed many lives.

HCA: Yeah, helping them to move on. And then another thing I want to point out in the material, that when I came to work at State Hospital, we had around twenty-nine social workers, and I would say only about three or four of them had their master's degree in social work. But I stopped and told them, "Unless you get your master's degree, you're not going anyplace." And a lot of them were very resistant to going back to school. But some of them who gone back to school now, they are high in praise, but you see, they had no interest and they would tell you, "Well, I'm doing the same thing that Susie's doing, why do I have to get a degree?" I said, "Yes, you're doing the same thing, but you don't have your degree." So I motivated, through the hospital system, Doctor Ingalls (sp?) to give these people eight hours a week to go to the Wharton (sp?) School of Social Work to get their degree. And some people would say, "Helen, why are you doing that?" And a lot of people would be jealous of them, getting a degree. And I said, "No, I got my degree in nineteen fifty-three and I know what having your degree, what a difference it can make." So some of them have gone on to get really good jobs and to get jobs that they couldn't have applied for, otherwise.

TBW: So it's also obvious to me that education is a key thing in your mind.

HCA: That's right. Education is it.

TBW: Seems to me a lot of people—maybe that's part of the problem that we're having with directionless people, that just don't know what to do with themselves. They're not bad, they're not inherently bad, it's just, you need direction. Can education get you that?

HCA: Yes. That's right. Education really opens up a lot of doors. If you got it—when I was coming up for, applying for the job at the hospital, the social service director in nineteen and seventy-six, one of the things that Doctor Dahmers (sp?) told me, “Helen, you're black, you're a woman and you're intelligent.” So he was saying, don't worry about who applies, because at that particular time there were a lot of retired colonels coming out of service applying for that job of social service director. But Doctor Dahmers (sp?) came through and said, “Helen, you are a woman, you're black and you're intelligent.” That just shifted my mind. Don't worry about it, Helen, and then when it came down to the selection, I got it. Over all these other people coming out of service, colonels, professional people who had experience and what not, but I had been in the system.

TBW: Right. And you got your education early and built on it.

HCA: So you just got to be aware of those things and work accordingly.

TBW: Let's see, what else did I want to talk to you about today. Ruth and I talked before I came today. Now, when you were in—a couple more questions—now when you were in Chicago and working as a social worker, were you aware of—Chicago seems to be the kind of birthplace of social work, with Hull House and Jane Addams. Did that have any influence on you at all?

HCA: No it didn't. I was aware of these great institutions, of course, but I have always been in psychiatric social work, and that's a whole different ball game. No, my whole thrust has been mental health. However, one year I did go over and work in adoption in the Illinois Children's Home and Aid, and that was a good experience. But I just worked in it for one year and then I moved back to Cincinnati.

TBW: That must have been a nice change, but you eventually had to go back to what you really wanted to do.

HCA: I tell you, it taught me quite a bit about early childhood development. Because we used to go out and pick up children from hospitals and other places and bring them into our clinic and we had one doctor, Doctor Bennett. And when we would bring the babies in, usually from three days to five days old, she would hold them on her hand to see really how flexible this baby was. And she would tell us which foster home to place that baby. And it's something, because most children, when they're first born, they're very rigid, just like a plank. But she had different ways of telling you where to place that patient. And we had one black foster parent, and if a child was very rigid, just like this board, take him over to Miss Sally's. And she would keep that baby there for six weeks, and then that baby was just as flexible as any other person. Those were some of the things I really learned.

TBW: So I suppose you're seeing, not always, but sometimes what you saw in older patients may have been connected to their early childhood experiences.

HCA: Yes. And particularly, see psychiatric social workers, they had to take social histories. And this is starting before a child is born, before this person is born, on up to how did he get the way he is at this point. So, I could really gather from that background, from adoption, that what happened to this child the first three years of his life. The old saying is show me a child who

had tender loving care to the age of three and I will show you a child whom I can treat. And it really makes a difference.

TBW: And we're hearing about that so much more now, there's just been tons of stuff in the media about the first three years. You knew this all along.

HCA: All along. Way back when I was in undergraduate we had a German psychologist who talked to us one night, I never will forget it. She was saying show me a child who's had loving tender care 'til the age of three, and I will show you a child whom I can treat. Because when they've had loving tender care to the age of three, they've kind of gotten themselves together, they've gotten the ego together, and they pretty much know who they are and they've got roots. But if you have a child coming in now, shifting from one place to another, not knowing where he's getting security and what not, it makes a difference. So in taking a good social history, you got to go back and count each one of those stages of his life, what was he doing? And then a girl, and then a boy. You can hear them say, "I had a good relationship with my father, I had a good relationship with my mother," but you have to point out what was the behavior, what was some of the things that you were doing at a certain point in the person's life.

TBW: Do you ask the patient about this social history? Do you do it, with the patient, or do you have to research elsewhere?

HCA: We do it, social workers do it with the families, or any other significant person in their lives. Now, we can come back and redefine it, but a good social history comes from the family and any other significant person.

TBW: That sounds so interesting, it really does.

HCA: It is interesting. And it helps you to understand, gives you some background. And even with people now, a girl, her mother died just this past week. And I can see so many things

that's really going to be really hurtful to her now, because she didn't resolve a lot of things in her early life, and she's a very successful person now, but emotionally she's going to have problems because a lot of things were never taken care of. Not a lot of resolution was done as she grew up. And it just helps you to understand.

TBW: It might help to have a social history of yourself, kind of give you an—that would be interesting. O.K., I'm looking at this list of things to talk to you about. Now, during your career, especially with this whole hiring thing at the State Hospital, you've seen a tremendous change in the status of blacks in society. Can you tell me kind of, other than your experience directly with the State Hospital that we've talked about, what other things have you seen in your career that have changed drastically?

HCA: In the community?

TBW: Yeah.

HCA: Now when we came here in nineteen sixty-two, things had just begun to open up for blacks in the community. And as I said, I couldn't go to State Hospital and work at that time. And then people couldn't go to other agencies and work at that time. Dolores Bradley, I can think of her. San Antonio person, went away to Atlanta U, got her degree, came back and the door was completely closed for her.

TBW: And what was she attempting? What kind of career did she want?

HCA: She was going into child development program. And the door was closed, and she could not pursue her career. [end of tape 1] [tape 2] ...went to Joske's, you know when they first opened? And when they first opened the Camille Room, that was the restaurant at Joske's. That was the first. And then I worked downtown at the Light building there on Broadway, and we couldn't go to Luby's to eat, which was just two blocks over.

TBW: So you had to go...

HCA: We had to go to the Ten Cents Store, Kresses, on Houston Street.

TBW: Is it still there? I thought I saw a sign.

HCA: I don't think it is, I need to go back and see. K-r-e-s-c-g-e. But we couldn't go over to Luby's to eat, we had to go downstairs at Krescege's, but that was no biggie for us because we always took our own lunch and we were out shopping and things like that. But once again you knew that certain places you couldn't go.

TBW: What did that feel like?

HCA: Well, you learned to compensate. We knew we couldn't go to Luby's and eat, so we brought our own lunch.

TBW: And so you found ways to make it not so...

HCA: Hurtful.

TBW: Hurtful every day, maybe.

HCA: Uh-huh, yeah. So I've been in a lot of situations, just like when I did my field work placement when I was in graduate school. I was doing it at the American Red Cross in Louisville, there was a restaurant that I knew I couldn't go to. And I was the only black at the American Red Cross at that time. Everybody else, occasionally, would go down there, but I knew I couldn't go. So you just learn to, you know, cope with the situation. You knew you couldn't go, so why you going to stand there and cry and say, "I want to go." So, that was true here in San Antonio. So many places that you could not go then, and just as people who were trained to do the job could not work because of their color.

TBW: With the degree, with everything.

HCA: That's right. And that was the State Hospital, that's a good example. And Lois Bradley...

TBW: So they did as you did, kind of found alternate employment.

HCA: That's right. And my saying then was bloom where you are, you know, I'm not there now, but I'll be there one day. I went to work for tuberculosis control board and the Protestant Children's Home. And so what if I had sat there and cried and fought. But you got to bloom where you are, and keep on going. And in fact, when Doctor Otero called for me to come to the state hospital, I almost didn't go. I passed by there the other day and I told the girl, I said, "You know, I almost didn't go to State Hospital." Although I had done my training, and those kind of things. But you just have to learn how to cope.

TBW: How did the feminist movement in the seventies, late sixties and seventies, did that really have any effect on your life, or did you feel as though you were where you wanted to be already?

HCA: I did. I know that there were some problems and some people really had to deal with it, but I never was a feminist, really.

TBW: Have you ever felt like you were kind of had any doors shut because you were a woman?

HCA: No. Not because I was a woman. Because I was black. But not because I was a woman.

TBW: So, now I can assume from that that you weren't too involved in organizations for women. Delta is an organization for women, but they're not specifically a feminist organization.

HCA: That's right.

TBW: Now, you were definitely involved in civil rights organizations.

HCA: Yes, I was and my husband, too. I was involved in college days and I don't think too much before that time. And I'm going to show you a picture where I was one of the group that integrated University of Louisville. Isn't that interesting?

TBW: So you've been involved for years, most of your adult life.

HCA: Yes. But not to the point where I ever wanted to carry signs or anything.

TBW: I was going to ask you about that. You seem to be a person that wants to work on it, that definitely is not going to sit still and just say, "O.K." You're working within the system.

HCA: And trying to change policies and those kinds of things. I think you get much further that way. Now, however, that article that appeared in Paul Thompson's column was kind of an outward sign.

TBW: Yes. Was that pretty out in the open for you? Did you feel like that was going much more public than you usually do?

HCA: Yeah. Much more than I usually do. But you see the results. You got to sit back and plan and see what's going to be effective.

TBW: Were you ever scared?

HCA: No. No.

TBW: Good for you.

HCA: No, never scared, never frightened.

TBW: Was there any kind of—I'm trying to get a sense of what was happening in San Antonio since I'm not a lifelong Texan, I'm still learning the history of this state myself. How was the civil rights movement perceived in Texas? Did things fairly quietly? Were there any real violent episodes?

HCA: Well, I think in San Antonio, we have not had the outstanding black leadership like I was accustomed to in Louisville and Cincinnati. I mean, there was blacks out there howling and screaming, that was their way of working, and things did happen. But here in San Antonio, we have not had that many black leaders. There was a Reverend Black, who is still living, second city council man, and then Reverend James was the first one, but they were very quiet people. But you could see them in important positions. But there never was a great leader as far as getting out and trying to lead the people, but I think they opened doors. Now, the person who just came on as the black city council member, Mario Salas, watch him. He is kind of in the middle and he does have the, he will speak out and cause people to get provoked at him, but at the same time, I think he's going to be a good leader, if he doesn't get too boisterous and things like that. But I think he's the first city council person who has really wanted people to take a stand. He has marched and he's done a lot of things in the background. Mario Salas, S-a-l-a-s.

TBW: District Two. That's my district.

HCA: I think he has the ability to make things happen, though, and not just for himself, but for others, too.

TBW: What do you think, in general, how are things going—I know that in San Antonio there is a lot of prejudice, to state things baldly. How is the situation for blacks in San Antonio now, as you see it?

HCA: Well, I think at this particular point, I want to see blacks continue getting their education. Because a black person who moves on, they are mature for the most part, they know how to control themselves, handle themselves and make things happen. That's going to be their saving grace. Continue in education. Continue in education. Now, Mexican-Americans they are continuing in education, but they don't have the maturity and the background that most

blacks have, so they know how to make things happen and stay up there and not be as abominable as Mexican-American or even the whites who are going through their struggle at this time. That's really the way I see it. But use your maturity, use your good common sense, be sure you get your education and you will go far.

TBW: And that's the kind of advice that you would give young people now?

HCA: That's right, that's the kind of advice I would give them. And just like those eighteen people I set up to process, the process is still going on at the State Hospital. Any social worker who goes there can continue their education by having eight free hours per week. But I've always been a great advocate of education, because I think that's going to be the key. That should give you more self-esteem, help you to know who you are and to get out there and perform, you know.

TBW: I was talking to Julia Gayden, I don't know if you know who she is, Julia Hoyle Gayden?

HCA: I don't know her, but I know her name.

TBW: I was talking to her the other day, one hundred and three years old, she's wonderful. She said the same thing. It's ignorance that causes the problems.

HCA: Yeah. You got to help, and everybody knows—they used to say about me, at the State Hospital, "If you don't go to school, you're going on the couch." Because I was such a motivator, not a pusher, but a motivator. Just trying to get them to understand that they need to go. And I would say that of the group that would go, only about three would not go, and they usually had a reason. And I didn't push them, once I saw that they just didn't have the interest or something, I didn't push them. One boy, who's still working at hospital, and he didn't get his degree, so he is subordinate to the others as far as supervision is concerned.

TBW: That's what happens in big organizations like that. Well, I'd say you're a pretty good role model for the people you encouraged to go on and get their master's degrees, how successful you were.

HCA: Yes, you really got to push people, share with them. And walk with them, cry with them, pull them, all those kinds of things.