

Interview with Norma Greenwood

Date: May 6th, 2014

Location: none given

Category: Women's Center

Jane Ryan (JR): This is Jane Ryan. And I'm facilitating an interview with Norma Greenwood concerning her role and interests in the Women's Center in Marquette County. She will give a bit of her own personal background and then share her involvement with a Women's Center and her perspective on their mission. Norma, welcome. And I'm looking forward to hearing your comments and a little bit about yourself.

Norma Greenwood (NG): Thank you. I went to the Women's Center in 1973. I had been married and had two children and was widowed and started taking classes at Northern, had never gone to college. And once referred there, they were on NMU campus just started all at that time. They were offering a lot of services and even though they had this, the big picture, they were working on huge issues, working on politics and legislation, working on wages for women, getting women into different careers that had not been traditional in the past, looking at equality for women, and I love being exposed to all of that. But my true experience with the Women's Center was so much smaller, so much more personal. And I had grown up in a rather difficult situation and married the young man had children and then my husband died when he was only 27. And I was 23 and had two little kids. So I was never going to get married again. I was going to be this independent person and started taking classes at Northern. And if it weren't for the Women's Center that helped me so much with my own self-esteem which needed a lot of work. Learning about... Well, in steps: self-awareness, even becoming aware of my upbringing and my growth and to get me to the point I was, then self-acceptance, accepting that. And then self-confidence in accepting who I was and reading from one of the brochures they had at the time the Women's Center is based on the belief that growth is a continuing process. Every person has a set of strengths and talents and abilities uniquely their own. Our goal is to help you find out just how much you have going for you and to help develop your own realistic plans for utilizing your potential. So all of that was new for me and exciting and met wonderful people there. And for the first two years, I took every workshop that they had available and learned about assertiveness

training which I needed. I did crazy things, I look back now about buying things from door-to-door salesman cause I didn't want to hurt their feelings and say, "No." Family members not really taking control of what my day would consist of or what my life consisted of, just reacting to things around me rather than making decisions about my own life. And then learning these wonderful communication skills. Assertiveness training helped with that also but we had Active Listening. And then just the titles of these workshops: Expanding Horizons, how you become so aware in your eager and self-confidence and then you're expanding, and what next? And Where Do I Go From Here was one. And How to Be Me and Life Planning. So it was just life-changing for me. It was wonderful. And after those two years, then for eight more years following that I led workshops. I had trained be a peer-group leader and I lived in Ishpeming and Negaunee area. And there was, I thought a great deal of difference in and people, overall people, who lived in Negaunee in Ishpeming compared to people living in Marquette belonging to the University population. So...

JR: Excuse me, Norma. Was the office still on campus when you were doing this?

NG: Yes. Yeah

JR: Initially? Okay. And I'll mention that Ishpeming in Negaunee are more, slightly more rural. Definitely smaller than Marquette. But pretty connected.

NG: Yes, yes. Right. And at that time, I think the word feminist was a bad word to a lot of people, it was was frightening, and changes. And so when I was able to do some basic workshops and my own community with people I've known for years and raised children with them and work with them softball games and fundraisers and gone to church with them. They trusted me as one of them and came to learn, and learned that equality is just such a basic thing, doesn't have to be frightening. And then all of these communication skills about expressing yourself. Asking for what you need, being direct. Not playing games to get what you want. So it was just a great experience for me. And so during all this time, I was also taking classes at Northern and at the end of that ten year span, I had been remarried and had another child, had a daughter and took some time off to take care of that. And so when I finally graduated from Northern, and I was 37 years old. I had a final project that I had to do for an accounting instructor that involved putting my resume together. And I was so proud to put ten years of experience. And all this growth and, oh, what a wonderful employee I can be! And when I got

that back, he said, you'd better take all of that off there. You'd better not show that your involved with the Women's Center because the people who will be looking at your resume and interviewing you are going to be white middle-aged males who do not have a positive concept of that. It's going to be a negative and you would be better off if you said you sat home and watched soap operas for ten years than to have that on there. So I graduated and I did not want to change my resume. I was proud of it. But I couldn't go out and bring it. I wanted to bring it to three CPA firms that were in Ishpeming. So for about three weeks, I was home just licking my wounds and be figuring out what I would do with it.

JR: Now your degree wasn't accounting?

NG: Yes. I major accounting. So and then as the life goes, it was so wonderful for me, the day I decided to just leave my resume the way it was and brought it to these three CPA firms. The one was a person I have the owner of the CPA firm had gone same church I did and had known me for sometime and called me, was calling me as I drove in my driveway and came home and asked me coming for an interview. And I was hired there and I had 25 years. I had wonderful time working there. Good experience much more than I thought was going to do. And he was curious about my experiences and the things I had on my resume and sometimes in manager meetings, he would pull out the word assertiveness and I could tell the way he was using it, that he was mixing it up with aggressiveness, you know, many people do. Many people think if you are an assertive woman that you are more aggressive. And the definitions of being passive and aggressive and assertive, once you learn them, you can be very assertive without being aggressive. So, but he did see that as a good thing. And he saw that it was great management skill and I'd have to tone him back and say, "Well, being assertive means this and if it were me, this is how I would handle it." And he grew to value that very much. It was a great...I used all those skills but as I worked with these manager meetings, I was also very maternal. Very nurturing and would think of my own children and their careers as I worked at these young managers.

JR: Well. And you were also combining or helping them realized the two could go together. You and I have talked that being a homemaker you developed valuable skills and the nurturing part of managing children and a home can carry over into a positive in your business work.

NG: It was how I figured it out how to handle difficult situations. I would say of this is my son in the situation that work. How would I wish that their supervisors would handle it. So yes, that did and also with the organizational skills that I had to develop over the years to run my home, raise my family, caring for family members who had health issues, I helped people over the years. So I read a wonderful book on time management and prioritizing, was involved in many of workshops I took also and that was how I was able to transfer those skills then to being a good employee also. Had good organization skills and very responsible and found I could do it all. It was fun.

JR: Excellent. I want you to move on ahead but you've mentioned so many of the different classes and works. Do you remember any of the key leaders or does anybody stand out?

NG: I have lists of them. I still have my materials.

JR: Really? I noticed that you read the mission there and I'm eager to see that. I haven't seen the printed. If you could, because we've interviewed some but I'm also looking to follow up...

NG: And I don't think I brought those with me today. So I will get them to you. But I brought with me, I had been interviewed, this was in February of 1983. An interview for a local newsletter, someplace I don't remember. But just reading at over and I went, "Wow", it's just what I have said today already is what I said then. But, I guess that's kind of my story. I met so many peoples with diverse backgrounds. Being born and raised in Negaunee and Ishpeming. That was eye-opening for me also, that was, and the acceptance then. There were women with all different backgrounds and all different goals of where they wanted to go and what...you know, at times people could be a little bit judgmental about where is that fine line of are you being passive or are you being assertive. You know, my level of comfort learning how to be assertive from somebody who had never even know with knew what the word meant. I was passive. So it was baby steps for me. And I had great pride in each step that I took. And learned how to...it came natural then. But that was I guess, something that still carries over. And looking at the children I raised, I raised two sons and a daughter. And my daughter is a great example of I think, an assertive women, she's a career person. She's chosen to not be married and doesn't have children, lives in a big city and I'm very, very proud of her and she has made some different choices than I have but I think she's happy. And I have two sons who are very, very good to their partners. And that makes me more proud. Very, very supportive. My husband now

was very supportive all along. Met me at this, in the middle of all this growth. Met me in the middle of all my excitement and we were just friends at the time. So we would talk and talk and talk...

JR: Did you feel he was an exception to the role to your experience in terms of man supporting this kind of growth in his wife or friend?

NG: Well I guess, he had very old-fashioned values, he can promote very conservative family and had kind of gone along those lines himself. When he met me, I think some of my thinking was radical too...but he also know me as a very gentle and kind and generous person. He knew that I was intelligent enough to run my life and make my decisions. So as we then became involved, it was always... I never wanted to give the impression I was selling out and becoming dependent, giving up some of my hard won independence. But I think it made him very comfortable of my being the mother to his daughter and him having a daughter changed him great deal to a person who maybe hasn't thought about being a feminist or equality, a man who has a daughter he loves becomes a feminist and...

JR: I like that story because he's sort of in between someone that couldn't make the transition. We've talked in some of the other interviews of how difficult it was for men whose cultural background was the man's role is and the women's role, even those who were open-minded had a hard time adjusting to that.

NG: Yes. It was a huge change. And some of the literature I was looking through this morning in my files at the time at the Women's Center first opened was, I think, one of their big projects was helping women to get hired in Cleveland-Cliffs mining company, the mines in the area. The best paying jobs in the area, and they were just starting to hire their first women in the mines. And one of the articles I have here is because one of first things that happened is some of the men there drilled a peep-hole into the women's shower room. And the women had to file complaints and go through the channels to get that corrected, and the attitude was, "You are taking jobs away from men. Men who are supporting families and need these jobs and the women shouldn't have them." So that was all brand-new and starting and it didn't go easily for those women to...

JR: Was there a movie with that theme, *North Country* or something...which showed... you mentioned them...

NG: Yes, there was. It was in the Minnesota mines.

JR: Yes.

NG: And yes, yes it was. I asked my husband at the time, cause he was engineer in mines and worked in mines, and asked him, "Did you see this and was this a real experience, and the attitude?" And yeah, it was.

JR: And well, certainly not agreeing with it, it was understandable in the sense that and you know, it wasn't on the radar that hey, there may be a woman who's having to support her family.

NG: Exactly. And the idea that women might be able to support a family without the man was very frightening, cause so many women stuck in difficult situations, only because they couldn't afford to support the family the way they thought they should...it was a lot of power and control over them when they had the better jobs.

JR: Now, were you still involved as they transition from Northern to the church and then other...?

NG: Yes.

JR: How did you view that? Because I know, it was challenging financially but...

NG: See, as I said earlier, I became so involved with this small part of the Women's Center. I did sit on their board for one year and that was in 1983 and I found I don't enjoy that part of any organization. I love the democratic process that everybody has the opportunity to give their opinion, give their ideas, you filter through it all, you battle it all out and you come out with the best decisions you can as a board. I was so impatient and I just didn't enjoy that all and I came to the conclusion that I would rather be a worker-bee. Even if it wasn't my first choice of the decisions they made, I couldn't stand sitting in those meetings or the church board or any of those others it, wasn't my cup of tea. So I admire so greatly all the big issues and all the big things they had to handle, funding for the center to keep the center going those one of them. And as that happened, at the end of my involvement with the Women's Center, my husband and I volunteered that their bingo games to help raise money and that was a big deal for my husband to

represent publicly, the Women's Center. You know, and he was proud of it and I was so proud of him that he did it. So, but I didn't then continue. Once I got my career going and it turned into, it started out to be a part time job, it turned into to a great big job. And I loved it and I worked long hours and I didn't have anything left to give them _____. [Speaking over each other]

JR: You're had to prioritize again.

NG: Yes I did, yes.

JR: The skill stayed with you throughout. One of the things that's come up in many interviews is the value or the importance of reaffirming all that's happened over the last, what, about 40 years for women. Because perhaps your daughter maybe take it for grant is too strong term but they don't realize what it took to break those barriers... what's your sense of that from your experience? Do you think we need to keep revisiting these issues?

NG: Absolutely. I do. And I think that...how would they know, how would they know they weren't there, they wouldn't know and I guess when I...as I was going through this wondering about, how much about all of this my kids really know about me. Because they were little and I was just there making sure everything was running well. So I think that is a wonderful thing too because I attend I think as I was going through this material thinking maybe now is the time, I've been trying to dispose of this. I have a table in my living room with a lot of files full of newspaper clippings and paperwork that I have decided to dispose of many times and my husband laughs, cause I'll sit on the floor in living room through a long winter blizzard and take everything else and throw this away and I just go through one more time. And I can't throw away, I just, it was such an important thing and it was good to remind me now, so I still get into situations in my life where I think I can be sitting and fretting and stewing and I am not using some skills that I definitely have and not taking control of some situations that I can. So why would dispose of these?

JR: And this is a real aside, but I'm involved for the group doing memoirs now. And we will be giving you a copy of this. But you might want to put that on paper for your children because we find people are interested in those things, particularly family. But and I have questions about my own family that I wished I had asked. Never knew to ask at that point. But this is excellent. The Women's Center now from interviews, again, I'm not actively involved... is having to focus on

survival, is probably too strong word, but the financial issues don't go away. The mission has then had to retract a little. But if you were looking ahead personally from your experience what would you hope for the Women's Center? Where do you feel the strength were? It's kind of obvious from what you said but...

NG: Right, yeah. I guess I wonder how many people who went through the Women's Center and the workshops and what they have to offer had the same experience I did. And if so, I mean, for me, I just think that I would be away to make better communities, better families, better employees. It's just such a great way to help people. So I guess I am just totally biased about that I think. It's a teaching people such valuable skills and helping us to deal with life in such healthy ways. And raise children who are aware of healthy ways to deal with live and even then, we certainly had our experiences too with not everything is perfect all the time and you have your trials and tribulations and your heart-breaks, but the difference between the person that I became after all this and person I was before was so big. So I guess I'm just totally biased that way, but I also enjoyed all of their the benefits of their hard work of the women being accepted and respected, women moving into different job markets. And the legislature changing in such a big way. So I don't know how to answer.

JR: Well, you are by example a good answer and somebody pointed out to me. We were in April of 2014 that equal pay is still an issue and it's being discussed as promoting more legislation or adding on or changing. So the issues are not going to go away. And we need to keep in touch with those.

NG: And money issues are worse than ever, government at every level, our local level our roads are falling apart, I'm wondering how. How are they going to come up with all the money they need for all the services, all the programs. So that's going to be a challenge.

JR: It is an issue. Norma, we've touched on a lot of things, but is there anything we've overlooked that you'd like to comment on either on your personal experience or about the women's movement?

NG: I guess maybe just in closing, one of the workshops that I took when we started was dealing with careers and expanding horizons and so on, we did some, a career exploration kind of work. And I was mortified, my highest scores came back as executive housekeeper. And I

looked...and I was in the room full of very professional women, I was so embarrassed by. But it took me time to value that. That was all I knew. I have never had any experience with education or with employment or anything else, I worked as a bank teller other than being a parent, so I guess the idea of valuing who we are. That self-acceptance and taking those skills and not being afraid to go, having confidence to add on to that. I guess I liked feeling like I represented a population of women who were trying to just be happy and fulfilled while we're just managing our lives. We're managing responsibilities, family's hopefully healthy relationships and aging parents but all those skills that we used then, that we learned then when they were for personal reasons or for professional reasons, whatever. Just valuable.

JR: Carried over, absolutely. And I like your comments you had to learn that. That was something that could be valued and you were not alone. I mean, most women didn't realized that they were doing something pretty special to keep the roof on the house. Thank you very much for your comment. This has been wonderful and you are a model of what the Women's Center is all about. And I'm putting words in your mouth but it sounds like they made a total different in your life having that contact directed you in ways you might not have been explored. So thank you again.

NG: Thank you.

JR: _____ this...are we off?

END OF INTERVIEW