

Title: Interview with Rosa Dittims

No Date Given

Location: Marquette, Michigan

Women's Center in Marquette

## START OF INTERVIEW

Jane Ryan (JR): Good Morning. I'm Jane Ryan and I'm the interviewer for a group of women who are giving us their perspective on the development of the Women's Center in Marquette, Michigan and the role they have played in its ongoing development. Today, Rosa Dittims is with us and she will explain she's rather new to the Women's Center, but has a good ongoing perspective on it. And she will explain her own personal background and what drew her to the Women's Center and then the role she's currently playing. Welcome, Rosa.

Rosa Dittims (RD): Thank you. Do you want me start with my personal background thing?

JR: Yes.

RD: Ok. I was born and raised in Wausau, Wisconsin and then when I went to college, I went to, they have University of Wisconsin Milwaukee and got a degree, bachelor's degree in Special Education, and taught school for four years and four or five years. During that time I met and married my husband John Dittims who is a physician and part of my work was to put him through medical school. After that, we went to Bremerton, Washington where he was the navy for two years and then was time for him to look for a practice and we, he settled on Marquette. And so that's how I happened to get to Marquette. I, we had two children that I raised and when they were in... did not work, was a homemaker during that time. When they were in high school, I decided that I needed something else to do with my life. So I went back to school to Northern Michigan University actually and took the credits, the classes that I needed to take in order to sit for the CPA exam. And so I did sit for the CPA exam passed it and worked as CPA in Sarah Davis's office for 10 years, I think.

JR: That was that a law office? Or accounting office?

RD: Accounting office. CPA. I started out as working employee and ended up becoming partner with her and John Neal. Guess that's pretty much my background in 1999, my husband retired and I also did. And so...at that time I was not involved in...particular any women's organizations or... how should I say, non-profitable charitable type of organizations. Do you want me to go on from here in that way?

JR: Sure. How that edged into being aware?

RD: How that edged into. Ok. Actually I was a part of an investment club in which several the people that are known the board of Women's Center... Well, members were part of this investment club. And I think that's how I got to know them really was in this that particular club.

At any rate, there at one time Pat Micklow and I didn't know, I really, truly have to say that, I had no almost no knowledge of the Women's Center at that time. I was familiar with Harbor House. I had been involved in a few organizations that had taken up donations for Harbor House. But as far as the Women's Center was concerned and any of their other projects, I was not at all and have no knowledge at all. Pat Micklow called at me often asked me if I would consider being on the board of the directors. Because they had their granters had recommended that they have somebody CPA, if they could, on their board. And so, I think I would specifically asked because of my background in accounting.

JR: Skill?

RD: And so at that time I was kind of at loose hands because our investment club had disbanded it and I was treasurer for another organization that, you know, light term, head well, run out, somewhere else was doing it. So I said, "Yes, I would be happy to do that." She warned me that it would be very time-consuming project. I have to say that it was far more time consuming and far more stressful. Then she had indicated I think that...how shall I say it? I think that the board members are extremely dedicated and extremely good. I just I've never been on a board that has been that much hands on and right down to scrubbing floors and whatever. It's just amazing. And I, of course, as part of board, I got to know little bit about more about the Women's Center. And felt like it probably has been most rewarding thing I've ever done. Even though it's stressful, difficult.

JR: So you felt a personal connection from your work to the mission and what they are doing?

RD: Definitely, definately. And I think it's hard to get that message out into the community. I think that, in most cases, people don't really have any idea, any very thorough idea. What the Women's Center does. And it was definitely part of being and...real eye-opener for me.

JR: Picking up on that point, there are certain organizations that I think have to deal with that. They need to respect confidentiality to the max. And yet how do you make it personable? How do you get the community to understand the impact? And we are in the process of interviewing some of the recipients of the services who are willing to do that because those stories are amazing. They've turned lives...

RD: They really are. They are very amazing. Yes. Very definitely.

JR: So, is your role still primarily as the accountant for?

RD: I am the treasurer and the chairman. I'm the board treasurer. I'm the chairman of the finance committee. Yes, and a big part of my role is in the financial aspects of which really converses pretty much everything. Aspects of the whole situation. It's been a struggle to get funds to cover our costs. I know that lot of non-profit organizations go through that. And I know that people in the community are feel like they've been pressured to lot to contribute but I think that the one thing that the Women's Center has going for it, that a lot of other organizations that I contribute to is that most things that I contribute to our...like...should I? I don't know if I can mention this but like Marquette Symphony or something like that. Which I'm getting something out of. I may be contributing money, but it's benefitting me. I feel like my contributions to the Women's

Center are totally non-selfish whereas the other contributions that I make, even to on church. It's kind of selfish thing because you're benefiting from the building and the congregation and all that sort of thing. Whereas I feel like this is just totally unselfish thing to be involved in the Women's Center and to contribute to all.

JR: Well, and you are seeing the financial challenges which, as you said, many groups are going forward, dealing with. But do you feel there's a light at the end of the tunnel? There was a period in the history that we've heard about where grants and those sort of supports were there and really quite generous, it allowed them to expand their services and they've had to. The Women's Center had to retract and consolidate little more. What are you looking into the future? What are you hoping?

RD: That's really hard to say. Because everything is so iffy. You don't know grants could open up, granting today's... I mean, really basically. Most of our funds come from government grants. And so at the government grants, if they cut back on that, that really affects us. If they enlarge on the grants, then it's much better for us. So right now, we're managing to get along. And that's kind of all that I can stay as that right now, we're managing to get along, but it is difficult. It's difficult and it's little depressing. Because the future is so uncertain because you don't know what's going to happen with these government grants. There are times when the board feels like they are, I can't think of the word to use... when they are burnt out, yes, that's what I want to say. Because all of the fundraising that's required and the struggle to find donors. But I guess, I don't think I get anything to that, I guess I really have to say as that, we're doing alright, right now. Whether we will in the future or not, I mean, we're managing to pay our bills.

JR: And you're actively involved there are grant writing skills within staff and board or people constantly on the alert for grants that might be available or support.

RD: Yes. There are. There are board members we do have a person that we have hired that does help us with grant writing and has done, really a very good job and finding grants for us.

JR: Past interviewees have shared about the passion of the board and the things that you did, and yet you mentioned the word 'burn out' and at some point, you would hope that there would be funding so that a treasurer could be paid for time or some of these jobs that are done, I know there are managers.

RD: As the treasurer, I don't need to be paid for my time. I would just like to be able to have a smile on my face and think, oh, we are doing fine, you know?

JR: Where you have to take a more defensive. We need...

RD: We do have a finance manager. That does the...

JR: nitty-gritty.

RD: Yes. And gets the \_\_\_\_\_ together and everything. And we have had some, it's been up and down with our financial managers in terms of their have been able to handle things. But right now the one that we have right now, is doing very good job.

JR: Good. As I heard your background story, you and I are contemporaries and follow of the more traditional roles but we're able, we're fortunate enough to be that we get back into the work scene, back to school, do these things. How do you view the mission and the stage in terms of supporting women's efforts to break the glass ceiling and do some of these things? Is that part of your dedication to this? The role that the Women's Center plays in that or as I understand other parts of the mission obviously having Harbor House there to help women who've been and men who've been victimized in some way.

RD: I... certainly the philosophy of the board is that they would like to, that they are feminist, should I say and they support, certainly support, women being more, having a greater role in society and being in more powerful positions and so on. But I think as far as the Women's Center right now is concerned, that is something that we had to put on the back burner, because that there's so much that needs to be done right now and so much of our funds that have to go to actually supporting victim survivors of sexual and domestic violence. So...

JR: That would be the priority now.

RD: Yes. That's the priority right now. Yes.

JR: Okay, and that's good from a historic perspective to know that you've had to prioritize given limited funds because again, historically these interviews have revealed how much they did to educate women, and to help them get into non-traditional roles or go back to school, or...

RD: Right. Yes, yes. And I understand that and I think it kind of started out that way at when I was at the university, Women's Center started out that way. And certainly, that has been part of their... what have done in the past and course we would like to be able to do continue on that role. Because I think right now that particularly young people have become relatively confident or kind of thinking that things are this way...

JR: Taking it for granted.

RD: Yes. Taking it for granted what some of the people in the Women's Center in the past and others have worked very hard to achieve for women. And I think that's too bad. Because you have no guarantee that things are going to continue the same...or not even continue the same.

JR: And I think that's what related to the passion you've described from the Founding Mothers. Is they don't want to see that lost? It's a holding action, maybe. But the...and that's why, from my perspective over time doing these interviews, it's wonderful to see what you call new blood somebody like yourself, entering and helping and helping people move on. Is there an effort to recruit younger people to the board? Is that a hard thing to do? Do you know?

RD: Yes. There is an effort, but is a difficult thing to do. Young people, I think that young people have just become complacent and they don't, I mean I shouldn't probably be saying that, but I'm thinking just in terms of my children, they're busy doing other things and of course...

JR: And they don't remember that it was any different. Because that wasn't a part of their life. They saw their mother get her ed and go on and return for the workforce...

RD: Yes. Yes. Right. So, it's difficult to get young people and still difficult to get them interested. Not only involved but also interested.

JR: So that would have to be part of the current mission to be doing that.

RD: Yes, yes, yes.

JR: Rosa, is there we've touched base on a lot of the issues, is there anything you'd like to particularly share in terms of your own experience or you've done a lot of that? Have we overlooked anything?

RD: I don't think anything else other than the fact that how impressed I am with the board of directors and what they've done and also with the staff. There was a while when we were, they know our staff is not paid as well as we're like. And so we were trying to figure out some way that we could do a little something that would help them to connect little more with the board, so we started having these brown-bag lunches, and where the staff got together and board members, anybody, that any board members wanted to come, staffs that want to come would come and get together and bring their own lunches so on and we got some outside people and talk to the...to talk to other various other programs that we will be able that they might be able to make use of...

JR: So are the networking principle\_\_\_?

RD: Yes. And I was, of course I had really had that much contact with the rest of, with the staff other than the director. And I was very, very impressed with the staff. That's still the other thing that I could say is, at how dedicated they were to the mission.

JR: And I've learned to the interviews that some of them have come through the ranks, they've seen them, the women's center from different perspectives and that's excellent. Well, thank you very much for sharing and we hope we can look into the future and continue these interviews and see the progress that's been made. But right now, the holding action seems to be the main effort.

RD: Yes.

JR: Thanks, Rosa.

Rd: Okay, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

