

Interviewer's Comments

The interview took place in the apartment of Heidi Kurz. It is a quiet area even though a lot of college students live in the area. The apartment was very warm with much of the decor typical of a college home.

Heidi Kurz is 21 years of age and seems to have great ambitions for her life. She told me before the interview that she would rather just talk about social work and to steer away from family background and matters pertaining to this area.

(The interview went well probably because I have known Heidi for a few years now. Although she seems to know what she is talking about and what she wants to say she has a little trouble expressing herself clearly. This made writing the transcript a little difficult and upon rereading it some of the passages are a little unclear.)

Heidi Kurz

Interview, 1988, interview with Heidi Kurz, 1988, 1988-89

1. Youth in Grand Ledge

schooling, neighborhood, recreation

2. University choice

reasons for choosing NMLU, was it tough?

3. Interest in Social Work

Harbor House, Parent Aid

4. Training for Social Work

classes, practical experience, dealing with people you work with

5. Future plans

type of career, continue education

Q. Did you always share your time with her?

A. Oh, sure. In fact, I was with her until 1971.

Wordlist for interview with Heidi Kurz on 2-2-89

Q. How long did you live with her? I was born in Lansing, Michigan.

Grand Ledge, MI. I was born in Grand Ledge, Michigan. I was born in

Marquette, MI. I was born in Marquette, Michigan. I was born in

Harbor House. I was born in Harbor House, Michigan. I was born in

Parent Aid. I was born in Parent Aid, Michigan. I was born in

Northern Michigan University. I was born in Northern Michigan University, Michigan. I was born in

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Q. Can you please state your name and age?

A. My name is Heidi Kurz and I was born 12/21/67.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. Grand Ledge, Michigan. It's about 6 miles west of Lansing, a really small town, smaller than Marquette. It was really close knit, a lot of my relatives were raised in that town.

Q. Was there more to do in Grand Ledge than there is in Marquette?

A. I would say Marquette has a different aspect because of the University here, but then Lansing had Michigan State too. No, I wouldn't say there was more.

Q. A lot of parties?

A. Yes. The same thing you do in every town. We went to games and parties and shopping. It was basically the same.

Q. What was your neighborhood like?

A. It was a lot of old houses, quiet with nice neighbors, really a residential area.

Q. Did you go to school in Grand Ledge?

A. Grand Ledge High with a small class of 300 to 400 students.

Q. How did you do in school?

A. It was a joke. I wanted to have a good time rather than study. I did poorly due to lack of effort.

Q. Did you participate in school activities?

A. I was in student council, a cheerleader, and I played powder-puff football.

Q. What was that like?

A. It was fun, it was fun. Only girls could play and we had guy

cheerleaders. It was a mock football scene, the girls with their big shoulder pad trying to exaggerate the opposite. The guys had big stuffed sweaters and everything, their make-up was outrageous. It was fun though, really fun.

Q. So you graduated on time didn't you?

A. Yes.

Q. So you decided to come to Northern. Why?

A. It was far away. I wanted to get away from Grand Ledge. New scenery, I wanted a change. I thought it would be a pretty good idea to venture out on my own.

Q. What did your parents think about you going so far away?

A. They loved it. They thought it was a good idea. Neither of my brothers went.

Q. You have two brothers?

A. Two older brothers. They just thought it was the best thing for me.

Q. Why?

A. Well the independence, the self-assertiveness, self-reliance, and to take care of things on my own.

Q. Did you miss them a lot?

A. Not really. I think when you're depressed or got a really shitty grade or something then I think I got more homesick then. But if I was having fun and doing really good I had other things to occupy my mind.

Q. So you really didn't go home a lot?

A. I did my freshman year, there was always the opportunity so I

did. But I didn't always go home, I went downstate a lot.

Q. Do you think your study habits changed a lot?

A. Drastically. I didn't have any in high school so I guess I just developed them.

Q. What did you do different?

A. I studied. I read my material and I ^{id} payed attention, I went to class. Just very basic.

Q. So you wanted to learn.

A. Yeah, I came up here for a purpose, to get an education.

Q. What did you want to major in?

A. Social work, I knew that right from the beginning.

Q. How?

A. How. I wanted to interact with people. I didn't want to just be pushing paper and taking orders from someone else. I didn't want someone else telling me what to do, I wanted to make decisions on my own. I wanted to benefit other people, help them out. That's the most important thing to me, to make a difference in someone else's life.

Q. Did you have any prior experience in social work before you came up here?

A. No. Not before I came up.

Q. How about now, what are you doing now?

A. I'm currently involved in a couple things. I do volunteer work at Harbor House which is a domestic violence shelter for battered wives and their children. I'm also a volunteer at Parent Aid which is when you be a friend to a person who has a child and they are at high risk for potentially abusing

their child or they already have. You're there for them in a time of crisis so they have someone to support them. They can call you up instead of abusing their child. They realize how they're going to do it and they'll call instead of doing it.

Q. You don't have a kid so is it really hard for you to relate?

A. Yeah it really is. I have one now and she has a little girl and shes talking about her teething, it is really irritating I suppose and she can't sleep and her baby wakes her up and her baby is just crabby all the time. I can't even imagine that. So I think it is more difficult. If I had a child then I think I could relate. But right now I can't, but I'm mostly there for her not her baby.

Q. Do you just help her with her decisions or do you make them for her?

A. No, her decisions are up to her. If she wants my advice I'll give it to her. I'm just basically a guide. Right now she hasn't done anything bad. She's at a high risk and she just needs someone, she's on a real fine line if you will, to just keep her on the line without stepping over it. She's doing really well.

Q. Do you feel you're doing really well?

A. It's frustrating at times, reall frustrating. I've just gotten started in it so we don't have a trust relationship. We're trying to get to know eachother right now, seeing what each other is all about.

Q. Harbor House, you said it was for battered women. What else?

Is that all they do?

A. Basically anyone in a domestic violence situation. We have taken in girls that have had very bad foster family experience and have nowhere else to go. We help women with their child care. A lot of people have problems because our society doesn't teach parenting skills so you're left to it on you're own. We have with that counseling and crisis calls, a 24-hour crisis line. So you don't have to come in if you're in a domestic violence situation, you can just call and receive support over the phone, legal advice, and child care help. Also we provide or refer them to other agencies if they need it. It's a good thing.

Q. Do you think there should be a Harbor House for men?

A. Yeah, definitely. We have taken in men before. It is just as devastatig for a man to be battered as is a woman because women are finally receiving some recognition and some support for it where men, they receive no support for getting battered. There is no emotional support, legal, anything, and they're really left up to their own. Many men feel they have this macho dominant thing they want to live up to and it's really nonsense but I suppose it would be really hard for a man to say my wife beats me up. I could see how it would be really hard.

Q. You had no prior experience going into social work. Do you think your classes at Northern helped you out?

A. So far right now, no. Well I just got started into my major taking classes for social work. One of the classes I've had

though, Psychology of Sex Roles, has been really helpful to help me realize that's just what they are, sex roles. They are not innate, they're learned and trying to teach the women in my Parent Aid that that's what they are and you're not rigidly stuck in them. You can change.

Q. When you graduate where do you plan and what do you plan to do?

A. I'm not really sure where I'm gonna go yet. I plan to do the volunteer work that I do now but get paid for it. I would like to set up a domestic violence shelter myself and direct it. There are just endless things I would like to do. I would like to get on a rape crisis line and learn more about that.

Q. Do you think the government provides enough money for the programs?

A. No way.

Q. From experience can you say that?

A. Yeah, I really can. Well it's all politics trying to get money from them. Everyone has what they think is the best place for the money to go, everyone's priorities are different. Whereas I think my priorities should be everyone elses but that's my beliefs that more money should be put into it. There are so many other areas also like the homeless, AIDS, and everything else, everything needs money. I think a lot more money and cooperation should be given.

Q. Do you think maybe we should just educate the public?

A. Yes, definitely. We should start out with educating the very

young, like in kindergarten, teaching them on their level of understanding. Teach them to disregard sex roles, things are not masculine or feminine. Just to be a boy you don't have to go around beating up other little boys and let little girls do things that little girls aren't supposed to do. Let little boys play with dolls and get some nurturing in. That should start really young along with teaching them about sex. There are so many people who don't have the basic understanding of what happens. We definitely need to redo our school system and what we teach our children.

Q. What are your plans for this summer?

A. I'm just going to work on campus like I do now, still do my Parent Aid, still work at the Harbor House and I want to get more involved with that, do some of my own programs there, and I'm going to sell Mary Kay products, and depending on my schedule join the Woman's Center rape crisis line.

Q. That's a lot of things, do you feel that you give equal shares to every group that you're in?

A. Well so far I haven't done two at one time. This semester my schedule didn't allow a lot of time at Harbor House and I just got started with Parent Aid so I don't know how much time, but I'd like to fit it all in, I really would.

Q. Have you seen any direct benefits from your volunteer work so far?

A. Yes I have. I've seen a lot of women come into Harbor House that have left their husbands and are starting to rely on themselves. Most of the women that come in are economically

dependent on their husbands and they usually think they cannot work or support themselves. We've helped a lot of women get jobs, support themselves, and have a better self esteem. When they come in they've hit rock bottom, they have nothing, everything about them is just shattered and to realize they don't deserve to be beaten is one good thing. I've seen very positive results.

Q. Marquette is not a large town but do you get a lot of women coming into your center?

A. Yes, a lot. I think it hits home more. When I first started I looked into the files and just by the addresses there are people on our street from the women that have come in and have been beaten. There's a lot of clients that come in more than once. They come in several times. I think we need another shelter or an extension of it and we should provide more services.

Q. Does it scare you that they keep coming back? I mean obviously they are with the same person.

A. A lot of times though they find someone new who treats them just as bad. Scare me, well I kind of feel let down. You try to do the best you can to help them make their own decisions. It's discouraging. I'd be more scared for them.

Q. What would be your next step in schooling after you graduate?

A. I really don't know. You mean like go on and get my masters. I don't know right now. At first I thought I wanted to, now I want to take time off and go back to that later on and pursue a couple of areas like domestic violence and child

abuse. Something I could be a little more concentrated in and study like that. Right now I'm unsure.

Q. Does any of your personal or religious beliefs get in the way of what you have to do?

A. Yes. Well at the Harbor House I just don't get how we male bash at the place a lot because that's all that comes in is women and we get a very negative view of men a lot and you have to get out of there and come to grips. I don't understand how these men feel they have the right to do this and that goes against my moral beliefs. It's frustrating that way so I suppose it does get in the way and blind you a lot of times. You do become aware and more tolerable of things. I think you have to be flexible about it. You got to understand why and what you can do about it to change it.

Q. Do you think for a social worker you have more impact in a smaller town than if you moved to a bigger town?

A. I don't know. That's really hard to say because everyone knows everything it makes it harder. The people, your family, your friends are really against you finding shelter. These women come from families where marriage is it so I think there is less receptiveness in a smaller town whereas in a bigger town you have a greater diversity, there are all kinds of people in a bigger town. They are a little bit more accepting in a bigger town because you've seen a little bit more of everything. Small towns are limited in scope.

Q. So you think the family might hurt someone who needs help even though they don't mean to?

A. Yeah. Well in their minds they feel they're doing the best thing, they really do. You got married and that's it, you stick with that man until death do you part and nothing else interferes. A lot of times friends and family will convince you that the woman provoked this and if you'd do this and that right and don't piss him off none of this would happen. So they put the blame on the victim I think in a small community where everyone knows everyone else. She didn't have dinner ready when he came home, it's not her fault.

Q. What was she supposed to do?

Q. Do you see people on the street that you have to deal with?

A. Yes. You mean that I've worked with? Yes. That's hard.

Q. How do you deal with it? Do you treat them different?

A. No. I'm just friendly to them like I would be to anyone else that I knew. You're the same way to them. There has been a couple of times when I've seen women I've worked with come into work and I've seen all those bruises and I want to ask them: How ya doing? Do you need to talk? But you're usually not in a place where you can say that. You want to protect their privacy and it's usually humiliating enough to go out with bruises like that. They'll deny it anyway so you just don't want to alienate them by pointing it out in a public place. I see a lot of people that I work with though.

Q. You don't go out and look for people they have to come to you right?

A. Yes, that's the only way it works. You cannot grab a woman out of her home and say you're not being treated right let's

help you. They've got to realize it on their own and say I can't live like this anymore. Usually they'll be battered for years and years or something will just snap and they cannot take it anymore. They usually hit rock bottom before they come in and they usually go back the first time after they've stayed a week or two. They go right back to their husbands. Usually it will take them two or three more times before they make a decision on counseling or whatever it may be.

Q. What would be your advice to somebody who wants to get into social work?

A. I think you got to have a high level of tolerance, you have to know you'll be frustrated. You can't have an idealistic unrealistic view of what happens out there. One of my girlfriends, she did and she says, "Oh that can't really happen." But it does. You have to really care for people and care for what happens to them and you want to try to make a better life for someone. Don't have any high expectations. It's self-rewarding and I want to make a difference in someone else's life and help them benefit themselves but I just get personal satisfaction out of it, even if I come home from the House and even if I have a real crummy night that's just one more night I tried to help. It's a good feeling. Frustrating but good.

Q. Do you think there should be certain standards for schooling for those people who come into social work?

A. I think we have a pretty good system right now. I really

haven't started that much into it yet so I don't think I could make a pretty good statement. Although with the field placement you have to do I think that will give you some experience so you're not going into it blind after 4 to 5 years of school, or getting your degree and getting thrown to the wolves. I think it's good to get some experience so you know what you're going to do. Not every part of social work is gruesome like Harbor House or child abuse, you can go into adoption, high school counseling, there are so many things you can do with it.

Q. Anybody in particular who made a special impact?

A. No. Nothing stands out. When I was trying to figure out where I wanted to go to school and what I was going to do, just helping people was all I could see.

Q. Are you planning anything in the immediate future, like rallies?

A. One weekend (April 7-9) there is a march in Washington D.C. for Pro-Choice but I haven't made up my mind whether I'm going to go or not. I'd like to go.

Q. Is that something you'd like to get involved in, Pro-Choice?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you think not having that is really discriminatory towards women?

A. Yes, definitely. We've got people telling women what they can do with their bodies and what they can't. How would you feel if someone told you you can't do that. Sorry it's your body but you can't do that.

Q. Is Harbor House sponsoring this?

A. I don't want to say Harbor House is backing it because not everyone there has the same view. It's a matter of personal opinion. I don't want to speak for everyone elses views. I can only speak for myself. For ERA they are together but Pro-Choice is a matter of opinion.

Q. Have a nice time at your rally and thank you for your time.