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Stalter, Ann interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

Donna M. Curry

Wright State University - Main Campus, donna.curry@wright.edu

Carol Holdcraft

Wright State University - Main Campus

Ann M. Stalter

Wright State University - Main Campus, ann.stalter@wright.edu

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

AUGUST 7, 2006

DONNA MILES-CURRY: And this is August the seventh, two thousand six. This is another interview as part of the Wright State University Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. Today we will be interviewing Ann Stalter as part of that project. Present also is Stacy Baldwin, research assistant and I, myself the interviewer is Donna Miles-Curry. And we're going to start off. Thank you so much Ann you can talk so that they can say hello to you.

ANN STALTER: You're welcome. Thank you for having me.

DMC: Okay, Ann, let's just start off and give us a little about your personal background and a little bit about yourself and how you happened to come to Wright State.

AS: Oh, that's interesting. Um, I am a nineteen eighty-three grad with my undergraduate degree. My bachelor's degree was then in December of nineteen eighty-three and I am also, have a master's degree from Wright State and I graduated from that, I believe, in nineteen ninety-four but I'm not positive of that date. I actually came to Wright State--.

STACEY BALDWIN: It's not moving.

DMC: No. We're going to start all over.

AS: Good.

DMC: Okay, we'll start on program three. Okay. This is August the seventh, two thousand six. This is another taping of an interview as part of the Oral History Project for the College of Nursing/Health, Wright State University on Miami Valley. This interview is taking place in a conference room here at, on campus in Dayton, Ohio. I am Donna Miles-Curry and accompanying me for this interview is also Stacy Baldwin, research assistant and we are interviewing Ann Stalter. So Ann, if you just start it again we've had a slow start to get our

technology working. Tell us a little bit about your personal background and how you came to Wright State.

AS: I'm a nineteen eighty-three grad, that was my undergraduate degree and I earned my master's degree, I believe, in nineteen ninety-four. I came to Wright State because it was a matter of convenience [sic]. I was a graduate of Fairfield High School in Fairborn, Ohio. Grew up right down the road here right off of Colonel Glenn Highway. My earliest memories of Wright State is from about the time I was five years old. There was absolutely nothing between my house and Zink Road except for Wright State, which was comprised of four buildings. Zink Road was a landmark for me because the Zink family owned most of the land that was here and my brothers and father helped to bail the hay that came off of the land here.

DMC: Oh wow.

AS: So, if you ever want to know more stories about that Mike Zink is Director here and Carol, Carol Zink I don't remember her last name, I believe it's Weber now, works upstairs in this building and it was her father and uncle that farmed the land here.

DMC: Interesting.

AS: Very interesting. Part of their relationship to the state with the land was they built the Neuman Center out here as a means of having the students have access to spiritual guidance. And they were a strong German, Catholic family as was I. Both of our father's were, Otto Zink was the developer of the small neighborhood that I grew up in and he and my father were schoolteachers in Beavercreek and they were very strong advocates of education. So, that kind of guided me in this area. When my mother sought here [sic] degree, she earned a degree here and I believe it was late seventies by the time she finished and she started when I was three years old. I was born in nineteen sixty-one which was the time that this was established. And then she was, I was in the sixth grade before my mother graduated with her bachelor's degree. She was very

adamant about the fact that I complete my degree before I got married and had my children and I did that straight out of high school, ten days after I graduated from high school I came here and took my first English class.

DMC: Great.

AS: And I went straight through but I believe it took me four and a half years but I'm not positive. If I did my math I would say that that's true.

DMC: What was it like when you were a student here?

AS: I would use the word, impersonal; I mean the word impersonal would come to my mind. I felt very isolated. Now mind you some of that is being adolescent coming to a commuter school but most of it was because there was no campus life here. We came, parked our cars, walked to class, and my big decision of the day was it faster to walk down Colonel Glenn Highway to class or to park, if I had to go to K lot to park, and walk up the hill because I don't even think they had a shuttle. So that was usually my big decision of the day. So, that's what I would say. The campus life consisted of Allyn Hall where there was [sic] mailboxes. There was no such thing as e-mail back then, there were these mailboxes and the kids would hang out in Allyn hall and go get their mail and it was usually some sort of stuff of some sort, some sort of flyer and there was usually nothing else to do. (Laughter)

DMC: So what were your classes like?

AS: The first class that I remember ever being in I was a student in high school when I came here with my boyfriend and we went to 101 Fawcett. And when we were in 101 Fawcett it just seemed like a huge room. Now that's out of the eyes of a seventeen year old having been in a classroom with twenty-five to thirty people. And so I was just amazed at how big it was. But then once I started school the one that I remember the most as a freshman was an English class and I knew then I certainly did not want to be an English major. That's all I could tell you. I

remember writing an argumentative paper to support, the argument was whether I should be allowed to drive the family car to the university and it was just that paper that I was granted permission to drive on a daily basis to the university because I was learning that walking down Colonel Glenn Highway was not ideal.

DMC: Amazing. When you got into the nursing program what do you remember, anything you remember about the nursing class?

AS: There was a long wait between that freshman class, that very first freshman year to the classes. I remember a therapeutic communication course and there was a, there was no communication between nursing and the undergraduate. You know if you weren't in the College of Nursing, there was just nothing. You felt like I'm going to nursing school but you felt like you were lying. But when I took that first class I was working as a med assistant over at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in one of the, it was a medical, it was called WIC, it was an internal medicine clinic and I remember sharing, there was a diabetic nurse educator, and I remember sharing with her that I was taking this class and she said, "Oh, my gosh, you've got to be kidding. You're going to go learn how to talk to people. Can't you talk?" I mean it was that kind of an attitude. And what that represented to me was the community at large wasn't all that supportive of baccalaureate degrees. They were really struggling with that. And I was coming in on a cusp of these huge barriers. I can remember one time the television crew being out in the parking lot saying, you know, that we had lost our accreditation and that we were just a terrible School of Nursing. And so we were going into these classes not sure of our future at all and we had this really nice instructor. Dr. Holdcraft just came in the room and I'm hoping that she remembers this lady's name because I can't remember her name. She taught therapeutic communication and wellness to me. She was only here one quarter. She had been a very large woman who had lost a tremendous amount of weight and she went off to Texas. That's all I remember about her but she

was like a dynamic speaker, one of those inspirational types, just had a lot of energy, believed that we could do anything and be anything and it was that energy that allowed the majority of that cohort to overcome that barrier that we were so afraid that we would no future. Well, in the mean time people on the fourth floor of Allyn Hall were working very hard to establish a good name in the community.

DMC: Oh, good. So, any other particular challenges you remember that you faced as a student?

AS: Anxiety. That was key. Now whether or not that was because I was a young adult having never experienced having to be responsible for something or whether it was just feeling of this, our feet were not firmly planted. I don't know but I just remember a tremendous amount of anxiety.

DMC: Could you give us maybe some examples of situations were you had that anxiety?

AS: Yeah, turning in a nursing process paper for the first time not even knowing what one was. There was no template. There was nothing. I think the first one I did was fifty-two pages.

(Laughter) Luckman and Sorenson page, page, page. I just remember a learned each page.

DMC: What were those papers like? What did you do with them?

AS: What was the purpose?

DMC: Yeah, what was the nature of the assignment?

AS: Ordinarily we would have some sort of a clinical assignment where we would write a care plan, if you will, about the person's problems. Now, those had to be bio, social and spiritual domains, all domains addressed and every intervention and every possible problem they had had to be identified and discussed and evaluated to the nth degree.

CAROL HOLDCRAFT: They were fun weren't they?

AS: Well yeah except you never knew if you got it right. And there were things like oh; I couldn't find that in the book. I know repetition is an effective strategy for teaching and learning but I can't remember what book that's in and I can't remember what page number that's in and if I put the wrong thing am I going to get points off. Are they going to say I plagiarized? Are they going to fail me? It's was just all that nervous energy. And to write a paper like that, there were do data processors, there were no computers. I sat at a manual typewriter that didn't have any back eraser with it and to turn in a product that had white out or eraser marks on it, in my mind, was tacky. So you know it was just that constant ripping and tearing and staying up to get it right. And having done that you know until two or three in the morning sometimes and juggling part time jobs and then being fresh to go back to clinical or to go to class was just you know probably had something to do with the anxiety. (Laughter)

DMC: So what was your overall goal? What were trying to accomplish?

AS: I was trying to accomplish that four-year degree so that my mother would be happy and I could go get married. (Laughter)

DMC: Were you dating anyone at that particular time?

AS: Oh yes, I was. The same one that had brought me to classes here.

DMC: Oh, okay. Is this the person that you ended up marrying?

AS: No.

DMC: No, okay.

CH: He shall remain nameless.

DMC: Could you perhaps describe any of your interactions with faculty or did you say, did you ever get a chance to meet your dean?

AS: Um, interesting thing about that. One of the very first memories that I have, remember mine are childhood memories, my mother came to school here and I remember my

brothers bailing, hay in the fields and all of that but the phys ed building had been built and in that came an Olympic size pool that wasn't really Olympic size but everybody went anyway, you know it was that kind of thing. And I can remember before I even knew who she was Susan Praeger swimming in that pool. And Sharon Prim who is Sharon Prim-Spruill now went to school, came with me as childhood playmates and we went to nursing school together and we would swim and sit in the sauna and Susan would talk to us. We would just giggle so much because she was so different. She was just different to us. We'd never met anybody like her. So, whether she inspired us to come I have no idea. I don't know. I'd have to talk to Sharon about that and see if she remembers any conversations in particular.

DMC: Yeah, she was here in nineteen eighty I know.

AS: Yeah, that would be about right; as kids coming here to swim. Um, interesting, anyway, other memories about faculty--.

DMC: Faculty?

AS: The one that was so inspirational that really helped me get on path in the College of Nursing because it seemed like such a long journey to get to that first nursing class and by then most people you were in school with anatomy and all that you were getting a little tired of seeing them. You know but they were now going to be with you for another two years and that wasn't fun because the competition was starting. You know who was going to be better. Who was the best instructor to get and all of that stuff. And so, I finally felt very connected by Debbie Ulrich and Barb Jones. They were the two that really lead me through med surge, OB, and at the time gerontology. So those were real core nursing courses that helped me. Of course by my senior year I had had Susan and I had had Carol and those were people that you'll never forget. And just the fact that I still you know surround myself by them should have some clue as to how positive they are.

DMC: Any other observations about students, any other of your classmates?

AS: At the time?

DMC: At the time, in your undergraduate program.

AS: We were all just balls of energy that needed guidance and the problem with that guidance was that remember there had been this turmoil that had taken place and so, with the accreditation process and finding new leaders and all of that, that some of us were really, we were truly competitive to get certain instructors because we knew they were worth their salt and they were going to be there for us. And there was that sense of, did that person have enough clinical experience to be teaching us because out there in the community, remember they don't think baccalaureate people know a thing let alone can they do anything. And so that was the energy that I remember in the groups. And then there were five of us that had lived in that neighborhood and of the five of us three of us came to nursing school together. And going down the list each of us graduated six months apart from each other. So, I don't know what happened along the way but we started to become more independent.

DMC: Were you all from the same high school?

AS: All from the same elementary school, junior high and high school.

DMC: Amazing. That's a very special group.

AS: Yeah, we all ended up in some arena of community health. The focus here was always the whole lifelong learning thing and the whole take a step back and look at the whole picture and that was core to community and so we all ended up in some area of community. Sharon was in Hospice. Tammy was in OB for years but when St. E's closed she went to like a Brighter Futures kind of thing.

DMC: Any particular clinical memories that you would like to share with us?

AS: Um, one that I remember that really stuck with me and I'm not sure why it sticks with me so much but I was at Children's Medical Center and peds seems like an odd memory for me because there wasn't this go every day for six to eight hours to the clinical at Children's Medical Center. It seemed to me that there were several instructors' hands in the soup and we were going to a variety of places. Some of those places in peds, we went, Lois Fish, Fisher?

DMC: Fish.

AS: I remember her because she took us to the Miami Valley School. We went to Mon. Co.?

CH: Which is a developmental, disability registry.

AS: We went to Staywater. We went to, and a lot of it was observational. A lot of the experience was observational. We went to, what is now Montgomery County Developmental Center, and that was at Timbercrest. So we saw group home arrangements. We went to Yellow Springs and I don't remember who that person was but she must have been an adjunct person and she showed us the community approach to day care and the seniors. They had that Friends Community way back then. So, I remember that, I was kind of like working moms you mean you don't stay home and take care of your kids. That was like, that floored me but that was because I had been raised so traditionally. But in Children's Medical Center I was working in a unit and Mariann Lovell was my clinical instructor that day and there was a baby about oh maybe ten months old and was going to be having surgery. I don't know what kind of surgery and I've thought about that many times, what was that kids' problem but her nurse was so concerned about her being nutritionally prepared for surgery, for the healing process post after surgery. And I remember that lesson, well I hadn't fed that baby yet, well it was because I didn't know where the formula and the bottles were. Mariann assumed that I couldn't hold the baby and I was so anxious that it probably was coming across as if I wasn't very nurturing or very comfortable holding the

baby. But we got over that and that was really good. But then we came, for some reason we had a post conference on campus as opposed to at the hospital, not sure about that, my memories are real blurred. I don't remember all of them but I remember going to her office not because she had asked me to but I wanted to make sure she understood that I could hold that baby and that I was so concerned about that baby. And one thing that she said to me that just stuck in my head was "Ann, I know that you care about that baby, I'm concerned about do you understand the nursing implications of not feeding that baby" kind of thing. And we got into this you know, discussion about subjective judgment and that kind of thing and she said okay well, let's take this from a different perspective. Do you understand the difference between mothering and nursing? And I'm like okay, here comes the lesson and it was and she said, "The word is objectivity. You have to stay with the facts and the facts of the matter are you didn't feed the baby at the time that it needed to be done. Of course when I come into the room I'm going to think you don't know how to do it. That's my job to teach you to do it." And that was just so like interesting to me of how all that fit together that way but I can hold that baby and feed it. I just didn't feed it because I didn't know where the stuff was which I never used. I stocked it up for myself though so I knew where the stuff was. (Laughter)

DMC: Do you have any things that you would like to describe about interactions with the broader Wright State community outside the College of Nursing?

AS: No. It was impersonal. It was considered a commuter school. I lived very close. I never did campus wide. I didn't get it. And that's not a complaint, it's just where the university was in its development and it's evolution and I'm okay with that. But no, not really. The library was nice. The classrooms were nice. There wasn't anything that was, from an educational point of view, lacking at the time.

DMC: I think you shared quite a bit with us about your experiences with hospitals or agencies any other recollections of maybe the community institutions that you may have interacted with as a student?

AS: I think the majority of the hospitals were accepting of students in general. The whole idea that people had to learn somewhere but they were not accepting of us, the Wright State students. Here we came in the lab coats and that was different, the patches, that was different, the stethoscopes. I don't think, other schools of nursing must not used stethoscopes is all I could figure because we had these stethoscopes and who did we think we were? We couldn't even start an IV, oh, okay but you don't listen to breaths now. But it was just that constant back and forth feeling some of it was said, some of it was said out loud but it was that sense of you don't belong here.

DMC: Okay. So how do you feel like your experiences at Wright State have affected your career?

AS: Well, part of the time I felt like I worked the late shift but one thing I do know is they taught us to be leaders, they taught us to be optimistic [sic], they taught us not to be afraid of very little things because if you were going to be afraid of every little thing you weren't going to get anything accomplished. And so all of that anxiety that I had as a student, once I graduated I was able to use that energy in a productive way. So it was all about leadership. It was all about leadership.

DMC: Did you have that in your undergraduate program or your graduate program?

AS: Undergraduate, undergraduate program definitely. And you have to remember we saw, we saw our dean fall. We were not in the college yet, we were on the outside looking in and as freshman and sophomores and so we weren't sure what was going to happen. And I think I'm right when I say this but Donna Deane stepped in as an interim director.

DMC: Right.

AS: And she did that several times and I think that's interesting because my first experiences as a director were interim and I wouldn't take the position and I wouldn't take the position, I was very resistant. But I would always step in and carry the ball until they found the right person.

CH: Do you remember why you didn't want to take on that permanent role in those positions?

AS: Well, it probably had more to do with could I balance being a mom and could I balance my personal life and my professional life more than it was I thought I was going to get into some sort of professional predicament that I couldn't get myself out of. But there was always that kind of cautious approach that I always took and a lot of it had to do with was my name strong enough in the industry that I was in and did I have support at that level in that industry. And there was and still is a bit of, among our age group, a bit of where did you come from and what, always feeling like you had to prove yourself. And I know that could just be nursing but I sense that in the community sometimes. Is that, everybody's feeling that or is that just me?

DMC: After you graduated where did you go to work?

AS: Grandview.

DMC: And then between Grandview and your decision to go back for a master's degree?

AS: Eighteen months. I knew. I knew.

DMC: Why?

AS: Um, what it was is, it was all about quality. You have to remember when I started there was mostly DRG's. I worked night shift, that's how I jumped on board shifts that didn't need to be jumped on and you know there comes a time where you just look and say there's got

to be more than this. Who's counting. this? Who's watching this? Who's making, these decisions? And you could see in medicine, there's a good old boys club, but you could start to see how, at least I could see how it was working in nursing and maybe that was because it was my first year out and I didn't recognize it before but I thought you know people don't belong in some positions. And it was a matter of oh, this is what they were talking about professionalism and this is what, you know all that starting to come to me. And that had been my foundation here was understanding what it meant to be a professional nurse, I mean, period. And to see it not happening in the work place and knowing that patient care was suffering because of it. The only way that I knew to step up was the leadership and I saw that a master's degree would give me some of that credibility that I wanted to offer.

DMC: And then how did you decide to do your master's at Wright State?

AS: Um, I don't know. I was probably too afraid to leave home at that point. I didn't see myself leaving a guy in the service and the other guy married somebody else, there was a guy down the street and I guess if I just hang around a little while longer and it's kind of comfortable at home and saving money. And I came here one day and I was scared to death and I thought oh my gosh, who's going to be the instructors and that they're going to say don't let her in the door, don't let her in the door! But Alice Renner, I don't remember what her position was.

CH: She was an assistant to the dean for a while. I'm not sure if that was her original position.

AS: And the dean then was Dr. Landcaster, Janet Landcaster had come about the same time that I came. Let's see so that was nineteen eighty-seven, I believe, that I took my first classes and came to an orientation and it was over in Allyn Hall by a fireplace and we met everyone. She was very polished, 'very polished, class act at the time and she told us we would learn to read, and we would learn to write and we would learn to speak. And I thought I can do that so I went to

Ohio State. (Laughs) Just kidding. Just kidding. But she, um Alice Renner, I came pecking on the door and I was just how much was it going to be per credit hour and how many years of my life is it going to take and just what was I getting myself into. And I must have said something like so, what's that grade point average have to be and she said here are the papers and oh by the way here's the trainingship form and she just walked me right through the process. And had she not done that, I probably wouldn't have come back for the second visit. It was probably like knowing me, Friday night at four o'clock or something. You know she didn't have to do what she did but she did it and I thought wow I'm really going to go do this and I did. In eighteen months I had the course work done and by that time I was on my defense statement for my thesis was also the due date for my first child.

DMC: Oh my gosh.

AS: So, seven years later I finished my thesis thanks to Susan Praeger. Had she, now that's the other thing that just happened. I was over at Meijer's, Meijer's was now, the straw field had turned to Meijer's and my hair was Crystal Gayle. I did not leave my house because these toddlers from, well Hades. She said "Ann?" And I was like this, I remember Donna Dean was my thesis advisor would call me on my recorder "Oh, so what do you want to do for me this week, or this quarter? You think you might want to take a class? You want to go one credit hour at a time like this and get it done?" I just didn't think I could do it and all I had to do was collect the data and analyze it so I don't know what the problem was. Susan Praeger was in Meijer and I was in Meijer and she recognized me and she said, "Ann, you've got to get your name off that list." I said, "I can't do it. I just can't do it." She said, "If you have to come to my office and I review word for word until you're happy with what it says and it makes sense then that's what we'll do." And I thought I'm not doing that to myself and so I went home and I wrote, and I put the kids in day care for two weeks and I was done. (Laughter) It's the truth though. She'll tell

you it's true. I can remember where we were standing in Meijer. She must have been running over there for something to take back over here or whatever but I remember that.

DMC: Carol, can you think of any other questions?

CH: It sounds like you shared a lot of really great memories Ann. I apologize for coming in late. I had a senior moment and got back from lunch and forgot what I was doing.

AS: That's okay. There is one other thing that I want to share.

DMC: Yes, I think you should.

AS: Yes, it's the very last thing and it probably hasn't come out on here but I teach here now and I've been here for about seven years in some capacity as a clinical instructor and my very first experience teaching was on five northwest at Miami Valley Hospital? I think it's five northwest, it's a triangular unit and on the back hall there's private rooms and I had my very first group. I was nine months pregnant with my last baby. I had no business teaching that quarter but I needed money. And I had no idea what I was going to do with these students, just as green as they were, scared to death. They were taking 218. They couldn't even knock on doors. I was trying to make them. And on the card next was Dean Swartz. She had been diagnosed with cancer days before. And I thought now what the heck do I do. If I ignore that she's here will she be offended. If we knock on her door, she doesn't know me, is it too invasive? So, we went to a primary nurse and I ask, "Would you please let her know that I am on the unit and that I would be more than [sic] happy to bring students in or I would be more than [sic] happy to give her privacy. Whatever she prefers." She wanted to see the students. Well, I don't think I could fit on one side of the bed let alone all eight to ten of them. So, they go in and I've given the little talk. "I don't know if she's sick. Let's just be very professional, very cognizant of the changes that she's going through. Let's give her the respect that she deserves." So we go in and she gives them a lesson on alpha and beta cells of the pancreas.

DMC: Oh my gosh.

AS: And she thanked me. Now, I thanked her. You know what I mean? And that stuck with me.

CH: So, that's interesting and I've never heard that story before.

AS: I didn't know her. I see her name written on my diploma. And then for her to take the time with the students, it was important to her.

CH: Sounds like it was.

AS: It was very important to her but it touched me. I thought, man it must be one of those things that's just in you, you know? And boy was I glad she taught it because I don't think I remember anything else of beta cells and the island when you hold it in your hands or whatever. I couldn't remember it and I'm thinking, oh my gosh thank god she's going on about this. And when she was done she asked them if they had any questions and she said no and she dismissed some of them and that was fine with me.

CH: You know that's a good example, she was a psych nurse, so I'm sure when she got her diagnosis and first began being ill she immediately went and got information and literature and began reading on what was going on.

AS: That's the way it came across to me but it didn't come across that way to the students. And to think as an undergraduate student, I avoided the deans, I avoided administration because of all the turmoil and all the craziness but they were right there beside her. You know? They probably to this day don't know that they had that opportunity. Maybe they do, maybe they thought about that later but I doubt it.

DMC: Anything else that you can think of that you would like to share?

AS: No, I think that says it all. Well, maybe one other thing. I gave this some thought. How is the College of Nursing as it's evolved different than the university? Because I had that

whole childhood experience with the university and when I think of Wright State I think of progressive change. Just progressive change, the cornfields changed, my family's life changed and I changed. But when I think of the College of Nursing and all the changes that have had to take place and how the people of primarily women have had to mold and scratch and just create the institution that it is, I think how is that different in terms of change and I don't know if I'm making this up or not. It may be some textbook somewhere but I think it would be as I recall ().

DMC: Explain that.

AS: Explain that. I knew you would ask me to do that. I had to write it down. I did because I didn't think I could do it after I said it. The spirit of hard work and perseverance that no matter who's guiding the group remains at for the purpose of improving lives of others.

CH: Yeah, sums up a lot doesn't it?

AS: Yeah. I learned it here. I live it here.

CH: Okay. Thank you so much.

AS: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW