

Arizona State University

College of Nursing
Tempe, Arizona 85287

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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Doris Maharry
Interviewee (signature)

5-22-87
Date

Name of Interviewee

*Modified from: Charlton, T. L. (1981). Oral History for Texans. Austin: Texas Historical Commission. p. 64.

This is Joyce A. Finch, Ph.D. Today is May 22, 1987. I'm interviewing for the first time Ms. Doris Meharry. This interview is taking place in her home in Chandler, Arizona.

This interview is sponsored by the Arizona State College of Nursing and the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities Council. It is part of the Contributions of Cadet Nurses Project.

JF Now, as I have said, we will start out in a somewhat sequential form. Let's begin with your nursing education. You graduated in what year?

DM 1945.

JF So you were not in the Cadet Nurse Corps the entire three years of your program?

DM No.

JF Then, what was your school of nursing; where was it?

DM It was at Traverse City State Hospital School of Nursing.

JF Traverse City. Now that's in Michigan?

DM Yes, it is.

JF Okay. About how large was the hospital at that time?

DM The general hospital was Munson Hospital, and it was under the state when we went in training. The two hospitals were connected. So we had part of our training in both hospitals. Munson Hospital had approximately 100 beds and the state hospital had about 3,000 patients.

JF So this was a hospital for mental patients?

DM Yes, psychiatric hospital.

JF Okay, that was a little different than a lot of students' experiences. About how large was the size of your class when you went into the program?

DM We started with 21, and 13 graduated.

JF So you had a little attrition there.

DM Yes.

JF Now, did you have any affiliations?

DM Yes, we had three months in Detroit in Women's Hospital where we had delivery, post-partum and nursery. Also three

months in Detroit in communicable disease at Herman Kefer Hospital. I had six months in an Army hospital.

JF Now, because you did have a lot of experiences, I'm assuming, in the psychiatric setting, could you tell me a little bit about how the breakdown of your education went?

DM We had most of our training in the general hospital. We did have some diet kitchen, physiotherapy, and, of course, psychiatric in the psychiatric hospital.

JF So they were doing quite a bit of physical therapy?

DM Yes, they did a lot then.

JF What kinds of things would they be doing?

DM Hydrotherapy, mostly.

JF So, by physical therapy it wasn't so much retraining the stroke patient, it was really more like [psychiatric] treatment.

DM Yes.

JF So you did see quite a bit of hydrotherapy?

DM Yes. They put people, especially the hyperactive patients, in tubs of warm water with soft music. We gave "fever" treatments for syphilis. Also, we gave ultraviolet treatments, I believe to build people up.

JF Oh, yes.

DM And then we learned about massage there, too. I don't know as we did that, but we had that training.

JF I did not know that. In my particular program we did not have any psychiatric nursing at all. We read about hydrotherapy, but I did not see it. Then when I went back to school and took psychiatric nursing it was pretty much discarded as useful. So, I've heard a lot about it but did not ever see it.

DM The nurse in charge was very interested in it and she taught it. We didn't really do massage there, but she trained us in various things that we didn't use on the patients.

JF What I understand you to say, though, is that you did not spend a whole lot of time at the state hospital, in terms of your years of nursing. It was a relatively short experience.

DM Yes.

JF I have read that there were some state hospitals that took in schools of nursing. I mean, they had a school of nursing and took in students. And students had an extraordinarily large amount of their nursing experience in psychiatric care. But that was not your experience?

DM No. There were about 3,000 mental patients and I've heard the census has gone down to approximately 150.

JF Oh, that is a big change, isn't it?

DM Yes.

JF Did you have any college affiliations when you were in nursing school?

DM No.

JF If you graduated in 1945, you probably went into the Cadet Corps in '43 or '44?

DM I guess it was '43.

JF How did you happen to decide to join the Cadet Corps?

DM It was offered to us, and I think everyone in the class joined up.

JF Yes, I was going to ask you about that. I will get right back to that. But, some of the former cadets that I've interviewed said that when they went into the Cadet Program they had a formal swearing-in ceremony. Did you have anything like that you can remember — promising to "do my best", that kind of thing?

DM We had a capping ceremony after six months, but not in connection with the Cadet Nurse Corps. There was a Cadet program at Percy Jones Army Hospital.

JF What is that that you have for after you went in?

DM This was a program that we put on at Percy Jones Hospital [shows program from the Army hospital].

JF So this is like an induction pledge that you did. "I am aware of the obligations, I assume ... follow the teachings of my instructors, keep my body strong. I pledge to my country my service in essential nursing for the duration of the War." That was a very specific commitment, wasn't it?

DM Yes, it was.

JF That was May 12, 1945, so that must have been like your graduation almost.

DM No. We we went [to Percy Jones Hospital] in March of 1945, and as I remember we had marching drills. I was a platoon leader because I was so tall. Some of these things I've forgotten. But there was a special program that the nurses put on.

JF And did you put that on yourselves -- you kind of organized it and put it on yourselves?

DM I don't remember. There were quite a few other people taking part in it. The Army band and some of the nurses and officers took part. Any Army Nurse Captain was in charge of the Cadets.

JF I notice that it says "Percy Jones Hospital Center Band", but that was not your hospital?

DM No, this was with the Army affiliation.

JF Oh, I see. This was where you had your last six months. I was still connecting [what you were saying] with when you were back in Traverse City.

DM No, this was at Battle Creek.

JF Okay. Then you did have your senior experience, your last six months, in an Army installation, and it was at Percy Jones Hospital?

DM Yes.

JF Where was Percy Jones Hospital?

DM Percy Jones Hospital is in Battle Creek, Michigan.

JF Was that far from Traverse City?

DM I imagine it was about 150 miles, I'm not sure.

JF It was not a big distance away from where you had your school?

DM No, it wasn't.

JF So, when you did go there they had a special induction-orientation kind of thing for you cadet nurses?

DM I hardly remember. There were about 120 of us that got there on the same day.

JF If I could go back to the program that you were talking about. It does say "Induction Pledge" which sounds like that was when you first went there.

DM This was was dated May 12, and we went in about the middle of March.

JF But they must have been glad to have you there, that's kind of what I'm feeling when I look at that.

DM Yes, I think they were.

JF Well, then you have a picture of your group in different uniforms. A big group of people there -- there was a large group of you. When you did go to Percy Jones General Hospital, what did you do there for that period of time?

DM We just worked on the wards. If my memory is correct, they had about 2,000.

JF That was a big hospital, wasn't it?

DM Yes, it was. That was the old Kellogg Sanitarium. It was very beautiful.

JF Were these people who were wounded in the War from World War II?

DM Yes, World War II.

JF So you were not caring for World War I veterans?

DM No.

JF They were all recently wounded people.

DM Right.

JF How were you supervised during that period?

DM Army nurses.

JF Did you have any additional classes for your experiences at Percy Jones Hospital?

DM Yes, we had classes in Army history, organization of the Army, and the Army Nurse Corps. In [military] courtesy. I know we trained in the use of gas masks and how to use them. Then they had their own rules, procedures, and structure, etc. for the way the Army did things.

JF So it sounds like they did really anticipate that you were going to join the military after you graduated, didn't they?

DM Yes.

JF One of the things that I wanted to ask you about that experience is, how did the Cadet Corps make a difference in your nursing education?

DM It really extended my education. I saw so many more things than I would have in my home school -- the different injuries and that sort of thing. I made a lot of friends.

JF That picture you showed me of your class -- it's a large group of people and it looked like you had fun together.

DM Yes. We had a large library, a beautiful chapel, and music rooms. We could study in the library, we had a lot books to gather information from. There were indoor swimming pools and a large outdoor pool. It was a very interesting and educational experience.

JF You went there in March, so would you have finished up about in September?

DM Yes. I was through two weeks before any of my classmates. I would have been through September 15th. I didn't lose a day during nurse's training. Then they also gave us two weeks for being in the Corps. So I finished about September 1st.

JF So you finished up. The War was over by that time, and you were probably all very happy that that was the case.

DM Yes. We celebrated there.

JF That must have been kind of interesting to have been in a military installation when the War ended. That would be a unique experience.

DM Yes, it was.

JF I think everybody must have been very happy, but the soldiers themselves must have been really very excited to see it over.

DM Yes.

JF After you did finish your nursing education, then what were your work experiences like, beginning with your first position?

DM I went with a couple of friends to Ypsilanti Byer Hospital. We worked there as staff nurses for awhile. Then we went back -- we were kind of like Gypsies, I think -- we went back to our home hospital when we got lonesome. I worked in Psychiatry at Traverse City. Then I went to Munson Hospital and worked awhile. Then four of us went to Hines Hospital, which is a veterans hospital in Maywood, a suburb of Chicago.

JF You were moving around with your friends. In one situation you did work in Psychiatry?

DM Yes.

JF What did you do in the other jobs that you had?

DM I was a staff nurse. Then when I went back to work in Psych. I relieved in the supervisor's office on evenings.

JF It was like Medical-Surgical nursing?

DM It was Psychiatric nursing -- making sure wards were covered with help and taking care of problems.

JF So, you went down to Hines Veterans Hospital. When was this, '46?

DM The first time was 1947.

JF So you spent a little bit of time in each one of these jobs that you went over so quickly.

DM Yes.

JF You went to Hines, and what did you do there?

DM I worked on the Cancer Ward, surgical, as a staff nurse.

JF So they had a special unit identified as the Cancer Unit?

DM They had a lot of patients. I can't remember how many cancer patients there were, but there was a tremendous number, all ages. Some were very young. The youngest I remember was 18. But, there were some in their 20's and all the way up in age. They did drastic surgery. They did mandiblectomies and hemipelvectomies. We gave a lot of narcotics.

JF I've heard of Hines. I've never been there but I've heard of it. And it's my understanding that in those post-World War II days they did a lot of innovative work with paraplegics.

DM Yes. My friends worked with the paraplegics.

JF But, you were working with the cancer patients. That's a whole new picture of that V.A. for me.

DM Yes.

JF So you were staff nurse there?

DM Yes.

JF How long did you work there in that position?

DM I guess I moved around a bit. I quit and then I went back. My grandmother became ill and I was very close to her, so I went back to Michigan. Then I went back to Hines. I met my husband there in Chicago.

JF Let's stop a minute and just identify the time sequence. How long were you there, at Hines, the first time?

DM A few months.

JF So that would be about 1949 that you went back to Michigan.

DM Yes.

JF Was this back in Traverse City, in your home hospital?

DM No, I went to work in a little hospital near my home, an 18-bed hospital, for awhile.

JF That was small.

DM Yes it was, but I was close to home where I was needed.

JF You must have had to be pretty flexible in a 18-bed hospital. To do just about anything needed.

DM Yes. They did surgery and delivered babies. We had quite a lot of emergencies.

JF I'm not quite sure how to ask this question, but an 18-bed hospital is very small. It doesn't sound like a city hospital.

DM It was owned by the doctor.

JF Okay. Did he run that as a service to the clientele?

DM Yes.

JF How long did you work in this small hospital. We're being approximate here, I don't expect exact days.

DM Approximately six months, and then I went back to Hines.

JF You went back to Hines. So this is back to '49 at this point?

DM I worked a total of 15 to 18 months at Hines at two different times.

JF Now, when you went back to Hines what did you do then? do then?

DM I worked on the cancer, or tumor ward, again. We didn't use the word cancer at that time.

JF Were you still a staff nurse?

DM Yes.

JF And you rotated?

DM Yes, two shifts -- days and evenings.

JF Okay. So, you were there about a year and a half, then what did you do?

DM Well, nurses were not allowed to work if they were pregnant past five months.

JF And you had met and married by this time?

DM Yes, I had been married in the meantime.

JF So, you were five months pregnant and you resigned.

DM Yes.

JF Did you stay home then for awhile?

DM No, I worked in Melrose Park. It was a suburb of Chicago.

JF Was that a private hospital?

DM Yes, or a general hospital.

JF What was your position there?

DM Just Staff nurse; Medical-Surgical.

JF How long did you do that?

DM Just a short time, part-time.

JF That was so you could take care of your little girl?

DM Yes.

JF After this, what did you do then?

DM We moved into Chicago and I worked at Grant Hospital.

JF Now, that's on the north side, isn't it? That's a big hospital, as I recall.

DM Yes.

JF So what did you do there?

DM Worked as a Staff Nurse, evenings. Usually I worked 6 to 11 p.m., but also some 11 to 7 shifts.

JF So that sounds like a short day, 6 to 11.

DM Yes.

JF That was still because you were taking care of your little girl?

DM Yes, my husband was still in school and he came home to care for the baby while I worked.

JF But that does sound a bit flexible for hospitals at that time. I recall that they were rigid. They wanted you eight hours, and didn't want the short shifts. So that seems like they were fairly accommodating to you to let you work 6 to 11.

DM I don't remember. I know I didn't have any problem finding work. There were a lot of student nurses.

JF So how long were you at Grant, then?

DM Let's see. Janis was born in '53 -- probably about two years.

JF Then what did you do?

DM Then we went back to Michigan.

JF Same area, in Traverse City?

DM Yes.

JF Did you go back to work then when you went there?

DM No, I stayed home for awhile. Then I did go back to Psych. again.

JF Okay. This was the State Hospital where you'd had some of your training experiences?

DM Yes.

JF What was your role in the Psych. hospital?

DM I worked in the Disturbed Women's Ward until someone kicked me. I was pregnant, so the supervisor sent me to the Convalescent Ward.

JF I was thinking this would be about 1954, or 1955, somewhere in there.

DM Yes.

JF So you were working in Psych. when some of that medication change started?

DM It was before that time.

JF I thought of that as being in the early 50's, but at least for your hospital, it was in the late 50's when that began to take place.

DM Yes. There was a well known doctor there who had charge of the medications. That's when the census began to decrease.

JF What kind of care did you give patients, then, in the hospital if it was before medications?

DM There was occupational therapy, movies, dances, they had electric shock treatments and insulin therapy. I can't remember the medications. They did have sedatives.

JF Were they doing hydrotherapy still at this time?

DM No.

JF So there were some changes that you were observing in your different experiences in that hospital.

DM Oh, yes.

JF So you said that you were there about three years at the State Hospital?

DM I worked a total of approximately three years in the State Hospital after graduation, at different times. Because of children's health problems, we came to Arizona in July, 1957.

JF So you really have been in Arizona a good period of time. This is 30 years now that you have been here.

DM Yes.

JF When you came to Arizona, what did you do as far as your nursing practice was concerned?

DM My husband had left his job and then wasn't able to find work here. We didn't know whether we were going to stay. I started working the next day at Southside Hospital.

JF Now, that ...

DM That was closed and went into Desert Samaritan later.

JF I knew that name, but could not remember how it had changed. Now as I recall, Southside was a small community hospital for Mesa at that time.

DM Yes, it was.

JF Did you then continue on with staff nursing and Medical-Surgical, or did you do something different?

DM Yes, it was Medical-Surgical.

JF Were you still doing shift work at this time?

DM No, I worked days.

JF How long did you do that?

DM Until the Fall of '60. Then I started working at the Indian Hospital in Sacaton.

JF So, you had to drive a little distance then.

DM Yes, 21 miles.

JF Were you living in Mesa at that time?

DM We had moved to Chandler in '59.

JF Is there a hospital in Sacaton, or a clinic?

DM It is a 30-bed hospital with a large out-patient clinic.

JF That must have been kind of an interesting change from working at Southside to moving into the Indian Health Service. Did you enjoy that change?

DM It was altogether different. I didn't really enjoy the first year, but I thought I should stay at least a year and ended up staying until 1982.

JF So you did adapt, then?

DM Yes, working conditions became better through the years. I really liked the people. I also liked being a federal employee.

JF I guess they call that cultural shock in Anthropology. When there's two quite different groups coming together and trying to work together.

DM Yes.

JF What were some of the biggest changes that you think you had to make when you went into the Indian Health Service?

DM I think the one thing that surprised me was that I had thought babies had to have a bath every day. The Indians didn't have water in their homes at that time, they had to haul their water in. There was a lot of upper respiratory and gastrointestinal problems with babies and children.

JF That was kind of a luxury. A bath every day was kind of a luxury.

DM Yes. Many families had to have water hauled in for cooking or cleaning, whatever. Of course, they had a lot of infections. Alcoholism was a problem, and there was a lot of trauma in out-patient.

JF You mean like automobile accidents, or farm accidents?

DM A lot of it was violence and auto accidents.

JF I have heard that the Indians, particularly in that area, have a great deal of diabetes. Did you find that to be true?

DM Yes, they have.

JF So you worked there for about 20 years?

DM Yes.

JF So, you must have come to at least feel satisfied with your role there.

DM Yes.

JF What was your position over that period of time that you were there?

DM I was staff nurse, and then evening manager of the hospital.

JF How long were you evening manager?

DM Approximately five years.

JF Approximate is okay. One of the things ... You said that you worked there until 1982 so this brings us up very close to the present time. But, one of the things that seemed to be happening in the 60's and 70's is that nurses were getting involved with continuing education. In that period, did you have any kind of formal or informal education activities?

DM I went to some workshops, and we had in-service education. I went to OB workshops in Denver and one in Tucson. SOAP charting was required, so I went to a couple of those workshops. I did take some college classes. I also took management training.

JF What kinds of college classes were you interested in?

DM I was always hoping to get my degree, so I took English 101 and 102, Sociology, Physical Assessment classes. But with my family, it was just about all I could manage.

JF Yes, you had quite a few children. I can remember four?

DM Four, yes.

JF That's a good size family to raise and then work.

DM Yes. Then in 1978 my son's wife left a little premature boy, and I had him until he was nine years old.

JF And you were still working at Sacaton?

DM Yes.

JF My goodness. Two families, in effect.

DM Yes.

JF So, you did leave Sacaton in 1982 to do what?

DM I worked on-call in a hospital.

JF How did you arrange to be on-call, I mean were you in a pool for the hospital?

DM Yes.

JF You didn't work for a registry or an outside firm?

DM No.

JF I understand you're still doing that part-time?

DM No, I'm working in an adult community just two or three days a week.

JF And what is your role there?

DM We have a health office and treatment room there and people will come in if they need to. We take a lot of blood pressures and do first aid. They have emergency buttons they can push in their homes or can just call us. And, we go to the homes when necessary.

JF To some extent, you're working with healthy people, or relatively well people.

DM Yes.

JF That must be an interesting change.

DM It is. The people are very nice, and most of them are healthy.

JF Well, that brings us up to date in your career. Let me make some shifts in the kinds of questions. You have always worked except for one period when your children were coming. At least part-time, you have always worked. Have you always wanted to stay in nursing?

DM Generally I loved hospital nursing. There were times when I thought I wouldn't stay in nursing. There were two times when I worked at Sacaton when I left for short periods. But I went back in time to be reinstated.

JF Why did you do that?

DM Well, I was just going to spend more time at home. Then when I worked in the local hospital I was going to work part-time, but I found I was working almost full-time anyway. So I decided to go back.

JF You have mentioned your marriage and children already, but because you mostly always did work, how did you juggle work and family responsibilities? That was a lot to do.

DM It was a lot because of the travel time, besides a lot of overtime. I was away at least ten hours a day. But I had wonderful people working for me at home. I was very fortunate. I also spent every minute I could get with the children, and sometimes left housework undone.

JF It may seem obvious, but why did you work?

DM Most of the time we needed two incomes, and most of the time I enjoyed it.

JF Alright. One of the questions I wanted to ask you then is have you ever seen yourself as an innovator or leader in nursing?

DM No. I like people and I like to work with them, but I don't believe that I'm a leader.

JF Also, I did raise a question of did you ever see yourself as a leader in the Women's Movement. But, before you answer, I want to clarify. It was very quickly apparent when I started talking to people that I was defining the Women's Movement differently than they were. Most people think of a political movement that arose in the late 60's, the early 70's. It was a little rowdy with a lot of political activity, it got a little uncouth sometimes. But, that wasn't really what I had in mind. I was thinking about a much larger group of women -- teachers, secretaries, all

women -- moving out into the work force, out of the home into the work force. That's what I meant when I said the Women's Movement. With that explanation, let me go back and say ask if you ever saw yourself as active in that movement.

DM No, I never have.

JF Okay, well that kind of brings us up through the list of topics that I have. Before we close, let me ask you if you think there is something that we should have mentioned but did not.

DM Well, there were lots of changes, like in Sacaton, with the water coming into the homes and the education, public health nurses working with the people. The census used to be very high. It was a 30-bed hospital, but sometimes we had almost 30 children. Pediatric admissions went down in the last few years.

JF So you're really seeing the health, in some respects, improving.

DM Yes. And, of course, we got unit dose medicines. We used to spend hours patching gloves, sharpening needles, and resterilizing equipment and supplies.

JF That whole thing of disposable equipment is something that is very different now. Sometimes we do forget how we ever did before.

DM Right.

JF Well, are there other things that come to your mind?

DM I was thinking where I had my training, Munson Hospital, is a big medical center now. You couldn't even recognize it as the place where I started training, and it has a lot of specialities.

JF I have not been back to the school where I graduated for about 20 years, and I'm sure I would be amazed if I could see it today. It's just really booming along. So many hospitals are.

DM I went back to Traverse City and was so anxious to get back there and see the same places where I'd been, but they didn't exist in the State Hospital.

JF It's kind of a blow, isn't it?

DM Yes, it was.

JF Well, I think those are experiences that force us to see how things have changed when you go to look at things and they are no longer there. You look at what is there and think, "Wow!"

DM Yes.

JF Well, I want to thank you very much for participating in my study. It is very helpful to me. This will conclude our interview.

FINAL EDIT PER D. MEHARRY 1/28/88