

12-3-2002

Bonnie Sommerville 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

Bonnie Sommerville

Wright State University - Main Campus

Follow this and additional works at: https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/nursing_oral_history



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Nursing Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Curry, D. M., Holdcraft, C., & Sommerville, B. (2002). Bonnie Sommerville interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. .

https://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/nursing_oral_history/10

This Oral Recording is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Nursing and Health at CORE Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Wright State University - Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of CORE Scholar. For more information, please contact corescholar@www.libraries.wright.edu, library-corescholar@wright.edu.

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BONNIE SOMMERVILLE

DECEMBER 3, 2002

DONNA MILES CURRY: For the sake of the tape we are interviewing Bonnie Sommerville. This is December the third two thousand and two for the oral history of Wright State College of Nursing and Health. Bonnie, let's just start with you telling us about your personal background and how you first came to Wright State.

BONNIE SOMMERVILLE: Okay. I was a diploma graduate living in Beavercreek. I was married and had two children and I wanted to go back to school and of course Wright State was almost in my backyard. So, I came to talk to people at Wright State and I think when I was first was interested I didn't even, I don't think there was even a School of Nursing. I think there was finance for a school of nursing.

DMC: Do you remember what year that was?

BS: It was in the early seventies probably. So, I started taking classes, a class at a time. I started out with English and you know all the general ed requirements. Maybe it was more toward the mid seventies because as I got into the courses I was talking to somebody, it might have been Donna Dean. Was she the very first person that had something to do with this school? Do you, I don't know if anybody remembers.

DMC: She was a real early faculty member at that time. Did you remember talking with her as a faculty member or as an administrator?

BS: As an administrator.

DMC: Okay.

BS: And I remember talking to somebody about completing my BS degree. And at that time there was no such thing as completing a BS degree. It was you start all over again, no credits were accepted. So, I kept, and at that point in time a lot of the nurses that I knew that were diploma grads decided not to go that route, to go a different route to get out of nursing or do something different but I really wanted the BS degree. So, I started talking with people at the university and started challenging courses because I didn't want to you know go through the whole, the whole curriculum again. So, I remember challenging a number of courses and the first one I was successful and then you know I challenged the second and then the third and I remember talking to, it might have been Donna, she said " Well Bonnie, you can't do that. I mean you can't challenge all these courses." But I would go to, and some of them didn't have tests to challenge. So I had to go to the professor, get the syllabus, go to the bookstore, get the book and then just work my way through it and then take the final. So that's the way I would pay my twenty-five dollars and go take the test and I think I challenged about half the curriculum that way. I challenged up 'til my senior year in nursing because I had to take, pass, Nursing Process and Julie George graded my nursing process. I do remember Julie.

DMC: (Laughs) Uh-huh.

BS: But I challenged until my senior year and that took me several years to do. So, that's how I first got involved with Wright State. And when I came, of course there were four buildings, the quad, you know and that was Wright State University at that point in time.

DMC: Did you take any classes here at Wright State?

BS: Yes, I took, I started out taking English and I took some Chemistry and I think I took one anatomy and then I thought well I can challenge this. So, I challenged I think maybe the second anatomy, microbiology, pharmacology, a lot of the sciences.

DMC: What year did you graduate with your BS?

BS: I graduated in seventy-six. I was the second graduating class.

DMC: Okay.

BS: Betty Schmoll was in the first graduating class and I was in the second graduating class.

DMC: Do you remember who else was in your class?

BS: Carol Dixon, Bobby Nolan, Linda Delaney.

DMC: (TAPE FADES OUT AND IN) when you graduated you went on to get your masters.

BS: I went to Ohio State to get my masters and then after I finished that I came back to teach here at Wright State.

DMC: So then what year did you come back as a faculty member?

BS: That was in nineteen seventy-seven.

DMC: Okay. Oh, that was quick.

BS: Yeah, I went right on to, or no let me see, I miss spoke. I think that was seventy-eight because I finished my masters in seventy, December of seventy-seven and then started teaching January of seventy-eight.

DMC: When you remember your early years as a faculty, what do you remember from nineteen seventy-eight?

BS: Those were very exciting times. Gert was the dean, Marge was there, Peggy Chinn was here and I think Julie George was here. I don't remember if Donna Deane was here then or not. I don't remember that. But, you know I had just graduated from graduate school and faculty meetings were, it was like a think tank. It was probably one of the most exciting times in my life. I felt, I was just a neophyte as an educator but sitting around the room with all those faculty members was a really wonderful experience for me. I mean it was almost like continuing graduate school. I think in graduate school I went to open my mind and think in a different way and that's the way it was in the faculty meetings. I have to admit I didn't understand everything that they were talking about. I remember Gert talking about the vertical and horizontal line, strands of the curriculum and all of this was brand new to me but it was extremely exciting, exciting time.

DMC: What challenges did you face? It was a new role for you right?

BS: It was a new role for me learning to be a faculty, learning to be a teacher and then I didn't understand all the things that were going on at the university at that point in time. I felt, retrospectively I was very, very naive because I was so caught up in trying to learn my new role, learning what teaching was all about and preparing for classes and trying to learn about the curriculum that I really didn't understand what was going on within the university or within the

community. Sometimes people in the community were pretty negative I think at that point in time. There were a number of RN's wanting to go back and complete their BSN and at that time no credits were accepted and it was, it was like you start all over again and that was then negatively perceived within the community. So there were challenges there from, you know from a political perspective. But I guess I tend to believe this was the right way of doing it because you know that's what everybody was talking about and Gert made a very compelling reason why these credits shouldn't be accepted and I think that was the way it was then.

DMC: You had been through it yourself.

BS: And I had been through it myself. I had been through it myself. Those were some really, retrospectively very challenging times.

DMC: What were interactions with other faculty, administrators, administrators outside the college on campus? Do you recall?

BS: The interaction with the faculty within the school of nursing was, there was a lot of support, a lot of interaction. Outside the school and of course we all served on different committees and that was, that was positive. Now I don't remember meeting with anybody in administration. But within the university the people that I interacted with were I mean it was a positive interaction.

DMC: How about students?

BS: Um, very positive, very positive. I really like the students and enjoyed the challenges and there were a lot of very serious students and that was a very positive interaction.

DMC: Now part of your faculty responsibilities then you had clinicals or interactions with the community, the hospitals, home health care assistance. How was that as a representative of Wright State?

BS: In the clinicals I remember being in the mobile health mobile. I then remember being at Children's. I remember being at Grandview ed. There were some, some comments I really didn't understand you know about those Wright State nurses. There were criticisms about not having a lot of clinical but you know we just, again I didn't understand all, you know all of this because I thought we had a wonderful program and I didn't understand all the negative feedback we were getting. But there was, there were a lot of comments about lack of clinical experience and they really didn't know what they were doing. You know we should go back to the good old three-year nurses with the diploma. Those were the real nurses. They made comments like that.

DMC: Was this discussed back at the university some? Where other faculty members going through the same thing that you recall?

BS: I don't recall. I don't recall a lot of discussion about that it was just, that was just sort of the way it was. I mean this was what our program was and it was like we would demonstrate the work of this program. And again it wasn't, if the decisions were challenged I don't remember that. Gert was so strong about this is the way it should be that we just sort of accepted that I think.

DMC: How long then were you a faculty member?

BS: I was faculty until eighty, so two years. I think all in all it was about ten quarters I think.

DMC: And then what happened?

BS: I left when, when Gert left and the rest of the faculty left. And then that was a very tumultuous time. There were lots of meetings and I can't even, I think it was in the school of medicine auditorium. I believe that's where it was. I remember different people speaking. I remember Peggy Chinn speaking and I remember, I'm sure Gert spoke, but I remember Peggy Chinn speaking very articulately. I remember the decision for Gert to leave and a number of other faculty to leave and I was one of the faculty that left. And I went to Children's Medical Center and later I found out, this is probably a couple years later, I think I was reading my employment file and I learned that Children's had done an intensive investigation about me and my background because I was one of those Wright State faculty.

DMC: (Laughs)

BS: You too Donna. And it was like they wanted to make sure that we weren't rebel rousers or something. I don't know exactly what they expected us to be. But I remember the letter, they got several references about me you know what my political views, and my behavior and other things. And I didn't know that at the time that they had hired me.

DMC: Who do you think instigated that at Children's? Who do you think would have done that?

BS: I think it might have been Manny Kelder.

DMC: Who was a physician.

BS: He was a physician and he was a CEO.

DMC: And that might make sense.

BS: That might make sense.

DMC: And he would be Wright State faculty.

BS: Yes, he would have been Wright State School of Medicine faculty. That's right. So that's probably who instigated that.

DMC: That makes me want to look back in my file. (Laughs)

BS: And of course you were a rebel rouser they just didn't realize it. (Laughs) Not bad though. No, but really I didn't understand a lot of things until I left Wright State. And then it seemed like more; more information came out about, feelings about Wright State and a lot of the faculty. It was, it was not positive at all. And I was much too close to that; I didn't see that you know when I was with the faculty. You know I saw the faculty as very bright, very articulate women that, very intellectual, wonderful discussions. I didn't see, I didn't see the negative about people's personal preferences. It didn't matter. You know why it didn't matter? You accepted people for what they were and acted in each setting, the contributions they made, you know their thoughts, their concepts. You didn't see other things or I didn't see other things. That was probably because I was so naive that I accepted things very much at face value.

DMC: All right, can we talk a little bit about your personal decision to leave at that time and how you came to that decision or about that decision process? You didn't really give much depth about that one.

BS: [You know the issue was nursing being put under medicine. That did not, that was not, in my mind, the right thing to do. I didn't want to be in a situation where nursing would be subservient or reporting through medicine. It seems like we had worked long and hard to establish ourselves as a you know as a profession standing on our own into report through medicine it seemed like we would be going backwards and I didn't want to be a part of that. It

was a difficult decision for me to make from a personal, financial perspective. I mean because it was comfortable here. I mean I liked being here but I liked being here in a different, in a different time. The people that I liked from my job were leaving. But at that time I was a single parent with three children and without a job. I remember getting my resignation being you know handing in my resignation and think I don't have a job. But I thought, I believed strong enough that I did not want to be here under the circumstances that we would be.]

DMC: How has that experience during the faculty time influenced your career since then? How's that made your thought patterns different or the way you proceeded with your career?

BS: I don't know how to answer that. My career, now with Children's I took with me a lot of very valuable things because I started out in nursing education. I can remember talking to I think it was called, it wasn't called nursing education then, continuing ed or something like that at that time. I remember talking to the faculty about the vertical and horizontal strands and they looked at me like I was just you know nuts. I tried to explain you know how that would fit in a hospital setting. I took a lot of, a lot of information, a lot of experience, a lot of theory I think with me to that position. In retrospect that was very valuable. I did take a lot of information with me.

DMC: Then you went into management after that, after your education?

BS: Yes, I did and Shirley Vedel was there at the time and it was only a year or two. Then when Shirley left they asked me to be interim VP for nursing. When I went there I had absolutely no intention of you know being administration because I was in education, nursing education.

DMC: How has your relationship been with Wright State? Has it changed?

BS: That's really an interesting question. It seemed like after I left Wright State there was very little contact with the school after that period of time for a long period of time. It was almost like there was an alienation almost. I can't even remember who the dean was during that period of time but there was no contact really between the people of the university and the people at Children's or other hospitals, I think, at that period of time. It was, there was just a void there. Now we had students of course from Wright State come to Children's but there was no interaction from you know faculty to people within the hospital. I think Janet Lancaster, I think she did a lot to help that situation. I think Pat Molton has really done a lot to bring the community back to the university. Patty's done a lot. She has really been reaching out and I think she sees the value and the support that she can get from people in the community, you know people at the hospitals. It wasn't that we didn't want to be a part of the Wright State University community. It was almost like sort of an alienation that we were wanted by you or anything.

DMC: Is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you'd like to share? If you don't have any further questions I'll shut off the tape.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

DMC: It's on.

BS: For a while I grieved over the loss of Wright State. I mean I felt, I lost my identity for awhile it seemed like because it always gave me great pride to say I was a faculty member of Wright State University and it was almost like well, I work at Children's Medical Center. I wasn't vested at that point in time with Children's Medical Center. I soon did become vested though. Looking back you know that never happened, nursing never went under medicine. My opinion is

and this is just strictly my opinion I didn't know whether that they ever intended to do that. I think that was a way of getting, the university getting rid of Gert. That's my opinion because as soon as Gert left I think things would have smoothed out. I was glad that it didn't happen you know for nursing but I think that was the university's way of getting rid of an embarrassment I think. And retrospectively I think Gert was an embarrassment to Wright State. (TAPE FADES OUT AND IN)-probably not. Retrospectively I think a lot of things were not appropriate. But at that moment in time I think, I'll speak for myself, I got all caught up in this. Again, retrospectively I can see where things probably weren't as wonderful as I perceived them to be at the moment. She was very powerful. She was very influential. I was you know very impressionable and I think a lot of things were not appropriate and I think there was a lot of embarrassment to the university. I didn't, I wasn't aware of a lot of, some of the personal things that were going on. Again what I was seeing was maybe what I wanted to see just the bright women working together to create something. But there were things that were probably not appropriate. (TAPE FADES OUT AND IN)-factor in.

DMC: Some people that we talked to in and out of the interviews feel though that that time has influenced nursing and benefited it. Most of the leaders in the area are Wright State graduates come from that period of time. How do you say it helped nursing or did it help nursing as a profession in the Dayton area and beyond or was it a hindrance to the profession? What all happened at Wright State during time.

BS: You know I think it's true there are a lot of the nursing leaders in the community came from Wright State around that period of time so surely something positive happened from that I believe. Now I don't know what's going to happen with the students now that are

graduating in ten or fifteen years. Are they going to be the leaders in the community? I would imagine they will be. I think positive things did happen from that period of time.

(TAPE FADES OUT AND IN) (LAUGHTER)

DMC: If you had to describe what the atmosphere was or whatever between the faculty and the (). Do you have any interesting stories about the ()? Any special memories of working with your piers?

BS: No.

DMC: You don't have any like in your mobile health van stories?

BS: Um, that it crashed three times. (LAUGHS)

DMC: You never crashed the mobile health van.

BS: I did crash it one time.

DMC: No.

BS: I did.

DMC: Driving that, I heard, was a monster.

BS: It was a monster. I was in a Kroger's parking lot and having to make a turn and I heard this thump and I thought a chair fell or something inside the unit fell and I got home and I got a call and I don't know whether it was from, it might have been from the police saying that, asked me if I was driving this vehicle and I said yes and they said did you realize that you hit a car? I said no. So, I did crash it a little bit, just a little bit.

DMC: Oh my gosh, hit and run.

BS: Hit and run, yeah. I really didn't realize that I hit a car. I thought something fell. That thing was a monster to drive. What happened to that?

CAROL HOLDCRAFT: They sold it to Miami Valley Hospital and it sat on the side there for a while and then I think they got rid of it because they have a new unit but it's not our old unit.

BS: The big one I think they sold to Miami Valley. Did they use it for a mobile health unit for a while?

DMC: Yeah, the Valley did. But it's not around any more. I can remember because I'd drive there on my way home and I would see it parked there.

CH: You know now that's one of the corporate strategic goals of the Ronald McDonald House. They're thing they will give institutions and they're called a mobile health unit to go out into the community and I saw that on a video at Wright State a long time ago. It was almost the exact same.

DMC: In the community assessment.

CH: Right.

BS: You know I have forgotten a lot. I think, human nature, you forget the bad and remember the good. I think I have, I just remember the good things about that period of time.

DMC: Who did you share an office with?

BS: For a while I shared an office with Linda Delaney and then I was right across the hall from Joan Reeves for a long period of time.

CH: I was just remembering my early recollection of Bonnie as an undergraduate student because I think I came to teach at Wright State in seventy-five, from seventy-five to seventy-six.

BS: That would have been my senior year.

CH: Your senior year so I think that was the group that I kind of taught with. We got started doing that and I think we did a community health project that kind of ran across all three quarters. I can remember students in small groups having to come up with a project that they were going to do. I believe you with a group that was doing some sex education in schools.

BS: Yes, that's right. I can remember that now. We did sex education. That's right. We had, I can remember now teaching these kids, showing them a film, you know talking to their parents before hand. I think showing the parents the film and doing that project. That's right.

CH: But my recollection you know and from my first year teaching was what a gutsy group of students we had who saw a need that was out there and at that particular time took a lot of maneuvering to be permitted to do that in the school system. Had to get permission through the principle, teachers, family members, et cetera. I mean it took a period of time to really pull that off and actually carry it out. I remember being so impressed with the students and thinking that they were really risk takers. They were really on the edge of what nursing was going to be like in the future because they were taking on some of those issues.

BS: We were a little bit older I think because I had kids in those classes you know of my own students. My own kids were the students that we taught, that age group. That was a very serious group of students because we were a little bit older.

DMC: I had forgotten all about that Carol. You're right.

BS: It's fun just to reminisce.

DMC: Yeah.

CH: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW