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Robinson, Greta interview for the Miami Valley College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project

Carol Holdcraft

Wright State University - Main Campus

Greta Robinson

Wright State University - Main Campus, greta.robinson@wright.edu

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

GRETA ROBINSON

FEBRUARY 13, 2009

CAROL HOLDCRAFT: We are ready to start and today we're doing another interview in our College of Nursing and Health, Wright State College of Nursing and Health Oral History Project. And today we are interviewing Mrs. Greta Robinson who has been a staff member in the College of Nursing over time. And present in the room are myself, Carol Holdcraft.

DONNA MILES CURRY: Donna Miles Curry

TARA ROWER: And Tara Rower.

CH: And so we'll get started. And today is Friday, February the thirteenth, two thousand and nine. Um Greta, we are interested in hearing today some of what your impressions of being at Wright State and we'd like you to talk a little bit about your personal background, and how you first came to be connected with Wright State.

GRETA ROBINSON: Well, I live three miles away. I have a sister-in-law who is a nurse and I was talking about getting a job somewhere and she said "why don't you go to Wright State." She said go to the Fred White Center and I found out Fred White was connected directly with Wright State. And so I just went to HR, applied for several jobs. I got two jobs on the same day.

CH: What were they?

GR: The first one was transcription, Donna, (Laughs) in the School of Medicine. And I hated it; just hated it, and I only did it one day a week. But then at the same time I was hired with Handicapped Services and that was part time but it was a half a day three or four days a week. I think I worked two or three months with both jobs like that and at that time computers were first coming into existence. So it was nineteen eighty-two. In Handicapped Services, Steve Simon, the director at that time, asked me if I would work full time. And I really didn't want to work full

time, but I wanted to get out of the other job, so I did. At the School of Medicine I worked one day a week and with that kind of job, computers just starting, and with the transcription you forget everything you learned the week before. I resigned with SOM and then I started with Handicapped Services. It was a brand new program for handicapped students with that office.

CH: And so what was the program with Handicapped Services?

GR: It was, if I can remember, pre-assessment program, which is not with the pre-assessment college here as such. It was taking disabled students that wanted to go to college and they would go through a week or two of different activities and we would evaluate them. Especially with those that were blind you would have somebody come in and evaluate them, a professional, and they would let them know how they would get around on campus. They would take tests and so forth and then at the end of the week or two, I can't remember if it was a week or two, it seemed like it was two weeks, we would do a report on them. If we felt like they were a good candidate for college we would inform them and the sponsoring agency.

CH: Uh-huh. And you would know from that what sorts of services Wright State would need to have available for those people.

GR: Yeah. At that time and still do although I have not talked to them for a long time. I was with them from nineteen eighty-two to nineteen ninety. The secretary to the director quit so I was promoted to her job and became a senior secretary for that department. It was very stressful because I had approximately forty proctors that I had to schedule for testing.

CH: Testing for people with disabilities.

GR: Disabilities or just to supervise for extra time. It was fun in a way and it was very enjoyable to work with the students. Also, I had time cards for those who did the personal care for them. There were about a hundred and fifty time cards per pay period I worked with. The students were real appreciative, and I cannot remember but only a couple that had a bad attitude.

It was a very stressful job, and so I thought well, I think I'll just change jobs. So I saw the advertisement that they needed a secretary for Nursing. So through Handicapped Services I used to have to beg, borrow, and plead for a room for testing. I would call Jill Oroszi all the time for available room I kind of was acquainted with her, so I thought it might be a little unethical, but I'm going to go ask her what this job would be like. So she talked to me and I came in for an interview and I got the job.

CH: So what exactly was your job then when you came to the College of Nursing?
Secretary?

GR: Secretary to the Dean. And at the time Donna Deane was the interim dean. The former, well he was the VP at the time, Chuck Hathaway; had promised Donna Deane the job. I really liked working with Donna, really liked working with her. She called me at home one night and said "Well, Chuck called me and said that he gave the job to Jane Swart." It was quite a shock because Donna was really, really good to me and helped me with everything. It was quite a different job than working with Handicapped Services. Because I was pretty independent there, and then Jane Swart came; I was her personal secretary. I worked here until nineteen ninety-nine and I retired. Donna Curry was my master of ceremonies at my going away party. Which I've never gone away, have I Carol? (Laughs)

CH: You sort of paused a little bit and then came back. And what capacity do you work now? Tell us just a little for the record.

GR: Now? Oh my! Well, my last day here when I was retiring, Jill walked with me to the Student Union so I was basically processing out. I don't know who we talked to at the Student Union but she said, "By the way Jill, did you know that Greta can come back. She can work under a temporary agency." So, I went on vacation, came home and I had a message. I don't know if it was from you, Carol, or not but help was needed here and I said sure, why not. The one

message you left me was, "could you help in the computer lab?" I laughed and said I don't know a thing about that but I'll do it. So I did that. Before I left I the secretary to the dean position, I trained, helped with Millie Biggers who's the Dean's assistant now. And then when I came back, let's see, I did a lot of work for Jill. Did some things for Pat Martin, the current Dean. I do, oh yeah, I helped Dr. Holdcraft.

CH: You actually did some things for me when I first came into that role of overseeing the...

GR: Yeah, actually I think I did change jobs. I didn't stay in the secretary to the dean's position. Dr. Swart wanted to upgrade my position. What she wanted to upgrade me to I did not feel like I was qualified because she wanted me to do reports that I wouldn't have a clue where to get the information. And so, she asked me three times, though, if I was really wanting to take another job. I was going to work then for Barbara O'Brien because Cherri was taking the FNP job, Cherri Thompson. So I was going to take...

CH: So, Dr. O'Brien was the associate dean at that point under Dean Jane Swart.

GR: Right.

CH: And so the position for her secretary was in the process of opening up.

GR: Right. And so I don't know if Dr. Swart had a change of mind or what because we got to know each other pretty well over a period of eight years. She was different to work with but she was a very nice person. So then, the things she wanted me to do was grant-type things, do research, and I don't have, I have two years of Bible College but I don't have college other than that and so I didn't feel qualified and I told her so. I asked her what would you want me to do if I did stay here and take that job? And she said well, I would want you to do this, and so if they told me to get this report out and say you could go back for the last five years and I would check with you periodically and see how you were coming along with it. And I said, "How would I know to

go back five years, you're the only one that knows that." (Laughs)

And so anyway I just thought it was best because I knew I was going to be retiring within a few years anyway. Barbara O'Brien and I worked together and so that was the Assistant Dean Secretary position I took. But it was kind of funny because Millie Biggers started in January and that's about when Jane Swart found out that she wasn't doing too well physically. Jane was at home just about the whole time when Millie had begun. Jane would call me and she would say, "I'm sorry to bother you but," I still remember her saying, "but I don't know that other woman."

EVERONE: (Laughs)

GR: And I said "Jane you know," because I don't live too far from her either and I'd take things over to her and pick it up. I said "I'll do anything you want, it doesn't matter." Didn't matter to me whoever I can help, I can help. So anyway, that's what I did; associate dean and I think you started, Carol, then. Did I work for you as Assistant Dean when Barbara left?

CH: Yes.

GR: Yeah, I think so. And then I did retire, and then like I said, back to your question, when I came back I've done reports for Jill, like faculty updating records, because the dean likes to see all the faculty that we've had currently and maybe who they can get back again.

CH: Right.

GR: I do travel update on faculty for the past year for Jill and a ton of different things.

CH: So you just do anything that we need different that is asked of you when we need extra help.

GR: Filling in.

CH: And somebody who has your experience and expertise.

GR: Well, we've had so many secretaries to quit, especially the last couple of years. So, I've covered their jobs until we've hired someone. So the FNP secretary I did a little bit, but I did

the graduate secretary, helped Donna some, Donna Deane, Donna Curry. And then I've done the BEACON Program. I think I'm in it the fifth time now. (Laughs)

CH: So whenever we have an interim spot available that we need the assistant, Greta Robinson is the person to go to it sounds like.

GR: Yeah.

CH: Well let's start back then a little bit and talk a little bit because we've been interested in learning more about the deans and the leadership within the college and people's perspectives on that. So initially you worked with Dr. Donna Deane who was in an interim position as dean. And tell us a little bit about what it was like working for Donna Deane. What kind of leadership did you see her displaying and how did you interact with her within that time frame?

GR: Well, my very first day I came she had all these balloons and a cup that said great secretary. Of course she didn't even know me but that was a real nice welcome. And she made you feel very comfortable. She was always interested in you, your family and you felt like she was a friend rather than a dean. And Um, I felt like she handled things. I know there was a particular time when one of the faculty was asking me to do something, and being fairly new, I didn't know that she was supposed to be asking faculty secretaries to do something. So, Dr. Deane took her in and said you can't be doing that and she never did it again. So, I mean she wasn't mean or anything, she just said the way it was. And she kept things going and as far as the mail would come in and it would never pile up or anything unlike later. (Laughs) She was just a very kind, nice person to work with, and I think, let's see, it was April of that year of nineteen ninety and Dr. Swart came in August of nineteen ninety. And so during that period of time is when I worked with Donna Deane. It was a pleasant time. I was real surprised though when Dr. Swart came because I just anticipated I would stay with Donna Deane. So when Dr. Swart came, totally, totally different type of person.

CH: So describe that.

GR: Very quiet, very withdrawn. She was not a people person. I think she worked a bit or just interacted more one on one. I can remember, I don't know how long she had been here but it was long enough for me to know that she was more withdrawn. We'd had a party over at Cheryl Clark's house, and she had a pretty good size house. We were over there and I was wondering where Dr. Swart was because most of us were in one room together. She was in another little tiny room, maybe with one or two people, sitting with those few people. That was just sort of the way she was. And if you could, well, let me think now, I would type up a list for her when things were due on that list. It was kind of difficult to keep her on track.

CH: What do you think the things were that would knock her off track? Do you recall what were the things that got her off track that she would spend time doing?

GR: Well, she was very intelligent, a very good writer. I think that she wanted it to be perfect. When you dwell so much on one thing then you neglect other things. I know I even had someone call me one time about something and we just discussed it. I went in and told Dr. Swart what we had said. I don't think it offended her in any way, but I told her I didn't want anyone to come and tell her, "Well Greta said this about you," so I just told her what I had said.

CH: Okay.

GR: And um, someone, I told Donna, some of the funny things that she, you don't expect Dr. Swart to say or do anything funny, but we were in Allyn Hall and upstairs on the fourth floor there were windows in both of our offices, and I would hear this slapping in her office. I went in and she had her shoe off and she was killing wasps and flies. That end of the building was especially bad with cluster flies and wasps. One time I went in because I heard her slapping on her desk and she said, "I was just sitting here and all of the sudden a wasp fell out of a light just right in front of my face." It just went zoom down on the table there and she took her

shoe off to kill it.

And then I went in another time and she's hanging over the desk there behind the computer and I said, "What are you doing, do you need some help? " She said "Well, I just wanted to make sure I killed that bug."

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

GR: And then other times she would say "This computer; I think it has gremlins in it." Well, it wasn't really the computer. She wasn't real computer literate, and not that I was necessarily, I think maybe just a little bit more than her, and Alice Renner was her assistant then. She'd always ask Alice to come in because she's actually the one who set up the computer lab. So Alice would come in and she was more verbal with Dr. Swart than I was.

She said "Jane you've got to quit doing that, and I try to tell you what to do and all you're doing is punching keys and that's your problem, you're just punching too many things at one time and you don't give time for anything to do what it's supposed to."

CH: That was a time when computers were a bit slower than they are now probably.

GR: A lot slower.

CH: You had to give them a chance to process.

GR: Yeah. Even though she was a real low-key person I think she wasn't patient in things like that. She wanted everything done when she wanted it done. But not necessarily that she was going to get it, but she wanted everybody else to get it. There's a lot of people like that naturally. So, I'm trying to think of some others. Oh, her daughter got married, finally and bless her heart, Jane didn't know what she was going to wear. So she decided that she was going to have her dress made. Do you remember that or anything? It was a two piece dress suit and the lady she got to make that didn't do it exactly the way Dr. Swart wanted it, so she decided herself that she was going to make a top to go with it because the jacket to this dress was supposed to close, but it

didn't because Dr. Swart was kind of heavy. So, she decided to open it and then she was going to make just a plain blouse. She did but as far as I can remember she forgot to hem the bottom of the blouse.

CH: Oh, okay. She had a raw edge on the bottom?

GR: Yes, for the wedding. (Laughs) So, just silly things like that. . She didn't do things like that very often, but then another time I think Jill and I were talking to her and she put her hand to her head and instead of her laughing she went, "Oh whimper."

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

GR: Sometimes she would be standing in front of my desk and you would think that I'm supposed to be involved in this conversation, but she'd totally ignore me like I didn't exist.

CH: She'd be talking to someone else?

GR: She'd be talking to someone else, yes. And is was supposed to be a three or four way conversation or something, and it was just like well, okay, I'll just sit here and wait until they're done because I can't type or anything, I'll make some noise. So, I just waited and got to listen to everything anyway. (Laughs)

CH: So you had a little window on everything that was going on in the Dean's office at that time, huh?

GR: Yes.

CH: So were there interesting things happening in the Dean's office, at that time, do you think?

GR: (Pause)

CH: Anything stand out in your mind?

GR: Well, no. I remember the beginning of the FNP program.

CH: Okay.

GR: The Family Nurse Practitioner Program. Margaret Graham had come and I don't know if it was her first year back. She was here, I think, originally and went back to school, I think maybe to get her doctorate. She was helping Dr. Swart with the grant to get it started here, the Family Nurse Practitioner Program. The deadline was coming, and she wasn't good with deadlines actually. Like I said she was a wonderful writer, but she wasn't good with deadlines. So, it was coming and coming and coming so Alice Renner, Jill Oroszi, Dr. Swart and I, stayed until maybe ten or eleven o'clock one night and it had to be in the mail by midnight. So, her husband took it to the airport at midnight and it was rejected. (Laughs) So then the next year she tried again and she got down to just a few days of when it was due again and she gave it to Margaret Graham and it got funded.

CH: And Margaret whipped it out in those few days.

GR: She's the one that started that program. So, I've seen the beginning of that, and then there was the prescriptive authority that had come into being in Ohio. Margaret Graham was very instrumental in that going to Columbus all the time. Dr. Swart did it a little bit and I helped a little bit with the Continuing Education Program, but we really didn't have one then, but if there was an event, Dr. Swart wanted me to help a little bit with that. That's one that I have helped with. I helped Donna Curry with that one when she had a different secretary and I helped Judie Lincks with the continuing program. Donna Curry has been here as well as Carol Holdcraft with Jane Swart. Judie Lincks is Director of the CE Program now but I don't think she knew Dr. Swart much. She may have known of her but she wasn't here then but she's the director of that program now

CH: Okay, well you worked for quite a few years as the secretary to Dean Swart so you probably were one person who knew and saw and interacted with her as much as anybody within the College.

GR: Probably.

CH: And it seems to me like you developed some fond feelings for her as well. Perhaps, recognizing both some of the real strengths that she had but also some of the human flaws that were part of her.

GR: Even when she wasn't sick I used to go over to her house. Her first day here I took food over to her and Tim, her husband. So, I got to meet him. You talk about two different types of people.

CH: In what way?

GR: He was funny, outgoing, Jane Swart was withdrawn and quiet but they had a very good marriage. I can remember one time, I think it was after Jane got sick though, I took something over to her and it was at Christmas time. In the doorway as you stepped in, there was a plant there, and Tim had decorated it like a little Christmas tree. It wasn't any kind of Christmas thing but he put lights on it and he said "So Greta, what do you think of my little Christmas tree?" I looked at it and I said, "Well yeah Tim, that's pretty nice." Jane was standing back behind him just grinning from ear to ear to say like, that's my husband. (Laughs) Another time they were going on vacation. I can't remember what month, it might have been August. She came upstairs, that's when we were still in Allyn Hall, and she told Tim I'm just going to be a few minutes so just wait in the car. Well, it was either two or three hours later when her phone rang. She hung up and came in my office laughing and I said, "Was that Tim?" And she said, "Yes". I said, "What did he say to you, Jane?" She said, "Well, he sat there long enough and he said do you want me to just go ahead and get a motel here at the Holiday Inn?"

CH: Waiting for her to finish up.

GR: Waiting for her. So, he went home and he finally came back when she was ready to go and I don't know how many hours it was. But it was amazing the patience he had.

CH: Well, it sounds like they had a sense of humor with each other, too.

GR: Yeah. She told me when they were dating, they were both in college, and she said that Tim would go away sometimes, and she'd have to go to his apartment and was supposed to take care of his plants for him. She said finally, I told him, I couldn't have a rock garden. I'd kill it.

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

GR: I don't know if you all had any interaction with her and the funny things that she said or did like that but it was interesting. But it was stressful too. You tried to please somebody.

CH: She set pretty high standards for what she hoped to accomplish within the College. Do you remember any of those goals she was really working towards in the College? Were you involved with anything?

GR: Well, the one thing was the FNP program, which did get established. And I don't know if she was actually the one where she came from in South Carolina but I think she established that, or was a big part of it. So, she wanted that started here and naturally with the prescriptive authority too. I was trying to think of what other programs there could have been.

CH: Community Partnership with the outside community? The Kellogg Grant?

GR: Oh yeah, the Kellogg Grant.

CH: Do you remember? Were you involved with that?

GR: I do remember that. And I can't remember who it, Cheryl, whatever name was.

DMC: Maurana.

GR: Cheryl Maurana, yeah.

CH: So that was a collaboration actually with the School of Medicine, School of Professional Psychology and I forget at that time if we were still School of Nursing, Sinclair

Community College, some dieticians down at Sinclair Community College and it was called, I believe the original one was called Healthy Communities.

GR: Yeah, it was.

CH: Healthy Communities Partnership. She was fairly well known for being involved with partnerships and collaborations.

GR: Yes. And she was in a lot of the state agencies, the Deans & Directors, she'd become, I think, she called it the president. I'm not sure, I don't think they call it the chairwoman on those committees, but she did that a few years. She was involved in the District 10.

CH: O & A.

GR: I know she wanted to become a FAAN.

CH: F-A-N?

GR: F-A-A-N or Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing but she never did. In those days you didn't get a form on the Internet to fill in the information. Instead she wanted me to type the information on the computer and make it so we could just run the form through the printer. It was supposed to fit right in that form. It took a lot of finagling to do that.

CH: A lot of challenges on the secretarial end of things.

GR: Right. Yeah. It's a bit easier now. But the Dean's Secretary has completely changed now from when I was there.

CH: Tell us about how you see it different, that role, within the College.

GR: Naturally I was just a senior secretary then and that was almost just about as high as you could go unless you went...

CH: At Wright State.

GR: Yeah, at Wright State. And then they started getting administrative assistants or administrative secretaries and things like that. And so I think when Millie Biggers came it became

an administrative secretary which meant that she had to do a lot of writing. Well, that was Millie's strength because that was what her degree was in. She had a bachelor's degree but she never worked for Dr. Swart very much. But then, well I just did minutes, even when she was the President of the Deans & Directors I had to look at the previous minutes and type up the agenda for the next meeting, and I just decided that was best to do it that way, to have it ready for her. She never said anything and it worked.

CH: So, being a secretary here at the time you started was a bit of a transition from pure secretarial work where people did it on typewriters and so forth, to computers, and so the actual writing part of many things the administrator, the dean, the faculty member did that writing themselves, and the secretary just typed it up and they corrected.

GR: Yes.

CH: How did it change? Did it change in a way; you're saying with Millie Biggers, was Millie was actually doing more writing and that.

GR: Well, she started in January of nineteen ninety-eight and Dr. Swart got sick and she was hardly here then, that whole year and died in October. I don't know for sure what Millie did, but I was working with Barbara O'Brien. I was doing both of the jobs somewhat. Send out letters for the staff and the faculty informing them what their raise would be and Millie still does this. I collected the information for the faculty in terms of their health requirements, and set up interviews for new faculty coming in, and just different things like that which Millie still does things like that some. But I've noticed that, naturally this big, big event, the Cameos of Caring. This was started after Pat Martin had come, and I don't know how many years she was here before that was a new event.

CH: A couple of years anyway.

GR: It's a big money maker now, I guess, but I never had anything like that. I'd set up

events and naturally as secretary. We all still do it, as you figure out the food, the room, the equipment and things like that

DMC: Did you do the retreats?

GR: Yes, I did do the retreats. At that time the faculty would go to was it Deer Creek?

DMC: Or Houston Woods.

GR: Or Houston Woods and so I'd have to find out from all faculty who they wanted to stay with.

SIDE A ENDS

SIDE B BEGINS

GR: With the retreats, they used to go every year. I think it was the end of August, and they always went away, and then obviously money got tight. So they stopped going, which I was really glad, because I didn't have to handle all those room reservations, and the food, and everything else even though I didn't get to go. Which I wouldn't have wanted to anyway except there would be some of my friends there, Donna. (Laughs) But they quit doing that and now the retreat is what, like at the Student Union?

DMC: The Holiday Inn.

GR: The Holiday Inn. True. True, which is across the street.

CH: But more likely a one-day and a little less involved.

GR: A one day, yes. Yeah. I'd have to set up new faculty orientation. Different things like that. The secretary still does things like that, but I notice more that Millie Biggers does the letter writing, creating the letters as the Dean's secretary. Because I know Pat gave me a letter when I retired, and of course Millie wrote it. (Laughs) And Pat signed it.

CH: Pat approved it.

GR: Pat approved it. And so, Millie just does a lot of things like that now and it's just,

well, I guess I did more the detail work. Maybe I'm wrong in saying that because I'm not sure exactly all that Millie does, even though I cover for her job occasionally when she's gone. It was more just little things and Millie has more of an overall, well is she an administrative assistant.

CH: Uh-huh. So, more oversight and responsibility for the job.

GR: Yeah.

CH: Let me follow a little different line with you if we can. The Dean's secretary normally interacts and sort of schedules the dean with students, faculty, involvements with other administrators across the university when meetings need to be held, or communication needs to occur. Are there things that stand out in your mind about that era with Dr. Swart in terms of serving as the interactive point with, let's start maybe with faculty?

GR: Well, she always had a full calendar because she was out of town quite a bit to all these state meetings or whatever. It gets a little difficult. It wasn't too bad actually. I never did like to schedule meetings with her and someone else, and I think that's with anybody because it's very difficult sometimes. She'd go to the Dean's meetings and so forth, and if she had to have some information, sometimes she had it, and sometimes she didn't. But you might hear a little bit more personal things, problems with the faculty because you'd have to say, "Can I ask you what's the purpose of your meeting," and then they'd tell me. (Laughs)

CH: And I'm sure it becomes part of your judgment how urgent the need is to be.

GR: Uh-huh and the same way with the students. Well, I always remember this one student was just so irate, and they're still the same way. Sorry Tara. We were still in Allyn Hall then and the student needed to see the Dean because the schedule was not right for her. Does that sound familiar?

CH: That does resonate, yes.

GR: Yes. Okay. Well this student, Dr. Swart usually left the door open unless it was

something really personal. So, you naturally heard everything and the student said the reason she couldn't stick to this schedule, she wanted the whole class changed for her, because she thought her cow was going to calf at any time.

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

CH: That is an interesting reason, isn't it?

GR: It was interesting but it didn't work.

CH: It didn't work? So, what kind of a responder was Dr. Swart to concerns that people brought her or complaints that people brought to her?

GR: I thought she was pretty good actually, not overly affectionate type.

CH: She would listen to what they said.

GR: She would listen, yes, and I know one of the faculty members, her mother had died, and so she was a real affectionate showing type person. So she came in to talk to Dr. Swart and so she hugged her, and she was a lot taller, and Dr. Swart was pretty short, of course I'm pretty tall too, but I could just see those two with her bending down. She said to me later, I didn't know if I should have hugged or not, because she didn't seem like she wanted a hug.

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

GR: But then Dr. Swart would talk to me about when her mother got sick and she confided in me with things like that, about how difficult it was and so forth. Her mother was just totally different than her, and she was very outgoing like Tim was, her husband. And that was kind of different because here it was her mother. So she was there for a while and then she died. I think she had bladder cancer if I'm not mistaken.

CH: She came and lived with Dr. Swart and her husband.

GR: I think she stayed for a short time and then she died if I remember correctly. And she said her daughter would never get married. Her daughter got married. She said well, she would

never want any children. Well, Dr. Swart died but then her daughter did have two kids last I had heard, but they lived in North Carolina. Dr Swart and her husband wanted to retire in North Carolina and travel a lot. They never got to do that because she had died, but now her husband has remarried and I ran into him one day at Wal-Mart. We must have talked forty-five minutes and he was already living in Florida with his new wife. He said he was really happy. He said "Jane and I had a good marriage, and I'm sorry she died, but I am happy." They were on their way to Alaska, and they were going to be gone six months. That's what he and Jane wanted to do.

CH: I think it's interesting as you talk about you're view of people and what's going on. As a support person, as a secretary, you really saw both the professional side, the business side in the college but you also saw and interacted with the personal and the family side of the administrators, the students and the faculty. So I really appreciate you kind of sharing some of those insights, even though sometimes they don't seem to be part of an oral history. They are part of the whole picture of what went on.

GR: Un-huh. Right.

CH: We were a College of primarily women and we had families and so forth. The time frame when Dr. Swart became ill, just to kind of set the stage, the president of the university had actually gotten ill, and had had pancreatic cancer and became ill and had been in office at the time, and then died during that time. Actually around the same time as Dr. Swart first became ill and we didn't know...

GR: But she didn't know, excuse me, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

CH: Go ahead.

GR: She didn't know that she was as ill as she was. When I was working for Barbara O'Brien, Dr. Swart would come into my office and she'd say, "My back is just killing me." She attributed it to an accident that she'd had quite a few years prior to that.

I said "Well, Jane, when I have a back problem I stand up and I just sort of slowly bend down and stretch my back like that." So, she didn't stand up, she just sat in my office bending over touching her toes. Then she was telling me that she went to the doctor and he was concerned because she had sugar diabetes then, and her sugar was so high. She had this pain still, and I can't remember some of the other symptoms she had. She hadn't started to lose any weight then and so she started feeling worse, she'd catch a cold, and I had like a cold six weeks prior to that and I was completely over it, and she got a cold and then got really sick.

And she said, "It's your fault Greta.

And I said, "Jane, I had that six weeks ago."

And she said "It's still your fault." She was laughing. So then she just got sick so much and it seemed like she couldn't get rid of things. She seemed like she had a really good doctor, so he started running more and more tests on her. Like I said Millie Biggers started in January of nineteen ninety-eight and Dr. Swart was staying home most of the time.

She came in occasionally and she would call me and I'd ask her how she was, and, "Not too bad," or whatever, "I'm going to the doctor and so forth." And then we found out about Dr. Flack, the president at that time of the university. They didn't divulge necessarily what his problems were and how sick he really was. But coincidentally my mother became very ill and I had taken her to Kettering Medical Center for some tests, because her legs were really, really hurting, and then she developed gangrene in her toes. So then, she was in this unit. It was sort of like what you'd think of the emergency room, or maybe it was divided by curtains. And low and behold Dr. Flack was down at the other end of that same room, and his wife was with him. I walked down there to talk to his wife. He looked absolutely terrible. He had jaundice and he was a light complexion African-American, but you could tell how ill he was and how jaundiced he was. And his wife was so sweet. If I can get through this.. (Pause)

CH: It's okay.

GR: She came down and she stayed with my mother, that was his wife, and my mother, and she came down and prayed with her. That was probably the end of March, well no; it was earlier than that because my mother ended up having one leg amputated because she had the PAD.

CH: Is that the Peripheral Artery Disease?

GR: Uh-huh. She had one leg amputated and I'm trying to think now. No, it was the first time and Dr. Swart had surgery, and they found out she had pancreatic cancer. The week she had her surgery or found out that she had pancreatic cancer, Dr. Flack died. And she did go to the viewing. It was held, I think, at the Nutter Center. I don't think, I don't know that she ever came back by then because that was in the week she found out she had pancreatic cancer too. And so, I went to be with my mother for her surgery when she had the first leg amputated, went right from there to Miami Valley Hospital, and saw Dr. Swart. That was a shock, and naturally she never came back then. It was sad.

CH: Yeah, it was a time of a lot of loses personal and professional within the university. It was really a different time within the university. Dr. Flack was the first African-American President at the university. Had a terrific following of people who were involved in his career and so forth and likewise to have two such high administrators become ill and to die within that time frame.

GR: And family. And even when, I don't know if you can say this in humor but you know how Dr. Praeger is, it probably was this past year she said, "I will not drink the water here at Wright State."

And I said, "Oh, you don't like the taste or what?"

And she said, "No! I don't want to get pancreatic cancer."

I said, "Susan, what are you talking about." She said, "Well, you know Dr. Flack and Jane Swart got it so I'm not about to take a chance."

EVERYONE: (Laughs)

CH: Probably seventeen thousand other students are actually drinking the water...

GR: I don't think, I don't particularly like the taste of it, so I just bring my own water. But it was, and then Dr. Swart then died that October of nineteen ninety-eight, and I don't remember how long Dr. Flack was sick. I think he was about the same amount of time probably, six months.

CH: Yeah. So, kind of a tough time. Donna, are there areas that we haven't covered?

DMC: Just, are there any other recollections like you know, you would go to visit her at her home?

GR: Uh-huh.

DMC: Um, when she was there.

GR: The last time I had seen her she was actually up walking. I almost fell to the floor, I was so stunned to see what she looked like. And what made her look worse, obviously she lost a lot of weight, but her stomach was very swollen. Her daughter had convinced her to get her haircut really, really, short and it was, she wore her hair short but this was really short, and so it showed her neck more, and I saw that it was really thin. I took something over for her signature and well; you see how I broke down here. I almost broke down in front of her. Margaret Graham had called me on a Saturday and said she had died that morning. Tim took care of her at home the whole time. Then Barbara O'Brien and Pat Martin were interim at that time. Pat Martin was, how do you say? Appointed?

CH: She was first appointed as the interim dean while Dr. Swart was ill, the two of them worked together to assume the leadership functions and day-to-day operations within that time.

GR: Barbara O'Brien was really good to me. Of course during this whole time with my

mother, and then my little granddaughter was very ill and died. She was really good but then Barbara thought that she would become the next dean, but at the time she didn't have tenure too. I met Pat Martin when I first started working for Jane Swart. That was another thing that Pat Martin was still at Miami Valley Hospital, and worked there and also worked here in research.

CH: As a nurse researcher at Miami Valley and it was probably a joint appointment.

GR: Yeah, I think it was a joint appointment and Pat was always very good to me too. I took her over, well she wanted me to go with her, I can't remember who drove but we went for a luncheon there. I might have driven her because I was going to drop her off and she said no, come on in. And I said well, okay and so they were going to have lunch and she said you come and join us. It was Sue Fitzsimmons, the VP of Nursing at Miami Valley Hospital and I can't remember. There were about five or six of us around the table and I thought what am I doing here with all of these people like this, but they all treated me like I was a normal person. (Laughs) I've told Pat Martin since that I said, "You've always treated me like I'm just as good as you", which naturally everybody is. But you know, a lot of times people in a higher position, they think that they are better than everybody else, but Pat never treated me like that. And so, I was really glad. I don't know if I should tell you this or not, but at my retirement party, who was the VP or the Provost, the first one under Kim Goldenberg?

DMC: Perry Moore.

GR: Perry Moore. He came to my retirement party and he came over and hugged me and I whispered in his ear, "You are going to hire Pat Martin aren't you?"

And he just laughed and said "Well, you never know." So naturally he did along with the faculty. I've worked for Pat Martin some when Millie's been gone, and filled in for her. She doesn't give me as much work, naturally, as she does Millie. So, she's easy on me. But I have to do fliers for her books, or make appointments, or do this or do that. I have known Pat Martin for

many, many years too.

DMC: Has there been any striking change or something? If someone said to you, if you were off in another place with people and they said oh, where did you work, and you said Wright State, and they said where'd you work at Wright State? Well, in the College of Nursing. Anything striking that you've seen in the years that you've been affiliated at Wright State?

GR: Well, the technology, obviously, has just exploded which is everywhere, naturally but when I worked in Handicapped Services I had to schedule the test proctors to work with the disabled students and we would lay out, or I'd lay out on the table schedules. I decided I wanted a computer because they were just coming in. So I got a little computer, and then Dave Hurwitz who was director of Tutoring Services in those days. He was a friend, and I asked him if he could set up a little program for me. So, I got a second external drive, and he set that up for me. That was the beginning of me seeing computers here. They say you've lived long enough to see the airplane come in, TVs, and everything. Well, I was here when I saw the computer starting.

CH: That's right. And computers have really changed our world.

GR: It has. And, especially there in Handicapped Services in which they call it Disability Services now, we never used computers for anything. I was able to work with Dave Hurwitz and we set up a pretty good little plan, how to schedule proctors, the students liked it a lot better, and it was easier to read and so forth. Then when I started with Donna Deane, then I did have a computer. But then, like I said I worked with School of Medicine and I learned a little bit about the computers there, but then Donna taught me a lot about computers too because she was learning it at the same time, obviously. But then faculty began using computers, and the faculty secretaries used to do all of the typing of the tests and the syllabi.

CH: Every hand out.

GR: Everything. And then everybody started getting a computer. Well, now I can see

that Julie, who's a secretary and Sharon, now they don't have to do a lot of that. They still do some but the faculty; it's just amazing how much typing the faculty does now.

CH: For themselves.

GR: For themselves, yeah. Yeah, I mean it's like their second job is a secretary. Right? (Laughs) And it's, Jane Swart always thought oh, good we have computers now so we're going to have a paperless society. Yeah right. It wasn't a paperless society. It's made it even worse. . But I can see, I think just right off the top of my head I think the biggest thing was probably the computers that changed everything. And now, my goodness, my grandkids they come in and I've got an iPod, I've got a Wii, I've got a this, I've got a that. And I say what is that? And here this microphone that we've got here now, what you've got Donna is an iPod microphone that you're going to hook it to the computer.

CH: It seems like one of the ways you've stayed young, Greta, is the fact that you've kept up with all these changes in society, and don't really get intimidated by anything but are willing to learn something new.

GR: Well, you might as well. Why spend your energy on things that don't count? You know? Well, I've worked with a lot of nice people though. My husband is always saying I cannot believe the nice people you work with. And I don't know of anybody really that's ever been nasty that I can think of Maybe I'm just naive enough. (Laughs) So, it's just, we've had some difficult people at the time but you have to accept them as they are.

CH: As you look over the whole time of your career or your time at Wright State there are always students or faculty, a few people who make life a little more interesting but then there were lots of other people, it sounds like, who make your job really pleasant and supportive.

GR: Yeah. Yeah.

CH: I think it's good to get that perspective at times. Is there anything as you sit here and

think about, you know, sharing your oral history of the College of Nursing and your time that you've been here that we have not asked you that you think it's important that we get Greta Robinson's view on?

GR: Oh my.

CH: Sometimes we don't know the right question to ask.

GR: I know what you mean. I'll probably think of two dozen after I leave here.

CH: Well, if you do we'll schedule another session.

GR: (Laughs) Um, well, my opinion on something is through the years I have seen that students have been babied quite a bit, and they like to take advantage of that. For instance, like I said Dr. Swart had a student come in and wanted a whole schedule changed because her cow was going to calf I guess that's the term. I didn't live on a farm. But they get very upset because they think they ought to have it the way they want it. And I think it's our society now, but you see it when you work directly with young people, that they need to learn to be responsible and not blame everybody else. And I think with the scheduling, I know you all have had difficulty trying to get rooms, trying to get faculty, the clinical sites, and all that kind of thing. that I think if there would be a way to do an orientation on growing up. To be more responsible because even like student workers, we've had one recently, she doesn't even call in if she doesn't want to come. And so therefore you're left hanging, and you think I've got all these jobs for the student worker to handle. Like I said I think it's just our society. That it's just a very self centered society and I don't know how nurses can function if they are not giving and understanding and so forth.

CH: Of other people.

GR: Of other people, yes. You have to think of yourself to a point but when you get to the point that everything revolves around you then that's when you've got to draw the line. And I don't know how, even in high school it's like that too, naturally, because they're a lot younger

obviously. But I don't know how you would ever teach students that.

CH: So, you've seen some generational changes. What we've talked about as generational differences during your time here with young people.

GR: It's more what we call, what'd you say Donna, the helicopter parents? (Laughs) The parents want to get involved, and I don't know if my children were that age, if I'd do what some of them do, they don't even have enough incentive to call to make their own appointment to see an advisor. Or just take the incentive to do things like that. Of course the parents, I think, are the fault and that way, naturally, they've been controlling them all their lives and they're going to keep on controlling them. But I don't know how you would try to do anything differently because this is the way the children have been brought up to this point. And that's obviously not seen in all the students. We've got some really, really nice people.

DMC: We do.

GR: And working with the BEACON program now it's really rewarding to see the students, and how they go through, they come in and they're like oh, they've got a degree already, but yet they're still immature, especially the ones that have been in finance or something similar. It's like, oh my, it's totally different. (Laughs)

CH: But you see a lot of change overtime with people. They mature, as they become nurses.

GR: Right.

CH: And that's part of why were interested in doing this history because we really do believe educating nurses is a unique kind of an organization to have.

GR: Well, I know Dr. Scordo, she's in charge of the Acute Care Nurse Practitioner Program. She had a student come in who looked terrible, and she said "When you come back here, I expect you to dress properly." And we shouldn't have to say that. Students come in with

the, well; this is a personal opinion actually, with such low cut tops on that when you have a male in the class, how can they concentrate? It's so unprofessional and I think that, well, I've got jeans on now, I'm not saying they don't dress casual, but I think decent and modest. But how do you do that because in the hospital I don't think they would tolerate that kind of dress. So, that's my opinion.

CH: Well, you've seen lots of changes over time. I guess I'd just like to add as we close the interview today that Greta Robinson has really been someone at our college who has always brought the human touch into the office as well. So, Greta's one who steps in when someone has a death in the family and helps out as she has described and interacts with people and that's really been an important function in our college over time. So, we'll just say publicly, thank you Greta for what you've done.

GR: Certainly. You're welcome.

CH: For both the work you've given to the college over the years but also the human element that you've brought to the College.

GR: It's been my pleasure. Thank you.

CH: Thank you.

SIDE B ENDS

TAPE ENDS