

Doris Boos  
Anoka State Hospital Oral History Project  
28 February 2014  
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Neal Holtan: Good morning.

Doris Boos: Good morning.

Neal Holtan: My name is Neal Holtan and I will be interviewing you this morning and this is for the oral history project for Anoka County Historical Society, concerning Anoka State Hospital. And could you tell us who you are?

Doris Boos: I'm Doris Boos and I've been a resident of Anoka County since I was 23 years old. So I was interested in the state hospital problems.

Neal Holtan: And could you tell us where you were born and where you lived?

Doris Boos: I was born actually in Traverse County in the western part of Minnesota actually on the little bump you see on the western border and I lived there until I was 18 and my father was a farmer. Actually not all of the time did we live in Traverse County. We did move to South Dakota Just over the border for about ten years, and then moved back to Minnesota.

Neal Holtan: And in what year were you born?

Doris Boos: I was born in 1927, in August and actually I was born on my grandfather's farm. My grandmother was a midwife and she delivered me. So, I was actually born on the edge of Lake Traverse, that's where their farm was located.

Neal Holtan: And how about school?

Doris Boos: I went to elementary school in South Dakota and in Roberts County and then in Traverse County. And I went to high school in Beardsley, Minnesota, which is in Big Stone County, over the line from Traverse. And then one year I went to High School in Wheaton, back in Traverse County again but it's all in the same area and I went to Wheaton because I wanted to take chemistry and in Beardsley it was a very small high school,. They had only four choices and they gave chemistry every other year. So I was unable to get chemistry in the year that I could have and so I went to Wheaton for that year. My reason for wanting chemistry was because I wanted to become a nurse. And also you had to be a nurse to be a stewardess for the airlines and this is what I really wanted to do. Well it turned out I was unable to go to college. I didn't have the funds to do it. And my father didn't offer any money. So I didn't go to college, but I did go to cosmetology hairdressing, whatever you want to call it beauty school in Minneapolis. And I graduated from there in 46', 1946 and worked in beauty shops until I was married in 1951, or 50' rather, excuse me. And occasionally I worked after that but until 19, I can't remember now, 65 I think it was. I went to work at Federal Cartridge, worked there for 23 years and retired from there. And there I was a, they called it a line audit, line auditor but I was actually just if you want to call it an inspector. And we inspected component parts for shells in all departments. So that's kind of the story of my life.

Neal Holtan: Could you say something about your first husband?

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Doris Boos: My first husband was diagnosed I believe in 62' with schizophrenia in 1962 and he was unable to work after that. He was a chemist for General Mills and so, it was necessary for me to go to work and we did have disability insurance for a while and then he refused to go back after he'd been dismissed from the hospital. He worked at General Mills for a while in their library and he was then asked to return to the doctor which he refused to do. His feeling was, was that he was not ill but he really was ill. And I think that's part of the schizophrenia feeling. They just don't think they're ill. But anyway, he was dismissed after a couple of years from...

Neal Holtan: So you had been married 12 years before he became ill?

Doris Boos: Yes.

Neal Holtan: Did you, were you surprised did you see it coming or not?

Doris Boos: I saw it coming and I can't tell you what brought it on. But, he was extremely concerned about the atomic plant that they were building, river, or were about to build and it was on the place where they have the, I'm not sure what they call it now, but it was a power plant at that time run by the REA and they were interested in installing this atomic plant and he was the Chairman of the Minneapolis Civil Defense Group and he felt that if there was a leak of any kind at the atomic plant it would go into the river because their discharge of hot water would go into the river. If there was a leak this would flow into the Minneapolis Water Supply. So he was diligently trying to prevent the building of that plant. And at that time he became very obsessed with this and whether this is what triggered the schizophrenia I don't know.

Neal Holtan: Was he actually committed to the hospital?

Doris Boos: Yes he was.

Neal Holtan: And was there some kind of crisis or event that happened?

Doris Boos: He became extremely agitated. He, a schizophrenic person feels very paranoid and he got to the point where he, for a long time he did not trust government people and so, it got so extreme that he went into the basement and he would not go outside or be anywhere where he thought he could be observed. And so when it got to that point I tried to convince him to go to see our pastor. We went to the church and driving on all the back roads. We didn't go our normal route. And as we got to the church I didn't know if the pastor was in the church or in his house so he let me out and he turned around and left. So there I was stranded, and the pastor and I went to the doctor. First of all we called Dr. Bunker and told him what was going on. He said that there was nothing I can do he has to be committed. That's the only thing to be done. So, the pastor took me to the doctor's office. He signed an agreement that he should be committed and we had to take that to the courthouse and I believe to the Sherriff's department and they went out and picked him up. So, that's how he came into the state hospital.

Neal Holtan: And Dr. Bunker, was he your family doctor?

Doris Boos: Yes, he was. He had delivered all of our babies and he was our family doctor.

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Neal Holtan: And how did your husband react to all this?

Doris Boos: He of course felt there was nothing wrong with him and he was very disturbed when they picked him up. It took several policemen to get him into a car to take him to the state hospital. Then, after being in the state hospital for two days he talked someone into opening the window and I believe he was in the Miller Building and they opened the window for him and he escaped during the night. He ran everywhere and finally ended up in Coon Rapids, about five o'clock in the morning and knocked on the door where he saw the people were up and he knocked on their door and called me. And of course the police were out looking for him and they had come to our house thinking he would return home. So, when he called they knew that he was planning to come so they just waited I think for him and took him back to the state hospital.

Neal Holtan: How long did he stay in the hospital?

Doris Boos: He was there, committed there for three days. Then they hold a meeting, I don't know what you call it, a committal meeting I guess. And there is an attorney representing the patient. They have a judge and they have a doctor, or someone from the Anoka County Board of Health and Dr. Bunker was the Chairman of the Anoka County Board of Health so he knew the case very well. While my husband had been in the basement before he was committed he wrote many concerns on a tablet, so I had given that to him and they were all paranoid thoughts. So it was quite obvious that he was ill, mentally ill and his family was from Chicago. My mother in law was kind of protective of her children, so to ease this news of his being committed I had him put in Glenwood Hills which was a private hospital for mentally ill people. And he was there for three months and then they dismissed him. I think he was a little better for a while, but it soon returned to problems and that's when he wouldn't go back to the doctor and he never did go back to the doctor ever after he was released from Glenwood Hills.

Neal Holtan: Did he get medication?

Doris Boos: He had medication but he would not take it.

Neal Holtan: Do you know anything about Glenwood Hills? Is it still around?

Doris Boos: I don't think it's still there. I don't know.

Neal Holtan: Where was it?

Doris Boos: It was in probably Golden Valley.

Neal Holtan: Okay.

Doris Boos: I don't know exactly, in the northwest part of Minneapolis anyway.

Neal Holtan: What eventually happened to your husband?

Doris Boos: He eventually he became unable to live with. He became very strict with the children to the point of abusing them, not sexually, but physically. So, I left him because my children were becoming very irritated and it was difficult for them so I left him and he remained,

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we lived on a 100 acre farm north of Anoka on the Rum River. Part of the property was on the Rum River and he stayed there until, I don't remember the year. But the children took care of him and he eventually was put in assisted living and then into a nursing home and that's where he passed away, at Epiphany I believe, nursing home.

Neal Holtan: How old were your children when you separated?

Doris Boos: I just can't remember exactly. I separated in 67' and we'd been, Carl would have been about 16, 15 and he was the oldest one and Wally, they were quite close and he was probably 14 and Barbara was probably 12 and Evelyn was probably 10. I'm not quite sure how old they were. But, it was in that area.

Neal Holtan: How did they react to what was going on?

Doris Boos: Well, they were relieved to be away from that influence, that environment and I think they pretty much were happier to be out of that situation. It was something I did not want to do but for their sake I felt I'm going to have children in the state hospital too if I don't move on, take the children and go. So, that's what I did.

Neal Holtan: How did your friends and neighbors react to this?

Doris Boos: I don't know. I didn't have a lot of contact with the neighbors so I really can't say what they felt. My family thought it was a good idea, and my oldest son had wanted that for some time. In fact he had wanted to go live with his grandparents and I said no you children are my responsibility and if you go I'll have to send all of the children and my parents should not have to do this, take care of you.

Neal Holtan: You mentioned your mother in law. Did she have much contact or?

Doris Boos: No, not a lot. She did come to see us once in a while. But, her feeling was that he was not sick. There was nothing wrong with him and his brother also. He only had one brother. The only sibling in his family was his brother. So, I did not get very much support from his family at all.

Neal Holtan: Do you think there was any mental illness in the brother or mother?

Doris Boos: I don't think there was in that generation too much. But I think their grandmother, from some of the stories I had heard had problems with her mental health problems. I really can't say, just hand me down stories that I got about her.

Neal Holtan: Well before we switch gears and talk about something quite different. Any final thoughts or memories of that time and those events that stuck with you?

Doris Boos: Well, I think you need to have a lot of understanding about mental illness. People sometimes just push it behind the door and don't want to discuss things and it's not a terrible disease. It is in a way, but I mean it's not something that you should sweep under the rug. It's not something to be ashamed of and people should be treated the same as someone that had measles

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or a cold or whatever. They need to have a doctor, they need to be treated and they need to be monitored also. That's my feeling of the mental illness problem.

Neal Holtan: Would you share your opinion about are things changing in that regard or not?

Doris Boos: I think there are some better treatments for them. They don't do the lobotomies and all the things they used to do, but I still think it's something that people feel ashamed of and they just don't want to admit it and that's why we have some of the problems we have these days. I don't know if there is any way to monitor them or do anything about it. That's my feeling on it.

Neal Holtan: Thanks. I understand that at one point you were involved with the community in Anoka about the hospital?

Doris Boos: Yes.

Neal Holtan: Could you share some of that?

Doris Boos: I was involved with the Minnesota State Hospital after there had been a murder committed there in 1976. There was a lady who lived just outside of the Minnesota State Hospital in Anoka and a patient, I guess burst into her home. I don't know about that, but he killed her. Actually he didn't kill her, but the injuries were very bad and she was taken to the hospital and died there later. But, she was a 68 year old woman who had retired and was enjoying herself doing many things. So, there were three women in the neighborhood who were trying to get some answers and the Minnesota State Hospital, I shouldn't say Minnesota State Hospital, the Minnesota Health and Welfare Department was in charge of the state hospital and they assured these women on television that there were no problems and everything was under control. Also, they would have meetings with these women and there was another friend of mine, who knew Mary, the woman that was murdered and we felt there needed to be some better security at the state hospital which I think, I don't think the Minnesota Health and Welfare Department was at fault for the lack of security but the regulations that they gave to the administrator allowed for too much freedom for the patients. I think they did this because of their past atrocities that happened in the history of the state hospitals. So they bent over backwards to make the patients more free in the hospitals. As a result of that the patients were allowed to go downtown at anytime.

There was no obvious restriction and they would go downtown in Anoka, order food in the restaurants and not pay for it. Probably, I can't say for certain but I think that they would steal things, pickup things and not pay for them and other things that they were doing downtown that were very disruptive. So, as a result of that the police were called to take them back to the state hospital and the police department in Anoka was constantly picking up patients and returning them to the hospital. They probably took the same patient back and forth a couple of times a day. The Chief of Police was very upset with this problem and it took a lot of man hours for his patrolmen to be hauling these back and forth. So, these women, getting back to the women they were assured by the Minnesota Health and Welfare Department that everything was under control and they would have them on television, kind of a media campaign to assure the public that everything was fine. But in reality it was not. They were not doing anything that they hadn't

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done before. The administrator wanted to do things. The administrator of the Anoka State Hospital, but his hands were tied by the regulations that were set up by the Minnesota Health and Welfare Department.

The representative of our district Tom Mangan was pushing for things to be done. He was not being very successful either. So, we decided this friend and I, Ruth Stocco was her name, that we should try to do something about the security. We worked at Federal Cartridge, both of us and we had people wondering into Federal Cartridge and there's a lot of ammunition around and it's an ammunition factory. It's not a very safe environment to have somebody that doesn't know what they're doing coming in there and there were other businesses that they would wonder in and out of. There was another factory near the state hospital and they would go in there. Ruth and I decided to attend a meeting that these three women were invited to at the state hospital. Ruth had written a letter, a protesting letter that she wanted to present to them and so we're driving along and she says we need to form a committee. I said fine how are we going to do this? We had no organization at that point. I said you better be the secretary because you're writing the letters, she was very good at that and getting publicity. So I'll be the President, and you'll be the secretary. When we got to the meeting this is what we were going to present to them, this committee. We got there, and were seated in the waiting area with these three women and the representatives from the Minnesota State Health Department were there and asked the women to come in. So, we got up to go in with them. No, you can't come in. Well, isn't this a public meeting they said? Thought it was open to the public? So she went back and talked to someone, pretty soon she came out and said we're not having a meeting, the meeting is cancelled.

Ruth being the campaigner that she was, and she was always interested in the welfare of the community. She had been in Anoka all her life. Her father was a doctor in Anoka. So anyway, we went back and we decided we're having a committee. We're going to get a petition for our things that we want done, which we did. We had the blessings of Federal Cartridge, in fact Ruth was on very good terms with Bob Ehlen, who was the Chairman of The Federal Cartridge Group. We were allowed to circulate a petition for, there were three things we wanted. One of them was for the staff to wear a badge. As it was, I guess the Health Department thought they wanted to have a very common attitude with the staff so that the patients felt comfortable, but the staff didn't know who was who because everybody wore ordinary clothing. No uniforms or anything. That was one of the things that we wanted to have, a badge. And we wanted a fence around the state hospital. And I can't remember the third thing. Escort, I think it was for patients that left the hospital. If you wanted to go to a restaurant then someone should go with them or whatever.

So, we circulated our petition everywhere, anybody that wanted to sign it we got them to sign. Our neighbors, our people at church, at Federal Cartridge. I think we had about 3000 signatures on our petition. In the meantime we talked to other people that were concerned. Eventually we had a committee of the Chief of Police of Anoka and Ed Fields, who was the County Commissioner. We had Tom Mangan who was the representative of our district. Lucille Lane who had a business, an electrical business downtown. Phyllis Lane who also had a business, they had a Pontiac garage. I think that was it on our committee. We had several meetings. Every time we had a meeting Ruth would get an article in the paper, I don't know what she said especially,

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but she was a good friend of Peter Bodley who was a reporter for the Anoka Union, so he would write up a story for her.

Then, Tom Mangan arranged a meeting with Governor Anderson to present our petition to him. The whole committee went down to see Governor Anderson and we were ushered in and I think Tom introduced us. We sat in a very sumptuous couch next to the Governor. The Governor had a platform with his desk on it so he's up about six inches higher than the floor level. The couch was very soft and you sank down into it. So anyway, I'm sitting first in the lineup on the couch and he turns to me, so I had to speak and tell him about our petition and our wishes. Then eventually some of the others spoke up and we presented the petition to him. Then we had to have our photograph taken with him. But, he had to study it first, and finally they did get some of the requests. They would not put a fence around the whole state hospital but by the Miller Building which was supposed to be the most secure building, and the most vicious, or people that they thought might do something violent, were in that building. They did put a fence around the Miller Building. They did have the women wear badges. But the escorting was not done. We did get a little bit of our wishes at that time. Actually, we were only interested in the security. We were not trying to find some sort of justice for Mary's death or anything, punishment for the person. I understand when they picked him up after the murder he was hiding in a shed near the house and he said you can't do anything to me because I'm crazy. So this was his attitude, but we never were involved in any of that, finding justice for Mary. I don't know, I'm sure he was never tried or anything, I don't know, that part I don't know anything about. But that was my involvement with the State Hospital in Anoka. I did, as a community event that they put on a dance, maybe a sweetheart dance, or something for the patients and I went to that. Ruth and I went, danced with some of the patients. They did things like that for them at the state hospital. I'm sure there were other things they did too. But actually that's about it as far as my involvement.

Neal Holtan: Okay, was that Wendell Anderson?

Doris Boos: Yes.

Neal Holtan: Okay. Well you did a great job of summarizing that episode.

Doris Boos: Thank you.

Neal Holtan: Any final thoughts before we wrap up?

Doris Boos: I think that the state hospital, or the Minnesota Health and Welfare Department are not as lax as they used to be. I think their regulations are better and everyone that I know of has diligently tried to help people that are mentally ill, or if they're chemically dependent and they have a big area now for chemical dependency people. So there are many facets that they're involved in the Minnesota Health and Welfare. They do a pretty good job I think. I am not able to do any campaigning anymore so I don't know much about it anymore. I'm not involved in it anymore.

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Neal Holtan: Well, thank you for sharing your involvement in two different ways with the hospital.