

Taking Care--Documenting the Occupational Culture of Home Care Workers
Archie Green Fellows Project, 2014-2015
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Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Bobbie Sotin interview, 2015-01-21 : interview conducted by Nathan J. Moore
and Donald Eugene Stacy**

INTERVIEW LOG

Additional Notes: Bobbie refers to the people for whom she cares as both consumers and clients.

Time coded logs for audio file afc2014021_01580_sr01

00:00:00 Introductions, audio and video set-up, signing of release forms.

00:02:49 Name is Bobbie Sotin. Born December 12, 1963, in Crescent City, California.

00:04:43 Been a home care worker since 2001.

00:04:52 Previous jobs – stay-at-home mother for 17 years. Went back to college and earned GED (General Educational Development) certificate. Worked at 7-11, which was awful. Also worked retail in a myrtle wood shop, then started another job at a call center with medical benefits. Wanted to choose her own hours. Put in application at senior services and became a home care worker.

00:06:07 Works with clients with disabilities.

00:06:30 How is caregiving different from previous work? Hard but rewarding. Has been a caregiver her whole life. Cared for grandparents and mother. “It was just a natural thing for me.” Was stressed at the call center job, but there was no reward for the work. Likes working with people who appreciate her. Also likes knowing that clients' lives are better because she is there.

00:07:21 Currently has three clients. Two seniors and one middle-aged client. Works 24 per month with each client. Doesn't work for the money because husband has a good job. Does a lot of union work so that other home care providers can get raises and pay their bills.

00:08:37 Can anyone do this job? No. You have to be able to cope with stress and different types of personalities. Has quit a few jobs due to the situation, but that has been rare. Has

worked with over 30 clients. Worked for one client for three and a half years. Sometimes you just don't mesh with a person. You can't make someone else change. If you can't deal with a client's personality, then you shouldn't be in that job. Decided to quit a job because the client was racist. It's not easy to quit a job. Had to quit another job when one client was diagnosed with cancer and needed more care.

00:11:50 Has worked with several clients who passed away. It can be very hard, but it's part of the job when you take care of people who are elderly and sick.

00:13:03 Mother and father were caregivers, but both had to retire. Two of her nieces were also home care workers. One is now training to become a nurse and the other is going to be a pharmacist. Daughter and sister are both foster parents. Caregiving comes natural to her family. Parents were union members too.

00:14:32 There are over 20 trainings provided by the Home Care Commission. Has taken all the trainings many times. Every time you're in a room with another person, you can learn something new. Some trainings should be paid for before workers even start, especially "Preventing Disease Transmission." She is working to get home care workers paid for certain trainings before they start working with clients.

00:17:30 Is there a typical day in your field? Yes. Cleans, makes food, and manages meds for one client. The shift passes quickly. Has one client who is doing more for herself now. Acknowledging clients' improvements can be tricky; they might think they will lose their home care worker. Usually tries to be upfront and encourage them. The state will sometimes reduce the hours of care a client needs when they still need them. Home care workers can talk to case managers about this, but change often comes from family members.

00:22:16 Relationships with clients – you can't help but get close to them. Has become so comfortable with clients that she had to quit. When you start saying things that you would say to a family member instead of a boss, it's time to move on. She usually recognizes this and explain it to clients.

00:24:20 She got one of her jobs because she was filling in for another caregiver. The client liked her better. Doesn't like it when that happens. When she fills in for others, she tries to make sure that clients understand that she is just a substitute.

00:25:16 Impossible not to have clients become like family. The longer you're with them, the more it happens.

00:25:44 How do you deal with getting too close to clients? Sometimes have to back peddle. Has talked to clients about the situation. Usually clients are happy as long as needs are filled.

00:27:03 Decided not to work with a couple; her parents took the job instead. Bobbie's father got them to take their meds and stop calling 9-1-1 every day. Sometimes it just takes guidance and somebody who cares. Previous caregiver had told them that they didn't have to take their medication. Not the right thing to do. Home care workers should encourage clients to follow the doctor's instructions.

00:29:13 Did you ever “talk shop” with your parents? Yes. Shared helpful advice. The same thing happens at union meetings.

00:29:41 The registry helps a lot with finding the right caregiver for a client. Clients answer questions and the registry matches them up with an appropriate caregiver. There's different work associated with each client. You don't have to know how to do everything. Some clients have more difficult situations (feeding tubes, wheelchairs, etc.).

00:30:56 Specific stories that illustrate the work? Yes. Worked for a gentleman who had 88 hours of care per month. His case was re-evaluated and he was knocked down to 20 hours per month. He had to go through an appeal and was worried. Request for more hours denied. He had a stroke and became paralyzed on one side. He had to get a ramp put in his house, but the state chose lowest bidder. Ramp wasn't put in properly. Sees this as neglect on the part of the state. Home care workers notice these situations.

00:35:05 Current clients all receive twenty hours of care. One of them should have “mileage” in her plan due to physical disabilities. Expected to get on bus and haul groceries home by herself. State should help her with this. Transportation is an issue—clients have to walk in rain from doctors' offices to the bus stop. Clients should be let off at the office and helped into the office. Bobbie's goal is to get extra help for people who need some variation in their care plans.

00:38:18 Home care workers and clients cannot exchange money. If they need to pay for transportation, clients have to go through complicated systems involving prepaid cards.

00:40:02 Comment by Don Stacy: money can't be exchanged between clients and home care workers due to incidents of financial abuse. Some consumers also felt the need to buy gifts for staff. Bobbie agrees with the law. Notes that home care workers previously received checks for situations that now involve transferring money to prepaid cards. Not easy for people who already lack transportation. Bobbie often ends up providing transportation for free. “A home care worker's gonna do what needs to be done whether they're getting paid for it or not. It comes with the territory because the plans that the state has don't always fit the person.”

00:42:33 Has lobbied at the State Capitol many times. Wears purple union colors. Government takes a long time to change. Current clients might be interested in participating in lobby days,

but previous clients have not been able to go due to physical disabilities. Has taken a consumer from town who is not her client.

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00:00:06: Chants are part of union activities on lobby days. Doesn't remember specific chants, but there are a lot. Union members sing as well. Mentions Paul McKenna (Research Director, SEIU 503) who writes chants and songs.

00:00:40 How has the union affected your job? It has given home care workers a route to improving consumers' lives. Home care workers lobby for more money in the state budget for services. They have also given money from their contracts to pay for senior services.

00:02:49 Thinks that many community members don't know that home care workers exist. They don't have a clue until something happens to them or a family member. Once in awhile, people hear about home care workers who steal from clients, but they don't hear the good stories. Example of a good story: the Home Care Commission recently recognized a worker who recovered a client's stolen purse.

00:03:58 Doesn't know what to call clients anymore. They've been consumers, clients, customers. Tries to call them "client-employers."

00:04:30 Union helps home care workers to network with each other. This makes it better for everyone, including case managers. Case managers learn a lot now from home care workers. In the past, they've only heard from clients. Discusses importance of home care workers attending doctor's visits. Consumers forget to tell doctors important information.

00:07:33 Tremendously important to have a sense of humor on the job. If you don't laugh at life, you're not going to make it. Clients joke with home care workers too. People who have dementia are hard to care for, though, because they forget who you are. Home care workers need to have very thick skins.

00:10:00 Clients know when something is going on in your personal life. They want to help. You have to be careful about what you say. Gives example of breaking cake pan; client wanted to buy one for her.

00:12:14 Hobbies? Enjoying new grandchildren. Likes to ride Harley with husband and play Bingo. Also likes her "alone time," which can be hard to find.

00:15:28 Works with both men and women. Prefers not to work with smokers, but isn't always possible. Discusses the problems of "third hand smoke."

00:17:41 Talks about the occupational hazards of handling pills. Home care workers have to wear gloves to touch certain medications.

00:18:20 Discussion between Don Stacy and Bobbie Sotin about wearing gloves on the job. Bobbie: "It took us forever to get the State to provide us gloves."

00:19:49 "Preventing Disease Transmission" class provides home care workers with trainings on universal precautions. Wants home care workers to have to attend class before starting the job.

00:21:08 Discussion between Don Stacy and Bobbie Sotin about OSHA rules.

00:23:30 Hopes for the profession: sufficient funds that provide for the consumers. Baby Boomers are retiring and some will need care providers. Doesn't think we have enough home care workers right now to supply the demand.

00:24:31 Thinks trainings and union meetings should be required. Home care workers need to be educated about the union.

00:24:54 Has been on the last four bargaining committees during contract negotiations. It is a lot of work. "It doesn't seem like the State gets their cookies, or ducks, in a row until the last five minutes of the race." Very frustrating. Thinks the other side should be happy that home care workers are saving the state of Oregon a lot of money. Home care will be around for as long the state provides funding.

00:28:11 A lot of home care workers are older; thinks the average age is fifty-five. Her mother was on the job when she had a stroke.

00:29:47 How to recruit new home care workers? "Having a wage you can live off." Home care workers are now making \$13.75 per hour. It took six years to get beyond \$10.20 per hour, which didn't encourage people to go into home care. Home care workers now only have to work 40 hours per month to be eligible for the union health insurance. Bobbie usually works fifty to 55 hours per month. Doesn't always use up the allotted hours for each client.

00:32:35 You can't work over the allotted hours for each client and get paid. If consumers need more help, they have to contact case managers. Hard for clients to call case managers because they don't always receive a call back. Case managers are overloaded.

00:35:16 End of interview

