

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.

**Terry Luther interview, 2015-02-13 : interview conducted by Michael Robert
Bussel and Sonia De La Cruz**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:01:06: Name is Terry Luther. Lives in Florence, Oregon. Born in Sacramento, California in 1955.

00:01:27: Other jobs: costumer theater company in California, started a theater company in Oregon, was a tree planter and hoedad in Eugene, Oregon in the late 1970s.

00:02:38: Caregiver at age 14. Had job at Roseburg, Oregon Veterans' Hospital as librarian. Caregiver for her autistic son for last 24 years and paid for her caregiving for last two and one-half years.

00:03:32: Caregiving not different from other jobs. We are all caregivers when we open avenues for another human being.

00:04:14: Special skills: no judgments or preconceived notions. Happy people are able to let go of themselves and are able to serve. If you are happy, it is easier to be a caregiver.

00:06:00: Learned from her father who had polio. If you care and are nurturing, it is your calling. Went to institute for children with autism and took classes. Learned to let go of the outcome and just play.

00:07:31: Started her own program. People around her son didn't like it.

00:08:24: On mission to teach people that we're all the same. Everything is possible if you let go. In room with her son one-on-one for 90 days.

00:09:46: Taking my son out and integrating him one of best challenges I'll ever have.

00:11:06: Son mimics what man did who yelled at him. No resistance...if her son lays on floor and screams, it is fine. Everyone learns. Truth teaches itself. Lets her son be.

00:12:39: Son asleep at midnight, up at 4:00 am, back to bed at 7:00 am, up later. Food, diet, cleaning, bed-making. 14 hours of constant activity. Must let go of my day. Logs 316 hours a month. "Sleep is overrated."

00:14:20: Finds respites for herself: iPod, listens to music, takes nap, must take care of yourself. 20-60 tantrums a day at one point. Trips to Portland. What you give your child is right there.

00:15:59: Parents get lost, rely on drugs to deal with children. Holistic, naturopathic is her approach. If you take care of yourself, kids and family will be fine. Don't be a victim. Ask for help. Caregivers will say they don't need anything, they're fine.

00:19:42: Does mentoring from Florence to Kenya. Potty training an issue for people she consulted with in Kenya. Common daily experience is non-existent.

00:22:04: Happiness is the key. Choose happiness and embrace it. Everybody can learn it. Need to create whole society of people saying "Rain Man."

00:23:41: Most people look at disability as a life sentence. We are here to be happy and survive.

00:25:40: Stay present in moment. Most gratifying place you can ever be. Just my ego that thinks I have to do it all. Son went to restaurant in Coos Bay. Takes no drugs or medicine but is pure and authentic. Don't need anything else.

00:28:17: Could change the world with autistic kids if we took the approach of being happy. Love what you got, got what you love.

00:30:36: Only challenge I face is myself. Need to be authentic. Challenges are self-fed.

00:32:05: Union got me on payroll. Had been only getting paid for two-three hours per day. Now getting paid for her work. Without union, she and her husband would be working until they are 80. Savings can now go into trust. Son has a future. Union has changed our lives.

00:33:50: Union liked her energy. She is a union delegate and runs local chapter. Has 12-14 people who call her. Union brings ability to share stories and our work.

00:36:07: ABC did documentary that featured her son's story. Was once on radio station in New York, where she spoke about autism. Establishing eye contact is one tool. Beginning of significant change in our lives.

00:38:28: Son will teach anyone to "humble themselves." Just do whatever it takes.

00:40:10: Took away all electronics when she started. Become isolated in caring for child with autism. At first was fighting to be with her son. Your child will tell you what they want.

00:42:58: To be a whole person, help someone else.

00:43:25: Parents killed by drunk driver when she was 24. Saw people coming back from Vietnam destroyed. Have to remind people what we are here for.

00:46:00: Makes wreaths with shells, collect glass floats, draws, paints, sings, play piano. Peeks with all these lenses.

00:49:55: Gratitude for sharing. What you do can make a difference. Cites case of Kenyan boy. One little thing at a time is success.

00:51:26: Wants people to know they should get rid of preconceived notions regarding autism and disability. Don't judge. Please ask, don't react.

00:54:13: End of interview.