

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.

**Penny Wicklander interview, 2015-05-05 : interview conducted by Michael
Robert Bussel and Donald Eugene Stacy**

INTERVIEW LOG

00:00:27: Lives in Pendleton, Oregon. Born in 1946 in Portland, Oregon. Has been a phlebotomist, managed an apartment complex for low-income senior citizens. Felt “like God sent me” to do this work. Always felt good working with older people and people in need.

00:02:08: Has been a caregiver for the last six-seven years. Cared for her son who had Lou Gehrig’s disease. Has worked with a few men and with one person who had a traumatic brain injury. Current client is 86-years-old and Penny has known her for a long time.

00:03:40: Always taking care of somebody: in-laws, parents. Felt need to be helpful. Something I love to do.

00:05:03: Has conducted orientation sessions for caregivers. Tells them you have to care. Go into it with your heart open and do the best you can.

00:07:04: Intuitive person: feels other people’s feelings. Need to be in tune with your client. Can’t make older people do something. Hard part: letting them make choices for themselves.

00:09:20: Has a saying: “the complacent die young.” Have to think about this as a caregiver.

00:10:20: Wants people to do the work because they want to, not because they have to.

00:11:09: Typical workday includes bathing. Client loves to talk. They laugh so much. Important to find things in common. Fix meals, lay out pills, take care of bathroom needs, getting dressed. Looks up pets on You Tube. Important to give clients things to do so they are just not sitting around. Companionship important.

00:15:48: Watching people pass away is hard. Tells current client she loves her. Client called and had fallen. Spent five hours with her at emergency room. Didn’t get paid for this time. It’s “who I am.” A “gift God gave her.”

00:19:22: Feels horrible when someone dies. People have God-given right to die with dignity. Need to be there and tell someone how much you love them.

00:23:20: Intimate tasks—need to give people respect and dignity. Saw sore on client's bottom and gets client to take care of it. Client would not like someone else doing this with her. She and client "come from the same egg."

00:29:43: Rural caregiving-- everybody knows everybody. Probably different in cities. Hopes it is not just a job for people. When out with client, says she is "her friend." Client says she is her "caregiver."

00:33:00: Humor is who I am. Likes being funny and people being funny back. Can get away with more. Clients laughs at getting lifted. Need to engage with them at all times. Brain needs work, not just legs.

00:35:15: Affect people's lives in short amount of time. Don't know about someone else's life. May save a life by being kind.

00:36:50: Bring joy into someone's life when they are dying or declining. Make them feel a little better. Most rewarding to see. Still, you know they will die.

00:38:06: Has seen much death. Hard but you go back to choice and free will. When you are done, God takes you.

00:39:08: Comes from union family. Father-in-law, son involved.

00:41:10: Job steward and on bargaining team. No raises for six years. Went from \$10:80/hour to \$13:00 and now up to \$13.75. Caregivers have told her they now don't have to rely on food stamps. Better life. Bring the bottom up. CAPE provides voluntary political contributions. Gave her support that allowed her to speak with legislators. People in rural areas don't understand politics. Have to be able to compete with big business and big money.

00:44:05: Spoke to legislators about paid sick leave. In Pendleton, legislator talked about sick leave as a "job killer."

00:46:17: Knows we have to balance but not on poor or those who can't care for themselves.

00:48:05: Love and caring, consideration and dignity most important to me. Not all value elderly. Exciting to hear older people talk about themselves. It's like history. Told client "I know you better than you do."

00:49:45: Some clients' families not involved with parent. Important to take client to see her sister when her daughter wasn't able to. "Why wouldn't I do it for her?"

00:51:50: Non-work time: has six acres of land with lambs, sheep, horses. Boathouse in eastern Oregon, helps son who has traumatic brain injury.

00:53:34: If you see that someone needs love, give it to them. We are all worth something. Accept good in people and do not judge.

00:55:27: Next ten years there will be 34 percent increase in need for in home caregivers. Where will we find them? Has seen institutions and for-profits and doesn't like them.

00:56:54: End of interview.