

Personal Home Health Care Aides in Michigan, afc2017/018
Sheila Weddell. 7.20.18

I: All right. The first thing I want to say is thank you so much, you know, for doing this interview and agreeing to talk with us. We're really grateful that you're taking the time and willing and courageous enough to just tell us what your life and work is all about. The other thing I want to thank you for is the work that you're doing because we believe it's really, really important work. So, thank you for being a personal care worker. So, as we talked about earlier, we are really interested in your stories. You know, over the years you've collected a lot of stories I'm sure.

P: Oh, yes.

I: And we want to hear them, but we would like to start with your story first. How did you get into this kind of work, and why, and when?

P: Actually, it started when I was 10 years old helping an elderly neighbor. I started my own first business as a kid [26.48]. I saw a need for—well, let me say this. I wanted to make money to by 45 records. That was my passion is having records, and so I created a job for myself. I was the town pooper-scooper [laughs]. I would charge 50 cents a week to go every day after school - go to people's yards and clean up their dog's messes because that was the biggest thing that all my friends complained about having to do. And I had tons of money, and through that job I discovered that some of the older people that lived alone on my block, you know, when I made my own fliers and was puttin' on the doors, you know, that I could hire myself out to scoop the poop [laughs] I had, "Do you do other things? You know, I could really use some help with this or some help with that." And before I knew it, I wasn't just a pooper-scooper any [laughing] more, I was kind of doing home healthcare for some of the elderly people on the block.

I: At 10?

P: At 10, yeah.

I: Wow.

P: Things were different in the early '70s, which it was probably like 1973, yeah, when I was 10, when I started working for myself. And obviously was through no agency, you know, I mean they would just, you know, here's your 50 cents a week for this, but then a lot of them would, "Oh, you did just a great job, here's \$5," and it's like I'm so rich [laughing]! That was a lot of money back then, you know, but that's how I started, you know, the feeling you get. They're so appreciative of the things that you do for them, and that just pumps you up, you know. It's like, wow! I'm needed! I'm wanted, you know. She said I was awesome!! [Laughing]. You know, everybody needs to hear that, you know, I mean. So, that's what got me started was helping, you know, I created the pooper-scooper business, but then it graduated, very quickly actually, into helping out elderly neighbors that needed other things done—raking, some outside work. Some of it was, "Honey, can you come sweep my kitchen?" You know, I mean it was easy chores for a 10-year-old, you know, but that's how I started.

I: That's a great story, so entrepreneurial.

P: Oh, yeah.

I: So, how did it then develop into home-health clients or home-health clients that you were getting paid for personal care?

P: At 16, you know, so for a good, you know, 6 years it was just the things that you did around the neighborhood and helped people out, but at 16 there was the six-county consortium. I'm not even sure if that organizations exists. I know it was through the state of Michigan. They would hire 16-year-olds to do different types of community work. You know, like somebody might get a job for the summer, you know, doing lawn care [23.38] or landscaping, but I found out that a lot of those positions they'd get filled up right away by the young men in the neighborhoods, and there wasn't a whole lot for girls until I found out by accident that they had

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some housekeeping for the elderly in there, and there was a lady that lived a block from my house. And I was like, wow! I could get an actual paycheck. My first paycheck from, you know, a boss, an organization was from Six-County Consortium, \$2.65 an hour. I would go to Mrs. F, this was so long ago, and she's been gone for 40 years now [laughs], but I would go to Mrs. F's house and it was easy work. I would maybe do her dishes. We'd play Rummy. I was to keep her company for 2 hours a day. I enjoyed it so much that even though I was paid for 2 hours a day, I'd stay there for 4 or 5 hours a day 'cause, you know, she was really good at Rummy, and I'm really competitive, and I wanted to win [laughing], so it's like, well, darn it [laughing]. One more hand! I thought I'm not leaving until I win a hand of Rummy, you know, but that was my first job [22.24]. I would take a break. I mean when she passed it was hard on me. It was like losing a grandma, so I didn't do that work for a little while. You know, I had to get over losing my client, my lady, my grandma [laughing], you know. I've always come and gone back and forth between retail jobs and then going back to home healthcare because I get to where I miss it. I love working with people because I like their stories, the history, 'cause I like history. So, when you're working for someone who's 40 or more years older than you, you hear some really awesome stuff. I've passed history tests from stories I learned from some of the Veterans I've taken care of or some of the other, you know. It's like wow! They were alive when so and so was a president, or when that became a law, or you know. Those stories. I eat it up, so you know, I miss that after a while, so I go back to that, and then when I lose people I have to take a break 'cause I'm heartbroken for a while. So, then I'm back workin' at a grocery store or, you know, retail. But that's—I mean and that's been right up even until now. Right now, I'm doin' retail again, but you know, doin' a little bit of home healthcare for my in-laws.

I: So, you've been doin' it ever since you were 10?

P: Yeah. Since I was 10.

I: Yeah. And you worked for an agency for a while or several?

P: Several, off and on throughout the years. Yes. And different types of agencies. I've worked at an agency where I would go to a home where there were handicapped—physically and mentally handicapped men—six men. Most of them weren't verbal at all, so you know, they can't speak to you. They can't tell you what they need or what's going on with them, so there's a lot of behavioral issues. That was probably the toughest job I've ever had because I see the frustration for them. You know, they can't tell you, "Oh, I really have a headache." All they can do is act out, and then you're hopefully gonna get lucky and guess what it is that's wrong with them and fix their problem. You know, I mean you feel helpless when you can't correct whatever it is that's bothering them, and they can't do things for themselves. So, but I worked in [19.56] an ALS—and Adult Learning Systems home, and that was what that type of home it was. I've also worked in—or for an agency where we went to people's homes, individually. We had to use our own vehicles and drive to wherever and work for an hour or two, mostly doing housekeeping, but some personal care. You know, grooming, things like that. I also for a while worked for state of Michigan, although we weren't supposed to write that we worked for the state of Michigan. The person we took care of was our boss, but we were paid by state of Michigan, like through the Department of Human Services or Family Independence Agency or DSS. They've changed their name so many times, but it's all the same agency—the Welfare office [laughs]. So, low-income families that qualified would have, you know, so many hours a month for a home healthcare person. So, I did that for a while, and you're your own boss. You have your own EIN—employer ID number so that you file it with your taxes. I mean that's—because the checks don't have the taxes taken out. You have to take care of that yourself. So, I had worked for that agency, and then just locally, word-of-mouth, I've worked for different people. You know, "Well, my grandma needs help. You know, you do that kinda thing or do you know somebody if you're not able?" And so, you work for cash, you know. Sometimes it's for a short time. Sometimes you end up with a 2- or 3-year job before they pass. So, different types of agencies, different situations, but.

I: Okay. And right now, you're not doing it for pay, but you have some family members you're caring for.

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P: Yes. Yes. Three—well, let me think. I'm trying to remember how many years ago it was that I worked for an agency [17.49]. Well, maybe 5, about 5 years since I worked for an agency. The last client that I had when I worked for an agency, well, they had passed, and of course, I needed to take a break 'cause I was devastated. So, I did retail for a while, but then my parents—they were both still alive then. I took care of my mom through the Department of Social Services. She qualified for a care provider, so I took that job. It made her feel more comfortable that she didn't want a stranger in her house, and especially as she would put it, "Oh, I don't need people washin' my private areas, and I don't know who they are or where they been." [Laughing] and it's like, okay, ma [laughing], but I would take care of her. When my mother passed, 4 years ago, I ended up taking care of my father because he was also—he was a stroke patient, and he could do some things for himself and not others. So, I kind of took over, and I never charged my parents. I mean I did get home healthcare from the state, you know, pay for them for a short while. And then when she passed, my dad was probably eligible, but he was too proud to sign up for something like that, so I just did the work. You know, he would sometimes say, you know, "Oh, here. Take this money and go get groceries," or "Here's some gas money." I mean, you know, I would take that from him, but he never actually paid me a wage [16.21]. And I lost my dad last year, so I had to take a break from that for a while, and that was about the time, eh, maybe once a week we'd go help out my in-laws. Of course, they're nearing their 80s, and they're having health issues. So, taking care of them, we don't charge them either. I mean so I haven't worked for an agency for a while. I mean if they want to give us gifts because they don't wanna feel like they're taking charity. They wanna, you know, feel like they're contributing, so if they wanna give me money for gas or wanna, "Here, you and D go out to dinner tonight. You know, here's \$50 bucks or whatever." I give 'em a hug and a kiss and thank 'em, and I accept it. I think it would be insulting to them if I didn't accept that.

I: So, now you're a family caregiver.

P: Yes. Family caregiver.

I: But you also mentioned the post-office.

P: Yup. I am a part-time postal worker. I'm a clerk at a little, teeny-tiny office that's kind of out in the middle of nowhere. If I get four customers in a day, it's like woo hoo it was a busy day [laughing]. Sometimes I don't see a single soul the whole 2 hours that I'm there. It's a part-time post office. Nowadays, people don't send letters anymore, so the postal service is shrinking, but they're still trying to service everybody. So, instead of being a full-time office, they just reduced the hours so that people out there in the middle of nowhere [laughs] can still, you know, have a couple hours a day where they can go buy stamps or mail a letter or whatever. So, that's what I do, and I enjoy 'cause I, you know, the few people I do get to see, you know, they become your work family. You know, I work alone out there, and you know, I'm not in an office with other workers.

I: So, you're obviously a people-person [laughs]?

P: I am [laughing].

I: And you did a great job of describing why you love this personal care work, but what are the biggest challenges of personal care work?

P: Well, you fall in love with your people, even the ornery ones, you know, even the ones that [14.14] have conditions that are difficult to deal with. I mean for an example, when someone has like irritable bowel syndrome, so they have a lot of personal issues where you're constantly like cleaning up, you know, a poopy mess or something. I mean nobody loves doing that. I mean we—there isn't a soul that says, "Yeah! I get to clean poop today and change adult diapers." But knowing that, you know, I'm keeping them clean and healthy, and they can't do it for themselves—the satisfaction of being able to do that for them, you know, that makes that part of it worth it. But I do—when I do those things, gosh, I just had three thoughts run through my head and I completely lost track of the original question. Ask it again [laughing].

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I: What are the biggest challenges?

P: The biggest challenges. You know, a lotta times the person that you're caring for, like the IBS situation, they'll cry. They're embarrassed. You know, they appreciate the help that you're giving them, but they hate that they have to have that kind of help for something that's gross or personal or whatever [12.57]. And so, dealing with them when, you know, and trying to reassure, honey, it's okay. You know, I wanna help you. Please don't feel bad, you know. I mean that's heartbreaking to me that they feel so bad that I have to do that for them or that I am doin' it for 'em, you know. That's one thing, and another thing that's a challenge or that's difficult are family members of the person you're taking care of. I think the biggest thing I've discovered with family members is for one, they feel guilty because, you know, maybe something the parents say to them. "You know, you never help me, or I have to get outside help," or, if one member of a family is helping and the other siblings are not, they kinda get angry that they're the only ones. So, there's always this—there's like this element of guilt all the time that you deal with, and so if they can't actually take care of their parents, then they come to you, the outsider that's the caregiver, and they're like throwin' their weight around, like, "Well, you make sure you do a good job with my mom," or "Oh, you're not doing this right." They like to I guess criticize the work that you do sometimes, and this isn't every situation, but a lotta times they criticize your work because they think it should be better. And I think it's there way of, "See mom, I really do care about you, and I just want you to have the best care," you know, it's trying to take guilt off of themselves for not being the ones to provide the care. I don't know if I'm explaining that exactly right. You almost have to go through it to know [laughing] what I'm talking about [11.10], but so having family members like I said criticize your work, "You're not good enough for my mom or my dad," or whatever, that's a challenge. Sometimes if you're working in a home where the person has dementia or Alzheimer's or other memory issues, they'll forget where they put things. And so, in their mind, somebody stole it, and now you're defending yourself because the family member says, "You stole my mother's bracelet," or "You stole my dad's watch," you know, because they couldn't find it. And so, then you're stressed out thinking, now it's my job to find it and prove my innocence [laughing]. You know, I've been in situations like that, so—

I: Do you have some stories around that? Some specific stories?

P: Yup. Yup. I had a fella, he just knew that I stole his military medals. They always stayed in the same place all the time. I know 'cause I used to dust 'em and everything, and I did notice they were missing one day when I came over, and I didn't think too much of it. I thought oh, you know, you probably put 'em away or you know, whatever. And until he—he got really angry and kinda violent, actually. He threw a couple things at me. [Screaming] "What did you do with my medals, woman?" [Laughing] you know, he called me a few other naughty names, but anyway he was very upset, and then he got on his phone and he called his daughter and he said, "Oh, that lady you hired, she stole my medals, my military medals." And I had an encounter with this lady right in my face, you know, "And I demand, you know, my father's a Veteran, and he served, and those medals he earned, and I want 'em back," and I was like, crying. I swear I didn't take his medals. I'm the child of a military Veteran, and I have the highest [9.19] respect for Veterans. I would never in a million years. What am I gonna do with someone's medal, right? Turns out [laughs], we found out a few days later, when he saw, you know, "Them damn rag heads," that was his words, across the street—there were some workers across the street from his house moving things in and out of a van because apparently somebody was moving. He thought they were the enemy, and he hid his medals so that they wouldn't get them. It took a while for him to— for that to come out. You know, he hid them. Then he remembered where he put 'em. They were under the kitchen sink, and they were in a little metal box, and he hid them because he didn't want the "rag heads" to get his medals, and it's like, oh. You know, and then of course, the apologies, and "We're really sorry." And, you know—

I: They did apologize?

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P: They did, and I said, well, thank you for the apology. I really wish that we didn't have to go through all of that. I mean it was painful to me, you know, to have my integrity questioned, you know. But it all worked out, but I mean those are difficulties. I mean it's crazy the things you would never expect in a million years that are suddenly an issue [7.57]. Another difficulty I've had—I have an allergy to cats, and sometimes you walk into somebody's house, and they're like the crazy cat lady. They have 11 of 'em or some—well, maybe that's an exaggeration. I did have a lady with four cats though, and I'm in there [wheezing sounds], you know, gasping and dying and trying to breathe. I didn't work for her for long because of that, but I really worked hard trying to find another worker for her off the clock. I mean I worked for an agency at the time, and they were having a hard time keeping people in her house because of the cats. I found somebody who didn't work for the agency, and contacted the lady's daughter, and said our agency has gone through every single person. It's the cats. You know, the house wreaked of cat. Even if you weren't allergic, to walk in and try to breathe just around all the cat smell. It was difficult. Cat hair on everything. You'd walk out of there and look like I'm turning into a cat [laughing]. I'm growing fur and everything, so, yeah, just all kinds of things. I've been bitten by a dog before because the dog didn't know who I was and came out from under the couch and nibbled off half my ankle and [laughs]. So, you deal with—there's all kinds of challenges.

I: How do you deal with all of that? How do you—

P: For me, personally, I'm a Christian, so I pray a lot [laughing]. I ask God for strength to get me through a lot of the situations. Oh, one situation I was in, and this was horrible. I have like a fear of cock roaches just from living on the island of Hawaii years ago. Not just people, like tropical climates, but so do bugs, and no matter how much you clean—'cause I always grew up in a home where the only people that have bugs are dirty people. My house was clean. Why am I having roaches? Well, I never slept the whole year and a half I lived on that island because I was always, you know, thought there were bugs everywhere [5.51]. And then we had geckos crawlin' the ceiling that would—weren't doing a good job of keeping the bugs [laughing], but anyway, that gave me like this—I have like a psychological fear [laughing] of cock roaches, so I went into a home I had never been into before, and I asked the lady, my first day here, you know, and where do you want me, and "Oh, I need help in the kitchen." So, I go there, and I start to do some dishes and the place is crawling with cock roaches, and I'm trying not to faint and die [laughing]. You know, 'cause you know I'm like ohhh. I got through that day. I wouldn't take the bag that used to keep all my paperwork in and my rubber gloves, all the things I carry in my satchel, I wouldn't bring it into my house because I just knew that when it was sitting on the floor by the front door that cock roaches got in it, and I didn't wanna bring 'em home with me. I mean that gave me such an anxiety because I didn't wanna bring bugs to my own home 'cause my home's bug free [laughing]. Occasional spider, but [laughs]. No. Those kinds of challenges are hard, you know, because everybody lives differently. You know, some people don't care if you take your shoes off or on when you come in. Other people are highly offended if you even step through the door and you didn't remember your shoes. I had a Japanese couple that I worked for years ago, and I had never, you know, culturally they don't have any shoes cross their threshold, and they were very offended that I stepped one foot in. As soon as she looked at my feet and looked up at me I was like, oh, my, gosh. I mean I saw all their shoes outside, and I thought, glad I'm a quick thinker, and I was like I'm so sorry, and I backed out and I took off the shoes, and I walked in, and I apologized like a thousand times. I was forgiven, and I never made the mistake again, but just culturally, you know, sometimes you don't—I mean whoever came in first or whoever approached me first, I might say hi. I worked for a family once where because I had dressed the wife first he was very offended because in his culture you needed to, you know, and you weren't actually supposed to really look at him. You could kind of, you know, keep your eyes down and talk to him, and him first, then acknowledge the wife. You know, I think the only reason I was able to pick up on some of these things is because I've always liked history and social studies and geography, so I read lot about things. You know, otherwise I think some people, if they've never dealt with that before, they wouldn't have a clue. "What did I do wrong? How did I offend them? You know, I mean I was polite. I was nice." You know, so those are challenges.

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I: We're going to—I want to talk more about that in just a minute. We're going to take a slight pause so he can swap out batteries.

P: Sure.

I: But those are great stories. I mean—

I2: You are a natural at this.

P: [Laughing].

I: Yes. You really are.

I2: I'm gonna grab my sweatshirt real quick.

P: It's a really small house. I have bedroom, bathroom, bedroom, and then these two rooms, so it's easy to see.

I: Just go in a circle.

P: Yup. Not too much of a circle 'cause that's the basement [2.17] stairs.

I: Oh, I see, I see. Yeah.

P: In fact, I say with the appraisal lady when she comes, she's gonna say what is this mess here? But I have, you can kinda see a paint pallet. It's actually a plastic Dollar Store deviled egg tray—I use it for a paint—we paint the rocks and hide rocks. My little grandkids, so I've got a bucket a rocks, I got all that stuff [laughing]—

I: That's a great idea.

P: Well—

I: My grand kids are coming in a month, I think I'll do that.

P: Yeah. We get like, you know, rocks. I mean I always have to tell the kids, do not collect them from people's landscaping. They pay a lotta money for the rocks. You know, if we're out and about—what keeps falling [she asked her husband this]? Can you check?

P2: I have no idea.

P: Check the refrigerator and the freezer. Maybe the freezer.

P2: I'm thinkin' it might be his battery charger [1.29]. Yeah. [Inaudible] that keeps falling out.

P: Oh, there's a battery?

P2: Yeah. Because of the countertop. It's not—

P: Oh, that's—oh is he charging something over there?

P2: Yeah. He's got a battery charger runnin' here.

P: Oh.

P2: I just pushed the toaster up against it. That'll hold it. What it is, is the outlet comes right to the very top of the backsplash, and it's—

I: Oh, so you can't get in there.

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P2: --in there, but it's not flat.

P: Oh.

P2: So, it keeps falling off.

P: Oh, 'cause I was just like, we don't have an ice maker and I'm like that sounds like ice dropping.

P2: I put it in there and pushed the toaster up against it. It shouldn't do that again until he moves it. Your battery pack fell off, so I put it back in and I pushed the toaster up against it.

I2: Okay. [Laughing] perfect.

P: To help hold it there, yeah.

I2: Thank you very much. Yeah. This is—I was joking with a friend because when you do work like this, everything is run on batteries, you know.

P: Oh, sure.

I2: So, you always have to keep thinking about what needs power, so.

P: Right. I was gonna say 'cause I have like on the other side there [.20] where those blue ethernet cables are, I've got one of those strips if you need to plug something in?

I2: I saw that. No, no. I think that with those two in there I'm set [end tape 1].

I: Okay. We're back on the air [laughs], and I'm actually gonna—I was going to say we're going to shift gears, but I'm actually going to keep going 'cause you have so many great stories. So, you were talking about the diversity of your clients and some of the challenges that you run into and how you need to sort of be prepared for anything.

P: Yes. Sometimes you don't [1.01.24] get a heads up about what you're walking into. You know, you don't get a chance to—like when you work for an agency for an example, your boss may not—because they don't actually go into the homes themselves. They just dispense people to the locations, and you don't always have an opportunity to talk to any previous workers, so you don't know what you're walking into. So, you know, no one's gonna tell you, oh, before you go there make sure you're not wearing anything that's even remotely low-cut because, you know, Mr. B, or whatever is really grabby [laughing]. You know, I had this bad experience—because that happened to me once. I'm a larger person, so I walked in and I went to meet the family first, introduced myself, and he was so [laughs] enamored with my physical appearance that [laughing] he made constant comments about my chest. He even was so bold as to go, "Are they real?" [she made gesture of him grabbing her breasts] and I'm like, uh, and I had to tell him, okay, we need to set some boundaries right now. You know, I'm here to clean house and I'm here to help take care of you. You are not allowed to touch me that way. If you do it again, I will have to leave, and your work won't be completed. So, I need to put that out there right away, you know, I will stay and do the work, but not if you're gonna touch me. You know, I'm a married woman, and you are a married man, and you need to behave yourself. You know, and I mean I was trying to be as nice about it as I could but talk about shocking. I had no idea he would be like, "Are they real?" [Laughing] you know, I was just, wow!

I: So, what did he say, and did it stop?

P: Because I addressed it immediately and told him I will leave if it happens again, you know, he didn't—he laughed about it like, "Oh, ha! I was just kiddin' around." And then he let it go. I didn't get an apology, but he never tried it again [59.11]. I found out later from a gal who worked there one time, he had done that to her, and she, you know, didn't address it. She just kinda like, oh, you know, tried to just steer clear of him, quick

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finish up whatever she was there to do that day, and got out and told the boss, “I will never go back there again. Oh, my, God, I was physically assaulted. He, you know, grabbed my private parts.” You know, I mean she was really upset and offended, you know. I thought, obviously, I don’t want that kind of attention either, but I’m pretty direct. You know, I’m the kinda person, you know, if you’re gonna do something that I don’t like I’m not gonna think it and hope you telepathically figure out, you know, [laughing] that I don’t like this. You will know. I will be firm. I will be direct. I will tell it like it is, and you kinda have to be in this line of work. You can’t let people do things to you that you don’t want them to do. I mean and a lot of people I know that work in this field, they need a job so badly, they don’t wanna do anything that will make them lose a job, and so they’re afraid to stick up for themselves [57.58]. And I always tell, you know, other coworkers in the past, you know, no boss want’s their employee to be assaulted that way by a client. You don’t want—they don’t want that for you. But you need to say something to them. I mean our boss isn’t gonna leave their cushy office [laughing] and come down there and say, you know, “No touching the ladies when they come.” I mean they’re just not. They expect you to kinda handle yourself.

I: So, that works if you are with an agency.

P: With an agency.

I: And you can report it to somebody.

P: Yup.

I: And you can say I don’t wanna go back there.

P: Right.

I: But you , yourself, have been self-employed, done this—as a self-directed worker for some of the clients you have. There are a lot of self-employed/self-directed PCAs—

P: Yes.

I: --out there who don’t have an agency—

P: Right.

I: --you know, it’s gotta be a very different experience than working with an agency.

P: It is, and I don’t know if anybody else does this or not. In fact, I really wished I could have located—I have my own rules and my own requirements when I work for someone, when I’m working for myself, and I had ‘em all typed out and nice and neat, and I had copies somewhere, and now that I have a different computer I can’t pull it up—the old fine that I had to print off a copy, but I have things I expect, and I also list what they can expect from me, and I give one to the people that I work for. You know, one says I expect, you know, mutual respect. I will respect you, I expect to be respected by you, and what that means is I will not be speaking to you or touching you inappropriately, and I expect the same in return from you. I don’t wanna be touched inappropriately or spoken to inappropriately [55.58]. And I’ll tell them, you know, what the different things that I am willing to do around their home whether it’s cooking for them, cleaning for them. I will bathe you. I will change depends. You know, whatever my job duties will be, so when I work for someone, they know what I will and won’t do. I mean like a little example, when I worked for one agency they had a rule, your feet were not allowed to leave the floor, and what that meant was we don’t want our people standing on a step-stool, a ladder, a chair or whatever to, like, get something off a high shelf, change a light bulb in the ceiling because, you know, the liability. “If you fall or somethin’ happens, you know, oh, we don’t want that doctor bill,” so that was a rule. But then when you go into someone’s house and maybe they don’t have the family coming around doing things for them, and they’re alone, and you know, Mrs. B is sitting there with no lights in her

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kitchen, and you know, in the winter it's dark at 4:30 [laughing], you know. And she can't see anything in her house because there's no one to change that bulb for her. When I work independently, you know, I'm gonna get on that chair and change that light bulb. Now, that I don't work for the agency that had that rule, I can admit that I broke their rule many times because I thought I'm not gonna leave this person all night long sittin' in the dark. You know, because then I'm gonna come back the next day and find 'em on the floor where they tripped and fell and couldn't get back up again [laughing], you know, because they had no light [54.22]. So, you know, I guess sometimes agencies—some of their rules are not reasonable. Maybe they don't want us stepping on their step-stools or chairs because they don't know if it's safe and secure, maybe they should provide us one. You know, that could be used if we need to change a light bulb or get something off a high shelf. You know, another thing that would be sometimes a rule, as a PCA we weren't trained in clinicals. I mean so we never, like learned about the medications and we were never shown how to administer medications, so I mean we don't give diabetics their shots or, you know, technically we weren't even supposed to say set up a pill caddy. We are not supposed to have our hands on their medications at all. As a PCA, all we were allowed to do is remind them, oh, it's 2 o'clock, time to take your pill. But the problem there is, if you're the only one there, and Mr. B can't get his pills open. Maybe he's got Parkinson's or something, and he's really shaky, and he's like this, and he can't get his pills out, and he's trying to put 'em in a cup and they're all over the floor. And technically, the rule at the agency, you're not supposed to touch meds. That's not what you're, you know, trained for. You're only supposed to remind them. Well, I'm tellin' ya, I broke that rule. I would put the two pills in the cup, and I would even help put 'em in his mouth and give him his drink to wash 'em down because he couldn't do it himself, and there's no one else there. And if there's no other agency, like a home visiting nurse or their son or daughter or whoever coming in to help them, and you're all they have I mean I don't want this person to not get their medication. You know, because I know me, and I know I'm not ever gonna do anything wrong like take their pills or not give 'em or give 'em incorrectly. I'm reading the labels, making sure it was 1 hour after they ate their lunch, you know, I'm pretty much a stickler for exactly like it says on the bottle. I know that about me. I know that nobody else knows that about me, but I mean, so I broke the rule. I helped people take their meds. I stood on ladders and step stools and, you know, to change light bulbs or reached down, you know, their favorite punch bowl [51.57] off the counter even though they weren't having punch [laughing]. You know, people ask you to do things, sometimes doesn't make sense why, but I'm there to serve them, and so when I work for myself I let 'em know that, you know, if it's physically possible for me to do, I will do my best to help you with it. I mean I've gotten out the power tools and redid the screws in the walls to hang people's pictures up because they were fallin' down or, you know, when someone sits in their home all day long and they can't do things for themselves anymore and they're looking around, and they're like, "Oh, that picture on the walls been crooked for however long, and it drives me crazy. But I'm in a wheelchair, and I can't get up, and I can't fix it." You know, and then you go there, and they say, "Can you straighten that picture," and every time you do it goes back to bein' wonky, and so I—because I'm kind of a handy man myself, you know, I'll go over there, and I'll look, oh, well, here's the problem. This is all goofy. You need two nails, you know, or two screws. If they've got the tools, I'm not afraid to go over there and do it. Yeah, it's straight now. You know, those are just examples of little things that I've done [50.47] that if I were working with an agency, I can't do those things.

I: So, those are some of the, as you see it, plus side of—

P: Working for yourself.

I: --working for yourself. Are there challenges about working—what's the downside?

P: Well, the downside of working for yourself is, well, you know, unless you can afford the insurance for yourself, you know, I mean you're not getting any kind of medical insurance or benefits or anything like that. Of course, with the agencies, that was never anything that I had either [laughs]. So, medical benefits was something we didn't get from agencies, and you don't really have it for yourself unless you're paying for

medical. I guess, too, sometimes you have to, you know, if you're on the up and up, you're gonna pay your taxes on it. You know, keeping track of everything and setting things aside, 'cause sometimes people would pay you in cash or just a personal check. Taking the time to photocopy a check, making sure you have all your records so that when you do your taxes at the end of the year, you know. It's hard to be legit, and I think a lotta people sometimes aren't because it's like, oh, my gosh, you know, if I'm chargin' \$10 an hour, because that's all anybody's willing to pay me, and they take out, you know, \$3 in taxes and insurances and whatever, and I'm only makin' \$7 an hour, I think a lotta people choose not to report it because they need that \$10 now. You know, they need—I mean so those are challenges, you know. It's hard to set a pay rate when agencies pay their workers minimum wage, most of them. You can work there 2 or 3 years before you get so much as a 50-cent raise. A lot of 'em don't pay mileage. Some of the things we do for clients is go do their grocery shopping, and we use our own vehicle, so that's our gas, and we're driving to the store or we're taking them to an appointment. And, you know, or drivin' 'em, you know, some people just wanna get out of their four walls. I had a guy that used to say, "Can we just go for ride through the park or something? [48.33] I mean I'm just stir-crazy." You know, and I would drive him all through the time, passed old neighborhoods where he used to, you know, where he grew up or where his friend so and so used to live. He just wants to see the house, you know, or drivin' 'em, but I'm not getting extra for gas. I'm getting my hourly wage, but I'm not getting extra for gas. I mean those are all little things that when you work for yourself, a lot of things come out of your own pocket. Another thing, and this is goin' back to another question that you had about [pause]—I lost my words—challenges. When you see people that they need things, and you know it's not in their income. They're on a fixed income. You know, they're getting \$801 dollars a month, you know, on their social security or whatever, and it's like, oh, they really need bath towels. They have four rags full of holes that they're using. You know, you wanna go get 'em stuff. You know, they can't afford it, but if you do that for everybody, you're gonna be in the poor house yourself. It's really hard sometimes to not spend your own money giving them things that they need—basic things. Like I said, it could be bath towels. It could be groceries. You know, pet food. It's like oh, my, God, their cat is eating their food, you know, because they don't have money for cat food or there's no litter, and that's why the cat's kinda goin' all over the house, you know, and it's like, oh. I should buy her some litter. Well, you can't afford to do it.

I: So, it's hard to set boundaries.

P: It is.

I: Boundaries get fuzzy.

P: Yeah. When you're working for an agency, they set the boundaries for you, so when you're working for yourself, you have to set your own boundaries [46.36]. I will not buy their cat litter. I will not do the [laughing], you know, it's like you have to tell yourself that, or it's really hard, you know, to keep yourself when you care about people, and you hate to see anyone doing without or suffering or whatever you wanna call it. It's hard to police yourself and not start taking everybody in under your wing and providing for [laughing] them.

I: So, one of the things we're hoping to learn from all of these interviews is whether or not there are some regional differences. In your view, would you—do you have any sense as to whether or not being a PCA in a rural area or in the UP would be different than it would be down state?

P: I do. A big one, a long time ago when I very first started working through the Department of Social Services, and they paid us I think it was 50 cents more than minimum wage—was the going rate—and that rate hadn't changed in I don't know how many years according to other workers in that field. I ask them, I said, well, do we have a union? I mean are we represented by anybody? And at that time, we weren't, and then out of the blue a couple years down the road I got a letter in the mail with my paycheck 'cause it was a monthly check. Oh, that was the other thing, you know, it's hard to budget for a whole month when you get a check from the state. I'd be great if they did at least bi-monthly, every couple a weeks, but that's a whole other thing.

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Anyway, I got a letter saying, good news, you know. You are now a member of the SEIU, and I'm like, wow! What's that, you know, and I'm reading, you know, oh, that's like a union for nurses and those kinds of workers, and we're gonna take 50 cents out of each hour that you work, you know, we'll do all that work for you, so you don't have to come up with this large amount for union dues all at once, and now you're represented [44.38]. Well, I thought, wow, so we have a union. Great. Somebody to fight for higher wages, someone to help us maybe get benefits or gas mileage or, you know, whatever. Here was the problem, because Michigan is here and here, and the bigger part is here, [using her hands to show the lower and upper peninsulas] this part gets a lot more attention than up here where we're up in the Tooley's. For an example, all the union meetings were held down in Lansing or Grand Rapids or, you know, bigger towns, and if I wanna attend one I gotta drive like 600-700 miles to be able to go there. They would never have any meetings up here that we could attend or no representatives. At least I wasn't given any kind of information from anyone about—well, how can I be heard down there? You know, there'd be phone numbers where you get recordings, and you'd leave messages, and sometimes you'd get a return call, and sometimes you wouldn't. I wrote letters. I didn't feel represented, and I really hated that money was automatically coming out of my check for a union that I felt didn't represent me. They represented other people, not me. I sometimes feel like they don't feel it's worth coming all the way up here into the sticks, you know, for the five or six people. I mean like the population of the whole UP is probably the population of Lansing [laughing] for all I know. I just feel like those bigger cities they get more of the state attention than these little areas up here because we don't have the population, but there's representation—that's the biggest one. You know, I feel like—we don't yell loud enough to be heard or something, you know, there's too much woods up here keepin' our voices, [laughing] I don't know. So, that's one thing for sure. I think because we kind of are used to be being isolated from the rest of the state, most people don't waste their time. Well, they would say, "Oh, it's a waste of time trying to be heard for our needs up here, so we don't bother." And people just deal with things up here, you know, I mean you just deal with whatever you're given. You know, so if you're—if your union doesn't represent you, "Oh, well, you know." [Laughs]. "I'm used to that."

I: So, when you talk about the needs we have up here, what would the needs be that would be different than the needs that PCAs downstate have?

P: Well, for one, I mean access is hard. I mean sometimes you're going to, you know, Mr. B who lives out in the—basically, out in the country in such a far-gone rural area, you know, finding places sometimes is hard. You know, I mean you're going to these little towns that no one's ever heard of. You know, like you got Perkins and Cornell, and I mean that's just little ones around here or Parinville or someplace. Some of these places don't even have a business. I mean they don't have a post office. They have a sign that says this is Brampton and finding people—access. In the winter when, you know, some of those little out in the middle of nowhere places they don't even get plowed. These people still need you to get there, and feed them, and do things, but you don't have a plow [41.11] or the roads aren't plowed, so you're not even hardly able to get to them. Access to these people is hard, and even though it's not a PCA thing, it's like we need the state or whatever to start plowing these rural roads, so we can get to these people. That's huge.

I: How do you get to them?

P: Prayers, following the guy that lives down the road that kinda plows his way through to work [laughs]. I have parked and walked into a place. I had to walk a mile in snow one time because I was so worried that 2 days in a row a lady didn't get a caregiver out there because nobody could drive through, and I was so worried about her that I just—I slogged through snow with my backpack, and got to her house, and she had been in the same depends for 2 days because she couldn't change 'em herself. Of course, I had called my boss and said I am not gonna make my other clients today. She has been without anyone for a couple a days, and she's in a really sorry state, and if we get more snow, which was predicted it might be, you know, I had to make some meals ahead. I had to do some things to help prepare her in case somebody couldn't get to her. You know,

pouring several glasses with lids on 'em of water 'cause she couldn't pour herself, you know, getting 'em set up on the counter or in her refrigerator, making some meals ahead, you know, that she could wheel herself to the microwave and take out a thing and put it in her—you know, I was there all day. You know and taking care of sores that had [39.20] from sitting in wet depends. I didn't know how to help set her up for that other than to [sigh], I guess, I would call it piggy-backing her depends. I came up with this on my own because I didn't know what else to do. I put three depends on over the ones she was wearing, so that she could essentially slide down the ones to her knees, take off the dirty one, and maybe pull the next one up, because I was worried that—

I: Wow. Did that work?

P: [Crying] yeah. [Crying] I just, sorry, that was hard. You know, because I felt so bad. I knew I wouldn't be able to make it the next day because I had several other clients I had to take care of, and I was scared [crying] for her. I thought, man, what if she fell. She could be here not able to eat, you know, you get worried [crying] for your clients. It's scary. It's like that could be my mom. That could be my grandma, you know, I mean. [Crying] you don't want to see somebody go through that, that fear. You know, and then I'm trying to be brave for her and tell her, you know, I know you can do this. You know, if that snow comes and you're stuck on your own, you know, you're rough and tough, you know. Yeah, I know that you're gonna be able to do this. You know, because we're women and we're strong. You know, and I gave her the empowerment speech, and you know, gave her lots a hugs. You know, see that was another thing. You know, speaking of hugs, I know this flits me back to somewhere else. Things that we weren't allowed to do. We are not to hug or kiss or, you know, our people. You know, they don't ever want someone reporting back to them that they were molested in some way. A lot of these people never have physical contact with anybody, and a hug means the world to, you know, they don't wanna let go of you, and you don't wanna let go of them either, really. I broke that rule all the time. Now, the only one I never hugged was Mr. "Are They Real?" [laughing], you know. Like I said, you had to know who you couldn't hug, but just—or to hold their hands. You know, when somebody doesn't have their husband or their wife anymore, and they don't have kids that live locally, and they don't have people seein' 'em [36.47], they don't have grandkids comin' over, they're alone. And, I don't know about you, but if I don't have like physical contact with people after awhile you know you just—it takes the life out of ya. You know, you don't feel loved. You don't feel worthy. There's a lotta feelings that go with that, but that poor gal, to just sit and hold her while she cried, because she was so scared for days. You know, there was nobody coming out. You know, no one to feed her. She was eating crackers. That was what she could reach on her bottom shelf. I stayed all day, and I redid shelves. I moved things where she could reach 'em from her wheelchair in case of emergencies. Like I said, I piggy-backed her depends, so that if there were an emergency she could peel 'em off. I mean I had things set up where she could try and clean herself if possible, and a garbage can for her. I mean she had a lotta things piled up next to her chair that normally weren't there, but I did that because I was afraid that if somebody couldn't get out to her because of the snow, that she'd be in trouble. You know, that she could really suffer, you know, that's hard [crying], you know.

I: Wow. That is such a great story, so I'm so impressed. I want to talk more about that story in a minute, but I just remembered we're supposed to take a pause.

I2: Sorry.

P: Okay.

I: That's amazing that you went to those lengths.

P: I just know if it was my mom or my dad I wouldn't want them sitting alone for 3 days, you know, or 2 days or however long. I mean I would want someone to get to them. I mean they're obviously not gonna airlift a helper [laughs], you know, because the snow got deep, but that's somethin' we deal with up here. You know,

there's a lotta remote areas, even some that aren't that remote. They don't, you know, the state plows all the main highways, of course, first and sometimes even just our little street out front might be further down on the list than we'd like, and we're shovelin' ourselves out, snowblowin' ourselves out, and just trying to get out on our own road, and then they don't have places for the snow [34.31]. So, instead of having your two-lane road, they've got this huge snowbank dividing, which you're trying to see around to get places [laughing].

I: Yeah.

P: You know, because they can't move that snow and get rid of it fast enough.

I2: Ready whenever.

I: Okay. So, let's continue with that story. I want to hear how it turned out. When were you able to get back to her again?

P: About 3 days later. I mean other people were scheduled to go to her. We didn't always have—at that agency, I didn't always have the same schedule every day. I mean today I might have three clients—clients A, B, and C. Tomorrow I might be B, and then D, and E. You know, I might get A, and F 2 days later. I mean the agency that I worked for—I don't know if it was like a random deck of cards [laughs], and then oh, we'll give you these three. I think, personally, a lot of agencies they need to understand that the clients—when there's a whole bunch a different people coming in all the time, they get confused. They get scared. They don't always remember this person. You know, if you have your three regular people all the time, well, they'll be more trusting. You know, you're not a new face every single time. You know, the elderly get taken advantage of a lot, and so it's hard for them to trust people, so if they see the same friendly face every day, that gives them more security [32.45]. And then also you get to know them better. You know what their needs are better. You know, they don't even have to ask you anymore. You already know what they need, and you can serve them better when you start knowing their habits or their preferences, but like with the gal that, you know, I had slogged through snow on foot, I mean like I said I literally walked a mile through a road that was impassable just to get to her, and I left my car up on the road to get to her. And after the third day when she was on my schedule again, and I went there, and I was asking her, you know, were you okay? Was somebody able to come the next day? And she said, "Well, they didn't come the next day, but they did come the day after that." Because they, you know, had finally taken care of the road, and I said were you able to take care of your bathroom needs okay. She said, "That helped." She said, I had trouble the first time because I was really, really messy. I didn't probably clean myself the best, but most of it—you know, 'cause you could tear the sides of the depends. She says, "I was able to get it up, you know." She said—she literally showed me she had to put her hand on here and then the arm around the back of her wheelchair, and lift, and she kept wiggling like this until she got it out far enough that she could put it in her garbage can, and try to clean herself, and just slowly—she says, "It took me a couple hours, but I got my next depend up."

I: Oh, that was brilliant of you.

P: And I thought I didn't know what else to do [31.12]. You know, and I thought because those could tear away that she would have extras, and she said that really helped.

I: Because, you know, that makes the difference between skin breakdown or not.

P: Yes.

I: And skin breakdown can make the difference between hospitalization or not.

P: And that's why I stayed there so much. I mean I loaded her up with so much, like that Destin type cream because I thought even if she can't completely clean herself, at least her skin where it already had some sores from sitting 2 days in a mess, would still be protected.

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I: So, what would have happened to her if there was no you?

P: At that time whoever would finally have gotten to her, 'cause I think that snow—that road was blocked off for at least 5 days. Well, she could have died. I mean, and I say that because I think, you know, she was a heart patient, too. I mean if nothing else would have a heart attack from the panic and the fear, and you know, I know you don't starve to death in 5 days, but without being able to get water. I mean, you know, for 3 or 4 days. I mean—and then like I said, to have the sores, and you know, just to be sitting in your mess, you know, for 5 days. I mean she would have been in a really terrible mess. She would have had to be hospitalized I'm sure. Whoever would come in after 5 days would, you know, have to call an ambulance, and they'd have to come haul her out, and she'd—and it's even possible that they would decide since you don't have someone there all the time, you have to go in this home. And that's a huge fear for a lot of people. They don't want to [29.30] be, you know, in an adult care home. They wanna be in their home. They wanna be with their stuff, you know. They worry about the cost. I mean some of those places are like \$6,000 a month. You know, you don't always find a place that's affordable. Not many people can afford those kinds of homes, and like I said, people wanna be in their familiar surroundings. They wanna be where their nick-knacks are or the quilt that their daughter made or all the pictures of the grandkids hangin' on the frig or, you know, they want those things. And they can't have all that in a tiny little room at the nursing home.

I: So, one of the things I'm so impressed by with personal care workers is this skill that so many of you have to do creative problem solving on the spot. It's not like you have a staff behind you where you can say, let's figure this out or call for help. You're the one sitting there trying to get creative about, okay, what she gonna do for 3 days without being able to change depends.

P: Right.

I: So, to me that's a big, huge skill. How do you feel about people calling the work that you do unskilled or low-skilled?

P: That makes me mad as hell. I mean just real blunt—mad as hell because, you know, I do a lot of the same things that say a CNA would do. But a CNA will start off at like \$15 an hour. Now, it's probably a lot higher in lower Michigan. You know, a different community would have a higher rate of pay, you know, based on the—I mean just like an apartment here might be \$400 a month. Down there it's \$800 a month for the same apartment. Wages are like that, you know, up here minimum wage, you know, I think is \$9.25 an hour now, but to start off down there in area where the cost of living is much higher. You know, their starting pay might be \$13. I don't know. But to have someone say that I'm just a butt wiper or I'm just a housekeeper, we do more than just dusting and cleaning and making Mr. B a bowl of oatmeal. You know, we do a lot of personal care. We do everything that a CNA does, and we don't get the same pay. We don't get the same respect [26.57]. A lotta times we're not even given, like, say a uniform or anything. You know, that makes people feel that you're more professional. You know, when you're coming in, you know, I'm wearin' my street clothes because that's what I have. I do have some smocks. I'll wear them. It sometimes makes the client feel more comfortable, like, they have a nurse. I'm not a nurse, but if I wear the nurses, you know, clothing I guess that gives them that security. I'm not paid the way a nurse is or a CNA, but I just—they minimize, you know, because we don't have that medical training. You know, they don't teach us in PCA classes about all the different medications and what they do and what they're for. That's the difference. That's the only thing different that CNAs get in their training than what a PCA gets. I mean we're all trained how to change a catheter or how to bath a person or how to do their oral care for their mouths, other grooming. CNAs typically don't do the housework that we would do as a PCA, so I mean we have several different hats we wear when we're a PCA. You know, I mean because we're doing housekeeping, sometimes we're runnin' the errands, doing their shopping or helping escort them and into a car and driving them to an appointment, so I mean we're transferring them in and out. So, that's something that a CNA does too. You know, you're transferring people. We do all that. A lot of our job is similar, but the things that we do that most CNAs—I'm not sayin' CNAs never do any kind of light

housekeeping. Some do, but [24.59] mostly they don't. They're there for personal care. They may be transferring or getting people in and out for appointments, but other than that they're not cooking for them, typically. I mean we're cooking for them. We're cleaning for them. We're doing personal care for them. Sometimes all that we're required to do is sit there just to make sure they don't get up and do something they shouldn't or that's harmful. You know, the guy that can't walk very well and his daughter's worried [sigh], "He's been fed, he's been this, he's been that. I just want someone to sit here and visit with him and keep him entertained because when he's here on his own he gets bright ideas, and he thinks, oh, I'm gonna go put up a shelf over there, and he thinks he's gonna climb a ladder. And then the next thing you know, we come here, and he's sprawled out on the floor [laughing], you know, with a drill in his hand. [Laughing] you know, and we don't want him doin' that. You're just here to babysit." So, sometimes we're looked at as, you know, we're just babysitters and housekeepers, but we do a lot more than that [23.58]. We're just not compensated the same as people who, you know, have that certificate until the BTBQ—am I saying my acronym right?

I: Mmm hmm, that's right.

P: Before then there was no certification for personal care assistants. I was tickled to pieces when I learned that there was going to be a course. It was actually paid for by state of Michigan, and I now have a certificate that even though it's just a piece of paper, it was like WOW! This is a—I feel special now. I have a certificate that says I can do all these things. You know, before we didn't have anything that said she is qualified to do all these things. You know, people just assumed that if you don't have a diploma or you don't have a badge, or you don't have something with that little medical emblem on it, that what you're doing isn't valuable or that it's not worth the pay that you're asking for. I love that I have this certificate now because working for myself I can bring my little folder. This is my certification. This is my—and I told you earlier I have this—my little rules and things that I put up with and things that I'll do, and things that you can expect of me, and things I don't wanna have happen, you know, during our working relationship. So, I have that, and then I also would have recommendations from some of my clients about—and I always tell 'em be honest. If there was stuff that I did that didn't quite meet up to your standards, let me know because I wanna improve in that area. Or, you know, maybe I need to change my list of things I'll do. Apparently, I'm not good at that. Eight people complained about the way I do this [laughs]. Maybe I won't put that as one of the things I do anymore [laughing], you know. I mean I like tools that tell me how I'm doing. I like knowing, you know, if this is great, I'm gonna do more of that. You know, if this isn't so great, I'm probably gonna take that out and not do that anymore or offer that.

I: Mmm hmm. So, just for the audience that's only listening to the videotape or sorry the audiotape, what you're showing us here is a certificate that you went through a training, a BTBQ training program.

P: Yes.

I: Called TPAAN, which is Adult Abuse and Neglect Prevention.

P: Yes.

I: So, that's the certificate you're referring to, and everything you're saying raises another question. One of the things we're hoping to do is to start a PCA Association that would be like any other association. Professional association where there are professional standards, and you get an endorsed certificate. And all of the things you were just talking about, do you think there would be some value in that?

P: Absolutely. I'll tell you when—one of my first jobs I got through state of Michigan a friend of mine—happen to run into her in a grocery store—she says, "Oh, I'm super excited. I got hired at—" you know, whatever place it was, "Full-time, but I feel bad. I have to leave my caregiver job," and so she says, "It's funny I run into you. If you're looking for any clients, I have a gal, G, that's gonna need someone," and she gave me a phone number. She said, "This is the phone number for the daughter." The daughter does all the hiring. Now, I

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had not worked for an agency at that time. This is quite a while back. I'd only done, you know the stuff I did like when I was 10. You know, just word-of-mouth and helping people out. So, I hadn't worked for an [19.59] agency yet, and so my first agency I worked for was Department of Human Services, so I called this lady. She wanted to meet with me and at her mother's house, and I went there, and because it was gonna be up to mom ultimately if she likes me or not, and she, you know, she has her own questions. "Do you like to play marbles?" You know, that was the first question she had, and I looked at her daughter and I'm like - marbles? I'm thinkin' this lady in a wheelchairs gets down on the floor and—Chinese Checkers with the marbles [laughing], that's—she called it playing marbles. Well, anyway, when her daughter explained that, I said, oh, absolutely. She said, "Good because if you ain't gonna play marbles with me, I don't want ya here." [Laughing] all right. Qualification number one, I passed. The daughter, she just wanted to know, you know, "Can ya cook decent? You're not just one of the box-mix people? You can cook things from scratch?" Yes, ma'am I can. She also wanted to know, you know, "Can you get here on time? I need you here from 8 to 12 in the morning, and make sure that you're here on time. If you can't be de—", that was the three qualifications. She didn't ask me [18.45] to see any kind of other qualifications. She didn't ask if I had a record. She didn't ask a lotta questions that if I were hiring someone to take care of my mother—I'm not gonna hire someone who's got a criminal history, you know, for theft or abuse whether it's for kids, animals, adults, whatever. I would want a background check. I'm sorry, you're comin' in to my mother's house, I don't just wanna take your word for it. I was a little shocked that state of Michigan just had me fill out one paper with my name, address, and social security number, and they didn't even at the state—did not need to know what kind of qualifications I had to do this kind of work. They just wanted to know where to send the check at the end of the month.

I: This was the Home Help Program?

P: Yes. The Home Help Program. I was a little shocked because, you know, I'm like, wow, they'll just hire anyone off the street. And in fact, as I began working for that agency—and I met other people who also worked for 'em, I was pretty stunned to find out that—one gal said, "Yeah. I just got the job working for, you know, Mr. B over here because turns out his son was doin' the work," but his son was, you know, he had his dad sign the check—the social security check—and he was takin' his money. He wasn't payin' his bills. He wasn't, you know, yada, yada, yada, all the stuff his son wasn't doing, and his son wasn't doing personal care for him. "It's like, ooh, gross, I'm not wiping butt," you know. "Dad can take care of that himself." Well, dad couldn't. That's why he needed home health. They don't screen their people. As long as your paperwork is in order, you know, you check off the list. Yes, I did this. Yes, I did this, Yes, I did that, and you've got it all filled in [16.42] for the month, and the right number of hours, and you sign it. Well, then you got your paycheck, and I thought, wow! There's no one holding them accountable. Once every 6 months the DSS worker, whatever, the case worker, would come and ask, you know, Mr. B, "So, are you satisfied with the help you're getting'," and of course, if the son is sitting in the room, "Yup. Yup. Everything's great." You know, because he's certainly not gonna say with his son sitting there that, "No. He steals my money, he doesn't clean my body, he doesn't do—", you know, I mean they need to fix that program. I don't know if it's still that way because I haven't worked for that particular agency for several years, now. But at the last time that I worked for them, the pay was way too low, they don't provide any kind of medical insurance, they don't give you mileage for the traveling that you do, and just their whole system of not having trained people. They need to screen people. I know people that have ended up with workers that were felons. And it wasn't discovered until half of their personal belongings went missing. You know, or a lady with bruises all over her, and she kept tellin' me she was falling, and I'm like where are you falling? I mean are you tripping over a particular rug? Let's get rid of that rug. You know, then come to find out, she was being abused. You know, the worker was shaking her. You know, she had, you know, because I've a had a history of my own with abuse, I know what that thumb and the finger marks look like on someone, and when I was seeing those marks on her I knew something wasn't right. And, you know, through the right kind of questioning where she doesn't really know she's telling on someone, I kinda pieced some things together, and I had to report adult abuse from one of her kids. You know, well, if she didn't like what they fixed

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for dinner [14.28], and they're trying to force it down her mouth or trying to do other things, you know, 'cause that's like wow, how did you get a bruise on your chin? From someone shovin' the spoon at her. "You know, you're gonna eat this. This is what you're getting," you know, and sometimes family isn't the best option for somebody. You know, it's hard sometimes for adults to have their children who they have been telling them what to do all their life, "Now, I've gotta take orders from you?" Not all families have the same kind of relationship, so where in my family I could take care of my parents. We didn't have the kind of relationship that maybe other families have, but people need to be screened. They need to be [13.42]—

I: So, what I'm hearing you say is that you clearly believe there needs to be some professional standards?

P: Absolutely. There has to be. You know, you're not just born with the knowledge of how to take care of other people. I mean you need to be taught these things. I mean, yes, common sense goes a long, long way. Everybody should have a course in common sense [laughin]. That helps a lot. If you don't have it, you're really gonna struggle, you know, because there isn't, you know, that course—a lot of what I was taught there, I'd already been doing on my own through trial and error or just I'm one of those people that I treat people the way I wanna be treated. So, if I'm stuck in a chair all day, I would want someone to maybe rub my back or rub my feet or move me around so that I'm not gettin' a sore butt or a sore back or something. So, that's why I think to do that. Not everybody thinks like I do. I know I'm kind of an odd duck as it were, but PCA courses teach a lot of that. Things that most people say, "Well, you should just know." People don't just know, and they need to be taught some pretty basic stuff.

I: So, we only have a few minutes left. I wish we had hours because I can tell you have a lot to say, and a lot of stories. So, I'm hoping this is just the beginning of a conversation and that we can continue to be in touch with each other.

P: Absolutely.

I: But in the few minutes that we have left with this interview, you know, this is your big opportunity to speak on behalf of PCAs and to tell the general public, but also the policymakers why this work is important, and what you think they could be doing to address the workforce shortage?

P: Well, I'll tell you people are living a lot longer because of, you know, medical science and whatnot. People are living into their 80s and 90s and need care. They need care. They need help. It's super important. You know, there's probably a larger elderly population—I mean just in the county I live in than there are kids. You know, and then the area we live in is kind of touristy too [11.25], so and a lotta people come up here to retire. So, we have this aging population, and no one to take care of them. And the financial part of it, you know, not everybody has the kind of insurance where, you know, it covers all the expenses. They sometimes have to pay out of pocket for a person to come, and so having it be affordable for them or having their insurance cover PCAs, I mean that's huge. Having—and PCAs need the support of the state to make sure that they're being taken advantage of. The reason they're so short-handed all over the place is because people aren't paid enough. They're not reimbursed for things like their mileage. They aren't given healthcare options. I mean we get sick and need dental work and eyeglasses just like anybody else, but there's no insurance that we can afford on these minimum wages. A lotta times people need more care than what their insurance will allow for them. Well, the insurance will pay for 2 hours of care. You gotta try to cram a whole lot into 2 hours. They probably need 6 hours of care a day. Some of them need round-the-clock care, but we need people that can go to homes. People don't—it's cheaper if they're staying in their own home, but insurances sometimes don't wanna pay for—they wanna pay for you to go to the nursing home and not stay in your own home. People just need to be in their own homes where they're comfortable, where it's easier for them, and like I said, the PCAs need to be treated with the respect that we give CNAs or RNs or LPNs. You know, all of—we do a lot of the same, similar work. Obviously, we don't have the whole medical training that those other positions

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have, but we still do a lot of things that are valuable that people can't do for themselves. The personal care, like I said, helping them with feeding, transporting them to and from appointments, just having mobility in their homes. That's just huge. We just need someone to hear us and to help do something about it [9.11].

I: Are there questions that I should have asked, anything that you want to say?

P: You know, I know I'll think of plenty after you leave, I'm sure, because that's the way it is with me. I mean I feel like covered just about everything that I felt was like really important to me. You know, like I said, I care about people. Most people in this line of work they love people. They care about people. If they didn't need money to survive, they'd do this job for free because they just love people, and they like to help. I mean if I didn't need money to live [laughs], I would do it for free. I love people that much, and I care about them. But, yeah, we need healthcare ourselves available for us. We need to be able to stay well enough to do these jobs. We need just the education. We need support. You know, like I said that certificate I got from BTBQ, that was huge to me. That was a great start. They need more of that. These agencies that aren't doing background checks and screening people, they need to do more of that. I don't know if it's the state that can help with that or just county by county. I mean we need help. We need a voice. We need better representation by the unions. I mean if there were a PCA union where we could have a good, loud voice that could stand up on that hill and say, [Yelling] we need this! [Laughing] you know, we need that! [Laughing].

I: There's actually a group in the Detroit area that's starting to organize.

P: That's amazing.

I: And I think it's called Direct Workers in Action or Direct Care in Action, and you should probably be aware of what they're doing.

P: Absolutely.

I: And they're working—they're getting the support of SEIU, and Michigan United.

P: Okay.

I: They're not a union, but they want their voice to be heard, and they hope to bring in people from all over the state including the UP [7.02].

P: Oh, awesome. Well, I sure hope they get ahold of me [laughing].

I: Yeah. Well, is it all right if I pass your name on?

P: You absolutely can.

I: Okay. So, I have one more question.

P: Sure.

I: I'm gonna circle back. We started out by saying we wanted to humanize you and the work that you do, so people put a face to these stories.

P: Sure.

I: And what Archie Greene would want to know is, you know, what is your daily life like and who are you? And why do you do this work? And we covered some of that, but we also recognize that you're more than just a PCA worker.

P: Sure.

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I: You're a well-rounded person. You know, you have a lovely husband over here, and—

P: I do [laughing].

I: --and two doves that you apparently always have—what do you call those birds?

P: They're just love doves. Willow and Cypress, my babies.

I: Okay. So, you always have some doves, and you have kids and grandkids, and—

P: Yup. I'm very active with my kids and grandkids. I recently became the first time every gardener. I built, with my husband's help, we built two raised beds in the back, and I took my first hand—I mean I've grown windowsill gardens and houseplants, but never like a garden, garden. And I've grown vegetables. We had this huge radishes the size of, you know, like—I was gonna say tennis balls—more like golf balls, but we had radishes, and I've been harvesting peppers, and it's like, I'm growing food! This is great! So, I've become a new gardener, and I'm really active in my church. I like to, you know, I do my Bible study on Wednesday nights, and then there's two services every Sunday morning, and I'll go to either the first, and then help out with the kids in the second, or sometimes if they don't have anybody to take care of the children in the first service, I'll do it then, and then go to the second service. You know, 'cause there's some transitions happening at our church, you know, so there's not a lotta people for child caregiving, so I do that too. You know, I like to stay busy [4.58]. I also joined a weight-loss group—TOPS—because I've got something else about PCA workers. We're so busy taking care of everybody else we don't always take the best care of ourselves [laughing]. And I need to do that. I wanna live to a really old age, so I can be a great, great, great grandma, you know. I mean I'm really lovin' the whole grandkid things, and I wanna be able to get down on the floor a little easier than I have been lately with this extra weight on me [laughing]. So, you know, I have—I stay busy. I think staying busy and staying positive and being, I guess, interactive with all ages groups, you know, whether it's the little kids or the elderly or even the people in my own age group, and people who maybe do have other physical disabilities—they could be my age but have disabilities. I like to stay in contact, and I am also very interested to know how people—how are you doing this or how are you doing that? You know, I've also been a questioning person because then that way later on when I see someone struggling, it's like, oh, you know what my friend so and so does? Here, let's help set you up [3.49]. You know, this is how I'm able to come up with things for some of the people that I have helped in the adult care situations. You know, I love other people's ingenuity. You know, how they create, you know, "Oh, I made this out of milk jugs, you know," [laughing] or you know, what I made—I love stuff like that. That totally turns me on when people use—when they MacGyver stuff, and it works [laughing], you know, I love stuff like that. And I like to pass that knowledge on, and then it seems like every time you figure out a way to do something, somebody else is like, "Oh, you know what would be even better, if you had this." Wow! Well, now I go back to the person I got the original idea from, and I can tell 'em, hey, this guy does this, and you know, a lotta these things help people do things in their homes or it helps them take care of something on their own where they don't have to have somebody help 'em. I think whoever invented that little—that squeeze stick with the grabber on the end, wow! What an amazing thing to not have to stare at things that fell on the floor all day long until someone comes over if they've got a grabber [laughing]. You know, just little stuff like that. You know, that's cool.

I: So, I totally admire you.

P: Oh, thank you.

I: I want you to take care of me when I'm in need of care.

P: [Laughing] I would love to [laughing].

I: So, and we're going to—I have to bring this to a close so that K can do his thing.

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P: Okay.

I: And take some wonderful pictures of you, but thank you so much, again, for doing this interview and for your bravery to speak up and be heard, and for the work that you do.

P: Oh, thank you.

I: It's really important work.

P: I appreciate it. I feel like really honored that I got an opportunity to speak for other people in this line of work that maybe weren't able to for some reason.

I: Well, you're a tremendous spokesperson—

P: [Laughing] thanks.

I: --for it, so you did a great job. Thank you so much.

P: Thank you. You bet.

I: All set?

I2: Thank you.

I: Yeah. That was wonderful.

P: Great. I see we've been gettin' a little bit of rain off and on, which I'm ecstatic about because I don't have to go water my garden today. It's been watered.

I: We need the rain!

P: We do. Oh, my, God, what a crispy lawn. We've had this crunchy brown lawn for far too long.

I: And it's not growing.

P2: Well, it came too early this year, the brown lawn.

I: Yeah. Mines been—

P2: We've got another month to go at least before it's [inaudible].

P: Last year we had so much rain that—I mean our basement was flooding. We never had that before. It's like hey, we got a pool now. Hoo hoo [laughing]! You know.

P2: Wading pool, ankle-deep.

I: Poured and poured, right? Just before my house inspection for selling the house, and I have water. It was not good timing.

P: Right.

I: So, while he does photographs I'm going to get your gift card ready.

P: Oh, thank you.

I: And you had asked for Meijer's, correct?

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P: Yes. Yup. We have a Meijer's now. It hasn't even been here a year yet, and I think your other choice was Target, and the nearest one is up in Marquette, so that's like almost 70 miles away, and so it's like, well, this one's not too far. It's less than a mile away, so that would be better.

I: All right. Well, I did have—I have a Meijer, but I also have a Walmart. I have two. Which one would you prefer?

P: Oh, Walmart. My husband works at Walmart, so support—keep him in business.

I: So, you'd rather have a Walmart?

P: Sure. A Walmart one would be great.

I: Okay.

P: Yeah. That would be fantastic. I didn't know that that one was an option, but yeah.

I: Well, we just added it.

P2: There I get my 10% off, too.

I: There you go. It'll stretch even farther.

P: Yup. It stretches a little further. It's like \$5 bucks.