

Karen K. Harrison

Interview #36

Interview Navigation Materials

This binder package contains:

Interview profile edited to new format

Original Interview Profile

Table of Contents

Original Segment Summaries

Karen K. Harrison

Interview #36

Interview Profile

Interview Information:

Two interview sessions: 28 May 2012, 7 June 2013

Total approximate duration: 3 hours

Interviewer: Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D.

For a CV, biosketch, and other support materials, contact:

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About the Interview Subject:

Mrs. Karen K. Harrison (née Kromer, b. 27 June 1929, Shamrock, Texas) began to volunteer at MD Anderson in 1968. She became a paid employee of the institution in 1980, when she began managing the Children's Art Project (originally called, The Children's Christmas Card Project), an increasingly important revenue generator for the institution. In 1990 she was promoted to Assistant Director of Volunteer Services. She retired from that role in 1996 and took a hiatus from service to MD Anderson. In 2005, however, she began hosting patients in her home on an informal basis, a service she continues to provide to the institution.

Major Topics Covered:

Personal background; faith

On volunteering at MD Anderson

Stories of offering care to patients

The Children's Art Project; origin and evolution of; managing; promoting; projects; financial benefits to institution; commercialization

Memories of Page Lawson and volunteers

Volunteer Services; history, operations; events

The "MD Anderson Annex," Mrs. Harrison's privately run residence for patients undergoing treatment

**University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center
Making Cancer History Voices® Oral History Project**

Research Medical Library: Historical Resources Center

Original Interview Profile #36: Mrs. Karen K. Harrison
Submitted by: Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D.
Date revised: 5 July 2014

This two-session interview with Mrs. Karen K. Harrison (née Kromer, b. 27 June 1929, Shamrock, Texas) takes place in May/June of 2013 (approximately 3 hours). Mrs. Harrison has lived in Houston since 1947 and began to volunteer at MD Anderson in 1968. She became a paid employee of the institution in 1980, when she began to serve as manager of the Children's Art Project (originally called, The Children's Christmas Card Project), an increasingly important revenue generator for the institution. In 1990 she was promoted to Assistant Director of Volunteer Services. She retired from that role in 1996 and took a hiatus from service to MD Anderson. In 2005, however, she began hosting patients in her home on an informal basis, a service she continues to provide to the institution. This interview takes place in Mrs. Harrison's home in Houston, Texas. Tacey A. Rosolowski, Ph.D. is the interviewer.

During this interview, Mrs. Harrison explains the roles she served as a volunteer and also tells many anecdotes about the patients she was able to help and with whom she frequently struck up long-lasting friendships. Mrs. Harrison discusses her work with the Children's Christmas Card Project, which she was responsible for expanding and describes Page Lawson, the Director of Volunteer Services under whom she served. Mrs. Harrison also describes how she began hosting out-of-town MD Anderson patients in her home over the course of their treatment; she has been extending these invitations for the past eight years. This interview provides a snapshot of a dedicated, caring spirit with an infectious enthusiasm for the institution.

Karen K. Harrison

Interview #36

Table of Contents

Interview Session One: 28 May 2012

Interview Identifier
Segment 00A

Resolving to Become a Volunteer
Segment 0 / A: Joining MD Anderson/Coming to Texas

The Children's Christmas Card Project
Segment 02 / B: An Institutional Unit

Details about the Children's Christmas Card Project
Segment 03 / B: An Institutional Unit

Expanding the Children's Christmas Card Project
Segment 04 / B: An Institutional Unit

Creating an MD Anderson Annex to House Patients
Segment 05 / A: The Volunteer

On the Children's Christmas Card Project, Volunteers, and Faith
Segment 06 / A: The Volunteer

Memorable Volunteers and Caring for Patients
Segment 07 / A: The Volunteer

Interview Session Two: 7 June 2013

Memorable Volunteers and Caring for Patients
Segment 07 / A: The Volunteer

Recalling Volunteer Events and Volunteers

Segment 08 / A: The Administrator

Interview Identifier

Segment 00B

Memorable Volunteers and the "MD Anderson Annex"

Segment 09 / B: An Institutional Unit

The "MD Anderson Annex"

Segment 10 / B: An Institutional Unit, Program

Family Background

Segment 11 / A: Personal Background

At Eight-Three, Still Providing Service to Patients

Segment 12 / A: The Volunteer

Karen K. Harrison

Interview #36

Segment Summaries

Interview Session One: 28 May 2012

Segment 00A
Interview Identifier

Segment 1
Resolving to Become a Volunteer
A: Joining MD Anderson/Coming to Texas

Story Codes
A: Personal Background
C: Human Stories
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
C: Patients
C: Cancer and Disease
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Volunteers and Volunteering

Mrs. Harrison begins this segment by noting that she and her husband, Bedford Harrison, moved to Houston in 1947.

[redacted]

She began as a floor hostess in about 1968, working with both adult and pediatric patients. When the new building was constructed, she chose to work with adults and explains that she eventually worked in the protective environment floor: she explains some of the requests that family members made, as she could interact with their loved ones in ways they could not.

Segment 02
B: An Institutional Unit
The Children's Christmas Card Project

Story Codes
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Portraits
C: Giving Recognition

B: Building/Transforming the Institution
C: This is MD Anderson
B: Industry Partnerships
B: Beyond the Institution
B: MD Anderson History
C: Volunteers and Volunteering

Mrs. Harrison begins by talking about Page Lawson, “the most innovative person in the world” (who served as Director of Volunteer Services at MD Anderson from 1973 – 1991). As an example, she says that Ms. Lawson arranged for the volunteers to have t’ai chi classes as a relaxation technique. She also speculates that the Children’s Christmas Card Project was really Ms. Lawson’s idea, though Ms. Lawson circulated the story that the idea came from an unnamed volunteer who taught art classes for children at MD Anderson and discovered a particular piece of artwork she thought would make a wonderful Christmas card. Mrs. Harrison then explains how Ms. Lawson offered her a job as manager of the Children’s Christmas Card Project; her first main task was to develop a five-year plan to expand the project. She was fortunate, she notes, because MD Anderson was connected to the UT System: she actively promoted the project at all the UT Divisions. She also explains that an important expansion occurred when Randall’s Supermarket agreed to sell the cards at no profit (and continues to sell them today).

Next, Mrs. Harrison talks about how funds from the Project were used: MD Anderson employees submitted requests for funds to a board of volunteers who decided how money should be spent. She notes that the aquariums one can still see around MD Anderson were one of the first projects funded. At the end of this segment, Mrs. Harrison talks about the importance of spirituality in her life.

Segment 03

Details about the Children’s Christmas Card Project

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Portraits
C: Giving Recognition
B: Building/Transforming the Institution
B: MD Anderson History
C: Volunteers and Volunteering
B: Institutional Mission and Values

Mrs. Harrison begins this segment talking about several volunteers who worked on the Children’s Christmas Card Project. She then describes how the cards were selected: artwork up for consideration was presented at an event where volunteers could vote for the designs to be turned into cards. She describes one of her favorite cards and then notes that the five-year plan included an initiative to offer cards for the Jewish community. She goes on to explain that the Art Department turned selected designs into production-ready images and the Project then took bids for producing the cards. All this work first took place in a single room on the first floor of Volunteer Services, she explains, then moved to a larger room as the Project grew. She notes that there is a Karen Harrison Award given to a volunteer each year at the Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon.

Segment 04

Expanding the Children's Christmas Card Project

B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes

B: Industry Partnerships

B: Beyond the Institution

B: Building/Transforming the Institution

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

C: Patients

B: Institutional Processes

Mrs. Harrison begins this section talking about “some political things that influenced the Project,” citing as an example the invitation extended to Barbara Bush to attend the Project kickoff party. Mrs. Bush’s presence had a very positive effect. She then goes on to explain that after Randall’s Supermarket began selling the cards, she hired a consultant to help the Project break into grocery stores nationwide. She describes attending a supermarket trade fair and the resulting success of selling MD Anderson holiday cards in markets around the country. She also explains that the Project eventually separated from Volunteer Services (coming under the management of Steve Stuyck in Public Affairs) because there was too much to do. She speaks briefly about the art classes offered to children and notes that Page Lawson offered an award to each child who entered a piece to be considered for a card. The children whose designs were selected participated in the holiday parade that circulated through MD Anderson.

Segment 05

Creating an MD Anderson Annex to House Patients

A: The Volunteer

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

C: Patients

A: Contributions

A: Activities Outside Institution

C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

A: Institutional Mission and Values

Mrs. Harrison explains that she purchased a very large home after her husband died and patients coming in from out of town stay with her. One woman gave her two robes to keep in the guest room, embroidered with “MD Harrison.” This is “another step in her love of Anderson.” Mrs. Harrison then describes the accommodating nature of people who work and volunteer at MD Anderson.

Segment 06

On the Children's Christmas Card Project, Volunteers, and Faith

A: The Volunteer

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Patients
A: Contributions
A: Activities Outside Institution
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
A: Institutional Mission and Values
C: Portraits
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Faith, Values, Beliefs

Mrs. Harrison tells of a holiday card that was sent into outer space and talks about the generosity of volunteers that kept the Children's Christmas Card Project moving forward. She then clarifies the progressive expansion of her role as she worked with the Card Project. Mrs. Harrison next talks about Page Lawson, who was known nationally as an expert in volunteer affairs and sought after as a speaker. Mrs. Harrison shows a picture of Ms. Lawson and goes on to describe her character. She recalls support that Ms. Lawson gave cancer patients. Mrs. Harrison recalls some volunteers she worked with and talks about her plans to continue volunteering with the institution. She talks about qualities that a person needs to volunteer.

Mrs. Harrison says that many people shudder when she mentions volunteering at MD Anderson, but explains that she always leaves feeling better than she did when she arrived because she has helped people.

Mrs. Harrison talks about the importance of her faith in her work as a volunteer: "God gave me the job."

Interview Session Two: 7 June 2013

Segment 07

A: The Volunteer
Memorable Volunteers and Caring for Patients

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
C: This is MD Anderson
B: MD Anderson History
A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents

C: Faith, Values, Beliefs
C: Portraits
C: Patients

Mrs. Harrison explains that when she began to volunteer at MD Anderson, she worked with young men with testicular cancer. She describes them as very determined to fight their disease and believes that she was able to give them confidence. Next Mrs. Harrison talks about working with patients on the protected environment floor. She describes the physical setting, in which patients were separated from their families by a glass window. Mrs. Harrison entered the protected environment (she put on scrubs), and she explains her role with patients. Often patients asked her to take personal items, such as a bible, to be sterilized so they might have it in the room with them. She tells a story of one woman who asked her to massage her daughter's shoulder. Mrs. Harrison also explains that she served as an informal recruiter of other volunteers: she brought in her husband and a former classmate of her husband, Rock Rabinowitz, who worked volunteered many, many hours. Mrs. Harrison notes that people would often react very negatively to the idea of working in a cancer center, and explains how she countered their qualms. She explains that she established strong connections with patients and their families. She invited many of them for the holidays.

In this touching story, Mrs. Harrison describes how she cared for a little girl who came from Hawaii with her family for treatment. After the child's death, her mother asked Mrs. Harrison to help her choose the dress her daughter would be buried in.

[redacted]

Mrs. Harrison says that she believes that her ability to connect with people is "God given." She describes her relationship with a patient who now has an externship with MD Anderson. She then recalls Sister Alice, an energetic volunteer who was a "cheerleader" at one of the Children's Art Project kick off parades. Finally she talks about Tom Jean Moore, the volunteer who took care of the rose garden and brought roses to be delivered to any patient who did not have flowers that day.

Segment 08

Recalling Volunteer Events and Volunteers

A: The Administrator

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
B: MD Anderson History
C: Portraits
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
C: MD Anderson Past

Mrs. Harrison first recalls the Children's Christmas Card Project kick off parade, which took place in early fall. She describes the parade, recalling the young men pushing their IV poles, the St. Thomas bagpipers, and the fire truck that drove patients along the route. She describes the route and notes that the barbecue restaurant, Goode Company, served sandwiches for lunch. Next Mrs. Harrison recalls valued volunteers. She notes that when she was promoted from Manager of the Children's to Assistant Director of Volunteer Services, her role did not change,

though her income increased. Next Mrs. Harrison talks about Page Lawson, “volunteer extraordinaire,” who had good business sense, enthusiasm, and a gift for matching people to the right job. She recalls that Ms. Lawson told her she’d been watching her in the cafeteria and decided that she “had what we needed.” [redacted]

Segment 00B
Interview Identifier

Segment 09
Memorable Volunteers and the “MD Anderson Annex”
B: An Institutional Unit

Story Codes
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
B: MD Anderson History
C: Portraits
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
C: MD Anderson Past
C: Patients
C: Patients, Treatment, Survivors
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

Mrs. Harrison explains that her husband, a chemical engineer, volunteered in the radiology department and could be comforting to patients, in part, because of his technical understanding of radiology. Mrs. Harrison then recalls a woman who became a volunteer after undergoing an hemi-hipectomy and who continued to volunteer, even after her husband died.

Segment 10
B: An Institutional Unit, Program
The “MD Anderson Annex”

Story Codes
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
A: Contributions
C: Patients
C: Patients, Treatment, Survivors
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
C: This is MD Anderson

In this segment, Mrs. Harrison describes the “annex” she has been running for the past 8 years. She explains that she purchased a very large home after her husband died, acting on her son’s comment that she could turn it into an annex for MD Anderson. She explains how she invited

her first MD Anderson patient to stay with her, then recalls some of the other patients and families who have stayed with her over the years when they came into town for treatment.

Segment 11

Family Background

A: Personal Background

Story Codes

A: Personal Background

A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents

When asked whether she came from a large family (which might explain her gregariousness), Mrs. Harrison says that she had many, many cousins. She also explains that she was married before she graduated from college, though eventually she finished her degree, earning a degree in Political Science from the University of Houston in 1951. He notes that her husband did not want her to work, but she did, teaching third grade. She explains some of the challenges of teaching and recalls an autistic child in her class. She speaks briefly about the television and radio appearances that she made while working with the Children's Christmas Card Project. She tells an anecdote to demonstrate that she inherited her public speaking skills from her "daddy."

Segment 12

At Eight-Three, Still Providing Service to Patients

A: The Volunteer

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff

C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

C: This is MD Anderson

Mrs. Harrison tells of her plan to accrue another 2,000 hours of volunteer time so she will be "neck in neck" with her late husband's 10,000 hours. She notes that she has introduced people to MD Anderson. She ends by talking about what she has received from her years of service to the institution.

Karen Harrison

Interview Session 1: May 28, 2013

About transcription and the transcript

This interview had been transcribed according to oral history best practices to preserve the conversational quality of spoken language.

The interview subject has been given the opportunity to review the transcript and make changes: any substantial departures from the audio file are indicated with brackets [].

In addition, the Archives may have redacted portions of the transcript and audio file in compliance with HIPAA and/or interview subject requests.

CHAPTER 00A INTERVIEW IDENTIFIER

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:01.1

All right. I am Tacey Ann Rosolowski interviewing Karen Harrison for the Making Cancer History Voices Oral History Project run by the Historical Resources Center at MD Anderson. Mrs. Harrison was Assistant Director of Volunteer Services at MD Anderson and also a manager of the Children's Art Project that is run through the Department of Volunteer Services, though as I understand, you were a volunteer for a very, very long time. The interview is taking place at Mrs. Harrison's home in Houston, Texas, and this is our first interview session. Today is May 28, 2013, and the time is about two minutes after 1:00. So thank you very much, Mrs. Harrison, for allowing me to come and interview you.

Karen Harrison

0:00:48.0

My pleasure.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 1

A: Joining MD Anderson/Coming to Texas

“Resolving to Become a Volunteer”

Story Codes

A: Personal Background
C: Human Stories
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
C: Patients
C: Cancer and Disease
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Volunteers and Volunteering

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:49.6

Just for the record, I wanted to start with just a bit of personal background, and if you could tell me where you were born and when.

Karen Harrison

0:00:58.3

I was born in Shamrock, Texas. That’s in the panhandle, east of Amarillo, and it was a town of about 2500 people. I was born in June of 1929, brought on the Depression, and they’ve never forgiven me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:20.7

What is your birth date? You’re going to be celebrating your birthday pretty soon.

Karen Harrison

0:01:23.6

Yes. The twenty-seventh of June.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:25.6

The twenty-seventh of June. Almost one month from today.

Karen Harrison

0:01:28.3

Yes.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:29.5

And when did you move to Houston, actually?

Karen Harrison

0:01:32.9

I came to Houston when I married in 1947.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:40.8

And what did your husband do?

Karen Harrison

0:01:42.0

My husband was a graduate of Texas A&M, and he was a chemical engineer and did the thermal and hydraulic design in the manufacturing of heat exchangers.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:57.4

Tell me how you started to be connected with MD Anderson and became a volunteer.

[redacted]

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:30.1

And what year was that?

Karen Harrison

0:04:33.9

I'm not sure. It was in '68 or '69 or something like that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:42.2

And what was your role when you first started? What did they put you to doing?

Karen Harrison

0:04:46.1

I was a floor hostess.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:49.5

And what did that involve? I don't even know what that means.

Karen Harrison

0:04:52.5

I took them newspapers. I changed the water in their room. I visited with them. Personally, I always tried to put my hand on their shoulder or on their hand because I think physical contact is helpful to people who are in hard situations. I did that for several years—a couple of years. I can't tell you exactly how long, but they built a new building. When they built a new building, I had to choose whether I would go with the children or with the adult patients. And I chose to go with the adults because everybody was clamoring to help the children, which of course I would have been too, but I also was aware of the young men that were victims of cancer of the testes, and either their mother or their wife or their girlfriend or whatever were busy all day and they were there pretty well on their own. So I thought that my volunteering would be more valuable there.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:17.2

So how long did you do that before you shifted over to work with kids?

Karen Harrison

0:06:22.7

At first it was between the two things. I worked both places before they built the new building. One end of the hall was children, and the other end was the young men.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:37.9

And tell me how it worked. Did you go in one day a week, or how did that work?

Karen Harrison

0:06:42.2

I at first went in one day a week, but very soon I started going two. My husband had retired, and the child that had gone to high school had gone to college, and I could have more time to be there. I eventually volunteered on, I think it was, the tenth floor at that time, but it was the protected environment where I had the gown and mask and everything to go in. And the families were on the outside of glass enclosures to be able to talk to their patients and all. I'd get off the elevator, and they would come running to me and say, "Will you do this or that with my husband or my son or my mother," or whatever. It was very gratifying.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:48.9

Did you get special training to be a volunteer?

Karen Harrison

0:07:54.3

Not particularly. I'm sure I did.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 2

B: An Institutional Unit

The Children's Christmas Card Project

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Portraits
C: Giving Recognition
B: Building/Transforming the Institution
C: This is MD Anderson
B: Industry Partnerships
B: Beyond the Institution
B: MD Anderson History
C: Volunteers and Volunteering
B: The Business of MD Anderson

Karen Harrison

0:08:04.0

Page Lawson was the Volunteer Services director, and she was the most innovative person in the world. We would do tai chi or something that she thought would help us be more relaxed and that sort of thing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:30.3

Why did she want to do relaxation for the volunteers?

Karen Harrison

0:08:33.8

Well, she thought it would help them with the patients.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:36.4

Interesting. Meaning if you were calm, you would communicate that to the patients or—?

Karen Harrison

0:08:41.3

I would think so. I'm not sure.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:46.4

What else did she do? I mean, one of the question areas I have on my list is to ask you about Page Lawson because she came in as Director of Volunteer Services in 1973, which was the same year as the Art Project started.

Karen Harrison

0:09:01.8

She was working with Volunteer Services, I think, before that briefly. I don't know how long. But I met her, and I volunteered under her, and then one day, having worked with her as a volunteer, she offered me a job, and I worked for seventeen years.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:33.4

Wow. She offered you a job doing—?

Karen Harrison

0:09:35.6

A job of working at Anderson.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:38.3

And what was the position?

Karen Harrison

0:09:39.7

It was the Art Project. At that time it was the Christmas Card Project.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:47.5

And what year was it that you started?

Karen Harrison

0:09:51.2

I would have to look to be exact.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:54.0

That's fine. Yeah. I mean, I know it's hard to remember when it's been a really long time, many decades.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:09:59.6

I wasn't planning on being interviewed.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:02.1

No. I understand. Nobody is. That's one of the reasons why after the fact you can go back and add dates if you need to. Tell me how the Christmas Card Project started.

Karen Harrison

0:10:15.8

Page always gave an anonymous volunteer credit for it—that she had been drawing and playing with the children, and they had drawn something, and she brought it down and said, “This is pretty enough to be a Christmas card.” And so Page always gave that credit to the volunteer but not a named volunteer.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:41.5

But you don't know who the person was?

Karen Harrison

0:10:43.5

I think a lot of it was Page's developing something that the person said to her. I think that it was Page's innovation.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:58.9

I see. I was curious. I read that story about a volunteer selecting a card and saying it was nice enough to be a Christmas card—or selecting a piece of artwork—and I was wondering how come the person was never named.

Karen Harrison

0:11:14.4

We don't know. No one ever called anyone by name. And I really think that a whole lot of it was Page's innovation.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:11:26.3

So that was in 1973, in the early part of the year, I guess. And it came out of art classes, isn't that correct?

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:11:40.0

Actually, I was still floor hostess more at that point. But yes, I think that they began doing art classes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:11:52.1

So when you got involved and when Page Lawson offered you the job of being director of the Christmas Card Project, what was the job you inherited? What was going on? Tell me about it.

Karen Harrison

0:12:06.6

My first assignment was to make a five-year plan for where I thought the project ought to go, and I felt that, because the University of Texas had so many locations and innovations and so forth, we ought to include them all. And so they ultimately were sold at the locations, and they supported us in every way.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:49.1

Now, when you became director of the project, was that before or after the very first Christmas cards were done?

Karen Harrison

0:12:58.9

It was after.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:01.7

I'm just looking. It's kind of incredible how the project grew. The first sale of cards made about \$588, and then the second year it ran, '74 to '75, was \$1215. Then in '75 to '76, it was \$12,000, so a hundredfold increase.

Karen Harrison

0:13:28.2

Again, I don't know dates, but I was hired to be the manager, not the director. I was the manager. But later I became Assistant Director of Volunteer Services. But anyway— And I'm not sure dates. I just can't help you with that. Randalls Supermarket came to us and said they would like to sell our cards at no monetary interest to themselves, so we were skipping through the— thinking that was a great thing. And so it put us into the grocery stores. The first year they wanted an exclusion, and after that we were in grocery stores. All of the grocery stores wanted to sell them at no profit.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:44.5

That's amazing. Why do you think people were so excited about this project?

Karen Harrison

0:14:50.9

People love anything about children. And secondly, it was really helpful to things they needed, like the summer camp or whatever.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:08.5

I'm trying to get a sense of how the project developed. Page Lawson was the person who most likely came up with the idea to create the Christmas cards. How many different Christmas cards were sold that first year? Was it just one?

Karen Harrison

0:15:28.0

The first I remember were two.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:31.2

Two, okay, so two styles.

Karen Harrison

0:15:33.1

And I think that was under Dr. [Charles A.] LeMaistre [Oral History Interview].

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:35.2

Okay, so two styles of cards were sold the first year. And then the second year, was—

Karen Harrison

0:15:40.6

It was still limited.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:42.4

It was still very limited. Okay. And still not a whole lot of money made. It was really the third year that it started making more serious—and so at that point, did people realize, “Wow, maybe we've got a moneymaker here,” or, “What's the possibility?”

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:16:00.5

I don't know what they realized. I just knew I had to keep on keeping on. The first years of my working with it, I worked in the warehouse, did the dolly, spoke on the radio, did whatever needed to be done.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:19.0

What did you—?

Karen Harrison

0:16:19.2

Radio or television.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:20.3

So these were ads for talking about the project?

Karen Harrison

0:16:22.6

Not ads. They were interviews.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:24.7

Oh, I see. So you were being interviewed about the project.

Karen Harrison

0:16:27.5

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:28.7

When was it decided that the proceeds from the Christmas Card Project would fund services for kids at MD Anderson?

Karen Harrison

0:16:42.9

As far as I know, immediately. But I do not know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:47.0

Okay. And what were some of the first projects that were funded by Christmas card money?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:17:00.3

I'm not sure what the first things where. I know early on we did a camp.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:15.9

Camp Star Trails?

Karen Harrison

0:17:17.5

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:18.4

Yeah. And that was for whom? Who went to that camp?

Karen Harrison

0:17:21.7

Any of the children that applied, pretty well.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:26.7

And these were kids who—

Karen Harrison

0:17:28.8

Who were cancer patients.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:30.0

Cancer patients. Yeah, that's amazing. It was a summer camp? Or did it—?

Karen Harrison

0:17:34.9

Yes, it was summer. I'm trying to think what else might— There was a board out of the volunteers, and you made requests for grants as we were making money.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:02.8

Oh, I see. So this board of volunteers, they came up with ideas of things that the kids needed?

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:18:08.6

No, they listened. The employees of Anderson came up with things that they needed in their department. We did things like the aquariums. We did anything pretty well that the departments felt they needed. We listened to them, and then on the board, we voted and determined which direction it would be going.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:40.9

What were the aquariums?

Karen Harrison

0:18:42.6

They are right in Anderson today in the—I was there last week with a patient, and a corner there was all glassed in, and the fish were swimming. It's supposed to be a very relaxing thing. They're in the—I'm trying to think of the name of the building now on the south side of the street. They have a piano playing on its own on the south side of the street.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:32.7

Is that on the first floor of the Mays Building?

Karen Harrison

0:19:34.6

Yeah, Mays, that's it. And—I've lost my direction.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:47.2

We were talking about the different projects that were funded by the money that came from the Christmas cards.

Karen Harrison

0:19:54.4

The coffee that was in the— There's a volunteer room that people in the building, the patients, can come down and have coffee and rest, and there is even a bed behind one of the doors, where if they really just feel like they need a nap and their next appointment isn't for three hours or whatever, they can use that. But it was things that affected the whole hospital in one way or another, not just the children.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:38.5

That's interesting, because when I was doing the background reading, it seemed like at first a lot

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

of the initiatives were specifically for kids, like learning tools and a playroom and things like that.

Karen Harrison

0:20:54.7

I'm sure that's true. I'm just jumping forward, I guess.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:00.6

It sounds like things there were farther along because there were eventually things for adults that were used, but it seems like it's much broader than I had thought. That's really interesting. When you took over as manager and made your five-year plan, what did your five-year plan look like? What did you decide was important to do?

Karen Harrison

0:21:27.3

Of course, mine was to promote the project any way that I could. I was not involved in the medical side of it anyway. And as I said, we automatically had entry to many facilities because they were part of the University of Texas. So that was my first plan.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:51.9

So tell me, where were the divisions that you entered?

Karen Harrison

0:22:02.2

UT Houston Medical School, Nursing School—I'm trying to think what else. We were in Austin and had volunteer parties there. We got to go to the president's home and entertain there with the project. Just anything that I or anyone else could think of that would fly, we tried to do it. As I said, we entered the grocery business in a big hurry after the first year with Randalls.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:05.2

Right. I bet.

Karen Harrison

0:23:07.0

So because we were really nationwide, we went to Florida.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:14.7

Yeah, I think it was 1993 it expanded to Orlando—MD Anderson Orlando.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:23:26.6

So we were anywhere we could get our foot in the door.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:30.2

How long were you manager of the project?

Karen Harrison

0:23:32.8

I was manager of the project for 17 years.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:23:35.4

Wow. Wow. That's really something. So you really saw it grow enormously.

Karen Harrison

0:23:42.1

Yes, I did. I wasn't looking for a job. I was offered the job, and, as I say, my last one had gone off to college, and my husband was retired and starting to play golf, and so it sounded like a good idea. I really was able to give myself to it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:09.6

What do you think were the skills that you brought to that position that made Page Lawson say, "Wow, Karen Harrison is the person for this job"?

Karen Harrison

0:24:23.8

I'm not sure. I think the fact that I was enthusiastic about it and I don't have a timid bone in my body. And I don't know what else.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:39.9

What made you so enthusiastic about the project?

Karen Harrison

0:24:42.8

Because I, as I told you, had been really seeing what Anderson had done and could do.

[redacted]

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

I just saw it from the beauty shop on down. And it, to me, was great to go into Volunteer Services under the chapel because I was always affected by the chapel, and I base all of my life on Christ. It was just—sometimes I would get to see the ministers that were volunteers and talk to somebody in there, in the chapel or whatever. I was just very inspired with the whole project in every way.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 3

B: An Institutional Unit

Details about the Children's Christmas Card Project

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Portraits
C: Giving Recognition
B: Building/Transforming the Institution
B: MD Anderson History
C: Volunteers and Volunteering
B: Institutional Mission and Values

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:44.9

When Ms. Lawson first handed you the Christmas Card Project, what did you envision as the possibilities for it in the early '70s? What were you thinking? "Oh yeah, this is what we'll be able to do with this."

Karen Harrison

0:26:04.0

I just really thought of things that could happen. I couldn't have imagined the things that did happen. I really didn't. But the five-year plan, that was a good assignment.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:27.1

Sure. Well, in the course of five years—one, two, three, four, five—it went from \$588 to almost \$60,000 of revenue. I mean, that's just staggering, really.

Karen Harrison

0:26:42.7

Well, that again was the generosity of the people. It's the only thing I can tell you.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:26:55.5

Generosity, certainly, but also an awful lot of work for volunteers. What were all the tasks that had to be completed in order to make that happen?

Karen Harrison

0:27:06.2

We have one volunteer that has given three days a week, three full days a week, for the last—I

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

don't know—twenty-five, thirty years. His name is Rock Rabinowitz. Rock was a classmate of my husband's, and he was retiring, and he had to handle cards in his grocery store that was downtown, down by City Hall and stuff. But then when I asked him if he might do some volunteering, and for him to come and give us full days a week, it just blows your mind. And he still volunteers. **Geri Davis** was a volunteer. Her husband was a computer expert, and he got us doing computer-type things. That helped. And Carolyn Hamrick was a several-days-a-week volunteer. The night volunteers—Gerry Berard I mention because he's the one that went with me to Points of Light, and the president gave us that award.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:56.8

And that was—? Let's see. I'm trying to get the name of that award.

Karen Harrison

0:29:02.0

The Points of Light.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:03.1

Points of Light Award. And that was in—? Was it 1994? The President's Volunteer Action Award? Was that it?

Karen Harrison

0:29:14.9

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:15.5

Yeah, in 1994. Yeah—which is pretty amazing.

Karen Harrison

0:29:19.5

We had been nominated under one president, and we got the award the next year. It changed its name, but when we were applying it was Points of Light and then whatever they named it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:36.6

That's neat. I wanted to get more of a sense of how the Christmas Card Project worked. How were the designs for the cards selected?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:29:51.8

We thought no one could make that judgment any better than the volunteers, and we had events and showed the cards and let everybody vote on them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:07.7

And what were the events?

Karen Harrison

0:30:09.9

As I said, we were in the president's home in Austin. We had a kickoff party here at Anderson, actually the Medical Center. We had a parade through the Medical Center, and we had cheerleaders, we had sister—I can't think of her name—well, anyway, from the Catholic Church. A sister was in the volunteering of it, and she was a cheerleader in our pep rally setting off the event. I'm sure I can think of her name later.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:03.7

And so there were—like, all the kids' designs were shown and then people voted on them?

Karen Harrison

0:31:11.2

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:11.8

And how did they cast their votes?

Karen Harrison

0:31:14.9

A ballot.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:15.3

Just a ballot?

Karen Harrison

0:31:16.2

A marked paper ballot. They marked it, and they still do that today at the Volunteer Appreciation Party, usually at the Junior League. Because my vision is so poor, I'm saddened that I can't really vote very well.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:37.9

In the art classes, the kids must produce a whole lot of designs. Do you show all of them, or is there kind of a first cut?

Karen Harrison

0:31:48.3

I think there is a cut. Angela Cheves, who is the production director, is an artist herself. She has a degree in art from the University of Texas, and I have several of her pieces of art here in my house. I had known her parents before she was born. When she graduated, I thought, "I'm going to see if I can get Angela to help us." And she helped. I don't even know what they called her at that point, but she helped. She wasn't like the art teacher, but she was, in making the judgments and stuff, the first review and which ones would we put out and that sort of thing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:50.8

What are some of the designs that you remember that were just really great?

Karen Harrison

0:32:58.7

There was one, a sort of stick figure. I've got pictures of them I can bring down if you want to see. But this was a blue card with just black on it and stick figures and so forth, and it's called *Our Neighborhood*. And one of the volunteers' children, who was not a patient but was a volunteer, contributed this, and I love the neighborhood. **Pat Wazelle** was the mom, and she volunteered in every aspect. I'm trying to think about cards. I like them all. Santa with wings coming in from outer space I liked a lot. I liked them all, but I can't zero in very well right now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:34:36.7

Sure. That's fine. I like your description of the one about the neighborhood too. That's an awful sweet subject. So after the volunteers voted and there were a number of them selected to actually go into production, what happened next?

Karen Harrison

0:34:53.8

Oh, I'll tell you one thing before I go to that. In my five-year plan was to not only do Christmas cards but to do cards that the Jewish community would be interested in. As volunteers, they are fabulous. We have a great number of them, and they are very, very giving. And so we did a menorah. They don't buy cards like we send Christmas cards. They don't do as many, but it was an important, in my opinion, innovation to include them in that way.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:45.4

Yes, important part of the patient population certainly and also part of the community to be inclusive. Yes.

Karen Harrison

0:35:54.6

So now back to your question.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:56.0

No. I mean, I'm glad you made that point. Were there any other elements of your five-year plan that you wanted to point out? That's important. All those details are important.

Karen Harrison

0:36:09.7

Something might come in again, but just in the conversation I thought I hadn't mentioned that, and that was important.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:17.6

Be sure you add in anything that comes to mind. We were talking about what happens next. After the volunteers voted and the cards that were going to go into production were selected, what happened next?

Karen Harrison

0:36:30.6

The Art Department—there is an Art Department at MD Anderson—they made them print ready.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:36:47.8

And then they went into production. Now, were you involved at all in selecting some of those details, like what stationer was going to produce them or what the paper looked like?

Karen Harrison

0:37:04.1

Yeah.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:37:04.9

So tell me about that process.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:37:06.1

We went out for bids. I was very much in all the details. As I said, at one point I did become the assistant director of volunteers, but that was— A new person in MD Anderson said that it was time for me to be that or whatever, and that was very gracious of her to do it. It was not, again, anything I had even thought of or had been seeking. We had a real small room. First we were downstairs at Volunteer Services. Then we had a real small room up on the first floor that was just the card office. And then eventually we had one when the Art Department really got involved. We were over on another floor. But anyway, our location moved.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:38:38.2

So you were in the Art Department?

Karen Harrison

0:38:41.2

No. No.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:38:43.2

So the second room, when you got more space, was still within Volunteer Services, but it was just more space?

Karen Harrison

0:38:48.6

Yes. I mean, it wasn't down where Volunteer Services was; it was upstairs in the—what building? I don't even know what it was called then. It doesn't exist now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:09.5

So at first there was you involved, and then how many other volunteers were helping you kind of move this project forward in the very beginning?

Karen Harrison

0:39:22.3

I mentioned **Pat Wazelle** and Rock Rabinowitz and Carolyn Hamrick. Gerry Berard I mentioned, and he was an evening volunteer.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:41.4

And these were all people specifically involved with the Children's Art Project?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:39:44.3

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:39:44.9

Wow. And how many—say, ten years down the line—how many volunteers were involved? Were there a lot more?

Karen Harrison

0:39:54.2

There are still a lot more. I have a granddaughter that is with a benevolent organization, and they came to Anderson several times, but they finally had to give it up because they had so many volunteers that they didn't really have room for these girls to do all this work.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:18.2

Amazing.

Karen Harrison

0:40:19.1

And my granddaughter came home and said, "Abuelita, I didn't know there was a Karen Harrison Award."

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:27.7

Is there a Karen Harrison Award?

Karen Harrison

0:40:28.8

There is a Karen Harrison Award.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:30.5

I had no idea. So when was that instituted?

Karen Harrison

0:40:33.7

I don't know.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:36.6

You must have felt very honored to hear that.

Karen Harrison

0:40:38.8

I was very honored. It certainly was an honor.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:41.7

Wow. And what is the Karen Harrison Award given for?

Karen Harrison

0:40:47.5

For good volunteering.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:40:50.9

Oh, so it's—

Karen Harrison

0:40:51.9

At the Appreciation Luncheon where we display the cards, they then make 10,000 hours, the different awards like that, and the Karen Harrison Award is given. I'm not sure exactly the wording on it, but it's given.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 4

B: An Institutional Unit

Expanding the Children's Christmas Card Project

Story Codes

B: Industry Partnerships
B: Beyond the Institution
B: Building/Transforming the Institution
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Patients
B: Institutional Processes

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:41:16.1

That's lovely. It really is. Tell me more. We were talking about kind of the process of producing the cards and all the details that you were involved with. What other details were there? What other details had to be worked out to really get this project to move along smoothly?

Karen Harrison

0:41:39.5

Well, any entity so large is political as well as—so we had to be aware of the political. As I said, my son is a physician and associate professor at Southwestern in Dallas, and he asked my advice about whether to take the position or not. And I said, "If you're willing to go into a political realm as well as a medical realm, it would be fine."

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:42:21.1

What was going on with politics that affected the Children's Art Project? Tell me about that.

Karen Harrison

0:42:30.1

I don't know that this was political. I think of it as political. But I invited George H. Bush to be in our parade, and he was unable to make it. He was vice president or something then. But Barbara came to our party, the kickoff party, and there are precious pictures of her sitting on the stage and down talking to a little bald-headed baby, a little two- or three-year-old. Oh, he's older than that—four- or five-year-old. This doesn't have anything to do with the art project, but they have donated the proceeds from a book to Anderson. I don't know that I'm hitting the political realm at all, but that was part of it.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:43.2

Was that a uniformly positive thing, or did it create some—?

Karen Harrison

0:43:47.7

Oh, I think it was uniformly positive.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:49.8

Yeah, it sounds like it was. Yeah.

Karen Harrison

0:43:51.6

They lost a child.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:53.2

Yes. To leukemia, is that right?

Karen Harrison

0:43:55.9

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:43:56.9

Yeah. It was a very, very good thing.

Karen Harrison

0:44:01.7

You know, we human beings such as we are, it may be slightly offensive to some people just because they weren't in the same party. But I think in general, it was all very well accepted.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:17.4

It seems like it would be in that instance. Were there other situations where it was difficult to move the project forward because of pressures or crosscurrents?

Karen Harrison

0:44:29.7

No, I didn't feel that there were.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:44:35.2

So tell me more about the work that you did in expanding the project and making it successful.

Karen Harrison

0:44:42.9

After the Randalls' first year, we did hire a consultant. We went to Chicago to the national grocery stores event, and that year Randalls won the Golden Grocery Basket Award.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:17.9

And that was for what?

Karen Harrison

0:45:20.5

I don't know exactly why, but they did. And we had a booth and talked to people from all over the United States. We went as far as California. We ate the ice cream from the man passing it out across the aisle, and we had a fun time and a productive time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:45:48.8

So what kind of expansion into grocery stores nationwide did that enable you to achieve?

Karen Harrison

0:45:58.6

It made for very much more recognition of the project, and financially it was very valuable.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:10.6

So were you in grocery stores in California and all over?

Karen Harrison

0:46:14.7

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:15.2

Wow. That's amazing. Do you recall what year that was about? I know it's tough.

Karen Harrison

0:46:22.8

Not any of the years. I don't know.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:46:24.9

I was just curious to see how that coordinated with expansion. I'm sure some of those details are in the records at the office for the Children's Art Project. But that's pretty neat. So what was another way in which you began to expand?

Karen Harrison

0:46:53.0

I really think that was the major— First we had done the University of Texas things, and then when we went into the grocery business, that was a big time. You can go to Randalls today and they have a display up of our cards.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:19.6

So it's still an enduring relationship. That's amazing.

Karen Harrison

0:47:22.0

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:47:23.2

Yeah. That's amazing. Your last year as manager of the project, was that 1990 or 1991? You said seventeen years you were involved—or sometime in the early '90s?

Karen Harrison

0:47:40.4

In the early '90s, yes. They did bring in a new manager. We kind of separated from Volunteer Services and then brought in a head of the Art Project themselves.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:48:02.2

Why did it separate from Volunteer Services?

Karen Harrison

0:48:04.6

Well, because there was too much to be done, and the volunteers over across the street thought we had too much of the time and so forth. Steve Stuyck was the manager of our managers. He's vice president. It just worked out that we decided that the separation would be good.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:48:38.3

Was this around the time when the Children's Art Project began to do more than Christmas cards?

Karen Harrison

0:48:47.1

Probably even earlier than that. I'm not sure when we began doing more products, but that was a big move. As I said, the Jewish community doesn't send quantities of cards like we do, but the rest of the world doesn't send the quantities they used to, so the variety of new products is, I'm sure—I don't know the profits and all, but I feel certain that the new products have been very helpful to the project.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:49:24.6

And that decrease in use of Christmas cards or holiday cards is because of the Internet? Is that the idea?

Karen Harrison

0:49:32.9

I don't really know. See, they were called Christmas cards up to a point, and then they decided that would be offensive, so that's when they became holiday cards. But our picture at first was this—the children's faces in a wreath.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:49:56.4

Oh, I see. That was the logo of the—?

Karen Harrison

0:49:58.6

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:49:59.4

Oh, interesting.

Karen Harrison

0:50:01.6

It's on my business card.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:03.2

Oh, I see. Mrs. Harrison is showing me an image on the cover of a scrapbook she's put together, and it has a logo. It's kind of a teardrop-shaped wreath and has children's faces.

Karen Harrison

0:50:16.6

And of course, it was in color, with red and so forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:19.1

I see. I think the expansion into other products was in maybe '95, '96, '97, something like that. Were you involved in that at all? Or that was—?

Karen Harrison

0:50:32.7

I think it was before that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:34.0

It was before that. You mean when Christopher Radko, the Christmas ornament person, was—

Karen Harrison

0:50:38.1

Yes, I think it was. Well, now, Christopher Radko was later, but there were limited additional products.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:49.1

So you were involved with that too?

Karen Harrison

0:50:50.8

With some of it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:50:51.7

And what did you do? What were those special initiatives?

Karen Harrison

0:50:56.1

I did not bring Christopher Radko in. That was probably Page, but I don't know.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:12.6

What did you do? What were the limited-edition cards?

Karen Harrison

0:51:22.9

I don't remember the limited-edition cards.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:27.3

Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you had mentioned limited-edition, and so that's why I picked up on that. Okay. My mistake. So were there other special things you did to kind of expand the project in other ways?

Karen Harrison

0:51:42.5

I bought them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:43.0

You bought them?

Karen Harrison

0:51:44.5

How about that? I still buy their products.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:48.7

You still buy them. They're very cool. They really are cool.

Karen Harrison

0:51:52.6

Yes, they are—t-shirts, umbrellas, scarves.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:51:59.1

Scarves. Right. They have mouse pads and covers for cell phones and all kinds of things. It seems like they're always innovating new things. Did you ever go to any of the classes, the art classes, where the kids were making work?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:52:15.1

Yes, I did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:52:15.9

Did you run some of them?

Karen Harrison

0:52:17.5

No, I did not run them, just attended them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:52:20.4

Tell me about the classes.

Karen Harrison

0:52:22.6

We had a volunteer—and I'm not going to be able to give you her name now—but she was an artist, and she came and worked with them. We had a period in the day—once a week, not every day, I guess—where they did art in school. There was a schoolroom. I'm sure there still is a schoolroom. We went in and encouraged, just mostly encouraging. “I really like that one,” or, “Have you thought there might be a bird on that tree?”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:53:16.8

What kind of materials did the kids work with?

Karen Harrison

0:53:21.7

Essentially just color and paper.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:53:27.0

But were they paints? Were they pastels?

Karen Harrison

0:53:29.9

Oh, no. They weren't anything that complicated. They were colored pencils, crayons, but I don't believe any of them were really—well, there was probably watercolor on a few of them, but it was pretty limited to the media.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:54:14.1

What was the age range of the kids? And did they choose to come, or was it like, “Okay, now it’s art, and everybody who can is going to come and do the art class”?

Karen Harrison

0:54:24.6

I think it’s everybody who was interested could come. But of course, the older ones were the ones that were chosen. The works of the older children were the ones that were chosen because everybody likes good things. People don’t have the imagination to think of how it could be presented or something. So the more sophisticated were chosen more often.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:04.1

Did more kids start attending the art classes when the word got out that their work might become a Christmas card for MD Anderson?

Karen Harrison

0:55:13.9

I don’t think so. I know that Page believed in instant gratification because of the times. That may not be what she would be interested in now, but we gave some kind of award to everybody that entered.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:38.0

Oh, really?

Karen Harrison

0:55:38.2

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:55:39.2

And what did you give them?

Karen Harrison

0:55:41.4

I don’t even remember. It wasn’t any big thing, but everybody that entered had some gratification right away.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:00.8

And what kind of honor did you give to the children whose work was actually selected to become a card?

Karen Harrison

0:56:08.4

I told you we had parades. They could be helping to lead in the parade, pushing their pole or whatever. Or we had an antique fire truck that had come, and the ones that couldn't walk could ride on the fire truck and wave. And we went through the medical center. I think that was fun for them, and it got the whole medical center's attention.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:47.1

The parade was advertised so people would—

Karen Harrison

0:56:52.1

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:56:53.6

—attend it. Was it like a lunchtime thing?

Karen Harrison

0:56:57.2

Probably it was late morning, just before lunch or something like that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:57:03.4

Yeah, when people are getting ready to take a break. When you think about the Children's Art Project, what do you really pat yourself on the back for doing? What are you really pleased to have done with that project?

Karen Harrison

0:57:24.2

I hope I'm not patting myself on the back too much. I feel thankful that I had the privilege to be with it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:57:33.1

And why is that?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:57:35.2

Because I think it's a—

0:57:43.4 (End of Audio 1 Session 1)

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 5

A: The Volunteer

Creating an ‘MD Anderson Annex’ to House Patients

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

C: Patients

A: Contributions

A: Activities Outside Institution

C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

B: Institutional Mission and Values

Karen Harrison

0:00:00.7

—contribution that has meant a lot to a lot of people This doesn't have anything to do with the art project, but when I bought this house, I had lived in Bunker Hill Village in Memorial, and all the years that I went to Anderson, I drove in thirty or forty-five minutes to come. Well, after my husband's death and my vision was gone, I needed to be near my daughter. She lives here in West U [West University], so my son was encouraging me to buy this house, and I said, "It's too big. I don't need it. I love contemporary, but I don't need it, and it's too big, and I want to do something to help somebody." My son said, "That's a natural, Mom. Just buy it and make it an annex for MD Anderson." So you met the patients. I had done that. But that isn't meant to be in there. I'm just telling you. But I love the project, and one of my guests had real nice robes, a couple of them, for patients to use if they failed to bring one or something, and they had monogrammed on them "MD Harrison."

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:02.1

(laughter) That's sweet. That's sweet.

Karen Harrison

0:02:05.3

So that was fun.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:06.0

Well, that's a very innovative way of thinking about a move and how to set up a new place and to keep up involvement with this institution.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:02:17.8

Well, it made it a lot easier for me, and it's another step in my love for Anderson and my appreciation.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:32.5

Now, what do you think makes MD Anderson so special that it inspires that kind of commitment and feeling in people?

Karen Harrison

0:02:41.3

Well, I find that everybody that works at MD Anderson is very, very accommodating. I went—I guess it was Saturday or something, the caterer was an inpatient, and I went to see him. The lights were off almost everywhere, and we couldn't find the right person to ask where his room was and so forth. People stopped what they were doing, led us around. No one ignored you in any way, and they were very accommodating. They're human. I'm sure there are mistakes made on occasion, but that's not what I see.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Chapter 6

A: The Volunteer

On the Children's Christmas Card Project, Volunteers, and Faith

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Patients
A: Contributions
A: Activities Outside Institution
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
B: Institutional Mission and Values
C: Portraits
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Faith, Values, Beliefs

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:34.5

Are there some children that were involved with the art project when you were manager or afterwards that you really recall some of the artists?

Karen Harrison

0:03:47.8

Yes, I can't give you by name, but we sent one of our cards into outer space.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:08.6

How did that happen?

Karen Harrison

0:04:11.8

Well, we invited one of the events people from NASA, and it ultimately led to a card going into space. That was a thrill for the children and for me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:35.5

Was it on a shuttle, or was it on a space shot?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:04:39.5

I couldn't tell you now, but it did go. I'm sure I can—I don't know. I probably can find—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:51.0

Was it a design that had an outer space theme to it?

Karen Harrison

0:04:58.2

It was looking down on the world. You saw the world, and it was looking down on the world. It was Santa or somebody looking down on—I have quite a few pieces of clothing not ready to present to show you, but I've got it if you want me to bring some of that out.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:25.4

That's neat. Yeah, we could maybe talk about that afterwards. Were there any other thoughts that you've got about the Children's Art Project and what it took to get it off the ground and moving?

Karen Harrison

0:05:44.2

Well, people's generosity.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:49.8

You mean people purchasing cards?

Karen Harrison

0:05:51.9

And volunteering. It took caring people, and that was the magic of it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:03.7

Now, the entire project is run exclusively by volunteers with the exception of—I mean, in your case, you were an actual employee or a manager. But otherwise all the other activities were—were you also a volunteer when you were a manager?

Karen Harrison

0:06:24.3

I used to say I work here X number of hours a week or a month or whatever, and that was earlier in it, but I say I'm being paid for twenty hours. That was what they hired me for, and I say I work about fifty-six. But that was in the first couple of years. After about maybe the first year, Page

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

said, “We can’t get along on a part-time employee anymore. You’ve got to become full-time if you want to be with us.”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:09.8

And you were able to do that, obviously. It sounds like a huge job. I was reading somewhere—I don’t remember what year this was for, but I was reading where they were estimating how many hours were required in a specific year to run the Children’s Art Project. They were talking, and it was a total of 189,000 hours for a year, and they broke it down. They said a staff of ninety people working forty hours a week for one year. That’s pretty amazing, and all of that time was volunteer time that was put in.

Karen Harrison

0:07:54.6

I don’t know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:57.5

It was staggering. It was in an article on the Children’s Art Project. It is a lot of hours, all the details that are being taken care of.

Karen Harrison

0:08:05.6

Well, as I said, Rock Rabinowitz, it’s three years. A full day three times a week gets to adding up.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:15.8

Absolutely, absolutely. I wanted to ask you a little bit more about Page Lawson. You said she was really, really innovative. What were some changes that she brought to Volunteer Services that were really—?

Karen Harrison

0:08:33.8

Well, she actually was outstanding nationwide as a director of volunteers and was sought after as a speaker and such things as that. Her enthusiasm and her long reach of imagination were invaluable.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:04.1

When you say imagination, what kind of things was she able to do? Was it working with people? Was it figuring out jobs?

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:09:14.8

I think working with the people.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:16.8

Can you give me some examples? I'm trying to get a sense of who she was as a person and what she was able to do.

Karen Harrison

0:09:25.2

Let's see. I think I have a picture. I can't tell. I can't see. Oh, the pink is Page.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:43.2

She's got a great smile, doesn't she?

Karen Harrison

0:09:44.1

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:47.7

Kind of a 100-watt smile. Now, what kinds of things did she do or institute to support volunteers when she took over the department?

[redacted]

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:11:55.1

Now, with Page, were there ways in which she reorganized Volunteer Services or provided training? What was the special mark that she put on Volunteer Services?

Karen Harrison

0:12:16.6

I think I've pretty well described what—I told you about our doing tai chi. That was her innovation, that it would be relaxing for us, and so she was concerned about the employees. She was concerned about the patients. She was innovative herself, and she was generous enough probably—like I said, a volunteer brought this picture down and said it's good enough to be a Christmas card.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:04.1

Now, I've always been curious. How are the different roles for volunteers within an organization like MD Anderson established? How do people come up with the idea that, "Oh, here's a new job for a volunteer?" How does that happen?

Karen Harrison

0:13:26.5

It's just like living. It needs to be done. That's it. Then you look for a way to do it. I told you about **Geri Davis's** husband put us on—the way I can describe it is put us online, but I don't know that that was what he did. But he got us so that we could work with computers.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:59.0

Right, and this was a volunteer who came in and decided—

Karen Harrison

0:14:02.2

Right, it was her husband.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:03.2

That's neat.

Karen Harrison

0:14:06.4

As far as I know—I haven't seen her in the last couple of years, but as far as I know, she still volunteers.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:16.3

Do you still do some volunteering aside from your annex?

Karen Harrison

0:14:23.2

Well, I plan to do some. I want to get that 10,000 hours. I can't let my husband beat me. But right now it's more I go with the patient, like I did last week. We spent the day at Anderson, and so I am encouraging him and that sort of thing. That's what I do mostly now when I'm at Anderson is visiting and that sort of thing. But I plan to probably again. Not work in the art project but work as a hostess or something like that, depending on what my vision will allow me to do. But I have a friend whose last child is going off to college, and I told her I'm going to take her to Anderson and teach her the ropes and get her volunteering.

Interview Session: 01
Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:32.0

What do you think makes a good volunteer? What kind of personal qualities?

Karen Harrison

0:15:41.3

Well, dedication and the time to do it or choosing the use of your time in that way. It's just pleasing. I had lots of people say to me, "Oh, MD Anderson, I wouldn't want to go there." And I can truthfully say that I've said over time—or it is said to me—I said, "I have never been in MD Anderson that I didn't leave there feeling better for having been there than before I went," because you feel like you did help the people. You feel like they were pleased to see you and have you. I think that it's a very valuable way to spend your time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:58.1

And you mentioned earlier that your faith is very important to you. How is that connected up with your volunteer commitment?

Karen Harrison

0:17:09.8

I say that God gave me the job. I was glad that he put that in Page's mind that I might be hired. My whole life is seeking his will and the walk with him. As I say, we have—because of the political situation and so forth—don't stress the Christmas card projects and all that sort of thing anymore. But it was God's gift to me is all I can tell you.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:00.8

Is there anything else that you'd like to add about the Christmas card project or the art project or your volunteering at MD Anderson?

Karen Harrison

0:18:10.5

No. I'll be back. That's all. I am coming back.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:17.0

That's nice. Well, thank you for taking the time with me today. We appreciate it.

Karen Harrison

0:18:22.0

I hope I've said what you needed to have.

Interview Session: 01

Interview Date: May 28, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:27.1

I've got a good overview of the project, yeah. Thank you very much.

Karen Harrison

0:18:32.9

Do you want me to get out these things?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:35.3

Let me just turn off the recorder, and then we can chat about next steps. I just want to say for the record, I'm shutting off the recorder at nineteen minutes after 2:00.

0:18:47.4 (End of Audio 2 Session 1)

Karen Harrison

Interview Session 2: June 7, 2013

Chapter 7

A: The Volunteer

Memorable Volunteers and Caring for Patients

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

C: Professional Practice

C: The Professional at Work

C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

C: This is MD Anderson

B: MD Anderson History

A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents

C: Faith, Values, Beliefs

C: Portraits

C: Patients

Karen Harrison

0:00:00.4

It was just about the protected environment, the bond hearing. That was not where I began, but I began in the old building, and one half of it was children, one half adults—male—with cancer of the testes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:18.2

Oh, okay.

Karen Harrison

0:00:19.5

And so when they built the new building, they were separating them, and I got to choose which group I wanted to go with. I chose to go with the young men because everybody wants to work with the children and the children get a great deal of attention. In the case of the young men, their mother or their girlfriend or their wife was out working and were not there to pat them all the time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:48.7

Now what did you see? I mean, when you would go to the floor and see these young men, did

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

they—? Was there something that happened to them by getting a cancer diagnosis like this, especially cancer of the testes?

Karen Harrison

0:01:01.6

They were very determined. Often they would take their poles and walk to Hermann Park and back, pushing their poles—their medications. They were connected to a pole, their medications, and they were very determined and very—being a part of helping themselves to get well.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:33.6

Now, what did you feel you could do for these young men as a volunteer?

Karen Harrison

0:01:37.9

Just encourage them. I never entered any patient's room without hoping to put my hand on their shoulder, give them a pat. I think that's just one more way that you could comfort them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:57.7

Human contact is just so important—it's so important—and I guess in the hospital you'd almost be starved. When people touch you in the hospital, it's usually to do something that's painful or uncomfortable. How long did you work on that floor with the young men?

Karen Harrison

0:02:14.6

I'm not sure the amount of time. I don't—you know—probably looking at when we first occupied the new building would give you a date. I know when I started, but I'm not sure how long I worked.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:35.8

What was the next job that you had when you were volunteering?

Karen Harrison

0:02:41.7

Well, I did work with the protected environment.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:47.8

Yeah, and tell me—remind me where that was again. It said it was on the—

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:02:51.0

It was on the tenth floor. I don't even know where I could locate it at this point, because the building isn't the same.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:05.6

Yeah, we can—

Karen Harrison

0:03:06.9

It was on the tenth floor. The patients were in a room that no one entered except the cleaning people. One side of the room was glass, and their families could look into them and visit with them. A curtain could be drawn if they wanted to draw it to rest or not have people with them right then. To have people with them there, there would be glass between them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:42.8

Now, why were these patients in the protected environment?

Karen Harrison

0:03:47.0

Well, because they—I think they killed all of their natural immunities and were working from that. Medically, I could not really give you—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:00.6

But obviously they'd be really susceptible to anything.

Karen Harrison

0:04:02.9

Yes, they were very susceptible.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:04.6

Right. Okay.

Karen Harrison

0:04:05.4

And to work with them, I went into the—I wore scrubs and covered my hair. I went into the nursing unit that they surrounded, and I did things like, say they wanted their bible to be sterilized and come into their room. I took things to be sterilized. The parents or loved ones of

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

the patients would meet me on the stairs saying, “Oh, could you massage my daughter’s shoulder today? It’s so bothering her.” And I’m a natural-born masseuse, so I put my hands into the gloves and did the work from the other side.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:05.0

Oh, I see.

Karen Harrison

0:05:07.1

And that was a popular thing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:11.0

So why do you say you’re a natural-born masseuse?

Karen Harrison

0:05:14.8

I know what feels good, and I have strong hands, and so I try to bring what—the good feeling to them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:22.8

Well, that’s a wonderful thing to be able to give to a patient. So how long were some of these patients in the protected environment and separated from their families?

Karen Harrison

0:05:35.1

I would—you know—all that is hazy, but I think at least three months.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:42.1

Oh, my gosh.

Karen Harrison

0:05:42.3

Something like that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:43.6

That’s amazing.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:05:44.9

I don't know. They've changed their philosophy completely now.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:49.2

But that's a very long time to be without.

Karen Harrison

0:05:53.3

But even six weeks—I don't know. But it was quite a long time.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:59.6

So how did the families and patients bear up under that? What kind of frustrations or—? How did they react to that over time?

Karen Harrison

0:06:08.6

Well, I didn't see them—you know—what I've described to you is what I've seen. I really don't know more than that, or remember, if I did know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:25.1

Yeah, it just seems like it would be a really stressful thing to have to endure for so long.

Karen Harrison

0:06:30.9

Well, I'm sure that it was, yes. But the whole act, all of cancer, is very stressful.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:41.8

Yes, absolutely. Was that the last job you had before you moved to the Children's Christmas Card Project?

Karen Harrison

0:06:50.1

I think that it was probably the last thing. I increased my days. I went from one day to two. I had 8000 hours when I began working. I had been a recruiter for volunteers.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:11.1

Tell me about that.

Karen Harrison

0:07:12.2

Well, first I brought my husband. He got 10,000 hours, so he outdid me. I've really got to go back and get to ten.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:07:23.0

So how did you go about recruiting volunteers?

Karen Harrison

0:07:27.0

Well, I just had stories to tell them about things that—what was helpful. This was after I was working for the card project. I recruited a former classmate of my husband's, and I'm sure you've written something on him, or will, Rock Rabinowitz. He has more hours, I think, than anybody. He came—since that time, he would come except when ill. He has been ill lately, because he's well into his 80s. He worked three days a week, 9:00-3:00.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:26.7

Now, why do you think he had such a commitment to MD Anderson and volunteering?

Karen Harrison

0:08:34.9

He's humanly as good a person as I know. And it was a job worth doing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:47.3

So was the way you recruited kind of informal, like friends of friends?

Karen Harrison

0:08:51.1

Oh, yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:52.3

Okay, so it wasn't like there was an official program.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:08:54.4

No, just friends.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:08:57.1

So how many people do you think, in all, you were able to recruit?

Karen Harrison

0:09:01.3

I really don't—I really don't know. A lot of people would say, "Ooh, I wouldn't go there. I wouldn't go there." And I'd say, "Well, I never go there that I don't feel like I have made a contribution. So if you're interested in a contribution—" And there were people that were interested. Again, as the coordinator for the art project, I came in one day, and there was someone at the front desk answering the phone. I was introduced to her. She and her husband had just come here for a new job, and they were still living in a motel. How she knew about it, I don't know, but she came to volunteer. Well, I was so delighted with her efficiency and so forth that I said, "I'll take this one." I had lunch with her the other day, and we laughed about me saying, "I'll take this one." She was a really, really good help.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:23.8

So you still kept in touch all these years?

Karen Harrison

0:10:25.8

Oh, yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:26.6

I was wondering about that—if the volunteers kind of formed a family.

Karen Harrison

0:10:31.7

For instance, Rock was at my husband's memorial service, and I've taken him up to A&M to football games after he couldn't drive. I didn't take him. I had a driver. As a volunteer, I did make friends with the patients and their friends, and often I would invite them to my house for holidays—Easter and things like that. I asked my daughter yesterday what she remembered about when I volunteered, and she said, "Well, you brought that little girl home from"—I think she was from—I forgot now—Hawaii or somewhere—"and I got to play with her." Elizabeth was in high school, but she was playing like a babysitter would with her and that sort of thing. And later, the

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

little girl did not live, and her mother asked me to help her pick out the dress for her funeral, for the child. That was complimentary and yet an awesome responsibility.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:22.0

Yeah, you made a real connection with that family.

[Redacted]

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:53.8

[redacted]

And did you feel that you learned how to do that over the years, or was it something that you just knew how to do? How did that work? How did you become able to do that kind of pastoral care?

Karen Harrison

0:16:19.1

I guess it's God's gift. You're given certain gifts or talents, and I think it would only be that. I couldn't do it in my own strength. I treasured them. I have kept up with them through thirty years. I was in Jerusalem for a friend's wedding about four or five years ago, and they had moved from Iraq to Jordan because of all the war. **Netta (???)** had remarried. She married another doctor, and they were starting a practice in Jordan. She had three children by this husband, and she, this time, asked me if I would be their grandmother. She didn't say "godmother" this time. I think that the religion was more important to her husband at that point—the new husband—than it had been to her original one. She asked me if I would be their grandmother, and I said yes. I have kept in touch with them. When I found out that we were really just across the—seventy miles away from Jordan, my granddaughter was with me, and I decided we would go see **Netta (???)**. They are the most hospitable people in the world, the near Asians. I don't know what you call them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:18.2

Iraqis.

Karen Harrison

0:18:20.2

Yeah. Well anyway, she wanted me to see Petra, and we spent the night in the desert. We saw native everything, went swimming in the Red Sea, and she just wouldn't let me do anything. She and her two daughters—the second marriage—my granddaughter and a sister-in-law of hers were doing this traveling, but women in that part of the world don't travel around by themselves,

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

so her daughter was in medical school, and one of her classmates, a man, she invited—or her mother invited—to be our royal guard. So he went with us everywhere we went, and it was interesting. I ended with another lifetime friend, **Bassan Cori (???)**, who has done work at MD Anderson externships and so forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:40.0

Oh, that's amazing. How neat.

Karen Harrison

0:19:43.0

He has come and stayed with— Oh, when he and my granddaughter were emailing back and forth and he told her he had gotten this externship at Anderson—he was so excited—and he would be coming to Houston for whatever—three months or whatever it was—she emailed back a curt congratulations and said, “And of course you'll stay with my grandmother.” And he did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:12.6

So you really have an international family from your volunteer experience. That's so neat. And such long relationships with these people too.

Karen Harrison

0:20:23.0

And the original, older son lives in California, and his wife is a doctor. She came from Iraq. I've enjoyed getting to know her.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:45.7

So tell me about—you know—from this story, obviously you were able to give this woman a lot of comfort and friendship over the years. When you talk to people, and when you used to talk to people, about volunteering at MD Anderson, how did you explain to them what a volunteer could add to a patient's experience?

Karen Harrison

0:21:13.4

I don't know that I really was required to explain it to them. I'd probably tell them a story of one of the patients, or one of the volunteers when I was a volunteer was Sister Alice. Now, she was already in the system. I did not recruit her. But it was fun to be able to point out— There was a doctor—I don't know who he was—that kind of helped support her as a retired nun. She did things, good things, for the patients and all. After I was with the art project, we would have pep rallies to open the season of the cards, and Sister Alice would be a cheerleader.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:18.8

In her habit?

Karen Harrison

0:22:19.6

No.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:20.6

She didn't wear a habit at that time?

Karen Harrison

0:22:23.4

No.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:24.2

Well, that must have been—I think a lot of nuns were not wearing habits at that time. Did she wear the wimple, I guess it's called?

Karen Harrison

0:22:34.1

I don't think so. I don't think she did that either.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:37.7

That's neat. What do you remember about Sister Alice, besides she had so much energy and enthusiasm to cheerlead?

Karen Harrison

0:22:45.8

Well, she just was—total giving—total giving, anything. And she was alive and well. Another volunteer that may or may not have been mentioned to you—I'm sure she's been mentioned to you—was—drawing a blank—Tom Jean Moore. Have you heard that name? There's a garden dedicated to her outside the chapel. She grew roses. She had done it professionally. She grew them and brought them to any—to Volunteer Services, and we were to take them in to any patient that didn't have any flowers. And so Tom Jean was a real—

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:00.9

You know, I think it was Dr. [Emil] J Freireich [Oral History Interview] who mentioned her to me in an interview.

Karen Harrison

0:24:09.3

Did he?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:10.1

Yes. He talked about— He couldn't remember the name of the volunteer, but he talked about the person who would bring roses to the patients.

Karen Harrison

0:24:20.5

That's Tom Jean Moore.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:24:22.2

Yeah, that's really, really neat. So she was a nursery person? She had a nursery, or she grew roses?

Karen Harrison

0:24:28.7

She had done it professionally, but she, at that point, lived out west of town, near Boss, I think. It wasn't that far out. I went to her house several times. That gets hazy. But she had the roses and knew how to grow them and tend them and when to cut them and cared.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:06.7

That's a really neat thing.

Karen Harrison

0:25:08.1

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:09.2

A little bit of bright nature in a hospital room makes all the difference sometimes. That's so neat.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:25:18.4

I think that it's—the garden is right between the chapel and the parking building, right in there. It has her name on it.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:33.5

Oh, so the new garden is named for her? How wonderful. Yeah, so we'll get that name, make sure it's spelled properly and everything.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 8

A: The Administrator

Recalling Volunteer Events and Volunteers

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
B: MD Anderson History
C: Portraits
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
C: MD Anderson Past

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:25:33.5+

So tell me some more stories from your time volunteering. What are some of the kind of important—really important—moments for you, besides the ones you've already shared with me?

Karen Harrison

0:26:01.0

Again, at this point I was not a volunteer, so I don't know. We had a parade to kick off the season of the card project. The young men did push their IV poles and march in the parade. I invited, at that time, Representative George Bush, and it turned out he was unable to come, but Barbara came. We had a party following it, and I got the cutest picture in the world of her sitting on the step, talking to about a three-year-old, bald as he could be. And that meant a whole lot to me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:27:04.6

Well, tell me more about the parade. About how big was it? And who was in it?

Karen Harrison

0:27:11.6

Patients that were able. I think it was St. Thomas that had the bagpipers. The Episcopal Church, I think they were in it. My husband had a cousin who was a fireman, and he brought the fire truck and drove the fire truck. The patients that were well enough to be out but not to march got to ride on the fire truck. We just went down Bertner to along about Methodist and then over and back up, that sort of thing. It was nothing real elaborate.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:02.7

So did people put on holiday colors? Did they dress up? What was—?

Karen Harrison

0:28:11.1

I think more of just what they—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:17.3

Just ordinary.

Karen Harrison

0:28:19.0

Goode Company came and had sandwiches for everybody that attended. They were outside on the grill.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:32.6

People who listen to this may not even know what that is. So say for the record, what is Goode Company?

Karen Harrison

0:28:38.7

It's the best barbecue in town.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:42.5

And still exists, too.

Karen Harrison

0:28:44.4

Yes, still exists. I still go as often as possible.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:28:49.4

Oh, do you? You're a devotee. That's great. Well, that must have been a real treat to have barbecue. So that was around the holidays, like in early December or something?

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:29:01.5

No, it was earlier than that. To begin the sale, to be able to get the cards there for Christmas, you tried to sell them in, oh, I guess, the beginning of September.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:29:18.2

Oh, okay. Wow. So that's really early in the season. It was still really hot then.

Karen Harrison

0:29:24.6

And one of the volunteers that I had and still value as a precious friend was **Pat Wazelle**, and she would do the mail orders at her house and just come in—had her across-the-street neighbor volunteering to drive in and get the orders for us, and he brought them out to her in the neighborhood of West U. She did all the bookwork and stuff that was required at that time, before we got it into a huge business. She's my friend still today, and it's been too long since I've seen her. We talked, I guess, in January.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:30:28.8

Tell me some other stories from the Children's Art Project. What are some of the high points you remember from that, or the difficult—? What are some of the difficult things, real struggles you've had putting that project—getting it moving and growing?

Karen Harrison

0:30:48.1

Oh, I can't even think of calling it difficult. Angela Cheves, who is a production manager now, I had known her parents before she was born. She had a degree in art from the University of Texas and came, and I introduced her to Page. I said, "She's a personal friend, and she's a good artist, but I'm stopping at that. It's your judgment." And I said, "I don't want you to think that I have to push a friend in, because she's worthy of getting the job on her own." And Page said, "Oh, no, she's what we want." So she has worked there.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:31:46.7

I've emailed with her about various things. Yeah, she's really neat.

Karen Harrison

0:31:52.0

She's a very capable young woman.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:05.4

When you became assistant director of volunteer services, what did that change in title mean?

Karen Harrison

0:32:13.0

It made it—made a little bit of difference in my income, I guess. It was just—and I'm drawing a complete blank on it. It was a new assistant director, and she went to Page and said I should be called assistant director as well.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:41.3

And was that because of the amount of work you were doing for the Children's Art Project?

Karen Harrison

0:32:46.9

Or had done in the past—had volunteered. I don't know what it was, but she was generous is all I can tell you.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:32:53.9

Yeah, and that is very generous.

Karen Harrison

0:32:55.4

It was very generous. I'm sure that I can get her name from Angela if I can't conjure it up. Usually I can conjure things up in a while, but I have not gotten her name yet. She went on to transfer to Dallas later and was with volunteerism there and working with them.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:20.0

So you were—? So basically it was a title that was in recognition of past work and current work that you were doing—your workload, basically.

Karen Harrison

0:33:29.2

It was.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:30.0

So once you did that, you pretty much kept on the same track doing just what you were doing?

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:33:35.9

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:37.3

Tell me more about Page Lawson. We were talking about her a little bit before we turned on the recorder, and you said she was just the most amazing—I can't remember the phrase you used—the volunteer deluxe. Or you said something like that to really—

Karen Harrison

0:33:59.5

Extraordinaire.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:33:59.9

Extraordinaire—volunteer extraordinaire. That was it. I love that phrase. Why? Why was she volunteer extraordinaire?

Karen Harrison

0:34:08.1

Well, she was very much a can-do person. At first we gave prizes at the end of the year to the children who designed—or to everyone who made a design, something like that. But she said, “Oh, children are into the now. Let's give it to them earlier in the scene.” She just—she had really good business sense and really a lot of enthusiasm and knew where to put slots to put people in and their talents. As a volunteer or floor hostess, I'd come down every day I worked, and we—Page and all the volunteers that were down about that time—would go up to lunch in the cafeteria. So it was—you know—you have no idea that you're being studied. And she would later say to me, “Well, I watched you, and I knew you had the things we needed—talents we needed.”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:40.5

What did she see?

Karen Harrison

0:35:42.3

Well, I guess just that I'm outgoing. I don't know.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:46.5

Interesting.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:35:46.1

She said I was outgoing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:49.5

So she really had a sense about people.

Karen Harrison

0:35:50.7

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:35:52.3

She could really pick up on things. I'd be interested if you could tell me about maybe you saw her working with one of the other volunteers—you know—how did she cultivate people?

[redacted]

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:37:25.3

Absolutely. Let me, Mrs. Harrison, just pause the recorder for a second.

0:37:30.8 (End of Audio 1 Session 2)

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 0

Interview Identifier

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:01.8

Okay, I realized I neglected to put the identifier on, because we actually started the recorder when we were in the process of talking. I just wanted to say that I'm Tacey Ann Rosolowski, and today is June 7th, 2013. I'm talking today with Mrs. Karen Harrison. This is our second interview session together, and we're at her home in Houston, Texas. We began the interview at approximately 1:07, just for that record, and right now it is almost a quarter of 2:00.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 9
B: An Institutional Unit
Memorable Volunteers and the “MD Anderson Annex”

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Professional Practice
C: The Professional at Work
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
B: MD Anderson History
C: Portraits
C: This is MD Anderson
C: Personal Reflections, Memories of MD Anderson
C: MD Anderson Past
C: Patients
C: Patients, Treatment, Survivors
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:01.8+

Now we have our business all done, and we can get back to it. You were going to talk about people you recruited.

Karen Harrison

0:00:48.4

By profession, my husband was a chemical engineer, so he had an understanding of science things that I certainly did not have. He volunteered in the Radiation Department. People would be apprehensive, and A, he'd had it, and B, he knew all about it, so he would go and be very comforting to patients as they waited for their sessions.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:23.3

Did they ask him technical questions too?

Karen Harrison

0:01:25.4

If they knew enough to do it. He can speak either technically or otherwise, as a patient. He could speak both ways.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:39.7

And that's really important. Have you seen a lot of people go through that? Are there a lot of volunteers who are patients? We don't necessarily have to mention their names, for privacy reasons.

Karen Harrison

0:01:52.6

Again, I cannot recall her name, but there was one really neat young woman that had had a hipectomy or something and was swinging around on crutches and volunteering. Her husband so wanted her to be able to have a prosthesis, and it was not happening easily and so forth. Well, ultimately, he was killed in a car wreck, and she kept on swinging through Anderson's halls on her crutches and her one leg.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:44.7

Maybe it even helped her to have the volunteering to go to. What a tragedy. Well, I can imagine that having the experience as a patient or being close to someone that has had that experience could really help you relate to someone who is going through that process. What other stories do you want to tell me about all of this experience over all these years of volunteering—it's amazing—and working with MD Anderson?

Karen Harrison

0:03:16.1

It was just a very important part of my life. I was with a young woman Wednesday night in another church. They were having a healing service, and she is driving patients to Anderson. Her husband had it in the last year. He died of cancer, but she was glad that she could do the driving and there were places there to go. I don't know. First of all, I want you to realize that I am not trying to toot my horn. Please don't think of it as that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:15.7

Would it be okay if I said that I think it's really okay if you do, and I think you should? I think it would be worth it, because you've done so much for the institution. But I understand why you're saying what you're saying. I do. But I really admire what you've done.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 10

B: An Institutional Unit, Program

The “MD Anderson Annex”

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer

A: Contributions

C: Patients

C: Patients, Treatment, Survivors

C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff

C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help

C: This is MD Anderson

Karen Harrison

0:04:32.8

Since my husband’s death—and I don’t know whether you know any of this or don’t know it, so I may be redundant—my eyes have gotten so bad that I can no longer drive, so I wanted to live closer to my daughter, and I lived in Memorial. All those years I drove in so far, the seventeen years I worked, and here I am ten minutes away now. But I like contemporary houses, and this was a contemporary house, and my son was encouraging me to buy it. I said, “No, I don’t want to. It’s too big. I don’t need the room, and I want to do something for somebody.” And he said, “In that case, Mom, buy it, and make it an MD Anderson annex.”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:36.4

What does that mean?

Karen Harrison

0:05:38.1

That means that I’ve now had about forty different patients from MD Anderson stay in my home. The package that you picked up was for the patient here. They’ve been here this time two to three weeks maybe, but they come different amounts of times. People ask if I went through Social Services—and as you’re already aware, I look to God for my direction—and I just say, “Oh, no. God sends them.” It is by word of mouth. The first ones that he sent—among the first—I don’t say the first—was a minister, and they were here several months. They didn’t want him more than thirty minutes away from the hospital, and they stayed with me for seven months. I guess my really first patient that stayed with me—I was with my daughter and her children in West University, the village, and had an ice cream. Someone rushed up and said, “May I sit here?” I said, “Yes,” and the children are looking at the windows. It was at the table where we were, and the children were window shopping, so we said, “Yes, of course.” She said, “I’m watching for the MD Anderson bus.” There is one that goes to the village. My daughter said, “I

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

think you've already missed it, but we can take you to the hotel," which we did. When we got her to the hotel, I tore the top of my check off with my name and phone number and all that and handed it to her, and I said, "If I can help you in any way, feel free to call me, because I do know the area, and I know Anderson very well." She thanked me, and the next morning before my feet hit the floor, she asked me where she could stay. I began with saying, "Well, why don't you try my house? But this is a trial. If you don't like me, or if I can't handle you, we'll part and go our way, but you are invited to come to my house." She came for eight years, but she did not last four, and she came from San Diego. My house was her headquarters. I stayed through the nights with her when she'd had surgery and things like that. She had a loving, caring husband, but he was at the age that he thought that his company might think they could do without him if he was gone all the time. He said, "If they knew all the money they'd spent on her, they'd just—" But her insurance was taking—his company's insurance was taking a lot of good care of her.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:30.9

Well, she's very fortunate to have that too. I imagine you had a real connection with her.

Karen Harrison

0:09:37.5

Yes.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:39.3

Did she stay here continuously during those eight years or just back and forth?

Karen Harrison

0:09:42.5

Back and forth.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:09:45.4

That's amazing. I would say that's really brave of you to give your number to a stranger like that, but it sounds like it's part of what you do as a person, as a volunteer.

Karen Harrison

0:09:58.9

I guess I'm just—I don't know what. Another girl that stayed here—and her sister was with her—she was from Colorado. They were here two weeks or something at that time. One afternoon they came in with beautiful, white terry cloth robes, and they had "MD Harrison" embroidered on it. It hangs in the closet where most patients room.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:10:39.0

That's really great. Is your MD Harrison your big activity with the institution right now? Do you do other things for MD Anderson?

Karen Harrison

0:10:57.5

It really takes most of the time that I have.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:11:00.5

What do you do to run the annex? What does that involve?

Karen Harrison

0:11:04.9

They're invited to come and stay and to use my kitchen, and sometimes I end up doing things with them socially or cook the meal together, and one of them will do this and the other that and that sort of thing. Or sometimes they would prefer to stay more to themselves. My star patient now is clear of cancer for the last six years. He came, he and his wife and two children—a two-year-old and a four-year-old—they were here at least three months. His wife, when he was inpatient, she would go and stay with him, and somebody had to be here with the children, so his parents from Pennsylvania came and stayed some. Her parents from North Carolina also came. So I got to know the families and the patient. He was here in May, end of March or May, and he got his six-year checkup of no cancer.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:38.1

Wow, that's great.

Karen Harrison

0:12:39.1

It was really good.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 11

A: Personal Background

Family Background and Personal Talents

Story Codes

A: Personal Background

A: Character, Values, Beliefs, Talents

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:12:41.3

I don't remember if I asked you if you have brothers and sisters. Do you come from a big family, an extended family?

Karen Harrison

0:12:47.7

No, I have a brother, and I had a sister until last July. She died last July. She's the artist. All the paintings I have in my house are her work, except about three, and she did them for me.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:09.1

She was a colorist, among other things.

Karen Harrison

0:13:11.1

Portraits are her forte.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:14.4

I was curious. I was wondering if you had a big extended family or a lot of siblings, because you're so gregarious.

Karen Harrison

0:13:21.2

I had seventeen first cousins, so there were eighteen in all. On both sides of my family we had that many first cousins, so it was my parents that had larger families.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:36.6

So family reunions must have been real zoos.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:13:39.8

Well, Kromer, which is my maiden name, my father's—

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:13:45.8

How do you spell that?

Karen Harrison

0:13:47.1

K-R-O-M-E-R. I think I got the invitation to the—I think it's the 58th—I'm not positive—reunion. My mother's family, just a few times and not really formally, but I kept up with the cousins and they with me and children of my cousins, because all my cousins just about are—I have a 92-year-old cousin who is still alive in Amarillo, and we chat, but most of my cousins are gone.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:14:27.1

Did you do volunteer work when you were a young person, like in high school or in college? I was just curious.

Karen Harrison

0:14:35.1

I did not in college because I married at eighteen, so then I had college to finish. My father had said that—marrying with his blessings—that he would want my promise that I would try to go to college, finish college. On our \$270 a month, it wasn't going to be easy, of course. He told me that he would continue to pay for the schooling. We didn't even have a car when we first married.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:15:31.6

When did you marry? What was the year?

Karen Harrison

0:15:34.8

December of '47. When we did get a car, which was by the summer—I guess sometime in the summer—I would go to school Tuesdays and Thursdays and six weeks in the summer. I graduated with a degree in political science.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:03.5

And where did you go to school?

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:16:05.6

Well, I went freshman year to the University of Texas, and I graduated from the University of Houston.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:13.2

What year did you get your degree?

Karen Harrison

0:16:17.6

Let's see. About '51, I think.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:16:31.3

Wow, so that took you about four years to finish it up, but still, with being married and starting a family and everything, that's—

Karen Harrison

0:16:41.2

I didn't really start my family until afterwards, but I guess that included working one year. I wanted to work, and my husband said no. He didn't want me to work. I said, "Yes, I want to. My degree will be more valuable with some experience in case I ever really need to work." He gave in on it, and he said, "I'll do it, but I don't want to see one penny of that money," and I said, "I think I can handle that part of it."

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:13.6

What was the job you held?

Karen Harrison

0:17:15.3

I had had my student teaching in Government and American Problems, seniors in high school. I lived in the Spring Branch School District, and there were no such openings available or not many students that age. They had a job for me in third grade. I taught one year of third grade, and I sort of did it with a guilty conscience.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:17:54.4

Why is that?

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:17:55.4

Well, I had had a reading and a math course in elementary, and they were really good teachers, but I just didn't want to— Spring Branch went from midterm entering and graduating and stuff to once a year. I had thirty-eight children.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:21.4

A huge class.

Karen Harrison

0:18:23.5

Some of them were repeating the first half of third grade. Some of them were skipping the last half of second grade. Some of them were where they were supposed to be, and so it was highly—I think the term is—it just grew. Well, with some guidance, there wasn't a child that hadn't gained a year in their testing.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:18:56.5

Well, congratulations on that, because that's very challenging—plus being prepared to teach students who are so much older and then having to re-gear for younger kids.

Karen Harrison

0:19:08.2

One of the things that I did that I think really helped them was after lunch every day, I told them to put their heads down and rest and I read aloud to them. I think that being read to is very valuable.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:19:26.9

It's funny. I remember that from elementary school and just loving it. I do. It probably gave you a break too.

Karen Harrison

0:19:33.8

My father, when I was in college and taking Texas history, would read my lessons to me because he was interested in history. He would read aloud to me. I was dyslexic without realizing it. I wanted very much to know what was in there, but I really didn't want the labor of reading it.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:20:00.7

Was there anything from your experience—training as a teacher or from that year teaching—that helped you when you started to volunteer?

Karen Harrison

0:20:12.1

I'm sure that it did, because I think every instance in your life adds or detracts. I'm sure that it did. I had one little autistic child that liked me, evidently. I would arrive in the morning in Spring Branch, in the parking area, and he would step from behind a tree and follow me. If I stepped backwards suddenly, I would step on him.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:01.2

He did like you.

Karen Harrison

0:21:04.8

It was something that I had never—it was a look at life that I had never seen and had no understanding about.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:16.6

You mean of someone who is autistic?

Karen Harrison

0:21:18.3

Uh-hunh (affirmative).

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:19.4

Was he very autistic or a high-functioning autistic?

Karen Harrison

0:21:23.3

I think very autistic, maybe. Ultimately, I heard that he did die in a fire. His house burned, and he died in it. There was genius in that class too. It was very challenging and stretching.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:21:53.2

I'd find it terrifying to teach third grade, personally. I'd run. (laughter) I commend you. So why did you only teach one year?

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:22:06.3

Well, I had, at that point, been married five years. It was time to have a child.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:11.7

Time to start a family. Are there any other stories about MD Anderson that you'd like to share with me?

Karen Harrison

0:22:25.0

Let me look.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:22:26.8

Do you want me to pause the recorder for a second while we—? I'll do—

0:22:29.7 (End of Audio 2 Session 2)

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:00.4

I think I ought to do that because I did want to ask you—you had mentioned after we turned the recorder off last time that one of the things you did when you were promoting the Children's Art Project on TV and radio was you had this quite amazing TV appearance. Tell me about that, on the *Today Show*.

Karen Harrison

0:00:20.0

Really, I just know I did it. That's all.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:24.1

Tell me about it. How did you get asked?

Karen Harrison

0:00:29.2

It was probably through Steve Stuyck [Oral History Interview]. I don't know. I really don't know.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:34.5

Okay, so this was sort of arranged behind the scenes for you. Did you fly to New York, or did someone come here?

Karen Harrison

0:00:41.2

No, they just interviewed me here.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:43.7

When you do an interview like that to promote the Art Project, what were the kinds of things you said? What did you say to people when you were on air?

Karen Harrison

0:00:56.6

I told about how the project really—the hospital was taking care of all their medical needs, but the art project's aim was to improve their social, educational, and emotional needs. We did eventually have a camp. We did have ski trips. Anywhere that we could answer that need we tried to do it, and there was a committee from the volunteers and donors and stuff that helped allocate the money. It still is true, I guess. I presume it is.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:53.2

Were you the only person who would appear, or did you have patients talking too?

Karen Harrison

0:01:59.0

No, anytime that I talked I was interviewed briefly.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:05.2

You were kind of the face of the art project for a very long time.

Karen Harrison

0:02:12.1

I don't know. I wouldn't go that far to say.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:17.3

But you were sort of the public representative of it. That was kind of exciting. Were you nervous about doing that? Are you a speak-in-public kind of person?

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:02:27.1

I'm a speak-in-public kind of person. I liked Declamation in the seventh and eighth grade. **Mr. Hilburn** prepared me well.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:02:40.0

I wouldn't have even known what that meant. Tell me what Declamation with Mr. Hilburn was all about, because obviously it did prepare you well.

Karen Harrison

0:02:52.1

Well, I bet it all came from my daddy, because I lived in Shamrock, Texas, and we celebrated St. Patrick's Day with great interest and glee. One of the things they did was a production of Abie's *Irish Rose*. My father played the part of the rabbi, so I was very proud of my actor father.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:23.4

And did you emulate him? You wanted to follow a bit in his footsteps?

Karen Harrison

0:03:28.1

Without being aware of it, I guess so.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:33.6

But obviously you didn't get that fear. Some people talk about this horrendous fear of speaking in public, and you obviously—

Karen Harrison

0:03:38.8

No, I didn't get that.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:39.7

So it sounds like Page Lawson was right when she said, "Yeah, you're the person who has what it takes."

Karen Harrison

0:03:47.3

She was very generous with me—very, very generous.

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:03:55.0

I don't have any more questions right now. Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your volunteer experience or working with the art project?

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Chapter 12
A: The Volunteer
At Eighty-Three, Still Providing Service to Patients

Story Codes

A: The Philanthropist/Volunteer
C: Dedication to MD Anderson, to Patients, to Faculty/Staff
C: Offering Care, Compassion, Help
C: This is MD Anderson

Karen Harrison

0:04:03.8

No. I will tell you that I do aim to get 2,000 more hours. I've got to get as many as Scoot had.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:11.2

And do you have a plan for how you're going to do that?

Karen Harrison

0:04:14.5

I have a good friend whose husband is the bible teacher for the Rice college group. Her fourth child is going to Rice this fall, so she's out of children, and I've told her I'm willing to take her as a volunteer to Anderson and teach her the ropes. So I'm hoping to have the good health and my good friend, and we'll go volunteer.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:04:49.5

What does teaching her the ropes mean? If you were going to teach me the ropes, what would you teach me?

Karen Harrison

0:04:55.2

Just introduce, and I know where the department is. Just show her around where the cafeteria is, whatever. Find out what jobs are available. My granddaughter belongs to an organization that does civic work, and they wanted to volunteer at an art project, and she said, "Well, we can't do it, because they have so many people wanting to volunteer that they didn't have any work for us."

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:32.9

Wow, that's amazing and great, a good problem to have for MD Anderson.

Interview Session: 02
Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Karen Harrison

0:05:39.1

And she said, “And besides that, you didn’t ever tell us that there was an award in your name.”

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:05:48.3

I thought that was cool when you mentioned that. Pretty neat. You know, I was curious. Did you ever run into a situation when you were a volunteer working with a patient that you really didn’t know, you weren’t sure how to handle, that you had to learn how to handle?

Karen Harrison

0:06:07.3

I’m sure I mishandled lots.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:09.8

I didn’t mean to accuse you but—

Karen Harrison

0:06:11.4

I know that, but I’m sure I did. I mean, doesn’t everybody?

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:17.6

I’m wondering about the learning curve. I was curious if volunteers ever came to ask you, “Mrs. Harrison, how would you think I should handle this?”

Karen Harrison

0:06:28.2

I don’t remember that they did. I don’t remember that they did.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:06:31.9

Well, I bet watching you—maybe you were a great role model for being a volunteer. I’m sure you were.

Karen Harrison

0:06:37.7

I don’t know, but I loved it.

0:06:53.7 (End of Audio 3 Session 2)

Interview Session: 02

Interview Date: June 7, 2013

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:06.9

Just for the recorder, I had the recorder off for a couple of minutes while Mrs. Harrison dealt with something. I just had one more question I wanted to ask you unless there is something else you would like to add at this point. Anything else you want to say at this point?

Karen Harrison

0:00:20.7

No, not that I know of.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:00:22.1

Okay. I wanted to ask you what you thought—what do you think you've received from working as a volunteer and then also with the Children's Art Project at MD Anderson? It's a long relationship with an institution.

Karen Harrison

0:00:37.0

I think I've received a real gift of doing something with my time that's worth doing, and I have received different friendships, lifetime friendships, and a lot of respect for the institution.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:09.3

Well, thanks very much. I want to thank you for talking to me again today. I really appreciate it.

Karen Harrison

0:01:15.8

More than glad to do it. You already figured out I'm vocal.

Tacey Ann Rosolowski, PhD

0:01:25.3

Well, thank you very much, Mrs. Harrison, and I am turning off the recorder at about sixteen minutes after 2:00.

0:01:33.5 (End of Audio 4 Session 2)