

MARILYN GRAVES

Interviewed by  
Katherine Schlottman  
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ABSTRACT

Mrs. Graves, with an undergraduate degree in international relations, began working, in 1947, as a public assistance worker with a caseload of Aid to Needy Children. This piqued her interest in work with children and led to her obtaining an MSW from the University of Southern California School of Social Work. After several years of working in a voluntary agency with children, she was offered a position with the Crippled Children's Society, where she remained until her retirement in 1998. In this interview, she recounts the development and expansion of this agency over the years and her own changing role in the directions and life of the organization, which included various functions until she became the agency's president. This interview also contains descriptions of her participation in various commissions and committees focused on children and adults with disabilities.

SCHLOTTMAN: Marilyn, I sent you the material, and we've had a chance to talk. I want to know if you have been the subject of other interviews on this or related subjects.

GRAVES: No, I really haven't.

SCHLOTTMAN: Okay. We will talk about you and your career in social work, so let's start by asking you what circumstances led you into social work as a profession? Please tell me a little bit about that.

GRAVES: I didn't know that social work was a profession when I graduated from UCLA in International Relations.

SCHLOTTMAN: And that was when?

GRAVES: That was in 1947. A friend of mine, a fellow graduate, obtained a job with the Department of Public Social Service. At the time, it was called something like the Bureau of Public Assistance; BPA. It sounded interesting, so I found out what it would require and applied and was employed. I worked with them on a caseload of Aid to

Needy Children, as it was called in those days, and I realized that I really needed to know more. I wanted to have more skills if I was really going to be effective.

SCHLOTTMAN: What were you doing? What kind of things did you do?

GRAVES: It was really qualifying intake and follow-up on people who were eligible for Aid to Needy Children. It was mostly where the husband had deserted or was ill and couldn't work anymore. Also, I did a little child placement.

SCHLOTTMAN: In foster homes?

GRAVES: Yes. That really interested me. With that, I made an application to the USC School of Social Work and was accepted. I started in 1950 and graduated in 1952. I just never ever regretted having chosen social work as a profession.

SCHLOTTMAN: Could you tell something about what it was like in 1950 or '52?

GRAVES: Yes. I don't know the size today, but my class was really small. Everybody certainly knew each other in the class. The first year, I had a placement in the Los Angeles County General Hospital with Medical Social Service. In the second year, I was at the Children's Bureau with foster home and foster children placement. I think, perhaps, at that time, the emphasis was more in helping individuals rather than whole social problems.

SCHLOTTMAN: The emphasis was on individual work?

GRAVES: Individual treatment and individual casework plans. It was that type of thing. I know this has changed and broadened today and there is much more of an interest on the whole community and systems within the community and the whole family.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then you got your master's in 1952, and then what did you do?

GRAVES: My very first job was with a new agency, at that time, called the Altadena Child Placement Agency. It was basically a branch of the Pasadena Family Service. The director was Elise Delafontaine who had come from the East, had written quite a bit about family service. It was really an opportunity for me to learn by working under her direction.

SCHLOTTMAN: What did you do there?

GRAVES: I found foster homes and placed children in foster homes, mostly. That was the early part of play therapy for children. I got involved a little in some of that and in learning. I forgot to tell you, though, to jump back, between my first year and my second year at the School of Social Work, I had a summer job. I was the assistant social worker at Camp Paivika, which was part of the Crippled Children's Society program. So, along with this, when I was finishing my first year with the Altadena Child Placement Agency, the Crippled Children's Society asked me to come to work for them. Talk about changes – in those days, social workers made next to nothing. I think I was getting \$195 a month at the Altadena Child Placement Agency.

SCHLOTTMAN: All right, so you were making \$195 a month with the Altadena program.

GRAVES: Right, and the Crippled Children's Society offered me \$250 a month, it was a little closer to home, and I liked the people that I met when I worked there that summer. Also, I really had a deep feeling about helping children with disabilities. It was mostly a child caseload at that time. I felt there was much hope and many things that could be done. So, I went to work for them on April 1, 1953. As you probably know, I retired on October 15, 1998. But I held many positions within the agency during that time.

SCHLOTTMAN: Maybe that would be a good way in which to proceed. You could give a rundown of those various positions you had, which led to your ultimately being the president of the agency.

GRAVES: When I started out, I was a social worker. I worked with the speech pathology department and with the camping department. It involved intake interviews, and helping families with resources, and then the follow-up of camp children that we discovered had problems that needed more follow up. I did that until for a year-and-a-half. Then the agency opened its first satellite office, which was out in the West San Fernando Valley where there was not a lot of population at that time. I became the director of what was called Rancho Del Valle. It was a really exciting opportunity, as far as I was concerned, to work and develop programs that could be meaningful to people with disabilities. The field was open to doing what you thought might be workable in a professional way. Believe it or not, I started out with four clients, four kids, on this five-acre old property.

SCHLOTTMAN: What programs did you offer?

GRAVES: Speech pathology was our very first program because the agency had a very good department, and they assigned a part-time speech therapist who came out, and then was there full time after a while. We had a swimming pool, and we finally got together a very good swimming program. Because we didn't have much money, we ran most of it with volunteers.

SCHLOTTMAN: And this was all for just for children with disabilities?

GRAVES: Adults could come in too. We had adult swimming. One of the programs that turned out to be really effective was what we called "family swimming" on the

weekends. The person with the disability could bring his/her whole family swimming. This provided a comfortable way for families to get to know each other and see other people with disabilities, how they coped and didn't cope. It was a time that they felt comfortable to speak to me about problems that they just didn't mobilize to call me on the telephone about. They learned from one another. We had volunteers who were certified swim instructors who ran the program.

I just have to say this one thing about volunteers at this point. Out of this, a lot of interesting things happened, but I want to tell you about one man who came to volunteer. He was majoring in engineering at Cal State Northridge. Out of this experience, he changed his direction and became an orthopedist for children. It was all out of his being a volunteer with the swim program.

SCHLOTTMAN: Very interesting.

GRAVES: I have a lot of stories like that, but it's just very exciting to me, what can happen with volunteerism. It's a great opportunity.

SCHLOTTMAN: How big a staff did you have then at this center that you opened?

GRAVES: I just remembered that I then started a pre-school group for children with speech problems. So, we had an assistant program person, speech pathologist, maintenance person, and myself. That five acres with a swimming pool was a lot to take care of.

SCHLOTTMAN: Sounds like you must have been working more than five days a week.

GRAVES: Yes, I was. I also started a program for young adults with disabilities. These were young people who had been through the public school system and what was offered in special education, and were just sitting at home. So, every Thursday, they came for a

day. It turned out to be one of those programs where at first, none of them spoke to one another; only to me. As we developed, they planned their own activities, talked to each other on the phone during the week, and the parents came to depend on this a great deal. If anything ever interrupted this program, it was very traumatic as far as the parents were concerned. This was their day to be able to do some other things.

SCHLOTTMAN: Now this was before the big emphasis on special education?

GRAVES: Oh, yes. This was in the late fifties, early sixties, and interest in special education came from the Kennedy Administration, which was interested in more services for people with disabilities. At that time, many people, many of the folks in special education, didn't start school until they were eight, and their education ended when they were sixteen. Then they did nothing but were just at home and isolated, with their relationships being only with family. This really was not as healthy as it should be.

SCHLOTTMAN: You really have seen a lot of changes.

GRAVES: Yes. So, anyway, out of this, on the property was an old barn. I mean, it was truly a barn with stalls and so forth. The agency, as a whole, ran what was called a sheltered workshop in their downtown office. It seemed to me that many people in my Thursday program would be able to do some work. So, again, because of volunteers, we set up the barn into a small sheltered workshop. We had a volunteer director, a woman who worked every day.

SCHLOTTMAN: Was that a paid staff?

GRAVES: She was not a paid staff. She was a volunteer by the name of Esther Reed. Then a fellow dropped by who had had polio and was working for one of the small parts manufacturing companies, making parts for missiles and that type of thing that was just

beginning to be a big business in the San Fernando Valley. He had a job that he felt the people in our program could do, and it was basically packaging small electronic hardware, which they did. Because it was under a contract from the Defense Department, we were able to pay the going hourly wage, and not just a minimum for people with disabilities at twenty-five cents an hour at that time.

SCHLOTTMAN: People with disabilities were being paid twenty-five cents an hour?

GRAVES: According to sheltered workshops rates, people with disabilities were paid twenty-five cents an hour. But this contract, because it was out of the Defense Department, allowed persons with disabilities to earn, according to what they did.

SCHLOTTMAN: How was the agency being supported during those years?

GRAVES: That was a very important part of this. The agency was a part of the National Easter Seal Program.

SCHLOTTMAN: That was true when you started in 1952?

GRAVES: That was true when I started. Basically, the support came from a direct mail program of Easter Seals. In those days, Los Angeles City Social Services Department let agencies solicit during one month of the year. The Easter month belonged to the Crippled Children's Society; February belonged to the Heart Association; United Way had the Fall, and everybody had a month, and we were not supposed to solicit any money at all during the United Way campaign. The income was very small and came in dollar bills and five-dollar bills and this type of thing. The agency had a lot of volunteers, of course, and wages of paid staff were not very high. So that's how we got along and, of course, support groups started. I'll mention a couple of them because some of them are still functioning in some fashion. One of them was a group called the Golddiggers. This

was a group of women whose husbands had been active in the agency and on the Board of Directors. They formed a support group, did a lovely fashion show during the year, and then the money was used to buy things mostly for the camp, not for the different services.

SCHLOTTMAN: The camp was already in existence, then?

GRAVES: The camp started in 1947.

SCHLOTTMAN: That was Camp Paivika?

GRAVES: That was Camp Pyveek Paivika. Camp Joan Mier wasn't opened until around 1960.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, you got mail campaign money and money from these luncheons?

GRAVES: These luncheons and other support groups. Somewhere in there, Easter Seals didn't want its affiliates to be a part of the United Way, so we joined with some other agencies in something that was called AID. They solicited employees at work, and it turned out to be mostly all the health agencies, cancer, heart, lung, etc. So, we were getting a little money from them. I can't remember how much, but it helped. Then an occasional service group would give us some money.

The other thing that happened to this agency over the years – and we'll get into that more – out of the blue, somebody would have remembered us in his/her will. It wasn't a planned program, it wasn't anything that we knew about particularly, but this would happen occasionally and save the day, as always. So those were our income sources.

SCHLOTTMAN: Did the people who received the services pay any fees?

GRAVES: No. Everything was provided without fees.

SCHLOTTMAN: Was that Easter Seal's direction, or was it the Board's decision?

GRAVES: Well, I think it was both. The philosophy from Easter Seals was always that we were there to serve people with disabilities. Our Board was that way; they didn't want to get into any fees, they didn't want any government money, because they wanted to be able to do that which they thought was meaningful for the population we were serving. Later on, as we began to take government fees, they had a really difficult time accepting government fees for service. Of course, today, that's a good part of the income, or was, certainly, at the time I left. It was around fifty-one, fifty-two percent of the income.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then you mentioned this sheltered workshop you started where you got a contract from one of the defense companies, and they started paying the people who did this work.

GRAVES: Yes, we got contract work from other small companies and we assembled little plastic toys, etc.

SCHLOTTMAN: And the workers got paid for that?

GRAVES: Yes, the workers were paid.

SCHLOTTMAN: So that was somewhere in the sixties, then? How long were you at the center in Woodland Hills?

GRAVES: Around ten years, just about ten years.

SCHLOTTMAN: Until the mid-sixties?

GRAVES: Yes.

SCHLOTTMAN: Did the little project, the workshop in the barn, continue?

GRAVES: Oh, yes. Today it's a thriving workshop in a lovely new building. We had to tear down the old barn as the city planners felt it was not appropriate. Which reminds me – I just have to tell you this little bit about this five-acre piece of property. About 1958 or '59, the agency was feeling a need to establish a second camp. Their emphasis – because there were a lot of children at that time, with congenital heart defects, who couldn't go to the mountains, and others with physical problems who couldn't take the high altitude....

SCHLOTTMAN: So, Camp Paivika is in the mountains?

GRAVES: Camp Paivika is up in the San Bernardino Mountains, near Crestline, and it's about a mile high. So, the agency started, began a camp in the back acres of Ranch Del Valle. We set up tents, and the old caretaker's house on the property was the kitchen and also where the nurses stayed. We put in a cement slab and a screen and canvas roof, and that was the dining hall. The campers stayed in tents, which I have to admit to you were a little warm in the San Fernando Valley. But, along came the planning department, and said, "Ooh, we don't like your plan very much." We did it for two years, and by that time, a lovely volunteer board member, Joan Mier and her husband, Harry Mier, said they would buy some property in Malibu right along the ocean to develop a camp. Their only concern was that we name the camp in honor of Joan Mier. That was how we moved from Rancho to Camp Joan Mier.

SCHLOTTMAN: When did the agency really open Camp Joan Mier?

GRAVES: Camp Joan Mier opened in 1960.

SCHLOTTMAN: And that was for those with cardiac problems, and people with other disabilities who could not take the high altitude of Camp Paivika?

GRAVES: Yes, but the population of the Los Angeles area was growing so there were just more kids. It wasn't that there were more kids with disabilities. But there were more kids needing camp than we could accommodate at Camp Paivika.

SCHLOTTMAN: Was the agency growing at the same time in terms of reaching out to other communities? You said that Woodland Hills was the first satellite center.

GRAVES: Yes, Woodland Hills was the first and Long Beach was the second. We always had a big interest in Long Beach.

SCHLOTTMAN: So the agency developed.....

GRAVES: Claremont. We had a small center in Claremont. Those three were the first. Then later on, we opened centers in Pasadena and East Los Angeles and Inglewood.

SCHLOTTMAN: All this was being done with just this source of funding you're talking about: direct mail, AID, wills, support groups?

GRAVES: Right. It was coming mostly from wills and bequests. If you visit any of the sites, you'll see gifts from the Golddiggers, the Rotary Club, etc., where the group would give enough money to build a cabin and so on.

SCHLOTTMAN: You mentioned that you were filling in with Easter Seals during all these years. When did that change?

GRAVES: December 6, 1971. This came about because while the money was coming in, it wasn't enough to do what the Board wanted to do and to meet the needs. So they wanted to make another arrangement with the National Easter Seal Program for all metropolitan areas - the growth was across the nation - and they would make a different financial arrangement with them so that more of the money that was raised would stay in the community.

SCHLOTTMAN: You were having to send some of the money you raised to National Easter Seals?

GRAVES: We had to send - I call it a franchise – a certain percentage to National Easter Seals.

SCHLOTTMAN: But were you getting services from the National organization?

GRAVES: We were getting some services from National, but the board and the executive director, at that time, didn't really feel the services were of that much value. They thought that the staff at the National agency was not as professional as they should be and that Easter Seals wasn't all that great. So, they spent a year or so, trying to negotiate, and finally, the Board voted to break away and become an independent agency.

SCHLOTTMAN: Did that create a lot of conflict among the Board?

GRAVES: The Board was very solid. There were just a few folks who didn't think it was a good idea. Always, in this type of thing, there are some things that are positive and some that aren't. For example, we lost all the national publicity. That was something that was a big loss. Also, there were a lot of national contacts. I'll give you an example: early on, because of National, they had made contact with a woman who was the Treasurer of the United States: Ivy Baker Priest. When she moved to Los Angeles, she became a part of the Board. But many of those with National stature who were affiliated with national were not interested in becoming affiliated with a local organization. On the other hand, we saved a lot of money by not having to send money to National, and not having to go to meetings, etc. We could put that into programs and services.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then that relationship was severed in 1971. The agency then was independent?

GRAVES: As an independent agency, one of the things we did, thank goodness, was to qualify to become a health agency with the United Way. This brought in a fair amount of income that we could rely on, and also gave us standards for operating the agency as well as some prestige to be able to say we were a health agency with United Way.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then United Way gave you some financial support?

GRAVES: Yes. There were a lot of other things that helped us at the time, but as always, programs change and directions change. We were able to make our program decisions through a professional assessment of needs here in the Los Angeles area.

SCHLOTTMAN: Did it bring about some changes in your ability to offer services and the way your board operated?

GRAVES: One of the things we realized was that we really needed to take in fees for service. Not only private fees, but to qualify for government fees and government grants. This was really harder on the board than breaking away from Easter Seals.

SCHLOTTMAN: Tell me about that. So when did that start that you began to charge fees and get government funding?

GRAVES: It was also happening on the state level in funding. Parents had been very successful in California in getting the legislature to provide funds for special needs children. One of the things, way back when, is they started providing transportation for disabled kids to go to school. They were picked up at home and taken to school and brought back again. This made a lot of difference to a lot of people, but they also provided funding for other services: after-school care, respite care, camping. Many of our programs, and our work training program, qualified for what we call State of California Regional Center Services. When I started in the early 50s, it was at the height

of the polio epidemic. It was severe in this area. Many of the young people in our program had residual effects from polio. Along with polio, there was a diagnosis called Legg Perthes. This involved a defect in the hipbone, which became infected. Kids with Legg Perthes were supposed to keep their weight off the hipbone and were supposed to walk with crutches. They really moved fast. You could not say that they were very disabled, but it was hard to keep that weight off. Then, also, at the beginning, we had kids who were disabled because of rheumatic fever. I don't think we see much of that today. I already mentioned the congenital heart children. We also saw a lot of people who had some form of cerebral palsy, and we also served a group who couldn't participate in activities because of their epilepsy. A lot of these things changed. The agency still sees people with cerebral palsy, but many of the orthopedic problems are no longer so serious that they have to be isolated or limited in what they do. So that makes a big difference, and, of course, there have been great advances in medicine. Medicine has really helped a lot with heart problems, with epilepsy, so there are things that have been solved with advances in medicine.

SCHLOTTMAN: You mentioned the speech therapy program that you had when you started. What kinds of speech problems were being taken care of?

GRAVES: We had a lot of children with cleft palates, enough so that somewhere along the way, we even formed a support group for parents whose children had this problem. It was called the Cleft Palate Parent's League. Again, this is an area where surgery was coming in and helping amazingly. There are also a lot more speech therapists being trained today to help with this and schools must provide this service. At the beginning, this was not true. So we saw that population and we saw some kids with cerebral palsy.

The others, then, were other kinds of minor mouth/tongue problems that were causing speech defects.

SCHLOTTMAN: These were kids who weren't getting help in schools?

GRAVES: No. Schools, at that time, along with the medical profession, were not offering very much, but this has changed, too. Now, I think it's mandated in California that children who need speech therapy get it in school.

SCHLOTTMAN: Tell me now, you were a social worker and then you were director of the center in Woodland Hills. That was until the mid-sixties or so. Then what did you do?

GRAVES: Then I came in, basically, to headquarters administration and spent about a year working with the volunteers: recruiting, training, and, I want to use the word "mobilizing," for different projects that were going on, and using them in many different aspects of the program. Then I was offered a job as associate director in charge of programs.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, that was in the late sixties?

GRAVES: Yes, late sixties, and I did that until 1979. Again, then, there were a lot of changes going on from what we talked about. I had the two camps and a lot more centers. I was developing the center programs and the sheltered workshops grew within that time.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then you started getting other funding during that time.

GRAVES: The funding was very important during that time and I really felt strongly about it. We became accredited by the Commission on Rehabilitation Facilities, which is called CARF. This was a big help to the agency. It required a lot of documentation and

some changing of ways of doing things and compliance with what was accepted professional processes. It was very difficult for the agency to do this. Since 1976, we have been accredited on our sheltered workshops. Then, several years later, we became accredited by the American Camping Association. It was the same type of accreditation. I just think it is an important thing for any agency, to receive professional accreditation.

SCHLOTTMAN: You were director of programs during that time, so you were making all this happen?

GRAVES: Yes.

SCHLOTTMAN: And then, in 1979, you became President.

GRAVES: Yes, I became the President.

SCHLOTTMAN: You were there, as President, for almost 20 years.

GRAVES: Almost 20 years. Not only did we continue to expand, we opened several programs in Orange County. We had been under a court order, when we left Easter Seals, not to do fund raising outside L.A. County, but once that order expired, we started a service in Orange County. The other thing that was really exciting, was a program where we started -- affordable, accessible housing for people with disabilities. This is an extremely meaningful program. What's happening is that all those kids grow up, become adults, parents started to pass away, and there were a lot of different needs coming along for people with disabilities. Affordable housing apartments and group homes, are long-time meaningful services for disabled people in need. I could just tell you story after story about the wonderful things that this has meant for many persons with disabilities.

SCHLOTTMAN: So the agency began to offer this somewhere in the 80's?

GRAVES: I think it was '84 or '85 that we did our Glendale – the first housing was in Glendale, in Maple Park Apartments. The original applicant for the project fell through, and we were approached to take over. So it cost it cost us next to nothing. I think we paid \$6,000 in fees, which we got back. We had this 24-unit apartment building that was accessible for people in wheelchairs. I can remember one of our first tenants was a woman who had multiple sclerosis, and after she had paid her rent and bought her medicine, she didn't even have enough money to turn on her utilities, and she ate very infrequently. Another was a man with severe arthritis and other complications who had been living in his car for two years. He only had an opportunity to bathe when he was hospitalized. He really had nothing. The Goldiggers gave the manager enough money so she could buy an alarm clock for him, for example. We had some furniture donated to help get the place furnished. These people really needed housing, and with this program, they only paid one third of their income for rent. So, if you got \$300 a month Social Security, your rent was \$100 and this included the utilities. It's just made a world of difference to all these people.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, you spear-headed that, but how about the board? Was this something they had wanted to get into?

GRAVES: As I told you, we kind of got into it, and the Board said, "Oh, well, we'll try it. We don't know whether we want to do this or want to put this much emphasis on adults." But, it turned out to be financially sound – it pays for itself and is not a drain on the agency or its services. Then the Board began to get more interested in doing it. I won't tell you they were overly enthusiastic because we had to work closely with HUD. Though I think this is a wonderful HUD program, they weren't always as sure of that.

SCHLOTTMAN: But then, once you were successful, they were...

GRAVES: Yes, we moved forward. We ended up with 24 units at Rancho Del Valle, a group home in Pasadena next door to our Pasadena center, 40 units in Inglewood and 24 units each in Marin Valley, Signal Hill and East L.A., and a second 24 units in Glendale.

I want to pause for just a moment to tell you – the second Glendale complex I think has national significance. We worked with the Redevelopment Department of the City of Glendale, and they were interested in preserving an old house, built in 1884, called the Goode House. It had enough property around it that we were able to design 24 units for accessible living and used the restored, lovely old house as a community room for these units. The arrangement with the City is that this should be open to the public at least once a year so that they too, can enjoy knowing Glendale's history. But it was a national project model and we did win some awards, because we were able to preserve something historical and make it meaningful today in terms of public social services, and it helped people with disabilities at the same time.

SCHLOTTMAN: So you had a long career with Crippled Children's Society.

GRAVES: That's true.

SCHLOTTMAN: One of the things that I'm supposed to ask you is what you found most gratifying, personally or professionally, in all those years?

GRAVES: Certainly, Camp is so meaningful for anyone who has special needs. Disabled people don't get out much, so they don't have the opportunity to have companionship and friends, and a part that I mentioned before that the parents need respite. That is extraordinarily important. Our staff: we had wonderful staff through the years. Many of them have gone on to be leading professionals in the field of special

education and other areas. Some have become doctors, nurses, and it has been a great learning for the young people on the staff. They're so sincere: they have good relationships with the campers, and many of them sustained these for many, many years. Also, I really believe in the vocational training programs. Over the years, I never felt we quite got where we should have, and I sometimes wish that more companies had realized what a wonderful opportunity our program was for them to obtain labor. Everything the shops do is quality work. They do a lot of inspections to make sure everything is timely, done properly, and it was a mutual kind of thing for business and our workers.

You can tell by what I've said that I think housing is a really exciting area and something that I hope will continue to grow and it's a good program for the community, for the agency, for the disabled, for HUD.

SCHLOTTMAN: As you think about what you achieved, and maybe what you didn't achieve here or there, what obstacles did you encounter?

GRAVES: A lot of people aren't accepting of people with disabilities – that isn't fair to say – they are uncomfortable being around them, so they're not enthused about helping them or even being able to see if they can be helped. They are reluctant to give publicity to some of that, and sometimes choose to give their money to other agencies where they feel they are being more helpful. This continues to be a problem. Being able to design a program where others can see some results, and see that it's well worth helping is a challenge. I think there were little obstacles. As I mentioned, once we were no longer a national agency, there were some things that we missed and some things we did not qualify for because we weren't a national program. I don't know if I mentioned to you that we did form a rather loose group of other metropolitan agencies, which also ended

their relationships with Easter Seals. They are Cleveland, Baltimore, MD, Minneapolis Courage Center, Denver, Phoenix, and San Jose. We would have meetings and share professional concerns and visit each other's facilities. We had speakers from various areas to talk about trends and some of the things that are changing in the profession. So there was still some kind of national relationship going on.

SCHLOTTMAN: That would be one of the things that you made up for with the lack of Easter Seals?

GRAVES: I was trying to think of other obstacles. One of the obstacles, of course, is that we never had enough money to do all the things we wanted to do. You have to do a lot of presenting and planning and hoping in order to make the programs work. I just don't think it's fair to start a program if you can't financially continue it. That's always a problem. One of the things I realized early on when I became President was that if an agency is going to succeed, they need an endowment program. This is where the board chair, particularly, was very helpful. He visited several agencies like Orthopedic Hospital and others, and recognized that an endowment program really was necessary. Then a fine gentleman, who had liked our camp program, left a fair amount of money at a time when our budget wasn't struggling. We decided after consulting with his family that we would start a campership endowment program. His initial gift was around \$300,000 which helped us get the endowment program started. That was in 1983.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, you've done a number of things then to try to overcome the obstacles.

GRAVES: Yes, but funding continues to be an obstacle.

SCHLOTTMAN: Were there any social movements or activities that you were involved with that seemed to you important but didn't lead to the goals you wanted?

GRAVES: There were some activities that didn't quite get to where we wanted them to go, and this was always very frustrating. One of the things had to do with volunteers in the programs. It was something the agency always started out doing, as I mentioned, not only for income, but also for community involvement. There were some really fine things that happened. I can think of a sorority alumni group who ran a whole day camp with minimal supervision from the agency's social worker. This is no longer possible. The laws in California have changed with the concerns about children's safety, and now it's a requirement to have people with certain professional backgrounds in charge of programs.

There's also the whole aspect of laws regarding human resources; everything from pay to how much time employees can work and this type of thing. You really have to have someone on your staff who guides and makes sure that all the programs follow these standards so that you don't do anything that's not within the law. For me, this has been a little bit frustrating, not that we would ever do anything that wasn't safe, but it was just that it's always these volunteers with a lot of potential who could offer a great deal to a program. All of a sudden, we couldn't use them or only use them minimally. That was really very difficult for me to work with, and it was very disappointing. I understand both sides of the question, but a lot of social service programs, in general, could benefit from what volunteers bring to a program. If nothing else, it calls upon a staff to try to be creative to use volunteers where they can to supplement the program.

SCHLOTTMAN: Wasn't there even a requirement to do fingerprinting?

GRAVES: Oh, yes, there was a requirement about fingerprinting, that volunteers had to be fingerprinted and checked through the criminal justice system to be sure that there were no persons who could put us at risk.

The other thing I want to tell you about that couldn't happen today is the National Charity League in San Fernando Valley used to do the whole summer day camp transportation program. They would have a volunteer driver who would pick up six children in an area each morning and another driver would pick them up and take them home. Each volunteer had certain days for this. The volunteers loved this program as they could get involved in a positive way. Today, you just can't do that. In transportation, your cars have to be inspected, insurance verified, drivers have to qualify and you just can't take risks like that at this moment. There are good reasons for this, but it ended what were really nice parts of programs.

SCHLOTTMAN: Yes, it sounds like that's the case. What about the other thing when you started out, that one of your positions was to develop a volunteer program during the Sixties?

GRAVES: Yes, supervising the volunteers in developing a volunteer group. That's another thing that's kind of dated. As we all know, most women now work and don't have time to give to volunteer groups. Members of groups that sustained themselves over many years are getting very old and fragile. Some have moved away and some of them have passed away. This whole volunteer system is, I think, going to fade in the future. There's a lot of talk, and some good points, too, in the fact that when there's volunteerism taking place, there's an interest in doing it as a family, but they typically don't want to take on long-time commitments. They want to do a project; we're going to

come and plant flowers or a garden at one of the centers. Then they see that as something they've done that had some value to it. Or, they're going to come and entertain at a holiday party. But they can't give a daily commitment or a commitment to groups like they used to. So, there's less fundraising in that area, and less of a traditional part of volunteering. I really do believe that people are delighted to have opportunities to participate, it's just a time schedule.

I want to say a little bit about parents in that respect. I'm going back, because I forgot this part. When I first started with the Society, we had parent groups attached to the special education school. That was because the PTA didn't want special education in the PTA program. Of course, this changed as time went on. Really, the attitude as I mentioned, in the Sixties with President Kennedy, there was really more interest in helping children with special needs. In the Nineties, the Americans with Disabilities Act passed. All these things have brought about a different attitude. The parents in California really obtain a lot of things for their kids who are disabled -- wonderful education, now till the age of 22 -- from age 3 to 22, the California Children's Services gives medical care. Transportation system and Regional Centers pay for lots and lots of special services. This has made a big difference. But what has happened out of this - because it really has worked so well - parents don't feel the need to be as mobilized as they were previously. They kind of say, "Well, the agencies are doing a good job, and that's fine with us." So, we don't see as much parent mobilization as we used to.

SCHLOTTMAN: That's very interesting. You've seen a lot of changes in terms of the clientele and the funding and the laws that have, for the most part, been positive.

GRAVES: Yes.

SCHLOTTMAN: Let's talk a bit about measures that social work professionals can take to affect programs and policies.

GRAVES: There is always a lot more to be done. One of the things that is happening within California particularly, because of term limits there are not long-time legislative interests. The legislators are there a short time, establishing a relationship, or working on a problem. It's just a lot more difficult than it used to be when there were people such as Frank Lanterman and the Lanterman Act, which opened the doors for Regional Centers. I also think that sometimes there is a push for all social agencies to become more businesslike. Sometimes you can lose what you are there for, and that is remembering that these services are there to help people. That's a huge problem, as far as I'm concerned. But all groups who work with people with disabilities need to collaborate more toward looking at things so they aren't threatened by the legislature.

I can remember when they were going to cut all the funds, and all of a sudden, everybody was frantic that there wasn't going to be money for service centers. This is really a tremendous emotional drain.

One of the other things I wanted to mention is that throughout the years, it's been advised to many social agencies that they not participate in any political advocacy – threats that this could ruin their non-profit status. As we saw, the board and certainly the agency, were nervous about anything that had to do with any kind of political influence on legislation. It took a lot of helping them to understand that sometimes it wasn't influence, but just education, helping them to understand the problem and informing legislators and bureaucrats, etc. of what the needs were and why these were important.

This comes out because I was thinking of something that's more current at the moment, and that's aides. These are the people who are employed for people with disabilities so they can be home or can manage at home. They're paid a very low wage with no benefits, so there's been a lot of advocacy on their behalf. Hopefully, this will come through with a little better respect in terms of benefits for them.

Then there is the whole idea of accessibility. Again, some people thought this was lobbying, but it was more education, helping people understand that if you are in a wheelchair or using an orthopedic device to move, and if you have steps you can't manage, you can't do that. You can't go to the library or to church. There's been some movement across the nation and California for more accessibility in accommodating people.

This is a good time for me to mention that for the last 16 years, I have been the Chair and then a member of the State Department of Rehabilitation Appeals Board. Accommodation frequently comes up in terms of employee/employer accommodation to a handicap, or of services being available so a person could be rehabilitated and get back, or try to get back, into the workforce. Prior to that, I also served on the Advisory Committee for the State Department of Rehabilitation. Again, it was looking at all these issues. There are more people with disabilities because of the population growth, and these issues become personal for a lot of people. Either they had problems themselves or someone in their family did, and then they realized these things are important – disability issues are important, accommodation is important.

SCHLOTTMAN: Then you worked with the city on some commission.

GRAVES: Yes, I was on the same kind of thing, the Mayor's Committee for the Handicapped. I was on that for about ten years and one of its thrusts that was fairly successful was making parks and public recreation areas accessible to people with disabilities. They did everything from getting matting on the grass so you could roll your wheelchair across to putting in new equipment that people with disabilities could use, and even making some of the tables and chairs accessible, rather than just the picnic style, having round ones so that wheelchairs could get to the tables and adding curbscuts. Some places, now, even have some talking traffic signals for people who are blind.

SCHLOTTMAN: As you look back on your long career, what significant changes have you observed between social work practice when you entered the field and today?

GRAVES: There are a lot more people who are concerned about social issues and there's a lot more being offered among all the systems. Whether it's local, state or national, people really are concerned about housing the homelessness and looking for answers and also, there is more respect for people in need. There's more understanding that this can happen, that people do need services and services can be helpful. It's much more of a positive feeling as a whole.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, social work practice – you mentioned something earlier in the interview. When you entered the field there was a much greater focus on.....

GRAVES: On the individual. Social workers had a caseload of so many people and they had to make sure that all the things were done for those people. But they weren't looking at a whole system - that there isn't enough childcare or this child shouldn't be home and isolated. They should be in school with other boys and girls. There's much broadening of services.

SCHLOTTMAN: I was to ask you if you had any personal papers, pamphlets or items that could be made available.

GRAVES: I'll have to look and see. I thought afterwards, that I might have some things from the days of the Easter Seals that might be interesting. I've already given the Camp Paivika 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary booklet we put out. I'm sure I have some other things, too, and I'll give them too.

SCHLOTTMAN: You've certainly had a long and illustrious career, Marilyn.

GRAVES: It's been very interesting. I enjoyed the whole experience.

SCHLOTTMAN: You started out as a social worker, and you ended up running an agency. What was the budget when you started?

GRAVES: Let's talk about that. The agency grew a lot. When I started as president in 1979, the budget was about \$1,500,000. When I retired in '98, it was about seven million. That was what I always said: you have to start from scratch every year and raise that much money just to run the agency.

The other thing was the growth of the staff. We had about 60 employees in '79, and we had around 130 full-time employees and 60 part-time employees plus our summer staff by 1998. Then our facilities had grown, too. Not only our housing, which was a whole new extension of services, but, as I mentioned earlier, our programs in Orange County had been developed. There was continued growth going on.

One of the other things I think is important, and I just don't know any other place to put this in, but we haven't talked about it: but that was the fact that the agency was very committed to diversity. This came from an early president of the board of directors, Don Belding who, right after the Watts Riots, began to perceive that Los Angeles really

was changing, and all social agencies had to be working with that and serving people right there who needed help. In fact, this was one of the factors toward ending our relationship with Easter Seals: the fact that we wanted to open an agency in East Los Angeles and in South Central Los Angeles, but ended up in Inglewood later on. We always put in a lot of time and effort into developing a program in the community, so that our services were available to everybody.

SCHLOTTMAN: All right. Is there anything else that you think you might have forgotten as we conclude this interview?

GRAVES: There are so many things, I'm not sure that I've gotten everything in there. I suppose I really ought to mention just a little something about board of directors.

Throughout the years, this agency, which was really developed by L.A. Rotary Club back in 1926, had, at the beginning, some very caring individuals such as Lawrence Frank, Paul Dietrick, Don Belding, people who had a lot to do with L.A.'s development as a whole. But, that's another whole story. They were very caring about the programs and the services that were given to the disabled. I can remember Mr. Frank – I can just picture Mr. Frank visiting camp, playing games with the campers with disabilities, and just really being a part of the scene: what you call a benevolent Chairman of the Board. He brought in many of his friends who shared his same philosophy. Then we began to grow and change in all the things that were happening professionally in terms of how boards are developed. You couldn't have all your core people just from one area. I don't think there's any real answer to what makes a board effective, how the board is developed, how you help them learn, how they keep up with what's happening in the world, professionally. There are still a lot of things to be worked through in terms of any

agency and their board of directors. Something I would say to the future, probably, will take a lot more study and learning.

SCHLOTTMAN: So, your early members were on the board a very long time, then?

GRAVES: Yes, a very long time. Basically, almost till they died. There was very little turn over. I can think of one individual who represented one of the sorority groups, and she was the corporate secretary for maybe 25 or 30 years. Now, there are changes, and there isn't that advantage. The pros and cons: you want new life, you want the new thinking, but you also need the tradition and the history and the real attachment to the program and services.

SCHLOTTMAN: That is very interesting and a very interesting comment. Thank you, Marilyn for a most informative interview.