

Interviewing Mrs. Stanford Hewitt, Chris Hewitt, Clara Hewitt in her home in Studio City Saturday December 1, 1990. Elizabeth McBroom interviewing.

McBroom:

Chris, first thing I would like to ask you have you been interviewed for any other oral history project before?

Chris:

No I have not done any other interviews.

McBroom:

Okay lets just start out and maybe you could tell me how you first happen to get interested in doing all that you have done. What first threw you into this.

Chris:

I wish I could remember accurately. I suppose the very first thing I got into oddly enough is soliciting for community chest. I met people who were also involved.

McBroom:

You were a young married woman who had just come here from the Middle West

Chris:

I had just graduated from college and I was looking around for things to do. In that process I met people I \_\_\_\_\_McFarland, Lillian Van Dyke, \_\_\_\_\_Frost no relation of mine although my maiden name is Frost. I think that at that time they were busy with this church welfare association which was not a big agency at any sense with a group of women who were interested primarily in the \_\_\_\_\_ of course. Back when Waters was a referee and the most wonderful leader and woman who interest anybody who came in touch with her you know in the matters of the courts. In the process of auxiliary agency of the court was Business Girls Club which was simply a residence here in town. Which juvenile court girls who had jobs some where else but they had a place to live and some supervision at all times and I got quite involved in that and with the work in the court and of course before all of that I had been listed as a student in training at the Children's Bureau in Los

Angeles and there was a time when you could be a full pledge social worker after you finish so many years of internship that is no longer the case I understand but anyhow it was a very good time for me and some of the same women are involved with the work at Children's Bureau too.

I stopped being a student trainee when I became engaged and was married in 1931 but I came back to Children's Bureau as Member of the Board and to follow was tremendous \_\_\_\_\_service sense. And at the same time this contact I became aquatinted with Hathaway than called Hathaway Home for Children it had grown from an agency first called the Kitty Coop and it was simply a storage place for children's mothers who were doing something else. What we would call child care today. Eventually that interest turn into a Board membership I served on that board off and on for so long I can't count the years. All has been devoted to the work that they were doing. As for agency you probably knows moved from its original base in Highland Park to a large residential treatment center I guess it the Angeles Forest. Later on I became very much interested in the Welfare Planning Council at that time located down on Figueroa at that time it corporated into The United Way it was an independent agency supported by United Way and I served on their children's division for several years. It was doing that time that the California study of Adoptions came into the picture subsidiary that was the County spending, I became very much interested in that. From there Adoption Institute which was a natural outgrowth of this very deep interest I had \_\_\_\_\_from the study of the County and State Agency we were so involved in the process of trying to work out what to be considered a safer way of adoption for children and emphasizes in particular the use of agency to work through rather than the independent adoptions which we felt at the time offered more hazardous for the child involved. Family Service some of these things are current one gave birth which I think is a natural process for most people experiences of social agency. Valley Mental Health Association had a group that was working hard to improve services for the mentally disturbed. I was not involved in that very long but enough to get a little picture of that part of the program seen some of the dangers some of the threaten some of the measures we were busy with than have been completely overlooked.

Mc Broom:

Can you give me an example?

Chris:

The lack of housing and care for the mentally disturbed. It was during that time that the idea was to return them to the communities, let the

communities lookout for them and that would have been a very fine idea but it wasn't done and it never has been done and most of us I think rather aware but very sad themselves.

McBroom:

You said currently you are working with the San Fernando Valley Child Care Consortium.

Chris:

Yes, we are in need child care every really pioneers in the states the child care consortium is a group of people who were involved basically in child care I think I am one of the true nonprofessional to be on that board but it started in the early 1970's before child care was considered very much of a legitimate problem for us to be working hard at and to be raising money for and also I think there are basic interest for emphasizing the fact that child care wasn't just taking care of a child it was really a part of the developmental processing of the child and if you didn't bring quality into you might as well not be doing it. The Child Care Consortium was responsibility for making application for funds for the Resource Center and at first we just fill the offices by volunteers now of course it is a full pledge professional group.

McBroom:

You are on the Board?

Chris:

Yes I have been on Board quite a long time. Child Care Resource Center.

McBroom:

Looking back what really interested you first in getting into this.

Chris:

Well I was fresh out of college and I was interested you know you feel sort of inspired to be useful doing something and social work was the easiest to get into it is a natural sort of a thing I think. I certainly have been very grateful for the opportunities.

McBroom:

You have really been in a broad spectrum of agencies many of them child welfare related can you look back and see anything that stands out as sort of a peak of achievement or something that was really very ratifying to you?

Chris:

Well I don't know if there is any peaks it has been interesting to watch the change and the growth and the way the change of philosophy because Hathaway for instance is a small group in Highland Park and as I said it is discriminate a rather large institution any type of tremendous budget at all but they also have changed their philosophy for feeling that the residential treatment is not as for as it goes. In order to do a job you want to keep the child from ever going their. So that they now have their community center, just recently started a in-home program which I very much approve of and things currently important and one of the things that has been left out of social work in the last few years. And the Children's Bureau the same way they are one of the pioneers in getting into in-home and out in the community by being in-home and out in the community they sound different but the same get into peoples homes and ----- . What I like particularly was the Children's Bureau approach to their first program was first program was tour front office they actually became part of the people as they walked up and down the side walks and they just did a marvelous job.

McBroom:

Where was that located?

Chris:

El Monte the first one.

McBroom:

How long ago did that start?

Chris:

Within the last few years oh yes its been within the last decade.

McBroom:

This agencies were kind of dealing with end result of neglect in the family and they are getting around to the other end now and starting-----

Chris:

Closeness that agencies in their neighborhood in the early days when I knew about it and I think just now they are coming back so it is really nice new idea you make applications for funds and get out into peoples homes that is what they were doing automatically before. I mean you know I remember this accurately to me it is one of the great losses doing the last few years as much at a distance you can be from the people that you are helping.

McBroom:

Social workers all got behind desks.

Chris:

Yet have an appointment and now a days you seat down seems to me the way you do in a doctors office first thing when you go in there hand them the ----- to show them where the money is coming from and that is not the first thing we thought about.

McBroom:

And at the store fronts they are not doing it that way either. They start with the people.

Chris:

No, I don't know exactly what their details are, but just seems more of a people to people thing. It is interesting to me at Hathaway and ----- --both have recognized the lack of that kind of approach and both have applied for funds and received them and done a good job in community and in-home programs and other things. Seems only logical that you can learn more about a person by seating down in his house than for a few minutes by having him come in to the office. I also do realize that it is not as safe today to go wondering around to peoples houses as it use to be and so I give that a little consideration. But it just about getting closer to people.

McBroom:

Chris, you have had a very great field of experience with adoption and followed it through in a number of organizational context. I wonder if you would talk a little bit about adoption and what you have seen happen in adoption and what you have seen citizens contribute and so on.

Chris:

Well I know they have contributed in the days of the state and county study their tremendous interest and concern that we were not doing the best job that we could on adoptions that there were too many people making money off of finding children it was more of a buy and sell feeling you felt kind of out of line. The groups that I work with were very deeply involved and holding the idea of agency adoption thinking it was much safer and had a better chance of paying for the benefit of both parent and child. As I have gotten older I am not sure that I know the answers as well as I knew than. I think adoption is a very interesting wonderful process but I think it just got build in problems and nobody is going to escape them by one method or another.

McBroom:

What do you think are some of the problems in agency adoption?

Chris:

Well I don't that you can say that their are problems per se but I think that perhaps its too much of a cut off between your natural parent. There are dangers either way and I refuse to come out with answers I don't feel nearly as solemn as I did before. But I think the attorneys doing it have probably learned something in the process of this.

McBroom:

What do you think they have learned?

Chris:

Well that it is maybe more important than just the money that probably just a few of them. But I have seen some independent adoptions that seem to have been yeah that's right I have had a lot of concern. Just a blanket decision - that one way is wrong and the other way is right.

McBroom:

You think we have learned something from these independent adoptions maybe.

Chris:

Well we have learned that they have their pit faults too they can be a little bit cold and they are not all wise they don't always do right I have been

surprised that they have been far from perfect made by agencies. I think basically I still believe in the agency approach but I just don't feel certain adoption can be guaranteed to be the best either.

McBroom:

It is to delicate a process and there is still so much that we don't know.

Chris:

It just the very nature of it, its just to build in has problem and some kind be handled easily and well by everyone concerned and some want. Whether it is agency or independent its not necessarily going to be the answer. I think I feel more strongly now about it but I'm not sure I'm right as I mentioned before I know its a more dangerous game to go in the areas that I use to go into. But I still feel that we need to get back to the in-home I know the money is total reason they are not. But we didn't always have to just not come with our mean of paying for a thing. If a person finally gets up the courage to ask for some help, walks into a large building takes the elevator to the 4th floor, doesn't know who he is going to see behind that door.

McBroom:

You see lot \_\_\_\_\_ personalization.

Looking back over some of your Board service and agencies that you have been associated with what are some obstacles that have been in the past of what these agencies were trying to accomplish?

Chris:

That was money that is the reason why the thing that I'm objecting to has become more and more prominent it was always important any agencies around they basic concern was always to be able to beat the budget some way. Now of course money has been withdrawn from so many important fields particularly the Mental Health field.

McBroom:

Looking back you if you had a larger or adequate budget for some of these agencies that course and their history would have been quite different than what it was in fact?

Well I certainly think it could be now. I think the last 10 years slipped backward a lot and I think that one thing is that people maybe don't go

into the social work field as readily as they use to cause they feel a little discouraged just if everybody is going to come.

McBroom:

You mean it is not a promising for young people?

Chris:

In fact most of the careers really calls for you to be close to people. I think having your difficulties nursing, teaching, social work all of them right now.

McBroom:

Well we can't compete with some of the careers where there income is much greater.

Chris:

That is right and furthermore, if you want to go into something I liked to sort of make the made to feel that if you go into something if you like to be with people and you like to work with them you don't really get the big end of it you get away from those people and get into to a managerial job. Something that pulls you away into an office. The further away from the people you get for more prestigious and more money.

McBroom:

Do you see anyway of solving that dilemma?

Chris:

I am not positive that I do but I think recognizing it would be a beginning.

McBroom:

And you think largely it is not recognized?

Chris:

Maybe it is not so to other people but to me it is. If you are a teacher and want to be in the classroom you know principalship is where you usually lined up if you are good.



McBroom:

You kind of suspect if you don't want to go up the ladder.

Chris:

Well than you don't get the money and usually need it yourself. If you want to be a bedside nurse and I know that it applies so much to social work exactly but it is just the fact that I think social workers now are in the offices and away from the street scene. Because we use to at the Children's Bureau unless I am remembering it wrong if somebody called up and said I am worried about the child next door I hear him screaming at night or something we would go out to that family without checking with any policeman or with any other bodies as to whether we could go or not. We would go with no idea of threat or anything else we didn't have any but we went in to offer some help and to get aquatinted.

McBroom:

Some of those calls were a very critique time for helping?

Chris:

You found the people in crisis and you were never turned down provided you went in there acting like a policeman that is one thing. But you can't ask people for money to pay for that kind of service they haven't ask for you. That again is where this business is coming in founding out how you are going to be paid is altered approach you able to take with people.

McBroom:

Do you think social agencies have gotten so materialistic that \_\_\_\_\_?

Chris:

I'm not sure they are materialistic but the budget cuts.

McBroom:

They carry that over to the clients.

Chris:

And I don't think they do the other kind. I guess one of things I wish could happen is which is very idealistic which isn't just the fact of agencies not being with people its agencies not really using each other to their best advantage. I would like to see a city like this somehow in section who are responsible for the people. The agencies they were responsible for the people and the agencies all knew each other, people knew how to use each other and I think we would be a lot stronger.

McBroom:

You don't see that happening?

Chris:

No, I think sometimes,

McBroom:

You see them each operating in isolations?

Chris:

Very much, furthermore the difficulty one case in particular calling up and saying I am worried about this child. This happened to a friend of mine called me and I went to one of the agencies that I was sure would be able to jump into this without, no we can't do it unless we are asked to come. Unless the polices ask us to come. I tell you that's. The police can scare them and an agency can go forth. For instance, the schools don't dare they apparently trust those kid not to just call up and ask an agency to come over and get something. To me you are losing something when we don't know each other and work together. I have one friend who was a counsel with the Y when they had a counseling service I don't know if they still do or not. He was always being called on from the juvenile police to go check on something. Walking in he said he could only remember one time when he wasn't able to get in to a home to meet the people and say hello. He has boys calling in up to now 30 years later from heaven knows where saying they remember it so well. I don't know what cause this businesses I guess it is litigation that you are afraid of but just seems\_\_\_\_\_.

McBroom:

It just principal you don't see people having today are counselors.

Chris:

I just think it is a pity that the principals of the schools can't call on some help they have some of them in their own system but not enough and the juvenile police should be able to at least know principals and maybe some of this is happening I don't know about it. My experience has been just the opposite.

McBroom:

The people who really need help can't get it without going through a lot of mechanics.

Chris:

The agencies their hands are tied. They can't do things.

McBroom:

There are no effective network of agencies in the communities.

Chris:

No, to me if they all knew each other, I often wondered the build out of United Way for so many agencies have their offices if they really know each other. If they ever get together once a month to have a sack lunch or something and they talk. Joint efforts and using of each other can really double the amount of good you could be it seems to me. It is one of the ways that they can multiply.

McBroom:

Looking back on the agencies you have served can you think of an achievement that kind of stands out or a problem that got solved through word study or word action?

Chris:

I think it is more in the rather than individuals or an individual case if you are asking about that.

McBroom:

I am thinking more of change of policy that made it more effective.

Chris:

Well I have mentioned the Hathaway's realization that they were not really doing a very hold job. Part of their job was to keep people from ever getting their and also at the other end of the thing to keep those children that have to leave when they are 18 or 17 to give them some after care.

McBroom:

Do you think they made a transition for the kids that got off at that age? It is a new development.

Chris:

Yes, it is a new development. Also another new development connection with that particular agency is developing their own foster parents. So it is quite a different thing to be a foster parent with a \_\_\_\_\_---and somebody drops by every 5 months to say what is happening. Just to be working with a staff member of an agency who available all the time and you can see what benefit it might be to the child.

McBroom:

And this is the way it is at Hathaway very close?

Chris:

It is hard work building a core of foster parents for yourself. But it is in the process it is happening. They have a few. Children's Bureau not so sure of as to how it works but I do know that they do have a lot of their own. They have been in that so long that been part of their program. I don't know, but I'm particular concerned but one of my big concerns is that agencies do work together and take advantage of the fact that it is a cost free possibility and I do think it is really enhancing.

McBroom:

What is some of your other concerns?

Chris:

I think I probably said most of it.

McBroom:

?

Chris:

Oh, I think it is kind of amusing. I was asked last month or invited to their annual meeting of the Children's Bureau. They were celebrating the fact that they were moving into a new headquarters and everybody was so excited and I said you know to somebody I can remember when well the thing that they were so excited they were so happy to be leaving that dreadful place that they had been in I said you know I can remember when that dreadful was being celebrated that they we moving in from that dark little hole on Broadway. So its all a matter of where you are.

One of the things that the system came up with I don't know too much about first hand but I thinks its another indication that is moving in the right direction and that is the Highland Park facility which was the original Hathaway what with the growth of the big residential setting. I mention the headquarters had moved to that and the Highland Park was for a just went on with a few children and than it closed entirely. Now I was terrified that they were going to sell the place cause it is just ridiculous that some use could be made of that. So much to my delight the Board just voted and -----the leadership to the agency ideas come but its is to be a resource center for families and have a day care facility and really just to be a housing where you can walk into with you problems. It has a store front quality to it. It will work into all kinds of things it is a family center. Yes, I am just overjoyed.

McBroom:

Chris, I remember a long period of time you were coming over to Highland Park to work in their thrift shop.

Chris:

I was a terrible the Manger of the thrift shop.

McBroom:

You were the Manger, how long did you do that?

Chris:

We had a good time. I wonder what it would be like over there now.

McBroom:

You were Manger for years.

Chris:

Well I wasn't the first Manager but I guess I was for about 4 or 5 years.

McBroom:

That is a long term.

Chris:

I don't have that touch. An interesting time, we never made very much money. But I think the community profited by having us there. We hardly put our prices up

McBroom:

It was a low cost supply for needed families in Highland Park.

Chris:

Very, mothers all came in with their kids to shop.

McBroom:

You were talking about your thrift shop in Highland Park.

Chris:

We developed quite a variety group of people that gave regular their clothes and that helped. They had to get rid of. It was an interesting experience for all of us who worked their. And we made some nice friends. You said I was the manager I wasn't really we had a paid person who was there every day.

McBroom:

You were sometimes benefiting the neighbors more than you were happy?

Chris:

Probably.

McBroom:

Well you were doing a lot of work of good work there.

Chris:

Well, it was an interesting thing I had fun.

McBroom:

When we were talking earlier you said one of the big pluses to you from all of your volunteer work was some of your friends and some of your associates.

Chris:

Yes, it occurred to me all of a sudden when we were having all of these retreat things and asking people had they gotten out of being a board member and by the time they got to me there obvious things had been said and things that weren't even true. I suddenly realized that one of the big things it meant to me was the friends I'd made. I guess people would have been really close friends later on and it been. The kind of thing you simply would not have had.

McBroom:

You have some idea about the particular contribution that volunteers can make that professional can't make?

Chris:

Yeah I think they can make all kinds of contributions from different outlook and different life experience. I think one of the problems is sometimes they are a little afraid to speak up about social work field is something that they don't enough about and perhaps they don't press their point hard enough.

McBroom:

Chris, did this early experience at Children's Bureau give you confidence do you think in speaking up and expressing your opinion.

Chris:

Well I think it came out gradually.

McBroom:

I think you must be a very successful Board Member you have been invited to so many Boards.

Chris:

I don't know about that, I don't speak up as much as I should. But I do think that maybe that one little brief 8 or 9 months or so of being in training was eye opening as any thing in making me flip at board members say and do of what they know and don't know about what the agency is doing and what the community needs. And also it kind of it kind of \_-the hell agency work. I have an experience recently in looking at some of the close case of family agencies and so on. Even there I think we did a more better going job in the early days. You know you come home and you dictate almost immediately some of the things that you have done and I see in this instance at least sort of an unsatisfactory chance of what the service had meant.

McBroom:

Yeah, do you think that you were kind of more focused and work was more purpose for you and so on?

Chris:

Well, just more focused but see we did more we reported what our interaction was this is only one. This agency as I mentioned also has several other offices and I imagine some of them are very close to their community and quite different from the feeling that I get from the cases.

McBroom:

Is this Family Services.

Chris:

Yes.

McBroom:

Lets talk a little more about adoption you were over this quite a period of time and quite intensely on an adoption study committee. Would you say a little more about how that got started and what you did?

Chris:



Most of it was either the process or the outgrowth of this county adoption committee it explored quite a lot of interesting people. As I mentioned to you earlier today one of the things we explored and I still think it is an interesting process is guardianship rather than adoption in some instance. There you don't run into any of the kind of problem that adoption offers. But it can offer real protection to the child and a real attachment to a person or persons a family feeling and I wonder if it been cared still.

McBroom:

Does your committee recommend more use of guardianship?

Chris:

I don't know if it was even followed through very much.

McBroom:

Why do you think that was?

Chris:

I don't know. You know a process and a technique that I just think that it stand continue examination and we recommended that and I don't know to whom we recommended exactly.

McBroom:

Have some of the work you have done with agencies locally effected what going on in the state as a whole?

I don't know sometimes you look back at some of these things and you just wonder whether it prove too much but I think it did. I think it keeps things from sliding if they get off track it keeps you from sliding back further nobody is paying any attention. Certainly volunteers play a tremendous part in \_\_\_\_\_. Not only the friend ask I said that you make but you know you do have a different sense of whats happening and this recent business that we have Department of Children's Services sounded like such a great idea when it started and it is a great idea but than again a lack of money or bad judgment in choosing leadership I don't know what but it doesn't seem to have improved itself.

McBroom:

Have you followed that quite closely?

Chris:

Well, yeah I have to some extent I'm trying to think what the. That was part of our committee we had out here the Valley committee for the Children's Bureau that came up before they changed it and just seemed so wonderful. Money does play a big part.

McBroom:

What is your understanding of why that kind of clapped on us when it is so disappointing to all of us?

Chris:

Well as I say there has been poor judgment in the leadership. Lack of money to have enough\_\_\_ You criticize what happens to children in foster care but when you don't have enough people to see them but as I said once every five months and I don't think that I'm exaggerating than. Perhaps they are being seen on that time. But not a trained social worker, somebody out of the office. And you can't recruit more social workers if you don't have money to pay them.

McBroom:

So it gets to be a vicious cycle:

Chris:

I don't really know how you can correct it. But that is what the private agency in some instances they are such pitiful little fraction that need that kind of work.

McBroom:

They are doing good work but \_\_\_\_\_but not the children.

Chris:

Not that they are doing their own but the foster parents have somebody to work with so you can develop a plan or a program for a child or at least protective them. Because I could imagine if I had some of these children in my home and knew I could call a social worker and she would be out there in a week or the next day quite a different matter from trying to call the county office and get someone to just listen to you.

McBroom:

As you see it has their been a kind of raising tide in the number of children in need of care any serious problems.

Chris:

I think so, at first we are just beginning to look at the drug addiction babies. Our isn't pretty small but certainly the kind of violence and abuse that we have seen certainly is on the raise. Really what I am talking in this early contact is the obvious which is what people talk about either we don't know how to do are aren't doing and that is prevention and we don't know how to accomplish early intervention. That is what I am talking about you they having section or cities that work together so we could know who to call -----libraries in one part of the city and playgrounds in connection with it all those things working together I think it would enhance the chances for kids today.

McBoom:

Do you think we know more about prevention than we are putting into practice?

Chris:

Oh I think so, we talk it but we don't do it. I don't think has to cost that much more money maybe. But when you close your playgrounds part of the time and your libraries are closed part of the time. They have a particularly beautiful outlook into the park from our children's room and I always thought of libraries as a place that you be quiet. I know that disturbs the rest of the people in the other part of the library but this is anything but a quite room. We even have building box and things for that kind. Kids come in they kept storm in after school to do their homework I don't know how much they get done but a lot of children their. In the YMCA across the street now how much interplay their is between those two agencies I don't know but one public and one is private but what differences does it make.

McBroom

You see the library almost becoming a new social center.

Chris:

Over there almost I imagine they dread that it is going to become a child care center. You there are some good programs and if they could become duplicated there you need to study the things that would work.