

Interview with Diane Wray Williams  
Diane Wray Williams' home  
514 19th Street South  
Moorhead, MN  
April 22nd, 2004, from 4:45 P.M. to 6:00 P.M.

Interviewers: Amber Boyd (primary)  
Sarah Beauregard  
Truman Douglas  
Brittany Daley

Amber Boyd: Okay. So we're just going to start off with when and where you were born.

Diane Wray Williams: Okay. I was born January 23rd, 1938, in a little town called Fremont, Ohio, and that's because Clyde didn't have a hospital (laughs).

AB: So you lived in Clyde?

DWW: We lived in Clyde. Yeah, Ohio.

AB: How did you end up in Fargo?

DWW: That's a story. I actually grew up mostly in New York State. My father died when I was three and then my mother remarried when I was five. And we were living in Florida at the time, and my father, my stepfather, was a minister. So we moved to New York State... Glens Falls, New York, and then to Syracuse, New York, and I went to Syracuse University. So most of my growing up time was in Syracuse and New York State at least. And then when I got married, I married a guy who went in the Navy, so we went to San Diego and then back to Pittsburgh and then after post-doc work we were looking for a job and Moorhead State was hiring. And Moorhead State was one of the few institutions that wanted physicists who would also... they would let them do research. So that's how we ended up here, and of course all our families were everywhere else in the world, and people would say, 'Why are you going there? It's the end of the world.' It did feel like it at the time. But now it's definitely home. I have no regrets that this is where I have spent thirty-some years. It's great.

AB: What is your ethnic background?

DWW: Well, I get to tell you a funny story about this. We're English, English, and English and English (laughs). And I have to tell you that because when I was growing up in Syracuse, we lived on a hill and down the hill from us was the Italian section of town, and they had carnivals and cool stuff. I had two boyfriends Jimmy DeStefano and Jimmy Grosso, and it just looked the forbidden land to me. You know, my dad was a minister so of course we went this way and they went that way. So one day I asked my mom, I said, 'Well, what are we?' And she said, 'What do you mean what are we?' I said, 'Well, are we Italian or something?' And she goes, 'No, no, no, we're English.' 'Aren't we... what do you

mean we're English?' She said, 'We're just English.' I said, 'You mean we're not anything?' (laughs) And that was my impression as a kid, that English weren't anything. But it is interesting as we've had some fun looking back at our family. Some of the family is very recent... coal miners from Wales immigrating to the United States, working in the coal mines. But the other part of the family came maybe on the Mayflower. Who knows? I mean they came way long time ago and were circuit rider...preachers, and teachers. So we have that kind of combination but it is true they're all English so... (laughs)

AB: Okay. We covered that... how long you've been here.

DWW: Uh huh.

AB: What is your educational background?

DWW: My college degree is English Education, and I actually taught secondary for one year (laughs) out of my long career of various careers. I studied to be an English teacher although I also intended to be a minister. And so what I thought was, after college I would go to seminary, but marriage interrupted me, and other goals. So what happened is, that background turned into—first of all the teacher in me...I continued seeking ways to teach, and I opened my own preschool when we moved here. And then the other piece which is what I would call [my] social justice bone that propelled me into becoming active in politics. So that goes on here.

My political life began when we moved to Minnesota. This is the only state that I had ever lived in that had a caucus system... where you, you know, meet ahead and meet with your neighbors and stir it up and talk about issues. I was very intrigued with that. So I decided to go to my first precinct caucus and I got ahold of the...there's a published paper called *The Call*...and so I got ahold of this and read it to see what would happen and what would you do, and I went to the caucus which was at that time held in Moorhead State, in the ballroom or someplace, and I was the only person who had read *The Call* (laughs). So I got elected chair (laughs). So this is a good lesson...you know, show up...you can run the world. Yes, you can (laughs). So that was my introduction to politics, which I have to laugh, because it's just a matter of sometimes being in the right place.

When I decided to run for office... we had a particularly bad state representative from this area who was very hard on women and children. He was after single women, single mothers with children, and cutting welfare. I mean he was mean about it... just mean. You know, some people can say, 'Oh, it's the budget.' Well, he didn't (laughs). He just [said,] 'These people just don't deserve it.' So I decided somebody had to run, and I really felt called to do that, but the party didn't think I was capable of winning. So I tried to get the endorsement. The first time I came out of the racing gate and right up until the convention, just a few days before the convention, I was the only candidate but then just at the last minute somebody emerged who was a lawyer in town. It was a hard-fought convention, and we had about maybe four or five votes before he finally got the right number. So, okay I said, 'Fine. You're the candidate. I'll work for you.' And he was pretty huffy about it (laughs). So we went through that election, and he won and he went on to

St. Paul, and he was there about a year. And one of my good friends was a newscaster in Fargo, and she called me up one night, and she said, 'You will not believe what's coming across the airwaves right now.' You know the ticker or whatever you call it. I said... well, remember this was a summer evening, and we were just sitting down to dinner and I said, 'What?' And she said, 'Your fellow, that, you know, beat you, was just arrested on a street corner in St. Paul for soliciting a prostitute when he was supposed to be on the floor voting' (laughs). Oh, geez.

So I sat down and turned around and looked at my husband and I said, 'You know what this means, right?' (laughs) 'Yup,' he said. 'You're running.' So I ran the next time. This time I got the endorsement, and I also got elected and it was terrific. I have to tell you it's... everybody who feels inclined to get into politics I would applaud them, because first of all, it's a great calling for any person who wants to give back to society. You learn so much. You meet so many good people. Believe it or not, I would say 98% of the people are great people. You know, contrary to the image politicians have. They're really trying to do a job and solve problems. I didn't meet very many sleazy people and now... and that's really why I'm back in politics again and on the city council, because you know when you start paying attention to what's going on to, particularly in my case, vulnerable people... you just can't sit still and not do something. So it was time and I tried running again and here I am.

AB: Please tell us about your role in organizing the Justice Circle.

DWW: Okay. This is a story (laughs). All of life is a story, right? Let's see... I guess about three years ago now... I can't come up with the dates exactly... but I was sitting in on a state board for the Minnesota Council of Churches in which they had a program called Renewing the Public Church and the basic idea of that was getting people who consider themselves people of faith to live that Monday through Saturday, not just go to church and say, 'This is what I believe,' and 'Oh happy day' and go home but to act that way on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and to begin to talk even in church about the issues, which is really interestingly hard for a lot of people. It's a difficult thing for the Lutheran tradition to be talking about poor people in your midst and so forth. (clock bell rings in the background) Presbyterians, which is what I am, are kind of used to it. They're very social justice oriented, often, not every time, but often.

So this program was going on and they said, 'Why don't we start something in Moorhead?' So three of the staff people came up here, and we got together... two professors, one from Moorhead State and one from Concordia...the local Native American staff person was there and myself and my minister. And we sat down and said, 'How can we do this in Moorhead?' Well, fortunately, we all were tuned in to what had been happening in Moorhead. Just the previous fall, well summer, is when the big riot happened in Romkey Park, just outside of Romkey Park... after the fireworks were over, and you probably know this story. And after that riot, there was a complaint filed with the Civil Rights Commission, and they came in and investigated it. They held hearings in the fall and some of us went and listened. We didn't testify, but we listened to the testimony and what we heard was very clearly that there were two different experiences in Moorhead... the majority experience and the minority experience, and they were very different. And so even though we didn't have the published report of the Civil Rights

Commission we kind of knew what it was going to say, and so we talked about this that day at the church and said, 'You know that report's going to come back to Moorhead at some point.' We thought that it would come back soon... like we thought like a month or two, and we knew that if it came back and was placed in the hands of our current mayor and council that it would just be ignored. It would end up in the wastebasket and that would be the end of that.

So we began to talk about maybe this was the place that we could coalesce a group that would start out with the purpose being, make sure Moorhead pays attention to this report. That was our focus. And as we sat there Sandi, my Native American friend, who does what she calls talking circles with... as she goes around to various Native American groups... I said, 'Why don't we call this a circle, too?' I mean the idea of being that... you know nobody's got the answers, nobody's going to tell you. It's a coming together of people... sharing our experiences and out of that will come the wisdom of the group. So we agreed that it would be a circle and then, well, justice seemed to fit. It was dubbed Justice Circle right then and off we went. Thus, a really interesting journey, because the report didn't come in two months, and in fact came a year and some later and during that whole year we would meet. First, we invited all the churches to join. 'Okay,' we said, 'This is what we're going to do, and you're invited to send somebody.' Well, three or four did (laughs) and then a couple of the people from the colleges, a couple of people who don't claim any church organization as theirs, and we just said, 'Well, you know, I think who is supposed to be here is here... let's keep going.'

So, we began to talk, while the report's coming, 'What do we want to do with this?' We wrote a study guide for it and hadn't seen it yet, but we knew what it was going to say. We wrote a study guide so that when we had it, we could hand it to someone and say, 'Here, why don't you sit down with a group of people and go through this.' We had a lot of dialogue about why, in our group, we could not attract people of minority other than Sandi. Sandi came. But Sandi said to me... she was very leery about being there, because she said, 'I feel like I'm the token Native American.' And I said, 'Yeah. You are.' (laughs) I said, 'I understand all of it. That's not a comfortable place to be.' But I said, 'We need you. We need you to be here.' And so, she stuck with us and as those questions were raised like 'Why is this a white group meeting?', because that's what it looked like, we were puzzled... people didn't come that we would ask to come, and finally we decided that maybe this was our work... okay, I mean we felt called to be there and maybe someday, I mean that was how we felt, maybe someday when we have earned the trust of people of minority status then they will also be here too. But we realized that there was no reason for them to be there and stick their neck out if they didn't know who we were and could they trust us and would it be a repeat of big talk and do nothing.

So we carried on... The report was actually stuck in Washington, and we found this out that it wasn't moving, it was on somebody's desk, and it wasn't moving along at all. So by various phone calls and means and various people doing what they could, it moved along. Finally, we got word that it was coming...that they were going to release it, and it was a January or February terribly blizzardy day. We ordered 10,000 copies (laughs) but of course we didn't get them (laughs). And so we settled for... I think we had to order them in batches of 200 or something... I mean some sort of rule got inserted there. So but we probably ended up with several thousand copies. We all showed up down at the Days Inn, and it was the Red River [Inn], or whatever it was at the time, and

because it was blizzarding only two members of the commission got there cause some had to fly in. And it was really bad out. There were at least 200 people in the atrium... media, local folks, just all sorts of people. It was so exciting... I can't tell you how exciting it was to everybody that had worked on getting this report paid attention to. And we had prepared press packets (laughs) and we had, you know, just build it and they will come (laughs), and we were just ready for this to be a big deal, okay? And we had the neatest moment happen in the press conference that the commissioners who came were just blown away. They had never been in a place that showed up like this to receive a report that was going to be critical of the community. But one of the guys said, 'You know, we have shown up in cities where nobody shows up. Not even the, you know, the officials.' And here were two hundred people. Plus we had managed to get a lot of the city people, you know, like the police chief was there and, well, various people in various official capacities.

And at one point Sandi was going to get up and give her statement. Now, remember she was feeling really on the spot and very exposed, and yes there are minority members in this two hundred group out here but she's gonna be the spokesman, and she's feeling very nervous. So, we quickly said, 'Just a minute, Sandi. Before you give your statement...' And we just turned to the group and said, 'Would anybody who has been participating in the Justice Circle up 'til now just come up and give support to Sandi and stand around her.' Well, of course over the period of a year and some a lot of people had been in and out of the Justice Circle. And so, this grand host, I mean that's all I can say, came up out of the two hundred and stood around Sandi in this semi-circle. And we had [omitted] made sure that we had put the word out if you were a clergyperson you should wear your collar (laughs), because we wanted it clear to the hierarchy, you know the city people, that the churches were represented. Well, there were a lot of them, and they all stood around Sandi and then she gave her [comments]... That was really a wonderful moment. And the city people paid attention.

What we had to do then, though... and this is what I think community organizing is really all about... that day we had a table set up with sheets out on it saying, 'The way that this is going to change Moorhead is if we really read it and study it and then figure out how to go from here. And would you like to sign up for a study group?' And we had all these opportunities lined up. We had several locations at the library. I did one at our church. Somebody did one at another church. You know we just...we trained people to be facilitators so that they would...we trained thirty, between thirty and forty people, to be facilitators. And gradually over the next few months with the cooperation of the colleges, I would say three to four hundred people got exposed in a disciplined way to this report. I mean they sat down and read it with other people. They asked themselves hard questions and how are we going to change things. Well, we had a town meeting then and this is Justice Circle doing this because the city can't do it at this point, okay? So we said, 'Let us...we'll just have this open meeting. And at the Hjemkomst on an April evening, just come, if you've been in a study group share what you found out.' And ten minutes to seven nobody was there. And we had one member in our group who was...he was sort of an elder of a congregation ...Shiloh Temple, do you know anything? I don't know anything about Shiloh Temple. But I know this guy (laughs), and he kept saying he wanted to open the meeting with prayer, and I said, 'No. This is a public meeting. We are not going to do it that way. We're trying to keep that separate.' Well, ten minutes to seven

and nobody was there, and I turned to Vernaya and said, 'Well, maybe we should pray' (laughs). But those of us who were in the Justice Circle who were going to try to run this sort of stood over in the corner, this was at the Hjemkomst, and we just stood there together, and we said, 'Okay, Vernaya had his chance to pray.' And we turned around and the room was full. I kid you not. And the custodian of the Hjemkomst comes running in and he goes, 'Oh we've got so many people tonight.' You know it was his meeting too. It was just exciting.

So... and that night people came forward and said all the things that they found out and, you know, things that surprised them. One of the statements in the report is so great that 'Moorhead has an illusion of inclusion.' Moorhead is full of good people okay... really good people. I would say, by and large, they are just good, well-meaning people. They have no idea how they exclude people of minority status, and there is an unconsciousness. If you know anything about racism in terms of it being an institutional thing....they're very.... that's what they look like. They look like people who say, 'Well, I'm not racist. I'm not prejudiced.' You know, and they think that's what solves it, whereas actually we live in a very racist society because it's all set up that way. People who are white are privileged. Nobody asks you... nobody follows you around the store. Nobody denies you renting an apartment. And it's all those things that a minority person is used to meeting day after day after day. So even if individuals don't think they're intolerant, or racist, we live in our own society of our own making where this is true. When people came forward that April evening and, you know, they had begun to see beyond the obvious. You know it was like peeling back the onion skin to see what really was there, and there were lots of people who came forward to the microphone and either told what had happened to them or said what they had learned in this group. And then that night we had the table set up again... this is...I learned all this from Amy Phillips at Moorhead State. And we had sheets out again, and we had taken the Civil Rights Report and assessed things like education, da da da, housing, da da da. You know, so we had those sheets with those headings, and we said, you know, 'If you want to work on housing, sign up here, okay?' And then later on that night we had at least a dozen task forces formed. And they met over the summer and began to cull together what could we do to make things different. By October of that year, they had reports ready, and they were ready to then go to the Human Rights Commission. We decided that would be the process.

So here are these citizen groups. You know nobody gave them permission. We took permission. Okay. And we came forward and the housing group said, 'This is what we looked at, and this is what we think needs to be done.' And the same with each group. And they gave it to the Human Rights Commission and then technically, you know, we thought our job was done (laughs). Silly us (laughs). You know we were ready for them to just take off. 'Yay, we got stuff to do, oh boy!' So they sat there and looked at us like, 'What? We don't have any staff... we're volunteers... we meet once a month... What do you expect us to do with this?' And we realized that we weren't done. So that night we said, 'I'll tell you what, how would it be if you received the reports and acknowledged that this is important input and the Justice Circle will partner with you in helping you....[bring] some of these things...to fruition.' Oh, they quick voted for that, too. So that's kind of where we've been sitting and then the next year the Human Rights Commission, little by little, went through the report. They ended up last, whatever, spring or maybe it was fall, coming up with sort of a grid that they gave to the city council and

they said, 'Here are the suggestions. Here's where we're at. Here's the dates, and things we think it should be done by. Here's who's responsible.' That was a good step. And so that's still where it's at because some of those things have not been addressed, but they're on this grid now to be looked at.

So what a journey from that moment of uprising over here in the park to the day that it's on this grid. It took a lot of people to get it that far and some changes have happened. We've gone through two elections now since then, and we've had minority candidates...more than one in each election... running for school board, running for city positions... very exciting—never happened before in Moorhead. And so we feel something is moving so that they feel safe enough and comfortable enough to claim this as their work too. I just feel like everyday there's little movements. I think the campuses...they got into Teaching Our Campuses Against Racism...TOCAR. They have trained lots of people in anti-racism training, and I think that it's making a difference, truly, as you.... MSUM has really good figures, like... I don't know if you ever look at the census figures, but 20 some percent of your student body is a minority category. Would that sound right?

Truman Douglas: Absolutely not.

DWW: Oh no?

Truman Douglas: Of the faculty or the student body?

DWW: Of the student body. The faculty, though, represents about...there's about 10 or 11 percent, which reflects the population in the town. So they're doing equal to what the town is. I don't know what Concordia is because I don't have their figures. I don't think it's 10. Anyway, there are... I mean I really applaud MSUM, because I think they make efforts to try to make it an open place.

AB: I have a question for you that's not on the sheet. Why do you think it was important to have a religious aspect to the Justice Circle?

DWW: Well, it started out that way, because that's kind of where we started from. We thought the churches should be involved in daily life and in issues. That's kind of where it started. Now, it didn't stay there, because other people didn't think the same way. I mean... I guess I may be a rabble rouser. I am in my own congregation and so people aren't very comfortable with that. So soon it became apparent that the people that you networked with and needed to network with were just more people people. I mean they were there involved in it, because that's who they were individually. Not necessarily because anything to do with their church or... Although I have to tell you we've had a very interesting conversation in the course of all this. Do you remember... maybe you don't.... when the YMCA was accused of not letting a lesbian family become members... Do you remember that? Well, we tried to talk about that at Justice Circle and at the time we had a Muslim woman and a...somebody from a very conservative background present...oh and we also had a minister who had a twin brother who was gay. Well, we began this conversation, and they just couldn't talk about it. And so, we said, 'What's

going to happen when we have to talk about justice issues and people can't talk about it? You know we can't do it. What are the rules? What are our ground rules gonna be? Well, what ended up was the Muslim lady said, 'I'm going to not come for a while'. She said, 'You go ahead and talk about this.' She said, 'I can't. My place in my society with my people... I can't do this.' So, we all agreed that that was probably okay. She could move out of the conversation, and...of her own accord, and we would be okay with that. We had to allow her that latitude. The fellow who was the minister with the twin brother who was gay...he just said to me, 'Diane, I can't do this, because I think this is all wrong.' I had to talk to him. I said, 'You think this is all wrong and you have a twin brother... And you... I mean, good grief.' Can you imagine the agony he goes through? And I said, 'I'm sorry. I understand that, and you need to be away if that's the best thing for you, but wow, I didn't realize this would be such a huge thing for you.' Now, so those people, what I would call the extreme pieces, went away. And now we were left with people who had all sorts of beliefs about gays and lesbians and justice and freedom and openness.

Well, so we talked about the issue. What should the YMCA do? And some of us went online and got their mission statement and what they say they are and when you talk to others it's very clear to me that they say they are trying to be an open group serving all people... It says nothing here about requirements, what kind of people. And we all agreed that the Y existed to serve and to model healthy living. Kids, all kids, are welcome. We never ask if their parents measure up. You know are they good parents or bad parents? So by the time we got done with this discussion we wrote a letter to all the board members and said, you know, this is who we are... we're the Moorhead Justice Circle. At that time, we didn't have church people in there and we said, 'We have given this a lot of thought, and we just believe that in order to be true to your mission there should be no requirements about looking indoor and asking, or, I mean, it doesn't matter if the family is gay or lesbian or what, it just needs to be fair and open to all, because who you're really serving are the kids...and the family right? And it doesn't...that's just not...a reasonable thing to even ask. Well, you know they changed their policy two weeks later. Nobody told us it was cause of our letter, but we thought perhaps we helped edge them in that direction to say, 'Yeah, that's what our mission says. Let's just do what our mission says.' You know. But I think that you can see if you... I don't know if any you are associated with faith or church, but you can surely understand that if a person has a faith you would want to engage in life issues relating that to, to your faith. But that's really hard for some people. So now we're just people... our statement says, 'We are people living in hope.' We don't say we're anything in particular (laughs)... we're living in hope, we believe in equality for the human family, and we're working for justice and equality so... So we've evolved too.

AB: Regarding the Justice Circle and the US Commission on Civil Rights Report how have people in the larger community responded to the report and what the Justice Circle has done?

DWW: I think that the Justice Circle came to be identified as...we're going to be out there saying things, pointing to things that need attention that are out of line... And, in fact, I think we've gotten a little more reputation than we even deserve cause there's not that many people. You know, it's just that that's our focus... our focus is to look around



the community and say... and we aren't an organization... okay, we have to say this out loud... Justice Circle is a conversation. It happens once a month, and we come from all our various places. You know everybody's busy, but we take this time and we sit down and we say, 'What's happening? What's coming up? What do we have to pay attention to?' When we leave that place, we all know what we're going to do about some issue. Okay. And it's up to each one of us to go away and do whatever we can in the sphere that we can affect. And there's not any big organization, there's no president, there's no budget, there's no... you know... all we do is email each other and then get together and have a conversation. So I think that the community has become aware of us somewhat, and I actually... three to four hundred people in this community....what is that 1 percent? You know that's not 10 percent but it's 1 percent and that's not too bad. You know, maybe not as many that know about hockey, (laughs) but I think that they know when the Justice Circle is going to be present and that they're going to be pointing out some inequity. So I think that's cool. One of the things we've done—before I ran for office is we made sure there were people on the city lists on our email list and sometimes people would say, 'Oh you don't want them to know we're doing this do you? You don't want them to know...' And I said, 'No, we do.' We want everything we do to be wide open... just bare. And if they get scared, oh great (laughs). If they think, 'Uh oh, we're going to be looked at,' good, 'cause that's what we want. And so I think the effect has been very exciting.

AB: What kinds of activities or goals do you perceive to be most important in creating change within the community for minorities and those who need justice?

DWW: Well, on several levels...first of all, I think people who are in the majority just need to be awake. They need to understand what racism is and if I just preach it to everybody...if you have a chance to be involved in anti-racism training you will never regret that you've gone to it, because it's so hard for us to see with our eyes, we've always been white, and if you don't understand that, it's very difficult to, you know, go the next step. I will tell you the one that I went to...one of my moments of 'Aha...' my 'aha moment', was someplace in the course of three days. We were split up and...we were told to go to this room with the other people like us (laughs). I watched the Native Americans go and the Chicanos go and the Blacks go, and I didn't want to go over there. I had never ever been told to go someplace with a bunch of white people (laughs). And it hit me. I mean I sat... I went to the room and I sat there, and I felt just discombobulated... I mean I wasn't happy sitting in there (laughs). I just... I didn't want to talk to these people. I didn't want to be there. I mean something was wrong, and I didn't know what it was and then finally I realized, it's the first time in my life that I'd ever been told to go with those white people. I'd never been carved out because of my color. And that was a real important moment for me, because I realized that's the experience that every person who is a minority has all the time.

The other thing...when you look at the minority side of the issue...one of the things that I have heard my friends say... they need to have opportunities just like everybody does. And if you can't get a house, housing...adequate housing, and you can't get into school or your kids can't be successful in school or you can't get a job. Well, if that makes life hard for us...those are just basic things... And so I think we have to be alert, very aware, when we deprive people of those opportunities. We have to seek them,

we have to create them, and frankly I think it's... we all benefit... I don't think it's like helping minorities... I don't think it's that...I think it's helping all of us have a better life if we can make sure that opportunities are open to all of us. We all are richer, and you don't have all those negative things growing up in yourself.

AB: How do you think Fargo-Moorhead has changed with all the influx of refugees?

DWW: Oh, we... well we're definitely growing. We have our percentages coming up and I think... I don't know... I'm sure some people wish things went back same as the old days but frankly I think we're a richer community...lots more interesting stuff going on. My kids are...one of my daughters married a guy from Chile...one of my daughters married a guy from Pakistan and so we have a very international family. Nobody's the same religion, in fact, nobody else is Presbyterian (laughs). I was a failure there (laughs). But we have great exchange and relationships and that's the way the world is, so we try to practice it in our family (horn honking in background). So, you know, I think it creates problems that we just have to get over.

AB: What kinds of other solutions have been presented to aid the community in being more open to others? Have you seen anything like that?

DWW: Well, we have a couple of things that have happened as the minority population has grown, and I think is very positive. Cultural Diversity Resources, you know that organization, I think they do a very good job. First of all, they really help people...blend into the community and get jobs and help them with all of the stuff that seems so mysterious...to a new person coming into our community. Then they offer that big fair, the Cultural Diversity Fair, so that the community as a whole can come in for a little visit. You know, we're used to in this area having the Scandinavian stuff and I'm not Scandinavian so I think it's great to... I go to that and, 'Oh, wow, this is like this other culture you know (laughs).' When I was in the legislature, there was a bill to make June 5th Ethnic Day or something and...remember my story about being English... Well, I talked to Sandy Pappas, who is now a state senator, and she is Greek and I said, 'Well, Sandy, I'll vote for this bill if you let me be Greek for the day' (laughs). But I think that as we've gradually [grown]...the world is very with us. Good grief. I mean news is from all over and think how that has changed. ...I think the schools are more aware. I went to Moorhead High's production of *Working* last year. Did any of you see that? You know, that was a great show for them to do. It could encompass all the diversity of the school. They could even expand on it some because of the characters in the play. It was a teaching play. It was a celebration of different people.

AB: What's the play about?

DWW: Do you know the name Studs Terkel? Okay, Studs Terkel wrote... he went around and interviewed all these people that did different jobs. That's the play. So the play really doesn't have a plot, but you get this celebration of all of these different kinds of jobs, and it's woven together with music...it's a cool show. Anyway, that was pretty cool for our

school to do and so everybody was in that play. It was just neat... They really celebrated the diversity.

AB: How does the image of the Midwest compare to the reality of living here when it comes to race relations and diversity?

DWW: Well, when I moved here from Pittsburgh... I moved here from up the hill from a ghetto and I came (laughs)... we moved into this house and after about a month of being here...I felt.... I was just depressed and I said to my husband, 'We have copped out' (laughs). And he said, 'What?' I said, 'We just left the East with all of its problems and its inner-city turmoil and the ghetto and all that.' I said, 'There are no people of color here.' (laughs) And I really didn't think there were... because they weren't obvious to me. And in fact I didn't even think there were any poor people here... and the image... I mean the image of waving wheat fields and corn fields and of cherry cheeks and you know the whole thing...Good Lord, that's all I could see. I went to church and everybody at church was...seemed to be one big family, like there were only three names (laughs) and you know it was oh my goodness I was just... Here I'd left all of my family way far away. So that was my first impression. Okay?

But then I began to get more involved with what's really going on in the city. I learned about the...first of all the thing that hit me was there is poverty...there's great poverty. I mean I don't live very far from a lot of poverty. It's just hidden...or people choose not to see it. And then, poverty plus other conditions... I mean there's a lot of drinking here... a lot of alcoholism. I don't think I was aware of that quite in the same way that I was when I moved here. And that often leads to domestic violence and that became more clear that there were hidden agonies...hidden angst. And so people were suffering but they were suffering more quietly than I was used to in the streets in the East. And then I became aware of the Native American issues where...we began to go out into the lake country and we ended up around Itasca, White Earth and getting to know some of the people and the terrible poverty and the lack of opportunity and so gradually little by little realizing that this place...

(SIDE ONE OF TAPE ENDS)

AB: You were speaking of...

DWW: Yeah how the image relates to the [reality of this area]. You know it's...when we lived in the East or in San Diego where you have more people of color... I mean you're all just more mixed up... you just live together. I don't know what else to say. You just... it isn't so much, 'Oh look, he's this or he's that.' You just live together. I mean you just go about your daily business and perhaps people who are more aware or antagonized by differences stick to themselves... and it's certainly true in the East and in the West there are gated communities and all that stuff. Here, where you don't expect, at least thirty years ago, when you didn't expect to see people of color, well, then it was kind of notable. You know people noticed, and I know that at first...thirty... I don't know how it is today, I think it's less... but thirty years ago, when the migrants came... oh my goodness I couldn't believe some of the things people would say and how they would be treated at

the grocery store. That was not us at our best...that's for sure. Now, I think we've changed somewhat because first of all the number of migrants has diminished incredibly, but we still see them as somehow invaders, a lot of people do, and that's too bad because they come to work just like the rest of us. We're still kind of a rosy white place here, though.

AB: Speaking of being white, do you think that your own ethnicity has created any obstacles in working on minority issues?

DWW: Well, it creates obstacles in that I can only listen to my friends who are of minority backgrounds and I have to... I can't be them so I have to trust they are telling me what is truly their experience. But you know what? Being white also gives you the opportunity to have a seat in the decision-making place, and so it's one of the reasons why I had to run for the legislature or I had to run for the council, because if you have the chance to make a difference and to speak up and to be there when decisions are made that affect people, well, then you better be there. You know. So it's good and bad.

AB: Good and bad. What do you feel is your greatest personal or professional accomplishment?

DWW: (pointing to family portraits) Those girls (laughs). I've always thought that our family....our kids were, you know, if nothing else, if you never did anything else in life at least we produced all those beautiful daughters. So family's great. I don't know, professionally...you know, I've just done so many jobs. I've liked them all...and it just seems for me there's always new horizons, new things to do. I will tell you that I loved being in the legislature. It was the greatest job. It was like I couldn't believe I was having so much fun (laughs). First of all, you go around, you get to meet everybody in town... I mean nobody gives you that excuse right? Hi...you can strike up an instant conversation with somebody. That was cool. And then you go to St. Paul and in order to work on an issue you sort of have to become Sherlock Holmes...figure it out you know and what's the best way to solve this. Oh that was fun and that's the twist... the legal piece of it. And I found I loved to do it, I loved to do that.

And the constituent stuff when somebody would have a problem and they would call me. One day, an exchange student was just about to really get in serious trouble because he didn't have something about his car. I walked over from my office building to the Department of Transportation, which was across the street, and [a ten dollar fee] later was able to fix it. I mean... you know how exciting that is? That's really cool.

Another interesting thing that happened was somebody... just wrote me a letter... it wasn't even one of my constituents and talked about how she was going to be institutionalized which was going to cost the state 25,000 dollars a year (train in background) because the state would not help her get a certain drug to maintain her psychic health, her mental health. So I went this does not make sense...the drug costs \$5,000 a year and we were going to pay \$25,000 a year to put her in a regional treatment center. So I got an intern to help me, and we did all this quick research and, low and behold, it just wasn't on the list... this particular drug. So with a few calls to the health department, we just got... you know... it's like pushing something to get it rolling, and we said you need to look at this, because this is costing us \$20,000 a year that we don't need

to do. And within a very short time, the health department had put that drug on that list and it was available... I mean that's fun, that stuff is fun.

I remember one time I was going to a meeting in Duluth on that lovely highway across...and I'm driving along and I'm saying to God, (looks upward) 'God, this is just the best job in the world' (laughs). We're having this great conversation. And then I lost the election after that and I went, 'Well, what are You thinking?' (laughs) 'What in the world do You have in mind?' Well, the interesting thing is there was something next, because I came back to town, and I was on a board of directors (train bell chimes in background) [while] I was in the legislature... I carried legislation that related to people who are vulnerable, who have disabilities, but I'd never been very, you know, involved on the street level, okay? And that's the board I was on here... for CCRI. Well, I got defeated, and I came back to town thinking, 'Geez, I really liked that job.' (laughs)

And I'm sitting there on the board and one very strange night we had to come to the decision as a board that we had to fire the top three people the next day (laughs). And people looked around the room and said, 'Who can take over the agency?' because, you know, we couldn't leave it leaderless. So I was the only one who didn't have a job (laughs). So I walked into CCRI the next day and had to become the executive director at 1:00 in the afternoon after they had removed the top three people. Well, the interesting thing was I knew a little bit about the place, because I had been carrying the legislation. You know it's kind of a backwards way to get into a job... I felt like I was backing my way in. And then everything I needed to know was in the computer, which I didn't know anything about yet. So boy did I have to do a quick study on computers and that was my next ten years of life, being the executive director there. That was very exciting. We pulled the agency out of a deep hole. The payroll had bounced, and they had a real redline, and today it's a three million dollar agency, so it's cool. That was fun, you know, to work on that.

AB: What kind of negative viewpoints have you met while trying to promote diversity be it racially or diversity-wise?

DWW: Well, a lot of people are just sort of stuck in their...preconceptions....and I don't know... if people don't want to give the time of day to somebody else...to give the benefit of the doubt...and you can't convince them otherwise, then I move on. I mean...in my younger days I was very in-your-face (laughs) and kind of always hoping I could rattle cages. And I think I've learned now that... do my thing, do what I know to do that I feel right about, and if other people see that there's something there to be gained, they'll follow or they'll look themselves, they'll open the window and say, 'Hmmm...' you know.... Some people have different priorities. You know, they like big houses and a lot of furniture (laughs) or something, you know... and a lot of money. Those aren't the things that turn me on. What turns me on is watching people thrive and grow and... (train in the background) so I do what I can do. If people have misconceptions, misinformation, then you can fix that because you can give them good information, but if they are just stuck in an opinion.... oh, I had an uncle like that. My uncle met me at a family reunion, and he came up to me and he said, because he knew I had been on the opposite political party and had won an office. And he came up to me and he knew that I probably had this terrible belief about abortion...that it was okay.... and so he comes up to me and he goes,

(imitating uncle's voice) 'Diane, we know that you have these terrible beliefs. (laughs) But we're just going to, you know, I need to talk to you about this.' And he was going to really convince me, and I just looked at him and I said, 'Oh, Uncle Chucky, you don't need to waste your time on me. Besides, I love you just the way you are.' (laughs) And he just.... he let me alone.

AB: Do you have anything else you would like to say or have stories about that you think would be important and a good addition here?

DWW: Any questions that you...that have come up that... You can tell that I love to talk.

Truman Douglas: Would you change anything about your life?

DWW: Well, there are things that have happened to me that I can't figure out. I mean... I don't know if I'd change them. My husband left that I moved here with. A guru came through town, and he followed him and went away, and we were happily married. Hmm. So that propelled me into single motherhood with three girls and having to get a job and support them. Now, at the time it was awful. I will tell you that it was very icky. Lots of sad nights coming home to my dog who was the only one who understood me, and we cried together. But, you know what? I look back on that now, and I don't know if I would change that. I don't understand it exactly, but I don't think I would change it, because what it caused me to do was to rise to the occasion to... I had to support my girls. So I had to find a way to do that and then by doing that it leads you to become stronger so you're ready for the next challenge. I don't think I'd have ever run for the legislature if I hadn't had that experience. So... I don't know if I would change anything, but I certainly look at some of these things as hmmm... what have I learned from that? You know or that or whatever so... hmmm...

AB: I have a question. You've been awarded for some of your work...

DWW: Yeah.

AB: How does that tie into what you do? Does it ever kind of motivate you, or is it icing on the cake?

DWW: You know what I think awards and recognitions...it's a little bit nice (laughs) for you. I mean it's nice cause somebody sees what's going on. But you know what's even more important is that it's an opportunity to tell the story to the community. So that if they don't know yet about this work, then they can hear it again in a different context and so that piece of awards and recognitions is very important. It's another time... another way to reinterpret, but you know there are a lot of things, and I don't think necessarily for what I do but a lot of things that you get involved in, and we don't recognize what people do, and I think it's so important to... often say, 'You know what? You're the only person I know who does this and thank you.' Because it's so... I was just talking to my daughter yesterday... she feels so unappreciated in her job and I said, 'I did too' (laughs). I mean no one knows all the little things that go into what you do for your living or for your life and

all the things that make it work. No one else is ever going to know that. You know it, and you can feel good about it but when somebody catches a little glimmer of something you do and then says thanks... a job well done. Well, it helps. It does help. It helps [prime] the pump, you know, so...

Sarah Beauregard: I have a question for you. How would you describe the Midwest or Moorhead to a refugee or someone who would be considering coming here and wants to know about it?

DWW: Well, today I would say it's a place of possibilities. There are good people in the Midwest and give them a chance... give them a chance, because I think you could make a good life in the Midwest. There [are] good chances to make a good life. We still have relatively crime-free cities, which is a big deal for a refugee. I mean many are coming from unsafe life situations. If you can just walk the streets and feel safe... live in a house and feel safe.... that's important. And we still have that in the Midwest...at least a lot in the Midwest. And I would say give the people a chance. They may not know you yet, but they will give you a chance if you ask for it. And I think that's relatively true. I hope I've... you know I am an optimist (laughs). Yeah.

AB: Well, I think we're pretty much done here unless you have something else to add again.

DWW: No I don't think so.

AB: (To Interviewer Group) Do any of you have any other questions? All right, thank you very much.