

# **Poweshiek History Preservation Project**

## **Interview Transcript**

**Interviewer:** Judy Hunter

**Speaker:** Karen Phillips

**Date:** November 18, 2016

**Place:** Grinnell, Iowa

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Persons present:     Judy Hunter-I  
                          Karen Phillips-S

Hunter: Okay! We're gonna assume it works 'cause I don't know how to play it back.

Phillips: Okay.

Hunter: But anyway, so, this is—

Phillips: Do you think I need to be closer to it?

Hunter: Um—

Phillips: Or, do you think I need to speak loudly, or?

Hunter: It's registering quite well, your, your, yeah, it's got the little thing.

Phillips: Good.

Hunter: So this is Judy Hunter and Karen, interviewing Karen Phillips, and it is November 18<sup>th</sup>, Friday.

Phillips: Could be.

Hunter: Could be. And we're gonna talk, somewhat about schools, but probably bring in some other stuff as well. So Karen, do you wanna talk about what was your connection with the schools?

Phillips: Yes, I'd be glad to. I'm, I was trained as a mental health counsellor and had quite a bit of experience in that job, at agencies, I had a private practice, and, I had seen mostly adults in my work up until 1985, and at that time I decided to apply for a position in the Grinnell-Newburg Schools, and the position at that time was called Home School Coordinator.

Hunter: Aah. Okay.

Phillips: And that was a little bit different. At that time, a woman who had been an Elementary Counsellor in Grinnell, for a few years, I'm not sure how many; her name was Audrey Peterson--

Hunter: Ah!

Phillips: Had been housed at Davis Elementary School and had been doing what I assume would have been some kinds of typical elementary counselling things. I don't know if she went to all three schools. What I do know is for some reason, which I was never told, she stepped down from that position, maybe they eliminated that position, I'm not sure what the story was, but she was back in the classroom as a fifth grade teacher when I was first hired as Home School Coordinator. And I think it was partly, the teachers themselves were really missing, at least some of the services that she provided, I don't know if they really regretted that they had let her go, I'm not sure about any of that 'cause I wasn't part of it, but it was very important that they hire under a new name, Home School Coordinator—

Hunter: Ah, rather than Elementary Counselor.

Phillips: Rather than Elementary Counselor, and I suspect that if they'd just gone back to hiring an elementary she'd've just re-applied for the job, and given her seniority, um, she would've had that position, but I'm just speculating here, I don't really know. What I do know is that the job description was very different, and I was really attracted to it. The job description was that I would work with a small number of students in, and actually and their families, sort of, a little bit like a social worker would, that I would go into the homes, that I would receive referrals from the three different buildings, and I would be able to contact those families that were referred, the idea was maybe five to seven families in each building. And that I would contact them and I would say that their family was referred, and tell the reason why their family was referred, and ask if I could come over and visit with them, and I think, um, it sounds kind of harsh when I think back about it, but it wasn't really because these were families who were having problems getting their kids to come to school, or their children were being bullied or there were some very obvious behavior discrepancies in the classroom that were disruptive. And maybe the parents had been called a number of times. So this call from me would not have been a surprise to the parents. So that's how I started my work in the schools. And I worked that way, I believe it was about three or four years, travelling from school to school, and then there was actually a law passed by the Iowa Legislature, a very progressive law, I thought, that required every school district in Iowa to have a Kindergarten-12<sup>th</sup> grade certified school counselor on staff. And I received a call from Clem Bodensteiner, who was our superintendent at that time, Clem had hired me for the position of the Home School Coordinator, and he told me about this law. I mean, I was aware of it, but I really wasn't sure how that would impact what I was doing, but anyway, he told me that Grinnell needed to hire an Elementary Counselor by law, and the person had to have the proper school certification, and that they would not have both an Elementary Counselor and a Home School Coordinator, and therefore, if I wanted to continue in the schools I would need to get that certification. So, that was a challenge to me. It turned out, I didn't know it would be a challenge, but it turned out to be a challenge, and sort of a dark time for me in my professional life, because I felt that I was already very well qualified to do the job that I wanted to do. And I had to go back and obtain a lot of graduate coursework in school counselling. And that was the part that was very, very frustrating to me, because, first of all, there wasn't

anywhere stated in the Iowa Code what the required courses would be for an Elementary Counsellor. What they said at the Department of Education was, you have to affiliate yourself with a graduate school that offers this school counseling endorsement, and you have to meet their qualifications. And so the qualifications were different between the University of Iowa, UNI, Ames, and Drake, they were all different. So I couldn't just grab a course here, grab a course there as it would suit me in my schedule. So I put myself in the hands of the University of Iowa, and I was told at the beginning that it would only require me taking three courses, nine hours, nine graduate hours. By the time it was done I ended up taking 26 more hours

Hunter: Oh my God.

Phillips: in counseling, and a lot of it I had already had, it seems like once I got into it, more professors who had their own courses that they were trying to fill, would pile on and tell me, oh, I had to take vocational counselling, and oh, I had to take this, and that, and the other thing, and some of the things I had to take I had already taken but it had been more than 10 years, so they discounted them. And the irony of it all was, there wasn't a single person on the faculty at the University of Iowa at that time that had ever been an Elementary Counselor, or that ever knew anything about elementary counseling. So, it was really pretty much a big waste of time for me. I'll just say that, be honest about it. It was frustrating to me, I lost a lot of summers to, and a lot of money, to getting that degree. But anyway it led me to a very good job, so as time went on, my anger subsided, and I just gave it up. And I became the Elementary School Counselor for, for the district. Um, there were times when Davis had a different counselor, and I had just the other two schools, the Fairview and Bailey Park. And then through budget cuts, and maybe some performance evaluations, it ended up that I was the one for the whole district. That kind of came and went, the job was hard. It was a lot of kids. There were a lot of things to do, and I had to learn a lot about going into the classroom. I had never been an elementary teacher, I was a secondary teacher, I was a high school English teacher before I became a counselor, so I didn't have any of the training in how to teach a lesson to kindergarteners, for example. And I had to learn on the job, and actually, I learned very quickly, and I became, I think, very good at it. So I feel good about ending up in that position, and I felt good about my ability to do the job, and so I'll just stop there and you can ask me another question.

Hunter: Can, can you give me some examples of the kinds of things you would do when you went into a kindergarten classroom?

Phillips: Well, absolutely. I, very early on, I developed a schedule, that I was told that the teachers would really like me to come in and teach to the whole class. The way a music teacher would teach to the whole class, or the P.E. teacher would teach to the whole class. And this was a completely turning on end, upside down, of what I was trained to do as a counselor, because as a counselor, I was seen, I identified patients, or clients, that were already seeking my help for a particular problem. And it was reactive rather than proactive. So when I had to think about teaching to the whole classroom, I had to think about, nobody's a client here, this is all proactive.

I'm gonna try to teach them skills that will maybe prevent them from becoming clients of mine. So one of the things that I became aware of very early on, and I credit Susan Harter for this discovery. She was a kindergarten teacher, very, very good teacher at Fairview School, and she was aware of something called Peace Works. And Peace Works was something of a curriculum that you could buy that, you know, online, I think there was an online then but maybe not!

Hunter: [laughter]

Phillips: Maybe we ordered it, you know, the old fashioned way. But they had a little puppet. And the puppet was called I Care Cat. And um, the Peace Works curriculum were just like five rules of I Care Cat, and they were actually conflict resolution rules. Things like listening and using your hands to help people rather than hurting people, and being responsible for things that you do, and caring for other people. These were all really really good rules for kindergarten kids. It had, it had a lot of nice materials that you could order, it had posters that were large, that you could bring into the classroom and put up on the walls. You could have little individual, kind of 9 by 13 size slick, colorful posters that you could hand out to kids, or hand out at a parent teacher conference night, or something like that. And slowly but surely, that became my curriculum. I planned all my lessons, pretty much, in kindergarten through second grade around this I Care Cat poster with the five rules of I Care Cat, and I just expanded on it. And so, like, the rule 'being responsible for what you say and do', that developed into, for example, a big lesson on how to deliver an apology, a four-step apology. You know, look the person in the eye, say the person's name, say that you're sorry for the thing that you did that was wrong, and promise them that you'll try not to do that again. And that was the four step apology that became part of my curriculum, that was something that I had every child stand up and demonstrate to me after I taught it to them. And I just kept hammering it home so that every child would know how to do that. And I had parents, when they would meet me in the hallways, say, "Oh, you're Mrs. I Care Cat, you're the one that taught my child how to apologize", and I felt really good about that, because there were a number of lessons like that that were very concrete, very specific, I would say fairly non-controversial; because, you always would get into the issue of values, and who has the right to teach children values, that became sort of a big issue. But this was non-controversial, and parents seemed to love it, and the kids seemed to like having, instead of just an instruction from the teacher, "be nice", they would have a specific way to be nice; these four steps, you know. And so that became the sort of thing that I would teach in a lesson. The other part of my job, and this was very popular with the children. In spite of the fact that I just said I didn't want to turn anybody into a little client, I also felt that there were kids who had problems they needed to talk about. So I developed, and the teachers were very good about letting me do this, because I'm actually coming into their space—you know, the gym teacher teaches in the gym, and the music teacher teaches in the music room, but the guidance teacher teaches in the teachers' classroom, so I'm a guest in their space. But I would hang up a little envelope that I decorated with the kind of materials teachers use to decorate their bulletin boards, little borders and things like that. And I would develop these little pieces of paper that said "Dear Mrs. Phillips" and then,

you know, “I would like to see you”, and then a place to sign their name. And I had a bunch of these little pieces of paper, you know, light blue or light green or whatever, and in a little packet next to the envelope, and they could grab one of these, sign their name and put it in the envelope. And then, there would be a certain time that I would arrange with the teacher, a certain day of the six-day cycle, a certain time of the day, when basically, it was usually when the children were doing seat work, what they call seat work. When the teacher’s not directly giving instruction, but people are working on various assignments. I would come in, reach into that envelope and pull the papers out, and then I would just write the names on the board in order, and then I would take the first student to my office, and talk to them for five or ten minutes. And then that student would come back, and erase their name from the top of the list, and then the next student would come, and sometimes that would break down, sometimes a student wouldn’t know what to do when they got back, or whatever, and I’d have to come down to the room, and say, you know, see who was next. But that’s pretty much how I handled self-referral. And I had literally thousands of little meetings with students, you know, over a year, in three buildings. The students loved it. And a lot of times it wasn’t anything, I mean, people would be fearful, about, “well, what are they talking to you about?” but it would be, you know, “somebody didn’t pick me on their team at recess for Red Rover Red Rover”, or it could be more serious, like, “my parents are getting a divorce, and they’re just fighting all the time, and I don’t know what to do, I’m really sad.” Um, I had resources in my room. I had games, I had books, I had books about divorce that I could lend to the students. I had a lot of different materials that I had gathered over the years that I was able then to put into the students hands, and give them something concrete. I also offered, uh, divorce classes, that the parents were told about, and if they were going through a divorce, they could have their kids sign up for this, and these classes met over lunch. We would have lunch together and then take the recess time, and I had specific curriculum for those classes too. I tried, for the most part, not to ever pull kids out of any direct instruction, because I didn’t want the teachers to feel like, well, “the counselling program is getting in the way of the instruction program.” I always was trying very hard to stay on the right side of the teachers, so that they would see it as an asset, and a help to them, and a service for their students, and I think for the most part I was successful in doing that.

Hunter: Okay. You said, you mentioned, conflicts about values, and who should be teaching values. Can you give an example of something you may have run into?

Phillips: Well, I had a couple of different very unpleasant things happen to me. There was a group of people that attended one church in town that was very pastor-oriented and, you know, conservative Christian church. And I found out that there were a number of parents in that church that were telling their children that they could not ever come and see me. And that became, I became aware of that when one student in a classroom was having a problem about another student calling them names and making fun of them, and I just, very naively said, “well, let’s go down and get Johnny” or whatever his name is “and bring him in and see whether he would talk with us about this and see if we can get this solved.” I did that kind of thing all the

time, conflict resolution. And when I went to get Johnny from the classroom, he was really, really reluctant to come. And I, I assumed it was because he thought he was in trouble or something like that, but he did come with me, and talk. He was nervous the whole time, and then I learned later when he went home and told his mother about it, that she was upset with him, and she was upset with me, because she had told him that he was never allowed to go and see the counselor. And that was because she didn't know what my values were, she didn't know what church I went to. I obviously didn't go to her church, and so, but she never shared this with the teacher, or let me know. I would have never gone and gotten that child if I had known that the mother didn't want him to see me. So, and then there was another time, oh, this was so embarrassing. There was another time, when I went to a kindergarten classroom to take a student to visit with me that had filled out a note, and another little boy in the class said out loud in front of the whole class, "oh, he's not a Christian because he's going down to see the counselor." And I was so shocked, it was so embarrassing. The teacher just absolutely turned white. And I went ahead and took the child who had asked for the meeting, down, had the meeting with him, and I brought him back to the classroom, and then I called the parent of the student who had said that. And I said, "I want you to know what your child said about another child in class today, and I wanted to know if you knew anything about why he would say something like that", and she said "oh, I'm so embarrassed, that never should have happened. No, I just told my son that he couldn't ever come to see you, because we have a Christian pastor that we can go and talk to. And so my son must have assumed that if somebody else is coming to see you that they're not Christian." And I said, "Well, I hope that you can talk to your son about that, and let him know that, you know, that his assumption about that was not right, and that was a cruel thing for him to say in front of the whole class". So there were things like that that I, that I was aware of, and it was hurtful, it was really, really hard for me, but one of the ways I got around that, I just think that openness is, I've always felt that communication and openness is the best medicine. So I became sort of a fanatic about every single lesson that I taught, in every single classroom, always had either a worksheet or a handout or a letter that went with it. If there was a worksheet that was from my materials that I worked on in class together, then on the back there was printed a little letter, "dear parents, today your child had a guidance lesson. This is what we talked about in the guidance lesson. You can reinforce these ideas by blah blah blah." And so that was a lot of paper, I destroyed a lot of trees

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: doing that, but I, and a lot of the kids would tell me, you know, when I would be passing out the papers and maybe there wasn't a worksheet, maybe there was just a letter from me today. The kids would raise their hand, "my mom never reads those. She just puts them right in the trash." And they say stuff like that, and I would say, "well I know, your parents are really busy, that's okay. I'm still sending the letter home, someday they'll want to read it." You know. And I did that for the entire time that I was a counsellor. Every single lesson, every child took a paper home. And so they parents couldn't say they didn't know what I was doing, they didn't

know who I was, or they didn't know when their child had a lesson or what it was about. And sometimes, like when we got into lessons about body rights, which would be about bad touch and you know, being private about your private parts and what the private parts are, I would always have meetings where I would let the parents know several weeks ahead of time, "I'm starting a unit in kindergarten that'll take place over the next six weeks. We're going to use Duso the Dolphin and we're going to learn about private parts of the body, and how to keep those private parts private and safe. And I would love to have you come and attend a parent meeting so you can ask questions and look at the materials" and I always had pretty good, pretty good...

Hunter: Attendance?

Phillips: That's the word I'm looking for!

Hunter: Yeah, yeah.

Phillips: Attendance at those meetings, the parents would come, some of them, you know, not a lot, but the ones that had concerns would come, and I don't think that I ever had anybody pull their kids out of those lessons.

Hunter: Oh, that's kind of amazing.

Phillips: Yeah. And even with the parents that didn't want their children coming to see me with little notes and you know, making appointments, they still kept their children in for the lessons. Because I would always ask them that. When I was aware of it, I would ask "well is it alright if your child stays in the classroom while I teach the lessons? I come in about once a week, or once a cycle." And they would say "Oh yes, that's alright, I know what you're doing, and yeah, that's fine." So there were just, was just, yeah, there was some, there was some fear. I was, I had a little puppet for a while named Pumsy. He was a little dragon. And one of the lessons in Pumsy was about learning how to say no. And I can't quite – it's been a long time now so I can't quite remember. But Pumsy was being used in schools all over the country, and there was a movement among some of the, this element of Evangelical Christians, that, they would communicate with each other. A lot of these same people became the people who wanted to pull their kids out of the school, out of the public schools and homeschool them. So that's the audience I'm talking about. And they would have little publications that they would send out. And Pumsy, there were articles about Pumsy being associated with the devil, and the reason was because Pumsy was teaching children how to say no, and if you learn to say no, then you learn to say no to your parents. And if you say no to your parents then that's the devil at work. Because the parents are the authority over the children. And it was so pervasive, and I was hearing about it at my professional meetings. I never actually had anyone at Grinnell complain about Pumsy. But I eventually just stopped using Pumsy because I thought, I don't want to take on this battle, about Pumsy being the devil. And so I just stopped using it. But it was a lovely little light turquoise, soft, velour-type puppet that, children just love these puppets, they love to hug them. And one of the ways I thought the children about body rights was with my I Care Cat puppet at the end of every lesson,



in every classroom, in kindergarten through second grade—I didn't use this so much in third or fourth grade. But I used the Pumsy, I'm sorry the I Care Cat puppet for the lesson, and I would have every child come up and say goodbye to I Care Cat at the end of the lesson. And I taught them that there was a whole range of ways that they could say goodbye, and any one of those things was okay. And they were things like, give him a high five, or a fist pump, or give him a hug or pat him on the head or just wave at him, or give him a kiss, or shake his paw. I taught all of these different ways of saying goodbye to I Care Cat, but I made every child come up in a line and go past I Care Cat and say goodbye, in whatever way they chose—they could choose any way nothing was off-limits. And I had the huggers, I had the kissers, I had the fist-pumpers, I had all of that, and I had the little puppet in my hand. You know, and I could control the paws, so if they wanted to do high five, I could do the high five with my hand inside the puppet, and I was trying to teach them that they have control of how much contact they have with other people, and especially when there's an adult there, they don't have to hug that adult. They don't have to give in, to every, you know, "hug your grandmother! Give your Uncle Fred a kiss!" they don't need to do that. They can just say "I would rather just wave at Uncle Fred".

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: And that's such an important piece of body safety, to teach kids that they have the right to say no, that's not the devil in them talking, that's the ick factor for kids.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: I teach them about ick, and if it feels icky don't do it. So, that was how—I used that puppet to teach a lot of things.

Hunter: Cool. Um, later in your career there was a, a federal grant or something that you, some other people?

Phillips: Oh, I have to tell you that that was the absolute highlight of my career.

Hunter: I bet.

Phillips: It was the last three years that I was teaching in the schools, and then at the end of that grant I retired, and it was about the right time for me to retire. It probably would've been when I retired anyway. But the federal grant was written by a professional grant-writer that we had in the district at the time, who was partly, I think, funded by Grinnell College, and partly was funded by the school system. And then eventually the Grinnell College part of it dried up, because it started at a bigger percentage, and then for a number of years it kept getting smaller and smaller, and then it got to where we had to pay, in the school district we had to pay the whole salary, then of course we got rid of it, because we couldn't afford it. But that woman was really really good.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: And she knew her way in and out of these grants and what was required. And I had, this was just a sidelight of this, but I had gone through a little rough patch where they tried to eliminate the Elementary Counselor position, one year in the '90s, I can't remember quite what year that was.

Hunter: I rem—I don't remember what year that was but I was on the board.

Phillips: I ended up not losing my job and not losing my position, but I had to fight hard for it. And that's a whole other story, but what happened after that was I decided there needs to be a counseling advisory committee. It was always considered best practice. When we would go to our professional meetings or read any of the literature; every single piece of literature emphasized that the quality counseling program has a parent advisory committee. So I started that, and it was hard, you know, we met, I think it was once a month. We had all the counsellors in the district were invited. I chaired it, we had teachers on the committee, we had administrators on the committee, and we had, and then we had parents. It was a really really good committee. And my thinking was the next time somebody needs to, somebody on the administration decides they're going to get rid of an entire part of our program we would have a committee of dedicated people who would go and fight for us. Rather than the counsellors that are losing their job going to the Board, that was always such a humiliating thing. So we have this committee going, and it turns out coincidentally, that was one of the requirements for the federal grant—you had to have a counseling advisory committee. So bingo, we had one, it's a well-functioning committee, and I felt really good about that. And the grant-writer said that was so good, that was probably the reason we got, one of the main reasons we got the grant. So we got the grant, and suddenly we had a lot of money—I think it was, oh, \$400,000, that's what's ringing a bell to me—I haven't thought about this in a long time. And, I became the administrator of the grant and I was able to hire two additional people for that grant, and that was a little hard because it's hard to get people to come to Grinnell, Iowa and take a job that's only gonna last two years

Hunter: Two years.

Phillips: or three years or whatever. But we found some people, we did have a little bit of turnover. But Trudy Magurshak was one person I was able to hire, and she's a wonderful, wonderful social worker that had been working for years at the Poweshiek County Mental Health Center, where, by the way, I got my start as well, years before. So I knew Trudy, and she applied for the job, and then I found a third person. And I think that was, uh, David Ford the first year, then he went on to become an administrator, then I had to hire. No, I think it was Christie Miller first, then David Ford, and then, then another woman whose name I honestly can't remember right now [laughter]. So that position had turnover each of the three years, and that was unfortunate. But, what I loved about it is that I designed this thing to work like a wheel where, before, I would be, there's a six day cycle, and I would be in, let's say, Fairview on day 1 and 4, then I'd be in Bailey Park on 2 and 5, and I'd be at Davis on 3 and 6, and it just went around the wheel. But on the days that I wasn't in those other buildings there was no coverage. The other

thing was, and right, this was true right from the start. Is that I had a teaching schedule that was kind of vigorous, because I was in every single classroom every single cycle, so the teachers were told right from the beginning, when Mrs. Phillips is in another building teaching lessons, you can't call her and say, "I have a child crying over here, can you come over and meet?" You could let her know, that you have a child crying, and if she has a little block of time that she can get away and come over, maybe she will. But she's not going to cancel a lesson with an entire classroom to come over and meet with a child who's crying. And everybody knew that from the moment I was hired. And so, um, so pretty much those buildings where I wasn't on a given day of the cycle, they were kind of on their own. They could kind of let me know what was going on, but for the most part I'm not gonna jump in my car and run over there, because I had recess duty, I had lunchroom duty, I had a lot of the regular stuff that you have when you're in a building. So, when I had the grant, I could schedule, I'm in Fairview, Trudy's in Bailey Park, and David Ford's in Davis, and we all had different roles. I was still teaching all the lessons. Trudy, this was so good, Trudy was doing small groups. Every child was scheduled for a small group, and her small groups were based on my lessons. So she was teaching skills in her small groups that I had already introduced in a lesson that month, so it was, like, coordinated

Hunter: Yeah. Yeah.

Phillips: and follow-through and practice time. It was so great, and then, the third position was more the social work position. David was meeting more of the kids that are putting in the little notes, going, contacting parents, doing some troubleshooting with behaviors and that sort of thing. Plus when we had David, we had a man. You know, a male counsellor, so that was pretty awesome too.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: So we just kept moving the wheel around, and we had, once a cycle we had all three of us, we had a time in my big office, that, they gave me a whole classroom at Bailey Park School that became the Counselling office for the grant.

Hunter: Oh, wow.

Phillips: We had sofas in there, we did parenting classes in there, we had, our team meetings in there, and we coordinated everything we were doing. I still saw some individual kids, and Trudy saw some individual kids, and David saw some individual kids, but we all had our, our different assignments, and that lasted for three years. And it was the best counseling, school counseling program I've ever seen, if I do say so myself. It was wonderful. And, um, I had to retire at the end of that because I couldn't have gone back. I couldn't have gone back, it was just, like, the Cadillac thing.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: And the funny thing is, is that it was one of the smallest Federal grants that was awarded. They couldn't believe that we could do all the things that we did with just the amount of money that we had. I had a contact person that was supervising me from Washington, DC, and I had to go to meetings in the summertime and meet with all the people in my, what they called, cohort, all the people who'd gotten grants all over the country that year. And I had the smallest grant of anybody in the whole country.

Hunter: wow.

Phillips: Yeah, and we did so much with it. And then I retired, and, um, the counseling advisory committee fell apart within one year. And several people were hired to replace me, several people, plural, were hired to replace me in the elementary school. But, some of them didn't have the counseling, school counseling degree, but they were hired anyway. I just sort of felt like, you know, I had gone through a lot to get that certification and, now they didn't care anymore. I think that the law was changed by the legislature so that it didn't require an Elementary Counselor to be in every building anymore, I think that must have happened.

Hunter: Ah.

Phillips: Because, I don't know how we could have gotten away with, we, we hired some good people but they didn't have the elementary counselling degree. So I've kind of, um, stepped away from it, because, I, I have to let it go.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: Anybody that retires from a job has to let it go.

Hunter: Yeah, exactly.

Phillips: And I've let it go, and I haven't kept up with anything really that's going on in the schools since then.

Hunter: That's, that's wise I think.

Phillips: Yeah.

Hunter: I feel the same way about the Writing Lab.

Phillips: Yeah, you just have to walk away and let the next group of people do the best that they can.

Hunter: Exactly, exactly. Um, can I ask you a question about before you were in the schools?

Phillips: Yes!

Hunter: When, when you were at the mental health center here?

Phillips: Yes, of course.

Hunter: Because the other night we were at that meeting, and Betty Ludden [?] mentioned that you were instrumental in setting up the, um—

Phillips: The Clubhouse?

Hunter: The Clubhouse, yeah.

Phillips: Actually, that's a little, you've gotten a little bit ahead of where I was.

Hunter: Okay.

Phillips: Um, when I was working at the mental health center I was only working 20 hours a week, and the director at that time, John Daniel, had a number of, um, faculty wives that were on the staff, and he kept us all pretty much right at about half-time, which was very frustrating to me because I wasn't eligible for any benefits.

Hunter: right, right.

Phillips: I was just paid by the hour. And then he needed more time so he'd hire another faculty wife, and keep her at 20 hours, and then you'd need somebody, I mean, there was Mary Moberg, there was Fran Uhlenhopp, there was all these people and they were all kept right at that level.

Hunter: Oh. It was, he was a smart administrator.

Hunter: Yeah, I suppose.

Phillips: That's why I ended up applying for the Home School Coordinator position because I wanted to work full-time and I was never given more than 20 hours in the, in the mental health center. So I had private clients, but part of my 20 hours was that I was to develop a community support system, and this was right after the time when they were not any longer warehousing long-term mentally ill people in the big state institutions.

Hunter: Right.

Phillips: They were trying to get them out of those institutions, back into their communities, and get them support in their communities. So part of my little part time job was to start a community support program, it actually met at St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Hunter: That's right? Okay.

Phillips: And it was a little group of, you know, people who were diagnosed with very serious, you know, things like schizophrenia, bipolar, you know, depression, people who were not really able to live independently with no support. And we had—

[ringing]

Phillips: Um, that's your phone I think.

Hunter: Oh, excuse me. Oh, it's Katherine. Never mind, I'll call her back.

Phillips: So, we had, um, a group meeting, they were all being seen by the mental health center. They were getting medications overseen by the psychiatrist at that time, I think Dr. Jerry Lewis from Newton came over, that's what I remember anyway. And those people were being medicated and seen at the mental health center, but they needed, they didn't need therapy so much, they needed life skills.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: So, like, how to floss your teeth.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: And how to make coffee, and how to go grocery shopping and not lose all your money, and how to write a check and use a bank, and so, I started that program, and we actually have scrapbooks of meeting at St. Paul's. I know there was a lot of coffee and, you know, donuts being eaten, and a lot of sitting around and talking, a lot of people were, agitated, they would walk around, walk, walk, walk, walk, walk. And, um, I would try to teach these life skills. We had people come in and speak to them, you know, somebody from the bank would come in and talk about a basic checking account, and, somebody from public health would come and talk about something to do with, you know, their sleeping patterns or their eating patterns, and we started having a Thanksgiving dinner, you know, the week before Thanksgiving. And then, slowly but surely I passed that on to some other people, and I kept my job being just a counselor, seeing clients. And I remember hiring a couple of other people, I've forgotten names now but there were some other young women that became the people that took over that community support program. And then long after I stopped working for the mental health center they purchased or built the Pearl Street Apartments and transferred that whole program over into the basements there. I wasn't in on the, the planning for that, but, but the idea of the program was John Daniels' idea, and he hired me to start it.

Hunter: Okay!

Phillips: So that's my connection to that.

Hunter: I do remember that group used to meet at St. Pauls'.

Phillips: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And I feel, I feel good about that. I mean, it was something that was good for those people. It probably wasn't enough—I mean it was better than when they had their own location and they could kind of hang out there. And then Betty Ludden became very

involved in that program, and was the most re- more recently she was the person from mental health that was—now she's retired too.

Hunter: Yeah.

Phillips: So, it's been a series of different people who have kind of carried that forward.

Hunter: Yeah. Is, is the connection, well, no.

Phillips: It's run by Capstone now.

Hunter: Okay I was gonna, I was just saying, the connection with our mental health, well, the mental health center doesn't exist anymore!

Phillips: A lot of our mental health services now in Poweshiek County are being provided by Capstone.

Hunter: Okay, wow, wow. Okay, well, back to school counseling. Anything else you'd like to add about having done that, that career?

Phillips: Well, it's funny that you're interviewing me today, because yesterday I had, um, I had a Bible study group that I belong to with my church. And it's been an ongoing thing, we meet here at Mayflower, it's about seven people that signed up for this particular group, there are other small groups studying the exact same thing meeting at different times and different places. Yesterday we were asked to tell what our favorite Bible passage was and why this was such a meaningful passage. And I picked, it's from Matthew, and it's the, the Beatitudes. And the Beatitudes talk about, you know, the underdog, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness", it's a whole series, it's about eight verses of "Blessed are...". And the blessed are, the people on the other end of that, are the poor and the downtrodden and the underdog, and I think that why that appeals to me so much is that I've always had a sense of being for the underdog and trying to help the people that are marginalized or left out, and in the schools I really found a comfortable place with some of my lessons in terms of anti-bullying and, just befriending children who were on the sidelines for being different, or being shy, or being friendless. And a lot of the kids that came to see me, they weren't the popular kids. They were the kids that would have been in the Beatitudes. And I, as I was thinking about, for my Bible study class as I was thinking about why that has such appeal for me I thought about my work in the schools, and I thought about I Care Cat being there for those kids. And I never actually, the full time that I was in the schools I never felt that it was a religious calling, because I was really in, I, had so much flak from this Christian element in the community rejecting me, that actually I was really trying to keep that very firm line of separation of church and school. But as I look back on that now I see that I was living out my Christian faith.

Hunter: Isn't that cool?

Phillips: Yeah. It makes me feel really good.

Hunter: Yeah, yeah.

Phillips: And sometimes, I was one of the marginalized, I mean, I didn't always fit in. There were some of these same behaviors that the children had I saw in the teachers' lounge. And there certainly were little cliques of teachers, most of the teachers were female, and there were the mean girls that were teachers. And I would always identify the other faculty members who were marginalized, and I would always be those peoples' friend. And I just recall now the close relationships in the schools I had with faculty members, and I still have some of those friendships, they were always people who were not popular with other teachers. So, I saw that as my role, and you know, I don't want to go into it too deeply, and analyze myself, but I don't know whether I felt marginalized as a little girl or... You know, I don't know, I don't remember it that way, I don't remember being left out or being ostracized or anything, but you know, I wasn't, you know, I didn't get in a sorority in college, you know, I wasn't a cheerleader, I didn't go to the prom. I mean, I was just a little bit of a loner, and I had an older brother that took care, took care of me and you know, included me in a lot of what he did, and that was fine. And I just think that I have a sensitivity to people that are being left out. So, that was good that I became a school counselor I think!

Hunter: Yeah! No kidding. Good for the community too. Thank you so much!

Phillips: You're welcome.

Hunter: Alright.

[End]