

Coordinator of Community Development: Ericka Goerling
Victim Assistance Program Director: Eileen Spencer

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewees are Ericka Goerling and Eileen Spencer, and the interviewer is Phuong Nam Doan. The interview took place at the Hillsboro Court House on Wednesday, May 25th, 2005 at 2:00 p.m.

Phuong Nam Doan: So Ericka, what responsibilities and duties do you do here?

Ericka Goerling: I do the community development coordination for the Center for Victim Services. That essentially means that I do the program development and outreach for what we have going on here. With that is press releases, grant development, data collection, and a lot of training and presentations for the community. That's about it.

PD: And, Eileen, what do you do?

Eileen Spencer: I'm the director of the Victims Assistance Program in the District Attorney's office. Our purpose is to support victims as they go through the criminal justice system and keep them informed about what's going on, and keep them involved.

PD: How long have you lived in Hillsboro?

ES: I have worked at this job for 15 years and I worked another job at the DA's for 5 ½ years before that.

PD: Do you live in Hillsboro?

ES: No, not anymore

PD: How long have you been in Hillsboro?

EG: I've worked here since 1998 and actually I've lived in Hillsboro since 1997.

PD: Do you feel safe here?

EG: For the most part, yeah.

PD: Do you feel safer now than back then in the 80's?

EG: I would say it's about the same, maybe, actually perhaps a little more safe since I moved back from L.A. And so when I first came up I still had the skittishness of L.A life and so I think I was a little more cynical and then as I become more connected to the community it feels a lot safer. I just have to balance it because there's a cynicism too of knowing what does happen in the community when you work with crime victims and so some days I feel safer than others (laughs) based on stories I've heard. What about you?

ES: That's defiantly true for me. Just being in a job where you see police reports every day and your whole job is focused on criminal prosecutions, you're just more aware who your probably passing on the sidewalk because we're right across the street from the jail. (laughs)

PD: How often do you see crimes occur here?

EG: Well personally or professionally?

PD: How about personally first.

EG: Okay. Well personally do I visibly see crimes, no, with the exception of the occasional incident of child abuse in stores. (laughs) I think rarely, but if I think of any crime, that would be it. I'll let you answer and then we'll answer professionally.

ES: On a personal level I don't really see it, but like Ericka said, you see people doing questionable things like seeing people mistreat their children. But I think our office prosecutes about 10,000 cases a year. So, you know, there's a lot going on and that's everything from serious felonies on down to traffic crimes.

EG: And I do have to come in, and actually personally, we were victims of identity theft. And then professionally we see a lot of victimization. And for us here at the Center for Victim Services because we do a lot more advocacies and the mental health counseling we work with victims who never reported to the police. So we get folks who come through who've reported it and then folks who come through who have never reported it. So it's even a greater number, apparently.

PD: So what is the relationship between the police and the social services?

EG: Well definitely it has become much more positive and I think for the most part the sheriff's office and the different municipalities have worked really hard to start collaborating, working together. There used to be an occasionally and it still comes up, I think some biases on both sides to what the other entity is. For example the police, they might look at some social services as too touchy feely or just femininity and difficult to work with. And some advocates might look at law enforcement, as you know, too conservative and they're just going to infringe on people's rights. And the really, really fortunate thing is that has changed quite a bit as people realized that, wait a second, we're all in the same community, we're all working towards the same goals and even though we're coming at it a little differently, we can do much better if we're working together.

ES: I've seen a great deal of change too, I think in people's attitude in willingness to cooperate between agencies. Probably about the mid 90's is when I became aware of the multidisciplinary teams that were being formed for different purposes -- child abuse, elder abuse, that sort of thing. And law enforcement, social service agencies, health professionals, all kinds of different people get together on a regular basis and exchange information and train each other, I think it's a really good trend and I think that everyone is more educated.

PD: How much control do police have in domestic violence cases? How big of a role do they have?

ES: Absolutely, because they are the first responders so often whether it's the victim within the household or neighbor who called them. They're the ones who are showing up. Gosh how many cases? There's just so many.

EG: I could have brought in statistics. (laughs) We prosecute more than 600 a year, I know that. Of course there is much more going on that doesn't get prosecuted.

PD: Is it better to call the police or social service and other agencies first?

ES: I think it depends on the victim. In working with law enforcement, because there is better partnership, most agencies now will at least give victims information. It is a little bit more comprehensive than what they use to give. Technically by law they have to give some information. But now it's a lot more: here is crisis line number, there are community resources available, here is how to get a restraining order, counseling is available. So that helps a lot for some victims and survivors. Law enforcement's still not the safest place to call maybe a better way to get into services is Social Services. And if in particular if people are non-native Americans, if they are non-English speaking, sometimes it's more challenging to have law enforcement. But we know that domestic violence is a crime and the prosecution and such is really helpful. It can help stop that cycle of abuse.

EG: And the court now mandates the abuser to get anger treatment and parenting classes and alcohol and drug treatments.

PD: With domestic violence, is it still from low-income families like back then in the 80's or has it changed now?

EG: I think what has changed the most the awareness. I think it has always been this idea that it has been stuck with low-income group, but in reality what we've known and even looking back historically is that it occurs across socioeconomic status, across racial lines, and cultural lines. So the awareness has grown to become not quite so secretive. There's been quite the burgeoning awareness of, "Oh wow, this really does impact a lot more people than we originally suspected." For example, the restraining order advocacy program, this is people who come in for a protective order. People come in for protective order not have ever reported it to police. The people coming in to do that process are truly across the board: engineers, doctors, lawyers, health care professionals, and teachers. You name it, the profession's been there just like there's somebody who has been unemployed or on welfare, it's the full range. Do you think that higher economic level of crimes is less likely to report to the police maybe?

ES: Yeah, it seems like the police are not as involved in that.

EG: And for some of the really, really high economic class people, they wouldn't even come to our programs because they would have the means to hire an attorney and keep it all under the carpet.

ES: So that would give an appearance is that it's just lower class, but it's mostly the matter of who is reporting it.

PD: Back then not many rape victims reported their case, has that improved now?

ES: I think that sexual assaults have been more reported. There's still a lot of stigma attached to being a rape victims, rape survivors. Probably there's been an increase just because like you said it's more educated. I think the more information gets out about acquaintance rape, either it's somebody who you know who's raped you which as opened a lot of doors for people to report. Where it's before it's "no, no, it's not really rape, I knew him" or whatever the inhibition might have been.

PD: What were some problems that would cause domestic violence in the household that was difference from then to now?

EG: Hmm I don't know if there have been a lot of changes.

PD: So it's been pretty consistent.

EG: It does stay consistent. In working with domestic violence, it started out I think probably in the 60's and 70's, was a real grass roots movement. It's really professionalized since then, and in that process it has been identified that domestic violence is about power and control. It is about one person wanting to have power and control over another person. And they use things like anger and rage, emotional, physical, and economic violence to do that. And so really the change is that there's been an understanding and it's not somebody has an anger problem or that it's just about financing, but it really is about that power and control. So that's not necessarily changed, it's stayed consistent. But the awareness now, which professionally helped us with how to tackle it, its like "Oh, this is what we're dealing with." Because we know about abusers. They're not necessarily beating up their bosses, or the officer who pulls them over, or the clerk behind the counter that might not as friendly as they want them to be, but they are beating up their wife or partner and their children in some cases. So it's about power and control.

ES: And there are a lot of cases that have been prosecuted too where there's alcohol and drugs involved, which further complicates the situation.

PD: Are women being attacked more or the children?

EG: Well, with domestic violence what we've find is straight up domestic violence you're looking at the wife or girlfriend or partner being beaten up. Children are often times witness to that. There's certainly trauma and victimization. And in some of those cases and the most severe cases, they're injured as well. There is a pretty high correlation with domestic violence and child abuse. Just like if you look at a case that's just about child abuse or neglect, often times you're going to find domestic violence. But one doesn't always mean the other exists.

PD: For domestic violence is there more with women working or stay at home moms?

EG: I haven't seen many trends that dictate one over the other. There is one recent study that looked at fatality issues for migrant women, and what they found was that women who are first generation American were more likely to be killed. And typically because they were most likely to leave they were a little bit more acculturated to American culture. But then there's that real, you know, you have that dominant culture which your from, but then you're getting your American culture too, and there that's your real pull and so a lot of those women are at greater risk and they'll chose to leave. Whereas women who stay into their culture or the women who are really, really becoming Americanize aren't quite as great at risk. Which speak to working men with minority victims who are coming through who are getting acculturated there are some risk levels there. The other trends as far as stay at home verses professional, I haven't seen any numbers on that. Anecdotaly, I haven't seen a difference.

PD: What do you find is the biggest problem in crime in Hillsboro now?

EG: Like the biggest issue?

PD: Yeah.

ES: Well probably the fastest growing crime has been identity theft, which has been directly related to drug use. And we have files that come through with dozens and dozens of victims. And the effects of identity thefts just go on forever. If they actually start using your identity, your credit cards or your checks, it takes years to get that all straightened out with banks. That is definitely the fastest growing. I think it mushroomed in the late 90's; I saw a difference. I just saw a real increase on that.

EG: I would concur. And just from the advocacy on the mental health side, we finding working with identity theft victims is that their level of trauma is pretty significant, which I don't think a lot of people realize that because it's not a violent crime. A lot of them feel a real sense of loss and a real sense of vulnerability because here they think they have these boundaries and now somebody is pretending to be them and all those agonizing issues to of trying reestablish credit. And many of these people have lost a lot of money and there's no way of getting it back, or there's limited ways of getting it back.

ES: If fortunately the bank won't charge you, if you report for example, that your check has been stolen and you signed an affidavit, they're not going to blame you for any checks that have been cashed. Of if someone has used your credit card and you've reported it and done all the things you need to do, you're not going to have to pay off for the things that are stolen. But still it's a tremendous loss to someone.

PD: Back to domestic violence, do men ever get battered by their wives? Is there an increase on that over the years?

ES: I wouldn't say there's a significant increase, but there's certainly more reporting of that happening. The number, the percentage though of true female to male domestic violence is still pretty low. So you're looking to between anywhere to 5-15% of all domestic violence cases.

There have been more reports of same-sex battering, lesbian and gay men, but that is still also not reported as often. Predominantly we see males tend to batter females at much greater rate.

PD: What do the police and social services agencies begin for an investigation for domestic violence?

EG: Well they differ, because police are looking specifically for information that they would send to the prosecutor's office to prosecute cases to do that criminal investigation piece. So they are going to look at things like the scene, they are going to make sure both parties are safe and they separate the parties when they do the interview. They will interview any of the witnesses or children. They'll take as much evidence as possible so for example, if there's damage to the home, they're going to take pictures of that, and they're going to take pictures of the injuries.

ES: And if they think that there has been violence, they will have to remove one of the people from the scene. So they'll arrest the suspect and he's not allowed to return...

EG: Which is mandatory by law. Social services are often going to approach it in a different way whether it's like advocacy based or Department of Human Services, they are going to look at often times at victim's point of view with what the victim discloses. That is certainly a part of the criminal investigation, but they are going to weigh a little more heavily on that information and in information like supplemental information like police reports, restraining orders, many other community reports of abuse that might be found, emergency records and doctor records and that kind of things. Law enforcement will also do a follow-up. They'll go back and take pictures. A lot of times there is redness in injuries, but there's not necessarily bruising. And they'll go back and document this.

ES: And all those reports are automatically summarized to the district attorney. If they find enough evidence, then they will go ahead and do charges.

PD: How does a conviction process work?

ES: A prosecution starts with a police investigation, so the police automatically **summated** (?) to the DA's office. A deputy district attorney reviews these reports and if there's enough evidence to prosecute the case, charges are filed in court, the suspect is arrested and is given a date to appear in court. It's called the arraignment, the first appearance. So at that time then the suspect learns of what he or she is charged with. And then depending whether it's a felony or misdemeanor, then usually the person makes several more appearances in court. Eventually he or she is given an opportunity to either plead guilty and be sentenced or go to trial. And if he goes to trial and there's a conviction there will be a sentence and it turns out basically the same as if he's been guilty. Or he could be found not guilty. Most prosecutions end in guilty pleas or convictions because they usually prosecute cases with pretty good evidence.

PD: What kind of evidence do they look for?

ES: Well for a domestic violence cases, there would be pictures of injuries and they would have the testimonies of what the police officer saw or any other witnesses that happen to be on the

scene. And they would have the testimony of the victim, which is also important. Sometimes in domestic violence cases it would be more complicated because often the victims change their minds about wanting to go through this prosecution process. They are not very happy on having to testify. Most cases actually end in guilty pleas rather than trials -- probably about 90% or maybe higher, of all criminal cases end in guilty pleas.

EG: I don't know, domestic violence cases may go to trial.

ES: I don't think so; I think they probably fall into the same general category. Most cases end in pleas, which is good because our criminal justice system will be completely blacked out every case in trial. It is impossible to prosecute the case if the victim's testimony is absolutely vital and the victim decides not to cooperate with the prosecution. Sometimes the cases are dismissed for that.

PD: Many people think that for rape victims it's because of what they wear, which is like an invitation for something to happen. Is that true to any extent?

EG: No, its not. It's blaming the victim. And we find that a lot with certain kinds of person crimes, especially in domestic and sexual violence. But there is a lot of the question of why doesn't she leave, it's because of what she was wearing, but the better and more important question is why does he abuse and why would it matter? Like a colleague of ours says "no means no" even if you're naked. So certainly I think as a social piece, we all have professionally I think we have a right and obligation to do prevention work and to talk to people about ways to be safe as possible. Even for those individuals in an unsafe situation it doesn't give anybody the right to rape them. In the criminal justice system you can have your advocacy piece and you could have that strength base pieces, you know, it doesn't matter if somebody says no it means no, if somebody is not consenting then you don't go beyond that line. In the criminal justice side it can be hard to prove. Sometimes it can be difficult when it comes to prosecutions especially when it comes to acquaintance or dating partners.

ES: In that kind of crime you often don't have other witnesses. That's why it's always difficult.

EG: So there are certainly some challenges there, which complicates things so much for the victim, which can certainly make her trauma much more significant. But we're working on that; we're working on a system that is much more sensitive to survivors. The big line is that it doesn't matter, you know, we don't penalize businesses for not having their lights on. It's not an invitation to be robbed or you know only having one clerk there doesn't mean there hey there's an opportunity to steal things from the store. What a women's wearing doesn't given anyone the right to violate her personal privacy, so we're pretty adamant about that.

PD: Is there an increase amount of attacks from the 80's till now?

EG: Up until this past year nationally I don't know, but locally the victimization rapes have gone down with the exception of crime against women. So those have been increasing, sadly, it would be great to say, "oh they've declined." And it is hard to know if the rates have increased or the reporting has been increased. Could be both, could be one or the other, we don't know for sure.

Professionally, I don't know about through the prosecutions office, but I know from our work here we're seeing a lot more.

ES: And like you said, I don't know if it's really happening more or it's reported more. But a lot of crime rates have gone down. But it just fluctuates so I don't know if we're becoming more and more violent.

PD: Is there a specific area in Hillsboro that is worse for domestic violent crimes?

EG: I don't know if there has been anything identified for issues like sexual assault maybe gang members would be one. Yah for any violent crimes I think, but I'm not aware of any. Law enforcement would be a better responder to that in a sense that I know Hillsboro, they have their little pockets that they know to be problem spots. Certainly areas like downtown, drug areas, and certain apartment complex areas where there seems to be more activities. So they've got their own little pockets, but we see everything.

PD: Is there a specific age or race that is easily attacked more?

EG: I'm not really aware of anything except there is a risk for young women when it comes to sex abuse. There is a significant risk from like between the ages of 7 and 13 is one of the prime ages for young girls and actually boys being victims to sex abuse. Other than that, I haven't seen any, nationally I know there are some trends, a lot of it depends on the area that you live in. Anecdotally, I know for a lot of Spanish speaking women, we've worked with quite a few who have been attacked specifically by Caucasian males. Usually kind of entrapped to go do domestic work for them, you know clean the house and when doing that they are getting raped and often times those cases are not reported. So we've had several of those cases. So we think there is vulnerability for those who are non-natives and non-English speaking Americans. So I'm not sure, I haven't seen any significant trends or increases as far as race or age.

PD: What is the process to helping children when they are abused?

EG: Well there are a lot of different processes. For example, let's say a kid is being abused and they report it to the teacher. It gets reported to the Department of Human Services. So for example for people like teachers and mental health professionals and law enforcements and judges, they are all required to report if there's a case of child abuse. And so they'll go to the Department of Human Services and they'll do an investigation and they might then go to law enforcement and they'll do an investigation forwarded on to the DA's office.

ES: And right at the very beginning, I think even before it gets forwarded, a lot of the times there's a special clinic in Portland that does child abuse. And so by the time the reports are sent to the districts attorney's office most of the time they include the secure reports and then the DA's office takes it from there.

EG: And then just on that support piece, the clinics that have done the forensics exams and all the exams of the children that have been abused, Cares Northwest, they provide social services, they'll provide resource information for kids and so that is where mental health will get involved.

And there are all different kinds of agencies that respond to that throughout our community including that who will sit down and work with kids. They'll work with parents to the non-offending parents so let's say if it's a dad, step dad, or family member who's been abusive, they will work with the non-offending family members to provide them with some support. And then what we know...because we work with a lot a lot...almost without exception when people come through with our program they're dealing with some kind of crime of victimization whether it's a person crime or property crime, all those without exception they've experienced either domestic or sexual violence as a child. And so it's a pretty significant trend that we're seeing adults who were victimized as children would often times victimize victims as well.

PD: So the child that was abused would turn out better as they grow up if they seek help earlier?

EG: I think there's a greater likelihood. I think that if it's acknowledged right away that the victimization happened and it is not ok and there's a building back of boundaries that are appropriate. I think there is a much better chance than for the kid who was never able to tell anybody and just internalized it and everything was their fault, and they didn't understand what that meant. Or the child who might have reported it to somebody and they weren't believed. There is certainly a lot of trauma for that kind of child, which sadly happens a lot. So I think that there's a greater likelihood of success, which makes sense. When there's somebody who's been a victim of child abuse, there's no sense of boundaries, what's safe and what's not, and what's appropriate and what's not. And so to reestablish that at a young age gives them a greater chance to experience that and work on that. It just makes for a more well rounded adult.

PD: What major programs have been made for domestic violence and other crimes?

ES: Well there's the Domestic Violence Resource Center, Sexual Assault Resource Center, which was started more than 25 years ago and I think the Domestic Violence Resource Center started about the same time. And they have been going strong ever since. And now we have programs like Ericka's program that does counseling.

EG: Yeah we have a...domestic violence resource center has a lot of programs within their agencies. For example, they've got their 24-hour crisis line, they've got the confidential shelter, restraining order program, free counseling for women and children, and the Latina outreach program. And then the sexual assault resource center, they are the ones that respond, again they are the ones with the 24-hour crisis line. They'll respond to the hospital when a sexual assault victim calls for the hospital. They provide education and outreach, advocacy for rape survivors, and they have a clinic who also do mental health work. And then there are a couple of other programs, little pockets of programs like SAWERA, which is the South Asian Women's Empowerment Resource Alliance. And there's the Middle Eastern Women's Resource Alliance and so they respond to domestic and sexual survivors of very specific cultural groups. And then our agency responds to any kind of victims. And there are other victims' services, like the DA's Offices of Victim's Assistance, the juvenile program has victim assistance and there's a program called Elder Safe and they provide assistance for crimes against the elderly. And so we've got quite a few responders, which is really nice.

ES: In the last 20 years there's been a huge growth in programs to help victims in general, help them through the system and help them get counseling. It's changed a lot, a great deal. Victims have more rights now than they used to have in the courtroom. Twenty years ago a victim didn't have the right to sit through a trial even if she was the victim because she was also a witness and so they didn't want her testimony to be influenced. And now the victim can sit in the trial regardless of whether she's testified or not. There's just little things like that have happened, that have really made a big difference of how victims are treated in the courts.

PD: Is there anything else you could tell me more that I have not asked?

EG: Oh wow, probably. (laughs) We could go on and on. I think Eileen's point of victims having more rights now is really significant looking at the trends of victim's rights of the course of the last 20 years. There have been huge changes and the things that are fairly minor like the rights for victims to be around for trial, well minor it is a huge, huge piece for a victim to have, I mean can you image being a crime victim and not even knowing what's going on? And the defender has been given an attorney and given the right to sit through the whole thing and be privy to all kinds of information that victims used to weren't. And now there's a little bit more of a balance.

ES: And now victims can be notified when a defendant is about to be released from the prison system and they didn't used to. There just have been a lot of changes like that.

EG: And when issues come up like parole and if the offender is wanting to be paroled early, victims will be contacted, they have the right to make a statement to as whether or not they want that done. I think victim impact statements.

ES: Well they can go testify at the hearing or they can submit a written statement to the board. So they have the right to free input what they did in the applicant form.

EG: And those are the things that all of the different advocates whether its domestic or sexual violence or general crime victims, I think everybody works towards...because in our criminal justice system we're still a bit heavy on the offender making sure that the offender's rights are accounted for, which is a good thing. We don't want people to be tried without a jury or that kind of thing, but really trying to balance the victims as much as we can.

ES: Before the balance the victims were treated as witnesses, I mean you could be a victim and get a subpoena in the mail and that would be about the only contact you'd have with the prosecution. And now they have to be notified of all major events during the trial or during the case and they have the right to appear at the sentencing also and make a statement. So their voices can be heard.

EG: So that's what we do.