Legacy Oral-Visual History Interview with Barbara Schmidt

Background Information

Interview Information

This interview with Barbara Schmidt (BCS) was conducted for the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans' (MNCDHH) Oral-Visual History Project. This interview took place on June 7, 2011 at the Golden Rule Building (85 E. 7th Place, St. Paul, MN 55101). The interviewer was Teika Pakalns (TP), and the on-site interpreter was Patty Gordon.

Translation Notes

A note about translation of this interview: The interview was recorded in American Sign Language (ASL). The interviewer and interviewee used ASL as a first language, and the signed information was translated into vernacular or spoken English by Certified Interpreters. Two Certified Interpreters voiced for the interview participants, one for the interviewer and the other for the interviewee.

This transcript and the open captions in the video are based on the spoken English information.

Actions are in brackets. Translation notes are in parentheses and italics (using the emphasis font), and they represent additional information and corrections about what was said.

Transcript of Interview with Barbara Schmidt

Key to names:

BCS = Barbara Corn Schmidt (signs in American Sign Language, voiced in English by Patty Gordon)

TP = Teika Pakalns (signs in American Sign Language, voiced in English by Evonne Bilotta-Burke)

[Visual of title graphic "Minnesota Oral History Project Interview with Barb Schmidt"]

[Teika Pakalns is sitting with Barbara Schmidt for the interview.]

TP: Hello, my name is Teika Pakalns. I am interviewing Barb Schmidt as part of the Oral-Visual History Project from the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, or MCDHH. Today is June 7, 2011 and we are here in the Golden Rule Building in downtown St. Paul. Welcome, Barb. It's nice to have you here. Tell us your name and name sign if you would.

[Interview time 2:36:01]

BCS: Thank you, I feel very honored to be here. My name is Barb Schmidt. My maiden name was Corn, so my name sign, using the C, is based on my maiden name (***she signs the letter "C" on the palm of her hand***). I went to the School for the Deaf in Faribault (***Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf – MSAD***) and I graduated in 1955.

TP: Great. Tell us a little about your background as a Deaf person. For example, were you born deaf?

BCS: When I was a little girl, my parents think I was about two-and-a-half, I fell down. (***This section was lost in the edit – I fell down some stairs and broke my eardrum. So I could "halfway" hear.***) I didn't use a hearing aid until my children complained. They said I was always talking too loud. That was because I couldn't hear myself. So that prompted me to get a hearing aid, which helped a lot. I tried to get by in the public school for a year. Then my kindergarten teacher told my parents that I didn't belong in the public schools and that I should go to the school for the deaf. My parents took me there. I'm so thankful they didn't sit on their pride and insist that I wasn't deaf. Instead they just accepted it and I really appreciate that.

TP: And you graduated from the school for the deaf in Faribault?

BCS: Yes, I graduated in 1955. I worked for a year, but I did have a scholarship to Gallaudet (***College – now University***) that I needed to use so I went there for a year as well.

TP: And you left Gallaudet after a year? Right? Did you go on to further your education or work after that?

BCS: No, I came home, got married, worked, raised three children, and now I do a lot of work in the Deaf community. There's never a dull moment.

TP: [Laughs.] One of the things we'd like to talk about is your extensive history of activism and advocacy in the community. I'm wondering, is there something specific that happened that got you started as an advocate?

BCS: Well, because I could hear some, I was able to work as a "reverse interpreter." Many of my friends asked me to go to their doctor's appointments with them. So I've been working and helping the community since the 1970s, I guess.

TP: Did you also see other general needs that were not being met? You mentioned working as a "reverse interpreter". Did you see some community needs from that experience?

BCS: No, but I felt that I wasn't the right person to work as an interpreter. And finally professional interpreters started to become available, so I took advantage of the timing to get out of that work. It just worked better with professional interpreters. The doctors and medical staff seemed to respond better to hearing interpreters than they ever did to me.

TP: [Points out papers on the floor relating to Schmidt's background.] One thing I noticed as I looked at your background, you worked in very specific areas – your church and with health care. So I'm interested in what got you involved in your church and specifically those two areas.

BCS: OK. I have been a member of Bread of Life Lutheran Church for the Deaf since 1957. The church itself was established in 1956 and I became a member the next year. Then I went to Gallaudet for a year, came back, worked as the secretary for the church for years and years – just basically keeping it running. Then, as for the Deaf Hospice program, really it was Nancy Meyers, a hearing woman, who started it. Her parents were in Hospice. Nancy, herself, was losing her hearing and started to study sign language with Marty Barnum Latz. Marty used to teach sign language and interpreting. Nancy was studying with Marty and began to think about how Deaf people would possibly interact with the doctors and the people in the Hospice system. She talked to Mary about it and, after some discussion, decided to leave the program so she could establish a system for Deaf people to access Hospice. She contacted one person who she asked me not to name and that person said they weren't available to help her, but they pointed her to me. So Nancy called me for help. Oh, I grilled her on that TTY – asking her what this was about, what she wanted help with. The printout of that conversation is so long and she still has it. Anyway, after a lot of discussion, I thought, "Well, why not? " My husband had just passed away. It was 1998 and the Hospice started in that following year. I thought, "I have the time and no obligations at home right now." (***Lost in the edit – I decided to come on board and have been with the Hospice program for the past 12 years.***)

TP: I've noticed the sign you use for "Hospice". Can you tell me how that sign, how it got started?

BCS: At first we used a sign that was based on the ASL sign for "help." But I read a poem that made me re-think the sign we were using. So I talked it over with some of the other Deaf people involved in the team and we changed the sign to the one we use now – on the shoulder. I'll sign that poem for you now.

Blessed are you -

Oh - I'll be doing it in ASL, which is different than the English, OK?

Blessed are you if you can minister to others with a heart that feels, with a heart that hurts, with a heart that loves. And blessed are you if you can minister to others with a heart that serves, with a heart that sees the need.

So the idea of this coming from the heart led us to move the sign to over the heart, and that's what we've used it ever since. But when we teach workshops in other states, we let them know they have a right to create their own sign. This is just the one we use here in Minnesota.

[Interview time 14:53:15]
TP: And that sign started here, right? You and a group of people developed it?

BCS: Yes, we started that in 1998. That's when it began.

[Interview time 15:09:02]
TP: Do any other states use that sign?

BCS: I have no idea. Several states have asked us to come and give workshops, but we've been waiting for everything to work out, so I don't know if other places have adopted that sign or not. I don't know.

[Interview time 15:30:12]
TP: And you sign it (***the letter "H" on the shoulder***) with the palm up only, correct? Never with the palm down?

BCS: Yes always with the palm up, never down. Actually with the palm down, it's the name sign for my housemother from the school for the deaf, so I just could never use that sign. And signed it with the palm up, it looks like the same sign as help.

[Interview time 15:51:21]
TP: And you are currently involved with the Deaf Hospice Education Project, also known as DHEP. I know it started in 1999, but how did it begin? Can you tell us a little about that?

BCS: OK, let's see. Well, Nancy Meyers, who is hearing, was learning sign under Marty Barnum Latz. At the same time, her parents were in Hospice care. Nancy was losing her hearing, which is why she wanted to learn sign. Anyway, she just started thinking about how Deaf people would learn about Hospice and she decided to leave the program that she was studying with Marty to start up the Deaf Hospice program. She contacted one person in our community for help but that person just wasn't ready. So she sent Nancy to me. Nancy called me and we typed back and forth on the TTY for so long while I tried to figure out who this woman was and what she wanted. Remember, no video phones at the time. Nancy still has the long printout from that conversation. So we worked together to develop some materials, pamphlets, booklets. I did a lot of reading myself. I met a woman who had written a book on advanced directives, or what some people call living wills. I learned a lot from that book. Everything just seemed to come together. We initially taught on the two topics of living wills and Hospice.

[Interview time 17:45:05]
TP: You mentioned before that you had worked as a reverse interpreter. Where did you work doing that?

BCS: Yes, I was doing reverse interpreting – oh, goodness, way back - for my deaf friends. At that time we didn't have the interpreting service system set up. I could hear pretty well with my hearing aids, so I would go to the doctor's office and interpret for my friends – just a few of them. Until finally, the interpreting system became strong enough for me to step out and to encourage people to use that instead.

[Interview time 18:28:29]
TP: So I'm wondering about your reverse interpreting experience and how that work affected you. Did that have any influence on you becoming involved in working with Deaf Hospice? Were there experiences that you had that you wanted to use to help people that led to the work with Deaf Hospice?

BCS: Yes, because think of how left out Deaf people are of all the new information that's coming out. Things like advanced directives or Hospice. As these new issues came up, I knew I needed to educate the community about them. But I sure hope I have someone to follow me, though. I can't live forever!

[Interview time 19:14:05]
TP: Can you describe, briefly, what DHEP is doing right now? I know many people have heard of DHEP and some haven't. How do you explain to people what the project does and how it helps people?

BCS: OK. The job of DHEP is to educate Deaf people about Hospice – what it does for them, how it can help them. Then we teach about advanced directives – how to make sure they've recorded their wishes in writing so when they are unable to speak for themselves, the doctors have to follow their wishes for their end-of- life care. Also many Deaf people know nothing about it and when I learned about it, I felt I had to teach it to others.

[Interview time 20:06:03]
TP: What exactly is Hospice? What do you want people to know about that? How can you describe that?

BCS: Oh, Hospice is a wonderful system. They provide support, comfort – ummmm – support, comfort and care for spiritual and emotional needs. Care, comfort and support - that's what Hospice provides and I want Deaf people to know that.

[Interview time 20:44:10]
TP: When would a Deaf person need Hospice care?

BCS: Well, when a Deaf person is diagnosed with a terminal illness, let's say cancer, maybe they're in remission for a few months and then the cancer appears in a new location. The doctor's no longer able to work towards a cure. They may say the cancer has spread to the liver or another part of the body. The person has, I don't know, six months or less to live. Well, then the doctor assigns the person into Hospice care, which does require a doctor's signature. Then any Hospice organization can provide support for that person. Medicate also has to approve the service, so you have to be a little bit careful about what kind of organization you're working with. We have nine organizations in the Twin Cities providing Hospice care and all of them are able to serve Deaf people. They know the importance of having interpreters at all of the meetings with all of the families that are involved in Hospice care – and not just the patient.

[Interview time 21:58:24]
TP: So how did all these Hospice organizations learn about Deaf Hospice? Were you involved in that process?

BCS: Well, the credit really has to be given to Nancy Meyers. She is the one who contacted every one of these Hospice organizations and explained about the ADA (***Americans with Disabilities Act***) and what their legal obligation was to provide interpreters for all the meetings with the doctors or with the staff. So a lot of thanks goes to her for setting up such a strong program.

[Interview time 22:37:24]
TP: What's been your primary role with the Deaf Hospice program? I know Nancy Meyers does a lot, but you have been very involved too. I have heard your name associated with the project. What has your involvement in DHEP been?

BCS: OK. I am the workshop coordinator. If any organization is interested in a workshop, I'm the one who works with them to make sure that all happens. I have a couple of people who back me up because I usually need someone there with me to manage the overheads during the presentation. Yes, workshop coordination. Let's see – if a Deaf person goes into Hospice and I know about it, then I'll make sure the right people need to know. I'll tell the visitation coordinator, then she will contact the person to see if they want any additional visitors. If so, how often, which days, for how long on any given day. Then she can work out a schedule with the Hospice site so that the visits don't conflict with any of the care services that are being provided such as baths or meetings with nurses or social workers. Then she can manage the schedule with all the visitors. We just don't want them all going in on their own because it's very important to keep the number of visitors in check. Don't want too many people there at one time. So she works out a plan for each person – who goes when – but we always have to be respectful of the patient. We have to teach people they are quite ill, easily fatigued. Sometimes Deaf people think about it – they just go in and talk and talk, which, of course, is what we love to do. So we tell them, "Bring a magazine. Bring a movie. Something to do. And just remember that you are just there to offer comfort. Don't stay too long."

[Interview time 24:53:01]
TP: You mentioned that there are hearing services out in the community that are aware of DHEP. But I'm wondering if there are other organizations out in the community as well and which organizations those are that are also supportive of the Deaf Hospice program. So, for example, MADC (***Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens***), the Commission (***MNCDHH***), and so on.

BCS: Bread of Life Lutheran Church supports our organization. MADC also recognizes us. Minnesota Deaf Senior Citizens (***MDSC***) provides us with support when needed. Ummm, oh, DSA - Deaf Seniors of American – knows about us. They've asked us to provide workshops for them. I think I've done eight workshops so far.

[Interview time 25:45:19]
TP: How long have you been doing workshops?

BCS: Oh, I'd say I started in, let me think – 2001, yes, 2001, and I've been doing that every two years since.

[Interview time 26:03:11]
TP: Can you describe briefly how the DHEP is supported? For example, is it an entirely volunteer organization? Do you have funding?

BCS: No, we have no funding of our own. But we are under the Deaf Community Health Worker, DCHW, program. It's kind of our "mother" program. That's run by Anita Buel, so Anita's the one who gets the funding. Let's see, she's gotten some fairly big grants from Blue Cross Blue Shield and several other organizations. Then she allocates that money to the other programs as needed. But really, we have no specific funding. We are all volunteers. If DCHW has some money, they'll give us some. Not a lot, but some.

[Interview time 26:58:13]
TP: I know DHEP has been active for the last ten years or so. How is it going now? Are things going well? Do you foresee anything for its immediate future?

BCS: Yes. I'd say Deaf Hospice is well accepted, well understood. But we just don't have that many Deaf people in Hospice, particularly compared to the number of hearing people. But if a Deaf person does go into Hospice, the organization knows to contact Anita at DCHW and then she will let us know. Then we as a team will let the other people know or not, depending on the desires of the patient, of course.

[Interview time 27:54:22]
TP: Where would you like to see DHEP go from here? What are your hopes for the future?

BCS: I hope we keep going strong. And I hope I find someone to take my place. I can't live forever. I am hoping I can delegate the work to someone else. I have a girl mentoring with me now, so I'm hoping I can eventually hand it off to her. The DHEP team does already have monthly meetings. I think there are eight or nine of us that get together. We talk over what's happening, how things are going. Now, we're thinking about a new – well, there are seven or eight organizations under the DCHW umbrella. There's DHEP, HIV and AIDS education, PRISM – which educates on a variety of cancers, and there's also the Pink Deafies – that's related to breast cancer – I can't remember them all. I'm pretty sure there are seven – oh, yes – the MS – the multiple sclerosis group and there's an ALS (***amyotrophic lateral sclerosis***) group that tries to get together every two months or so. The DHEP group meets monthly but the ALS group meets every two months. Let me think – yeah, that's it.

[Interview time 28:53:07]
TP: [Clarifies the spelling being used by Barbara.]

[Interview time 29:31:10]
TP: I know you've been very active in health care through DHEP, but you also are very active in the church, particularly the ELDA, the Evangelical Lutheran Deaf Association. You are also involved with Bread of Life Lutheran Church. Tell us about your role with both ELDA and Bread of Life.

BCS: Bread of Life serves Deaf people. Our pastor is hearing but very fluent in sign language. She won't use her voice during the sermons. If a hearing person attends a service, she willing to give them a script, but she delivers the sermon in ASL only. We minister to Deaf people – no matter what church they belong to, they are welcome. Anyone is welcome – black, white, gay, lesbian - everybody is welcome to Bread of Life. The church has been going since 1956. And ELDA, the Evangelical Lutheran Deaf Association, meets every two years. Their offices are in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The head of the ELDA is a Deaf minister, one of the first Deaf ministers – the Reverend Beth Lockard. She is the director of the organization and then we have a national conference every two years.

[Interview time 31:19:01]
TP: So Bread of Life is based here in the Twin Cities, right? And ELDA is a national organization. What is the primary mission of the ELDA?

BCS: Well, we come together as Christian people to encourage each other and – oh, have a good time together. You know Deaf people always love to get together. There are workshops, though, about religion – really all kinds of topics. It's such a wonderful organization.

[Interview time 32:07:24]

TP: Where are the ELDA meetings? They're every two years, right? Always in the same place, or around the country?

BCS: Yes, yes, yes. We've met in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. We've met in Pennsylvania two or three times. In Wisconsin once, Minnesota once – I think that's about it. Mostly in the northern part of the U.S.

[Interview time 32:36:04]
TP: So, ELDA is a place for Deaf Lutherans to come together. Do you also do volunteer or advocacy work?

BCS: Well, if the ELDA was holding a meeting here in Minnesota, you could be assured that Bread of Life people would be very involved in that process. We did that two years ago. We helped with the planning, figuring out lodging, that sort of thing. Of course, we would help out the organization if they wanted us to as well in some other capacity. We could do that. That would be fine.

[Interview time 33:22:36]
TP: Are there any special programs that either ELDA or Bread of Life have for the community?

BCS: No, not really. What do you mean by special programs?

[Interview time 33:32:06]
TP: I mean, of course, you have the church programs, activities and services. But I'm wondering if there are any special programs where you do outreach to the community or work directly to help the community?

BCS: Well, the church has a picnic that's open to anyone. They do sponsor our workshops if we would like to have them at the church.

[Interview time 34:04:18]
TP: What kind of workshops?

BCS: Well, we just had a workshop on Hospice and advanced directives. I think that's about it.

[Interview time 34:22:13]
TP: What is your role with Bread of Life Lutheran Church?

BCS: Well, for fifty-five years I was a member of the Board. Then our new pastor thought it might be time for me to leave and I agree. So I resigned my official Board position. I'm not as much involved in the church's work, but I am on the visitation team and the outreach committee - work that is done outside the church. Those are the things I'm currently involved in. And I still go to church every Sunday, of course. I'm trying to let the young people take over. Fifty-five years is too long. That's what the pastor said and I agree.

[Interview time 35:19:15]
TP: What are you doing now to get young people involved?

BCS: Well, that's the pastor's job, not really mine.

[Interview time 35:32:16]
TP: You said you were on the board of Bread of Life Church for fifty-five years? How have you seen things change in the church and the community? That's quite a long time. What changes have you seen in that amount of time?

BCS: Well, it's always been a place for Deaf people to come together – to feel comfortable. Maybe they're looking for some church and they hear about Bread of Life. Then they meet us and they meet each other. Right now we have a lot of hearing people coming to the church. They might be learning sign language so we offer them the opportunity. They learn our signs through attending church.

[Interview time 36:23:16]
TP: How does that compare to fifty-five years ago? How would you describe what it was like at that time? Was it different or the same?

BCS: Hmmm – that was a long time ago and it was very different. Back then, the pastors basically did everything for the church. They were in charge of everything and the Deaf people just were there. We had a Ladies Aid and a seniors group, but the current pastor – oh, she's delegating a lot more of the work to us. We have a lot of committees – I think there are nine committees that work to take care of the church. She knows Deaf people can take care of things themselves. In the past, hearing people took care of us and now we take of ourselves.

[Interview time 37:08:28]
TP: You said that in the past, the pastor basically did everything for you, that you didn't have a lot of responsibilities as a congregation, but that has changed quite a bit. When and how did that change?

BCS: I guess I would say two years ago, when our current pastor came. She really wanted us to align better with the ELCA rules and their structure so our Deaf church would be a lot more like the others. She's gone to Seminary and she wanted the Deaf community to be independent, but also a really strong church.

[Interview time 37:56:29]
TP: And you said the pastor wanted to align more closely with the ELCA rules. Is that related to the ELDA or not?

BCS: No. The ELCA is the Evangelical Lutheran Church Association. That's our mother church. So the ELDA, Bread of Life, and other churches are under the auspices of the ELCA. That's where the bishops are and so forth.

[Interview time 38:22:06]
TP: You've been active with DHEP, with Bread of Life, and ELDA. You said before that you've given DHEP workshops at Bread of Life and other places. Is there a relationship between the church and DHEP? For example, is the church a supporter of that organization?

BCS: Do you mean financial support? Or general support?

[Interview time 38:51:27]
TP: Volunteers?

BCS: I mean, if we want to give a workshop at the church, they always support that. But in terms of ongoing support, no. If we need something, we can ask for it. We did try to rent office space for the DCHS program but it cost too much, so we had to drop that plan. We have a room there, but really, it just cost too much. There's no regular funding for the programs, you know.

[Interview time 39:28:02]
TP: So, even though the pastor said that fifty-five years is a long time to serve on the Board, you still want to be involved with the church in other ways, right?

BCS: Oh yes, as much as I can. Especially helping people, doing the visitation work. That's where we go visit the people who are members of the church but can't come to service. We make sure they get the newsletter, the offering envelopes, and just visit with them. For the outreach committee, we try to help people in need. For example, last year we gave hats and scarves and mittens to children who needed them. We also gave toys to the children's home. Now it doesn't have to be Deaf children that are served. We serve Deaf and hearing organizations – especially children like we did last year.

[Interview time 40:25:01]
TP: So children are one of your areas of focus? Children and children's programs?

BCS: Yes, mostly children. Right now we're thinking about how we can help some children in South America. Our pastor's daughter is teaching and helping there for a year, so this fall we plan to have a collection drive where we can get everything that they might need – I don't know – school supplies, clothes, what have you. We'll find out more about that soon.

[Interview time 50:56:19]
TP: Doesn't matter whether they are hearing or Deaf children? You just want to support the children?

BCS: And we volunteered at Feed my Starving Children. Seven of us went to fill bags of food for children in need. We help hearing people all the time, not just Deaf people.

[Interview time 41:21:08]
TP: So, in the future, what is your hope for the church? What would you like to see happen?

BCS: Well, so many churches today are closing or having to merge. We got very, very concerned recently. It looked like we were going to have to close, but at the last minute, God blessed us. We got a gift of $180,000 from a Deaf member who died. That helped a lot. We invested $150,000 and then we used the remaining funds to do some work on the church and the grounds. But we still don't have enough to ease all our concerns. It's still a question whether or not Bread of Life will remain. We hope and pray it will.

[Interview time 42:06:17]

TP: That's something you are working on for the future, right?

BCS: Yes. Right now, yes.

[Interview time 42:14:04]
[Pause in interview.]

[Interview time 42:52:10]
TP: I'd like to go back to DHEP. You were telling me about the trainings. What does that involve?

BCS: I was trained under both Allina and Health Partners. Technically I wasn't supposed to be able to be trained under two organizations, but it just happened that way. In reality, any Deaf person who wants to be a Hospice visitor has to have training first. It's an eight-week program. That organization paid for interpreting services for that eight-week training. I took that to be qualified as a Hospice visitor and a member of Hospice.

[Interview time 43:45:12]
TP: So, before that training program, did you already have Hospice volunteers?

BCS: Oh yes, there was me. Let's see, there was Lorna Rasmussen, who has since died. Bertha Scofield is still alive and then, later, Anita and others. We have about four or five people who want to take the training but there's no funding available for them and it costs money for those interpreting services. They're still members of the Hospice team. They come to our monthly meetings to demonstrate their continued commitment to the process and to becoming a Hospice worker. So we're working hard to find classes for them.

[Interview time 44:32:27]
TP: And with the Hospice program, did you take that training right away or was it something later in your involvement?

BCS: It came later. The program was so new, so young. Then, later, we found out about all the requirements and that's when we went to take the training. So no, it wasn't right away at all.

[Interview time 45:01:00]
TP: But even at the beginning, you were working with Hospice, going to visit people?

BCS: I can't remember exactly what year we started visiting people, but we started teaching and giving workshops back in 1999 – 2000 – 2001. But in terms of visiting people, I have all my files on Hospice since the very beginning. I can look at those and try record the dates of everything we did. I certainly could let you know.

[Interview time 45:42:01]
TP: So now I'm wondering, after all these years with the Hospice program, what is one of the toughest challenges you've had – either providing the help or with the program and people involved? What's been the toughest experience?

BCS: Well, some people who are in Hospice don't want any visitors and that just breaks my heart because I would like to be there - to offer comfort. But some people do not want it, and you have to respect their wishes. So what we do now is we give them a booklet on Hospice that was created by the Minnesota Hospice organization. We always have a stack of them on hand, so if someone is admitted into Hospice care, we give them one of the books. If they want visitors, that's fine. If they don't, we respect that as well. But it does break my heart. People have a right to their preference. Some people are just very private and we have to respect that.

[Interview time 46:49:04]

TP: Conversely, what is one of the best experiences you've had while working with DHEP?

BCS: Being recognized for my work! Getting that Schrieber Rose pin at the NAD (***National Association of the Deaf***) conference. My first award was back in 1997, from MADC. I think – yes, MADC. That was the Woman of the Year award. Oh I have a whole pile of them – just too many to mention, too many.

[Interview time 47:28:07]

TP: You've gotten two awards recently that I want to mention. The first is the Met Life Foundation's Older Volunteers Enrich America Award in 2008. How did you get that award?

BCS: Well, that was a big surprise. Nancy Meyers, and, I think, Marty and I, flew out to get that award. We gave a speech. It was very, very inspiring. Then we got back and my local Coon Rapids newspaper heard about it. They came out to do an interview and they put that in the paper, too. I still have the article. It's a beautiful glass award.

[Interview time 48:23:22]

TP: Where did you go to receive that award?

BCS: In Missouri.

[Interview time 48:31:04]

TP: Wonderful. Secondly, you got a very prestigious award from the National Association of the Deaf or NAD. You got their Golden Rose Award. That was two years – no was just last year! 2010. How did you get that award?

BCS: When I first heard I was going to get the award, I knew I couldn't afford to go out to the conference, which was in Washington D.C. So I tried to see if someone from here could go and pick it up for me and bring it back. But they refused to let me do that. They said I had to go. When I said I didn't have the money, they took up a collection here and paid for my plane fare to get the award. I got it from a Deaf man – Schreiber? It's a beautiful rose pin, gold, very pretty. I was touched. Nice.

[Interview time 49:31:04]

TP: Very nice. You received the award from (***signing "named for")*** Fred Schreiber, correct? Who took up that collection for you?

BCS: Oh dear, I can't remember. I think altogether, five or six people donated the funds. I know Cynthia Weitzel started it though. I'm so thankful.

[Interview time 49:57:03]
TP: So, how did you feel about that?

BCS: About the award?

[Interview time 50:01:05]
TP: And the experience - the whole thing?

BCS: I was thrilled, honored. "What? Me? Again? What did I do?" So many times I feel that way - "What did I do?"

[Interview time 50:16:13]
TP: Obviously, you've worked as an advocate for a long time now. It seems almost all your life. So how do you feel in general about advocacy? Because people often say you won't say no!

BCS: I want to see this work and this kind of support continue. I had to learn to teach other people how to be assertive, to take a leadership role. I want the program to stay alive. So many people just want to sit back and have us do things for them. I know a lot of people who do that. It can be very difficult to motivate them.

[Interview time 51:10:15]
TP: How do you encourage people to become involved?

BCS: First I ask if they want to help and, if they are reluctant, I try to explain what's involved – that it's easy – and that leads them to becoming involved. Often when I ask people, they're just so fearful. They're unsure. I tell them to come and see what it's all about and then they inevitably fall in love with the work.

[Interview time 51:40:00]
TP: If people seem fearful or resistant in becoming involved in volunteering or advocacy work, how do you convince them to be involved? What's your secret?

BCS: Be good to them. Be their friend. And I do just tell them, come and see for yourself what it's all about. Then I answer any questions they have. And I try to get them to help out with things like registration tables at a workshop. After a while, I'll invite them to come and sit in on a meeting of the Hospice team, again, just to see. And that usually does it. We now have about eight or nine people on the team for Hospice. In terms of active members, there's four or five of us. The others are not as active because they are new and we can't afford the cost of interpreters for their training. It's very expensive.

[Interview time 52:41:00]
TP: Once you've convinced people to be involved, how do you keep them involved?

BCS: I don't have to. They just fall in love with the program. And they are people with kind hearts anyway. They see the need; they want to be involved. But that was in their hearts in the first place. They may not have known they could do it until they were recruited but once they come in, they stay.

[Interview time 53:12:18]
TP: For those young people you hope will replace you - as you said, you can't continue forever – what advice do you want to share with them?

BCS: To become a member of the Hospice team, you have to come to the regular meetings - come monthly. That shows us your interest and your desire to be involved. From there, we can figure out what to do next. There is that young woman that I mentioned. She asked me to mentor her so I'm doing that. Unfortunately she's not from the school for the deaf and that can sometimes put people off, but she wants to try just to see what happens. So many people worry. They're afraid to get involved and I just try to assure them, "It's OK. It's going to be all right."

[Interview time 54:06:00]
TP: Do you have any other advice you want to share with people about why it's important to be involved, be active – not just sit back and expect other people to do things for you?

BCS: Well, we need to take care of our own. If you want the Deaf community to be strong, to be healthy, you have to help. You can't just leave things sitting there waiting for hearing people to come around and take everything over. That time has passed. We now have a duty to each other. It's our turn now.

[Interview time 54:44:23]
TP: Wonderful. I want to thank you very much for your time. We appreciated talking with you today. Thank you again.

BCS: You're welcome. I appreciate being able to share my stories.