

OREGON HEALTH & SCIENCE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW

WITH

Karen Peterson, M.A.

Interview conducted May 16, 2014

by

Maija Anderson, M.A.

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Narrator: Karen Peterson
Interviewer: Maija Anderson
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Transcribed by: Teresa Bergen

[Begin Track One.]

Anderson: All right. My name is Maija Anderson and I'm interviewing Karen Peterson for the OHSU Oral History Program. It is May 16th, is that right? 2014.

Peterson: It is.

Anderson: And we are in the BICC Building at OHSU. Hi, Karen.

Peterson: Hi, Maija.

Anderson: I want to just start the interview by asking about your childhood and family upbringing. You are from St. John's born and raised, is that right?

Peterson: I am.

Anderson: Okay.

Peterson: In fact, I was born September 13, 1948. I was... I should say, born and raised in St. Johns, but my mother at the time was working in Vancouver, Washington, at a hospital, and so my birth actually happened there. But I was born shortly after World War II ended. And it was an interesting time because I think that parents were more distraught at that period of time. My dad had been in the war, had fought in the Philippines and actually told a story about killing a man who was about his age... very young. But he didn't talk much about the war, other than that. We just knew that he had fought in the war in the Philippines. He had a sword, and he had... from this man that he killed. So that was in the closet. He had lots of medals and the Japanese flag that he had taken off of the man, too.

But for us, my brother, my sister and I, it was a really carefree childhood. We rode bikes, played with our wagons and our roller skates. We had an empty field down at the end of the block and we rolled around in the grass and built forts and pushed tires around and hopscotched and pogo sticked and all the fun things that kids do, and didn't think much about the fact that maybe Mom and Dad had some trauma in their lives over that. My mother had lost a brother when he was on his way back from the war. He had survived the war but... so we weren't aware of that. We were really carefree.

I was raised in a very large family. We had lots of cousins around. My father had also been born in St. Johns. And I went to the same grade school that he went to. I went to the same high school that he went to. The Carnegie Library had been built in St. Johns in 1913. It opened in 1913. It was a real hangout for me and my brother and my sister and all of our friends.

St. Johns was a place where working families lived. There was everything from doctors and lawyers to ship builders, to men who worked in the cooperage and in logging. So it felt very safe. We didn't have any inclination that there could be anything to be afraid of. I remember Mom saying, "Don't talk to strangers." And, "Don't take candy from strangers." But other than that, we didn't have any fear. And, like I said, it was really, really carefree.

My dad had bought a house around the block from my grandparents, his mom and dad, and I lived there my entire life, except for two years when my dad decided to work in Eugene at a place called Acme Fast Freight. Don't laugh. That's kind of like an old cartoon. And then we just came back to the same house...so born and raised right there, and with Grandma and Grandpa around the block.

And I was entirely in love with my grandmother. I would have moved in with her if my parents had let me. But they wouldn't let me. I would rather be there than anywhere.

And my grandmother had come out from Kentucky when she was just a child at the turn of the century. And her grandparents were plantation owners. They grew tobacco and race horses. So I grew up listening to Grandma tell stories about the slaves...the house slaves...the woman who washed her clothes and the house slaves. And my grandfather was infamous in the region. And they would say about him that he was a good man because he treated his slaves as well as he treated his racehorses. Kind of a sad story but also my grandmother was not racist at all. She had friends that I could tell... she had friends that were of every ilk. But she loved telling those stories. The washerwoman had twelve children and she could repeat the names back to us. I wish I could remember those now or I wish I'd done a better oral history with her.

My dad being born in St. Johns stayed in St. Johns his entire life except for those two years in Eugene. So it was a really stable childhood.

My mom had come out from Bemidji, Minnesota. She was a farm girl and raised on a sustainable farm. They baked their own bread. They made their own sauerkraut. Her dad not only farmed, but he had his own delivery truck and he'd pick up milk and whatever was going to be sold in town for the farmers around town. And he'd take those in and sell them, and then he'd get a list from the people who were sending things in. And sometimes he'd buy fabric for the women to make clothes for their kids. And then she came out...she went to nursing school at the University of Minnesota and even worked with Sister Kenny when Sister Kenny was developing treatment for polio using hot packs and massage and that kind of thing.

And when she graduated from school... from the university... she came out to Portland. And Mom and Dad met shortly after the war was over. Dad was back. Mom and Dad were standing in a liquor store line and met one another and were together for the rest of their lives.

Anderson: That's a great way to meet.

Peterson: It was a great way to meet.

Anderson: Your mom was a nurse. And remind me what your dad did.

Peterson: My dad... it's really interesting because Dad, having grown up in St. Johns was a... it was a small town then. Very, very small. Like I said, you had everything from doctors and lawyers to coopers and loggers. And Dad started out from high school working at the Union Pacific Railroad. And he would... I don't know what the name... the title of this kind of worker was, but he would record the numbers of the cars. And he could remember numbers that were like twenty numbers long. He just had a mind for it.

And then he went to the war. And when he came back, he worked a little while for the Union Pacific. But then, I think he got restless. We never really knew... but he tried all sorts of things. He sold vinyl windows and screen doors and siding, which he hated, because he would talk old people into siding their house and putting new windows in and felt very guilty about that and hated that. He worked for a company called Balfor Guthrie and I don't know what that was. But he didn't like that. I think that was kind of a sales thing, too. And then he worked for Acme Fast Freight. And we were down in Eugene for a couple of years and he didn't like that.

When he came back, he tried longshoring. He kind of stayed with that. Unfortunately, Dad was killed in a car accident when he was only 52 years old. It was tragic. Our family was devastated by Dad dying. He was healthy, he was young. You know, 52, for me, now, at 65, is quite young. And I think in this day and age it's really a young age to die. He loved his family. We fished, we hunted, we went to the drive-in theater. Weekends we were camping and out in the boat. We always had a boat. So to lose Dad was like losing this fun guy. He was a great jitterbugger. He loved to bowl. He loved to drink. We've got lots of pictures of him with guns and ducks and, you know, big salmon, huge salmon. So he was great. It was a real loss.

Another thing about my childhood which was... affected me, and has affected me for the rest of my life... is I contracted polio when I was just five years old. It was the year before the vaccine was distributed in the schools. After that, we'd line up in the schools and get our vaccinations. But I ended up getting polio. No one else in my family did, fortunately. My brother, my sister... And it was, of course, infantile paralysis, so Mom and Dad weren't affected.

But Mom was a nurse. I woke up one morning. I was in kindergarten. And we would always go out to the table. Even though Mom was a nurse, we didn't realize she was a working mom because she worked at night. She got home before we left for school to fix us breakfast and when we got home from school, she was there. Yeah. And she sacrificed a lot, too, because she took summers off, so that we really never thought of her as a working mom.

But in the morning, when I woke up... we always headed to the table to eat. And my sister and my brother were out there and Mom kept calling to me. I could hear her calling to me. And I just felt so tired. I was just exhausted. And eventually, you know, she was kind of threatening me, "I'm going to come in there and get you," or, "I'll switch you," or whatever, you know.

And I made it out to the table. And I said, "I can't pick my spoon up." And I was just a little girl. I was really tiny when I was little. When I started to walk, I could walk under tables, I was so tiny.

And Mom knew immediately, because of course there was an epidemic at the time. She knew right away and called our family doctor, Dr. Peasley. And he came over and he said, "Yep, she's got it."

And my mother immediately called Dad at work. They drove me out to Isolation Hospital, which is not in existence anymore.

Anderson: Where was that?

Peterson: You know, I don't know. I think it was in Southeast Portland. There was all sorts of communicable diseases in the same hospital. I laid next to a guy who I believe had tuberculosis. He had a bottle that, you know, bubbled and you know, the tubes going down into his chest. And I think all sorts of other kinds of things as well as polio victims. There were lots of teenagers. It hit teenagers really strongly. And they had to just drop me off there. I had to be isolated.

And Mom said it was really heartbreaking because as they were leading me down the hallway I turned around and said, "Mom, go home and put your uniform on." And she said she just... she went out in the car and just was devastated.

And I ended up in the hospital for months and months. And finally ended up in an iron lung. And I can remember to this day laying in the iron lung. Because you're in a tube with rubber all around you. And your view on the world is... you're looking up at a mirror. And all you can see is what you can see in the mirror. And I can remember being terrified. But 24 hours later, I started getting better, and stayed in the hospital for a long time. They took me out of the iron lung and I had to stay in the hospital for a long time. I spent Christmases, Thanksgivings... one Christmas, one Thanksgiving, I should say. It seemed like a lifetime. I was away from my family and it was really hard at five years old.

But I also was a hell raiser. I can remember at Thanksgiving spinning my tray with peas and mashed potatoes and turkey on it. And eventually all the food was flying off. And I got in big trouble for that. And we'd race down the hall in our wheelchairs. And so there was fun.

There was more fun for me, I think. I mean, it was hard, because I was sick. But my brother and sister would sit in the hallway and wait while Mom and Dad visited with me. So that was, you know, devastating, but I've lived with it. They never let me be "crippled." They had to ask for help, financial help, to cover the expenses. But they made me eat with my right hand. They made me brush my hair with my right hand.

Eventually, the only thing that it left a disability was my deltoid, my right deltoid, which it... just... was atrophied. And I ended up having a couple of surgeries, and had a big cast on. And that was in my teenage years when I was in high school. And of course, you know, you're worried about what you look like and do boys like me. So that was really hard, too. And having a brace on made me different than everybody else in grade school. But I made it through.

Anderson: Wow. So looking back from where you are now, certainly there seem to be things like your polio experience and your mother being a nurse. And I know she really hoped you would become a nurse, too.

Peterson: Yes.

Anderson: We've talked about that. Are there other things that you look back on now and you can think that person or that experience really influenced me to do what I did later in life?

Peterson: Well, like you said, my mother... my mother was a really big influence on me, because her father did not want her to go to college. Those were the days when women struggled to go to college. It was hard to get into school, it was hard to stay in school and then it was hard to have a career. And she came from the back woods, you know. Went to college and became assistant director of nurses at St. Vincent Hospital. And worked there most of her career, over forty years.

So of course that was... I came from a strong woman. Even my dad would... because my dad was more of what you'd call working class or blue collar, and Mom was college educated... there was some resentment there. And he'd say, at home, "You're not my boss. Because you're a boss at work, but you're not a boss at home." So I watched that kind of dynamic in the house. So, she was huge.

My grandmother, too, because she was very sweet and very kind. And then other than that, poets, writers, philosophers, those were the people that I really was influenced by. I was also influenced by teachers in high school, particularly in art and in music and in English. I hated history. Because it was, well it was right after the war. So you can imagine what history was like at that time.

Anderson: So it was military history.

Peterson: It was military history. And it was built, it was... books were written... textbooks were written to build nationalism and patriotism. We'd been through a devastating war. Two world wars and other wars as well. So it was all dates, you know, names of generals and corporals and what happened in the war. Nothing about social history. So I wasn't influenced by that. It's a wonder I ever went into history.

Anderson: So what was, after you finished high school, what was your life path after that?

Peterson: Well. I'll be candid here. In my junior and senior year, I was becoming pretty disillusioned with where the United States was going. The Cold War was on... full swing. The Vietnam War...

Anderson: This was in the mid--

Peterson: Sixties. Yeah. And racism was a big thing... civil rights... And I was confused about where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do. It didn't seem like going to school made it... I mean, they were killing people at Kent State for protesting. And my mother knew what she wanted to do when she was five years old. And she would say that to us all the time. And I never knew what I wanted to do. I played music. I did art. I danced. But I just couldn't figure out what I wanted to do.

So right after high school, I kind of wandered around. I did a lot of reading. I did a lot of learning. I did a lot of protesting. Met a lot of people. Traveled up and down the

west coast. Gardened. I learned about organic gardening and I would have wonderful, wonderful gardens. I experimented with LSD and marijuana. It was the thing to do at that time. It actually wasn't the thing to do. It was kind of like the beginning of the thing to do. And I always considered myself not a party person but someone on a spiritual quest. Somebody on a quest for the understanding of what we're doing here.

And so I spent the early years doing that kind of thing. Living rurally. Living in town. Traveling. Reading, writing, that kind of thing.

Anderson: And what sort of, what sort of communities did you have as you were traveling and learning? Who was your sort of support system at that time?

Peterson: Definitely not Mom and Dad. They were pretty upset with me because they had plans for us. And because I'd had polio, I think they thought that I would get married and somebody would take care of me. Even though I was really smart... I got really good grades in school... my brother was smarter. My brother was brilliant and he had scholarships to colleges. And so it wasn't my family who was my support group at that time, which was really unusual for me because like I said, I had a big family, very supportive.

It was basically people around my age who were wondering about the same kinds of things. Kids from North Portland got shipped off to the Vietnam War. There were friends of mine who shot their toes off so they wouldn't have to go. Friends of mine who bled into their urine. Friends of mine who went up to Canada. It was really kind of a dropped out kind of crowd. But good people. Like I said, I wasn't a partier. A little later, I think... people who kind of shunned consumerism, materialism... started thinking about environmentalism... peace marches and things like that... got to be more, you know, drugs were a part of their party scene. For us it was more, "what are we doing here and what are we supposed to be doing here, and what is this trip all about?"

Anderson: So, and then tell me when your children and your family came along. Did you stop searching at a certain point, or did you—what happened?

Peterson: I never stopped searching. In fact, I feel like I'm still searching. I don't have answers. I'm a person who says I have more questions than I have answers.

Anderson: I've always liked it when you said that.

Peterson: Yeah.

Anderson: Whenever something sort of, if we were talking with somebody in the archives and they get opinionated about something, you often say, "Well, I'm somebody who has more questions than answers." And I always really like the way that—

Peterson: Thank you. Thank you. And I still feel that. That's how I run my life. And I'm not afraid of chaos. And I don't need answers. I just need to always be asking questions. So interestingly enough, I met the man, that I married in 1969, in high school.

Anderson: Okay.

Peterson: And his name was Jack. And we hung out together until we got married when we were 21. So we were 16 when we met and 21 when we married. We didn't think a whole lot about getting married. But we felt a lot of pressure from outside. Family and churchgoers. You know, "How can you be living together?" At that time, that wasn't acceptable. I mean, being gay wasn't acceptable. Being black wasn't okay. Being Hispanic in the United States wasn't okay. And living together when you're not married and having children is really not okay especially when you come from a family that everybody knows. Being born and raised in St. Johns, and my dad being born in St. Johns, you got away with nothing. If you didn't tell your parents something, somebody else would.

So Jack and I met in high school and really liked each other. I think we were on the same quest right from the beginning. He was actually the one who led me into some of the reading I was doing. He introduced me to Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and Buffy Sainte-Marie and all the people who were singing about social injustice; looking at Cesar Chavez and what he was doing; Martin Luther King... He was much more adept at that. And perhaps it was because he was at Jefferson High School, which was a mostly black school, and still is, I think, mostly populated by black people. I don't know. It's in the black neighborhood. And it's kind of a charter school, and population's changing. I can't speak to that with any authority. But I think because maybe there was more protest going on there and then... and the people he was hanging out with were thinking in that vein. So we just fell in together. And we stayed together during those years between high school and the time that we got married.

And then Hannah came along in 1972, three years after we got married. And we wanted her really bad. She was very welcome. That was before... when Lamaze was pretty new. Natural birth was pretty new. And I had to really struggle not to have an episiotomy, not to have an epidural, not to receive Pitocin to speed up my labor. And then, they didn't leave the babies in the rooms with their mothers, so I had to fight to keep Hannah in the room. And they kept us there for three days. And so, brought her home.

And then Jesse was born at home. We were living out on the edge of the Mount Hood National Forest and I had a naturopath and a midwife and he was delivered out in the woods. We had horses and donkeys and chickens. We actually lived in places where most people take vacations. We moved out to this Mount Hood National Forest area; we lived up on Whidbey Island for about eight and a half years; we lived in the Columbia River Gorge for another eight and a half years; and then moved back into Portland once Hannah started college and Jesse was a senior in high school.

And had a terrific, terrific family. Jack was a stone mason and had his own business. And then he went to work for Skamania County, when we lived out in the Gorge, as the noxious weed control officer.

And then Hannah, like me, has gone to school and gone to school and gone to school. She started out at Lewis & Clark College and went to Portland State and then went to East West College of the Healing Arts and is now a massage therapist.

And Jesse is a trained chef. He, as well, has gone to school and gone to school... went to Portland Community College, Portland State, and then the Culinary Institute here

in Portland. And he started out as a skateboarder, and he was a sponsored snowboarder and jumped off mountains and out of helicopters...scared me half to death. I never actually saw him physically snowboarding. I never wanted to. But now he cooks where he wants to so that he can pursue his dream. Never married; he's forty years old and I don't know if he ever will. He likes to pick up and... pick up his backpack and his snowboard and head off to wherever he wants to go. And Hannah is married and has two children, Ancel and Enora.

Anderson: So, why did you decide to go to college and then grad school? And when did you start thinking about that? Was it something you always wanted and thought well, after my kids are grown, it will be my turn? Or was it something that you just thought about—

Peterson: I've always been an active learner and have enjoyed learning, and realized that there were things that I just actually couldn't learn on my own. I think... Hannah was in college. Jesse was a senior in high school. Jack was the noxious weed control officer, like I said... very, very busy and had his own masonry business, which he was running at the same time. He was developing friends and colleagues outside of the home. He wasn't willing to bring me into that circle and I realized that there was a certain amount of embarrassment about me because I'd been a stay-at-home mom. But that was the decision that we'd made together and I think that I felt pretty on the outside. And because he had such a busy life, and such a busy social life outside of the home, I had a lot of free time on my hands.

And not long after I started thinking about going to school, we moved into Portland. So I started at Mount Hood Community College because, again, I didn't know what I wanted to do, what I wanted to be. I thought maybe a horticulturalist or a nurseryman because I loved gardening. I'd continued to have gardens and grow in my knowledge about how to be organic and eat organic and learning about the health aspects of it.

But once I got there, I kind of changed my mind and I thought maybe I wanted to be an anthropologist... a social anthropologist because, like I said, I'd always been a seeker. And I thought maybe looking at people... that way might be helpful.

And so I started taking anthropology classes and then also started taking some history classes. And it was like a light went on; it was like, "oh my God, this is what I want to be doing. This is what I wanted to be learning."

And Mount Hood Community College at that time had, I think, the largest number of PhD history professors in community colleges in the United States. Some of the best teachers that I've ever had were at Mount Hood Community College and they just turned me on; totally turned me on. It had nothing to do with war. War was peripheral. War was what happened. War was what people made. But people were living lives, you know. They were having children. They were struggling. They were dying. There were diseases. I mean, it was just like, I was just in heaven.

And once I finished two years at Mount Hood Community College, I moved on to Portland State and stayed there six years because I couldn't stop going to school. And I took every history class I could possibly take, from ancient history to current events; what was going on in the world today. And I wanted to take German, because I knew that

was one language that was very useful if you were going to be a historian or if you were going to be a history teacher, just because of what things were written and what people were looking at, at the time. That and Latin.

And so I had a professor who was my counselor. And he said, "You're not taking German." And I was a little confused by that. And he said, "You're taking Spanish." And I'm like, that's kind of weird. I don't want to take Spanish. And he was German. And in his thick German accent, he said, "You're taking Spanish." And fell in love with the language. Because I realized that language was a conduit to culture. It, you know, it has to do with music; it has to do with science; it has to do with literature; it has to do with everything... medicine... whatever.

Anderson: Why did he want you to take Spanish?

Peterson: Because he said the only place you'll ever use German is if you have German speaking people at home. He said the population one day will be probably more than half Spanish speaking people in the United States. And he said this will serve you in your life if you learn Spanish.

Anderson: Interesting.

Peterson: Yeah.

Anderson: It almost sounds to me like the discipline of history kind of had to catch up to your interests before you really could dig into it. Because what occurs to me is when you said you hated history in high school, social history at that time, it really wasn't done, or there wasn't much of it going on.

Peterson: No.

Anderson: And it really didn't start to blossom until, I always think of *The People's History of the United States* and things like that.

Peterson: Yeah. Howard Zinn. And there were a lot of people in Portland... lot of the professors at Portland State who were writing radical history. And so I was just in my heyday. It was just the best thing ever.

And the first... my first year there in taking Spanish, like I said, I fell in love with the language. And therefore with the... I thought, with the culture... I thought, I'm going to really like... I just love this language, I'm sure I'm going to like it.

So I applied for a study abroad. And I went to Mexico and stayed in Querétaro, which is about two and a half hours north of Mexico City. And there I studied Spanish and Latin American history... which I had also done at Portland State. I forgot to say, I'd also studied Latin American history.

But the best part of being in Mexico was I had an opportunity to travel with the curator of the Museum of Art of Querétaro. She was Marguerite Magdalena. Another person who influenced me greatly, but more in my later life. She had had polio and was

in braces, but she traveled worldwide. And in high school, she was the top student in Mexico in the entire country.

And so we studied the murals in Mexico, and traveled extensively. I don't think there's a state we didn't go into.

You were talking about being... or I remember the question you had given me about being a nontraditional student—

Anderson: I wanted to know how did that seem at the time? And I think now in education there's more sort of outreach to nontraditional students, and more sort of understanding of how their experiences and what they bring to the table differ from somebody who's just fresh out of high school and going to college.

Peterson: Yeah.

Anderson: How did you experience that?

Peterson: Well, the first two colleges I went to, Mount Hood Community and Portland State, because a community college often serves nontraditional students, whether they're helping people get their GRE, retraining for jobs, people finishing their degrees, women who have empty nest syndrome and so they're taking flower arranging, you know, different things like that. So I wasn't as out of place there except that I was not in a job training program. I wasn't in the finishing my degree program. I didn't have empty nest syndrome. I wasn't looking just for something to do. I really wanted to learn. And I wanted to start from the beginning.

So I was in school at Mount Hood Community College and Portland State with undergraduates -- people right out of high school... large portion of them. That wasn't easy. Oftentimes students would look to me kind of like their mother, especially when we were doing group study and projects. And as soon as we had, you know, got in our groups, all faces would turn towards me like, "okay, you're leading the group, right?" So it took a lot of effort on my part to say, "no, I'm also... I'm just like you. I'm just learning, too." And feeling a little out of place, you know. Feeling like this is an odd place for me to be.

But the oddest place was being in Mexico, because there were no older students. Once you finished high school and you go to college, that's it. And I was told that over and over again.

I stayed with a family. The mother of the household was my age. So it was really odd, because she was going to the store, she was cooking dinner, she was washing clothes, she was doing yard work and I was going off to school...

[End Track 1. Begin Track 2.]

Peterson: --just like her children were doing. She thought it was pretty strange, but she was very nice to me. So that was a little bit more difficult.

After Mexico, I went back to Portland State and stayed there. I stayed there six years. I wanted to learn about history but I also took linguistics. I also took the TESL

certification program. I just... I got a certificate in Latin American Studies. I had a certificate in Spanish. I just wanted to learn. I just wanted to keep learning.

And then, the last college, well, not the last college, the next college I went to was Florida State. And we'll probably talk about that later with archival studies.

Anderson: Were you also employed during part of this time? Or were you a full time student?

Peterson: I was a full time student. But once I got to Portland State, I was worried about sitting on my behind for that many hours and then going home and sitting and doing homework. So I thought, you know, there's a job out there for me where I could move and it turned out to be housekeeping. Worst job ever. It was so hard! And I worked for a company that serviced the wealthy in Portland: the presidents of universities, lawyers, doctors...

Anderson: Oh, that's right. You told me about cleaning a VIP person's house.

Peterson: Yes. Yes. And they didn't look at me with any kindness. It's funny. I got... it was great discrimination. Especially being, I think, an older woman. I wasn't old then. I was in my forties. I wasn't at all old. But it was just like, "You're my housekeeper. Don't talk to me," kind of thing.

And then during PSU was when I came up here and worked at OHSU. And we can talk about that more later, too.

Anderson: So I want to kind of piece this out. You went to Florida State for grad school?

Peterson: For grad school, yes.

Anderson: And then, and then when did you start working at OHSU?

Peterson: Started working at OHSU in 1998.

Anderson: Okay. And that was before or after grad school?

Peterson: That was during.

Anderson: Okay.

Peterson: Well, actually, I started in 1998. I was still in...I was getting my bachelors still. Still working on my bachelors, taking my own sweet time. And there was a work study position in space planning up here. And so the first job I had up here was working with space planning, which was really fortuitous. It was fortuitous because not being able to foresee that I would be the OHSU archivist, I was sent out with a DISTO laser measurer and floor plans and I walked this entire campus. There wasn't a nook and cranny that I didn't go into, because the CAD people back in space planning wanted the floor plans to be perfect. And people would throw up walls in their suites, in their units.

They would take their room numbers, their suite numbers with them. They would take second floor suite numbers up to the fourth floor and put them up on the, you know. And so there was a real problem worrying about if there was a fire, if there was an earthquake, if there was any kind of emergency, somebody had a heart attack, how would they find the people? Because of course emergency medical folk or emergency firemen and policemen know that number 214 is on the second floor. It's not on the fourth floor.

So I was out there in HVAC areas. I was in the labs, in the research areas. Measuring and measuring and measuring. So I knew every nook and cranny of this campus.

Anderson: How did you get around? Because I just think of all the issues we have with access and keys and things.

Peterson: I had a key that got into everything.

Anderson: Really?

Peterson: I had key... that even the people in facilities couldn't get into... the places that I would go. There are some research labs up here, or there were at the time, where nobody went into. And the people were keeping their research very, very secret. And everybody knew about it, that you didn't go into that space. Well, I had to go into that space. We couldn't leave any floor space without being documented.

And I went into one, and I think she is still up here. And I was in her space. And I of course had this DISTO. Well, who knows? That could have been a telephone, it could have been a recorder, it could have been a whatever, audio or video recorder. And I left her space. And she wasn't in there when I was in there. And pretty soon I heard clump, clump, clump, clump, clump, clump, clump, coming down the hallway. And she was pounding down the hallway and yelling at me. "Who are you? What are you doing?" And it took me a long time to calm her down. But I'm a very calm person. And I think I have a way with calming people. And calmed her down. She wasn't happy about it. I think she reported me. She ended up reporting me. But I got the measurements.

Anderson: So I want to come back to your educational path. So you went to Florida State.

Peterson: Yes. I went there on a fellowship. Full ride and a stipend.

Anderson: Was this a PhD program? Or MA?

Peterson: It was MA. I was in history, and it was directed toward the World War II and Human Experience Archives. I was going to go work there and receive interning and training, and, as well, while I was there, I was trained by the state archivist of the Florida State Archives.

And it was really tremendously interesting because it wasn't the dates and the big names, the generals, of the war. It was the human experience; what happened to the foot soldiers? What happened to the air force men? What happened to the navy people? There

were love letters, there were photographs, and there were artifacts. Just about anything you could think of that have to do with the human experience. So it was really... it was heart wrenching, because there were lots of letters home from the services whether it was the air force, navy, what have you, to families, saying, "We lost your son." Almost always sons. I don't know how many women were in the military at that time, but just really sad kind of things.

Florida State really supported it. They had money to spend on the archives. And they're still in operation and doing a great job. I learned a lot about databases there. And I learned a lot about preservation... got to work with some terrific people who were very dedicated to the archives. As well, I worked with Dr. Rodney Anderson, who was doing an early nineteenth century and late eighteenth century census of Guadalajara. Right up my alley. Because, of course, Mexico... I had a real love for Mexico by that time. And I worked for him, as well. And we were using a very complicated database. So, I learned a lot more about taking ledgers that were barely readable and getting this information into a database as a preservation strategy, but also as a way for researchers to be able to get at the data. Because when you've got ledgers that old... and they were all handwritten, not in ink... you can lose that stuff very, very quickly. There's a website up now about that.

Unfortunately, I left before my fellowship was up. Tallahassee was not for me. Florida State was not for me. Like I said, it's a huge football university. There were giant men in my classes, in my historiography classes, in my history classes, who weren't there to learn. They were there to play football. They were being nurtured. So whenever there was a project to be done, I got absolutely no help.

A real highlight was my historiography teacher. She handed me my first postmodern textbook and said, "Let's look at history from the eyes and perception and perspective of the people who were writing it. And let's analyze it first. You are not to study history after the table of contents. You're about to read about this person. You're to research about this person. Know about what they were born into, their religion, their education, what country they lived in."

And again, I'm getting goose bumps. I was so turned on by that. It's like... this is a way of looking at the writing of history. This was an opportunity for me to work with primary resources, to working with both projects, the archives and Rodney Anderson's work. It was, you know... talk about another person who was a great influence!

But I couldn't take it. I couldn't take it in Tallahassee. The racism was evident... everywhere you turned. Graduate housing was in the black neighborhood. People had been so mistreated for so many years that they didn't like white people. And in order for... I didn't take my car... so in order for me to get from school to graduate housing, I had to ride the bus. And I received a great deal of abuse. Verbal abuse, not physical abuse.

Loved the climate. Bougainvillea growing across the parking lots. Spanish moss hanging. White sandy beaches.

I made friends with some people. One was a guy named James James from New York, New York. And we'd try to go out to dinner – he was a black man – we'd try to go out to dinner and we wouldn't get served. We'd try to go to the beach and we couldn't get a hotel or a motel room. Really, really tough. And he wasn't a poor person. His dad supported his education, and as long as he stayed in school, he had a new car every year.

I also met a man who was on the football team... great big guy from Mississippi, and he'd come over and we'd talk about all sorts of things... and about his life, what it was like for him growing up. And he said, "If you were in my town, in Mississippi, and I went into your apartment, they would feed me to the alligators."

And I thought I had a great deal of fortitude, that I could handle things like that. But I couldn't. I really couldn't. And I felt very alone, even though I had friends. I felt very lonesome.

And because of the way that Tallahassee is laid out, the buses have a central hub. So if you're going to go anywhere, you have to go from where you're at to the central hub and then out again. I didn't have a car. There weren't many sidewalks in Tallahassee. It's really a driving town. And it was really a hard place to live.

I really regretted giving up my fellowship and regretted having to stop my studies in both working with the Guadalajara project and the archives, but I just had to. Just had to.

Anderson: That must have been really hard to feel like you got this fellowship and you have all these people supporting you and cheering you on and then you're just thinking, I can't make this work. This isn't what I signed up for.

Peterson: No. It really wasn't.

Anderson: This isn't what I want my life to be.

Peterson: No. It really wasn't. And I think that was kind of a really dark period in my education. There were bright spots. Some amazing instructors in history, and especially in Latin American history, and my historiography teacher, like I mentioned. But it was, again, fortuitous because I went home and applied to UCLA in the history department. But I also applied for an articulated degree—I think I kicked my water. Oh, no, I didn't. I'm sorry – in library science. And—

Anderson: What made you decide to do that? Where did library science come in?

Peterson: Well by that time, I was working here.

Anderson: Okay.

Peterson: And during my time at Portland State and UCLA, I was working. I was coming back and forth to work in the archives here. So history and library science... because then it was just starting to be archival tracks within library science programs and I thought this might give me a leg up in what I was doing. But what I ended up doing was dropping the MLIS program, because I got very involved in the history program, in folklore and mythology and worked with a professor named Donald Cosentino, who was an expert in ethnographies with Cubans and Haitians, and particularly in the spiritual aspect of their lives.

By the time I was at UCLA, I had come back from Mexico, met up with Cuban refugees here in Portland, and was doing ethnographies with them at the time, and fell in

love with one. Jack and I had divorced by that time. We were together thirty-two years, married twenty-seven years, but we divorced after I got back from Mexico. I was a different person. Mexico had changed me.

Anderson: Was that realizing your own independence or your own sort of empowering yourself?

Peterson: Definitely. And I felt like, you know, Jack and I had been together since we were children, really. At sixteen, you're not at all formed. And I think that, you know, he had an idea about who he was, and I had a growing idea about who I am. And those two did not cross and meet and run parallel even. So we had broken up by that time. I had Cubans... fell in love with a Cuban, and lived with a guy who was a *Santero*, who was a priest in the Santeria religion. And I spoke Spanish only at home. The only time I spoke English was when I was at work or at school... and learned a lot about the Cuban religion from him. So I was writing a lot about what he was doing at home: putting eggs in glasses of water and spitting rum on the doorjamb, and altars in the corner, and when a certain *orisha* wouldn't do what he wanted, he'd tip their statue upside down in the corner... and you know... he had cigars laying in the corner. And a couple of times... I think... I was cleaning up the house and vacuumed up all the stuff in the corners, and washed his rag that he would use to wipe his brow and dance with, and all of that... just not understanding.

So when I went to UCLA, it was like... Donald Cosentino was my conduit into a deeper study in Cuban religion. And my focus became very, very narrowly focused on Cuban spirituality. I worked in the archives there as well. The folklore-mythology program had a huge... not a huge archive, but they had a substantial archive. I also started taking museum studies... because the Fowler Museum is a wonderful museum on the UCLA campus. Started hanging out there and helping. They had done a huge Haitian flag exhibit. And got involved with that. And started thinking about the work I was doing. And kind of looking at other people and writing about them. And thinking about subjectivity and objectivity. And got very pulled into post-modernism because of this lack of being able to be objective about things that you're looking at, that you're observing, but you're not raised in it. So how can you write about these people? I always felt like I was looking through a crack in the door into a room. And could never really experience what they were experiencing. And so started writing radical, what they called experimental ethnographies. Where you took yourself and... you put yourself right in the middle of it. You took your chair, you sat down, you said, "this is what these people are doing, and this is what I think about what they're doing." Hard to get published when you're doing radical ethnography.

Anderson: Did you look at the work, there's an anthropologist named Sol Tax. Did you look at his work? He was—

Peterson: I don't think so.

Anderson: --at University of Chicago. And his thing was action anthropology. So this idea that you can't responsibly study a group or responsibly do ethnography unless you

are helping them or going to do something for them in some way. And it does strike me as sort of having this crossover with what you called experimental ethnography, trying to get past this idea of I'm the educated person observing these strange subjects. And he was really saying you can't do ethnography appropriately unless you're trying to do something responsible for this group.

Peterson: It becomes an ethical question. Who do you think you are?

Anderson: Yeah.

Peterson: You know, going into a group of people who really don't know you. Maybe they're here in the United States because they're refugees or they've immigrated here because of economic reasons or political reasons. And you sit there and try to write about them.

But one of the things that I learned about doing ethnographies is that people who actually live their religion, live their culture, don't necessarily have an ability to articulate about it. They just do it. It's a part of their life. It's a part of who they are. They're not busy saying, "This is why I'm doing this, by the way." They're just doing it. They learned to do it. They've grown up in it. And so ethnographies, anthropological studies are necessary in order to expose the wider world to these other... other cultures. And then, again, why... you know, why would we do that? I think just to broaden our horizon. To say that these people are, especially in the United States, where we've had a problem with racism, to say these people are every bit... their lifestyle is every bit as valid as our lifestyle. Their reason for doing things is every bit as valid as ours. So I think, you know, you can argue about doing anthropological studies. But I think if you're going to do them, you better do them from a subjective point of view and don't think you're at all objective.

Anderson: And did you have a thesis or another sort of terminal project? Was that on the Cuban community?

Peterson: Yes, it was. In fact, I did a slide production... because I lived with a *Santero* and he had also done a lot of dictating to me, and I had done a lot of recordings of him in his ritual practices. So my thesis was writing an experimental ethnography. It's actually... you could almost think of it as a piece of fiction. If you read it, you'd say, "my God, this is like a story. This can't be true." And I wrote it kind of, just from my voice. But then I did an analysis of it at the end. And then, of course, had to cite other people looking at primary... there weren't a lot of primary sources at that time, but there were people who were writing about Cuban spirituality at the time.

Another part of my project was doing the slide show, where I had a lot of the accoutrements for what he used, and what other Cubans used in their rituals. And I would set them up and do these really strange perspective kind of, strangely lit still lifes of eggs and knives and chickens with their heads cut off and blood and graveyard dirt and their statues and things like that. And then, the lights were down... the lights were off. And I recruited people from my class to speak these ritual words that would be used in the

rituals, you know, the chants. And they would sometimes whisper, and sometimes get very, very loud. So it was a real artistic endeavor as well.

I always got great grades. I had four point, sometimes 3.95, 3.96. ... got high honors for my thesis, my master's thesis. And I was asked to publish them. But there's not a peer-reviewed journal yet who will publish my work. They're not ready for that. But Donald Cosentino keeps writing to me and saying, "Have you published yet? Have you published yet?" And even the *Journal of American Folklore* would not publish it, even in their radical ethnography volume that they published. It was just a little bit too far off for them. But I had a great time.

Anderson: That's all that matters.

Peterson: Yes.

Anderson: And then you came back to OHSU to work, is that right?

Peterson: Yes. Yes.

Anderson: So I want to ask you if you remember the first time you saw OHSU's archives and maybe your first day working with the archives and what you remember, how you felt that day.

Peterson: I do. I remember it vividly. I was taking an archival management class from Doug Erickson, who's the archivist at Lewis & Clark College. He was teaching in the history department and that was kind of my first exposure to looking at primary resources and the value that they had to the study of history. And we had to do an internship. And he said that Janet Crum... (she was a bibliographer up here, cataloger) was looking for an intern in the archives up at OHSU. And I said no. And he said yes. And I frowned and said no. And he frowned and said yes. And that went on for a while until he finally wore me down and I came up and met Janet and really, really liked her.

The archives started back with Bertha Hallam. We don't really know the beginning, and we don't know why she started collecting. She had great relationships with people, with the doctors and the students. And she was accumulating books like crazy, and was also receiving funding from the library committee and from the licensing group. And... but while she was doing that, she was also soliciting artifacts and soliciting unpublished materials. And there was a history of Medicine Club and they were writing on history, the history of medicine and she started collecting those things.

There is one annual report of hers where she talked about the Pacific Northwest collection, which is publications by people, basically about Oregon or the region and unpublished materials... things like talks that the history club would give and yearbooks and things like that. She started collecting on that but only one mention of that in the entire time she was here from 1919 to 1965.

She didn't really talk about the medical museum collection. But I guess there were some exhibits in the Old Library, where there are some cabinets there now, there were some exhibits. But she doesn't really talk about the medical museum, either. But she was obviously gathering some things.

Anderson: That's really interesting, because we have letters from her, especially between her and the Portland Academy of Medicine, talking about the rare book collections. But they really don't talk about these other two big components of the special collections here.

Peterson: Right. Right.

Anderson: It's really focused on the things that people tend to be really immediately attracted to, like beautiful old books.

Peterson: Yeah. And she traveled the world accumulating books and accumulating the first class collection, and the Sydenham collection, the Whitman mission collection. And she was obviously collecting, I think that when she really started in earnest was after World War II. Because we have a lot of Japanese... and not as much German... but mostly Japanese artifacts, as well as field kits. Not just from the World Wars. We have field kits from the Spanish-American War. We've got saddlebags, we've got all sorts of things. But she was obviously gathering these things.

In '65, when she retired... another thing is that she was clipping things from the newspapers right from the beginning. And then her successor, Margaret Hughes, would work with her... also continued clipping newspapers. And I think because of... I'm just speculating here and kind of being presumptuous that because Bertha wanted this stuff, people figured that Margaret would want the stuff, too, so things were probably still forthcoming.

Anderson: I have to laugh, because I think of if our library director today, I think of Chris Schaffer clipping newspapers at OHSU.

Peterson: That's truly laughable. That's truly laughable!

Anderson: You get an idea of how much the library field has changed.

Peterson: Yes. Yes.

Anderson: When you think about a library director clipping newspapers.

Peterson: Yeah. And the kinds of things that they did back then, and the close relationships. Well, the school was so much smaller. They had, I think at that time, four employees. And then they had students who would work for them. And Margaret, I think, had six employees and students that worked for them. Many fewer students. Many fewer faculty. So it seemed like something, maybe a good thing to do. You know, when there was a lull, they got the scissors out and clipped the clippings. And we have those today in our biographical files, and we have folios as well that have clippings pasted into them.

And then, once—so what I'm trying to say is that there was always this interest in archival materials and artifacts. And then there was an interim director before Jim Morgan came on, her name was Heather Rosenwinkle and she had a passion for history.

Sometimes a misguided passion for history in that she really took possession of materials. She felt it was incredibly important to maintain, not only to maintain them and preserve them, but to hold onto them. She didn't have any training on how to do preservation or conservation, so she was taking in things. She also built great relationships with physicians and students. Really close with the old guys, you know, we continue to do that today. And she was working in the Old Library, in the History of Medicine room, where my office is now... has been traditionally the History of Medicine office... with just stacks and stacks and stacks of stuff everywhere. She was taking it and she was clipping newspapers. Just stuff. Even though we didn't have a place to store these things, they were still coming in. nobody was keeping track of what was coming in. After Bertha and after Margaret, I think it just blossomed. It just... like a nuclear cloud... it was just everywhere.

Anderson: So we didn't have at that time the professional expertise in place—

Peterson: Absolutely none. Absolutely none... nobody with professional training as an archivist. She became the history of medicine librarian when Jim Morgan and Joan Ash came. Joan came as his assistant, or librarian, not his assistant, really, a second-in-command kind of thing.

But Heather held the reins very, very tightly, to the historical collections. She gave access to them, but in fact, there had always been access to them. I don't think to the museum materials, but I think to the books in particular. And I think when possible, access to the archival documentation.

But there was little interest... I think there was interest, but little money and little ability to throw staff or money at the historical collections.

Anderson: There's a really telling part in Joan Ash's oral history interview.

Peterson: Yes.

Anderson: Where she says one of her biggest regrets was not investing in historical collections. And that they felt the economic situation of the university and of the library was so poor that she felt they just had to focus on the now.

Peterson: Right.

Anderson: Which is a really interesting and odd way of looking at things. To say the things that are relevant for now are only current research in health sciences. And that somehow history is not relevant for now.

Peterson: Right. Which is funny because now we're archiving the things that they did at the time. Yeah, Joan, coming from the east coast, she said that she didn't feel that there was really any history in Oregon. We were too young. And of course, the library was just really moving into the technological age with ILL, with cataloging. And there was lots of money needed.

And the first time that there was really any attention given to the archival collections was in, I believe it was the late '70s. I think it was like '76, '77, when there was a CETA grant for employment and training and part of the money went to cataloging the medical museum. Best thing that was ever done. Some things were done inappropriately because there was, again, no trained archivist. No preservationist who knew how to do things. But they all got numbers and were put into boxes and were kept that way.

The rest of the materials ended up in what we now do not call the "North Tower," but what was called the North Tower for decades, is a room right above our history of medicine room. Room 402, 402. And that was my first exposure to the archives. I came and met Janet. She said, "Let's go take a look at the archives."

We walked over to the Old Library. She was in the BICC at the time. People had moved to the BICC in '91 when it opened. '91, '92. Because some people were still in the Old Library at the time. And we walked up the stairs and opened that door. And it was dark. It was wet. It smelled like mold. There are wooden cabinets in there. Old wooden cabinets. And they had drawers in the bottom. And there were floor to ceiling archival materials. The most incredible stuff that you can imagine. There was the—

[End Track 2. Begin Track 3.]

Peterson: --minutes of the Willamette University when the faculty broke away from the Willamette University to form this university just sitting in there. There was Clarice Ashworth Francone's medical illustrations just sitting there. She'd done some of them on clay paper. Which you can imagine what happens when clay gets wet. Amazing, amazing collections. And Janet says, "Well, here you go."

Not only was it wet and damp and dark... I mean wet... there was a leak in the ceiling. So they had put plastic sheeting over the cabinets. So not only was there this damp, dark, dungeon kind of feeling, even though it was on the fourth floor... it was like water on the floor... and inside the plastic sheeting was condensation. Worst possible—

Anderson: You couldn't get it more wrong.

Peterson: You couldn't get it more wrong unless you put it, you know, I don't know, I can't think of a worse place. There was also a window in there. So in the summer, that window would be open. So you've got this incredible fluctuation of heat and humidity. Which is worse than if you just have it in a hot place or a cold place, or a wet place or a dry place. But you've got wet, dry, hot, cold... it's changing all the time.

So, I had been receiving training. And Janet said, you know, "This is your stuff." And I think... I can't remember the first thing that I did, but I remember doing Clarice Ashworth Francone's. Some money had been found for preservation supplies, so I had acid-free boxes, acid-free folders, I had tissue paper and pencils. That was about it.

Anderson: So Janet Crum had some interest in archives, some training in archives?

Peterson: She did.

Anderson: She was the person who made that happen?

Peterson: Well, like I said, I think that Jim always had an interest. I think Carrie Willman, who had been hired in '77, who became kind of second in command, after Joan Ash moved from the library, I think she had influence. Janet Crum would... she did have training. She'd been trained at the University of Washington, and also had processed the Muir papers in California. But she was not hired as an archivist here. She was not doing any archiving. But she had a great interest in what we had. And she was instrumental in when there was money and they said, "What do you think we should spend this on?" saying, "What about environmental controls up in 440? What about environmental controls in the History of Medicine office? What about hiring, or getting an intern? Won't cost you a thing, except for preservation supplies."

I think Carrie was a rung up from Janet in that she was that much closer to the purse strings. So without Jim, Carrie and Janet, this would not have happened, you know, unless we had another group of people with the same kind of impetus.

Linda Weimer also had been hired as a reference librarian. Had been given kind of jurisdiction over the special collections, but not in the archives. And I think... and then she and Joan had asked Carrie if she could do oral histories. And that's kind of like how the oral histories started. And I think having the oral histories going and seeing all this material over here, I think everybody was really starting to think, we're letting something really important go. I tried to uncover... thinking about this oral history... even just talking to everybody who was even here at the time... nobody really has a good memory about it. I think it was kind of this thing that was going on over here. And Karen was kind of like doing stuff. And Janet was in control of her. She was supervised by Janet. But it wasn't a big deal at that time.

And while I was in school, I would come back and forth and work in the archives. I would come home for the summer. I didn't take classes in the summer. I would work all summer in the archives. Then Christmas break I would work, because that was long, winter break was long.

I've looked at lots of email from Carrie saying, "Can we come up with some money to hire Karen for the summer? Can we keep Karen on? Do we have to terminate her? Can we raise her from nine dollars an hour to ten dollars an hour?" There was always just like a lot of work being done to keep me... keep me going.

So I wasn't appalled when I looked at it, because I'd been in archives in Mexico. Some of the worst ever. But they're dry, and most of them pretty warm, and consistently warm. But I was like, there's work to be done here. This is someplace I can be. And I didn't want to be here at first. But when you're an archivist or a historian... I think that historians find out, it's all fascinating. Whatever it is. Whatever story's being told, it's all fascinating. So I just became utterly fascinated. And I kept coming back.

And... did you have a question?

Anderson: Yeah. You've told me a few times in the past that when you said, "I didn't want to be here," it was because you weren't interested in the history of medicine.

Peterson: Right.

Anderson: And you weren't interested in western medicine.

Peterson: Not at all.

Anderson: Which I always think is interesting because there's this, kind of a misconception about archivists that we, if you are the archivist for OHSU, it must mean medical history is your thing and you know everything about it and you devoted a lot of study to it and, as you know, as any archivist knows, you go where the job is.

Peterson: That's right.

Anderson: And if you are an archivist and the job is in, you know, English language and literature, you learn about that.

Peterson: Mm hmm.

Anderson: If it's history of medicine—

Peterson: You absorb it.

Anderson: You have to, you have to just think on your feet and learn as you go.

Peterson: And there are archivists who are subject specialists. But those are people who have been in archives sometimes fifty, sixty years, when archives were not what they are now. When you found an archive, you built an archive, you went in and you talked about building an archive. You found money and grants for it. And you stayed there the rest of your life and you lectured on whatever it is that you became a subject specialist in.

I became a subject specialist in archiving. That was my real interest... is archival management... not the history of medicine. And I never have claimed to be the history of medicine historian.

Anderson: I hate it when people call me the history of medicine librarian.

Peterson: Yes. Yeah. Because that isn't, my interest... is in preserving this material for people to use who are history of medicine experts. They're the people who want to write about it. Not me. Of course, I've ended up writing a great deal about it, just in writing finding aids and things like that. But, so yeah, I just kept coming back and forth, and back and forth.

By the time I graduated in 2002, Carrie and Linda and Janet had all contacted me and said... Carrie on the phone first... emails from Linda and Janet. "Do you want a job? We can hire you. We've got the money to hire you. It will be just half time to start with, but we'll be able to hire you."

And I was so settled in southern California. I was living a few blocks from the beach. I had a great job with a... here I was again in medicine... a gastroenterology society. And I was doing their records management. I also worked at the Weingart Center in downtown L.A., working with the people there, as a records manager, who take care of

homeless people. I was so happy there. My job was in Santa Monica. I could walk to work. It was hot. It was lovely. I was just so happy.

But Hannah was having a baby. Mom was getting older and Hannah had started to call me and say, “Grandma’s getting older. She can’t keep her apartment as clean. I don’t think she’s eating very well. I think you need to do something about Grandma.” And I could have brought her down there. My mom was always healthy until right before she passed away. Or “healthy” in quotation marks. She had congestive heart failure, but you would have never known it.

But I just thought, wow, what a coincidence... because I was going to have to find a place.... I had to move out.... I was living in an apartment, kind of a loft with a woman who would let students live there. Well, I was no longer a student. I was working fulltime. And she, I think, wanted me out, even though we’d become good friends. I was looking for a place. But rent, as you can imagine, was really high in Santa Monica. And I would have had to have been way into my career to have enough money to actually live in Santa Monica. So it was just like, wow, you know... I’ve had such a connection at OHSU. I know those collections. I’d been processing since day one. And why not? It takes me home. My daughter’s there. My first grandchild’s there. And I came back.

And from that day, I had an office in the history of medicine room in the Old Library. And Linda Weimer was my supervisor. I rarely saw her. She was very busy. She worked only half time in reference and special collections, and half time for the main library. She knew I had the training. I was perfectly capable of working autonomously. And I just became a processing machine. I just processed and processed and processed...starting from that day.

Anderson: It sounds wonderful.

Peterson: It was. It was just like everything was so... almost like meant to be. I mean, from... my life just seems like it’s just been magical. I’ve had incredible adventure. I’ve had great love. And I’ve had a wonderful career.

Anderson: So I’m curious about, as you started working in the archives, what I know as a manager is wherever you put people, you’ll suddenly start developing all this capacity that you didn’t know you had. And you’ll be able to provide all these services that you couldn’t before. And was there a point where you started to see, people are starting to come to us now. People are starting to get interested in what’s going on here. People want to use these collections. Was there a point where you started to see that? Or was it kind of a slow build? I still see this kind of like slow build of interest.

Peterson: Yeah. When I was even just working, you know, coming back and forth, there were people coming and using the archives. I remember Ralph Tanz and Harold Osterud and Connie Carter. Claire Peterson. There were folks who were very interested in the collections and would just kind of show up to chat, or to do some research. Ralph Tanz was doing research on syphilis. And Donald Trunkey was doing research on medicine in the Lewis & Clark expedition era. And so there were people using the archives. And it was kind of a slow build. I think as we were able to give more access to the collections, because when I came, by the time I got back, things had been moved out of the North

Tower and into 440. But they had just been put on shelves. There was absolutely no organization. Linda Weimer had inventoried the historical image collection. And the subject files. And the, what we now call the ephemera files, it was called the subject files. And she had done a couple of collections. The faculty group's collection. And I think someone had done Joe Matarazzo's stuff. That was about all that was done. And I think that she had been giving access... the oral histories were happening. I think she and Joan had done a video on World War II, so that included archival materials as well as oral histories. So they were being used, but not a lot. And so, yeah, I think it was a slow build. I think part of it was the exhibit program. Because when I first came on, the first exhibit that I did was with Donald Trunkey and the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Medicine during that—

Anderson: What year was that? Do you recall?

Peterson: Hmm. Probably '99. Yeah, probably. No, let's see. No, it was after that. It was more like, because Linda and Jerry Fulkerson, who still works with us, had done an exhibit on Esther Pohl Lovejoy and one on Mackenzie's Folly, the establishment of the medical school up here on the hill. Small exhibits. I think one case, I think we only had one case at the time. So when I came, I think that Linda was about to do this exhibit with Donald Trunkey, and left unexpectedly, suddenly. Her mother had passed away. She had an estate to deal with. And she was just gone. And so I took over from her. Dr. Trunkey and I had a great time. He and his wife wrote the text for the brochure. And he had some artifacts. You know, I rifled through our stuff as best I could. Pulled some things for the exhibit. And I think it was just like... that was the kick start the archives needed. Because things were out there. We had Jerry, who was doing the graphic design. Money was coming in to do the exhibits. Not a lot, but from there on out, I did four a year after that.

That and then the hiring of Sara Piasecki as the history of medicine librarian. Which term, nobody really likes. Then she began to take over some of the responsibilities that Carrie had done, which was the History of Medicine Society. I had been doing donor relations. But she was then handed the donor relations part of the activities that we were doing. Attending the history of medicine classes, managing the lecture series.

And I had been going to the emeritus luncheons already. But then Sara really took over the public face of the archives. And she started going to the emeritus luncheons. I still had a great deal to do with donors because I had already built a lot of relationships. People in the School of Nursing, people in the School of Medicine, people in the School of Dentistry. Henry Clarke and I had already started working together. And yeah, it's just kind of been... as well with the volume of archival materials coming in... and then the advancements of access to the collections has really built the program.

Anderson: So I want to talk a little bit more about how you built the archives program over the years. And then what were the biggest challenges you had and then the biggest triumphs? And how you were either supported by your colleagues here or how you were challenged by them.

Peterson: The way that I had... there had been a website... not a website. There was the library website and there was like a page that had to do with history of medicine

resources. One of the first things I was asked to do was to redesign that website. That was a great deal of fun. Laura Zeigen, a faculty member in the library, was on that group. Karen Lippert, who was in the reference department. And I think maybe Linh Le was also involved, who was with the IT group. And I changed colors, I changed font, I wrote text. I wanted it to look like a historic site. Now, of course, our website looks like an OHSU site, which is okay, because the information is there and it's up to date, which is the most important thing. So that was one thing that I worked on that I think helped to build the program. Gave us more exposure.

Also we developed a brochure. I was asked to write the text for that. Do the design for that. I think... I don't remember whether Jerry Fulkerson was involved in that or whether we sent the brochure out. Carrie and Jim approved it. They looked at it, edited it, asked for changes. When Sara came on, I think she did some extra editing, as well.

Asking for money. That was the hardest part. Because money is always needed in an archive. Supplies are in short supply all the time.

And then convincing people that we needed technology. One of the biggest challenges was technology. I was always given someone's castoff computer. I think that... thinking... it wasn't, like I said before, it wasn't that there wasn't interest. It wasn't that there wasn't a desire. It was that we were the last priority. If there was money, and there was money left over, we got it. If there was a computer that somebody else didn't want, and it was better than the computer I was working on, I got it. I had three computers crash early on in my career. One time Sara and I were sitting there and she's at her desk, which is about six feet from my desk, and we heard this strange whirring sound and it kept getting louder and louder. And it sounded like something was going to explode. And my computer just went kaput. Absolutely no place to back stuff up. It's still a big problem that we have. We had a couple of drives that I'd saved things on, so I hadn't lost everything. But I'd lost a great deal of things.

We had scanners. We had printers. They were in better shape than the computers all the time. Also, and I don't know whose decision this was, people's memories are fading... It's very, very interesting... because I've talked to people... they don't remember what happened, why they started giving students to work with us, but there were students out of the Acquisitions Department. Holly Gabriel was the first and she didn't have a bit of interest in archives, but I made her work. And everybody else after that really had an interest in working in the archives. And they did a wonderful job. So that was a real, I think, a boon to getting more done.

Another thing that happened is, I was hired permanently in 2002, October 2002. Sara Piasecki was hired in July or August, 2003 and so she was doing a great deal of the reference work. In 2004, early in 2004, she said, "Why don't you just go up there and accession everything in 440?" Best idea ever. Because I was working through this collection and that collection, and this collection and that collection. So I went up there... I don't know how... remember how many months it took me. But I accessioned every single collection in there. Which meant that I had to find not only what it was, but who had given it to us. Trying to find accession records, deeds of gift, sorting through files. And then also having a big enough budget to rehouse everything.

And I always had a great deal of autonomy. Nobody really managed me. I think that I was asked to do things and I did them. I wrote lots of policies. I think that was another thing that helped build the program. Access policies. Collection development

policies. Copyright policies. I just wrote policies like crazy. They always passed through Sara, Carrie and Jim. And once they were approved, then they were used. And used extensively.

I'm trying to think of some other things that were major changes that really helped to build the program. I think, like I said before, the exhibit program was really a big part of that. And then just a lot of hard work. A lot of hard work.

Anderson: What challenges did you face during this time? I know that you had cancer, for instance.

Peterson: I did. Sara came on, like I said, in July or August of 2003. December of 2003, I was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. And I was told, "You're going to have surgery. Like right now."

And when they did the surgery, they also did an abdominal wash and found a rare and aggressive cancer. And so I went... as soon as I healed enough from surgery, I went directly into chemotherapy. I refused radiation. It was all I could do to do chemo, because like I said, I've always been a natural girl. Organic was the way that I went. And using chemicals for anything—I always said I would never, if ever I get cancer, I'll never do chemo or radiation! And I've learned a lot. Don't ever say, "I will never." I've ended up doing a lot of things that I said I would never do.

I went through... March through September getting chemotherapy, having infusion chemotherapy. And they... because it was a rare and aggressive cancer, they didn't have precedents for how much or what to give me. So they just went whole hog. I lost all my hair after the first treatment. And I was sick. Really, really, really sick for that entire eight months.

But I never lost my job. The library just rallied. And people gave money, donated money, so I never missed a paycheck. Carrie kept writing to HR, "We don't want to fill this position. We want to extend her FMLA." You know, "This is who we want. It's nobody else. Let's... what can we do." There were emails that would go out asking people to donate more money. It was just phenomenal.

And that was a huge challenge. Because when I came back, I was exhausted. I was sick. Really, still very sick. And it took me about, I would say eight years, to get over being sick from cancer. It's just been in the last couple of years that I felt normal.

And Sara had been with us what, six months? And she had to run the archives and special collections while I was gone that whole time.

And when I got back, we had accepted the NLM exhibit, "Frankenstein." And she had been working on it. And I walked in the door and she said, "Here. This is for you to do." And so right away, I went right into this exhibit. But it was a fantastic exhibit and I loved doing it.

I think being sick... there's pictures of me with other people at the exhibit opening and I've got a bald head and it was really very funny.

But I think the work, also. The love of the library. It was truly a real community then. It's... when I would come back and forth, Carrie, Janet and Linda would take me out to lunch or dinner. When I would leave to go back to school, they'd take me out to lunch or dinner. When Hannah had her second baby, they threw a shower for Hannah.

You know, I mean, they really... there was a real feeling of camaraderie and that saw me through a lot.

Another challenge was having some of the things that I had been used to doing kind of taken from me without any prior notice. I wasn't told that I wouldn't be dealing with the donors anymore. I wasn't told that I wouldn't be going to the emeritus luncheons anymore. You know, I wasn't told that I wasn't going to be doing as much of the reference work anymore. It just kind of happened. I wasn't told that Sara was even going to be hired. I had decided to get my MLIS degree, executive MLIS, at San Jose State. And I was down in San Jose when Carrie called me and said, "I've decided to hire Sara Piasecki." And she apologized for not having discussed it with me.

It was a great decision. Sara did a great job. But those things were difficult for me. Because... I think as an archivist, and especially when you're the first and only archivist, there's a certain proprietary feeling that these are your collections. They're kind of like your babies. You're building this collection. People are starting to come. You're feeling really good about the work you've done. You're feeling really proud about the work you've done. And then you're kind of relegated kind of to the shadows. And not that I didn't like the shadow. I love the shadows. I'm a great introvert. But I never wanted Sara's job. I didn't want to be the history of medicine librarian. It was the last thing I wanted. I wanted to be working in the archives. So those things were a challenge for me. Also that Sara's name had to go on my work. And I think it was just because she was the head of the department. And I read emails from people saying, "What a wonderful job you've done, Sara, with nothing. You've brought this up single-handedly." And those kinds of things were real arrows in my heart. In fact, it makes me tear up a little bit now because I'd worked so hard. I think I was very much appreciated by the library. Very much appreciated by Sara. Very much appreciated by the community. But I became less and less known to the community. And Sara became more and more known to the community.

That changed when you came on. I get all the accolades for the work that I do. I get all the recognition I need. And I really, really appreciate that.

Have I talked about all the challenges?

Anderson: Yeah, we've talked about a lot.

Peterson: About a lot, yeah.

Anderson: A lot of challenges. Yeah. And I think those are, I think some of those are great examples of things archivists really struggle with or, you know, can struggle with, is this idea that you're often the person supporting the much more visible work of others. But at the same time, it's, you know—

Peterson: They couldn't do their work.

Anderson: They couldn't do it without you.

Peterson: Exactly.

Anderson: And you know, I think that that's analogous to a lot of professions where there's the people that are doing the kind of fetch work or whatever it may be, and then there's the researcher or the department head or whoever it is kind of out in front. And they're the one that's visible.

Peterson: Yeah. Yeah.

Anderson: And I feel that way a lot. I get thanked a lot, or approached a lot about, "Oh, you guys did such great work on that PA exhibit." I'm like, "I didn't really have anything to do with it."

Peterson: And you are so good about that. I feel very, very much recognized for the work that I do. Triumphs, also. I mean, we think about the history wall in Peter Kohler Pavilion. The diversity wall, which Morgen had a great deal of... I mean, she was the historian for that. And she used our archives for that. Morgen Young, we use her a lot for a lot of things. And we're now getting the School of Nursing archive, which I started working on in about 2003, well, the end of 2004 when I came back, constantly consulting with them. This is how you do things, this is how you preserve things. This is how you do conservation. This is how you inventory. Always with the hope that they would be united with the general, you know, OHSU's historical collections and archives.

School of Dentistry collections have come to us. And now that they're moving to the waterfront, everything... Henry Clarke has been so generous. All the work that he did to build that collection, all the knowledge that he has, he's transferred to us. The President's Office Records have come to us. More and more... we're doing more records management kind of stuff because OHSU does not have a records management office, nor a records manager.

And that was another triumph... was I was asked to be on the Records Retention Schedule Committee and those folks had no idea there was an archive.

One of the big changes that I instigated was taking the name "library" out of our title because people on campus had an idea that we were the library's archives. You know, that what was here was library material. I said, we need to take that out. Sara 100 percent agreed. Carrie agreed. So that people could think of us as OHSU's archive.

Working on that committee allowed me to say, we're here. We're here and we're doing the work. And the first ever records retention schedule was published. We have a mandate from the university to collect anything over seventy-five years old. Hopefully that age will come down in the future. And it's been a big boon for us getting materials from the university. We have hospital records now. We've got records from all the hospitals. You know, so many things have come to us because of that.

Anderson: So I want to kind of step back and take a broader view about archives and the archives profession. What are the biggest changes you've seen in archives over the past ten or fifteen years? I started working in archives in 2000. And it's already like night and day compared to when I was a student worker. I couldn't even have imagined.

Peterson: No. I would say many, many, many changes. But foundationally, very few. We are still soliciting, selecting, appraising, preserving, describing, arranging, and giving

access to historically valuable materials. That has never changed. We are still working under those two wonderful ideas, the theory that we follow of original order and provenance. There's been some argument about provenance. And the United States was at the forefront thinking because after World War II there were so many more records being created, how do we ever maintain provenance when we have people from various groups in an institution or group working on the same materials? So how can we say this only came from the President's Office, or this only came from the Department of Surgery, or this only came from the records management group? But they've come back, they've come back around... provenance, once again, I don't think that will ever go away.

So those are the things I think that foundationally we stand on. And I think it's a firm ground. I don't think it's a slippery slope at all. I doubt very much it will ever be anything else.

What has changed are the materials that we collect and the tools that we use. When I first came here, I was writing finding aids or guides to the collections using Word document. Awards were won for the finding aids that a person would write. You would do original research into that collection or collections that had to do with a topic. And you would write extensively about it. I was also doing item-level description. Which was possible when we had fewer collections.

Electronic records, we were printing—

[End Track 3. Begin Track 4.]

Peterson: --things that were being produced or created. We were printing those. And that's how we were collecting them. Everything was analog. But when you have magnetic tape, both audio and visual. When you have film. When you have photographs. When you have all sorts of computer disks, all sorts of software programs that are either deteriorating or needing to be reformatted, you can no longer rely on printing things out. I think also there are interactive websites and documents that you can't just print out. We've had to develop tools in which to preserve these, which basically are databases or institutional repositories. We need these kinds of tools. And sometimes it's slow in coming. Sometimes it's slow to convince those that hold the purse strings that you know that these are the ways in which to preserve these things. Otherwise, we're going to lose this history.

And convincing people who hold the purse strings when other things are, you know... people are... for instance, in a science institution, information is coming out so rapidly that you can't keep track of it. Unless you're saving it in some sort of a database, it's going to be lost. And even then, the worry that we archivists have that that stuff could explode. That stuff could just disappear. You know, a lightning storm. A fire. An explosion. Anything could happen. So I think our worry has doubled or tripled. Paper can sometimes last centuries and go through floods... be burned. But this electronic stuff can disappear in a moment.

I've had to learn so many things. You have to almost become a jack of all trades and people expect it of you.

Anderson: I have a follow-up question about that.

Peterson: Okay.

Anderson: Something I really admire about you is how current you kept your skills constantly. It really impressed me when I first got here and started supervising you. And it's to the point where, there's this sort of stereotype about, you know, the euphemism is workers who are close to retirement age. And they're stereotype is their lack of aptitude, or they don't keep current with their skills. And my experience with you, now whenever I hear that stereotype, I just get very angry.

Peterson: Thank you.

Anderson: Because I think that people are being written off unfairly. Or there's this, you know, a very broad, unfair stereotype about people who are mature workers.

Peterson: Mm hmm.

Anderson: And it would have been in some sense very easy for you to just kick back and say, I like going through boxes of cool old stuff and doing research and writing about it and inventorying great collections. You know, we don't need to have EAD finding aids, or we don't need to contribute to NWDA. And what motivated you to keep going instead of kicking back?

Peterson: I think perhaps it was because I was an older student. I started learning when I was older. I started going to school when I was older. I was very much... I didn't think of myself as an old person. I didn't think of myself as somebody who was aging in my career. I thought of myself as somebody who was being very current, wanting to be very current. In fact, it took some convincing to get XMetaL, which is an xml editor, so that I could start doing EAD. It took some convincing to get people to think that... get administration to say okay, we maybe should be in NWDA.

And I think what started that was the National Library of Medicine... wanted to harvest our finding aids. And the archivist was like, "Karen, I can't harvest your stuff and I want it really bad. Because not only is it... it's in a Word document. If it were a pdf, I could do something with it. But what about," you know, and I'd already learned about EAD when I was in school. And encoding for archival materials. And I'd created a website. So it just made sense to me to get out there and do everything that I could to expose our collections to the public. I was a part of website design, part of the brochure, EAD, NWDA, National Library of Medicine, Archives Grid. I mean, it went on and on and on. Where not only was I seeking people to harvest our material, they were coming to us and asking if they could. And so it was like do or die. I mean, why wouldn't I? That's the way I felt.

And because I loved to learn so much, doing web seminars, you know, doing webinars. Doing... going to SAA meetings, going to NWA meetings, taking continuing education courses. That was all so natural to me. I went from my graduate degree to continuing to learn in archives. And it's been exciting. That's what's kept it fresh.

It's been challenging. It's hard for anybody to learn things that you don't think you're ever going to have to learn. I mean, who would have thought that I would have

had to encode our guides, or digitize and deliver things electronically. There's a lot of skills that I learned that I never thought that I would do. And it's not that I thought oh, boy, I can do this job and I can just, like you said, open boxes and inventory and that kind of thing. But I always was thinking, what else can I do? And talking to administration about it.

Anderson: So I want to move on now to sort of your outlook for going further. You're going to be retiring in a few months.

Peterson: Yes.

Anderson: And sort of looking back over your life, and where you're going now, I know your family is very important to you. And you spend a lot of time with your grandchildren, especially. And how did you balance work and family life? And I'm especially interested in that, knowing about your mother and how she worked nights so she could have food ready for you guys. And then she probably slept most of the day.

Peterson: She did. She did. I didn't start going to school until Hannah was in college and Jesse was graduating from high school. I didn't balance my marriage very well, obviously, because Jack was very busy. And somehow I did not insert myself into his life well enough.

And yes, my family is very important to me. My mother has lived with me more years as an adult... my being an adult, than she lived away with me. As soon as she retired at sixty-two, she moved in with us. My kids were teenagers then. And then when I came back from UCLA and started working here, I asked Mom to move in with me. It just made sense. And then we lived together until she passed away. She passed away in our house.

Fortunately, Jack didn't need anything, my kids didn't need anything from me. I was traveling. I was going back and forth to Mexico quite a bit, too. And Mom, fortunately, was healthy. She wasn't... she was practically born a nurse and died a nurse. When she retired, she worked in like senior service centers giving immunizations, drawing blood, taking blood pressures. She worked for Metropolitan Family Services. She worked as a foster grandparent. Talk about an example. And plus, she'd come home and she'd cook dinner so dinner would be ready for me when I got done with work. And so it was just easy for me to have my mother with me.

And then when she got sick and was going to die, we knew she was going to die, again, the library came to my aid. And I had a second absence, FMLA absence. Never missed a check. Took care of my mother at home. And hospice came in and took care of her so that I could work. I stayed with her the first month. And then hospice would come in in the morning and stay until I got home. And then they would leave. And then I'd fix her dinner, change her bed, anything that she needed, because she'd got to the point where she couldn't get out of bed. But she was sharp, mentally sharp all the time. She had a martini every night until I think the day before she died. She was a firecracker and a nurse through and through. And so she was keeping her own chart. I finally told her, "Mom, quit telling me when to give you your medication, okay?"

So I think part of the being able to balance my work and my life has been the help of the library and how supportive they are. Another thing is, now I'm sharing a house with Hannah, my daughter and Ancel and Enora, my grandchildren. Fabulous. Just wonderful. And they know how I am about work. That I've got to work. I'm going to be at work. It doesn't matter if Hannah might need me to be with the kids. She knows I'm going to work. She makes arrangements. So I've had a lot of support from family and at work.

Anderson: Great. So what's next for you? How are you going to spend your retirement?

Peterson: Well I have to tell you, I'm super excited.

Anderson: Yeah. I know.

Peterson: I am super excited.

Anderson: As I keep saying, people are still saying, "Is Karen Peterson really retiring?" And things like that.

Peterson: Yeah.

Anderson: And I'm like, she seems ready. She seems ready.

Peterson: Well and I told you, when I first came on, I think I told you that I was looking forward to retirement. And I think you've been planning for that. I mean, it takes some planning to have people leave who have been there a long time, who have grown the collections.

Anderson: I'm so grateful for you telling me about it. Telling me your plans instead of just telling me, "I'm going to retire next month."

Peterson: No. I couldn't have done that. The program's too important to me to have done that. But my plans are to keep on learning. I plan on knitting and weaving and spinning and riding my bike. Going to galleries. Going to museums. I've always wanted to move to Mexico from the time... from the first visit I had there. I've actually found a house that I want to buy. Very inexpensive. In Sayulita. And I've engaged a real estate agent. But the more I think about it, I'm like, what if I don't like living in Sayulita and I've bought a house? So what I think I might do is just spend some time renting down there. And moving around a bit. And maybe I won't want to live in Mexico. I mean, I'm really open. Like I said, I have more questions than answers. And don't really know where my life is going to go. But I'm very used to chaos and don't mind it at all. And I just have so many interests.

And I also... if I stay in Portland, I want to audit some classes at PSU. I'm fluent in Spanish. I'd like to take more Spanish classes. And I've taken Portuguese. Maybe do some Portuguese. Maybe take some more history classes. I'm not done learning yet. I also have the Esther Pohl Lovejoy manuscript, her autobiography. I've got copies of it at

my house and I plan on continuing and finishing that. Kim Jensen, her biographer, is looking forward to having that in hand. And I definitely want to finish that. And I think I'll just have my ear to the ground in case anybody has any questions for me here, too.

Anderson: Sounds like fun.

Peterson: Yeah. It's going to be great.

Anderson: Are there any questions you wish I had asked or anything else you wanted—

Peterson: No. I've probably given you a lot more information than you've ever hoped for.

Anderson: Okay. And then at this point I kind of want to turn it over to Morgen to see if there's anything she wants to make sure we talk about.

Young: You wrote that great *Oregon Historical Quarterly* article on the Lucy Davis Phillips collection. So could you elaborate a little bit on some perhaps under-utilized collections that you'd like the public or historians to know about?

Peterson: Some others, other than Esther Pohl Lovejoy, the Lucy Davis Phillips collection. There are so many. The under-utilized collections that we got from Henry Clarke in the history of dentistry collection that he had kept were really kept in a vault. And I know that he used them. And I know that he used them to teach classes to his first and second-year students. But I don't think anyone has any idea what a treasure trove of materials there are there. Also the Medical Museum. My hope is that one day we have some permanent exhibit space where we can really bring out the museum collection. In the exhibits that I do, I try to use a lot of artifacts. But they're really boxed away. And people say, "Where's the museum?" They ask us all the time. "Where's the museum?"

One day, I hope, and especially since we've reconfigured the third floor where I install the exhibits, there's lots of space now for more cases. So if there's ever any more money, I hope that that collection gets a lot more exposure.

There's just so many, Morgen. Of course, I have a fondness for each and every one. But those, I think would be, the museum and the History of Dentistry.

Another, let me just bring up one more, is the School of Nursing archive that's coming over, that was literally a closed collection. The alumni, the women in the Alumni Association have done a wonderful job of preserving the materials. They have done a lot of work in inventory and gathering the materials. But nobody can get in there. And there's no finding aid that is up online. There's just nothing there. I know that Barbara Gaines, when she wrote the history of the nursing school, was up in the North Tower, climbing through our collections, looking for things. And it's always been a huge gap in our collections.

And because it's been closed, she had access to everything there, which was wonderful. But few people are. There's nobody to open those cages. They're in locked cages. But they're dry, they're clean, they've been well cared for. Once we get those, we'll get something up online. There will be a full inventory and I'm sure that we'll do an

exhibit on those materials, as well. So those are very, very important collections that I've been working for years to get. So to be able to leave on that note is just so wonderful.

Young: I might stand behind Maija so you're facing the camera. Because it seems to be making Steve nervous.

Peterson: Okay.

Young: So related to that School of Nursing collection, how do you build trust with the gatekeepers of these collections? And is there sort of, are you having to educate them about how to preserve these collections?

Peterson: Absolutely. Yeah. With the School of Nursing, it was a long time coming. This has been almost my entire career talking to these people. First of all, assuring them that I didn't want to just take the stuff. I wasn't going to just go in there and gather it up and walk off with it and they would have nothing else to do with it. Because they use the materials for their annual celebrations that they do. They display nursing uniforms and books and yearbooks and caps and student uniforms and things like that. So, yeah, convincing people that you're not stealing the stuff that they love so much.

And I think Henry Clarke was the same thing with the School of Dentistry. His heart and soul was in that stuff. Building a relationship with these people. And not saying, "We want to take it," but, "Can we have access to it? Can we help you preserve it? Can we help you inventory the materials? Can we show you how it's done? Can we tell you where to get preservation materials? And then, can we have an inventory of it?"

Which is difficult to do. Because oftentimes you've got these collections out there that nobody's inventoried. They're not even really sure what they have. But with those two collections, the School of Dentistry and the School of Nursing, they know what they had. I spent time in the vault with Henry Clarke, sitting in that vault looking around, my eyes just bugging out of my head. Wanting to say, okay, I'm going to go get the carts now and I'm going to haul this stuff over to the Old Library. But he was using it. He loved it. Same with the School of Nursing.

And you have to show some control with that kind of thing. Because even though these materials, you know that maybe they're not being kept in the best condition, they're not being utilized, you can't hurry these people. You can't hurry people to give you stuff. And that works with any donor. They might call and say, "I've got some photographs. Do you want to see them?"

"Sure I want to see them."

"Well, I want you to look at them but I don't want you to have them."

And I'll say, "Well, can we scan them? And if we scan them and we give you a DVD with these scanned images, you can make copies and you can give them to all your friends and family." You know, give them ways in which it is a benefit to them to give us the originals. Because we're trained. I mean, you can have... anybody can inventory a collection. But we're trained in knowing how to care for them.

And also, appraisals that other... and that's the issue that archivists don't like to talk about. Because we in that way control what history is written. Because if we say,

“This isn’t worth keeping,” then it’s not going to be seen by people who are writing history.

And so trying to get as much stuff as we can without making people feel like we’re trying to take their stuff. Making them feel like you are the most valuable human being on the face of the earth right now. And I’m going to send you a letter of appreciation. I’m going to do everything I can to make this a pleasant experience for you.

And then we’ve had people just dump things on us. Like I’ve had family come and say, “I don’t want this. I didn’t like my dad anyway.” You know. So dealing with donors is a very, very important part of the work that we do.

Young: I think that the OHSU Historical Collections and Archives is one of the best archives in Portland. Between you and Maija, I’ve had nothing but positive experiences.

Peterson: Thank you.

Young: But I know a lot of historians and the general public aren’t aware that you’re up here. So say in ten years’ time, what sort of outreach efforts would you like to see happen so that more of the public and more of the history community is aware of your resources?

Peterson: Well I think one of the things that we did... and I was in the van when the seed was planted... when we decided to have an archives crawl. That was a really significant boon to getting the public to know about what we have. And I would cart things down to those archives crawls, whether it was in the Multnomah County library and PSU and put out as much stuff as possible. And people would say, “This is the best table in the entire crawl. What is this stuff and where is it and what do you have?”

We’ve done everything we possibly can. We have artists who come up. For instance, Katherine Wagner who came up. She had heard about us online. She’d seen our medical museum online. She’s a world renowned photographer. And she wanted to look at our osteo stuff. Our braces. And then she did an exhibit called “Reparations.” OPB uses our stuff. When they did “The Great White Plague,” they used our photographs and artifacts. We have people asking to use our materials. Trimet, there was an artist who’s building an art installation who used our collections. I think we’re doing everything we possibly can do with what we have right now. I mean, things like the archives crawl that’s advertised on KBOO and in Willamette Week. I mean, they really try to push out the collections.

What I’d like to see in the future is our new archivist really take that on as a challenge. I’m sure that there are lots of venues. For one, showing up at the history... And I know Maija does a lot of outreach that way. Going to other conferences other than SAA and Northwest Archivists to let people know about what we have. She presents at these conferences, which is what’s needed. I think the new archivist needs to do that as well.

I think just finding every venue and avenue we have to show what we have. Because it’s incredible. It’s an incredible collection. And thank goodness it’s getting the exposure that it’s getting, but it certainly deserves a lot more. Did that answer your question?

Young: Absolutely.

Peterson: Good.

Young: Yeah, I would like to see objects from your collections in museums more often. I think it was well-received at the Oregon History Museum when you had the 125th exhibit.

Peterson: Yes. Yes.

Young: And I think sometimes just the location of OHSU can be a bit inaccessible to the general public.

Peterson: Absolutely. Yeah.

Young: So getting it down off of the hill would be very beneficial. Both digitally and physically.

Peterson: And we're very open to loaning our materials. We loaned materials to the Oregon Jewish Museum when they did their exhibit on doctors and lawyers and Portland. We loaned our materials just recently, the Esther Pohl Lovejoy medals, we loaned them to—

Anderson: CSU Sacramento?

Peterson: It is Sacramento. It's UC Sacramento... in an exhibit they did on, I think it was war in Greece... or just on Greece... I think it was war in Greece, because they had a lot of sabers and uniforms and guns and all sorts of things. And Esther Pohl Lovejoy had spent time in Greece helping the victims of war. So we shipped our stuff down there.

It's always very scary. In fact, when we shipped those down there it was during a holiday and the person I shipped them to as the curator of the exhibit couldn't find the box of medals. So you're really taking a risk. And those are irreplaceable. You can't get those back. It's one thing when you can hand deliver something. It's another thing when you're trusting UPS or FedEx. And it doesn't matter if you put ten thousand dollars insurance on it. You're not going to buy that again. There's not another one like that out there. That was Esther Pohl Lovejoy's. You might be able to find another one like that, but it's not the same thing. And you can't cheat people like that. "This is the one that was like Esther's." No. It's not the same.

Young: Well I think the last question I have is can you compare OHSU's HCA to either other archives that focus on the health sciences or other archives in the Portland area. Do archivists do such things as that?

Peterson: Not really. Not really. One thing that's interesting is... because, I used to like to say that the archives lay dormant for decades... they didn't, really. They were being... there were still materials coming in. There was still interest in housing the stuff, even though there wasn't money to hire an archivist.

I think the biggest challenge to medical archives is having pharmaceuticals. Pharmaceuticals can be highly toxic. They need to be dealt with in certain ways. And not just pharmaceuticals, but, for instance, radium. We have no way of disposing of radium in Oregon. We have radioactive materials. We have drinking radium and we have an invigorator. Or a revigorator, excuse me, that is radium-lined. Knowing how to deal with those things, knowing that they shouldn't be... looking for corrosion, looking for rust, looking for leaks. Making sure that they're secure, where people aren't going to get a hold of them. Giving access to those things.

The reason I don't want to get rid of them is because research can be done on, for instance, carrying agents of pharmaceuticals, which can be much more toxic than the actual drug itself. Most archivists that I've talked to who have pharmaceuticals in their collection have their HazMat people come and empty everything out and they're left with bottles. To me, that's not enough because people were making pills, they were making their own pills; they were making their own herbal medications; they were making their own prescriptions. Pharmaceuticals are an important part of a medical museum. And those are the kind of discussions that I hear in particular.

You also have things like path... pathology specimens. Tissue slides. You know, those kinds of things are special pieces in a medical museum or a medical archive. Medical museums really are separate from medical archives and not all medical archives have medical artifacts. So when you have artifacts in your collection, you've got to be... a museum curator is quite different from an archivist... unless you've had training... I, fortunately, had training... not necessarily in pharmaceuticals but I could prove to our environmental safety folks on campus that I knew how to handle this stuff and I knew how to keep it safe. So this agreement that we have with them is wonderful. They don't question the things we have because they know we're taking care of them. So I think that's the biggest difficulty in archives, in medical archives.

Young: What about HIPAA? Because that seems to be—

Peterson: Oh, HIPAA. Oh, yeah. Well.

Young: --something I struggled with as a historian, of what I can and can't show.

Peterson: Yes.

Young: So could you speak to that a little bit for those who aren't familiar about how that might affect an archive?

Peterson: Absolutely. HIPAA restricts certain elements in a document or a record such as a person's social security number, their address, their phone number, the type of diseases they might have had. There are ways of working around HIPAA when you're in a medical archive. For one, researchers can get permission from our Institutional Review Board to look at materials and to use the information from the materials in their research... not necessarily disclosing these elements, but if they want to disclose certain elements or I think even as far as we restrict access to some things.

But we also have a policy that says if you accidentally or unintentionally run across any of these types of elements, and you disclose them, you are liable. We had to run this through Legal so that we covered them for liability because we certainly didn't want to be collecting these materials that are so valuable to research, and then create a liability for the university. They could shut us down in a heartbeat and say, "You can't have that stuff anymore." So we have to be well educated concerning HIPAA.

Not only HIPAA, but FERPA as far as students... because we're a university, not just a medical institution. We have to protect the privacy of the students. There have been, over the course of taking photos, probably University News and Publications, or University Relations and Public Affairs before UNP, where they would get... they had permission forms that people would sign. For instance, Doernbecher kids, because in order to raise money, sometimes you've got to have photos of patients... full face photos. You want to show that cute little child in a hospital bed with Hopalong Cassidy. Well, not in the bed with Hopalong Cassidy, but Hopalong Cassidy standing beside the bed. Or Ronald McDonald, for instance. And there would be permission forms. But we have... those have been misplaced, a lot of them. I say misplaced in that people with good intentions taking things home. Or thinking that they could take care of them better than we could, before we actually were something.

So yeah. All of those are huge issues. And you have to know how HIPAA operates. You have to know if you're a covered entity. Not everybody who has medical records is a covered entity. So, for instance, I may not be able to let you publish a photograph from our collections. But maybe Oregon Historical Society has a copy of that same image, and you can publish that image, because they're not covered by HIPAA. So it gets complicated.

HIPAA... there are lawyers who do nothing but HIPAA negotiations and arbitration. We take reasonable risk is what we do. If we think that this is a full-on face, but this is not, we will take that risk. We do not expose addresses, documentation... those kinds of things we wouldn't do. But everything we have is subject to HIPAA. So it's just an issue we have to deal with. It's an everyday issue.

Anderson: Okay. I have I thought of a summary question and we'll wrap it up.

Peterson: Okay.

Anderson: When you come back and visit us some time, twenty, thirty years from now, what would you like to see?

Peterson: More of the same. I think we're doing so many tremendous things. And I think hiring you was one of the best things that ever happened to us, because you're out there, you're all about the program, you're all about outreach, all about building everything about the program. Whether it's funding, whether it's technology, whether it's, you know, education and training and mentoring, you're all about that. I don't doubt that when I come back we're going to have space that we need, which is, of course, always a nemesis, that lack of space. I hope to see more exhibit cases. I hope to see more staff, now that we're hiring another archivist... we have head of the department, we have a sixty percent employee that we've had now more than five years, we have students,

interns. And I hope that continues to happen. I hope that we have a full time reference archivist. I hope that we have a larger staff of processing people, whether they're trained archivists or library—

[End Track 4. Begin Track 5.]

Peterson: --techs or volunteers or whatever. I think growth in staff, more money and more space and more exhibit stuff.

Anderson: All right. That's great. That's what I have for today.

Peterson: Good.

Anderson: So thank you so much. I've learned so much from talking to you and it's been such a pleasure and a privilege to get to work with you for a few years.

Peterson: Thank you.

Anderson: I couldn't be happier about how much you're looking forward to retirement and all the great, great things that you're going to do.

Peterson: Thank you.

Anderson: And I just thank you for all your work here. And OHSU doesn't know how much it owes you.

Peterson: Thank you. And the pleasure has been mine. And I thank you for this opportunity of sharing all this information.

Anderson: Thanks.

[End Interview.]