

THE  
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Oral History 039

An Interview with  
Donna and Allan Dieter

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## **AN INTERVIEW WITH DONNA DIETER AND ALLAN DIETER**

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: This is Sarah Canby Jackson interviewing Donna and Allan Dieter for The oH Project oral history program. The interview is taking place on February 24, 2018, in Houston, Texas. I am interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Dieter in order to obtain their recollections concerning care teams and the AIDS Interfaith Council.

Good morning, Donna and Allan, and thank you for talking with me.

DONNA DIETER: You are most welcome.

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: Donna, where were you born?

DONNA DIETER: I was born in beautiful downtown Burbank, California, in 1940.

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: Can you tell me what your parents' names and occupations were?

DONNA DIETER: My parents' names were George and Mary Moe. My dad was an engineer, and my mom was a stay-at-home, take-care-of-the-kids mom because that's the way Daddy wanted it. We had a very, very wonderful childhood.

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: You enjoyed growing up in California?

DONNA DIETER: I did, so much. We had the most wonderful neighbors and so much wonderful fruit that was growing on every tree around. It was amazing.

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: Did you have brothers and sisters?

DONNA DIETER: Sisters.

SARAH CANBY JACKSON: Sisters. How many?

DONNA DIETER: Two sisters, young. One was about three years younger than I, and

one was 10 years younger than I.

JACKSON: So you were the oldest?

DONNA DIETER: Yes, ma'am.

JACKSON: You led the pack. What was your life like growing up?

DONNA DIETER: You obeyed your parents. You had fun with the kids on the street.

We had neighbors who had nine children, and I adored all of them. It was just all play growing up. I was meant to clean house and do all these kinds of things, the normal things that Mary Moe would have her children doing, and then I was on my own in the neighborhood. It was a short street that we lived on, so everybody knew everybody, and it was a delightful place to grow up.

JACKSON: What did your father do?

DONNA DIETER: He was an aeronautical engineer. He worked at Lockheed.

JACKSON: So he was working during World War II?

DONNA DIETER: Yes.

JACKSON: You were quite young when the War ended. Five? Six?

DONNA DIETER: When did the War end?

JACKSON: 1945.

DONNA DIETER: I was probably four.

JACKSON: Were you even aware of the military buildup in southern California or any of that?

DONNA DIETER: No. I was very cloistered. No, I did not know what all was going on.

JACKSON: Did you always live in Burbank?

DONNA DIETER: This was in Glendale, excuse me.

JACKSON: Glendale.

DONNA DIETER: It was in Glendale, California. I was born in Burbank, grew up in Glendale, and then we moved. My father's job took him north to Sunnyvale. I finished high school there and went to college at San Jose State.

JACKSON: Great. What was your religious training?

DONNA DIETER: My parents were Lutheran, and so I was in the Lutheran Church. My mother's closest friend, when she was growing up, was the wife of the pastor of the church that we attended in Burbank, and I had a very wonderful experience with the church.

JACKSON: What did you major in, in college, and why?

DONNA DIETER: Nutrition, probably because it was the easiest. Besides that, I loved to cook, and I loved to take care of people, and I loved to do all the things that the department at San Jose State had to offer, and I adored it.

JACKSON: Excellent, excellent.

Allan, your turn. Where were you born?

ALLAN DIETER: I was born in the hospital, in Eureka, South Dakota.

JACKSON: Why were you in Eureka, South Dakota?

DONNA DIETER: I liked it when you stopped him, "Why?" His mother always wondered, too.

ALLAN DIETER: We lived in Herreid, South Dakota, and all of my relatives before me had been born at home, and so I was the first to be born in a hospital, and that marked for the family an advance in the world.

JACKSON: Yeah. What were your parents' names and occupations?

ALLAN DIETER: Henry and Lucinda Dieter. Henry was a Lutheran pastor, and my

mother was the mother of her children.

DONNA DIETER: She was as sweet as could be.

ALLAN DIETER: And never worked outside the home.

JACKSON: How many children?

ALLAN DIETER: Two others. I was the oldest; a brother, Lowell; and a sister, Elaine.

JACKSON: Tell me about your life growing up, because I'll make an assumption, here:

Being a pastor in smaller parishes, you moved around, as a preacher's kid.

ALLAN DIETER: Yes. When Dad graduated from seminary, he had met my mother, and she had been at the University of Dubuque in a teacher's course. Because of her debt from college, they didn't marry right away after he graduated, so he spent his first year in Herreid, South Dakota, as a bachelor until she earned enough from one year of teaching to pay her school debt, and then they got married. After she came out, I got born nine months after she came.

JACKSON: They were quick.

DONNA DIETER: They were Dieters.

JACKSON: They were Dieters, huh?

What was your childhood like?

ALLAN DIETER: It was a very small town. Babysitters were from a family in that small town, and so I grew up with babysitters. Mother had hay fever, we called it at the time, so badly in South Dakota, there, that Dad asked that he be called maybe to Iowa, where she had come from, and we knew that would have been much better. As soon as my sister was born, we moved to a rural area near Iowa City called Atalissa, Iowa. Then in 1939, we moved to a larger parish in Dubuque, Iowa, and then in 1948, to Oelwein, Iowa, and I graduated from high

school there and then went to Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, 35 miles away.

What else in my childhood?

JACKSON: Uh-huh.

ALLAN DIETER: Then I went to Wartburg Seminary back in Dubuque, Iowa, for five years, interning at Washington State University at the time in Pullman, Washington, and then made a trip to Europe during that last summer, for a student tour, a meeting with students in Paris and Vienna and Berlin and several places, and then I graduated.

JACKSON: And then you graduated. You graduated with a degree in theology?

ALLAN DIETER: Yes, yes.

JACKSON: These were Lutheran seminaries?

ALLAN DIETER: Yes, yes, the same seminary that my father had graduated from and that his father had graduated from.

JACKSON: So you were a legacy.

ALLAN DIETER: I was a legacy.

JACKSON: A legacy from the word go.

DONNA DIETER: An old school.

JACKSON: Tell me a little bit about your postgraduate education. You said that you had worked with colleges or college ministry? Student ministry?

ALLAN DIETER: My education after leaving seminary, I went to Moscow, Idaho, as a lay, not an ordained person, as a student counselor. My internship had been 12 miles away at Washington State in Pullman, Washington, and so when I graduated, I wanted to do graduate work in psychology. I had been raised and educated within the Lutheran tradition, and I had heard about these secular

universities and wondered what they were like. I didn't want to take a parish. I wanted to get more education, so I started for a master's degree in Pullman, Washington, at Washington State, as well as a part-time job as a counselor at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho.

Then each summer from then on, I would also do summer school someplace, graduate theological seminary, in Maywood, in Chicago Seminary, and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley. I would take courses during the summer toward advanced degrees.

Then later on, I became interested in some other kinds of movements from my clinical psychology. Fritz Perls was one of those who had developed a following, and I went to seminars and things like that, trained in his — later on, when I was campus pastor here in Houston, I got acquainted with Carl Rogers as a psychology guy in theology and attended two full summer programs in San Diego, California, on how to relate to people, how people — you know, clinical psychology for him. He put on a program in which we actually trained, with students in the community, in his style and his approach, and Donna also participated in that program with me.

JACKSON: Let's back up a little bit. How did you two meet? She's in California.

You're in Idaho and eastern Washington.

ALLAN DIETER: Do I get to tell that, or you?

DONNA DIETER: You do.

ALLAN DIETER: I was counselor at Moscow, Idaho, at the University of Idaho, and the campus pastor at San Jose State was leaving his position, to become a regional director for the organization. He had met me at summer conferences from when I

was an intern, and now when I was a lay counselor at the University of Idaho. He invited me down, knowing that I was on a path toward a degree, to maybe replace him, and so I came down —

DONNA DIETER: As campus pastor at San Jose State.

ALLAN DIETER: — as a campus pastor at San Jose. I was not ordained yet at that time. It was kind of odd. I considered it a compliment that he asked me to come down. He asked me to preach to their service on a Sunday and meet with students there, et cetera.

I came down. I preached a sermon which was okay. Then we had kind of a little reception, that I could meet with students and the like. I don't know what I did during that period, but anyhow —

DONNA DIETER: You did it, baby.

ALLAN DIETER: — the students and he, as campus pastor there, met and said, “What do you guys think?”

I'm afraid my wife was typically untypically so outgoing, she said, “He's the one.”

After that little reception, I noticed that she had cookies, and so I went over to take some cookies, assuming that she had baked them. Later in life, I learned her mother had done it.

Anyhow, it was an interesting thing in which I noted in the back of my memory, this is someone I should get to know a little better.

JACKSON: So you moved to San Jose. You got the job.

ALLAN DIETER: I got the job and went through the rigmarole —

DONNA DIETER: I just said, “He is going to be a campus pastor,” and it was so



exciting.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, but I had this big hurdle. I wasn't ordained. I had theologically trained, and in the Lutheran tradition, you cannot be ordained or remain as a pastor unless a group calls you to be a pastor and offers you a job, a position, et cetera, and so we had to go to higher Church authorities and say the normal regulations, a guy like this has to serve a congregation for three years before you can be eligible for special ministries like campus ministries or hospital ministries or something like that.

Well, I was called in for an interview to Chicago while I was counselor there, and then in a little while, I got a call and said, "You've been okayed," and so then I was, on the strength of a call to this new-for-me position in San Jose, I was ordained in Iowa and then took up residency in San Jose.

JACKSON: And began dating Donna.

DONNA DIETER: You betcha. She started dating him. He finally caught on. You know, we just need to work on the works.

JACKSON: He was putty in your hands, wasn't he, Donna?

DONNA DIETER: Absolutely.

ALLAN DIETER: Not exactly putty.

DONNA DIETER: He wouldn't want to look at it that way.

ALLAN DIETER: This Midwestern, Iowa-grown-up person had heard about California women, and I knew that I was no real match for what wiles they might have, and so I was very cautious and very circumspect about seeing her. They weren't really dates.

Part of my job was to help get an old house they had bought ready for

occupancy as a center, and students were around that would help with that, and she was one of those students that would show up and help. We tore off wallpaper off of the house and —

DONNA DIETER: These were ancient houses, like from the early 1800s sort of thing.

ALLAN DIETER: When you peeled away the wallpaper, some of them were very garish and red, and people said, “Hey, that was a” —

DONNA DIETER: It was a bordello.

ALLAN DIETER: — “bordello house in its history,” so it was an exciting time.

JACKSON: That is.

DONNA DIETER: A good place for campus ministry, right?

JACKSON: When were you married?

ALLAN DIETER: Two years after I arrived, it could occur. By then, I had decided that this is going to be it, got over my fear.

JACKSON: Had you graduated?

ALLAN DIETER: Yes.

DONNA DIETER: We got married two weeks after I graduated from college.

JACKSON: What year was that?

DONNA DIETER: 1962.

JACKSON: 1962. Okay. How much longer did you stay in San Jose after you were married?

ALLAN DIETER: 1964.

DONNA DIETER: We moved here in 1964.

JACKSON: What brought you to Houston? I mean, why did you leave San Jose?

DONNA DIETER: Campus ministry.

ALLAN DIETER: Well, I was campus ministry in San Jose. I knew nothing about the racial issues, and I was aware from my counseling, et cetera, I wanted to understand that better. I was very happy in San Jose, but nothing was happening. It was 1964. There were big things happening at all the Eastern campuses and everybody else, but at least at San Jose that wasn't the type. A classmate of mine from seminary was on the board here, looking for a campus minister.

DONNA DIETER: Who was that?

ALLAN DIETER: Elias Roede.

And so they said, "Would you come and look us over and see whether you might like to come here?"

I left Donna, coming to Houston thinking, "Who would want to go to Houston when they're in San Jose, California?" But I came here and saw the situation in which there was a black university right next to a new state university, the University of Houston. It had been a private university, I think, only three years earlier yet, so it was a unique kind of situation.

DONNA DIETER: And there was a black campus pastor on the staff there, too.

ALLAN DIETER: Yes, and the position also was at Rice, also.

DONNA DIETER: Rice, TSU [Texas Southern University], and U of H.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah. Rice, TSU, and U of H were my campuses. When I came here, I saw that the racial issue here was a really live thing and this was a Southern city, and so when I went back, I said, "I think we ought to move." Spent only two years wasn't what I wanted to do, but I saw an opportunity. What I found out when I came here, that they had a residence already for the campus pastor in the neighborhood that was turning black from the wealthy Jewish

community.

JACKSON: Riverside Terrace?

ALLAN DIETER: Riverside Terrace.

DONNA DIETER: And we were the only whites. That was exciting.

ALLAN DIETER: And we were the only whites in this area here. It was exciting for the possibility of being in a black area, living and working.

JACKSON: Really, this was your only true exposure to dealing with a significant number of African Americans.

ALLAN DIETER: Absolutely.

JACKSON: You grew up in the Midwest.

ALLAN DIETER: Yes, we had one football star in Dubuque, Iowa. He attended high school, all white.

JACKSON: Then you went to postgraduate school in eastern Washington and Idaho, and then you were in San Jose, where I'm sure there were some African Americans, but not many.

ALLAN DIETER: No.

JACKSON: And now, as a family — did you have children at this time?

ALLAN DIETER: One.

DONNA DIETER: We made one over there in San Jose.

JACKSON: So you came here —

DONNA DIETER: He was three months old or something.

JACKSON: — with a baby, a wife, and you as a relatively young pastor.

ALLAN DIETER: Yes.

DONNA DIETER: And came into an all-black neighborhood and loved it.

JACKSON: In Jim Crow Houston. It was still under Jim Crow.

ALLAN DIETER: But they didn't have separate entities at businesses, did they?

JACKSON: At that time?

ALLAN DIETER: In the 1960s?

JACKSON: Yeah.

ALLAN DIETER: I wasn't aware of them.

JACKSON: The county cafeteria was still segregated.

ALLAN DIETER: Was it?

DONNA DIETER: We were kind of oblivious to a lot of things, Allan, I think.

ALLAN DIETER: I guess we were. I guess we were.

JACKSON: I would have been.

DONNA DIETER: We were here. We were embraced by our neighbors. We were excited. I'd cook and bake and send it around. We had a very wonderful time here, plus having babies.

JACKSON: You had two more children?

DONNA DIETER: Uh-huh.

ALLAN DIETER: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: So that's the background. You're socially liberal and responsible coming into Houston.

Did you join Christ the King when you moved here? How long were you with that parish?

ALLAN DIETER: As a campus pastor, I was representing many congregations, and I was hesitant to have our family membership at a specific one.

JACKSON: Right.

ALLAN DIETER: We probably as a family didn't join a congregation for three or four years, and then she joined with the boys. I didn't personally join.

JACKSON: So they could get Sunday school, yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Well, we had them baptized at Christ the King.

ALLAN DIETER: Oh, yeah, that's right.

DONNA DIETER: And that started it up.

JACKSON: Your relationship with that particular parish?

DONNA DIETER: Congregation, yeah.

JACKSON: You were happy in Houston?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: The college situation here, was there participation in Vietnam demonstrations, antiwar demonstrations, or was that pretty much off the table?

ALLAN DIETER: I don't remember those.

JACKSON: Because the big demonstrations nationally were — Cambodia was in the spring of 1970, the invasion of Cambodia, and that was also the March on Washington. I'm just wondering if there was anything in Houston.

DONNA DIETER: Did you go to that? Did you go to Washington?

ALLAN DIETER: Huh-uh.

No, I don't remember the war issues, of being much aware of them. I was much more aware of the local issues in the race situation.

JACKSON: In racial situations.

ALLAN DIETER: There were several of us campus pastors. The Episcopal especially and I were assigned to both U of H and TSU, and so the TSU group of campus pastors generally, there were three of us who were white, the Roman Catholic was

a white Catholic priest, and the rest of them, about four of them, were black pastors from Methodist, Baptist —

DONNA DIETER: Presbyterian.

ALLAN DIETER: No. The Presbyterian was —

DONNA DIETER: He was the white one.

ALLAN DIETER: He was another white, yeah. He was a part-time. He had a parish and the campus pastor. So we'd work on a half-and-half campus pastors.

What does a white guy do with very few Lutheran students on the campus at TSU? You talk to students. We had weekly, I think it was, campus pastors meetings in which we would share what was going on and what the issues were and blah, blah, blah. As campus pastors, we were mostly talking to students, and of course, a lot of them were those who were vocal. Barbara Jordan. Who was the guy that became a Congressman after her?

JACKSON: Mickey Leland.

ALLAN DIETER: Mickey Leland. He was in pharmacy at the time. He was one of those level-headed kind of leaders. We would talk with them, and the administration seemed like they didn't know quite how to do things, to react to what students were saying. Black Power, for instance, nationally and even locally. We found ourselves kind of an intermediary sometimes between the administration people and the vocal students, especially, letting them know what the others are really saying.

Black Power scared many whites, and I was at a loss to know whether that was really reverse racism or whether this was a way to express themselves that blacks could understand in their code languages. We would often talk to the

president or other student affairs, et cetera, at TSU about what was going on. Sometimes we actually passed actual messages from the group here — I don't remember Mickey Leland especially, but people like that — on what they were talking about to the administration so that they could at least have our perspective of what was going on and what they were saying and what it might mean. It was kind of an exciting situation.

We did the same thing, with a different group, of course, at the University of Houston, because at that time I was doing this graduate student stuff out in California at Berkeley, and we knew that Berkeley was ahead of the times, and so I was very interested while I was doing my graduate work. Then I would go down to downtown Berkeley and see what was going on and talk with the Lutheran students down there, and they would take us around.

One Saturday, we went down —

DONNA DIETER: At heart, he's a rabble-rouser.

ALLAN DIETER: We went down to downtown Berkeley, and there were lots of people around. Maybe they had legitimate reasons for their being there, or maybe they were going to be protestors. We didn't know, but we did notice that there were policemen on the roofs, with guns in their hands.

DONNA DIETER: This made me feel real comfortable, when he'd call home, and I'd say, "Come home."

ALLAN DIETER: Anyhow, I noticed the students we were with that were kind of showing us around said, "Hey, something is funny here. We've got a student apartment up here, second floor, right on the thing."

So we went into that building and got up on the second floor and opened



the window and looked down, and sure enough, we could see the whole main street, all the way, and then we could see buses way down there and see policemen coming. Then they came up, and students gathered in the street to our left, and the police were coming down to the right, and then there started being tear gas fired by the police. I don't remember the police using a lot of megaphones and saying, "Hey, we want you students to disperse." I don't know.

Anyhow, then the students would take the canisters and throw it back at the police, and then the police had to be busy about getting rid of the ones that were back on them before they could fire another one off. Anyhow, it was a very exciting experience.

JACKSON: But you weren't in the middle of it. You were an observer.

ALLAN DIETER: That's right. I was an observer, that's right.

JACKSON: See, Donna, he was just an observer.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah, right.

ALLAN DIETER: Anyhow, then I would come back to the U of H and TSU and say, "Hey, this is what's going on there. This is the way I understood it," et cetera. "Let's get ready for this so that we don't make a bunch of stupid stands on the part of the administration or the students."

Part of it, we, then, as campus pastors at the U of H, would go to the administration to talk to them and say — I talked to the president once or twice, the vice president most of the time, about what was happening and what we might do here to change things so there doesn't have to be an anti-violent kind of thing.

For instance, U of H had a — it wasn't even related to a race issue. They were going to build a new architecture school building, and it was in a big crowd

of trees. A lot of pine trees here at that time. The students wanted them saved, and so they got in the trees, and the campus police started to chase —

DONNA DIETER: Oh, gosh, I remember that.

ALLAN DIETER: — after them up the trees. They brought in 40-foot ladders to try to climb the trees, and the students would climb higher. I think I called one of the vice presidents that I knew and said, “Hey, this is what’s going on.”

He said, “Oh, my gosh,” so he came right down to us.

I said, “This is the kind of thing that I think was going to tip off other kinds of things.”

He said, “I agree with you 100 percent,” so he ordered the chief of police to get his men out of there, and it de-escalated. That was fun.

DONNA DIETER: He’s a good guy.

JACKSON: I’d imagine. When did you leave campus ministry at the University of Houston?

DONNA DIETER: I don’t recall.

ALLAN DIETER: It was such an anxious period that I’ve blocked that out of my mind. I want to get back to you on the date of that.

JACKSON: Well, you had said earlier it was 1972. Does that sound right?

DONNA DIETER: What happened in 1972?

ALLAN DIETER: I’m not sure. That could be.

JACKSON: Anyway, I think it’s important to know that you-all were very involved and did not shy away from dealing with issues.

ALLAN DIETER: At U of H, there was a, hired by the university, head of the religion center. As a private school, the religion center was financed and built —

JACKSON: You mean at Rice?

ALLAN DIETER: At U of H.

DONNA DIETER: No. At U of H.

ALLAN DIETER: At U of H.

JACKSON: It was a public school.

ALLAN DIETER: Well, it was a public school, that's right, but the financing and all that  
of the religion center —

JACKSON: Oh, was private.

ALLAN DIETER: When it became public, the state allowed that that was okay for them  
to keep it, and all that kind of stuff.

The head of that then had a Christmas party, I think.

DONNA DIETER: Ed Bennett?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah. Over in West University. I'm not sure where it was, where  
they lived.

DONNA DIETER: At his house?

ALLAN DIETER: They lived over someplace.

DONNA DIETER: That's right.

ALLAN DIETER: And we took our neighbors as guests.

DONNA DIETER: Black.

ALLAN DIETER: Black neighbors. He worked in a high school.

DONNA DIETER: Well, they were both teachers, high-school teachers.

ALLAN DIETER: She was a counselor, and he was an administrator, mostly.

DONNA DIETER: Okay.

ALLAN DIETER: We had the party. The next day, we found out that they had a

cross —

DONNA DIETER: Burned.

ALLAN DIETER: — burned on their lawn.

JACKSON: Because of your guests?

ALLAN DIETER: Because of our guests to the people.

DONNA DIETER: Two wonderful, wonderful people.

ALLAN DIETER: That kind of set the stage for things, too.

JACKSON: Yeah, that's difficult.

ALLAN DIETER: It bamboozled us because we didn't think of the tension here as that — we were completely isolated from that kind of activity. Of course, we were in this community. We weren't in that community, and I guess there's a reason we weren't there.

JACKSON: Well, I think if you think forward a decade or so to when AIDS struck, that you already had a history of dealing with controversy, of dealing with fear in the community.

DONNA DIETER: Controversy was never an issue. We went for what we believed in.

JACKSON: Right, that's what I'm saying, that you were able to go.

ALLAN DIETER: I never, ever considered it —

DONNA DIETER: Yeah, that's what I'm trying to say.

ALLAN DIETER: — as moving into a controversial issue.

DONNA DIETER: No.

ALLAN DIETER: It was just —

DONNA DIETER: A people person.

ALLAN DIETER: When we marched in Montgomery later on —

DONNA DIETER: Right.

JACKSON: You went to Montgomery?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

Four of us at U of H, white guys, campus pastors, said —

DONNA DIETER: I sat at home by the radio with three babies.

JACKSON: Are you talking the Selma to Montgomery March?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Yes.

ALLAN DIETER: We didn't participate in the march, but we did attend the rally at —

JACKSON: You met them in Montgomery?

ALLAN DIETER: In Montgomery, and the four of us decided we ought to go. I don't know if any of the guys checked with their bodies or not. Anyhow, we felt free enough to go, so we put on our collars and — well, we didn't put on our collars yet then, but we got up early, we were going to arrive about an hour before the march was supposed to start, and then we were going to drive Maddock manic afterwards.

So we did that, and I never thought of it being controversial. It mostly dawned on me, after we got there, that we needed a restroom. Then we went to a house, and they said, "Sure, come on in," a black house. It was, I guess, a high school, it was maybe even a black high school, for their — the football field is where we all gathered. And so we were instructed to stand so far apart, and they were about eight, nine people wide, to march down the street, no parked cars, but hecklers at the sidewalk on each one.

The National Guard, Alabama National Guard was there, and they had

soldiers with rifles, but they faced the crowd. They didn't face the marchers, so they couldn't see where anything that was thrown at us might land or might hit somebody or something like that.

Even then, I wasn't afraid of anything. I didn't think of this as something that would become violent. I was dumb, I guess. My activity in these things wasn't ever based on fear of violence that might erupt. It was based more on what can I learn? What can I know about this? And then, accidentally things happened.

JACKSON: Donna, while he's going off to Alabama, marching in the most violent civil rights summer there was, the end of the Selma Bridge marches and all of that, you're home with three kids, two or three babies.

DONNA DIETER: Three babies.

JACKSON: What was your life like?

DONNA DIETER: Scared, just scared, because I know that he was left off on his own to be Allan Dieter, which scared me. His willingness to get into any situation scared me because looking at news from all over the country, watching TV, sitting up next to the radio all the time, taking care of those little babies that we had, I thought, "How can you do this? Why are you doing this?" But I knew that he had to do it, and so I was betwixt and between, and I prayed a lot. I listened to the radio constantly.

ALLAN DIETER: And as I look at it, it reversed itself when it came to AIDS. When it came to AIDS, she was the one that was into it first, and I was the outsider wondering, "What in the world is she getting into?" At that time, lots of people didn't believe it was transmitted only certain ways. They thought just being in the

presence of AIDS person.

JACKSON: Yeah, no one knew.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, no one knew. “What is she getting us into?”

JACKSON: Your turn to pray.

ALLAN DIETER: My turn to pray.

DONNA DIETER: I never thought of that.

JACKSON: This is kind of an aside, but I just want to get it straight, and then we may go back to it. You were a midwife. You practiced midwifery, correct?

DONNA DIETER: Uh-huh.

JACKSON: When did you do that? When did you get trained to do that?

DONNA DIETER: I don't recall, I'm sorry.

JACKSON: Was it before or after the home groups?

DONNA DIETER: The home groups?

ALLAN DIETER: Before.

JACKSON: The care groups. It was before.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, way, way before, yeah.

JACKSON: In what way were you involved with midwifery? You said you're not a nurse.

DONNA DIETER: No, I'm not a nurse, but I was involved with a lot of nursing, and I did what I could do, and it grew, and it grew.

ALLAN DIETER: From the hospital, Jeff Davis.

DONNA DIETER: Jeff Davis.

JACKSON: From Jeff Davis. So you worked with Jeff Davis?

DONNA DIETER: I was a volunteer at Jeff Davis to start with. You're right, that's

where it started.

ALLAN DIETER: And while I was writing sermons at home and taking care of the kids, she was going to Jeff Davis in the maternity ward.

JACKSON: Just to put some context into this, Jeff Davis at this time had a very bad reputation. Babies were dying from diarrhea. This is when they were trying to get the hospital district passed. This was not just being a pink lady at your community hospital, was it?

DONNA DIETER: No, it wasn't. No, it wasn't.

JACKSON: Can you describe the conditions of Jeff Davis at that time?

DONNA DIETER: All you wanted to do was to make them better and to treat each person as a child of God and to do the best you could to enhance their life while they were hospitalized. They were people. It was the poor people who could not defend themselves or care for themselves in the way that they could have been and should have been. The Red Cross nurse's aides came in there, and they worked, and they worked.

JACKSON: So you worked with the Red Cross?

DONNA DIETER: Yes. It was such a blessing. You know, the people are so gracious.

ALLAN DIETER: Give some detail.

DONNA DIETER: I don't have a lot of detail to give, sweetheart.

ALLAN DIETER: One time, she was assisting in which some of the people about to deliver mothers were about to deliver, and there was no way to get a doctor there. They were all very busy, so she practically helped birth that person in the middle of the aisle.

DONNA DIETER: Sure.



JACKSON: In the hallway, yeah.

DONNA DIETER: I knew what to do.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, she saw what was going on and knew what to do kind of thing.

Another time was, she was in with a patient in surgery, and the doctor looked at her and said, “Cut her throat open. We need a tracheotomy.”

She said, “I’m not a nurse.”

“I don’t care. We’re in such dire need, you’ve got to do it.”

She said, “I won’t do it.”

He said, “You will do it.”

DONNA DIETER: He was bigger than me.

JACKSON: It’s a surgeon, too, and you know they’re God.

ALLAN DIETER: Right, right, and so she did it. It turned out great. But that kind of understaffing and the like was going on, and for somebody like her —

DONNA DIETER: This was at Jeff Davis in those days.

JACKSON: I don’t know if you read the book *The Hospital*, and I’m sure you were well aware of all the controversy in the newspaper articles before they got the hospital district finally staffed, but babies dying of diarrhea just from the conditions.

DONNA DIETER: Absolutely, absolutely. I felt so blessed to be there, to be able to see something and to act on it. I’d go out with the doctors. I’d go out after work, which would be like 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning, and they’d find someplace to go and have a drink, and we’d talk about it. It was so sad, but I was so glad to be there, I just could have smiled forever.

ALLAN DIETER: She’d come home and tell me about all these wonderful things that had happened and how excited she was about it.

DONNA DIETER: Oh, I'd wake him.

JACKSON: Did you ever consider getting formal training?

DONNA DIETER: Who needed formal training? I was getting it on the job.

JACKSON: Right. So you really became a midwife from on-the-job training?

ALLAN DIETER: Well, she also had some formal training from a group. Jehovah's Witnesses, was it?

DONNA DIETER: I'd forgotten that.

ALLAN DIETER: One of the religious groups like that that doesn't like doctors, and so they train their own midwives, and she joined that kind of group, and that's where she got her more detailed kind of education, et cetera.

DONNA DIETER: That was a long time ago.

JACKSON: Right.

DONNA DIETER: Gosh, you've got a good memory.

ALLAN DIETER: During that period, she would have meetings with other wannabes for midwifery, and they would have a naked mother on the table, and she would show them all kinds of things.

DONNA DIETER: Oh, yeah.

ALLAN DIETER: The kids were all out someplace. I was out.

DONNA DIETER: Our dining room table. It was big.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, on the dining room table, helped do this training as part of her own training kind of stuff. It was very responsibly done, and she also always had a doctor as backup on any of her births, et cetera.

JACKSON: So you did home births.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: Because you wouldn't be able to do a birth in the hospital.

DONNA DIETER: Well, I did some of those, too, but I only did — and just because nobody was there.

JACKSON: Right, but I mean, you had patients. You had women you followed and took care of.

DONNA DIETER: Yes.

ALLAN DIETER: Oh, yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Oh, yes.

JACKSON: And those were home births?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: Yeah. That was a time when it was becoming popular.

DONNA DIETER: I had more than I could deal with, but I wouldn't have passed up a moment of it.

[END OF AUDIO PART 1]

JACKSON: Were you still doing nurse midwifery when AIDS came on the scene?

DONNA DIETER: Probably.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, yeah. It tapered off then because of the AIDS.

DONNA DIETER: What tapered off?

ALLAN DIETER: Your midwifery.

DONNA DIETER: Did it?

ALLAN DIETER: You didn't have time for it.

JACKSON: Well, let's go back to the AIDS. You were in the medical field. You were at Jeff Davis. You were dealing with mothers. When do you think you first

became aware of AIDS or of this — at one time it was called GRID [gay-related immune deficiency].

DONNA DIETER: It was Michael Fry, my dearest friend.

JACKSON: So that's when you really became aware of AIDS?

DONNA DIETER: When he got sick, I was his. I would not do anything else, but I took care of Michael.

JACKSON: Tell us about Michael.

DONNA DIETER: Michael was a very special, delightful, rambunctious child of God.



Michael Fry, ca. 1987

Don't forget the rambunctious. He was a delight. His mother was a delight. His sister couldn't understand him or me or anybody. She just was angry that Michael got sick with AIDS. Michael was a wonderful gay man.

Michael got sick. So what do you do when your friend gets sick? You take care of him.

JACKSON: Do you know when this was, roughly?

DONNA DIETER: It was a long time ago. I don't have any pinpoints to —

ALLAN DIETER: We could ask some other people, though.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah, we could. We could go to the church records, even.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Michael is a member of Christ the King, and he came to me, right here to this table, sitting right here, and he started weeping, and I was just,

“Michael, what is wrong?”

He’s going, “You’re not going to like me anymore.”

I said, “What could ever make me not like you?”

He said, “I’ve got AIDS.”

I said, “So? We’ll work with this together,” and we did.

ALLAN DIETER: His greatest fear was the reaction at Christ the King.

DONNA DIETER: Exactly. What happened at Christ the King —

ALLAN DIETER: Tell them what he feared.

JACKSON: Say it out loud, what his greatest fear was.

ALLAN DIETER: Say it out loud.

DONNA DIETER: That the people at Christ the King would —

JACKSON: Reject him.

DONNA DIETER: — reject him, would stay away from him, would not have anything to do with him.

And what did they do? They became the most holy of wonderful people, taking care of Michael, day and night, if necessary. However he needed help, they were there. It transfixed him. It just made him believe in God again. He was so scared, and his mom was so scared. So you’re ministering to — his sister was angry at him and at all of us for caring for him. His mother, who was the princess of the — you know, she is so wonderful. I don’t know what happened to her. I lost track.

ALLAN DIETER: Tell them, Michael was an interesting member because he was in the choir, the main church choir. He was in the altar guild that takes care of the paraments and the like for Holy Communion, et cetera, and as a man, was the

only man that's been on the altar guild in that congregation.

Was he on the church council?

DONNA DIETER: I don't know about that. I think I was, at the time, but I don't think he was.

ALLAN DIETER: Don't think he was. But he was well-integrated in that congregation and was an assistant for Holy Communion on Sunday mornings regularly. He was very well-integrated and a lot of his life was, and he was afraid that all of it was going to be disappearing.

DONNA DIETER: I had no problem in telling him that he should put that aside because his church was with him and he was with the church, and that's exactly the way it was, and it was beautiful.

JACKSON: Tell me how the church coalesced, came together to care for Michael. I know that you were the spearhead. Michael was yours.

DONNA DIETER: [Shaking head.]

JACKSON: Yes.

But how did everyone else come together? Did you have a sign-up sheet and say, "We need people to bring food for Michael?" or how did it happen?

DONNA DIETER: I don't recall all the details. All I know is that we needed to take care of Michael, we needed to take care of his mother. His sister could fit in wherever she wished to, because she was an angry woman that her brother did this, and so we dealt with that part. She came together.

ALLAN DIETER: There were no sign-up sheets, as I remember. She became an advocate when talking with people about, "We've got to take care of Michael."

People would volunteer, to say, "Well, what needs being done?"

When he became hospitalized and visiting in the hospital became — did we ever take food to him at his home?

DONNA DIETER: Sure.

ALLAN DIETER: Did we? I don't remember that, yeah.

DONNA DIETER: The church took care of Michael.

ALLAN DIETER: Individuals in the church responded to what was happening.

JACKSON: The needs, exactly.

ALLAN DIETER: The needs. We only brought food and would sit with him.

DONNA DIETER: He was our first person that we could take care of as the AIDS situation grew and grew and grew, and it helped people to accept other friends of theirs that they heard about. It was like Michael was a flower that bloomed, and all of his pollen dust came onto all the people, and they all joined in to be caring of people in that place. My God, there were too many people in that place.

JACKSON: Michael was the first but not the last of the people you cared for. How did you get other AIDS patients? How did you become aware of them?

DONNA DIETER: I think they became aware of us, and I think we were asked to help. I can think of a couple of churches that called me and said, "We've got a member. Where should we go? How should we do it?" and that sort of grew. It just sort of blossomed because it needed to.

JACKSON: Were there other members of the congregation who had AIDS, or did AIDS patients become members of your congregation?

DONNA DIETER: I wouldn't know how to say that. It was still a —

ALLAN DIETER: This was the first situation.

DONNA DIETER: Where they came out.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, and when Michael died, and in those days, they died soon after they first knew they were sick, it happened so rapidly, so that by the time Michael died, there were 40, 50 people that were volunteering as a team —

DONNA DIETER: The AIDS care team at Christ the King.

ALLAN DIETER: — at Christ the King that were not part of any Christ the King organization. They were just friends of his or responding to the need, and many of them were not members of Christ the King.

DONNA DIETER: But they became members, a lot of them.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: It was like, “This is for gay folks. I mean, if your congregation can take care of us, we’re part.” Michael just blessed everything, wherever he went, without knowing it.

JACKSON: What was the reaction of the clergy to you taking this on and to the care teams?

DONNA DIETER: “Thank God somebody is doing it.” You know, they didn’t need to be called out, but they came.

JACKSON: Right.

DONNA DIETER: It wasn’t like, “You’ve got to be there,” because there are a lot of people there. It was, they came from their own hearts. Michael was one of the magnificent men, gay, single, funnier than heck, worked harder than an army of people.

ALLAN DIETER: He was a chef, a sous-chef, right?

DONNA DIETER: Yes.

ALLAN DIETER: In pastries, for one of the hotels.



DONNA DIETER: One of the big places, yeah.

And if this can happen to Michael, it could happen — you know, there but for the grace of God, and they came out.

ALLAN DIETER: But the question is about the clergy. This was not a Christ the King organization. This was just some private people getting together and/or attracting other maybe homosexual people, too, you know, that wanted to help in this, even though they weren't affected yet. It was a generally positive reaction from clergy.

DONNA DIETER: “Generally”? Yeah. It was like, “Somebody has got to do it,” sort of thing.

ALLAN DIETER: It was not resistance, and there was no question about whether it was an official organization of the church. It never occurred to anybody, but it became associated always with the church because that's where almost all of the original members, at least, were coming from. It was not officially sanctioned by the church council, the ruling group of the congregation. It just happened it was growing again, and people would talk all the time at church when they'd meet. “How's Michael?” or, “How's so-and-so-and-so?”<sup>1</sup>

Then I guess later on, you did make reports to the church council about what was going on, and they assigned one of the pastors, a second pastor, to be at our meetings. I don't think it is in the minutes. I don't think it was official.

JACKSON: A liaison, yeah.

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<sup>1</sup> Added later by Allan Dieter: “People from the congregation began coming to the group and would be assigned to a veteran when they visited a patient. It was training while doing. After Michael died, the group decided to ask for another patient. By then we had so many team members that we asked for more patients. Patients died quickly, often within several weeks. We ended up having five patients at a time. By then we had almost 70 members, many not members at Christ the King. At one time I remember having 24-hour care for over a week by team members. Most members had full-time jobs.”

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, but he was a liaison.

JACKSON: Yeah. You spoke at other churches. Tell me about that. Did they call and invite you, or did you reach out to them?<sup>2</sup>

DONNA DIETER: He didn't, no. They called and invited me, and they would stick me up in the front, and I was to do a sermon or something. Well, I don't do some of those things without weeping. I cried during some of these things, and people cried with me in the audience. It's just such a tremendously moving experience to be able to share with people the gifts that they gave to us by coming forward in their own pain and grief and letting the church minister to them, and people did. Does that make sense?

JACKSON: Uh-huh, absolutely.

You don't have to give me the exact date, because I know that's difficult. How did you become aware of the Interfaith Council? And you worked with them, also called FIRM [Foundation for Interfaith Ministry and Research]; it became FIRM.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah. I don't recall.

ALLAN DIETER: When Michael died, the group had been around him. What does the group do? There were gobs of people. I don't think we were aware of any other

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<sup>2</sup> Added later by Allan Dieter: "Word got around that Christ the King Lutheran Church had a team caring for an AIDS patient in their congregation. So churches began to ask Donna to talk to them about how to go about it. She'd typically meet with the pastor, and then their governing body would ask her to talk to the congregation, often at their main worship service. It seemed like most every congregation discovered an HIV person in their congregation and they were frightened about how to treat them.

"After a short time, FIRM asked Donna to join their work and solicit congregations to form their own HIV care group. It was exciting for Donna to search out unlikely churches. She had a way of calming fears and helping form new groups. She remembers many evangelical congregations who many would expect to keep their distance from homosexuals. She even recruited Second Baptist. I'm not sure, but I believe at one time they had over 100 AIDS care teams in Houston. We ended up having teams from Beaumont to Galveston. AIDS had spread outside of the gay community to straight folks and children."

member of the congregation that had AIDS, but the general thought was, let's continue. I think it was at that time we got in —

DONNA DIETER: That Earl came into it.

ALLAN DIETER: — that Earl came into the thing and said, “Hey, can we help you?

We're dealing with these kinds of issues?”

DONNA DIETER: It's not, “Can you help?” It was, “Can you help us?”

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, okay. They then were the feed for the people who were recommended to us to be the next one.

JACKSON: So they acted as a clearinghouse?

ALLAN DIETER: Yes.

JACKSON: Okay.

DONNA DIETER: I'm not thinking this. If they knew of somebody, they'd tell me.

ALLAN DIETER: Well, yeah.

JACKSON: Right.

DONNA DIETER: Instead of “clearinghouse.”

ALLAN DIETER: Well, I think they did that with other congregations, too, became that kind of clearinghouse.

The group decided, “We'll take somebody,” so they took somebody, and I'm not sure whether we took a second person. Because we had so many people at that time, it was relatively easy to take care of the people, and so it grew. We began to have to have meetings because we had two, three, up to five people at a time, that some of them had needs for 24-hour care. There was one stint with someone I can't remember right now in which it was over a week and a half of 24-hour care of only volunteers, all of whom that I know of were working during

the days, and people found ways to still schedule two or three hours, 24 hours, for one person. That was just phenomenal, how the response was on the part of people on the team.

DONNA DIETER: It was a God-given scenario, and when you thought you couldn't go any further, bingo, you could go much further.

JACKSON: Because this started during a time period when people did not know how AIDS was contracted, saying everything from mosquito bites to breathing the air, were people particularly frightened to have to deal with someone with a disforming and, quite honestly, many times ugly disease, scary?

DONNA DIETER: It was a scary disease, but there are a lot of people who went beyond scary, you know. I mean, not letting that be scary to them. There are a lot of people who just wanted to help. I think that that's true in society. "I'd be glad to help somebody, but I don't know who." Well, we could provide that.

JACKSON: Tori tells the story of a woman, after working with AIDS patients, would — and I can't remember if she was nurse or not — but would come home, and her husband would make her scrub down in the garage, take off all of her clothes, put them in the washing machine, before she was allowed to come in the house.

But you didn't run into any of that with the people you were dealing with?

DONNA DIETER: No.

ALLAN DIETER: No. One mother, and that guy was living with his mother when he was bedridden, and we would bring food as a team, two or three people.

DONNA DIETER: Who was this?

ALLAN DIETER: I don't know his name.

We would eat together, she and he and the two to three people from the

team there.

DONNA DIETER: Peter.

ALLAN DIETER: Was it Peter?

Anyhow, she would scald the dishes that we ate on, as part of her team, after the meal. By then, we were so comfortable with that not being an issue that we thought that was unreasonable.

JACKSON: Overplay?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah. But she continued to be that way.

DONNA DIETER: She couldn't help it.

ALLAN DIETER: When he died, we helped with the arrangements for the funeral and all that kind of stuff to guide her, et cetera. But the mother was really scared, and often the families, parts of the families, at least, were really scared.

DONNA DIETER: It's ignorance.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Pure and simple. We did what we could to help them understand the reality of what this disease was about and how you contracted it.

JACKSON: As much as anyone knew at that time.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, but.

DONNA DIETER: Well, we knew more than what they were —

JACKSON: Saying, exactly.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: Because you had the experience with it.

When we were talking before, we talked about the number of churches that had care teams. You were thinking it may have been 50 to 60 churches.

Were there any churches, any denominations, that rejected the idea of the care team, that you remember?

DONNA DIETER: There are some that I remember that I thought would reject it, but I don't recall any that did.

ALLAN DIETER: By that time, teams or possible teams were contacting this team about how you go about doing that, and so people were visiting like that. Then FIRM — I'm not quite sure how this happened — asked Donna to be a recruiter for them to get teams, and that's when she went on the payroll for FIRM. Wherever those monies came from, I don't know. Her assignment was to go out and visit congregations. Sometimes FIRM knew a congregation that wanted such a visit. Sometimes she just went on her own and visited with them.

DONNA DIETER: Because I could meet pastors and ask them if they had a congregation that maybe I could talk to kind of thing. I could go out and do things just pastor-to-me and get that done, and it was amazing. Everybody knew somebody, and they all joined together, and it was beautiful. That was one of my favorite parts of my life, was to be able to do that kind of thing.

JACKSON: I can understand that. Once you started working for FIRM, did you stop participating in care teams, but were you also doing that work on care teams?

DONNA DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: So you continued with that work?

DONNA DIETER: I worked during the day and during the night, yeah.

JACKSON: Then, Allan, you also participated on the teams?

ALLAN DIETER: Right. I was a skeptic. It was fine to do it with Michael, because I knew Michael, too, and et cetera, but I wasn't too sure about — I was busy with

my things and all that kind of stuff. But she would come home at 3:00 and 4:00 o'clock in the morning after having been with someone earlier in the evening and wake me up and say, "You will not guess what happened. I had such a marvelous experience," and blah, blah. "This is what we talked about, this is what," blah, blah, blah.

Luckily, I can go back to sleep easily, so I would go back to sleep. But when you've got months of that kind of stuff behind you, you begin to say, "What's going on?" If it's that important for somebody and they get that excited about what they're doing and it's that messy a thing —

DONNA DIETER: It wasn't messy.

ALLAN DIETER: Well, you're with the kind of level of people that you normally wouldn't have?

DONNA DIETER: You normally have them. You just didn't know what their background was.

ALLAN DIETER: Didn't know it, that's right.

DONNA DIETER: What they were involved in.

ALLAN DIETER: But anyhow, that was kind of my rationale, and so I said, "I guess I better find out and go some, myself."

Well, I'd had a lot of clinical psychology stuff by then. Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls and all those kinds of them, I knew what they were doing and all that kind of stuff. So I joined the team. I mean, I started going. We never went together, we always went separately, and I experienced some of this kind of joy, this surprise. I think of it more in terms of energy. I got so much energy out of it. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't cook. She did all the cooking, and I'd

take the food on my trips to help feed them and be with them, et cetera.

Nobody, no society, is without those kinds of groups that energize and grab people by the nape of the neck and get them to do things they would never have done before. You ought to pay attention to those kinds of groups, and the society is stupid when it doesn't.

JACKSON: Let me ask you a question: Did you find that you were ministering to people in more of a pastoral kind of situation because that's your nature, that's what you did, that's your training? I mean, did people want to talk about God with you?

ALLAN DIETER: No. They do that with non-preachers, I think. Donna talks about having a bunch of conversations that way. I never had a conversation like that.

JACKSON: You should have worn your collar.

DONNA DIETER: That would have been scary. I don't think so.

ALLAN DIETER: I never wore my collar, of course.

DONNA DIETER: I only talked about God when they were talking about God.

ALLAN DIETER: Oh, yeah, they brought it up.

JACKSON: Right, I would never have brought it up.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, we would never have brought it up, no, no. It was funny for me because somebody would say, "Hey, I'd like to go." They weren't sure they wanted to join the team yet, but they liked us. Usually there were two assigned at a time to a person for an event, you know, bring a meal, evening meal, and be with them for a while. They would get someone who had volunteered to come with us as part of the thing, you know, and they'd get hooked and they'd want to become a full member.



There were absolute atheists, never had barked a church door, ever, type people. That didn't matter to anybody on the team. The matter, what was more exciting, is to be able to do these kinds of things, and none of them generally had to do with theology or biblical stuff or all that kind of stuff.

DONNA DIETER: It's called being there.

ALLAN DIETER: How do you become a friend? What do you do with a friend? You do friendly things. Friends give us each energy when we are together, and you like to be with that kind of situation. So we never had a problem of not having enough people to volunteer. People who were working would get off work early sometimes or come to work early in the morning because there was somebody that was working — there were enough nonworking people to fill in the night hours throughout the night if it was a 24-hour-care kind of situation. Energy promotes energy.

JACKSON: I think you're right about that.

ALLAN DIETER: We avoid mentioning it as religious, because that turns people off immediately. If they come to understand this as part of their religious situation, great. If they don't, it would at least help somebody.

JACKSON: Donna, you worked for the Foundation for Interfaith Research and Ministry, and then you were let go along with your office neighbor Pat, that's what you told me, who was a Catholic priest?

ALLAN DIETER: Former.

JACKSON: Former priest. He was a former priest.

Did you know why you were being let go?

DONNA DIETER: Well, see, this is something I was just guessing when I talked about

this. I think money, they couldn't afford us any longer. I don't know where Earl has gone with everything since then. I think he lost his — I don't know. Something very much was lost in letting Pat and me go, and I think it was the center of his program, so I don't know where —

JACKSON: What did you do after that?

DONNA DIETER: Washed dishes, scrubbed floors.

JACKSON: Stayed home.

DONNA DIETER: I can't recall.

It was kind of a surprise, wasn't it?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: "What happened?" I think it was monetary.

JACKSON: Yeah, something. Something was going on.

DONNA DIETER: Because I don't think that Pat nor I did anything that was against Earl's pattern for how we should respond and how we should — I don't know. I just don't.

JACKSON: One of the things that we all know is that, especially now, not only homosexuals contracted AIDS.

DONNA DIETER: Oh, yeah.

JACKSON: Hemophiliacs, it just ravaged the hemophiliac community. Children, mothers.

DONNA DIETER: Babies.

JACKSON: Blood transfusions.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah.

JACKSON: Can you tell us about any of those stories of people who had contracted

AIDS? Children or —

DONNA DIETER: I have a picture in my mind that just drives me insane. A little girl, I think her mother had AIDS, and she contracted it, the little girl did.

ALLAN DIETER: From birth.

DONNA DIETER: And I went with them to a funeral, didn't I? I did something with them.

ALLAN DIETER: Her mother. Her mother.

DONNA DIETER: Was it her mom's funeral?

ALLAN DIETER: [Nodding head.]

DONNA DIETER: Okay. Her brothers, the people who were living in the house, dressed her up and did a mess with her hair, and we were going to the funeral, and so I just took the little girl aside, and I remember unbraiding, undoing everything and redoing, and she felt so much better. That's, to me, kind of a symbol of when a family is falling apart, nobody is going to braid a little girl's hair. It made me want to just cry. That's what life and death is about, is all the changes that occur.

ALLAN DIETER: And her lament was?

DONNA DIETER: Pardon?

ALLAN DIETER: And her lament was?

DONNA DIETER: Was what?

ALLAN DIETER: That she hadn't died first.

JACKSON: Oh, the little girl said that?

DONNA DIETER: The little girl wanted to die first so that she could make a place in Heaven for her mom, because her mother was dying. That's just life, I guess.

JACKSON: How long did you continue to work with care teams in AIDS?

DONNA DIETER: I don't remember. I'm sorry, my memory is —

JACKSON: That's okay. I know that the model has been carried on into other areas of people.

DONNA DIETER: Really?

JACKSON: Well, Alzheimer's and other people who have debilitating diseases, as a way of caring for people in the community.

DONNA DIETER: Great. I'm glad to hear that.

JACKSON: After 1995, it was no longer a death sentence automatically. There became ways of dealing with it.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah, to deal.

JACKSON: I'm just wondering if at that time the care teams began to kind of taper off because people weren't dying the way they were to begin with?

DONNA DIETER: Well, if that's the case, they served their purpose, and then they just could step aside.

ALLAN DIETER: When the Christ the King care team began to take on four and five people at a time, and then —

DONNA DIETER: You mean four and five people to care for?

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, to take care of, yeah.

That began to be a longer and longer period you took care of them because the drugs were allowing them to live longer and longer.

DONNA DIETER: Yeah.

ALLAN DIETER: And so that took more people, et cetera, to take care of them over longer periods of time. But then, the model was, you get at least a weekly visit from a care-team member, but usually a team, two or three, four, and there

wouldn't be anybody there when you'd visit the house. Pretty soon, we began to understand that the reason that was happening was drugs. People were high on drugs, and although they said they were going to be home and would meet the team at "X" amount of time —

DONNA DIETER: They didn't remember.

ALLAN DIETER: — they couldn't remember it. It probably wasn't because they didn't want to meet with the people, because they had been helping them, et cetera. But the team got very discouraged that, "I'm volunteered here and got some food cooked and everything else, and nobody there." It became so disabling that they said, "We don't know what to do about this."

The other thing I want to say about care teams is, this movement did not have an institutionalized bent to it. We never became an organization that had bylaws and rules. We didn't even have rules of what you can and can't do or say.

DONNA DIETER: Good deal.

ALLAN DIETER: Huh?

DONNA DIETER: Good deal.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

That was a very interesting phenomenon, because usually people want to shape things up and say, "Hey, you've got to do it this way because da dum da dum."

JACKSON: Exactly. You spend two minutes feeding them; three minutes, you know, doing this; four minutes, that; and then you're out.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah. They never had that, and it worked. I don't know how that worked, but it worked. People would come in as a new person, just be around a

while, and pretty soon they got the understanding of what you do and how you do it, and be helpful as you can, and then you talk with the other friends that they have with them there that night, and all that kind of stuff.

I can remember feeding a group of six people. They were friends, five friends of the guy we were — in an apartment, and we came in as a team with some pots and pans with hot stuff, and we had to split it. Instead of between three people, it was eight people or something like that. Nobody batted an eye at those kinds of things.

JACKSON: Loaves and fishes.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah.

DONNA DIETER: I was just thinking the same thing.

ALLAN DIETER: Most what?

JACKSON: Loaves and fishes.

DONNA DIETER: Loaves and fishes.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, yeah. It didn't follow those standards in our society. We could organize those things.

“We've got to get more recruiting people.” Nobody went out and recruited anybody. They came after they heard about what was going on. Then they came. There was never, ever a recruitment director for new members of this organization. None of that happened.

The other thing, from my background in psychology and clinical psychology we would have a meeting with a care team once a month, once a week. I don't know what it was. We would have our meeting, and we would have patients with us, the very patients we had been visiting. The team members

would help to explain to the rest of the team members what their visit was like with the patient, and the patient would often come in, and we'd talk about this type of thing.

JACKSON: So the patients would also talk.

ALLAN DIETER: Yeah, also talk, and that violated all my clinical psychology thing.

You didn't discuss patients in their presence. When we would tell FIRM, Earl, that kind of stuff, "You did what?" To his good sense, he never censured us for some of those kinds of common-sense violations of how to run organizations and be with people and help people. If Christ the King was doing it and they taught other people to do it, they left their hands off us in that sense. I was just astounded how it had violated all kinds of things.

We had another psychologist on the team.

DONNA DIETER: Who was that?

ALLAN DIETER: He was a clinical psychologist. Also didn't say a thing. He said, "I would never allow that," or, "I've done something like that before."

That was, I think, something that really helped the movement, is it didn't begin to define things that are off limits. If it seemed normal and it was received well and everybody was happy with it, it was allowed to continue, even if it violated some of those principles of what's good for helping people, in psychology.

JACKSON: This is a question for both of you: What do you think the legacy of the AIDS epidemic has been? I acknowledge it's ongoing; it hasn't stopped. But what do you think, especially this time period, say, from about 1983 through 1995, when it was most critical and when it frightened people the most and there

was the most activism and your response was the care, what do you think the legacy of that is? What can we learn from it?

ALLAN DIETER: One thing that I personally, we have Holy Communion every Sunday, and often in the past, in the history of the Church, this was one cup that was with the wine, and people drank from that one cup. During the AIDS period, there also appeared small, little glasses. In our congregation there even became a procedure that said the group over here will



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also have a common cup, one cup for anybody; everybody else has got only little glasses that they pick up as they go to communion, and it's filled, and they drink from it.

I deliberately have since then always gone to that common-cup table, we call it, as a kind of protest that if you're doing the little glasses because you're afraid of AIDS, I want to witness that I am doing it this way and that that's not a good idea; that's for the wrong reason you're doing it.

DONNA DIETER: I didn't realize that that was going on at Christ the King.

JACKSON: I guess you haven't been there for a while.

DONNA DIETER: Well, I go other places.

JACKSON: Right.

ALLAN DIETER: Well, that was during the heat of the battle. This was not recently.



DONNA DIETER: Oh, okay.

ALLAN DIETER: It's continued on. It's a legacy now.

JACKSON: Well, it is. At my church, we have a small chalice where people intinct, and that started with AIDS. But there are a lot of people, especially those that come from other faith traditions to the Episcopal Church, who prefer that. Drinking out of the common cup, they don't like that idea at all.

DONNA DIETER: Really? This is common Episcopalian?

JACKSON: Uh-huh.

DONNA DIETER: Our background is Lutheran. That's interesting. I'm surprised that they're not on the same page.

JACKSON: Well, we still have the chalice, the common chalice. But if you choose, when they're going down the altar rail, you don't take the common. You can just get —

ALLAN DIETER: Intinction, yeah.

DONNA DIETER: Well, I guess that's what you do, too.

JACKSON: I guess that's okay.

Donna, what do you think the life lesson or maybe the response, or what should be taken away from AIDS and the epidemic? What have we learned? I hope we've learned.

DONNA DIETER: I think we've learned that we're all children of God and that we're all blessed with health as long as we have it, and when we don't have it, we get used to it. I don't know. It's like you work from there, but I don't know that there's any answer for any one problem for any one person. I think that you go with the grace of God, and you enjoy what you have to enjoy, and you work on

the rest.

JACKSON: Well, thank you very much, both of you. I really appreciate this.

[END OF AUDIO PART 2]

[INTERVIEW CONCLUDED]

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