

Henderson Libraries

Henderson Oral History Project

**Sister Victoria
Dalesandro, O.P.**

Oral History of Sister Victoria Dalesandro, O.P.

conducted by

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and filmed by

Edward Feldman

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Interviewer: *Today is June 26th, 2013 and we're in the Paseo Verde Library in Henderson, Nevada. My name is Anne Marie Hamilton Brehm and our cameraman is Ed Feldman. We are interviewing Sister Victoria Dalesandro as part of the Henderson Oral History Project of the Henderson Libraries. Thank you so much for participating, Sister Vicki.*

Sr. Victoria: You're welcome.

Interviewer: *I'd like to begin by hearing a little bit about when and where you were born and what your family was like—where were you raised—and what your family was like.*

Sr. Victoria: I was born in Los Angeles, California. I'm the oldest of four. My Dad's Italian American. My mother's a mixture of all kinds of things. I had a sister that was a year and a half younger than I and she was killed. She was hit by a car when she was five. So my other sister and brother never really knew her. So I was raised in Lynnwood and Southgate near Inglewood, California.

Interviewer: *And what was it like growing up in Inglewood?*

Sr. Victoria: Well it wasn't exactly in Inglewood. It was fine. It was right near there. We could walk to school or take the bus or sometimes we got a ride to school.

Interviewer: *Was there a big population back in those days?*

Sr. Victoria: I think so.

Interviewer: *What led to your decision to become a nun? And how did you choose your order?*

Sr. Victoria: Well I think what led me to my decision to become a nun really was my first grade teacher, actually. She was very joyful and I don't think I'd ever experienced a person quite like her. I'll never forget—she broke her leg one time and she was still teaching us, but she didn't use crutches, she used a chair. She just sort of knelt on the chair and went along that way. So

that was the Sisters of Notre Dame I had in the first three years of school. Of course kindergarten was not there, it was in a different school. But then I had the Dominican Sisters from fourth grade to seventh grade—or eighth grade, actually. And I think it was my fourth grade teacher that I also had in seventh grade that eventually was the person that I thought about when I was deciding which group to enter. It was not an easy decision—it was—because I was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph in high school and they talk a lot about patience and they had like movies of their Sisters, you know, people becoming Sisters and all. But when I really had to make the decision I was really choosing between four groups and it was really that one Sister that I thought about again. She was very joyful, and the priest that I'd spoken to said, "You want to really talk to the Dominicans because they're the freest group I know." Well, I didn't exactly know what that meant but I've been always very happy that I chose the Adrian Dominicans.

Interviewer: *What does that mean?*

Sr. Victoria: Well Adrian Dominicans were from Adrian, Michigan. There were actually some other Dominicans right close to where I lived whose novitiate was in San Jose area, but I didn't really know them and I'm very glad I didn't enter that group because I found out later that they were still reading in German at the table when they ate and I didn't know any German! So when I entered the Sisters in Adrian, there was a lot of Irish influence at that time and I sort of felt like, "Oh, I'm not Irish," but I was fine with it. Now we're a much more diverse congregation. You know, we have all kinds of races and ethnicities and everything in our Community.

Interviewer: *So there's a lot of diversity.*

Sr. Victoria: Very much diversity. In fact we have a whole area, we call it a Chapter, in the Philippines right now. So we have thirty-six or -seven Sisters there.

Interviewer: *Oh wow. Are you anywhere else in the world?*

Sr. Victoria: We have people, I think, still in Africa. We had four people in Malawi. We did have people in South Africa, but I don't think they're there anymore. We have a lot of Sisters in Santo Domingo and a couple, one or two, work in Haiti, Puerto Rico. We used to have Sisters in Peru and we have had people in Nicaragua, and—I think just Nicaragua. So other than that we are in the United States. We do have one sister that entered—actually she's from Japan, but I think she might have entered from our University in Florida, when she actually entered. We have a Korean Sister right from Korea—a lot of diversity.

Interviewer: *And the fact that the Order has a Hospital here is directly related to your Order's values, right?*

Sr. Victoria: Yes, well in 1947 when Father Moran contacted Mother Gerald, he told her there was a need here. And Mother Gerald was very good about sending Sisters wherever there was a need, whether it was Santa Cruz, where we also have a hospital, or here. We didn't have a lot of people that were nurses or in Hospital Ministry at the time. But of the seven Sisters she sent in the beginning, I think two of them were nurses. No, probably three, three of them were nurses.

Interviewer: *So that gave the Hospital a good start.*

Sr. Victoria: It did and then one of them was the initial Administrator and the other one became the second Administrator, but she did all kinds of different work in the Hospital. And one of the others that came ended up being a lab technician. I'm trying to think what the others

did. There may have been four nurses now that I think of it. Sister Marie Daniel, Mary Augustine, Daniel Therese, I'm not sure—maybe there were only three.

Interviewer: *And you didn't come here right out of Michigan, right? From Michigan you were assigned somewhere?*

Sr. Victoria: Yes, I went first to New Mexico and then I went to Hayward, California, Arizona, and it was when I was—let me think for a minute. Yes, when I was in Arizona, when we used to come in here a lot, because my superior was the blood sister of the sister that was the principal and superior at St. Peter's in Henderson. So I think the first time we came was 1964 for Thanksgiving. So we've come every Thanksgiving and then I remember in 1968 we had a retreat here and we lived in the Hospital and walked across the street to St. Peter's for the services and things that we had. And I also remember there was a function here, I don't remember the exact year, I think it was the 75th anniversary of our congregation, because I remember they gave us a little medal that was in the shape of a triangle like the hospital in Santa Cruz. But there were quite a few of us that came for that, so I think it was around the same time.

Interviewer: *That's really neat that you have that sense of community that you all visit each other.*

Sr. Victoria: Right.

Interviewer: *Was it right that you—you said you worked in New Mexico—did you also work in El Paso?*

Sr. Victoria: Well since then I worked in El Paso. I was in New Mexico until 1960. I went to El Paso from '86 to '92.

Interviewer: *Ok. Because I'm from El Paso, that's why I ask.*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, are you? That's one of my favorite places, really; the people were just wonderful.

Interviewer: *I love it, yeah. It was a good place to grow up.*

Sr. Victoria: The pollution when I was there was pretty bad. We were near the refineries: Texaco and Chevron. And I really finally had to leave El Paso. Well I had to move. I was near Bassett Center working and I had to move up near where all the hospitals were that last year I was there and then I came to St. Rose after that.

Interviewer: *And what—did you decide to go to St. Rose on your own or did somebody invite you—you know, ask you to take that assignment?*

Sr. Victoria: Our Chapter Prioress asked me to look at it. I remember I looked at three places at the time and I really liked St. Rose the best of the three where I interviewed.

Interviewer: *So you came here in '92. And what was your assignment?*

Sr. Victoria: I was supposed to be the Director of Mission Services—we called it at that time—and so it consisted of doing a community needs assessment. I don't think we'd had one before that. We were supposed to do one every three years as part of the outreach to the poor—making sure we were meeting the needs of the poor. So we did that. And I remember also we had to design a Mission Statement. So that was part of the first year I was here. And we worked with the doctors. I was part of the Ethics Committee. We would orient the doctors with regard to the ethics and how to make ethical decisions and how to work with families, that sort of thing.

Interviewer: *So that's one thing that I've read about you is actually that you know all about the community and that's from those Community Assessments that you were doing.*

Sr. Victoria: I'm sure it was from that, and I love doing outreach anyway. I had done a lot of that in my life. So I really enjoyed getting involved with Henderson Allied Community Advocates and all the different programs we had or we were trying to have come to Henderson, too.

Interviewer: *What were some of the programs that you've overseen?*

Sr. Victoria: Well, Sister Robert Joseph Bailey really started a lot of the programs, the Positive Impact, which was for school children that couldn't afford health care. She started the Positive Impact on Reading; I think she might have started Red Rose, also, before I left. And I can't remember—I don't know that she reported directly to me, but I was somehow in charge of those programs. It's been a while—because I left here in 2000—so to try to remember back—I was also in charge of the Chaplains for a brief period of time when they didn't have a manager. But you want to know which programs I was in charge of? Mainly, the community needs assessment and then working also with the executive management of the hospital. I mean the job really is making the sure that the mission of the hospital happens, that the values of the Sisters and the values of the hospital continue. So I worked with a lot of the managers. I'm trying to think what other programs—those are the main ones I can think of right now.

Interviewer: *I read about some of them—like there was Baby Your Baby. Do you remember Baby Your Baby?*

Sr. Victoria: I vaguely—I know the title—I'm trying to remember what they did. Baby Your Baby—I don't know if we had articles for them, for the moms or the babies. And I don't remember who started that. It probably was Sister Robert. She started most all the programs. She had the Buckaroo Days before I got here and that was a lot of fun.

Interviewer: *Yeah, Sister Michael was telling me about that.*

Sr. Victoria: And then Positive Impact on Reading she also started when I was here. So that was our volunteer Sisters or other volunteers that wanted to tutor the children—mostly they were at McCaw School, at that time, Gordon McCaw.

Interviewer: *And you were also involved with encouraging cultural diversity. You had a program for that. What was that about?*

Sr. Victoria: I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

Interviewer: *Oh! [laughter]*

Sr. Victoria: Sounds familiar. We had a Women's Committee also—because that was one of our Mission Statements toward the end of the time I was here—was to support women. And that's when we did a lot of the audio recording of people that had been important in the history of the hospital and the city. And we made little booklets—I don't know if Sister Michael mentioned to you—the Women's Committee made the little booklets you have here at the Library about different people that had been important in history, like Sister Angelita and the Angel Bread, and I know they did one about Sister Robert Joseph and Buckaroo Days are in there. But the cultural thing—I know I was involved in it, but I just couldn't tell you right now what we did. We had a Mission Committee, too, of different people that worked in the Hospital that would take part in all—but they would help with deciding and doing those kinds of things.

Interviewer: *Some of these things that I'm mentioning, too, are things that I read in an article that was at about the year 1999 or so. So that was a while back!*

Sr. Victoria: It was a while ago.

Interviewer: *And I'm sure you've been involved in much more since then. What are some of the things in the last decade that you've been really involved with.*

Sr. Victoria: Well what I wanted to do when I left was counseling. I had been a counselor and I wanted to get back into that, so I moved to Apple Valley, California, to another Catholic hospital and they had a Midwifery Clinic and I was the counselor for the young moms. I mean they weren't all young—the ages went from fourteen to forty-two pretty much and, you know, sometimes when you have young moms, a lot of times just people in their twenties or late teens, but also women like forty-two and all of a sudden they got pregnant and they didn't expect it. So we had some depressions and post-partum depression, relationship issues, financial issues—but great cultural diversity there. Probably I was involved with cultural diversity because I've been speaking Spanish since 1974 and I have a great love of outreach to the Hispanic population. The other thing I do remember we worked on when I was here was the COW Program, Clinic on Wheels.

Interviewer: *Yes, I saw some pictures of that. That was neat.*

Sr. Victoria: That was because there was no mandatory kindergarten in this area—and I can't remember the lady's name that started it—but all the buses were painted. They looked like black and white like a cow. And we used to go out and help with that anyway that we could.

Interviewer: *That was really clever. So you were trying to get kids some healthcare before they even entered school, is that right?*

Sr. Victoria: We provided the healthcare but they provided education. The whole idea was to help children get ready so that when they went to first grade it wouldn't just be a great brand new thing—that they'd be able to survive in school. Especially the ones that were bilingual. You know that was for everybody.

Interviewer: *Yeah, and I know in El Paso we really could have benefitted from that. All of us could have. No matter what language we spoke.*

Sr. Victoria: That's true. I don't remember, did they have mandatory kinder—I don't remember if they had kindergarten in El Paso.

Interviewer: *It wasn't mandatory when I was growing up in the '70s. It may be mandatory now.*

Sr. Victoria: I worked in a parish there. I actually worked in a Sewing Cooperative there before I worked in the parish, so I wasn't really involved with the schools there.

Interviewer: *Well, that COW Program was a good idea.*

Sr. Victoria: It was and I was surprised when I came back I didn't see it happening anymore, but maybe you have—I'm assuming you have kindergarten now for the children. I'm assuming.

Interviewer: *I hope so. I don't know. When you moved here, what was Henderson like? I mean obviously you'd been here in the '60s so you already knew what it was like, but it had probably changed since then.*

Sr. Victoria: It had grown. I mean, there were 82,000 people when I came and when I left in 2000 there were 200,000 people. So the whole time I was here, people kept moving in and Green Valley was really growing. I remember when I was first here, we went and spoke with Barbara Greenspun, and she was describing how her husband had bought the land here and he took her out one day to show her the land and all she could see was lava rock and she kept thinking, "What in the world is—what's going to happen to this land?" So that was interesting to hear. And then of course, people like Harry Reid, you know, he'd come to the hospital, or I can remember different political campaigns when we seemed to know all the politicians because it was small enough, the state was, that if we needed something at the hospital, our

CEO could just call whomever it was. I'm trying to think of the name—the freeway right here is named after—215, I can't think of his name—Woodbury? Is it Woodbury or is it—Bruce Woodbury? I remember he was one of the people at that time.

Interviewer: *I think so, yeah.*

Sr. Victoria: So it was an interesting time to be here. I also remember when they built Siena, the Siena Campus at St. Rose Parkway and Eastern, we were trying to get that road named St. Rose Parkway and I remember going with our CEO down to—I think it was the Las Vegas Chamber or Las Vegas Council or something when that was in the process—so it was an interesting time to be here.

Interviewer: *Yeah that's great that they let you do that, to name it St. Rose.*

Sr. Victoria: It was, but again, that just shows you how much connection we had with the local politicians or the state politicians. You know, it was small enough at the time.

Interviewer: *Why do you think it's easy for the hospital to get along so easily with the politicians? I mean you say it's a small state but—*

Sr. Victoria: One of the reasons, I can remember Harry Reid saying—Senator Harry Reid—that when he was nine, he broke his arm in Searchlight, and he was at our hospital as a patient. So a lot of people used our facilities and appreciated the care they got. I have a feeling that is why.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I bet you're right. Yeah. That's pretty neat. What was St. Rose like when you moved here in '92 and how has it changed over the years?*

Sr. Victoria: Well I can go back a little further. I can remember being here in the '60s because I had to see a doctor in town, so I stayed in the convent area of the hospital, and in 1970—well those were little rooms along a little hallway—it's still there right now, but they use it for offices

now. And I remember in 1970 the Sisters had to move out because Medicare happened and you couldn't be living in a facility where they took Medicare. So the Sisters moved into an apartment building. I think it was on Basic—I remember being there, but I am not sure—I couldn't give you the address. And what was your question? Your question was?

Interviewer: *How has St. Rose changed over the years? Because there's been a lot of building going on and expansion, I think.*

Sr. Victoria: Okay. So in the beginning, when I used to come here in the '60s, the room that's now the Boardroom at the Rose de Lima Campus was the Chapel. And I also remember the dining room for the Sisters was where the nursing supervisors sit or have their little offices now. So that changed when the Sisters had to move out; in fact, I can remember Sister Robert Joseph telling me that when they first came—and she was talking about the initial group of Sisters—they didn't live in a little house, they lived in what was like a ward of the hospital that is a conference room now. At least it was a conference room when I was here, right near where the chapel was. And then—so after the Sisters moved out, I'm not sure if the Chapel stayed there for a while—I think it did, because I don't think they built the present Chapel until they built the '90 expansion of the hospital. So in 1960, they had built the part in the back that has three stories and it has like a glass wall in the back. That's where I remember where we stayed in '68. So in the beginning were just the two little wings in 1947, and Sister Robert Joseph said they were so poor in the beginning that when they would—has Sister Michael already told you the story about when they would serve the trays to the patients, they only had enough dishes and covers to serve one wing? So they had to take them back and wash them and then serve the other wing.

Interviewer: *Oh, how funny. She didn't tell me that story.*

Sr. Victoria: Well she might not have known it, because I knew Sister Robert Joseph really well and she used to tell me a lot of these stories. And then also I can remember in the '60s or even in the '80s the hospital had a different configuration than it does right now in that when you'd go down from the old entrance toward where Human Resources is now at Rose de Lima, the double doors were closed because it was a psych unit down there and Sister Marie Bridget was the psych nurse. And then when I came back in the '80s, you went down that same hallway into the area where Medical Records is now, I think. I think they're still there. It was—the County had offices there, like Mental Health and different things, because I remember meeting with one of the Mental Health people there. Also I can remember in the '90s up on the third floor of the '60 building we had a Mental Health unit at that time, too. I think it was for—oh gosh, it was like—at one point it was for people that overate and at another time it was for people with drug addiction problems. Then it had to close. And then I can also remember in the '90s coming for the dedication of that—the part of this Hospital now when you go to Rose de Lima, the main entrance, that was all built in the '90s. You can actually see where those buildings came together, you know, where they were joined together. So that's how that part has changed. And I think they still had the capability of building on another—like where the helicopters land? I think that was—they were thinking of building on top there, but that never happened. So I was here when they built Siena, and that was interesting because they asked every department to tell them what they wanted, how they wanted their department designed. So it took a while because you had to do it exactly just like they wanted and then as it went along, you know, look to see how it went, and so on. And then I can remember after it opened which was July of—I

think we dedicated July of 2000—some people could see things already that they wanted changed, so I'm assuming when they built the San Martin Campus, they probably used all that information to build San Martin, because it looks very much the same on the outside but it's different on the inside—San Martin is. So I really wasn't here when they built it to know what people said, but there are a lot of differences. I do remember one difference was we had built the Chapel, and we were under a tower and we didn't think about going up, all the way up the tower at Siena. And I remember when the CEO saw it he said, "Oh, why didn't you go up?" Well, you know we were trying not to spend too much money; we were trying to just do what we needed to do. So I know at San Martin they do have the tower going all the way up inside the Chapel, you know, all the way up, which is really very nice.

Interviewer: *Yeah that must be beautiful.*

Sr. Victoria: It is, and the windows, too, go all the way up, which, with the stained glass, is real pretty. The other thing I remember about Siena was we were looking for an artist to do the statue of Catherine for the front, and I was traveling somewhere and I had the alumni magazine of where I got my master's degree at Flagstaff, at Northern Arizona University, and the artist had done a sculpture of Sacagawea, and he was living at Cottonwood, so I brought it back and showed people and they thought, "Well let's ask him." So we went to Cottonwood and we did hire that artist and he did do Catherine. And people liked it so much, at our Motherhouse, that they actually asked him to build another one just like it in Adrian, at our Motherhouse.

Interviewer: *Oh, that's neat.*

Sr. Victoria: But the thing they did differently was instead of leaving the patina just like a bronze or dark color, they painted it white and black like the Dominican habit. So they look different even though they're the same statue.

Interviewer: *It looks to me that you get a lot of support from the Adrian Motherhouse.*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, definitely. Financial support, as well as, you know, just regular support over the years.

Interviewer: *The Hospital has joined forces with a larger network?*

Sr. Victoria: That's right. I think it was 1988 when we became part of Catholic Healthcare West because they just knew that to survive we had to be part of a bigger organization. And I can remember, when I first came, we still had the Dominican logo on the Hospital—the shield—and I remember when I was here is when there was talking about putting the CHW cross and the CHW name, and I can remember people really weren't happy with that because they liked the signage with the Dominican symbol. But we explained to them that we really need to be part of this bigger network to survive because when I was here—those first years—I don't remember which one—which year in the '90s—we really almost had to close. We almost had to sell because finances were so bad. And also I can remember hearing the stories in the, you know, the early years, where the Sisters couldn't even pay the salaries. I don't remember exactly what decade it was, but Selma Bartlett, and I'm sure you've heard of Selma, paid the salaries one time—I think it was one time—so that the Hospital could survive and keep paying the employees until its recovery.

Interviewer: *Wow, that's really great.*

Sr. Victoria: So we've had a lot of support from the community over the years, lots and lots.

Interviewer: *Yeah it seems like you had a lot of support. Well, the early '90s when you got here, that was the little depression that we had—they want to call it a recession, but those were tough times.*

Sr. Victoria: Well maybe that's why we were having trouble. The other thing, when you mentioned community, I thought it was Lou LaPorta. He was one of the first people. Actually I think his child was the first one baptized at the Church there, St. Peter's.

Interviewer: *How about that.*

Sr. Victoria: But Lou says if we hadn't come in '47 that the town probably never would have happened. And I think he says that because we employ so many people and we give people jobs and help the economy. But you could ask Lou; I'm sure you have Lou interviews.

Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah. Yeah we have several oral histories with him, and we're always talking with him about—because he has the Henderson Historical Society. Can you tell me about some memorable events at St. Rose?*

Sr. Victoria: Well, we had—I think we had the 50th Anniversary when I was here and I can remember going through the vault at Rose de Lima and, you know, pulling out all of the historical pictures and everything. Actually before the 50th I think was when we did the historical wall. I don't know if you've seen that in the hospital? So, Sister Carol Fleming came and she knew a lot of those people because she had been here in the '80s. So we went through all the pictures and decided which things to put on the wall and I can remember we had all kinds of—like scrapbooks that the early Sisters made of their opening and cards people had sent them in 1947, congratulations, telegrams, all kinds of wonderful things. And I think that you have most of that here at the Library.

Interviewer: *We do have, yeah, a large collection.*

Sr. Victoria: And the other memorable thing that I noticed when I was going through all that was how supportive the Auxiliary had been during those years, and they had had so many different fund raisers with people like Frank Sinatra and just one after the other of celebrities to help them to attract people to the—I think they were dances. I'm not sure.

Interviewer: *I think I've heard about that, dances, and there was a Mardi Gras Party?*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, yes. Well we've had Mardi Gras for years and years. That's a memorable time, I think. We still have it every year. I think the Buckaroo Days were always memorable, whenever I'd see Sister Robert with the children, she'd have like a bale of hay there and Sister would have her scarf and her helpers would have cowboy hats on, and the little kids really enjoyed it.

Interviewer: *That's cute.*

Sr. Victoria: And I just think too, when she started the Positive Impact on Reading; that was memorable because we were helping children learn to read.

Interviewer: *Were you reading with them?*

Sr. Victoria: I didn't but actually Sister Monica was still doing that until December. They would tutor the children one at a time.

Interviewer: *That's really helpful, I've found.*

Sr. Victoria: I think, too, our first community needs assessment was memorable because I can remember when I came we still had the old computers with the kind of paper that had the little holes on the sides? Well, first I had to learn how to do that, but then—and I can remember also we were able to hire a young man that had just graduated from UNLV to do the actual needs assessment and Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach gave us the money to pay him with—I mean I

think that was what we used it for. And then a couple of Sisters came: Sister Janet Ackerman, who's still here, and Sister Jeanne Berg. They came—I think it was three years later. They were looking for a job and I said, “Well, we need to do the needs assessment again. Would you be willing to do it?” So they did the second one. So that was always interesting, you know, having the focus groups and pulling all that information together and then seeing how we could meet the needs that the people had.

Interviewer: *How did you—did you have a method for getting focus groups together, or was it just word of mouth, or how did you select people?*

Sr. Victoria: I'm trying to remember. I know that we probably had—I think we had them at the libraries. I remember going to the Boys and Girls Club that was up off of Boulder Highway. I honestly can't remember where all of them were. I remember we had more trouble getting people to the focus groups than we did—we sent out questionnaires, too. And it was easier to get information—telephone interviews I think mostly. Seems like we may have sent out some regular interviews, but I remember the telephone interviews. The Sisters did a lot of those, I remember.

Interviewer: *It's always hard to get people to send back things through the mail.*

Sr. Victoria: It is. I forget what percentages you need to have for it to be valid. But that was always interesting. And it was interesting working on that historical wall. So that's memorable. Like I say, I remember being here for the dedication of the '90 tower. Well, also the dedication of the Siena Campus was interesting. And we planted—I remember in the 50th Anniversary, we planted a capsule underneath the little rose garden outside the flagpole at Rose de Lima and I don't know when that's supposed to be unearthed.

Interviewer: *Well, that's interesting.*

Sr. Victoria: I don't know if it's twenty—I don't know, maybe they pulled it out at seventy-five years, I don't know. They may have. Wait a minute, excuse me, we've only had sixty—sixty-five?

Interviewer: *Are they planning to pull it out at seventy-five?*

Sr. Victoria: I don't know, but how many years are we now? This is 2013—'47—I think it was sixty-five, isn't it, this year?

Interviewer: *I think so. I think it's sixty-five this year.*

Sr. Victoria: So it will be sixty-five. So maybe they're planning—I don't know when they're going to do it or if they did it at some point, I don't know.

Interviewer: *That's pretty neat. Do you know what went in it?*

Sr. Victoria: I don't remember. I'm sure we put things in that were probably—you know, illustrated that year, but I don't remember what it was. I know I was here; I just don't recall.

Interviewer: *What did they do at Siena to celebrate the grand opening?*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, it was really beautiful. I remember how hot it was. It was July. We were outside, I remember. And I remember our Chapter Prioress was here, the Bishop was here, different people spoke. It seems like we had a tent. But I don't know that I was in the tent. I remember I was in the tent at San Martin when they opened it.

Interviewer: *I hope you had a tent! [laughter]*

Sr. Victoria: Well, the tent at San Martin was like a hundred-and-ten [degrees Fahrenheit], I think. And they had all the flaps, even though they had air conditioning in it, all the flaps were open. So I don't know that it made any difference, you know. It had a little shade; that was

about it. So I can't recall. We must have had a tent for Siena's opening. I do remember we were out in Pahrump for a while. We tried to get a hospital started in Pahrump and we had a clinic there and I remember that tent because those sides were down and we did have air conditioning that day, I recall. So that's another memorable time, was the opening of that clinic.

Interviewer: *Yeah. But you don't have the clinic anymore in Pahrump?*

Sr. Victoria: No, we couldn't—Nye County wouldn't give us the money to pay for people that were indigent, or poor—so we lost all kinds of money there. We had to leave. It seems like we might have been there two years? I don't recall for sure the number of years we'd been there. But it was really sad because they wanted a hospital, and it was a pretty nice clinic that we got going, but I've heard that they do have a hospital now. So that's good.

Interviewer: *What other ways do you raise money for the hospital?*

Sr. Victoria: Well, our Foundation does a lot of fundraising, and over the years different Sisters have been involved with the Foundation, going out to ask people for donations. So the Mardi Gras is always a big fundraiser for us, every year.

Interviewer: *One year you gave away a car!*

Sr. Victoria: Oh Gosh, yes. If you look at those older things, you see all the things they gave away year after year. So they probably had a person that owned a car dealership that donated that car I would guess.

Interviewer: *Sounds like fun.*

Sr. Victoria: It is fun because you get to know people socially as well as in the work environment. Especially like when the nurses go to those functions, often a doctor will buy a table and so the nurses then are able to go, and it's fun to see people socialize.

Interviewer: *Did you—when you did the surveys, did you learn anything about Henderson that you didn't know before?*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, I'm sure I did, but I couldn't tell you right now what it was. It's been too many years.

Interviewer: *What are some of the things about Henderson that you think maybe people don't know a lot about?*

Sr. Victoria: Well, I don't know how many people know about Victory Village and Carver [Park], you know, the initial places where people lived. I don't know how many people know the areas on Boulder Highway that are really very poor. Like if you go down Boulder Highway and you see those trailers that look like maybe they're from 1940. And I remember being visiting people, if we would—we adopted families like for Christmas and things—and taking things to those little places. They're really, really, really very poor. So a lot of our patients would walk to the hospital. They didn't have transportation. I mean it's wonderful to come back and see these beautiful buses that the County has now. But we didn't have those then. We had a lot of people living in the desert and I'm sure some of those homeless places are still there. We used to go out into the desert past Lake Mead and Boulder, into that area there, and take things out. I can remember trying to get a homeless shelter built in Henderson and it wouldn't happen. It just couldn't seem to happen. But St. Timothy's, you know, the Episcopalian Church, does a lot of outreach and a lot of good. I think they have meals every single day for homeless people.

Interviewer: *Wow, that's great!*

Sr. Victoria: Because a lot of homeless do sleep on the streets there in Henderson at night, a lot out in the desert. I can even remember and I think it was here—I don't think it was Apple

Valley—where people were living out on the side of mountains. I mean, I have that in my memory. I can see it but I'm not sure where it was, if it was here or there. Maybe it was there, because we had a similar situation out there. But it's really something when you see people living out in the hot sun or living out in the cold wind. And I can remember Barbara Gomez was very involved with the Henderson Allied Community advocates. She's since passed away, but I could remember her telling me she was so involved because her brother was homeless and she didn't even know where he was and in what city or state he was.

Interviewer: *That's awful.*

Sr. Victoria: It is; it is awful.

Interviewer: *It must be very hard.*

Sr. Victoria: So I'm sure—I don't work at Rose de Lima right now, but I know these people still come for sandwiches and food there. So I know we still have a population that's poor. And I think if people live in Green Valley, they're probably not that aware that that exists in Henderson. But I know some of the churches here do donate and they go over and give out food there at St. Timothy's, so I think if the churches are involved here, then they have an idea.

Interviewer: *So there's some collaboration between the religious organizations. That's great.*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, there is. I think they take turns every single day, different churches, feeding the people.

Interviewer: *That's good.*

Sr. Victoria: And there was also a program when I was here—and it might still exist—where the churches took turns every day—a different church would open their doors—and the homeless people could sleep there at night, and then a family would adopt them to stay at their house. I

can't recall the name of that program, but I think I've heard that it still exists—since I've been back.

Interviewer: *How interesting. And which church is doing that?*

Sr. Victoria: I couldn't tell you off the top of my head, but I bet if you called St. Timothy's they could tell you.

Interviewer: *They probably know—interesting. What are you doing now at St. Rose? What's your work like now?*

Sr. Victoria: Right now I'm working part-time. My title is Director of Caring and Healing. So I was hired to work with the nurses to just help them be aware of how important it is to be very caring and to treat people with dignity, et cetera. So one of the big projects I've been working on is—our executive management has been to Ministry Formation Days up in Sacramento where they spend a day and a half on each topic. For instance one topic is The Heritage of the Hospital. Another topic is How Vocation Is—we're called to our ministries. It isn't just a job or a career. Another topic is Work/Life Balance or Whole Person Care, Spirituality, Suffering. So my job was to take those day-and-a-half conferences and put it into three hours for our other management. So I'm about halfway through that now. So right now we're getting ready to do Catholic Social Teaching and Advocacy for the Poor. We're going to do that on July 11th. So it's been quite a challenge, but it's been a lot of fun finding the presenters and then working with them to—with the same power points that they used at the day-and-a-half presentation, which things to keep, which things to get rid of, and how to present that for this area. And hopefully once we—we're still in the pilot phase right now, but we're going to roll that out to the other two campuses—to Rose de Lima and Siena. And then once we've got enough of our managers

and directors in the training, we'd like to shorten it again for the staff and maybe present like a four hour presentation for it, whichever people on the staff would like to come to something like that.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I bet they'd really benefit from that.*

Sr. Victoria: And people are real interested. Yes, it is. It's very beneficial.

Interviewer: *That sounds like more than just a part-time job.*

Sr. Victoria: Well I do it part-time. It's like, you know, I work fifty-six hours in two weeks, so that's a little more than half-time.

Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah. Not too bad. What else—what do you do in your spare time?*

Sr. Victoria: What do I do in my spare time—well I do things with our community. I live with a Sister that's not real well right now, so I end up taking her to the doctor quite a bit. What else? Well, I visit my family sometimes, watch television, go to movies once in a while. I do Facebook on the computer quite a bit just to keep in touch with my grandnieces and nephews to see what they're doing. I don't put a lot—I just watch pretty much.

Interviewer: *That's a good way to keep up with your family.*

Sr. Victoria: It is. It's a very nice way to do that. And that, pretty much, is my day. You know I do some cooking, not a lot of cooking. I like to cook but I don't do a lot.

Interviewer: *What do you like most about working for St. Rose?*

Sr. Victoria: The values, the mission, the people, and the fact that the people really appreciate our presence here. They did too where I worked in California; they appreciated having Sisters there. But because this Hospital is part of our—and even though the values are very similar to where I was working before, there's just something about the history here of, as you know, of

the Sisters that have been here all these years. It just feels like home working here. Of course I've been in and out of here just since 1964. Really in and out of the Hospital itself maybe since '66 or '67, so it's sort of fun to see it grow and change and meet the present needs of people.

Interviewer: *It's like Sister Michael was saying, that it felt like a family.*

Sr. Victoria: It does. Even though I've often said to people, "We really aren't a family. We're more like a team, because on a team, people come and go; in a family, people stay no matter what." You know. Where in a hospital, certain positions have to be eliminated or certain people need to move on, you know, it's more like a team, I think, like you're working together for a goal.

Interviewer: *And it must be hard to make some of those management decisions.*

Sr. Victoria: It is. I'm very glad even though I'm a Director right now nobody reports to me, so I don't have to evaluate people or—yeah, it's very hard I think on the people that do it.

Interviewer: *What advice would you give to someone who is considering a vocation as a nun that you wish someone would have told you when you were first considering the vocation?*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, that's interesting. I mean I was going to answer the first part but the second part of your question is interesting. Well, this is sort of like an advertisement. The second part is—nobody told me we would travel so much. I never had any idea that I would go to Michigan and then I'd be in New Mexico, Texas, Nevada, Arizona, and California, or traveling for other things, either. So we do travel a lot because of the nature of what we do.

Interviewer: *Is that different from other orders?*

Sr. Victoria: I think so. Some orders stay just in the city where they're started and they just minister there. But when we were founded—it was very interesting—when we started in

Adrian, the Bishop in Detroit, for some reason, didn't like us very much. He liked another group more. So he would give them the schools. So we ended up going to Chicago and getting a lot of vocations from Chicago. We did end up having schools in Detroit eventually, but initially we had to move other ways. So I think from the beginning that's been part of who we were—is moving out to meet needs. But I do wish more people would think of becoming a Sister. I think the thing that's the most enjoyable—maybe people don't even know it—is our community is really known for our joyful spirit. And I don't know if people pick that up, but I know that that's what attracted me and I think it's really true. It is part of the Dominican care, is the joy. Right now we just hired another Sister for our Vice President of Mission at San Martin, and she's a Dominican from San Rafael, California. But I'm sure they have the same kind of a spirit, because that is part of the Dominican heritage, is the joyfulness. It's a great life! I mean I think more young women could look at it to see would they like to do that.

Interviewer: *It sound's really exciting when you have varied assignments.*

Sr. Victoria: Well we really now choose—we pretty much choose our assignments. It used to be that we were told where to go until 1971, and then they told us we had Open Placement. So that meant that year if we were teaching we needed to go to the principal of the school and ask to work there the next year. Well I was not about to do that since I didn't really like classroom teaching, so I was fortunate I was able to get into counselling. So we pretty much are asked or we find places and then we talk—we dialog with our Superior about—“Is it all right if I do this?” “What do you think?” We pray about it. So we really aren't assigned that much anymore. I mean we could be assigned, but I can't even think of anybody that's been assigned, to tell you the truth.

Interviewer: *What are some of the other things that have changed over the years.*

Sr. Victoria: Well we wore a habit before and then we wore it shorter. So since about 1971 also we've been wearing regular clothes. And I found it to be helpful. In the beginning I didn't really like the idea because I thought there was a lot of witness value to the habit. But it was really true what people said that even though some Catholics would be attracted to us because of the habit, there were more people that felt comfortable talking to us when we don't have something different that we're wearing. So, I mean, it used to be, you'd get off a train in a train station with your long habit on, and the people that would come up to you would be the drunk person that would say—kiss you on the hand and say, "You made me"—you know, "You taught me in school," like "You made me what I am today!" And you'd think, "Oh, Dear!" [laughter] That doesn't sound very good! So nowadays, you know, you'll be on an airplane or you'll be somewhere and people find out you're a Sister and then they continue talking to you even though they don't know another Sister or they don't feel real comfortable, you know, with the Catholic Church or our teachings or anything. But I do think it has helped, definitely.

Interviewer: *I think there are a lot of people who don't know there are nuns that don't wear habits.*

Sr. Victoria: Maybe, because often when I meet somebody and they find out I'm a Sister—just recently someone said, "You don't wear habits?" I said, "No, we can if we want to. Some of our Sisters do."

Interviewer: *Do you still wear habits for certain events?*

Sr. Victoria: Well we have what we call a preaching garment and it looks like our habit; it doesn't have the veil. But our Sisters wear it at the Motherhouse, like if we're doing part of the

liturgy with the priest. If they're helping him or if they're doing the preaching, they'll wear it. They don't have to but a lot of them choose to do that. That's about the only time. I actually don't have one. I thought of getting one but I don't preach that much, so I don't really need one at this point. We do go around—once during the year we usually go to the churches and ask for donations for the Sisters that are elderly and retired, and I did borrow one of those one time when I did that a few years ago. Because we do have—well our Community isn't doing too badly financially, but we have a lot of groups of Sisters that didn't plan and also we didn't receive much of any money in the beginning. I can remember when I was in Arizona, we made fifty dollars a month and we kept twenty-five and we sent the other twenty-five in to take care of the elderly or sick people. And we lived on twenty-five dollars a month.

Interviewer: *That's amazing.*

Sr. Victoria: It was. I was the bursar. I was the treasurer at that time. And I saw how we stretched and we cut coupons and people did donate canned goods to us once a year, so that helped.

Interviewer: *That's really impressive.*

Sr. Victoria: So in those years, I can remember too, we'd be getting down to our last penny and somebody in Detroit or in Chicago would send us a check with some money. So we always had what we needed.

Interviewer: *Providence.*

Sr. Victoria: Yeah it was; it was providence. So there are communities like that where Sisters really are all elderly and don't have any money. So once a year we always do that: Religious Retirement Fund.

Interviewer: *That's really great that you take care of each other like that.*

Sr. Victoria: Well, that's who we are. Like you say, that is definitely family. Our community is family.

Interviewer: *What do you enjoy or have enjoyed most about living and working in Henderson?*

Sr. Victoria: Oh! I like Henderson. Well, initially Water Street was the main part of Henderson. I remember when they built the Mall, you know, the Galleria Mall. And I used to love to just go there to walk in the morning. I don't do that anymore. The traffic isn't too bad. Even though I drive every day to San Martin on a freeway, it's nothing like Los Angeles or San Francisco or Chicago. And I love the weather—healthwise I do better in the desert than I do in other places.

What else do I like about Henderson? I love the people! I like the people here; they're very friendly. I loved the people in El Paso, too. I think wherever we go we find wonderful people.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I feel very comfortable in Henderson; it reminds me a lot of El Paso. People are a little bit laid back here.*

Sr. Victoria: Yeah, I think the original people are. I love the libraries here, too. They really have really some good resources, in Vegas and in Henderson. We've used them a lot for movies and DVDs, you know, videos and things.

Interviewer: *Yeah, they do have a good collection.*

Sr. Victoria: And the fact that this library [Henderson Libraries] took a lot of our historical things and is storing that for us, there's a community spirit here that you don't find in a lot of places. I don't even know if El Paso has that. I don't remember that when I was there.

Interviewer: *It does but El Paso is a much bigger place.*

Sr. Victoria: Is it? See, I don't even know the population there.

Interviewer: *I think it's getting up toward 700,000. And if you count Juárez in that too, it's almost two million between Juárez and El Paso.*

Sr. Victoria: No, I don't usually count Juárez. Juárez, I used to love going there. It's so sad what's going on there.

[Editor's note: This is a reference to the ongoing Mexican Drug War and the turf battles that escalated between rival cartels in Juárez. The murder rate in Juárez was the highest in the world by 2009, peaking in 2010, but has decreased somewhat. Remarkably, in spite of the violence just across the Rio Grande, El Paso, Texas, is consistently rated the safest city in the United States with a population of 500,000 or more based on crime statistics.]

Interviewer: *It is. It's heartbreaking.*

Sr. Victoria: It is, terrible.

Interviewer: *What else would you like to share about your experience in Henderson and at St. Rose that we haven't talked about?*

Sr. Victoria: Well I think it is important for people to know the history and the Sisters and what they did initially, because they really struggled with a lot of difficulties over the years. And I think it's wonderful there's a school named after Sister Robert Joseph Bailey, because she not only worked at the Hospital, but she taught in the school, and she really developed all the beginning community education, all the outreach that went out into the community. So I think she's an important person. I don't know, I mean, I think all those little booklets we made about the history—I think it's wonderful that you people are collecting, you know, the heritage. And I hope we didn't lose all the audio cassettes we did all those years because they have a lot of good information on them, too.

Interviewer: *Yeah, I think somebody's looking into those to see if there's information on those that we can use.*

Sr. Victoria: Oh, there's a lot, I'm sure there's a lot of information. Because a lot of those people have died since 1980. Well, let me think—that was in the '90s. I'm thrilled that the Henderson Heritage is doing what they're doing.

Interviewer: *The Historical Society?*

Sr. Victoria: Yes, the Historical Society. I went to the one that Jim Gibson and Lou La Porta talked on that panel. That was wonderful! I think it's good for people that have moved here recently to know what the history is and how we started and everything about the plants and all that.

Interviewer: *Yeah it's worth telling people about so that they understand the foundations of Henderson and why it's important to the United States and to the world—because we helped win World War II.*

Sr. Victoria: Did anybody tell you about the tunnel that went from the factories to the Hospital? There was a tunnel and when I was here in the '90s, I think the late '90s, maybe 1997 or '98, they finally closed the tunnel, the people who work at the Hospital. But they had built the tunnel because they thought the Japanese were going to bomb Henderson. And that's why they built all those streets crooked, you know; they didn't do them straight. And they had the tunnel so that they could bring the workers from the factory right to the hospital if we got bombed or if there was some big, you know, catastrophe. But that tunnel was open until 1990-something and I think there might still be workers in our environmental facilities area of the Hospital that

remember closing up that tunnel. Lyle, I think was involved with the—I can't remember the other guy's name.

Interviewer: *Lyle Burkholder?*

Sr. Victoria: Lyle—I don't think that's his last name.

Interviewer: *That's the Lyle that I know from historical resources.*

Sr. Victoria: Does he work at the hospital?

Interviewer: *No.*

Sr. Victoria: No, no, Lyle is working in Facilities. He made the handles of the Chapel door at Siena. He does carpentry and he does other kind of work. And I think Lyle worked with Bob. Bob Wonder was the one I think that told me they closed up the tunnel. So that's good to know that—it's still probably there, it's just that they put cement or something to close it off.

Interviewer: *Yeah, so nobody could get trapped in it.*

Sr. Victoria: I don't know what the reason was. But I do remember there was a basement also under Rose de Lima that had a lot of historical things—I mean old things down there. And they've told you about Water Street, right? Why they named it Water Street?

Interviewer: *Well that's where the water pipelines went.*

Sr. Victoria: Right, it came right down, so that's one street that does sort of go straight. But the rest are all curved.

Interviewer: *Do you think they were worried about an air attack from the Japanese?*

Sr. Victoria: Yes, definitely. Maybe they thought of a train attack, too, I don't know, but I think it was air attack.

Interviewer: *Well, that's interesting. Is there anything else that you'd like to say or talk about that we haven't covered?*

Sr. Victoria: Well, I think Rod Davis is another one you might want to interview since he's been here since 1991. Anne Wasco is very willing—she's one of the original—she's the only original Sister left. She's the one that did the Angel Bread—she was actually the baker and I think the cook—she was the first one here in the kitchen. She looks wonderful. She's probably close to 90 years old.

[Editor's note: Sr. Anne Wasco, OP, formerly known as Sr. Marie Angelita Wojciechowski, died September 9, 2013, at the Dominican Life Center in Adrian. She was 91 and in the 69th year of her religious profession in the Adrian Dominican Congregation. Henderson Libraries' Digital Collections includes a number of historical materials related to Sr. Angelita and her famous Angel Bread.]

Sr. Victoria: That's about all I could—oh, the other people you may want to talk to—Sister Michaela and her companion—both were here in the '60s. They live in Santa Cruz. They might be willing to do a video. And Sister—I just spoke with Sister Pauline Richter. She was working in Physical Ed here way back. She's in Adrian now. She just went to Adrian. And Sister Mary Singer was a nurse there; she was a nurse here. So I'm just trying to think of people that have been here a while back.

Interviewer: *That's what I was wondering, too, if like you say there's so much travel, if people come to town on a regular basis.*

Sr. Victoria: They don't normally come. Sister Carol Fleming might come from Phoenix. Now, she's the one that did the Historical Wall. Like I say, she worked a lot with Sister Maureen

Comer decorating—doing interior design on the Hospital in the '80s. She'd be willing to come from Phoenix, I would think. She comes for other things up here. And then like I said, Sister Michaela and Joseph Eugene are in Aptos, near Santa Cruz. So they come here periodically to visit with Selma Bartlett, so they'd be here anyway, I'm sure. That's about all I can think of.

Interviewer: *Well thank you for doing this interview with us. You've told us a lot of interesting stories.*

Sr. Victoria: There are lots of interesting stories.

Interviewer: *Thank you.*

Sr. Victoria: You're welcome!