

Interview with Lois Johnson Jones, February 27, 1984.

Annette: A number of my interviews so far have been with the early members, people who belonged to the Progressives in 1970 and so on. Now I'm trying to talk to people who came in later and can bring me up to date. When did you first become involved with the Senior Citizens Center? What's the first experience you remember with it?

Lois: My first experience with the Senior Center was coming down--I lost my husband in '77, so in '78 I started going to the Center, early part of '78--just to try to get something to do. And I recall going in and asking, you know for a volunteer job. "We don't have anything." Then I would come back, and I'd ask. "WE don't have anything." Well, one day I walked in and they were doing a Snap. So I didn't even ask --I just sit down and there was one of the girls I knew--I just sit down and I started working on the Snap.

Annette: That's your newspaper?

Lois: Uhuh. At that time, you know, we had to fold it and put on the tags and all of it. So I helped with the tags and then--oh, there was one of the girls I got acquainted with who did the Bulletin. Then I started going down to the dances. And in June I was nominated to be on the Board. That fast!

Annette: So persistence paid off! If you wanted to get involved...

Lois: I wanted to get involved because--I'm one of these people who get my house done and I'm through. I don't want to mess it up, I want to get out and do something. And so, I figured the Center was the best place I know of to go. And at that time I really thought the Center was only for those people who really needed to go to the Center. For meals, not as a socializing thing. So I was--you know, quite surprised--why, we had a couple of friends who went down there all the time; in fact, we talked about this. Why did those people go to the Center? But then I find out, you know, that it's certainly good for people who want to socialize. Of course, working 20 years with Senior people, really, out at the State...

Annette: The State Hospital?

Lois: Uhuh. I thought, well, gee, this would be a good thing. I just kept getting more and more and more involved, and going to the dances, and then I was the dance chairman. I don't know, I just--I'm kind of--you know, if there's a job to do, I can do it. I have no job, I had nothing to do at home. So it made it much easier for me, to do these kind of things. I started going to the dances when--oh, we had 45 maybe--if we had 50 people, we had a big night. And of course Doc Powell ~~was~~ at that time, and had his little band.
(was the pianist)

Annette: I haven't talked to him yet, but I want to.

Lois: Well, he's one to talk to. And it went on, and I finally--I thought, well, gee, it would be nice to have a nice, big band for the Center. I got the Bob Butler Band, to come over on a Friday night.

And we had around 160 people, that night at the dance. And so, after that--Doc quit the first of the year...

Annette: Which year are we talking about, now?

Lois: About--he's been gone 3 years, so it would be--1980, the January of '80. And then I was--from the Board, I was the chairman of the dances. And so we've had--since then, we have built the dances of to--well, an average, of 90 to 100 aweek. Every Saturday night. We're the only Center in the State that has live music, every Saturday night.

Annette: That's great.

Lois: And I've been involved in going to Bingo, I go to Bingo. I get involved in too many things, I think, but I see them through, I do not start it and drop it.

Annette: Better to have too many than too few. I feel that that's what keeps us young. Keeping busy and getting involved. Well, now you're still on the Board, right?

Lois: Uhuh.

Annette: And you became Chairman of the dances in 1980, when Doc Powell quit?

Lois: Uhuh.

Annette: Somewhere in there--I talked to Bessie Timmerhoff, and she was in there--before you? before Doc?

Lois: No, no, no, no. Bessie didn't last long, she only stayed a short time, and then she quit. That was just at the end of--when Doc left.

Annette: And you've been there ever since, doing them? The dances. I've got a lot of the serious stuff--like the Board meetings and like the different political things that have been involved in founding the Center, and I'm interested in hearing about the entertainment, about the fun things. Are there any stories about the dances?--anything in particular that you could just give the feel of what they're like?

Lois: Well--to begin with, our dances were a dollar.

Annette: This was in 1980?

Lois: Yes, always a dollar, You know, no change--we don't change. It's hard for people to change. So--after you start hiring a band, you have to go up on the prices. So, after we started hiring bands, we had our dances at 7:30 to 11--\$2. And we even had people who quit, the dances, because of the \$2. But then they couldn't stand it, then they came back. But you'd think that \$2, for an evening of dancing and food and your coffee or punch--you can't go anywhere for \$2. In

I've planned on--we're going to have a 8-piece band starting the 31st of March from Lake County, which is a big, beautiful band. That's going to cost us \$2.50, so I don't know what I'm going to do--but anyhow--the dances has grown. And--I know that Doc--in fact, he just called me yesterday or the day before. He was real hurt about the first dance that we had down at the Center. And I didn't feel like I was taking anything away from Doc--you know, I asked the Board, and they all agreed, and I didn't have it on a Saturday night to take anything away from him. And he cried about this, and he was upset with me. But then it was really nice the other day, he called me and he say, 'You know, there have been times--a time--when I was really upset with you, but he says, you know, he says, 'You're doing such a good job--at least, you didn't let the ball just drop.'

Annette: Well, that's nice. What was he so hurt about?--because he had to stop?

Lois: Well, he got to where he just give out. But he was--Doc has a little jealousy in him, and he just didn't want--he felt like maybe we were intruding on him. But that was just a one time deal, we weren't...

Annette: We probably all do a little bit. When there's something we care about, we hate to let it go.

Lois: And I guess maybe he, at that time, knew he was going to have to give it up, and it just didn't sit well. But he really never..never really showed toomuch anger toward me, because he always would talk to me. But he had this feeling, and apparently he doesn't have any feeling about it now.

Annette: Well, that's good. It's gratifying that he would let you know that. Do you know anything about the history of the dances? They've been pretty much a part of the Center from its start.

Lois: Yes, they have. I don't really know who started the dances, because I have heard so many different stories, you know, like--I've heard Doc started them, and then I've heard that Katy Schwank started, you know, the little dances--so I really don't know, because I have never really run that down because--you know, it wasn't that much to me. I know Doc gets up, and he tells some beautiful stories about when he started it, and Katy tells when she started it--and most people say Kate ~~started it~~ did start the dances--I think they played by phonograph or something, not by music. Now Doc might be talking about--he never says this--he might be talking about, with music.

Annette: The live music maybe wasn't there in the beginning. Well, what did they use? Probably phonograph, records.

Lois: Right, they did. Records.

Annette: And you have the live band every Saturday night, and you charge \$2. Does that cover them, or does the Center put up part of the money?

Lois: Yes, it does. The \$2 covers them.

Annette: Where do you dance?

Lois: There in the Teen Building. Year before last, I made enough that year, over and above the dances, we bought all of the lights that's in there. I got new speakers for the Center. I got--that stage was a very small stage, and I had that--oh, it's much larger than it was. And I had carpet put on it, and I think we ended up with around \$3,000 that year. So you can see that ~~it you know~~, it paid off.

Annette: Good. Do you serve refreshments?

Lois: We serve refreshments. Most of the people bring--you know, like sandwiches or cookies. But we furnish the coffee, and we furnish the punch. In fact, we're supposed to have a potluck the first of the year.

Annette: Is anyone allowed to come, or only Seniors?

Lois: Anybody can come.

Annette: I would like to come to one and see what it was like. It would help give me a feel of it too.

Lois: I'll tell you, the dances--they wanted to keep it Senior Citizens only, but there's so many younger people--well, say my daughters' age, 30-40 years old--they don't want to go to a bar. They want to go somewhere where they can just dance. And we felt it was wrong, to keep these people from coming to our dances. What happened when Paul _____ had it for about 4 months, it went down, and apparently he had a lot of kids come in, teenagers.

Annette: That's a danger--I'm sure you wouldn't want another group taking it over.

Lois: They wouldn't come to our dances. I couldn't make my grandchildren come to my dances. It's not their type, ~~you know~~. And this is why--well Jack Simpson and I felt like that--and he does come to the dances once in awhile. He's the only person, outside of myself, --the Board, ~~you know~~, just doesn't have that much interest in the dances. Course, ~~you know~~, we do not serve any kind of liquor. And there's a lot of people don't like to go to a dance, unless they can have drinks. Now this next--the 31st of this month--we're having that from Lake County...

Annette: Of March?

Lois: Of March...over to play for us. Now I don't know whether we're going to get to have it at the Elks, or we will have it at the Center, but I'm expecting to have an awful lot of people.

Annette: And are the rules that, if I came, I should bring some food? Everyone that comes brings some food to share?

Lois: Well, see, you're new--you wouldn't have to bring food. We usually know, like I'll take this week and somebody else can take this next week. That way it's kind of split up, and everybody doesn't bring food every time. You'd really enjoy it. You'd find out--this is quite a little story, about what happened last week. One of the fellows that goes to Elks, they want a band over there for the 9th of March, and this guy comes to the Center, and he says, 'Why don't you get one of those bands that comes over to the Center?' He says 'I don't want none of that blunk-beep-beep, blunk-beep-beep music.' And ~~so~~ he says, 'Why don't you come over Saturday night and find out how blunk-beep-beep it is?' So he came over for awhile Saturday night--he brought him, in fact--and he found out that the Seniors are pretty swingers.

Annette: Good dancers--people that really appreciate the art of dancing. Really dedicate themselves to doing it right.

Lois: Well, dancing anymore, the music is so loud. You dance in here and someone else is over here. But we don't do that. And it's really...We have people come from Laytonville, every Saturday night. Lakeport, Clearlake Highlands, Willits. ~~So~~ you know there must be something there.

Annette: Now it sounds like there's a lot of work involved in setting up, and cleaning up and all this. Is this all done by volunteers?

Lois: Yes, the food is all served by volunteers. And, see, I am the coordinator for the Board. I'm in charge of volunteers, activities, things such as that. ~~You know~~ in the Teen center there, I have a desk right inside. I volunteer down there every morning, from--oh, about 9:30 to 1. And this year we have Graves--Eva Graves--as the dance chairman, ^{I was} coordinator of the dance. So we work together, and that's why our dances are a success, is because it's really a dancer's club, they make the rules. You know, if something comes up, they vote on it. The Board is between us, but they don't have that much say about the dances anymore. At one time--all this was back, I guess before I was coordinator--I went directly to the Board. But now the Chairman goes through me, and I go tell the Board of any--like our money. I'll be reporting tomorrow in regards to the dance that we're going to have the 31st of March, so that they will be aware of what's going on. And I always--if something happened, I'd always go to George, because I don't want something to happen over here, then go back to George and he doesn't know about it. And I kept him well aware of everything that went on over there. It's been quite an experience and--I've enjoyed it.

Annette: I can tell you enjoy it a lot. Can you tell me something about your background, Lois? You mentioned that you started to get interested in Ukiah Seniors after your husband died. Had you and your husband lived here in Ukiah a long time?

Lois: My husband came over here from Point Arena in 1951.

Annette: Uhuh--what was his name?

Lois: Troy--Johnson. And he went to work, and about 3 months later I went to work over there. At that time there were no--women, it was just absolutely impossible almost to get on.

Annette: Where?

Lois: At the State Hospital. And so he got--they'd take a man because they needed men. And my husband was hurt, and the doctor told him to do something light--well, he never thought about coming to work for the State Hospital, but some friends of ours was over here, and they said, 'Why don't you go there to work, until you get to where you can do better?' And at that time I think he started in at about \$100 a month. Then I got on, and I loved the job, because it was working with people, and I liked working with people. So he figured I would make it one day, but I made it almost 20 years. And I enjoyed every minute of that. In fact, when I had to quit...

Annette: Was that when it closed down?

Lois: No, I quit in '68, because I got arthritis in my hands and my feet, and had to go in for treatments. I was real broken up about that, having to quit. So he continued working, and then he had a heart attack and had surgery.

Annette: Could you tell me what you did there?

Lois: I was a psychiatric technician. Most of the time I was in charge on RTA, which was Receiving for men and women for about 11 years. And I had orientation classes, for new people, new employees, students from Santa Rosa Junior College. I had all those. I had all new patients, and a lot of--well, even social workers and psychologists.

Annette: Are you and your husband natives of Point Arena?

Lois: No. We're natives of Oklahoma. We came to California in 1940-41. So my husband went into the service in Oakland--World War II. And then he went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and at that time we had another child, which was 2 daughters. When he got settled down there--he got a house, he was a staff sergeant--the girls and I took off and drove ~~0000~~ through and went to Kentucky. And then, when he got out, we came back to California.

Annette: How did you ever find Point Arena?

Lois: We had some friends over there ~~we~~^{we} bought a service station-- ~~we~~ had the only Standard Station in Point Arena. And my husband was a building contractor over there. So he had the service station, and he finally gave that up and just did his building altogether.

Annette: Did you work over there too?

Lois: No, I didn't work over there. I never did work until I got-- I'd work maybe a day or two, something like that, just to have something to do. My husband never wanted me to work.

Annette: Out of the home, that is? We have to clarify that we do plenty of work.

Lois: Well, that's what he said. I had plenty to do at home, taking care of the kids, keeping up the house. His salary was so low, and at ~~88888~~ that time the girls were going into high school, and you couldn't get by, really, on that kind of salary. The only reason we made it was because we had a little money backing us. But as far as \$100 a month, at that time ~~you know~~, and then of course when he re-tired, it was almost \$1500 a month. That's how salaries went up.

Annette: Another question I was thinking of is--you've been on the Board now, I guess, it sounds like, 5 or 6 years...

Lois: Six.

Annette: Are there major decisions in the history of the Center that you've been involved with that you think would be important to put down? To the growth of the Center?

Lois: I think of the growth of the Center, I was in the decision of the MSSP program. In fact, I was one of the people who went to the classes in San Francisco. I was the one that went round into homes, here, and took their history and got them--we used them, you know, as kind of guinea pigs.

Annette: Who is "them?" In this case?

Lois: Well, now, like the Schindlers--we used them. The people we knew that could be eligible for the MSSP program. And then I even ~~Annette~~ have met with the guy from Sacramento--that's the boss--and he and I went through all the questions, and there was some that I had the pleasure of changing--that was more suited than what they had. I think it was probably because I had worked with people, the elderly, that made it easier for me to see that it was better. In fact, I could have gone to work for MSSP, but--I don't want a job. I can't afford a job, because I'd have to give it right back to Uncle Sam, so why work? I like what I'm doing. I can do it if I want to.

Annette: Sounds like a nice, independent situation.

Lois: And also the Day Care is another thing that has been since I was here on the Board. Day Care came after MSSP. I was the chairman of the hiring when they hired Cynthia, for MSSP. And I've seen lots of employees come and go. There was one fellow who was fired and who fought his case, but lost. I've seen them come from one building into the big building. At one time we only had the one building here where the offices are. We had our meals there, and everything. And then we moved over--course we all figured, 'It'll never work, it'll never work'--but it did work. I guess at that time we were only serving around 40-45 meals a day. Now then you can get up to 150 a day, some days. Yes, I've seen the Center grow. The Board members--we had a new ruling on Board members. It used

to be on the Board you could just stay forever. But now then it's six years and you have to be off one year, and then you can be off and come back again.

Annette: What do you think if you could name one thing, that's the most valuable thing the Ukiah Senior Center does? What do you think it would be? For you?

Lois: For me--what does the Center do for me? Self-satisfaction, of being able to socialize..helping other people. Which--I feel I do help other people. I always take the time to talk to them; I don't pass anybody by. In fact, a lady today introduced me to a friend of hers she'd brought with hereand she says, 'I just was telling her how you take the time to stop and talk to all of us.

Annette: It's important to people.

Lois: It's very important to people, to just stop--if nothing else--to say how are you. Of course I'm admitting that I get self-satisfaction out of this, myself. I enjoy it. I think I would be sick if I had to stay home and I couldn't go. I have relieved--let's see, this has been about 5 years ago--Babe has always been on the desk, but at that time I think she had, some kind of heart problem or something--she was in the hospital. And I was a cast, and I relieved the counter--you know, where you pay--for 3 months, while she was off. And here--well, in November--I fell and ~~broke~~^{hurt} my leg--in fact, it's just getting well. I only missed 10 days, and that was because the doctor put me to bed.

Annette: You have good recuperative powers, it sounds like.

Lois: Well--doctor says I do have.

Annette: Another thing I want to ask you--do you have any views on what kind of book this should be? Do you have ideas about the kind of book you would like to see printed in this history?

Lois: I think I saw about 3 books that you brought in, to the Board meeting, and I don't really recall which one it was, I liked. I like a book--I don't like a fancy book, because of the fact that I think there would be more people buy a less expensive book. I've saw too much down there.

Annette: So you have an idea of what would sell?

Lois: That's right. That's the idea, I think, behind this book, is so we could sell it to people so that they do have a history. There are people down there who just can't buy everything. And I like to see these people have something too.

Annette: So to try to come up with a book, that would have what we want in it, and at the same time would be available for people to buy, and would pay for itself. That's the trick--to decide what kind of a book that is. Sounds like it should be a paper back.

Lois: The only thing I have against that--I know that a hardback is more expensive. Paperback--they seem to get worn and torn; where a hardback, you can always treasure and keep them, they can be handed down.

Annette: They're much nicer for pæserving, for endurance. But so much more expensive.

Lois: That's right. But don't you think, as long as we're going into it, a little bit more and have a little bit better book would be better? Now that's my thought.

Annette: And photographs are something else that cost money. But photographs in a book are one of its nicest qualities.

Lois: Yes.

Annette: I guess just making that decision. How much we can afford to spend on it, and still be able to sell it, so people will be able to buy it.

Lois: What do you see as the price of a book is going to run? I think you told us that day, or one of the days when you brought in your books, the range.

Annette: It so depends on the size and everything, that it's just impossible. If we had some specific books, in front of us. I could tell you what the ones I've put together have cost. For instance, one of the ones I brought in was a little journal, the WordWeavers, that I put out once a year with the Women Writers' Guild. Those cost us last year \$4 a piece. We only had a small amount of books made, and so they were higher. The more books you have made, the cheaper they are. So we have to decide how many, and the volume makes a difference. One of the books I brought out of mine is the history of Gualala...

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