

Transcription of Inez Buis Interview

Tracy McMullen, Interviewer

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Abstract

Longtime UUFHC member Inez Buis sat down with member Tracy McMullen for an interview. At the time of the interview, Inez Buis was our longest standing member. She signed the UUFHC Membership Book in September, 1957. (She misspoke initially during the interview concerning this date and corrected it later.) This was videotaped and then transcribed in this document.



TRACY: Hello, I'm Tracy McMullen, member of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hartford County, and with me is Inez Buis, who is the member of longstanding of our Fellowship. And Inez today is going to tell us some of her memories of the Fellowship, dating back almost to the time that it formally started in 1957.

Inez, can you talk to us a little bit about some of the early times that you remember of the Fellowship?

INEZ: Well, the first that I remember, my husband had a co-worker whose name was Denny, and he told John about the Fellowship.

And we had been disturbed because our daughter,

who was in the first grade at that time, had a teacher who put up on the board religious poems and religious things and asked the children how many had gone to Sunday school, and implied that if they didn't go to Sunday school, that was terrible. And, at any rate, we thought that we would see what the Unitarian Church was like.

TRACY: Had you been involved with another church before that?

INEZ: No. No, we had not. So we came to the church for the first time on Easter Sunday, and I can't remember for the life of me whether that was 1970. It must have been 1977. I think it must have been 1977 when we first came. [Corrected later to 1957.] And they were meeting then in the

Seventh-day Adventist Church in Wilma, and we were quite favorably impressed with the program.

TRACY: Was it lay led at the time?

INEZ: It was lay led. It was lay led completely that year and many years thereafter, I think. And so we continued going to the Fellowship. I remember a number of the people who were involved at that time were still involved for years after that.

So that was how we started. And my husband came fairly regularly and brought the children. Very often I stayed home and cooked Sunday dinner.

TRACY: How many children did you have?

INEZ: I had two children, a girl and a boy. And as I recall, at the time that they began coming, they were eight and six. So that was the age at that time.

TRACY: And did they continue at the Fellowship until they left home?

INEZ: Yes, they went.

TRACY: Went through the RE program?

INEZ: They went through the RE program. I don't think the RE program was as good as it is now.

I've been very favorably impressed with the RE program that has been as I have seen it, which I've not been directly involved, but I think that it has improved considerably since the days when I was involved with it.

TRACY: What kinds of things have changed in RE? What was covered then or not covered then that is now, or taught differently?

INEZ: I think that it's more structured now. That's the main thing, and it's more comprehensive than it was at that time.

So much was left to the teacher that the teacher sometimes had a hard time finding something to do because it was very hit or miss at the time.

TRACY: Did someone direct the program and guide it? Did you have a formal curriculum from

the UUA?

INEZ: That was the main thing. We didn't really at that time have a formal curricula from the UUA, and that's why I think it was not as good a program as it is now.

TRACY: Tell us about the Sunday services themselves. What kinds of topics were covered and what was done?

INEZ: The topics covered were almost anything under the sun. Whatever whoever had the program desired to talk about.

Most of us took a turn at speaking on Sunday. My husband did several times. Most of the other members did, too, one time or another, and whatever they chose to talk about, they talked about. Sometimes it would be more or less a review of some book that they had read. It might be that or it might be almost anything. I'm really remembering back now to the time after we got our building on Lee Way. We had visiting ministers from time to time that would come.

TRACY: Always UU?

INEZ: Most of the time, although we would have visiting speakers also from other places, from the college and from wherever we could get them.

TRACY: Did you have discussion groups at all as to the services?

INEZ: Sometimes. Sometimes we did, but it wasn't something we had year after year after year. We did do that sometimes, yes.

TRACY: About how many members were involved at that point? This sounds like the late 70s we're talking about.

INEZ: That you would have to look up. I'm sure the archives could tell you how many members we had at that time. I don't remember, but I know it was less than 100, but somewhat over 30, I think. It was somewhere. I don't remember the exact numbers.

TRACY: What kinds of things were you able to do once you moved to Lee Way that you weren't able to do at the Seventh Day Adventist church?

INEZ: The most important thing was that we could have our own supplies in various rooms and not have to carry everything home at night.

We could have the use of the building at any time we wanted to do that. We were not restricted in any way. That was the most important thing.

Of course, you also realize that in those days when we first moved to Lee Way, you must realize also that the building was largely finished by us. I'm sure that you know from the archives that the buildings were day buildings that were at the Proving Ground and were hauled in. You've probably seen the pictures of them hauling in the day buildings.

Then the two were joined together. Then the old paint that was burned or scraped off the outside, and then buildings were painted and all the interior painting was done. We had a concrete floor for the longest time.

In fact, we had the concrete floor, I think, until Dirk died. I think that Jenny Doyle contributed the money in memory of Dirk to buy the carpet that was in the main room. That's about it.

TRACY: Was there any thought at that time of moving from the building on Lee Way to a larger place?

INEZ: No. We didn't feel like we needed it.

TRACY: That came about how much later, would you say?

INEZ: How much later? I don't even remember that. It was in the 80s, wasn't it? Yes. In the 80s. In fact, we didn't really think of moving until we had this permanent minister of Alice Wesley.

TRACY: I see.

INEZ: It was really her idea.

TRACY: We are in the process now of looking at long-range planning for a very rapidly growing membership. Did the membership at the time feel that it was going to remain about the size it was?

INEZ: Are you talking about in the 80s or the 70s?

TRACY: The early 80s, before Alice came, when you were on Lee Way.

INEZ: When we were on Lee Way, as I recall, we didn't really have any idea whether we would grow or not. But the point was that we thought that if we did grow, that we would expand the Lee Way building and make it larger, which I think we could have done if it hadn't been for the, whatever it was.

TRACY: There's a watershed issue.

INEZ: The wetlands. The wetlands problem, which I still think was ridiculous. But at any rate, that was what our problem was at that time.

TRACY: That seems to impact on a lot of expansion efforts in Hartford County. I've heard of people running into that kind of problem. So it does.

And you were there when Alice came, is that right?

INEZ: I was there when Alice came. In fact, I was on the committee that chose her.

TRACY: Were there a number of ministers that you interviewed for the position?

INEZ: Yes, there were at least three. I don't remember their names, but there were at least three. And of the ones that we interviewed, we thought that Alice would be the best. Of the ones that we interviewed.

TRACY: What kinds of questions were asked or what characteristics or features were you looking for as a Fellowship and a minister at that time?

INEZ: Now that I want to refer you to the archives. Because in the archives there should be the packet that we made up for Alice. And it would have that information in it.

TRACY: The actual criteria?

INEZ: Right. So I think that you should look in the archives for that information.

TRACY: Was it a unanimous decision to call her?

INEZ: I don't recall that it was unanimous, but it was almost unanimous if it wasn't unanimous.

TRACY: How did things change then in the Fellowship once you had a full-time minister?

INEZ: Well, we had had Geoff Drutches before Alice as an interim minister. So we were rather accustomed by then to having a minister.

And even so, well, especially when we had Geoff Drutches, we had a minister just half-time because he was paired up with York. So that the other times when Geoff was not speaking, we had outside speakers or members who would make, give sermons. So it was sort of a gradual change from having our own speakers in some different topic each and every week to having somebody there all the time.

And since it was so gradual, it wasn't so much of a jolt for us. But I think that there were still a lot of us who liked having different people speak in between.

TRACY: And before Geoff, if you had ministerial needs in the Fellowship, was there someone that you were able to call on? Did the UUA provide that? Or did you have an agreement with another Fellowship in the area?

INEZ: We did not have an agreement with another Fellowship. But we did have a minister that we called upon and that would come if we had a special need for a minister. And also we had some that would come, say, once a month to give a sermon. Ernest Sommerfeld was one, although I think some of the time he came more than once a month. I think maybe about twice a month. I'm not sure. Archives, again, give you that information. But he would come and take care of funerals, weddings, ceremonies. And as I say, he would come about twice a month for a sermon.

TRACY: Can you tell us about some of the things that you did to promote fellowship within the Fellowship? Did you have social activities or potluck dinners on a regular basis?

INEZ: Oh yes, we had potluck dinners. I don't remember how regular they were, but we certainly did have them. Tom Giuliano used to make big pots of spaghetti or something like that. Or was it soup? My memory is not too good, but I remember them. We had good dinners. And we also had a coffee hour after each meeting so that there was fellowship after each time. We all took turns at doing dishes and the kitchen work, the KP. We took turns at just about everything. In the beginning, we took turns cleaning the place. I remember many times going over and sweeping the whole place. That's before we had the rugs, too. So in the beginning, we did everything ourselves. The history refers to a lot of sweat equity that went into the building and maintenance and keeping things going. It was all sweat equity for a number of years.

TRACY: Did you have committees set up to lead those things, or did people just get together and do it?

INEZ: Oh yes, we had committees set up. Again, the archives can tell you about that, too.

TRACY: Once Alice came, you had a full-time minister by then.

INEZ: Yes, she was really our first full-time minister.

TRACY: Can you tell us about the beginnings of the movement to find a larger building in a new location?

INEZ: Well, that again was mostly Alice. She was the one that was most interested in that. I can remember she took me around to look at various and sundry pieces of property that she thought would make a fine place for a church. She was really the instigator and the force behind getting a different building. At first, I knew about this property that they now own. I had nothing to do with it. It was just announced that that was being given to us or virtually given to us. I was not involved with that.

TRACY: Is that the property on Lee Way or the one on Churchville Road?

INEZ: The one on Churchville Road that the

membership eventually bought. Yes. We pledged to send a group to build that building.

KIT BROWN: I might add I was president when Alice came.

TRACY: Oh, you were?

INEZ: Gee, I didn't remember that.

KIT BROWN: No. I don't remember. I don't think so. Charlene Phillips was president. That's right.

INEZ: See, I didn't think it was.

TRACY: We can edit that out.

INEZ: I was president before 1977. I know because my father became sick and I had to go down to Chattanooga to take care of him and my mother, who was incompetent at the time. I had to take a year's leave of absence from school. Then I was president again, I think, some year after that, after we came back. I've forgotten when.

TRACY: What kinds of things did you do as president in the small Fellowship at the time?

INEZ: Virtually, I think, the same things that they do now. We got organized committees, arranged for meetings, and just saw to it that everybody did what they said they would do. It's not any big, difficult job.

TRACY: Were there any conflicts within the Fellowship? Churches tend to go through periodic problems, conflicts, and they usually tend to be resolved. It's always interesting how that process goes. Do you recall any difficult times in the Fellowship and how they were resolved?

INEZ: There was no difficult time until Alice came. Alice, unfortunately, I remember especially one particular annual meeting when Alice got up and called for a cessation of taking minutes. She wanted to speak, and she spoke, and I think she said a lot of things she shouldn't have said.

It caused a lot of hard feelings. Those hard feelings never went away because she virtually accused a number of people in the Fellowship of

going against things that would be good for the Fellowship. I don't think it was true.

She caused a lot of hard feelings, not only then but other times, too. Unfortunately, she caused a lot of hard feelings. As a result, nine-tenths of the people who were still there, who had been founders of the Fellowship, left.

I think I was the only one who didn't leave. I felt like I had to stay because I had voted to go ahead and buy the land and build the building.

TRACY: Was it tough sticking it out and staying? Did it make things more difficult to work with?

INEZ: think so, yes.

TRACY: Would you have left had you not felt that responsibility?

INEZ: I might have, probably would.

TRACY: That was when a second Fellowship was founded, I understand.

INEZ: The second Fellowship was founded some months, maybe a year later. It was not immediately. It was some time later.

TRACY: Correct me if I'm wrong, a lot of the people who put that Fellowship together were people who had left.

INEZ: Absolutely.

TRACY: Is that correct?

INEZ: Absolutely.

Tracy: Had you visited that Fellowship at all? Was there any back and forth between the two or was it pretty much a complete split?

INEZ: A complete split. Then Alice, I guess, left shortly after the building was completed. I moved away in 1993. I moved down to Charlestown Retirement Community. It was after that that Alice suddenly, or it seemed sudden to me, that she decided to retire and left.

TRACY: Looking back, if you could depict one memory involving the Fellowship that was your favorite, your favorite story or your favorite event

or your favorite year or accomplishment, could you talk about that a little bit?

INEZ: I would really need to have some time to think about that, I think. Because, but I think the most enjoyable times was when we were at Lee Way and we were just working together and working on the building. We were having enjoyable times together. That was going back quite a ways. Then, of course, I remember the time when Dirk, my husband, died. We had a memorial service for him and the Fellowship. If that wasn't Easter, I know it snowed that day. I believe it was Easter, too. If it wasn't Easter, it was close to it because he died the 25th of March. Then I recall when Dirk died, Dirk had been our organist from the beginning.

TRACY: This is your husband?

INEZ: No, this is Dirk Reuyl. He was from Holland also. That was another time because my husband was from Holland and Dirk was from Holland. Dirk was the organist from the beginning. Then I started playing the organ. I took some lessons so I could play it right. I was an organist for some 20 years until I moved.

TRACY: Is that rough? Had you played organ before?

INEZ: No, I had played piano. As I said, I took some lessons so that I could play the organ. To tell the honest truth, Dirk always played the organ as though it were a piano. That's the way he played it.

TRACY: What about the music program at the time? Did you sing hymns as part of the service? Did you have a choir? Were there anthems or offertory solos or instrumentalists?

INEZ: Charlie Reed played the piano. Sometimes he and I would play together. That's another one of the enjoyable times that we had. I would play the organ and he would play the piano. It was a duet. At various times we had a choir. There was one time when we had a good ... I want to say Alta Romine. Was that her name? I think she married again. She has a different name now. She goes to the Towson Church

now. She was a music teacher. When she was there, we had a very good choir. She would lead it. We always sang hymns. We had three different hymn books. As new ones came out, we would get new ones. We usually would have a choir sing. We would have Christmas programs and things like that.

TRACY: So music was a big part of the culture?

INEZ: That it was. At least as far as I was concerned, it was.

TRACY: Is there a sermon or a talk or a speaker that particularly stays in your mind?

INEZ: No, not really. I don't recall any particular one. Except that the ones that Ernest Sommerfeld did, we really always enjoyed him. Because he was very good, very interesting. I think that I remember him.

TRACY: Was he a visiting minister or a part-time?

INEZ: I would call him a part-time minister. Because for a while we had him two times a month. But then he got so that he was not able to do it anymore.

TRACY: I see.

INEZ: I have to mention my husband making the little ... What do you call these things that hold the papers and hold the podium? Is that the right word? Lectern? Lectern. Lectern is better. We only had a table for the speaker.

One day my husband went down, I think it was on a Saturday, down to the basement and got some scrap lumber and nailed together a sort of a box with a slanting part to it that he could put up for a lectern. We used that for years and years and years and years until Alice came. I know that Alice got rid of it because I remember seeing it in her office sometime after she came.

I don't know what happened to it after that. I guess it was thrown in the trash. That was used for years.

My husband never meant for it to be used for years. It was just that it was to be used that

Sunday. It was made out of scrap lumber.

TRACY: Do you remember any of the social movements or activities that the Fellowship was involved in?

INEZ: The Fellowship was used as a meeting place for a number of groups. We rented our building to various groups. We also sometimes had the meetings of the JPD, not the whole JPD district, but various parts of the JPD district.

I can't really remember it well enough to tell you.

TRACY: Marches?

INEZ: Well, I know that during the Civil Rights Movement, the church did play a part, but I was not directly involved. I don't remember the story at that time.

TRACY: That may have been before, from what you said, that may have been before you were involved.

INEZ: Well, not before I was a member, no, but it was before I was actively involved as much as I became later.

TRACY: Inez, you talked about you and your family looking for a church that, not your words, but was liberal in ideas and open to different ways of thinking and worshipping, and that's what attracted you to the UU Fellowship. What year was that that you became involved first?

INEZ: Well, I think the year was 1957. The first time that we went was on Easter of 1957 at the Wilma Church.

TRACY: Which was the Seventh-day Adventist church?

INEZ: The Seventh-day Adventist church. They met on Saturday and we met on Sunday. And sometimes come to think of it, I remember that for Sunday school classes, we used part of the Methodist church, I think it was. It was not right next door, because we didn't have enough room in the Wilma Church. But my husband had been brought up as a free thinker in Holland, and the church was very liberal, and let anybody believe

anything they wanted to, so that's why it appealed to us.

TRACY: Stayed with it for many, many years then.

INEZ: Yes, for the rest of his life, and mine too, I suppose.

TRACY: We hope so!

Are there people that you remember through the years that stand out in your mind, who have been instrumental in giving the Fellowship its character, its flavor?

INEZ: Well, I recall that the earliest members that I recall are, of course, the Woodwards, Mary and Art Woodward. In fact, I remember the first day that we were there, my daughter was sort of befriended by Ann Woodward, who was the daughter of Mary, and made her feel more at home. And the Reeds, Lois and Charlie Reed, they were the founding members. Also founding members were Dirk and Jenny Reuyl. As I said before, Dirk played the organ. And let's see, the Marzullis, Florence, and, oh dear, what was his name? I'm afraid to say because I've forgotten what his name was.

At any rate, you can look that up. The Missouri Marzullis. And let me think.

Well, I mentioned some time ago the Julianos, but they were not founding members. They came later. And I remember the TyBuiss, they came later also.

And they moved away to Oklahoma. Let's see. Oh, what was her name? Oh, dear.

I can put her, I have her face, but I can't think of her name. She was a very interesting person. Seems to me it was Elizabeth something.

We'd better look that up.

KIT BROWN: Mary and Arnie Lucas?

INEZ: Oh, yes. Why couldn't I think of that? Mary and Arnie Lucas.

They were early members. I can't remember now. That's one of the reasons I moved to

Charlestown Retirement Community. My memory is gone.

TRACY: We all seem to have that trouble building moments.

INEZ: There were a lot of good people, a lot of good people in the Fellowship. That's why we liked it so much, because we liked the people.

From time to time, they never became members, but Margaret and John Carver were often present. We used to have Sunday evening get-togethers. I don't like to call them services, because it weren't really that, but they were really discussion groups. And very often, the discussion groups met at various people's houses on Sunday nights. So we did that for quite a few years, I know. So they often participated in the discussion groups.

TRACY: Is there anything else you'd like to add to your recollections?

INEZ: I'm afraid my recollections are skimpy, and so I can't think of anything to add.

TRACY: I think everything you've said is very interesting, and probably very meaningful to many people who have many of the same memories.

One thing I'd like to say before we close is that I

understand you gave the organ that is now in our Fellowship as a gift. And I want to thank you for that on behalf of everyone, because I know it's given us all a great deal of pleasure. It's a wonderful thing to do.

INEZ: Does anybody ever play it anymore?

TRACY: Yes, it is played.

INEZ: It is?

TRACY: Not as often as, I'd like to hear it, because I love organs, but it is played, and it's a lovely organ.

INEZ: That was supposed to be anonymous. Somehow, somebody leaked it out. [laughter]

TRACY: Well, thank you so much for this. I just really appreciate your time on tape, and all that you recall to say. It's been a very, very fascinating time.

INEZ: I enjoyed meeting you, too. I hadn't met you before.

TRACY: Please come and visit us often.

INEZ: Well, in fact, it's a long trip now.

TRACY: I understand. You'd be very welcome anytime.

INEZ: Thank you. ■