

KING COUNTY DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION
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KING COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

PATRICIA KARRASCH

April 19, 1988

Final Edited Draft

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This is an interview with Pat Karrasch on April 19, 1988. The interviewer is Lorraine McConaghy for King County Parks.

Well, I'm going to start by asking you how did you become interested in working in parks.

Ms. Karrasch It was by chance. I was going to be a nurse or a teacher, and taking the curriculum at the University of Washington. For summer jobs, I found an easy way to make a small income by going to work for the Seattle Park Department working as a summer playground leader on some of their outdoor recreational parks where you were just a playground supervisor and tried to make all of the kids happy. I found that this was not as structured, and was more fun, and I found out that they also had a curriculum of recreation at the University of Washington which I was not aware of. So I made the switch.

So you changed your major on the strength of a summer job...

Ms. Karrasch Yes. I've never regretted it.

What did you do for the Seattle Parks Department?

Ms. Karrasch I worked on what they called "Summer Playgrounds," which consisted of a small softball field, a small shelter house which had restrooms and a little tiny cubbyhole where equipment would be stored. And they would have swings, a playground area, and tables with some arts and crafts. We would do children's games, and I checked out equipment and supervised the activities of primarily children at that time - the things that they did in self play.

So it was not a structured program?

Ms. Karrasch No, it was not structured. Obviously, the summer lent itself to certain kinds of activities and that's what structured us into what we did. The Park Department required us to play what they referred to as "low organized games," and that was for youngsters in the early grades, 1 through 6. At that time, it was not difficult getting boys to play baseball and softball, and the girls were a little harder to find because they didn't come to the playgrounds to play baseball or softball. They came to do arts and crafts, and it was very spontaneous. We played a lot of children's games like "Capture the Flag" and "Kick the Can" - those we would do with the junior high school age youngsters and even some of the high

schoolers. Those activities would be at night. We primarily worked from 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Was the recreation curriculum new at the University of Washington?

Ms. Karrasch I don't know how long the major existed but it was a fairly new curriculum because not very many students knew about it as far as people who came into the building. It was kind of like a minor instead of a major curriculum - you would major in Physical Education with a minor in Recreation which, of course, later changed to be a major curriculum with a degree in Recreation.

You were really fulfilling a P.E. degree without the teaching requirements. And that permitted you to be in recreation, and that was the professional title of it at that time.

Were you taught by professional recreators?

Ms. Karrasch Yes. At that time, there was a professor named Helen McCellan whose emphasis was on camping, and that was the emphasis of recreation at that time. I mean organized camping, like Campfire Girls and Girl Scouts and obviously Boy Scouts, though I didn't do that. I didn't want to go into the field of camping; I preferred Park Department activities. Our classes were towards camp crafts and not necessarily how to manage a camp but to be a leader in a camp. It was supplemented by P.E. activities - we learned how to play children's games because we were also involved with people who were in elementary education and we learned how to play team sports because we were

involved with people who were going to be in high school and teach high school sports. So we had an overlap. We also had a little bit of dance, and we had what we called individual sports, like badminton and golf and tennis. And we were taught the skills of teaching, but not with the idea that this was what you did in recreation because you weren't a teacher in recreation; you were kind of like a facilitator on a park. You just wanted to make everybody happy; at least that's how I did it. That's how I felt. It was important for me that everybody participated and had fun. That's what recreation was.

So did you take the B.A.?

Ms. Karrasch Yes.

When did you graduate?

Ms. Karrasch That's kind of a long story. I went to the University for two years and then World War II came about. I wanted to be a Marine, so I joined the Marine Corps, and was in for two years. I tried to get into physical activity like a gym program, and but I enlisted too late to do that. I participated in some of the activities that the Marine Corps offered and then I came back to the University of Washington and spent another two years. I think I'm probably lacking about twenty credits of my degree.

So you went away and returned. What were your career goals, as a young woman?

Ms. Karrasch Well, to be honest with you, my career goal was to stay in the Marine Corps. When I found out that I couldn't do that, then I went back to what I enjoyed which was the Seattle Park Department. At that time, they were hiring full-time people to work in their year-round facilities, which they called community centers and I started working at some of their lesser-in-size facilities which did not have gymnasiums, but had year-round programs.

So, we worked the 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM hourly shift and sometimes we worked with a co-worker and sometimes we didn't. Again, we were working with mostly youth and mostly boys. They were the predominate occupiers of our athletic facilities.

Where were you working, or were you all over?

Ms. Karrasch Well, one of my first facilities was in the University District, in what they referred to as the University Playfield which is still there. My year-round experiences were in a little, small building called Colman, which was next to a school. Then I was at Rainier Beach and I finished working with the Seattle Parks Department at Yesler Terrace which was an interesting experience working with low income families.

And then I had the wonderful opportunity to go to work for King County Parks for \$240 a month! And that was a fabulous salary for me. They had a facility at Richmond Highlands which was really out in the boonies, and didn't have anything but an old building. Fortunately for me, the community had a lot of insight and

a lot of love for someplace for their kids to play. There were no facilities out there like theatres or places for kids to occupy their time, so they looked to the King County Park Department to help them provide that, and they did.

What kind of a community was it, at Richmond Highlands?

Ms. Karrasch Well, it was an area that grew up after the war, and suddenly developed with a lot of young families that had one to three youngsters in the primary age level. And a lot of housing was built so that the community sprung up very rapidly in numbers and it was supported by the Shoreline School District, which is now a very large school district. The area in which our building is was surrounded by trees and today it is surrounded by houses. The area behind the building was brush and blackberries, but today it has a lighted ballfield. We used just about every school in the Shoreline School District to provide programs for everyone - the adults and kids - and utilized that space whenever the school district was not.

How did you hear about the job with King County? Was it advertised? Had you wanted to make a move?

Ms. Karrasch That's hard for me to say... Oh, I know. My mother lived out in what was called North City and not too far from that was Hamlin Park which was a park that belonged to King County. Because I was going to spend some time with my mother, I called the King County Parks Department and told them I'd had some experience with the

Seattle Park Department and asked did they have any summer playground jobs? So I was assigned to Hamlin Park, and then I was just in the right place at the right time to make a transfer. I went back to Seattle Parks to work in the winter months, and then finally an opening for a woman happened with the King County Parks Department, and I was there to get it. Nothing in the newspapers, or any advertising like they do now.

What was King County Parks like when you joined?

Ms. Karrasch It consisted of - let's see - about five year-round facilities and about ten or twelve summer playground facilities with no beaches. Most of them were in south King County. You had White Center, Des Moines, Burien, Enumclaw, Si View, and then the facility acquired after the war, which was Richmond Highlands and that was an old school facility which they moved and remodeled into a gymnasium and what we called a fieldhouse. We learned, though, that the word "fieldhouse" meant that it had to have a dirt floor and so we very quickly changed the connotation to "community center" or "recreation center" because we didn't want to have to play in the dirt.

I didn't realize a fieldhouse had to have a dirt floor! When did you come on board in King County Parks?

Ms. Karrasch Full time, was 1951. That's when I was assigned to go out to Richmond Highlands and I worked there for five years before I was assigned to go into the office as a summer supervisor.

Did you know much about the community that you were working in?

Ms. Karrasch Most families were a result of the war - couples chose to live there in the north end to start their families. And they were not war workers, because the war was over, but they were looking to move out of apartments or confining areas in the city of Seattle to have that feeling of owning a little bit of land and their own home. At that time, most of the homes were small, three bedroom homes and probably there were three to five people in the families. They were all relatively young - in their early thirties - which made it nice for me because there were a lot of young people right away to start a recreation program. I had a captive audience of the elementary youngster.

Who was your supervisor?

Ms. Karrasch I had two supervisors: one was a woman and her name was Nita Upmeyer and she was in charge of activities other than sports. She didn't visit me very often and we never talked much about recreation in the parks. However, she was nice and easy to work for; when she left the Park Department, she was very supportive of my filling her position.

George Wyse was my athletic supervisor who provided me with the materials for the league play for boys in the program. And I worked under Robert Stephens who was the second or third

superintendent of the Park Department - he really was the first full-time, bonafide superintendent of King County Parks.

There were a couple of people before who acted as acting directors where they were called Superintendent of Parks, but that was before the system was defined to be a true parks system. I'm not sure if that's really true, or if I'm saying it right. The park department originally was White Center Park, as the first park, and there was where the park department was born into King County government, before my time. Way before my time!

What is your own story during the next few years?

Ms. Karrasch Well, my love, of course, was working with young people and providing them with as many varieties of activities as I possibly could. I had a strong feeling that recreation was for everybody so I was really dedicated to providing activities to everyone from the smallest youngster to the oldest senior. And after I'd been at Richmond Highlands for about five years, I had the opportunity to consider an advancement which I really wasn't excited about because I didn't want to leave the community environment and all the nice people I'd worked with so many years. I also saw the handwriting on the wall that if I did not take this opportunity perhaps it would be many years before I would have another opportunity to be in the supervisory role. And, of course, like anyone else, I did want to advance. And that was to my advantage because my schooling and my experience with the Parks Department directed me into developing many, many programs for the King County Parks Department. Nothing was ever impossible for

us to do, and we never recognized anything as a failure. If something was not real popular, we tried to find out why and then to either improve it or find another way to do it so that people did enjoy it.

Everything just fell into place - like that was where I was supposed to be and the things that we did were a combination of many people's efforts. I spent thirty years fulfilling a dream of being in a job I really loved and really enjoyed and had the opportunity to have unlimited chances to provide services for the people of King County. It was just very easy.

What was the title of the position that you moved up to?

Ms. Karrasch I was a Playground and Center Director Supervisor, and then as we grew, I became Director of Recreation, which was then being responsible for all of the physical activities from the preschooler through the senior citizen including the handicapped.

That's a huge spectrum of activities. What all did that include and how did the program change?

Ms. Karrasch The concept up until that time - and I don't mean to say that I was responsible for the change of philosophy because obviously I wasn't - but recreation was primarily a boy's activity. The activities that were provided for in our gymnasiums and on our playgrounds were competitive sports. This was a natural for boys; not so natural for girls.

Because I was female versus male, I did feel a strong need to provide for girls in a competitive way not necessarily equally to the boys but to at least have some opportunity for gym time and opportunities to use all facilities. So we started scheduling and arranging, using facilities to their maximum, and if we didn't have a facility, finding one from somewhere else and making it available. It created a marriage between King County Parks and the King County School Districts which was invaluable to us because we were able to do so many things. Our own facilities were either not in the proper places or they didn't have the right architecture to them for us to offer a diversified number of activities.

Probably the next thing, is that people would come up to us and say, "Why don't you do this?" And we would say, "Why not?" And before long, we would be doing it all over, everywhere, if it was an activity that people liked to do.

So people in the community felt very comfortable and perfectly free in making their own suggestions for program?

Ms. Karrasch I'm sure that without either one of us realizing it, that's what we had hoped for. Certainly, we didn't plan it that way - I wasn't wise enough to realise that. It just was that people would come with a smile on their face: they enjoyed doing something and they wanted to know if they could do something else.

"What would you like to do?"

"Well... What about square dancing?"

"Well, what about it? Let's do it!"

And there were trends. When square dancing was real popular, everybody wanted to do it and it was real easy to insert it into your program. Athletics always took their place because of the seasons and it was easy to plan athletic events by the time of the year. Then you could build into that some of the events that the extremely competitive person might not be interested in but the noncompetitive person would have an opportunity to use the facilities. So you would find things like arts and crafts and you would teach leathercraft or dance and the list just grew forever. If we could get ten or more people to do something, we would try it. We did cooking, and even preschool cooking!

Certainly, I think the King County Parks Department can say that they started a movement for the handicapped because we hired a very special lady by the name of Barbara Mumford who had some inner love for the mentally retarded and the physically handicapped. She directed us into ways that we could offer programs that the school districts were not able to. We felt that these children should have opportunities after school, like anyone else, and about 1956 we launched into a very energetic program for the physically handicapped and the retarded. Barbara Mumford was the one who started this program for us.

Did she start both programs - for the physically and mentally handicapped?

Ms. Karrasch Yes. See, her first experience was with the physically disabled. She had a very good experience with muscular dystrophy,

muscular sclerosis, and cerebral palsy, but what we experienced was that these people were not as mobile or as visible in the community. When we tried to do this physically disabled program, the parents of the mentally retarded said, "Well, what about us?" And within a very short time, the program reversed itself, and we were producing a great many more programs for the mentally retarded than we were the physically handicapped because of their mobility.

Was Barbara hired specifically for this purpose or was it just good luck?

Ms. Karrasch Some of it was luck. She had a swimming background, and she started doing some swimming instruction on our beaches and expressed this profound desire because she had majored in this down at Oregon State University where they had a course (for recreation with) the physically disabled. This was something that we had not experienced here at the University of Washington - it had not surfaced yet. She had a background in this and had volunteered some time with the Easter Seal Society and did summer camping with the physically disabled, and brought all of that expertise here. It was a gift that she brought. It was the foundation of so many activities; it was the beginning in swimming in the Special Olympics today. Special Olympics would not be where it is if it hadn't been for her introducing it back in 1958.

Maybe this is a sensible time to talk about the way the Special Olympics did begin here. How did they start?

Ms. Karrasch Well, we started a program - "we" meaning the King County Parks Department - with the help of the school district in teaching the youngsters to swim. This was one physical activity that none of the schools were able to offer their students. We rented a couple of pools and trained instructors who were certified by the American Red Cross to be instructors. We specifically trained them in some of the needs of the physically disabled and mentally handicapped - some of the things they needed to have in order to swim. At that time, most people thoroughly believed that retardation retarded children in their learning process, and that once they were retarded, they would be retarded forever and that their capabilities of learning skills were very severely limited. Through the swimming program where we demonstrated the fact that young folks who were muscularly handicapped while they were in the classroom, once they got into the water felt achievement and success that they could not feel any other way. Very soon, youngsters who were uncoordinated and not capable of using their arms and legs in an athletic manner learned to kick and to swim and to actually stroke in the swimming pool. We just kept working with them to the point where they graduated from the shallow water to water that was up to their shoulders to water that was over their heads to the deep end of the pool where they were actually competitively swimming. We offered them competition without even actually realising it.

It sounds like you almost surprised yourselves...

Ms. Karrasch Oh, we did! No question about it. Who would be able to expect that we would have that much success? Some of the school districts then also built some of their own pools so that they could offer swimming on a year round basis for the students. I think Dr. Stewart, who was with the Lake Washington School District, certainly would be an individual who would testify that this program demonstrated what the kids could do and not what they couldn't do. It kind of changed the philosophy for the educator - that there was a far-expanding way that the retarded could learn in a recreational environment that they did not learn in an educational environment because they put restrictions on them.

From there, we started track and we started softball - any sport that any normal youngster could do, we would try it. We would try it, and we had success with the kids. Not all of them, of course. It worked out that there were several classes of the mentally retarded: there was the trainable, and there was the educable, and each of those divisions had two levels of restrictions or levels at which they could participate. We followed those, and they were set up by the Kennedy Foundation.

The Kennedy Foundation, in doing this, wrote to Marie Sampson, an employee of the King County Park Department, and wanted to know about our swimming program and asked her to bring back our experiences and what we did to teach and how we taught and what our competitive activities were so it could be reviewed and considered for entrance in the First Special Olympics. And it was. And that was held in Chicago.

From that, of course, everything has just burst as far as the handicapped are concerned and what a marvelous it was to be able to expose that and give all these young people an opportunity to enjoy and have fun. There isn't a park department that I know of that doesn't have recreational opportunities now for the handicapped and retarded. The growth has just been fabulous.

Our department also introduced competitive bowling to the Special Olympics, which was included as an activity several years after swimming for King County Parks. It was a major activity for many youths who could not swim.

You mentioned Kennedy Foundation money - did this program begin with county money and then someone in the Parks Department go after Kennedy Foundation money? How did your program come to their attention?

Ms. Karrasch Well, it came to their attention because of the activity we did.

What I'm getting at is whether this activity - which obviously would not pay back financially - whether there was support for this in the County with or without the Kennedy Foundation...

Ms. Karrasch Oh, we had no difficulty in convincing people that it was not a payback, but rather that it was an opportunity for youngsters to have some equal time and space in a program that had been dominated by the physically able. Support was very easily given to us by county government to offer certain programs and at that time,

we were not on a paying basis. We were allocated x number of dollars to provide programs, and it was up to us to offer as many varied programs for those allocated dollars as possible. So we dedicated some of those dollars to the handicapped program without any criticism or anyone saying you should not be doing this. It just exploded, so that more and more was given to the program.

The Kennedy Foundation never gave us a dollar to provide program; what they did do is to provide us the opportunity to send youngsters to a large arena for competition. Our program was always supported by the parents and any financial need for a youngster to go and compete out of the King County or Seattle area was raised by the community. The first time we went to Chicago, we raised \$35,000 to send ninety youngsters to Chicago to participate in the second Special Olympics. The University of Washington allowed us to use the football team's allocated airplane from United (Airlines) and they let us have that for \$35,000. We assessed each youngster who participated \$350.00 so that we could use the plane and take the kids to Chicago. Once they were there, the Kennedy Foundation picked up their room and board, their meals, and transportation while they were there for about three days.

Do you know when that first Special Olympics was?

Ms. Karrasch It was in 1967.

Now, when you hear about Special Olympics on TV, it's just amazing all of the things that they do. They have marathon

dances and they just do so many things now, it's marvelous. And it's done by local support.

Side B

You've talked about coming into the program and changing it from one in which boys and men competed in physical sports to including women and girls in gym and field time, to including the physically handicapped, to including the mentally handicapped. Didn't your program eventually involve senior citizens, as well?

Ms. Karrasch Yes. That goes back to Barbara Mumford again. In order to justify paying her a full time salary, we asked her to do something half-time that would be complementary to the handicapped program. Now the handicapped program was envisioned to be during the summer months when the youngsters were out of school and we had the availability of water and other facilities. At that time, she also began to develop our senior citizens program which took place during the nine winter months or school months when we could utilize the indoor facilities. That all happened in the fall of 1958.

Those two programs started very closely together, almost at the same time. Maybe we forced it, because we had to justify her time.

What did you expect senior citizens to do? Play softball, string beads?

Ms. Karrasch We were aware of the fact that there was a senior program being done by some of the churches and that it primarily was called Evergreen Club. Seniors went from approximately 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM in the daytime, and they would play cards in the morning, have a sack lunch, and then dance for three hours to music. It would be the old time dances - the foxtrot and the waltz and the three-step and the schottische and the polka. That constituted a senior program, and that's what we copied it from - the same format. Now this was one day a week, but soon we were doing it twice a week and eventually what happened as we were opening our gyms to other activities than the Evergreen concept. So it would be badminton for the older adults. We certainly did an awful lot of crafts, offering them space to do pottery and painting and social activities.

"Social Recreation" began to be a term that we all recognized then. Before it was just something in our vocabulary, though we didn't always know what to do with it. It really attached itself to the senior, and we did a lot of parties - social parties - giving them an opportunity to get out of their homes and to mix with other seniors so they were not lonely. Of course what we found out was that there were a lot more women than men in that particular age bracket. The King County Park Department wasn't the only one offering senior activities but we implemented activities at a different place every day of the week so they would socialize five days a week instead of one. They had a marvelous time, and it brought health and well-being because it was a very healthy activity. Now, of course, they do jazzercise; they swim a lot; they play softball and get involved in track, especially down in California and Florida. They do things all

year long and it's not just a social recreation activity - it's a health activity now. They've learned to promote their health, and that's what it's all about. That's what we were doing, too, and didn't know it.

You've mentioned arts and crafts in passing a couple of time. When you came on board in 1951, you've described a recreation program that didn't include arts and crafts. How did it start?

Ms. Karrasch Probably, the training we received in college as well as what the Seattle Parks Department taught many of us - arts and crafts was an outdoor summer activity, with inexpensive materials, and lots of paste, lots of crayons, lots of scissors, lots of colored paper, and we were to be creative from that and develop arts and crafts activities for the little guys. That was well and good - but paste and paper only go so far and pretty soon you reach the end of ideas and you have to find something else. Our department started offering arts and crafts shows so that it would stimulate the kinds of projects that were not just the simple little things we were used to but it was to accelerate their skills in doing the things they liked as a hobby.

We set up what we referred to as the All King County Arts and Crafts Show about 1958 in Moshier Park. Again, that was summer only. We blossomed out from that to realize that arts and crafts, if we had the right facilities for it, could be an on-going, sophisticated program on either an adult or youth participation.

We were fortunate in the first bond issue that King County (passed) to acquire Moshier Park, which was primarily an

athletic field because of all its baseball diamonds but also had a unique but small facility that used to be a garage and repair shop for the Highline bus system. We were able to convert it with the monies that were made available into a very nice, large social center. That just didn't materialize - we couldn't get people to come and socialize there so very slowly we added arts. Pretty soon, we were doing pottery and jewelry and wood craft and seniors got involved - pretty soon we had everybody doing arts and crafts on a sophisticated basis.

Probably, that was - if I can think back far enough - the first place where we started to make small charges for use of materials. Up until that time, everything had been free. But as the quality of activity increased, it was more difficult for our budget to support that, so we started charging small materials fees to maintain the quality of program. That brought us to the point where we are today where all classes have a fee - a charge to either pay for the instructor and the facility, or to hire someone who has expertise in an area that our recreation staff does not but there's a need for it in the community. So we get time and place, register, and set up a class.

How sophisticated did the art classes become? Were there kilns, for instance?

Ms. Karrasch Certainly. We went from a little kiln to a commercial sized kiln. We had one facility that we developed as our pottery center. It developed at Moshier and the pottery program eventually took over the facility.

The whole facility?

Ms. Karrasch Yes. We had three kilns and one whole half of the facility was storage where everybody's pots were drying, and being worked on. The gals that worked there developed a very nice annual pottery display, and we let people sell their items so that they could recover the costs of what they'd spent in Pottery, and it also gave them the opportunity to do more and to be more creative and improve their skills. Twice a year, spring and fall, they would bring all of their wares that they had made at Moshier and sell them at a big show. In fact, I've got a lot of stuff at my house that I bought! I love it dearly.

Though pottery occupied most of Moshier, it also provided a home for senior activities as well as wood-carving and jewelry-making inside and extensive use of the outdoor fields for the Highline School District. There was a cooperative exchange for building and field usage.

It was at Moshier and then it went to Highline when we acquired Highline Community Center as one of our facilities, which then brought in the element of dance which we had not had very much opportunity to do. It had a very nice small gymnasium that was very desirable for ballet, though certainly our seniors danced there do.

Dancing is probably, with the exception of square dancing, the least demand on our facilities of all the things we ever did. Probably, that's because there were lots of dance studios where people could go. And that was kind of a philosophy of ours - we

thought that it was our job as professionals to tickle people's imagination and give them the opportunity to try something they'd never tried before. Then, to direct them to where they could continue to advance their skill on a paid basis by a professional. So when we would try things - it would be with the idea that they could try a square dancing class at one of our facilities but we would never develop it into a square dancing club where it became highly skillful or required everybody to have dancing costumes and so on. We would direct them, then, to the nearest square dance club. We were continually being the introducer - the place for the beginner to come and get tickled, and then hope that if they found something they really like, they would pursue it in a highly concentrated way.

Now that's excluding sports. Sports were always very highly competitive with the exception of that fact that we never competed with high schools. We kept scores and season records. People stayed in our program for seven or eight years, starting out as a little guy until he was in high school.

The swimming program, when we acquired pools through Forward Thrust, presented another aspect. It became much more competitive because we were able to offer a sport that was not offered by any school, though it was offered by swim clubs. We were able to offer water facilities to the schools and we were instrumental in helping them develop swim teams as they have them now and they swim in almost all our own facilities.

Before Forward Thrust, most swimming had been outdoors...?

Ms. Karrasch We had one indoor pool, which was at North Bend, and it was just a little larger than a bath-tub but we used it for everything. We used it for synchronized swimming and we had swim meets and it was less than twenty five feet long. It was very deep, and we had to put a false bottom in it so that we had a shallow end that little people could stand up in.

That's a program that I'd like to divert back to.

Sharon Posey, one of our gals who taught swimming and also lived in North Bend, developed the preschool swim program where we had babies from six to nine months of age swimming in their little diapers up at North Bend. This was one of the first programs for tiny tots that existed, and this is another program that went all over. The Y did it, and any other facility that had a pool or a wading pool did it. But that started at Si View pool, and was done by Sharon Posey who later authored a book about teaching swimming to the babies.

She has some pictures of them in their little diapers. In fact, they did swim shows and a couple of the features were the babies. I can remember a set of twins, about six months old, who had a show of their own in the pool. They swim so much under water, you know, because that's what's natural for them, and then they'd come up ever so often and get a breath, and their little heads would go down, and they'd be swimming unattended.

It was marvelous and it caught the press. Those are the kind of exciting things that happened, and you don't have any preconception that you're going to do that. Somewhere, somehow, more than one person gives you an idea, and the idea is born, and it just runs.

It sounds like there was a great deal of flexibility in the program - a real opportunity to try things...

Ms. Karrasch I'd have to agree with that. I don't think we ever had a failure. We'd had some things that were not as popular but it never happened to us that we had programs where nobody showed up. Maybe we were wise in what we chose - that's possible - but I think recreation in the fifties and sixties - well, the communities were so thirsty for things to do and things to participate in that it was just natural for the parks department to be the community place where people knew they could go and participate in the activities.

The "golden age of parks?"

Ms. Karrasch It certainly was a physical age, yes. Every-body wanted to have fun and participate and share time, and I think we were able to get across that recreation was not only competition but for fun. Winning and losing, yes, was part of the game, but not the most important part. The most important was participation.

You've said a lot of things throughout our conversation about the value of recreation. If you had to sum up, what would you say?

Ms. Karrasch Well, I don't know if I can just sum it up. Recreation allows a mixture of people: people who have lots of abilities and people who have few abilities. And they can find their place in

recreation, either in a highly skilled activity or just where they can be self-directed but the end result is that they've had a physical or cultural experience that they could not have had any other way. Because of that, they are happier and more content - they've experienced a few moments of something they could have experienced no other way and it gave them joy and happiness. I don't know if I can say it any other way.

From the point of view of the recreator, what is the fun of the job?

Ms. Karrasch Well, the fun is having a bunch of little preschoolers in your gymnasium and you're trying to teach them tumbling. You take a little piece of chalk and you draw a little round (circle) and you tell a little guy, "That's a puddle, and don't get your feet wet." And he'll look up at you and deliberately jump into that little square and have joy.

It's telling a little guy that he can really do something that he's afraid of. You take his hand and you help him or her have that experience so that he loses his fear. And you watch him grow through his growing years until you don't see any fear but you see his physical capabilities bloom and develop to make him a wonderful, worthwhile individual. And you know that's going to be for a lifetime, not just when they're ten or eleven years old - you know that's going to be with them their whole life and on into their senior years. Where else can you find anything like that? You can't, that I know of.

Those experiences last them, and last the leader, a lifetime. You never forget them and they always have a special place in your heart. At the end of the day, you smile and say, "I know I'm tired, but isn't it wonderful that so-and-so was able to finally do this?" It makes everything perfect.

Well, the other side of teaching is the increasing professionalization of your profession in the fifties and sixties. What kinds of people were you looking for to lead these joyful experiences? Were you looking for college-trained people?

Ms. Karrasch I think as our programs grew, we recruited. Our goal - meaning, the Park Department's - was to recruit the best possible individual who shared the philosophy we had of providing activities for as many people as we could, and who had that charisma and ease with people. And so we went to the universities and colleges - to the recreation departments - and we'd look for sophomores and juniors, more than freshmen and seniors, and hire them for summer playground leaders. This gave them experience for them to become professionals but also gave us the quality of leader that was what our profession was all about. Their skills were pre-built-in, and it made it easy for us to provide quality leadership especially in the summer when the program tripled in its services because of the weather and because the kids were out of school.

This is not to preclude (the possibility) that there aren't some very natural people who come to you and have the skills to mix with people. But at that time, we were teachers as well as

professionals - we felt that it was our job to teach basic skills because it wasn't always being done in the educational process. At least, not the variety of skills. Certainly athletics was being taught very well, but to do an over all job - to have a youngster learn some skills in gymnastics and some in tumbling and maybe go to the beach and learn some skills in swimming and cultural arts. We could do all that in a three month summer period where they might never get that in school the whole time they're there.

For myself, I did not go back and complete the few remaining credits for my degree because by this time my experience had filled in the voids. I had credibility in my field because of my education and my experience.

Was there a sort of day camp program in the summer?

Ms. Karrasch We did not do a daytime concept until probably in the late sixties or early seventies when it seemed like there was a need for children to be at a facility all day or at least a good part of the day. So we're looking now at the full-time working parents, and needing someplace for their children to have a summer experience. So yes, we did utilize some of the programs that the YWCA and YMCA used. We looked at the Campfire camps and the Girl Scout camps - because many times, they used our facilities for day camps. And then, we did the same thing, and offered some full-time, five day a week camping, where a youngster would register and be involved in athletics, camping, arts and crafts, and social recreation. We would mix all of

that up. At the end of the week, they would have kind of a climax - what we would call a "special event."

And then, the following week, we would start all over again. And maybe the emphasis would be on pioneer days which had so many wonderful things that you could do to educate them about early history and pioneers. We would pick subjects like that and carry it out as our theme for the week. We would do that for ten or twelve weeks a summer, which is what Campfire and other organized groups would do.

This also stimulated us to get into overnight camping with a facility that we acquired from Mr. Tyrrell, who was the originator of Tyrrell's Dog Food. He was a gentleman very dedicated to youth, especially the youngster who did not have as many opportunities as others. He built a park called Gold Creek, which is in the Woodinville area, and he dedicated it to the King County Park Department. The first five years it was operated, it was operated by the Boy Scouts. At the end of five years, the Park Department was responsible for utilizing it and we tried a summer overnight camping experience. We felt that all city kids should be able to go to Gold Creek and have an overnight experience. So they were there two days and one night; as one group was coming, the other group was leaving. We utilized our five days that way. All our playgrounds filtered kids into Gold Creek, and they had an overnight camping experience in the woods, building a little fire, learning how to cook with tin cans. They did camp crafts, too, in the building. It was a double loft, and the boys slept on one side and the girls slept on the other and our director slept in the middle. It had a huge fireplace and they would

toast marshmallows and make s'mores. It was, for some youngsters, the first overnight camping experience they ever had - bringing the city kids to the country.

Now when is this?

Ms. Karrasch This is the end of the sixties and into the seventies. At that time we hired a lady who was a camping specialist. Her name was Andrea Long and we asked her to tell us how to set up a camp. What we should have been important at that time was to be ACA accredited, which meant American Camping Association, so that we could be recognized in the camping profession as having an overnight camping facility that fulfilled the requirements such as showers, and food, and housing, and met all of the health requirements it was necessary to meet so that youngsters could stay there overnight. And she did this and developed our program. We had to hire a cook who cooked there, and occasionally, when we had the handicapped there, we had to hire a nurse to be there for them. We did all of those things, and we were able to take them down to the Gold Creek pool, and they were able to swim. It was an interesting experience but we lost our overnight camping when it became too expensive and too hard to get the kids from, say, South King County to Gold Creek. And, also, we lost our leader who moved on to the Seattle Parks Department, and we just never found anybody with the same credentials to offer an overnight camping program like she did.

So we then moved to making the facility for the physically disabled and the handicapped, and they used the facility all summer long as a campsite and it was marvelous.

Is it still in operation?

Ms. Karrasch Yes.

Did the program received any acknowledgement or award? I mean the whole Parks program...

Ms. Karrasch There was an organization that did recognize park departments and, yes, we did receive what they called the Gold Medal Award. It was designated to certain size cities, and we had to submit everything we did as far as programming, numbers of people that we served, how much our budget was - we submitted that and were recognized as (a city of) over 500,000 in population and received the Gold Medal Award which we were very excited about.

Some of our parks have received - and I'm rusty on this, Lorraine - national recognition. Forward Thrust was a package which received a lot of national attention for the fact of how much money it was and its being passed by the population to provide for parks. It certainly was a first.

You must have felt so validated and approved by the voters, too, for

Ms. Karrasch Clean, too.

"Clean?"

Ms. Karrasch Meaning that we did everything right.

But I mean the approval of having them support your efforts in that way - to say yes, we think what you're doing is right and we'll show it by voting this enormous self-taxation...

Ms. Karrasch No question about it. Certainly, as far as I'm concerned, that's when we were at our peak of production and were doing the most things physically that we could do as a park department for the most number of people in King County. That was really the beginning of the end of all our efforts and dreams. That's kind of what we built for, and then we levelled off for quite a few years and stayed there because of the award. It lasted us for four or five years - the momentum and living up to what it represented.

Certainly the challenge of Forward Thrust was to see how much farther we could extend ourselves from what we had before. It was a tremendously difficult challenge physically on the basis that we were four or five times the size that we were but our operational budget had not changed in proportion to the physical additions that we did to our parks. To keep quality and not dilute quality, and not be able to increase personnel but requiring them to seek and find volunteers and to hire hourly people to provide program in areas we had not been before - it was a real challenge.

"Challenge?!" I bet.

Ms. Karrasch It was also a headache. (chuckling)

Did you feel any of the tugs and stresses of the different requirements of operation, maintenance, and acquisition of new parks, in terms of money and of commitment of the people you worked for?

Ms. Karrasch That's hard for me to answer but, most of the time, no. I thought of us as three separate departments working together but not really overlapping. In other words, Acquisition never came to Recreation and said, "Would you like to have this site for a park?" It was the other way around. "We've acquired this place for a park; now what can you do with it?" We were expected to do it...

Tape 2, Side A

So the three branches were working with one another...

Ms. Karrasch Yes, administratively they were, but they were independently trying to reach the goals of what they were responsible for. Maintenance would always have a higher priority for a passive park and for some of the major facilities when it came to being available to the recreation department for preparing a ball field simply because the priorities had to fall into place. This was a totally frustrating time when you were trying to meet your goals for

league play, or maintenance was trying to get a facility open for the public to see. Let's say the acquisition department still had deadlines to meet for the matching funds they were going to get so we each had our independent difficulties with what each other was doing. It blended into an overall picture at the end for the public, because they got the facility or the experience or the usage of a well-planned park system once it finally reached its goal.

So you felt no rivalry with Acquisitions, say, if they wanted to spend five million dollars on acquiring a huge passive park or wilderness park?

Ms. Karrasch I never felt that. Maybe I was blind or ignorant of the fact that if I'd said more at the time dollars were being allocated, it would have made a difference. But I sincerely believed that the Forward Thrust program was, first of all, an acquisition program and, secondly, a development program, and the Recreation Department would have the luxury of using after it was acquired and developed. I was, maybe, a little bit naive about the lack of dollars to do that at the beginning. Obviously as it developed, it showed that dollars for recreation would never be equal to the dollars spent to acquire and develop property. But that never presented a problem because we had been so thirsty for new facilities for so long that it was a joy to know that you had a park! You didn't worry about whether they were spending too much money to acquire a park - on your mind was, "I need a new ballfield!" We just envisioned that it would become another ballfield, and when it was didn't matter. It was just that a certain

area was going to get something they'd never had before, and that was a plus.

When you say you were naive, it seems to me you imply you had a lesson coming to you down the line. Did it turn out that way?

Ms. Karrasch Yes, it definitely did. It almost destroyed recreation. So much money had been spent and certainly you have to have money to develop it after you acquire it. Then in all sincerity, the pot was dry. So you had a lot of facilities but all of a sudden people couldn't use them because there was nobody to help them with them. And somewhere along the line, in the process and the theory, the fathers of Forward Thrust speculated that people did not need to have leadership, that if they had a place to go they could be self-directed to participate. I think that might be true in the very small community parks that were developed but it was for a very short time. It's like a new toy that's marvelous and well-used at the beginning, but at some point in time, the new toy is no longer new and it has no fascination unless there's something there to bring back that feeling again.

That was what nearly destroyed us because we were never included in the monetary growth of Forward Thrust to continue the cycle so that what the parks were developed for could be. So instead of having our budget grow, it decreased because the needs were so much greater on the other half - the maintenance half - they'd say, "Hey! We've acquired this piece of property and now we have to do something with it." So dollars went from the right hand to the left hand.

Fortunately, we had experienced a little bit of the charge concept with our Forward Thrust pools at the very beginning. We realized that we could not operate the pools without a fee. This alerted us to the fact that if we were going to offer recreation programs of the same concept we'd offered before, as difficult as it was because our philosophy had always been that recreation should be free. We would have to put a dollar value onto it. Certain programs were chosen first because they were more specialty programs. We tried it with that, to see if the public would respond and pay, and they did. Then, slowly, the whole recreation system has had a fee attached and it has been well received by the public. They have no difficulty paying whatever fee is asked for whatever activity they want to participate in. So evolution swung back for us and we survived. The programs now are greatly enhanced in numbers of activities than we were ever able to hold in the sixties because of the facilities and the multi-use that we can do in one community instead of having to drive from Enumclaw to the North End - Enumclaw can be self-sufficient because they have enough facilities and activities that they can do everything.

Now, we're in regions and this makes it possible for more people to participate because they don't have to go so far. And they don't mind (paying). Because they have space and a place and an activity they like, they pay for it.

Now, for me personally, that violates my love of my profession because we were trained that recreation was free. It was a terribly difficult adjustment to make that you've got to pay for everything because we knew that there were many people out there who

could not pay and we had a responsibility to those folks. What were we to do?

Our first concept was that we would retain some free activities and, granted, they couldn't do every-thing but they weren't totally shut out. We had times we called "open gym time," and there were times when people who could maybe not afford the use of the facilities and use them. Open gym does have a charge now and free activities are a thing of the past.

But, as I told you earlier, we went from a one page information sheet to a program now that's thirty-two pages in length, with everything from A to Z in it. It provides something for everybody from the preschooler to the senior citizen and everybody in between. It's not just recreation as we've been talking about it, it's taking income tax preparation and real estate classes and computer classes, or things that might enhance a person's hobby. So the term "recreation" has expanded from just play and fun to include everything that an individual might conceivably like to do as a hobby. We know it's not all physical activity.

It seems to be assistance in living one's leisure time...

Ms. Karrasch Absolutely. Very definitely as general as that.