DISPLACED HOMEMAKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
Narrator: GRIMES

Cassette no. 1  Side no. A

Special recording problems: taped at City Park, Fort Collins, CO; some background and wind noise

TAPE 1
SIDE A

Counter no.  Subjects covered (in approximate order)

000- Background info: b: October 5, 1946, Memphis, Tennessee; father owned a tire store, mother was a homemaker; as a child she enjoyed playing with dolls; wanted to be nurse, school teacher or flight attendant as a child; felt society expected her to grow up to be just like her mother: wife, mother, marvelous housekeeper and cook; ways she received this social message: possibly family role models, "I don't remember anyone telling me that I couldn't be a physicist, but I don't think that was ever in the realm of even consideration"; did not watch much TV; "Donna Reed Show-- another reinforcement of the wife and mother syndrome"; goals remained the same during high school; "As long as I did at least average work it was acceptable--pressure was never put on me to excel particularly as long as I had friends and dates--I was what I was supposed to be"; she knew she would and could go to college; "I probably assumed that I would marry and not graduate from college but I didn't--I did graduate; "in high school I was really very shortsighted--long term career. . . .did not play a large part in what I concentrated on"; Ginger wanted college but not a career "because I assumed I would get married and be the wife and the husband would go to work and I'd stay home. That was my expectation at that point."

160- Went to Memphis State and majored in history and education "what else?"; graduated in 1968; went to graduate school and joined the National Teacher Corps teaching in poverty schools; she hated it; did not finish her MA; "I was too emotionally involved"; left grad school and joined Delta Airlines as a flight attendant; lived in New Orleans from 1969-1972; married and moved to Mississippi in 1972; husband a pilot, met him on the plane; what she expected of her marriage: "Prince Charming on the white horse and the living happily ever after. I know I expected more from him than he could provide--that is emotionally. Going into it was just the typical princess with the prince--that it was all going to be happy ever after. And surprisingly enough it wasn't!"

212- How she obtained the fairytale expectation of marriage: family life "watching my parents interact with one another, the respect they had for one another, the mutual trust that [was] just very evident. I obviously expected that I would automatically have the same. And that just wasn't the case." "Superficially [my marriage] was exactly what I wanted--the nice house, the perfect children who are intelligent, bright and pretty, financial security"; built their own dream house on a farm; Ginger designed and decorated her "perfect house"; she describes her house; and "I got it briefly"; after they were married 4 years husband's ex-wife
died and Ginger became an "instant mother" to an eight and ten year old; Ginger quit work at that point; two years later they had their own son (1978); Ginger did not resent quitting her job and caring for his children although later she regretted that she had given up her job;

270- Ginger was "very dependent" on her husband (economically); "he controlled the money. That was his main means of control and he used it extensively"; double standard regarding money; "I really resented it. It took a long time for the resentment to really become obvious enough that it made me angry. But that took many years--I'm real slow at times!" [laughter] anecdote Revealing when she realized her resentment; husband could buy "toys" while kids could not have tennis shoes; he had already disappointed Ginger "many times" but at this point "the focus Really began coming in"; "I realized it was all really going his way and no one else's. Granted he was the 'breadwinner' but he was doing all the taking"; breadwinner to husband meant "total control to the point that others had to sacrifice so that he could have his toys"; it was becoming clear that he did not respect Ginger or her needs: "I had put the rose colored glasses on for as long as I possibly could. . . but they were getting clearer and clearer. I had put the blinders on for about as long as I could"; what the rose colored glasses saw: a good provider, he didn't run around at the time ("to my knowledge"), "that I should be satisfied";

320- What caused the marriage to break up: "I became really dissatisfied with our relationship [pause] we had been going to marriage counseling. I was becoming vehement on the subject of his drinking. He had reached the point that he would become abusive at times. And I had reached The point that I couldn't stand that any longer. And then. . . I decided to take a break and came to Colorado to visit my sister and in the process found out that he had been having a long term affair. That wasn't the cause. It wasn't like I was home happily and realized my husband was having an affair. But it was the straw that broke the camel's back. In fact, that's what finally gave me the courage to say 'enough's enough.' But it wasn't the reason."

343- Mentally, verbally, and physically abusive husband; it was "devastating" for Ginger to make the shift from wife, mother, homemaker image of herself; "he had me totally convinced that I was incapable of facing the world and supporting the children by myself and that no one else would ever want me"; "he was the benevolent caretaker"; "to make the decision that I wanted a divorce--that I wanted out--was, I think, the most difficult decision that I've ever made"; she felt like a failure and she assumed responsibility for the failed marriage

356- How Ginger reached her decision: first, she fantasized running over him and second, the death of a friend's husband; the friend was devastated but Ginger realized that she wouldn't have been; "we both deserved more"; "I sure didn't want him any more"; she left May 1, 1985; how her life has changed since her divorce: "there's nothing the same!" [laughter] "totally different"; "economically, much for the worse--it's been a struggle financially just to try and make ends meet. Emotionally, 100% better"; Ginger's change in standard of living: "you go from one end of the spectrum to the other"; on food stamps when
first came to Colorado; "a very humbling experience, but my son needed to eat"; a brief but enlightening experience; she learned that welfare was an interim step; how she coped: "I didn't; I just did it. I'm a great one for compartmentalization. . .I'm like Scarlett--I'll face this one tomorrow"; found job within 2 weeks;

415- How she fell from a custom home to food stamps: "Mississippi is the process. It is a very backward. . .male dominated state. I had a degree therefore I should be self supporting. That's it! My husband made at the time. . . $130,000 per year. He was required to give child support for our son. . .$270 a month--that's not even his beer money!"; she has since gotten an increase in child support but no maintenance; Delta will fire employees who do not pay their family obligations; "all of it" caught Ginger off guard [the divorce process and settlement]; "the fact that I had not worked for fifteen years was not considered"; he lied on the stand and was accepted; "it was phenomenal, it really was phenomenal!"; "being Mississippi, everything he said was fact because he was the man"; she felt very powerless; she felt a lot of anger and felt fatalistic; she decided not to appeal; she did not have the strength or money to appeal; she didn't want to borrow from father to fight a losing battle; her attorney did not protect her; also her main goal was to just get out; "also, I realized that I had paid a really high price for many years for things--the house--the car--whatever. And I wasn't going to pay that price any more. . . For a long time I didn't realize [the price to my] self-esteem, my self-pride, I really think I was beginning to lose my self-identity 'cause I was having to concede on points so constantly, so regularly just to keep things calm. . . it's taken me a long time to come back from that and I realized it wasn't worth it. No thing is worth that!"

475- Her peace and happiness has increased since the divorce even though she has less material goods and money; she cares more about people now and their feelings; her lifestyle decreased while his increased and for a while she felt bitter during her first financial struggles, but no longer; how she coped: went to a divorce recovery workshop--especially helped her accept her anger and to learn that "you can't go forward if you're standing there kicking yourself"; if you are bitter and angry you can't grow; difficult for her son to see his dad's affluence; dad lures son with gifts; her husband has remarried "another caretaker, just like I was"; she did not anticipate the financial or economic impact of divorce: "I knew it was going to be bad; I had no comprehension of how bad--none. Emotionally, I was so drained. . . it took us. . . fourteen months in court from the time I filed for separation until the divorce was actually final" ; she is still paying her legal fees "but it's still worth it!"

525- She was supermom and community worker; "I fulfilled the role I had always picture"; husband unsupportive of her roles; she never felt the rules were changed for her since Mississippi divorce law was consistent with social expectations for women to be married; she did not like people's pity that she lost her big house and couldn't make her marriage work; she wanted support but not pity; southern expectations for women—if divorced it is the wife's fault completely—that she hadn't done enough; example of settlement double standard--all went his way; time and the divorce workshop helped her move past her anger and bitterness; the unfairness of the system; feels society still encourages girls to
marry; example from her son's sixth grade class; society does switch messages to women therefore they are not prepared

608- END OF TAPE
Ginger's thoughts regarding young women who married young and without careers: "they are really at the mercy of society coming out of a ten to fifteen year relationship"; "I even had a career but I was so totally unprepared. When I was in college it was almost a joke-type situation. The focus was not on really learning and education. . .it was almost a stomping ground for husband finding"; ways she received southern social message that femininity equaled dependency: "a woman would never open a door for herself--it is almost an insult to the man's masculinity if she did so. She is not to change a tire she is to sit on the side of the road and wait until some gallant man along and rescue her. Just the small every day things like that. It's ingrained, it really is, that the man is to be the dominant one, the man is to be the strong one, the man is to be the decision maker. And the poor little weak woman is to stay home and her major decision is what to fix for dinner. [laughing] That's a biggie!"; but after divorce she is expected to be "self sufficient, self supporting by all means, capable of being the single parent--the mother and the father to the child because the father has probably moved on and found another mate with or without children and has another family. Out of sight out of mind. Therefore his children from a previous marriage are assumed to be taken care of. So the woman has to become the father and mother."

How women make the switch from dependency to independence: "a lot of them don't. It's really difficult."; some become very bitter, angry, and are unhappy; watching such women motivated Ginger to work through her own feelings; Ginger moved to Fort Collins to be near her sister who has been a great source of support for her; Ginger went to Al-Anon another “reinforcement that I wasn't crazy”; what she learned at Al-Anon during 1 1/2 years in support groups "it takes some of the sting away--the hurt away--plus you can learn from other people what they did to cope"; she has always valued women friends but values them more now.

She feels social expectations are shifting for women and views it as positive: "women are very capable and I really think that finally that fact is becoming more universally accepted. . .and men expect women to be capable now. It goes back to self-esteem. If someone says 'sure you can do it' then you can do it--or at least give it a try. Whereas if they think you can't do it, you won't even try. Yes, I really think expectations are starting to change." It has been difficult for Ginger to change her self image along with society's shift in expectations for her: "I was so totally convinced that I couldn't do anything. [chuckling] You know, step by step I've learned 'ya, I can do that!' I can balance the check book. I can get up
and go to work in the morning and already have dinner put on. I can go out and throw the ball with my son; I may not throw it well but at least it gets there [laughter]. The more I do, the more I learn I can do."

200- Why and how she moved to Colorado. The steps she took to get into school at Colorado State University: began with a continuing ed. class for people in mid-life crisis and career changes; Myers-Briggs personality test and the positive feedback she got from others; she had feared that her "brain cells were dead"; others viewed her as self-confident which really surprised her; how she conquered her feelings regarding her southern accent; before she reentered CSU she was the head of the accounts receivable department of a furniture store in Fort Collins, CO; she had doubled her pay but could go no further therefore went back to get an undergrad accounting degree; the vocational counseling she received and her choices to get out of school quickly and cheaply; she is going into debt to get her education; she considered counseling but realized she did not have the time to get a PhD at her age;

285- The change which has been the most difficult for Ginger to make: "accepting the fact that I don't need someone else--that I can do it. I think this is the most difficult and I still struggle with that. When things get tough I think 'if only I had a man!' I still struggle with that. Another difficult transition [is] dating. . .I hate it! I'm tired of the game playing that you really have to do. I have been out with some really nice men and have been fortunate, I guess, from what people tell me--; of course school is such a focus for me right now that's it really hard to separate it. But I don't like it. And also trying to be the best mother that I can be to my son with all the other pulls I have on my time that I've got. I don't really believe in the phrase "quality time"; I think they [children] just need you. And I really struggle with that because I'm gone so much. . .[I'm] trying to give every minute I can to him even if its nothing more that sitting and reading a book near him. [My] presence there. Most of the time he doesn't want to talk; he just wants me there." She invites study groups to her home. She does feel guilty but tries to keep it in perspective. "I can't be all to him and it wouldn't be healthy if I could. I've watched him become more independent, self-assured, courageous--a lot of pluses--by having to be more self-sufficient. It hasn't been all bad. That's how I justify it. Because he has grown as a result of it." She will finish CSU the summer or winter of 1991.

327- Her greatest barriers to self-sufficiency: "Courage. I think without a doubt that is the biggest one and self-assurance--the combination of the two. The courage to set realistic goals and the assurance to go for them. I think those two are the most difficult. It would have been nice if someone had offered to pay for my school; they didn't. That was really minor [though] once I made the decision what I wanted to try and then had the courage to go for it--then the rest all fell in."

340- How she built her courage: "difficult question"--"One step helped a lot. And the Serenity Prayer helped a lot. As a matter of fact, their book, they call it One Day at a Time (the ODAT book) the principle of go one day at a time. To do what you can today. . .a lot of that helped me face the next day by just getting through today"; in one workshop she learned
how to set realistic goals; "one of them was to get up in the morning and drink a cup of coffee. So you've already done something positive. That type of idea of not to make it impossible so that you can succeed, I think, was really important to me because I had all these long-term goals and I couldn't even do today. So when I switched the focus around and realized that if I can get through today then I can long term, maybe, look at tomorrow but not worry about it. That gave me the courage to get through that day and then move on. . . .Self assurance. . . is the consequence [of taking life one day at a time]. If you can get through it, it shows."

363- How her self image has changed since her divorce and since she is no longer a full time wife, homemaker and mother: "I have problems with that because I see myself so often back in that other role. It's almost like [I] have to pinch myself and say, 'what are you doing? Where are you and why are you here?' . . . It's called avoiding reality. [laughter] When things get a little too much and [I] think back I used to this and this and this. Basically its transference it's just changing roles. I was a role player then--to be this to this person and this to that person. . . .I think more than anything I've learned to focus in on me and be what I need to be. I think that's the biggest change between the two. I put that first otherwise I can't be anything to anybody else if I'm not true to me first. And that's the major change, I guess. But I still have trouble separating ting the roles some times and the picture of myself is still sometimes murky."

383- The best advice she was given: "accept your emotions but control your actions. And sometimes I have difficulty doing that."

390-400 She was not a magazine reader or much of a television viewer; favorite TV programs were "MASH and Barney Miller"

END OF TAPE