

AL 158

Interviewee: Captain Steve Welch

Interviewer: Paula Welch

Date: March 24, 1993

PW: This interview is with Captain Steve Welch of the Salvation Army. The day is March 24, 1993. The address of the Salvation Army is 639 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida, 32602. The interviewer is Paula Welch – there is no relationship. I am sure someone will ask that, so I will just state that.

When did you arrive in Gainesville?

SW: It was the end of June last year, 1992.

PW: And where were you located before?

SW: For nine and a half years we were stationed in Oklahoma. Shawnee was the last appointment we had out there.

PW: Just as a matter of interest, did you deal with very many homeless people in Oklahoma? Is that one of the projects the Salvation Army dealt with there?

SW: Yes. As far as I know the Salvation Army deals with that everywhere, just in different degrees. It just depends on the needs of the community. A lot of what we do is homelessness prevention. A lot of the services we provide are to keep people from having utilities shut off or providing those band-aids so that they will be able to continue to keep the shelter they do have.

PW: Tell me a little bit about this homelessness prevention in the Salvation Army.

SW: It is just emergency services. One of the main things that we do is to provide emergency services to keep people's utilities from being shut off or help them with clothing so they can use their income for other needed things. It might be a rent payment to avoid eviction.

PW: You help financially, then.

SW: Right. This is emergency financial assistance; it is *emergency* – I stress that. We do not do ongoing-type care, and we do not want people to become dependent on us. We are just there to give some hope and to fill in some cracks where the government will not be able to meet the need at that particular point in time that person has. So we just try to keep people's hopes up that they will be able to take care of their own situation, but in the meantime they are being assisted so they do not lose hope.

PW: You mentioned the financial assistance. How is the Salvation Army funded?

What are your resources?

SW: Well, here in Gainesville we get some of our funding from United Way. We have several budgets. The budget that United Way helps out with, which we call our corps budget, is about a little less than 20 percent of that budget. Then the rest of our funding would be mostly contributions, just donations and things like that. We do some appeals, which those donations would come under appeals. Mail appeals are sent to our regular donors, and at Christmastime we do an appeal to the whole public. You have seen our bell ringers out there on the street corner. We also have a thrift store, and if we have any surplus we are able to use that surplus to help with the budget here in those helping programs.

We do get a few government funds. We have been getting some FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration] money through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program. This year we are helping with rent with that money to keep people from being evicted. Last year we used the money that we got for utilities, I believe. There are different agencies that cover different needs. This year we were given the responsibility of rent for the shelter part of that program. There is the GRU [Gainesville Regional Utilities] Share program.

PW: You might mention a little bit about that in case somebody would like to know.

SW: Okay. Customers of GRU, the utility company, can overpay their bill in order to contribute to the Share program. GRU then turns that money that is contributed over to United Way, and United Way sends us a check monthly (usually) for this program. The program is geared mainly for those who are elderly or disabled, either temporarily or permanently. That is the target population for that program. But it is to help with the utility payments. We are able to help once a year each client that applies. It has been real helpful. It is a pretty good program.

PW: Just as a matter of interest, what made you decide to take the position here in Gainesville?

SW: My supervisors [laughter]. In the Salvation Army the officers move at the discretion of the divisional commander. In this case, since we moved from Oklahoma, the territorial commander had to approve it in Atlanta. We are moved about because people resign, people retire, people die, and there are new officers who come on the field every June from our school in Atlanta. So that necessitates moves. We get about a month's notice. The housing is owned by the Salvation Army – it is a parsonage – so we do not have to look for a house or anything like that, and furniture is provided. So it is matter of moving personal effects. It is still a traumatic thing, but it is adventurous. It is exciting. I got kind of used to it because I grew up in [that type of environment, since] my folks were

Salvation Army officers. But I did not want to put my kids through that, so that was one of the last things I wanted to do. But God had other plans for me, so . .

PW: Where are the headquarters?

SW: The headquarters for Florida are in Tampa.

PW: And the national headquarters?

SW: National headquarters is in Washington, DC. They just recently moved it from New Jersey. We have a territorial headquarters for the South in Atlanta.

PW: What educational requirements are expected of people in your position?

SW: Well, they like for each candidate – that is what person is who is going to be a cadet – to have at least two years of college. I am not sure just how strict they are on that. They are getting stricter. Myself, I had a four-year degree. Anyway, after being excepted as a candidate, then a person becomes a cadet when they start their training. Our school is in Atlanta, and it is a two-year school that probably crams about four years worth of knowledge into two years. That is still not enough. There is just so much to be learned by experience, and it just cannot be taught in that short of a time. A person at least has to have a GED or a high school diploma, and, like I said, at least two years of college is really helpful. I am not sure if that is required yet or not. They like for candidates to have at least a year of job experience outside of high school.

PW: You mentioned your four-year degree. Where did you graduate, and what was your major?

SW: I majored in music education-secondary education. I went to Indiana University [Purdue University] at Fort Wayne, and it did help train me for what I am doing now. The Salvation Army has a tradition in music also. It also helped me to be more relaxed when I am speaking in front of people. I had to do a recital my senior year. That was for me, being kind of shy, a very nerve-racking experience. But those types of experiences and student teaching and that type of thing helped me to be more relaxed in front of a public when preaching. We are also pastors in the Salvation Army; the officers are pastors as well as administrators.

PW: Is there a particular denomination or religion that is associated with the Salvation Army?

SW: The Salvation Army, if you look in that book of denominations (I forget the name of it), is listed as a denomination. Its roots are in the Methodist church, because a founder [William Booth] was a Methodist preacher. He wanted to reach the

people on the streets with the Gospel, not the ones who were in church, because supposedly they were already receiving the message. But the people on the streets were the ones that he wanted to minister to. When the Methodist church wanted to keep him in a parish, he left so he could continue that evangelistic mission that he felt he had to do to the street people in London, England. Salvation Army is an international movement. While he was ministering to these people he saw they were ill clothed, ill fed, some did not have shelter, and that type of thing, so the social ministry began. There was not a whole lot going on as far as social services back in 1865.

PW: Now, was that in England or the United States?

SW: That was in London, England.

PW: When did it arrive in the United States?

SW: In the United States – let me see if I can get this right – it was 1880 officially. In 1878 a woman and her daughter did the work of the Salvation Army here. They went to the founder and asked if they could do it. He said: "You can do the work, but not as Salvation Army. Do the work and let me know how it is going." Apparently it went rather well, and two years later he sent an official delegation – one man and seven women. They landed in New York. They did not have very good success until a man called Ash Barrel Jimmy got saved.

PW: Ash Barrel Jimmy?

SW: That was his nickname, of course. He was called that because he would pawn his clothes or whatever he could to get liquor. He got gloriously saved at a Salvation Army meeting, and the word spread like wildfire, and people started attending the services and supporting the Salvation Army. It just has grown since in the United States. The Salvation Army is currently in about ninety-three countries officially and some other regions of the world unofficially. So it is a worldwide movement, and everywhere we are we are trying to meet the needs of humanity, whatever they are, in the location.

PW: In other words, that is the mission of [the Salvation Army].

SW: Right, to preach the Gospel and to meet human needs in Jesus' name. That is what we are about. It does not matter what religion a person is [when they] come to us for assistance. That is where we are non-denominational. They do not even have to believe in God to receive assistance. We believe a need is there, and we are here to meet the need and in that way witness our relationship with God. That is what we are all about.

PW: Now, you mentioned the music background and music involvement. As I think back about some of the parades I have seen with the Salvation Army bands, I wonder if Gainesville has anything like that.

SW: We are working on it. The Salvation Army has been here since 1962 as a corps. I am not sure about much of the history yet here. But we are working on a band now. I have about a half a dozen people that are interested in it. I am trying to teach them how to play. It takes a while, but we are working on it. We hope to have a band. If they leave us here long enough we will. That is one of my goals, to develop that kind of a program where we could minister through that kind of music.

PW: Now, how do people learn about the services of the Salvation Army, here in Gainesville, for example?

SW: Well, of course, most of the agencies in town, if not all of them, know about us and know how to refer people to us. The United Way information referral has an extensive list of the services that we provide. That is really the main way. We have an advisory board which interprets the Army's mission to the community. It helps us understand the needs of the community that are not being met.

PW: Let us say a homeless person comes into town. [Is it] spread by word of mouth [that the Salvation Army provides these services]? How do they know [where you are located and what you have to offer]?

SW: Mainly the police department knows . .

PW: So they refer them.

SW: . . what services we have and everything. When you say "a homeless person comes to town," there is where we might need to have more specific definitions. What I would call a genuine homeless person typically would be a person who is in this community. They would consider this their community of residence, but they are without a dwelling. They do not have any family to stay with; they do not have any friends to stay with. There are people that I am aware of that camp out in parts of town, which is easy to do in a town with this many trees and land and stuff. A person that has come into town is a different type of homeless person that we would call a transient, a person that is on the move. They would come here on their way someplace else, just moving around, and maybe they just need one night's shelter and go back on the road again tomorrow. Those people know the Salvation Army normally has a shelter where they are located. It is just general knowledge among those types of people.

PW: You mentioned there is a shelter. What are the causes as to how long they can

stay in the shelter?

SW: Well, we treat each person on an individual basis. We consider their case. If they are just traveling through and they have a different destination – "this is just on their way to someplace" – they can stay the night, take a shower, eat supper and breakfast, and then be on their way the next day. If they indicate to us that they are looking for work, then we will have them see one of our social service workers the following day to see how genuine they are and set up some kind of plan to where they can go look for work. Then they report back to us of their progress. As long as they continue to do that, we will let them stay up to four or five days, to see if they will have any luck finding a job. If they do not, then chances are there is not any work for them to do or they are not genuinely looking, not genuinely wanting to work. If they do find a job, then we extend their stay again, at least until they get their first pay check, and in some cases it may take the second pay check before they have enough money to get a place of their own. In any case, we try to limit a stay to about thirty days. So it just depends on the situation. A person may come here waiting on a check; maybe they get a government check of some kind, and they have to wait until the first of the month, and that is another ten days away. Well, as long as we can verify that money is coming where they can get their own place, then we will work with them on shelter until that time.

PW: How large [of] an overnight facility do you have for people? How many beds?

SW: We presently have fourteen bunk beds in the men's dormitory, and there are five beds in the women's and children's room.

PW: Now, in general, [describe] the clientele that come here. Do you see mostly men, or do you see more families? What is the general population?

SW: Now, most of the cases – I would say about between 60 and 70 percent of the cases – are single men. They are traveling by themselves, anyway, whether they are single or married or not. But they are traveling by themselves. We do occasionally see families, [and] we do occasionally see single women, but the overwhelming majority is single men.

PW: We hear that there is a growing population in the United States of the homeless. As a result of working in the Salvation Army, to what do you attribute that increase, from your vantage point?

SW: Well, [at] the smaller Salvation Army units where I have been where I have dealt one-on-one with nearly every client, many of those people have been borderline institutional, should be institutionalized. So it may go back to when they were deinstitutionalizing those borderline types of people to give them their freedom

so they have some control over their own life. But some of those people just do not know how to live on their own. So I will say some of them are like that. Some of them are elderly men who just like that lifestyle. It is hard to believe, but that is the way they want to live, some of them, apparently. It is harder to make it without a job or some kind of source of income, because it costs more to live – it costs more to have a house, to pay rent, whatever. It may be the lack of affordable housing. From what I have been reading and hearing on the news there seem to be less people willing to build housing for low-income people.

Here in our shelter – I have been comparing statistics lately – there has not been a dramatic increase in the number of people staying in our shelter. We have had a little increase in the average length of stay in our shelter. I think more people are really looking for work. Maybe it is because we are trying to help them do that. But as far as the number of different people staying in our shelter, last year compared to the year before, there was not a dramatic increase. So I do not know if it is kind of leveling off. It is hard to judge it based on one location.

PW: You mentioned that some of them are obviously ill. Can you do anything about maybe referring them to someplace where they could get help?

SW: Yes, that is what we try to do when we have cases like that, people like that when there is an obvious need for additional help that we cannot give them. I recall one time in another place where I had to contact the department of human services – that is what it was called in that state – and the adult protective services division to take care of an individual. Sometimes we just work closely with these other agencies to coordinate our efforts so that we can get the help that is available. Sometimes, sadly, there does not seem to be anything for that person – they fell in a crack somehow.

I recall one guy who was blind, and he showed up at our shelter. We kept him for a month. [He told us that] his disability was supposed to be coming at anytime, and we found out that he had not even applied for disability. So we were able to get him in that process. Then after another thirty days – sometimes it takes a long time to get that type of thing through the system – we still were not able to get anything accomplished. So we just try when there is a person like that or somebody who has an obvious mental condition of some kind that could be harmful to the people staying in our shelter or harmful to themselves. We call on some help; we try to get some assistance for those people.

PW: You mentioned that most of the people you see here are single men. What is the average age group that you see among those?

SW: I cannot base that on a statistic because we do not keep those kind of statistics where I could just call it up. I would say it is pretty even. We get a lot of young

guys.

PW: In their twenties?

SW: Yes, [we get a lot of clients who are in their] late teens, early twenties, that just never seem to have gotten a good start. They never seem to be able to get a job and are just kind of drifting already. Then there are those in their middle ages who have lost a job and may have other problems as a result of some kind of addiction to alcohol or drugs or something, lost family, etc. For whatever reason they are out there without any income, just waiting around. Then there are a lot in the extreme older category, retirement age. Some of those guys I think you could even call hobos. Like I mentioned earlier, there are some guys that just like to travel around, and just as long as you give them a couple of nights' lodging and some meals, they are happy, and then they move on to the next place.

Some of the people come to town to take advantage of the medical facilities here, the VA or Shands. They might just need a place to stay for a night or two until they get their appointment because they do not have money for a motel. They do not have money for transportation, so they have to take a ride whenever they can get it. Some of the people we see are like that.

PW: Now, you mentioned that breakfast and dinner are provided. What is the source of the food? Partly from the budget?

SW: Supper we provide for anybody in the community that needs to eat. At 4:30 every day a year we feed inside our dining room. We average about sixty people – at the beginning of the month it is less, and the end of the month it is more because food stamps usually come at the end of the month. Some people have that source.

A lot of the food for that program comes now from Gainesville Harvest. We are thankful for that program, which provides food that has already been prepared from restaurants or grocery stores or hospitals or other institutions where they have extra food. Rather than throw it out, they donate it to Gainesville Harvest, and Gainesville Harvest will give us some of that food. Then we just warm it up and serve it one more time. So it provides a variety of food for those who have to eat supper here for any length of time. At least they do not have to eat the same thing day after day, so it gives them a varied diet.

Any additional supplies that we need, like paper plates and cups and all that runs in the money, or any other foods that we need, come out of our budget. We get some United Way money for our shelter programs. We also get some government commodities to use for our on-site feeding program. So that helps

us out when Gainesville Harvest may not be [able to provide us with] the right kinds of food or not enough of the same kind of food to fill in the gaps. We have that to help us out, too.

PW: For how long do you serve? From 4:30 till . . .

SW: Until it is gone. Usually it takes about a half hour to feed everybody.

PW: You mentioned that sometimes they will stay here for as long as thirty days. Are there any activities suggested for them, or what do they do during the day?

SW: Well, most of those people should be out looking for work. That is one reason we do not feed them lunch. We want to encourage them to go out and look for work. We do not have facilities for people who would stay here during the day anyway. Even our sleeping facilities are small. We want to help them get back into the mainstream of society and be productive members of society, so we encourage them to do that. To those others who may just be waiting on a check or may be disabled, we will suggest, "The library up the street," if they wanted to do some reading or different things that they can do like that during the day.

PW: Well, I know there is a chapel here. How often do you have services?

SW: We also invite any people who come here to attend any of our services. We have regular Sunday morning services, we have Sunday night services, [and] we have Wednesday night services. We do not require anybody to attend to receive any of the physical assistance. We are just letting them know that is there, and they can attend if they like. We usually have a pretty good majority of those who are staying in our shelter to come.

PW: Do you conduct those services?

SW: I do and my wife does. There are some lay people in the church that sometimes fill in and provide that leadership. Normally my wife or I preach and lead meetings.

PW: Now, you mentioned that there are fluctuations in the number of people during the month. What about during the year? Do you notice an increase during any particular time [of the year or] any particular month since you have been here?

SW: I have looked at this before in other places, and there does not seem to be a whole lot of rhyme or reason except when it gets really cold. Here we are able to use the dining room for overflow on the real cold nights. We open that up and put some kind of makeshift bed on the floor to handle those extra people who come in on those really cold nights, rather than allow them to stay outside where

it is dangerous. It is pretty obvious that we have more people during those really cold times. Other than that there does not seem to be any certain month where we have more than another. The number of people staying in our shelter does change from month to month, but comparing year to year, there does not seem to be any correlation. The same month is not going to be high in another year.

PW: Now, when people come here for assistance, do they have to have any kind of identification? Maybe you could just trace what happens when some one arrives here, [saying,] "I do not have a place to stay." Who meets them, and what are the procedures?

SW: Okay. Say a person shows up after all of our offices are closed, but the shelter is open. Maybe they come to supper at 4:30. After supper they tell the shelter coordinator, the man in charge of the meal there, that he needs a place to stay. Well, the man who is in charge of the meal is also the person on duty at the shelter. So after supper and after he gets cleaned up and everything, he will have those people come back for an interview. He fills out a little card with their name and address and identifying information like that, and he asks for an ID. We like to have a photo ID because we want to protect as much as we can the people staying in our shelter.

PW: Where do they get the photo ID?

SW: Wherever they might have gotten it from – a state ID, a driver's license. A lot of people do not have those. If we send them to the police to get a police clearance, from what I hear, from what I understand, the police station here will not give them a clearance without some kind of ID because how can *they* know that person is who they say they are? In those cases I pretty much leave it up to the person on duty at the lodge, at the shelter, that night.

PW: They use their judgment.

SW: Yes, it is a judgment call. If the person is really in need and does not appear to be a threat to anybody, we just take some chances. But that is what you do when you help people. The policy in the recent past – the student murders had something to do with it, I think, but even before that – was to require a police clearance, but you have to have a photo ID in order to get that. We are relaxing a little bit on that now.

PW: Then they are interviewed by the receptionist. Then what is the next thing?

SW: It is a shelter coordinator; he is the same. It is a one-person job to run our lodge. After he gets the information that is needed and deems the person safe to put into our shelter, then the shelter coordinator will give the person bedding--freshly

cleaned sheets and pillow case and blanket--and he will be assigned a bunk so he will know which bed he is staying in. Then he or she can stay up until 9:00 reading, talking, playing cards, or whatever. Then at 9:00 we have lights out. Before that time, we ask them to take a shower also. They are given a bar of soap and any toiletry items that they are needing so that they can go to bed clean and everybody in the dormitory feels comfortable that everybody is clean. Then in the morning they are woken up around 6:00, and after they dress and everything they are fed breakfast, and by seven they are sent on their way to look for work or to continue their journey.

PW: Let us say a woman comes in with children. Is there any difference in the way they are oriented into the program here? Is anything special done for the children?

SW: Not really. There is a separate room, like I said, for women and children. They have their own private toilet facility in there, but they eat their meals at the same time that the men do, and they are given their linens the same as the men are. The only thing we ask those who stay, the guests, to do is in the morning to strip their beds if they are staying just the one night. Other than that, we cannot require or ask them to or even let them do any other chores.

PW: Do you provide any toys and books for the children?

SW: Yes, we try to keep a few items like that in the women's and children's rooms. Sometimes those things walk off. That is okay too. We can get those from the thrift store people and things that people donate.

PW: How many people are working here?

SW: In the whole Salvation Army in Gainesville?

PW: Here in Gainesville. Are there other sites here in Alachua County?

SW: Well, this is our only site where we do social service work. We have two satellite offices who do corrections, misdemeanor probation, and they cover three counties – Gilchrist, Levy, and Columbia. Here at this facility we have another corrections office, and there are three employees there.

PW: Now, are they tied with the law enforcement here in Alachua County? When you say "corrections," [precisely what do you mean]?

SW: It is a misdemeanor probation counseling program. In this county we do not actually do that program, but we have a counselor here to see the cases that transfer from another county. It is mostly students at the University. Instead of

having to travel all the way back to the county where they were sentenced and got their probation, they can see a counselor here, but they get their case transferred. So most of the clients that we see here are transferred because they are going to school here.

Of the other two people over in that corrections office, one is the director for the whole corrections program that we supervise here, the four counties total, and then the [other is the] bookkeeper for the corrections program. The administration part normally has a secretary, which I am trying to hire right now, and a bookkeeper for the whole program and my wife and myself.

[At the] social services office we have two employees, one part-time, one full-time, and then [for] the shelter program there is a full-time coordinator and a part-time shelter manager who works the weekends. Then there is a custodian who spends roughly half of his time with the shelter program helping to keep that area clean and taking deliveries from Gainesville Harvest and other donations. The other half is general, [dealing with] all the other areas of our programs.

In this location we have a thrift store, where we have about five employees.

PW: Where is the thrift store?

SW: 818 West University. It is kind of behind Taco Bell. It is kind of hard to find. It is a warehouse that sits back there. We try to salvage items that people donate, [like] clothing. We will put it out for resale at low cost. There are a lot of people on low income that want to buy their clothing, so we do it that way. If there is somebody who wants free clothing, all they have to do is see a social service worker here, and they will write them a ticket to go down there. We allow them to get ten dollars worth of clothing. It could be two or three changes, I guess, but every season, every ninety days, they can do that for every member of their family. If there is a furniture need, say somebody gets burnt out or something like that, then we could add that to the order. Other than that the things that are sold to anybody are sold as is – whoever pays for it first gets it. That is the way it operates – cash and carry. We have people who I am sure are well-to-do shop there, as well as low-income and middle-income who are just looking for a bargain. Some people are looking for antiques and things like that. So the income is generated from that. It pays the employees, and it pays the rent on the building, which is high, and the utilities and all of that. Then if there is any surplus after the expenses are met, like I mentioned before, that is one of the sources of income for what we do here through our social services program.

PW: You mentioned Gainesville Harvest. Do you get together with other groups, such as perhaps the director of the Saint Francis House in Gainesville, to coordinate any special projects or anything?

SW: No special projects – not yet since I have been here. We work together; we try to coordinate. We may be helping somebody [and] maybe we have reached our limit. When we have done the most we feel we can do for that person, we might call over there and see if they are willing to take on a person, take him on into their program and see if they can make any additional progress. Maybe they just used up the time that we feel we can give them. So we work back and forth on things like that. But as far as projects, no.

PW: Do you have any regular times that you meet during a month or during the year with any other groups to coordinate things?

SW: Well, yes, it is like an interagency council. I cannot remember the exact name of it in this community, being new here, but different agencies meet to say what is going on in their agency and what programs they have going, maybe needs that they are seeing, that type of thing where we might be able to put our heads together and solve a problem that somebody is having with a client or come up with some additional resources. Right now the United Way is trying to get all the people together that do anything to help people with food so they can all be more coordinated to cut down on duplication and things like that to help people the best that we can. So yes, there are different groups that we are part of to try to improve the services.

PW: [Are there any] conventions or meetings which people from various parts of the country get together during the calendar year? Is there any national meeting of the group?

SW: Yes. There are several types. Regionally, the state of Florida has a social service conference once a year. Last fall's was cancelled because of the hurricane [Hurricane Andrew], and everybody was down there in south Florida working on that. But there is a social service conference once a year in this state, so we would send our social service workers there to get additional training.

As far as corrections, that program has its own things too. There are some that are not sponsored by the Army. There are some [that are sponsored] by correctional types of groups. I do not know what they call them, but they have their own conventions, too, that we try to send our director to once a year. Those counselors have their own seminars that they are able to attend. The Salvation Army as a church is divisional – in this case there is a state meeting because we are in the Florida division. There is one geared just for young people that is called a youth council. We just had one in Jacksonville, where youth that are members of the Salvation Army church got together for a weekend and had sessions there. The Salvation Army has annual camps. There is a

camp for our men's club, and there is a camp for our Ladies' Home League, which is our women's group. A lot of the ladies that belong to that are not members of our church. It is just a women's group [for] Christian fellowship and education. They have their own camp once a year.

On a territorial level, Atlanta will normally host southern territory councils – they usually call it a congress – and that usually happens every couple years. It is just a real big gathering there in Atlanta. Nationally, maybe every ten years or so, whenever there is a special time to celebrate, to get people from the Salvation Army all over the United States together, they might do that. I think 1980 was the last time that we did that, and that was the year that my wife and I were commissioned officers. All four territories in the United States converged on Kansas City, and that is where we were commissioned all together, which is unusual. We had a big national congress there.

There are international congresses. It seems like those are maybe every five years or so, usually in London, England. People from all over the world in the Salvation Army world get together. That is a pretty big thing. I have not been to one of those, but I would not mind going. We just never had enough money [laughter]. I have never been in a unit that had money to help pay for that.

PW: Now, at any of these meetings, congresses, or gatherings, are there ever opportunities to discuss programs for the homeless and ways you can better serve the needs of [the] homeless?

SW: Yes. That would happen more at the social services conferences. But there are also advisory organization conferences, and they will address those there. Like I said, the advisory board has a big role to play in the local Salvation Army. Those board members would be invited to attend an advisory organizations conference. Those happen, I think, every two years, and that would be one of the areas that it covers. Lately, of course, that has been a specific topic of discussion in one of the sessions. Board members are allowed to choose which sessions they would like to attend. That has been one of the important sessions, to discuss homelessness – what is being done in other places, what can be done in your community. It is usually a panel discussion type thing. Of course, the delegates are allowed to write questions ahead of time that they would like to have answered and that type of thing. So those are the two areas where it would be brought up in most, the advisory organizations and the social service seminars.

As officers we also have officers councils. All of the officers throughout Florida meet two or three times a year for three or four days, and we discuss all the aspects of the Salvation Army. Of course, one would be the social services programs. That is normally one area that is covered. So there are three levels at least.

PW: There are a lot of opportunities to exchange ideas. Have you picked up any ideas that maybe you heard about in other parts of the state that you have employed here with respect to the homeless? Is there anything that is effective, in your opinion?

SW: Not yet. I have been focusing on how to improve our shelter since I have been here. One of the improvements that has happened since we have been here is moving the meals indoors. They were outdoors, so we moved them indoors. It is more dignified. It gives people a place to sit, a table to eat at, and shelter from the weather. You do not have to worry about what the weather is going to be like, and it keeps the neighbors happy too. Trash is hard to control outdoors. So that is one of the major improvements we have made. I can see enough things that need to be improved right now that are just going to take some money to do. I have not had an occasion to discuss other things yet. There is enough readily visible that needs to be done. [I] have talked a little bit about some other possibilities, like transitional housing, which has been mentioned before in this community.

PW: What was the transitional housing?

SW: Transitional housing is for a person who goes from homeless to having a place of their own; it is the in-between housing. Someone might have an apartment building [with,] say, six apartments in it, family-size apartments. Say an agency were to run that; they own it. Someone shows up at the shelter overnight who is homeless. They might be screened and found that they will qualify for this transitional housing program. They would be moved into the transitional housing for a few months – half of a year maybe – and during that time they would not have to worry about rent or the housing needs. They can concentrate on employment and saving up money and searching for a home, that type of thing. After that, they move out, and then another family can come in.

Being new here, I do not know how much discussion has gone into that type of program. I am not aware that there is a transitional program in town. I know the Salvation Army has looked at it in the past. So that may be something that we look into in the future. The last place I was, Shawnee, Oklahoma, had one transitional house that another agency was sponsoring. They were having trouble with people meeting the guidelines to move in, and as of the time that I left there still was not a family in that thing.

PW: What kind of guidelines? People that are out of work temporarily?

SW: I am not sure. I did not study all of that too much. I just know that the director of the program was telling me that he was having problems with people meeting

guidelines. There has to be some kind of income, apparently.

PW: But that is a project that is possibly going to take place here?

SW: Possibly. It has been talked about two or three years back on and off. There have been two or three officers here since then. If they leave an officer here long enough we might be able to explore that further and see if it is feasible, if it is a needed service, first of all, and then if it is feasible for the Salvation Army to do. There would be a lot of work involved. Property would have to be secured, guidelines drawn up, and everything.

One thing about homelessness that we did not really discuss is what some social workers call couch people. They are people staying with relatives or friends [where] the house is only built for a single family, but there might be two or three families living in that residence. So they have shelter, but in a technical sense of homelessness I guess they would be homeless because they do not have a shelter of their own. If that family or friend did not let them stay there they would be out on the street. There are a lot of those people around. So the problem I can see with transitional housing is there is going to be a limited number of units. If we get people out of those situations, the couch people, into transitional housing, we are still going to have whole lot more people that I would see qualifying for the program that could not get into it. There is just not enough transitional housing to do that. I think those families are living under difficult circumstances when you get that many people in one house. I do not really know what the solution would be for that. Probably if there were a small transitional housing program, those who are strictly homeless and have no place right now when they come to see us would be the ones who would be given priority for that type of program.

PW: You mentioned neighbors earlier. Have you had any complaints, particularly since you have moved the eating facilities indoors? Do you have any complaints from the surrounding neighbors?

SW: I have not had any complaints since we moved it indoors. That was something that I wanted to do any way.

PW: How soon did you do that after you arrived here?

SW: We came at the end of June. I had a few camps to go to and a vacation to take, but it was by the end of August. We went on vacation in August, and when I came back my shelter coordinator told me that he moved it inside because of complaints [about] the trash. I said that was great, because I wanted to do that anyway, so now it is done. So within a couple of months they were eating inside. I just could not believe it when I first arrived and saw the people eating out back

here, just standing around or sitting on the sidewalk or whatever. But at least they were getting fed.

One problem that we had to consider was the dining room. It is not that big, but it has worked out. When people come in and get their food, when we get to the last people in line the first people that were in line earlier are through eating, so there are places left. We have found that it has worked out pretty good. We are able to do it without any problem.

PW: So in general, you really do not have a problem with neighbors here.

SW: Not that I know of.

PW: That is great. You mentioned a little bit about the future, and this will be my last question. What would you like to see the Salvation Army doing in Gainesville in terms of the future and the homeless? Is there anything in particular that you would like to put into the operation or change?

SW: Well, the number-one thing that I see, that I saw when I first got here and still see, is the inadequacy of our facilities here. To house fourteen men in the dorm that we have is cramped. We have bunk beds in there, and it is just crowded. This facility was a Church of Christ, and ten years ago when the Army bought it they tried to adapt it as well as they could. It is better than what we had. We were in a house down the street here, so this is much better than what we had, and it was adapted the best it could be adapted at the time without spending the money that we did not have. But we really need a bigger dormitory for the men. We need more adequate facilities for women and children. We should have a family room separate from the women's dorm, too, I am thinking, for a family, so if a husband and wife come in they do not have to be separated. The whole family can stay in a room. [I would like to have] maybe one or two rooms like that. We just do not have the room to do that now. We have so many programs going on here, there is not enough room to do it. I would like to have a lounge where people [can occupy their time] after they check in. Say they check in at 6:00. Maybe they do not like to read. For three hours what are they going to do? Twiddle their thumbs? Go to sleep early? Who knows? But with a lounge they could play some board games or watch TV or just have an area to relax in, which we do not have. The kitchen needs to be a commercial-type kitchen. We just have a conventional stove in there and conventional-type kitchen and appliances. It is a small kitchen, and that really needs to be up graded. But all of this takes more room, so it is going to require expansion or building another facility to house some of our other programs so that we can expand the lodge program into other parts. Anyway, that is something that our advisory board is looking into, the possibility of doing a capital campaign and renovating or adding on or building another building to house some of our programs somewhere else,

to free up the space for all of the programs.

PW: Would you tell me your [birth]date and place of birth?

SW: Okay. I was born January 18, 1954, in South Bend, Indiana.

PW: Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate your [allowing me to talk with you about the Salvation Army and how it is helping Gainesville's homeless].