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Las Cruces, New Mexico

**Mesilla Valley Community of Hope**

2018

**Hope Stories**

Interview 5

**Nancy Baker Transcript Index & Excerpt**

**Hacienda Del Sol, Gospel Rescue Mission, and Camp Hope**

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte

15 June 2018

NMSU Public History Seminar Room, Breland Hall 258

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## **Project History**

The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH) is a homeless services corridor in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In the 1970s, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church began a small lunch service which later became El Caldito Soup Kitchen. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased, the Las Cruces community supported the Saint Andrew's congregation with the opening of Saint Luke's Health Clinic. With a long history of compassionate services for visitors, the City of Las Cruces recognized the importance of limiting distance and travel-time between public health and human service organizations located throughout different parts of the city.

Incorporated as a non-profit in 1991, additional support continued to shape collaborative alliances with operations at 999 West Amador nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns and exposure deaths for the homeless, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with Hope Campus clients, appealed to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status, and soon founded Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the legacy of organizational homeless services at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a healthcare industry perspective known as the Consolidated Services Model that helps people to access health and human service related programs quickly, reliably, and within centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas of potentially consistent preventative care.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate with the actions necessary to become the Hope Campus at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. Rather than conduct interviews with those who experienced homelessness, the project features staff and volunteer narrators who shared community engagement stories about the consolidated services “Campus” concept.

The project ended without narrators to represent the community’s food pantry. Founded in 1979, Casa de Peregrinos relocated to the Hope Campus as an alliance member during the 1991 opening, and today continues to serve Doña Ana County with increased food delivery and expanded satellite locations. Two additional perspectives from outside the Hope Campus: the fourth interview with Glenn Trowbridge took place at CARE Complex in Las Vegas, Nevada, an out-of-state counter-balance to the history of homeless consolidated services in the United States; while the fifteenth interview with Kit Elliott and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on the NMSU campus, a satellite food pantry inspired by Casa de Peregrinos.

Today’s work to help the homeless in Las Cruces is the result of a compassionate, multi-organizational approach by non-profit service providers. In 2018, these five core non-profit organizations include Mesilla Valley Community of Hope; Casa de Peregrinos food pantry; El Caldito soup kitchen; Jardin de Los Niños educational program; and Amador Health Center (formally Saint Luke’s Health Clinic). With Hope Campus the geographic center of non-profit homeless service providers in Las Cruces, it is important to note assistance and resources offered by the City of Las Cruces, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the New Mexico Department of Human Services. For an updated and comprehensive list of regional community services, insightful for anyone experiencing homelessness, inquire City of Las Cruces or MVCH with search term “Las Cruces Community Resource Guide.”

## **Narrator Summary**

Raised in Appalachian West Virginia, and inspired by her mother's belief in the power of education, Nancy Baker rose above the roots of poverty and into an academic career. Dr. Baker earned a PhD from Tulane University in 1989, joined New Mexico State University that same year, and authored numerous scholarly works about law and government in the United States, including two non-fiction titles on the office of U.S. Attorney General — *Conflicting Loyalties: Law and Politics in the Attorney General's Office, 1789-1990*, and *General Ashcroft: Attorney at War*. A Professor Emeritus with multiple academic honors, including two national teaching awards, Dr. Baker is a recipient of the Westhafer Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Dr. Baker helped establish “Hacienda del Sol,” a shelter for women and children located on the Hope Campus. Although the non-profit organization struggled financially and eventually closed in 2006, its history remains an important blueprint of the competing demands necessary to fund and maintain the day-to-day operational growth of homeless shelter services.

In support of higher education for non-traditional women, Dr. Baker created the “Over the Rainbow” scholarship, a Spring-Board fund with Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico. In 2015, to increase awareness and outreach efforts for those experiencing homelessness, Dr. Baker became a Development Committee member with the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope.

Now a retired Mystery novelist writing under the name N.V. Baker, the book *Vanished* was published in 2016.



**Index of first hour**

00:06 - Interview introduction

00:46 - Narrator biography

01:20 - Mesilla Valley Community of Hope origins

03:19 - Hacienda Del Sol housing agency for women and children

04:21 - Mission statement

06:53 - “Housing First” model

08:43 - Perceptions of stereotypical violence

09:37 - Elected Hacienda del Sol board president

10:41 - Early challenges to permanent housing

11:25 - Hot temperatures and the health dangers of locating MVCH consolidated services

12:46 - Gospel Rescue Mission shelter

13:40 - Unsheltered men “Spark” potential for Camp Hope

14:58 - Hacienda del Sol “Move-in day” 1999

15:44 - Las Cruces generosity of spirit

16:29 - Fundraising challenges and rummage sale collaboration

19:04 - MVCH Development Committee structure

19:37 - Executive Director without health insurance

20:31 - Hacienda del Sol “Absorbed by MVCH”

21:47 - Las Cruces community support for Camp Hope

**Index of first hour (cont.)**

22:17 - State of New Mexico and Veteran's funding

22:55 - Camp Hope temporary shelter and Tents-to-Rents partnerships

26:47 - Las Cruces social services and MVCH consolidated services for homeless resources

28:57 - Project Link, homeless youth, and the need for year-round community support

30:38 - Business owners near MVCH and criminalization vagrancy laws

32:06 - Homeless court system on the Hope Campus

37:11 - Project Dignity shower and restroom facility

37:58 - Extreme summer heat and outside living conditions

40:18 - Funding audit of MVCH overhead costs for staff and volunteers

41:58 - "Spring of Hope" community open house event

43:05 - State of New Mexico and federal funding availability

44:10 - Psychological and emotional toll on homeless service providers

46:00 - Differences between laws and "Operational" policies

46:46 - Customs and Border Patrol one hundred mile buffer-zone

48:06 - Colonias Development Council

49:26 - Women's rights, honor killings, and sexual violence prevention

**Index of first hour (cont.)**

53:34 - Experiences of homelessness for women and children

55:40 - Hope Campus resources, Sue's House, and housing homeless women

57:52 - Potential services overlap with La Casa shelter for women

59:20 - Caseworker management, behavioral health counselors, and addressing burnout



**Index of second hour**

01:04:45 - Mental health resources for those experiencing homelessness

01:07:17 - West Virginia Appalachia family background

01:10:07 - “Over the Rainbow” and “Spring Board” education scholarships with Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico

01:14:54 - Ammu and Rama Devasthali foundation for the arts

01:15:49 - Local support networks for borderland migrants

01:18:00 - Vista Program and MVCH Development Committee fundraising

01:22:29 - Camp Hope Safety Shack and Self-Governance

01:25:37 - Building trusting relationships with The Great Conservation and democratic process

01:27:41 - Potential incentives for Camp Hope and Safety Shack managers

01:29:43 - Jobs training pipeline to self-sufficiency and increased education opportunities

01:32:35 - Mesilla Valley Community of Hope future

01:34:14 - Reflection on individual MVCH homeless service providers



## **Interview 5 Excerpt — Nancy Baker:**

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Between 1997 and the opening of the campus in 1999, people were placed in housing as it could be located, but a lot of the landlords were not— There wasn't the good network that Nicole Martinez has developed, and very strong relationships with local landlords who will now step in, and realize that this is not only an important population to serve, but that if there are any problems they can call the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff, and things get resolved. So, they're actually not bad tenants. Up to that point though, it was sometimes a challenge to find housing.

We didn't have any permanent housing. There wasn't anything like Abode, or Sue's House, or the Oak Street housing for veterans. There just was nothing like that so people were just hanging out on the street, and in very hot temperatures like this that was— That's deadly. In our community the problem isn't that it's too cold for the homeless. It's because it gets too hot, and if people have diabetes, especially, they're not conscious that they're putting their health in danger.

They're not conscious that they're dehydrated. So, that's, I think, part of what spurred all of this. There had been a kitchen at St. Andrew's Church that then evolved into the El Caldito Soup Kitchen. It opened at the campus about the same time. Maybe a little before Hacienda Del Sol moved in, Saint Luke's Clinic, and soon after Hacienda moved in, Jardin de los Niños.

## **Nancy Baker:**

The emergency food shelter [Casa de Peregrinos] didn't move in for another couple years, I believe, but it was part of the program from the very beginning, but the building had— Construction had to occur over phases. So, you had, then, all of these services in one place. If people could come in and find it, that was the initial challenge. Getting the word out to the community. Getting the word out when people showed up in town. Someone will tell them about it.

“You go down here on Amador, and they'll take care of you.”

So, we'd have a lot of people coming there. We were able to house a lot of the women and the children. Across the street, of course, was Gospel Rescue Mission, but they have— at that time in particular, I don't know if it's still true, you only had one night's stay. And they may not accept you at all. And they had a lot of rules in place that made it difficult to stay there, and so it was sort of an area where people who are homeless were clustering, but the men didn't really have a shelter. They didn't have a place to go to. They would hang out around the buildings. But, the fam-, women and children, they were in sort of— Or families with children—

So, men who were part of families could stay, but they were very secure locations with the doors locked so that— because the whole point was some women become homeless because of abuse in the homes. In fact, that's a big trigger for homelessness among women.

## **Nancy Baker:**

So, you have to ensure there's a safe environment for these vulnerable populations. But, that left the guys out there, and that's really, I think, where the origin of the Camp Hope idea came from, was a handful of those guys talking and working together, and basically I think they were the spark that got Camp Hope started, was that:

“We need— Can we just camp here? Can we just pitch our tent?”

And, of course, we had to say “No” initially because it's city land. So, we have to get that approved by the city. All of that took time, but a number of the people camping there came and testified to the city, and I think it was very powerful to find out these are— And it was empowering for them because suddenly they were the ones defining their future. They weren't just flotsam and jetsam on the raging torrents of society. They actually could take charge and lead an initiative, and then be successful. So, I think, the Camp Hope had not yet opened, it was many years later, but it was clearly a need that we could see even in 1999 when we moved into Hacienda Del Sol.

del Norte: Obviously these discussions are taking place across the community. Can you talk about some of the high points of the Board's activities, and what you tried to address first of all? And the reason I ask this is because I'll follow up with “What were some of the challenges?”

## **Nancy Baker:**

Yeah. Okay. Well, for me, the most exciting day was “Move-in day,” which was in the late spring of 1999. A number of NMSU students came. In fact, one of my students from my Introduction to Political Science class showed up with her— She’s maybe in her thirties, and she brought her kids along, and they were all— We’re all moving stuff in because we had to set up bedrooms. These were like these— They weren’t full apartments, but they were nice, separate, lockable bedrooms where people could, you know, had to have their basic needs taken care of. So, we’re moving things in. We’re moving food in. We’re moving in washing machines. That, for me, was a real highlight. It was a warm day if I remember, so maybe it was even early summer, but it could have been here— It could have been late spring.

It was very exciting that the community came together, and saw this as a chance to provide services that many communities denied the homeless. Some of these communities would just give the homeless a bus ticket to the next town, and they think then they’re serving the needs of the homeless, and I really, really appreciate that about Las Cruces. It’s one of the things I love here, the generosity of spirit, the sense that we’re all interconnected. It’s not like “Us and them,” and “They made their bed, let them sleep in it.” No. We’re all fragile. We’re all just one or two pay checks away, or a devastating illness away from, you know, being right on the edge, possibly losing everything. And I was really impressed. That was, for me, the highlight.

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### **Recommended Citation**

Baker, Nancy, interviewed by David Lee del Norte. June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018.  
Hope Stories oral history project, New Mexico State University  
Library Archives and Special Collections.

### **Recording Information**

Hope Stories 05 — 1h 35m duration. Recorded at the Public History  
Seminar Room, Breland Hall 258 on the NMSU campus.

### **Transcripts and Recordings**

Listen, read, and request Hope Stories complete transcripts, sound  
recordings, and 2018 project research box at New Mexico State  
University Library and Special Collections.