

Interviewers: Caden Hageman and Judah Miceli
Interviewee: Donna Kimpan
HBR Modern US History
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Oral History of Hinckley Residents - Transcription

Judah: How long have you lived in Hinckley?

Donna: We came when I was in eighth grade. We had a lot of animals—I had a horse and all kinds of farm animals—so I spent a lot of time south of town. We had a little farmette. Hinckley was a very tight-knit community, and it was a little difficult to make friends because most people had grown up together and I came from somewhere else. High school was easier because there were a lot of new houses built in Big Rock. Our house was one of the first new houses built in Hinckley in about ten years, so Big Rock brought in a lot of kids from the suburbs. Most of my friends in high school were Big Rock kids for that reason. In the 1970s, the word would have been “cliquey.” It was a little cliquey. I rode my horse and had my horse friends, and by high school things got better. I was very involved in school.

Caden: How was your high school experience?

Donna: I belonged to a lot of clubs and did a lot of volunteer work. Homecoming was a really big deal. On Friday night we had a bonfire and a snake dance through town that lasted until about 10 or 10:30. Everyone would go home, then get up early Saturday morning to set up for the parade at around five o’clock. The parades were huge—anywhere from 100 to 150 floats—with Shriners troops and floats from every business in town. I was very involved in homecoming. We had something every single day at school. Each club did something, like selling carnations, similar to candy grams. Every day was different. There was Spirit Week, where you dressed in school colors, crazy socks, and themed outfits. After the parade, you went straight to the JV game, then the varsity game. Everyone went home, cleaned up, and came back for the homecoming dance that night. Everything happened together. It’s very different now.

Judah: What was downtown Hinckley like?

Donna: Downtown Hinckley was full of businesses—clothing stores, fabric stores, two grocery stores, a hardware store, a variety store with all kinds of small items, a pharmacy, a car dealership, doctors, and dentists. Downtown was full from one end to the other.

Caden: What led you to open your flower shop?

Donna: I graduated from floral school in 1982 and worked for a greenhouse that went bankrupt, so I lost my job. I had a car payment, so I went to Dick Edmier, who owned the grocery store at the time, and told him I needed a job. He handed me a set of keys and said, “You know that empty building across the street that I own? Just go open a flower shop over there.” My dad gave me \$500, and Dick gave me free rent for a year. I started in just a small office space. In 1984, my parents and I bought the building and expanded it to take over the whole space.

Caden: What led you to close your flower shop in 2005?

Donna: In 1990, I found out I was highly allergic to mold. With fresh flowers and cooling systems, there's no way to avoid mold spores. I got rid of the fresh flower portion of the business and ran it as a gift store, still selling indoor and outdoor plants. By around 2003, things had changed in Hinckley. Many businesses had closed, and people were shopping where they worked instead. Randall Road was expanding, and the competition made it hard for a small store to survive.

Judah: What is one change in Hinckley that you've noticed over the years?

Donna: The cliquy feeling I experienced when I first moved here has mostly gone away. There are so many people from different places living here now that people are more accepting.

Caden: What do you miss the most about Hinckley?

I've lived here a long time, and I miss many people who are no longer here—customers who gave me advice, especially when I was pregnant. Every older woman who came into my store had advice, and it was heartfelt. My best customer was probably Betty Bastian. She was the postmistress for about 40 years and never married. She came into my store every single day and wrote thousands of cards and letters every year. She walked everywhere and lived just a few blocks away. She didn't spend the most money, but she came faithfully.

Judah: What is one tradition that Hinckley has had?

Donna: The main community event I remember is Fall Fest. It was put on by the Junior Women's Club and had around 100 craft booths, food, and activities. They closed Route 30 for the day. There was a big beer garden and a dance at the end of the day. People came from all over.

Caden: What did you do after closing your shop?

Donna: I closed my shop in 2005. That was the same year Michael's Grocery built the new store where Hinckley Fresh Market is now. I worked there for eight years, then at Monsanto in Waterman for a year, Target for a year, Small Cakes in St. Charles for almost eight years, and now I am the lead baker at Johnny's in Rockford.

Judah: What is your association with the Hinckley fireworks committee?

I helped start the fireworks committee in the 1990s and was involved for 10 to 12 years. Recently, the committee was revived after fundraising fell short, and I was asked to help again. Fundraising is the biggest part—you need at least \$15,000, and \$20,000 is better to cover fireworks and expenses like porta-potties, garbage, and activities.

Caden: What is your association with the FFA alumni?

I also help with the Alumni Association, which is the fundraising arm for the FFA. It's mostly made up of parents and alumni. My son graduated in 2012, and I still help. Our current goal is finishing the new building—we still need about \$100,000. I'm on the board in an ad hoc role and help organize fundraisers like the golf outing, wreath sales, and tree sales. Recently, I made 150 bows for wreaths and planters.

Judah: In one word, what makes Hinckley a community?

Donna: The people. In a small town, everyone has to work together. If you want to raise money or help someone, you have to come together. That's what makes it a community.

Caden: What accomplishment are you most proud of?

Donna: My son and the man he has become. I've done a lot—raised money, volunteered, worked with the church, and I was named Hinckley's Citizen of the Year in 2005 for my volunteer work—but my son is what I'm most proud of.

Judah: What events in school paved the way for your history in Hinckley?

Donna: I wanted to be a business teacher. Typing classes stopped after level two, so my friends and I petitioned the school to create Secretarial Club, which became secretarial Three and Four. We worked through simulated job packets and used a ditto machine, which was a pre-copy machine typing system. To take the burden off of the school secretary Mrs. Kneip in the office. We also helped the school office by typing tests and materials for teachers, which took pressure off the secretary. I was very involved in that. I was also involved in FHA, the girls' organization focused on volunteer work and helping less-privileged children overseas.

Girls were not allowed in FFA or wood shop at the time, and boys couldn't take home economics. I had to go to the superintendent to be allowed to take wood shop. There was a clear divide between boys and girls, I kept statistics for the boys' track team and traveled with them. There were very few girls' sports—girls' basketball didn't start until my sophomore year, and girls' soccer and track came later. I was on yearbook, in choir, performed in musicals and the junior-senior play, and I still sing in my church choir. I did a lot of volunteer work, including delivering meals made in home economics to a shelter in Aurora. I sold candy at school to help fund the senior trip to Florida. I was a hall monitor, an honor student, and deeply involved in everything. I was all in.