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Interview with Divonna Crecelius

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Transcript of interview with Divonna Crecelius about Ron Crecelius
War & Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends
November 28, 2017

Cherice Bock: The following recording is an interview of Divonna Crecelius for the project War and Conscientious Objection in Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1940–1975. You will also hear the voice of Ralph Beebe, one of the researchers for this project, and I am Cherice Bock, the other researcher. The interview took place at Friendsview Retirement Community in Newberg, Oregon on November 28, 2017.

Ralph Beebe: Well, thank you, Divonna, for coming. And, what year was Ron born?

Divonna Crecelius: In 1921.

Ralph: '21. Okay, so he would be 18 in '39, just before the war. Do you know what—how he registered for the draft at that time?

Divonna: No, I don't know.

Ralph: Did he go into the military?

Divonna: When he went in the military, he, it was after Pearl Harbor, and he enlisted. He knew he wanted air force, and if he didn't enlist, they could send him anywhere.

Ralph: Now, all of this this part happened before he was—became a Christian, right?

Divonna: That's right.

Ralph: And before he became part of Northwest Yearly Meeting.

Divonna: Mm-hmm.

Ralph: So, he did serve in the military during the war. Do you know whether or not the fact that he became a Christian and a Quaker, did that influence his attitude toward the military, toward military service?

Divonna: Well, I can't think—no, I don't think so, because he, he felt—even strongly—that you could have a, an influence, and when he was recalled after the war, during the Korean situation, and they recalled him, he went in as a chaplain's assistant. Of course, his nerves were shot anyway. He probably couldn't have done much. They call it post-traumatic stress now. At that time they didn't have the title for it.

Ralph: Okay, so he, and that was after, of course, after he became a Christian, and so his life had changed quite a little bit, I suppose, spiritually. Can you tell us a little bit about how and why he became a Christian?

Divonna: Well, mainly what they called Fox—it was Pacific then—and he and Glen Moore, who had been in the service, too, the Navy—they had a, what was it? It was a basketball trip, I think. Both of them had bus trips that night. [laughs] And all of a sudden, they were talking—I think they were really under conviction, because everybody'd been praying for them. And they said, "Well, if somebody came and would take our bus trips, we'd go to the meeting." Guess what? Somebody came up—two of them! And took their bus trips, and so they had to go to the meeting. So it was that night that they both came back to the Lord.

Ralph: And where was that meeting?

Divonna: Well, it's an auditorium up there now.

Ralph: But it's on—it's at George Fox? On campus?

Divonna: Well, yeah, uh-huh, in Wood-Mar Hall.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: You remember that old—

Ralph: Oh yes! [laughter]

Divonna: With the squeaky chairs, and what have you! [laughter]

Ralph: Yeah. Well, how did he, how did he get connected? He was a student at George Fox?

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: Why?

Divonna: Well, I don't know if you remember Verna Keller?

Ralph: The name, but I don't remember...

Divonna: Anyway, he had known her before the war, vaguely, and she was here, and he came down to visit, he and his brother, and I don't know, others, and that's how he got interested in it. So, and of course, he was kind of a pseudo-Christian before, you know, not really "born-again Christian," but on the fringe. You probably all know people like that. So, that's how he happened to come here. And of course, they, being a small college, they offered it. And of course, he had the GI Bill, so...

Ralph: Okay. So, again, when did he actually accept Jesus?

Divonna: Where?

Ralph: When?

Divonna: Well, it would have been in...must have been in '48. We were married in '47. It was after we were married. So it had to be about '48.

Ralph: Yeah, okay, so that's a very central part of this whole story.

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: He accepted Jesus and, and married you, the two things really changed his life, didn't they.

Divonna: Yeah, mm-hmm. I was always told, "Don't marry someone's not a Christian." [laughs]

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: He was on the fringe, you know?

Ralph: Are you willing to talk about that a little bit more? Because you were a Christian.

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: But you married a guy who was...

Divonna: About like this. [moves hand side to side to indicate ambivalence]

Ralph: Was that a hard decision for you?

Divonna: No, he was a very outgoing [laughs] person, and we had music in common, so...

Ralph: Yes.

Cherice: Can you tell us about yourself a little bit? Did you grow up Quaker?

Divonna: We went to a community church, so my dad never was a Christian, but, and then, Mom had Friends—went to Second Friends in Portland, and at that time they would were living in southeast Harold, not very far from there, and so that's how we got started with that. So...

Cherice: So, you went there, and then you went to George Fox, or Pacific College?

Divonna: Yeah. So I remember the Swansons.

Ralph: Yes.

Divonna: Elmer was my friend, and through that we got acquainted with—I had relatives that went to, to Oregon State, and they thought it was terrible I was going to such a little college, but it was bliss for me, because I was not very outgoing.

Ralph: Do you know whether or not, coming to a Quaker school, and he became a Quaker, how that influenced his attitude toward the military? Any changes in his feelings about the military?

Divonna: Well, no, he never said much about it. I know he was very, he was questioned a lot before his recording. It was up on Greenleaf, and you know, they're terribly conservative. We didn't know whether he would even pass, but he did!
[laughter]

Ralph: Good!

Cherice: So they were asking him about his military service and how that, how that related to the—

Divonna: Oh yeah, yeah, they questioned him a lot. I mean I wasn't there.

Cherice: Yeah.

Divonna: But, one thing I remember, in that conservative vein: it was a hot day and I was wearing a sleeveless dress, and I was questioned about it! [laughs]

Cherice: Oh.

Divonna: Those people nowadays would die if they saw the way people dress! And Quakers, at that! [laughter]

Cherice: Yeah. So they—

Divonna: I remember that, because I was rather timid. I didn't have any come back. I just listened to them.

Cherice: So they were conservative in the sense of conserving their understanding of traditional Quaker values? Is that what you'd say?

Divonna: Yeah.

Cherice: So they were concerned about his military service, and that it didn't fit with the Friends testimonies?

Divonna: Yeah. So obviously he had changed his—but we never particularly talked about it, you know.

Cherice: Though he had changed his opinion, you think, on the peace testimony, or, or he just decided it wasn't important, or the, the recording committee didn't think it was important?

Divonna: I don't know.

Cherice: Okay.

Divonna: I wasn't there, so I just, all I know is that he passed.

Cherice: Yeah.

Divonna: They must have been alright with what he had to say, so...

Cherice: And what year was that, about? The recording process.

Divonna: Oh dear...well, it had to be...I don't know, had to be '48, maybe...

Cherice: That he was recorded?

Divonna: Or maybe early '49, I don't know.

Cherice: Okay.

Divonna: It had to be in that area.

Ralph: That's very soon after he became a Christian himself.

Divonna: Yeah, yeah.

Ralph: That was a—

Divonna: Of course, like I said, he was on the fringes before.

Cherice: Right.

Divonna: And did a pretty good job of imitating what he was.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: Yeah. And he'd always been singing in churches, with his mom playing, you know, in churches, and she was an organist and piano teacher, so it wasn't like he wasn't... What we would call a born-again Christian, he was not.

Cherice: Before that?

Divonna: But as the world would see him, he was a Christian.

Cherice: Okay. He was kind of a cultural Christian, but it hadn't gotten into his heart yet?

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: Yeah.

Cherice: Okay.

Divonna: I think the world would probably have considered him a Christian. But we wouldn't. [laughter]

Cherice: Alright, and so then he felt a call to ministry, apparently, since he was being recorded?

Divonna: Yeah. So, because let's see, our first son was born in '49, so it had to be in that time from '47, '48, or '49.

Cherice: Okay. And then when—

Divonna: It's hard to remember! It's been a long time! [laughter] My brain isn't what it used to be! If it was anything.

Cherice: And then, when the Korean War started, then—

Divonna: Pardon?

Cherice: And then when the Korean War started, then he was drafted again, he was called back in?

Divonna: And then actually, the quartet was travelling when he was recalled.

Cherice: Okay.

Divonna: They were back in the Midwest.

Cherice: Oh, wow.

Divonna: And then Paul Thornburg stepped in with the quartet.

Cherice: Ah!

Divonna: To take his place.

Ralph: Who, did you say?

Cherice: Paul Thornburg.

Divonna: Paul Thornburg.

Ralph: Oh yes, yes.

Divonna: Yeah. Because he had to report right away when he was recalled.

Ralph: So he was out of the quartet for quite a while?

Divonna: Well, at least a year.

Ralph: Yeah.

Cherice: And this is the Four Flats?

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: Because—yeah, because that was in, well, let's see, '50, '50 or '51, because our daughter was born in '51 in March, so...

Cherice: So they, they drafted him and he chose to go in as a chaplain, or they specifically called him to be a chaplain?

Divonna: No, they didn't call him to be—he was a chaplain assistant, because he did not have his seminary. And fortunately, the chaplain he was assigned to down in the Bay Area was a Free Methodist, so they meshed. [laughs] He didn't get somebody that was what I call "way out." [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah so, similar enough theologically that they could work together well?

Divonna: Yeah. And the chaplain was—I don't remember his name, but he was very, well, he was conservative, too, but whatever my husband wanted to do, he let him do it. I mean, just like taking a bus full of the GIs or the air force guys to the Bay Area Youth for Christ every weekend. And at one time, they had to have two buses. So, they did a lot like that. So, anyway, that's what I remember. I hope it...

Cherice: Yeah, that's great. So do you do you remember if they, if the military drafted him again for Korea and he was able to select being a chaplain's assistant, or was—or did they specifically ask him to do that?

Divonna: I don't know. I think he, I think he asked, but I don't know for sure. I really don't.

Cherice: Yeah. So at that point he didn't feel like he could go back into the military, or just...

Divonna: Well see, he was, they were not using, as far as I know, B-29s, and he, when he was in the service, bombing Japan, it was...I lost my train of thought.
[laughs]

Cherice: Since, since they weren't using B-29s anymore, then he felt like he wasn't really trained?

Divonna: Yeah, yeah, they weren't really using the big ones like that over...and he was central fire control when he was over the Tiber (?), he had charge of all guns in the place at the top, so, and he had so many experiences, just... He was the smallest guy on the crew, and at one time, there was a fire in the bomb bay, and he was, you know, one who could crawl fast enough through there and pull off the burning wires, and until, well, years, his hands were burned, and they would peel, for as long, as long as I can remember, every so often, they would come off.

Ralph: And this was during World War II.

Divonna: World War II.

Ralph: And then he became a Christian three years later, or three years after the war. But—

Divonna: Yeah, yeah. Did you read one of his things he wrote, he wrote for a [inaudible]?

Ralph: I didn't, no.

Divonna: About their one sortie over Japan and his, his plane was the only one that came back out of 14 planes.

Cherice: Wow.

Ralph: Oh wow.

Divonna: Yeah, we typed it up, too, but it, he had written this, called "Milk Run," and it was very interesting.

Ralph: Do you know whether or not his becoming a Christian three years later, after the war, affected his attitude toward the military, his feelings? Would he still, would he have gone back into the military, and [inaudible]?

Divonna: Well, only thing I know, he did not sign up to be in the Air Force Reserve again. That's how they got him back into the Korean War, because he was in the Air Force Reserve.

Ralph: Okay...

Divonna: When he was recalled.

Ralph: So he was recalled, and went back into the Korean War in or shortly after 1950.

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: (That's when the war started.) How did, you don't, see, see, I'm trying to examine whether his acceptance of Jesus changed or modified his attitude toward the military and—B-29 just killed so many people. But, you don't think that his becoming a Christian affected his attitude toward that very much?

Divonna: No, because, well part of it was because his brother was a career Air Force pilot. I mean, he spent 30-some years—his brother did. So, and he was a pilot, and in the intelligence, so, I don't, I mean, if you think he's really against the military, he didn't like what—some things they did, but he certainly—I wouldn't say he was antagonistic towards them.

Ralph: And he was able, within himself, to accept what the military was doing and become a part of it.

Divonna: No, I don't think he accepted what they did, you know, but as far as the people in them and stuff like that, you didn't find an antagonistic attitude like some people had over there.

Ralph: Yeah, yeah, and I'm examining not—not so much whether he approved of the war itself, but did he approve of military service for himself?

Divonna: Well, I suppose, if he knew, like, when he was recalled, if he had thought to go back into it, it would be a noncombatant.

Ralph: You think so?

Divonna: I think so. I can't speak for him!

Ralph: Yeah.

Cherice: Because that's kind of what he chose by being a chaplain assistant?

Divonna: Yeah. And if he had gone back in, he would probably go back in as a chaplain. I'm almost sure of that.

Ralph: Okay, that's what I was trying to get at, and I appreciate your answer. So his acceptance of Jesus probably changed his attitude some, about whether he could kill people.

Divonna: Probably. But, you know, being in an airplane, and dropping bombs, you're, you're not seeing the aftermath.

Ralph: Yeah, yeah, but you surely—

Cherice: And you said—oh, go ahead.

Ralph: But you surely know those bombs are—

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: Man, the B-29 was a massive bomber.

Divonna: Well, I don't suppose any of those guys thought of it as that, I mean, think, they may have, but as a whole, I don't know, I can't speak for them, that's just my attitude, you know...

Ralph: Yeah, I know!

Divonna: Yeah, I mean it's not, I can't speak for them.

Ralph: Right, yeah, but we can kind of imagine what, what it was like for Ron to be in the plane dropping bombs on people, and of course that was the purpose, was to win the war.

Divonna: Well, yeah, and what they bombed, were not what we see now, on civilians so much, were all factories (even though there were people there, probably), I mean, they were all night raids.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: In fact, even then, his hat had those little bombs, on his hat.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: The black ones were the night raids, and the others were the...

Ralph: Oh, uh-huh.

Cherice: So, you said he came back with post-traumatic stress syndrome?

Divonna: Yeah, I remember the first time after we were married, he got up in the middle of the night and ran, and ran into the wall. He was having nightmares. And of course, nobody said anything about it then. It was just one of those things. Now they have a name for it. So...as you look back on it now, but it took him years to get over that. [researcher leaves the room with a coughing fit] And he, he did not like the fourth of July. He just...or any loud—even years later, no, if there was a backfire, he was just like this.

Ralph: Tense when there was firing?

Divonna: Yeah, I mean, even years later.

Ralph: That's interesting, isn't it, that it, how it affected him for such a long time.

Divonna: Yeah.

Ralph: When he, let's see, did you say he was only in for a year or two?

Divonna: Yeah, I can't remember what I said. Actually, actually, overseas, he was only there three months, anyway, but he was in at least two, maybe three, I don't know, I'd have to look on his discharge papers.

Ralph: But anyways, that's approximate time. And so he served his country, but apparently had some question about the, the killing of people.

Divonna: He never talked about it.

Ralph: Never, uh-huh.

Divonna: At least not to me.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: He may have with others, the guys or something, but not to me.

Ralph: Yeah.

Divonna: In fact, he never said very much about the war.

Ralph: It was probably hard on him.

Divonna: Yeah. Well, even my son who was in the Vietnam War, he wouldn't talk about. So...

Cherice: As you grew up yourself, you said you kind of came to Friends in your teenage years, is that right? You became part of a Friends church in about your teenage years, is that right?

Divonna: Yeah, it was...

Cherice: Okay, and did you, did you hear very much about Friends' opinions about war or conscientious objection, or anything on those lines?

Divonna: No, we never heard much anything about or even brought up about. At least, in Second Friends, it was never, to my knowledge, was never emphasized. Either that, or I was just a teenager that didn't bother to get myself tangled up with stuff like that! [laughs] I wasn't very much, a very political person! [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah, and since women weren't being drafted—

Divonna: Not like the young people nowadays.

Cherice: Well, maybe. And since women weren't being drafted, you might not have paid much attention, since your, it didn't apply to you. Did you feel like that made an impact on your choice to continue being part of the Friends church?

Divonna: No, I don't think it... No, I just, well, like I say, I'm not a very political person. There's a lot of... I just accepted, I guess I just accepted a lot of things that the kids nowadays question! [laughs]

Cherice: So it's just, because it was a teaching of the Friends church, you accepted that that was how things were?

Divonna: Just like I, now I accept our split in the church. I stay with the Quaker things. I mean I, I can't really accept the separation. [laughs] It really bothers me. [laughs]

Cherice: Yeah. So you're saying that you would go with what the tradition says because, because that's what we've—

Divonna: Yes. That's the way I was raised!

Cherice: That's what we practice and, and—

Divonna: I don't change very easily. [laughs] I'm kind of set in my ways! [laughs] At 91 [laughs], you're going to blast me out of it!

Cherice: Yeah. But you're saying that, that you kind of understood that there is a Friends peace testimony, and since that was the tradition of the church, you believed it?

Divonna: Yeah, and like I say, at least in our church, it was not emphasized, or else I was just out in left field and never paid much attention to it. It was not emphasized, that I—

Cherice: But you were aware of it at some point? And what did you...?

Divonna: Well, when there was big hullabaloo about, you know, going, either—well, what I liked about Friends church: they gave you—the guys—a choice. It was your decision whether you go into the military or you did the alternate service. And I still like that situation. It's up to you and your situation with God.

Cherice: So do you know when you became aware that that choice was offered to the men in the yearly meeting?

Divonna: Yeah, but I think it was after, really, more after the war.

Cherice: After World War II?

Divonna: Yeah, became more acquainted with it. So...

Cherice: And by that point you were in college?

Divonna: Yeah, so...anyway that's how I remember.

Cherice: Yeah.

Divonna: Whether it's accurate anymore, I don't know! [laughs]

Ralph: Well, I imagine it's pretty accurate. Thank you so much, Divonna, for coming!

Divonna: So, yeah, you should have read his essay for class!

Ralph: Yeah, I've read a little bit of it, but not very much. It's a big book! Thank you. And if I can keep it a little while...

Divonna: That's fine.

Ralph: I would like to.

Divonna: Yeah we typed—I mean, the original copy's there. I think he got an A- on it or something? Anyway, and we typed it up, and so there's a copy in there, which you can read a little bit better.

Cherice: Okay, great.

Divonna: So, yeah, interesting now whether any of my kids will even care about it. I don't know. [Laughter] Okay, well, good luck on your project!

Ralph: Thank you so much.

Cherice: Yeah.