

## Velda Marie Young Ishizaki: An Oral History

Presented on the occasion of Norman Ishizaki's retirement from  
St. Alban's Episcopal Church  
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My name is Velda Marie Ishizaki, née Young. I was born in Glendale, California. The hospital was in Glendale [but] I never actually lived there. I lived in Wilmar, California which has now been incorporated. I believe it's near El Monte. I lived on New Ave. I grew up in a household [where] I went to church every Sunday [...] Presbyterian church.

**Early years at a Mono Indian mission in North Fork, California.** When I was around five, my parents became missionaries. My father left his job with the Pacific Electric Railway Co. They thought he was completely nuts [...] to be doing this, so they kept his job open for him. He was a very smart man, very capable, and they didn't want to lose good workers. So we went to North Fork to live. My mother was the cook and my father was the caretaker of this mission for children of the Mono Indian tribe. The Mono Indian tribe is a very broken tribe, fraught with alcoholism, and so their children didn't have good homes. There was great poverty. The children lived in this mission and they went to school. I lived and went to school with them. [...] We were bussed in [...] It was a public school. [...] We'd all stand in a line to get on the bus and they'd take us to school in North Fork. [Where exactly was the school?] Now there's a brand new school. [So, it wasn't the same site?] It might have been the same site, but being five years old, I'm not quite sure. I know, we just went down the hill and it wasn't that far. You could walk. It was a walkable distance, because one day I'd become so involved in playing with my dolls that I missed the bus. My dad walked me to school, so I know it's doable for a little child. We were there at the mission for one school year.

**Ethnic heritage.** I had long braids. If I tipped my head I could sit on my braids and so I looked like an Indian. I have features that tend to look like any race I'm with. I'm a chameleon! [What's your background?] My father's family came from Ireland—a bunch of redheads [with] freckles, and my mother's background is English and Dutch. My father's background is Irish and Norwegian (Larson is the family name, from Norway).

I'm probably more Norwegian than English, I think. It's a hodge-podge. When my children ask me what my nationality is, I say: Southern California. It's a mixture of things. But not what many people think it is! [You're absolutely right.]

**Life at the mission.** [What was it like being at North Fork with the Mono Indian children?] It was a great adventure. I was on my own a great deal of the time. I don't recall too many children my age there. They seemed to be older children. And so I played outside. Children have great imagination and I remember playing around boulders. I remember a cat that had kittens and she ate her kittens—which I guess, just happens frequently, that mother cats eat their baby kittens—but it was horrible. [...] I didn't watch the mother eat the kittens but I went down to see those tiny babies (they [...] look like little rats), they were gone. [Are you sure it was the mother? There are a lot of predators around there.] That's what I was told. She was in the basement, [in a] protected area. [...]

**Hominy trauma.** I remember we had to eat all of the food off our plates. We had hominy grits and I thought they were mashed potatoes, or little chunks of bread, like communion bread. And so I asked for a lot and I got a lot, and it was just awful! So I sat there a couple of hours, long after all the dishes were done, and I still sat there. [...] This was at Indian Home. We ate in a big cafeteria at long tables. I just sat there. I was not going to eat that...and I don't eat it, to this day! [...] Grits seem to be different, but this was hominy, that was boiled, and it was white, and it was just awful.

**Siblings.** [Did you have siblings?] Yes, I had two sisters and a brother, except my brother was not born until after we left the mission. One of my sisters has died. She died ten years ago of breast cancer. [Were they at the mission with you?] Yes, they were. My sisters were close to each other. They were only eighteen months apart and then I was seven and six years younger, so I was like a different family. [...] That's why I was by myself a lot. [Looking back, do you see that as a good thing—being alone? I know you're very creative, very artistic. Do you think being alone helped you develop some of

those tendencies?] I have no idea. I just played as a child. I think children have great creativity naturally. I have no idea how it might have affected my later life.

I know, as I reflect upon the whole mission incident, I look upon it as good. I like multicultural environments. I like Los Angeles because of its multicultural environment. I like my job because I might have ten languages spoken in the classroom, in that one room, and I find that enriching [...] with all sorts of points of view. I like that very much.

**Early school years.** [When you left the mission, then what happened?] We moved to Eagle Rock and my dad got his job back, and we were just a regular family in a suburb. We lived two blocks from Occidental College. It was a nice neighborhood [with] lots of places for kids to play, and I had friends from school. I walked to school. It was just three blocks away. [Which school?] Toland Way [That was elementary. What other schools did you go to?] Then I went to Eagle Rock Junior and Senior High School. I walked through Occidental College every day to go school, because Eagle Rock Junior and Senior High School was all together. It was a 7-12 school and it was a mile to walk. It was up-hill [but] it was a very beautiful walk. I remember the jacaranda trees, the great lining along the hill that had sorority houses on it, and then in June walking down that hill with the gorgeous [trees].

**Winning a fashion design contest.** [What were your interests at school?] I love school. I was always in lots of clubs. I learned to sew when I was a very little girl. My grandmother made wedding gowns and suits and so she taught us all to sew. So, I've sewn ever since I was a little girl. [...] I look upon it as a gift, because people now don't sew. It's just in me, because I've sewn for so long and sewed so many things. I was very interested in fashion design and I won a contest in Los Angeles for designing a wardrobe. It was presented from Robinsons Dept. Store, by a company called Scooter Shoes. I won \$500 worth of clothing...which was a lot of clothing! It was an entire room of clothes. I was sixteen, and I got to go to Robinsons and pick out \$500 worth of clothes! [Every little girl's dream!] It was. And they packed it up and sent it home, and one day I came home—there were all these beautiful clothes. I'd never had so many clothes bought from

a store, because we always *made* everything. It was very exciting. [What other clubs were you involved in?] I was always involved in clubs at school...what did we do specifically? I have no idea what the focus of these clubs *really* was, just to get together and be elected to something, and meet, and plan dances. I was very involved in Junior and Senior High School.

**College.** [When you went to college, you went to UCLA. Was that your first choice?] Yes, we didn't have a lot of funds, in the family, so UCLA was very inexpensive at that time. It was on a semester system, and it was, maybe, \$60/semester to go to UCLA. That was it. [...] I knew I was going to be a teacher [You knew that early on?] Yes. I was going to be a teacher, and that's I went to do, and I did it. I got my degree and my credential. [What did you study?] It was a General Ed. major, because that's all you did for teaching credentials at that time.

**An early love of art.** If I had it to do again, of course, I'd be an Art major [...] I loved art. I remember the very first time I saw an original painting—it was by Van Gogh. I remember when the County Museum was built in Los Angeles. Los Angeles didn't have many museums when I was a little girl. They had the Southwest Museum; but the County Museum didn't exist. Of course they had the Natural History Museum. But I think that the very first time I went to the L.A. County Museum, I saw Van Gogh, and I'd always liked Van Gogh (I'd seen him in books). I saw the painting and I asked somebody: is this the one he really painted? They said yes, and I almost fainted, realizing that all the things in this museum [were] real! They are the art that *that* painter, who is *so* famous, painted. I had to go outside, sit down, and get some fresh air. [How old were you? When that epiphany happened?] I imagine I was 15 or 16.

**Artistic training.** [And that passion for art, when did it start?] I've always [had it], but I thought I couldn't draw. I wasn't born drawing, the way I knew some people in school could just draw, they always could draw, and I thought that's what you had to do. I thought you had to be *born* drawing, to be an artist. I didn't know that it's definitely not the case. The way most people are not born playing the piano. You have to take lessons

and learn and some become better at it than others. And then there are some who just sit down and can play the piano—but there aren't many like that. And there aren't very many artists who can just sit down and draw without any training.

My art emerged after I'd taught school and had Lisa. Norm was at St. Alban's, and I had Craig. He was two, and I could finally take a breath after two little children. I told Norm I needed to do something, and I really, really wanted to learn how to draw or take a photography class, either one. So I got the UCLA Extension catalog, opened it up, and looked for beginning drawing. We figured out a night that he would be home to watch the kids [so] I would take a drawing class. [...] Tuesday night [worked] because other nights he had vestry [...]. Every night he was always out. [...] I was so excited. It was a beginning drawing class and I read carefully that you didn't have to have any experience (because I was scared, frightened). I thought: I'm going to be so dumb cause I don't know how to draw. [I] signed up right away.

I got in the class and it was in the UCLA Extension Studios, in Santa Monica, on 2<sup>nd</sup> street, next to the Pussy Cat Theater—which we always laughed about. It turned out, I inadvertently signed up for one of the foremost drawing teachers in the United States. [...] Jan Stussy, professor from UCLA. It changed my life. I took drawing and painting classes for the next 10 years, primarily from Jan, but then from some [other] painting teachers, when Jan said we needed to get somebody else's point of view. Jan's teaching wasn't so much for painting. It was for drawing, but that's what you need the basics for. [...] The class just clicked, so that class stayed together for 10 years, pretty much. He taught me how to draw, and now I can draw. It's just part of my soul now. It allowed something that was inside of me...I think, with the fashion design, [it] was there. But, I didn't want to give my soul to fashion design. That's not what I wanted to do. It's not a world I wanted to become part of. But now, the fine arts world is definitely the world I'm in, and I'll stay in, the rest of my life.

**Daily art and devotions.** [When you say you're in that world, how? Are you part of a group?] It's part of the structure of my day. I retired in June from teaching and people

said: how will you “*fill your day?*” Well, I’m not interested in “filling my day,” as though time is not your ally. Time is my ally. It gives me an opportunity to learn every day and become better at drawing, and better at painting. So, it’s easy for me to say I’m going to spend two hours, or four hours today, in my studio, and I’ll do it. I know there are easy distractions: I really need to pay the bills; I really do need to trim my roses; I really do need to go to the bank...those are really terrible distractions. And then before you know it, your day is gone! So, I’ll be in my studio for four hours. I’m pretty tired at the end of four hours. *Then* I can go to the bank, [or] whatever has to be done. [You save your best energies for your art.] Well, I’m also very spiritually-oriented, so the first thing in the morning, I do my devotions—which I do every morning. I’ve done that my whole life. I’ve done it so much it’s as automatic as breathing and eating. You don’t think of getting up without having your food... [Can I ask what form your devotions take?] I like the centering prayers. I read *Forward, Day by Day*, and we have our prayer list at St. Alban’s, and I have a prayer partner, Sherry Shollenbarger. We met for 20 years! That’s a crucial part of my life. So, I have a spiritual centering, my art, and my family and friends—and that provides a very full life for me.

**Meeting Norm: “I always knew Norm.”** [You went to UCLA. Isn’t that when you met Norm? Can you describe that for me?] Meeting Norm: episode 1. I never *met* Norm. I always *knew* Norm. We were friends. I lived in a co-op at UCLA called Twin Pines, which is now the University of Religious...something or other on Hilgard, next to the Tri-Delta (Delta, Delta, Delta) House, across from the Botanical Gardens. Norm had been dating one of the girls at the co-op and that’s when I first heard of Norm. [The] two broke up. She thought it was going to be big...anyway. They no longer dated. But Norm and a friend of his, Calvin Louie, were friends with several of us in the dorm. We had a good time together. We did lots of laughing and joking around. And of course, we all went to UCLA. Norm and Calvin roomed together in some apartment on National Blvd. They had a little, funky VW bug. They would come over and when we’d hear: “Hey, Norm and Calvin are here,” a bunch of us would pile down into this big, huge living room, and just talk and laugh and have a wonderful time together. None of us went on dates with each other, in that little group. Calvin wasn’t dating Robin yet, and

Norm wasn't dating me. We all went out *en masse*, pile into one car, and go some place. We were all poor as church mice, but we still had lots of fun. And so I came to know Norm that way and never was introduced: Velda, this is Norm. We just knew each other.

One summer I went to summer school at UCLA, and Norm was around [...] He had changed majors, so he had to make up some units. He was [a year] ahead of me in school. Summer school was ending and I needed to go home, back to Eagle Rock, because the house closed down and no one could stay for that short time between the end of summer school and the start of the regular semester (it was semesters then, not quarters). And Norm said: "Do you want me to take you home?" I said: "Hey, that'd be great." He drove me home and he said: "What are you doing tomorrow?" He must have asked me out on a date, and we went on a date. That was a Saturday night. We went out dancing. Then, he said: "What are you doing tomorrow, Sunday?" [and I said:] "Well, I'm going to church; do you want to go to church with me?" And he did—and we went out ever since. [That was the clincher.] We knew each other well, and that was it. Then we were engaged the next year, the next September. So, in about a year and a half, we were married. September 7, 1963. We just had our 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Family and ethnicity.** [Did Norm's background cause any tension in your family?] The fact that he was Japanese? I think it was hard for my mother, but Norm is such a lovable person, and my dad knew that we loved each other. [...] My mother didn't speak up or say anything [but] now that I look back at it, I know she didn't approve. She grew to love him more than me, I think! Because he was such a likeable person, there was no conflict. And there was no conflict on his side. His mother died when he was eighteen. His father died shortly after we married. So I never had any in-laws to complain or worry about. But he was reared in a Caucasian atmosphere. [Was his family close to yours? His siblings?] His sister lived out here. But that's it. He had an aunt who also lived out here, who we loved dearly. She has since died. But my family and his family were always separated, and his parents died. They were always very cordial, [there was] no strife. In fact, Norm and I never encountered any bigotry in our entire marriage, that I was aware of. He was always offered jobs—more jobs than he could take, because you

can only have one job at a time! Housing was never a problem. [...] Our children never suffered ethnic slurs. I attribute that, a great deal, to the fact we live in Los Angeles. If we lived in Mississippi, who knows—or some other place—it might have happened, but not here.

**Joining St. Alban's. Becoming an Episcopalian.** [Were you a member of the Presbyterian Church when you were at UCLA?] No, I started at St. Alban's. I started when was 18. I had to have a church I could walk to because I didn't have a car, so I walked to St. Alban's. I tried it out. [Did you like it? What was it like then?] There were many more parishioners attending church, because it was the 50's, and people went to church in the 50's. So there was a college chaplain, Edward Crowther, and he was very congenial. He was a large presence [...] he was a tall man and had a tall personality, [a] big ego. And I was welcomed with open arms. So I just started going to church there, and became confirmed at St. Alban's. That's [the time that] when you were confirmed, you wore a veil! And women wore hats and gloves. [It was] a different era.

[Were you very much part of the St. Alban's social scene?] I was part of the college group, not St. Alban's. There was very much a separation with the parish of St. Alban's. I knew who Parker Jones was, but I didn't really know him. [...] John Farnsworth was there. He married one of the gals who was at college [...], Linda. [Did you go with Norm? Or did you discover it before Norm?] I discovered it before I ever knew Norm. By the time I met Norm I had become an Episcopalian. My dad had changed churches, so that's probably another reason I thought it was OK to try the Episcopal Church. [Had he also chosen the Episcopal Church?] He had chosen the Episcopal Church in Eagle Rock. But I never went to that church. [What did you like about the Episcopal Church? Or was it just the fact that it was UCLA?] I liked the service very much. Its still Christian, [so] I didn't really change any [...] belief system, except the importance of the Eucharist. And they didn't have Eucharist every Sunday. They had Morning Prayer. They only had the Eucharist once a month. So it was very much like a Presbyterian church. There was really very little change. [...] It was a little more formal. The minister was called a "priest" and they wore a priestly garb; where[as], the minister from our

church always just wore a suit, never [...] a collar. I think some of the Presbyterian ministers wear collars now. So, it was very similar to the Presbyterian Church, especially when I went in the late 50's. But I connected with UCLA—that was the connection. We met every Sunday night and had our own service in the chapel. Then, the chaplain's house was down the street, on Thayer, and we just walked down the street and had dinner together, every Sunday night. It was a wonderful thing.

**Norm's decision to become a priest.** [You were married in 1963 and then Norm decided to become a priest—when did that happen?] It was when we were engaged. [What did you think about that?] Norm always asked me lots of questions about what I believed and I thought: *oooh*, I'd better tell him the absolute truth! I felt the importance, and so whenever he would ask [...] I remember how deeply I dug inside of myself to find the answers. [...] I knew he was very interested. When we went to St. Alban's, and after we married, St. Alban's was our parish. I was teaching school, and he was a social worker. He and Parker Jones struck up a very congenial relationship. They liked each other a lot. But before that, when we were engaged, there was none of this “living together” business. You didn't do that. One time, we drove out to Malibu, he said: “there's something I have to talk to you about,” and I knew what it was. I thought: you want to go to seminary and become a priest...I just knew it. So he sat down (we were in a bar), and he said: “I have something...”—he was pretty unsure about my reaction. And I said: “Oh, I'm pretty sure I know what it is: you want to become a priest.” He was shocked that I knew! I could just tell. It was fine with me. We were both right out of school. [...] I had my degree and my credential all clear, so I knew I could get a job anywhere. So, he did. St. Alban's was his sponsoring parish, and I knew he could get into any seminary he wanted—which he did. He picked Seabury, because it was in Evanston, which was near Rockford where his stepmother lived. He felt it would be important to be near her, even though he hardly knew her. His father had since died and he never really knew his stepmother.

**Life at the seminary.** [What was seminary like?] We had great, great fun! We had good friends. I had a good time, even though the workload was crushingly exhausting. I had

endomytreosis, and the doctor said I needed to get pregnant. When you have endomytreosis, one of the ways to cure it, is to have a baby. That was that: arrived at seminary in September, and the doctor says: you need to have a baby, and I'm the one teaching school. I said "but I'm the breadwinner!" He said: "well, I told you, you are not going to be able to get pregnant in a year or two. If you don't get pregnant now, you may not get pregnant [at all]." So we decided: OK, here goes... I got pregnant immediately and I had Lisa July 11, which means I could teach the entire year. I had her, and I started school in September. [Good planning!] It couldn't have been planned any better. She was a wonderful baby. It was a blessing all the way around. I was fatigued, to the depts of fatigue...I never want to go there again.

Then, when Lisa was 11 weeks, Norm broke his knee. He was playing football with the other seminarians and he broke his knee. He said he broke his knee stepping off a curb, but I *think* it happened while he was playing football. After the game, he walked home, stepped off the curb and this excruciating pain...ended up in the hospital. He was in a cast for six months from his hip to his ankle. [So he couldn't really help.] So he was no help and we had a VW bug. I took care of a baby, I taught, did everything, because he couldn't move. And it's snowing! And there's ice. [How did you manage?] As I said, it's a part of my life: I had a wonderful job, I was teaching 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade in Glenview, I had a carpool with wonderful people, I thoroughly enjoyed the teachers I taught with, and enjoyed the teaching very much. But [...] I'm glad I did it when I was twenty something because...I was exhausted. I remember coming home, when seminary was all done [and] I just slept. Lisa would crawl into bed with me and we'd sleep together. I was *so* tired. But we *did* it and we walked out of seminary not owing anyone one dime! Which is what we wanted, because we knew that when you're a clergyman, you're not going to make very much money, and you certainly don't want to start out in debt. Which is what many of our friends did. Credit cards came out while we were in seminary—the very first credit cards. They were called "Town and Country" credit cards, and some of [the seminarians] ruined themselves.

[What sort of childcare did you have?] One of the wives at seminary had a little boy and she didn't work outside her home. She took care of her little boy and she said she would take care of Lisa. That worked out. She was a *wonderful* caregiver, Cathy Weaver! [...] So I was blessed with this wonderful baby, wonderful childcare. I had a terrific job, and I liked the people I worked with. If [there] was a blizzard and [it was] snowing outside, we'd all gather together in someone's apartment and make this terrible wine punch and play poker, and had lots of fun. We were all in the same boat; no one had any money. We were all young and starry-eyed about the future. [I have] very fond memories [of that time]. And Chicago, of course, was a wonderful town to be next to. Evanston is very beautiful, North Shore. Norm had a part-time job at St. Matthews, in Evanston, where he was offered a job [...] upon leaving seminary. But St. Alban's offered him a job too, and we were really ready to get out of the hot summers [and winters?] Mostly the summers [because] you can get warm, but you can't get cooled off from the humidity! I remember sweat just pouring off of me continually.

**Holding down the fort.** [Those were the years that feminism, the Civil Rights Movement, and all that, started. Were you involved at all? How did you feel about it?] I believe that I was so tired in doing my job that I wasn't aware of all of it. I knew it was going on. Watts Riots took place when we were in Evanston. [I] couldn't fathom it. Century City was built when we were gone. The Music Center was built while we were gone. So we came back to a different Los Angeles. I can say that [...] it was all I could do to take care of my baby and household. And I became pregnant again...! Taking care of my family and being involved in church took up all my time.

[So you've always had a career and your family. Have they always worked well together?] When we came back from seminary [...] we knew we wanted to have another child. I knew it would be too much to have two children and teach, and that we were just going to [have to] bite the bullet, not have my income, and just live on Norm's income. That was all right. I bought into it. That was fine. Then I started my art. Between my art, my deep interest in St. Alban's, and my deep interest in my family and friends, I had a very full, rich life.

**Return to teaching.** [Then you started to teach again.] Lisa started college. When your children go to college, you stand at your front door and you shovel out money by the *thousands* of dollars! And the only way that could happen was if I went back to work. So I did. And of course, it was very easy for me to get a job. I just dialed up the phone, and “oh sure, come back.” [Did you enjoy it?] Not right away, I didn’t. I was also very rusty because I had been out of teaching for 15 years. A lot had happened. Special Ed. had arrived while I was gone, while I was doing my art, and I didn’t know anything about it. So I had a lot to learn. Teaching was pretty natural for me, so I learned. I grew back into enjoying it very much again. [What did you teach?] I started doing some long-term subbing for some friends. Then I went to Fairburn and taught at Fairburn for 9 years. Then when Fairburn went to the middle school concept [...] I went with the 6<sup>th</sup> graders to Emerson and taught there [...] for 9 more years. [...] I just retired.

**Retirement into art.** We decided that I didn’t need to work any more and that my soul was very hungry for art. [...] I was never able to teach and paint at the level I wanted to paint, together. I have a tendency to pour my guts out into anything I do. And so, teaching took my energy. I decided that was wrong, that I needed to be in my studio, that that needed all my energy. So that’s where I am. [Is that exciting?] It’s thrilling. Every day I wake up and say: I get to go in and work on that arm and hand that I didn’t get right yesterday and I’m going to work on today. [What’s the subject of your work?] It’s people. I’m very interested in the human body. [...] That’s my focus. So, of course, since I’m around myself all the time, I end up drawing myself over and over again. But anyone who walks inside my house is subject to be drawn. My grandchildren know that sometime during their visit, grandma is going to draw them. And now they vie for who’s first. [Isn’t that like trying to hit a moving target?] Well, that’s what you learn to do. You start learning to draw faster. I focus on a gesture, like your gesture right now is very beautiful, the way your body’s sloped. There’s a straight, firm couch and you’ve got your arm up and your head down. I like that, I’m intrigued by gestures. You could do it in a minute, and show them that you’re going to do that in one minute. I don’t ever pick

up my pencil: I go, go, go. And you end up and you say: that person's leaning against something. You don't know it's a couch because I never had time to put a couch in [...]

[But you've also done textile art.] I just did that wall hanging right there. I don't have the stick to hang it up. [But you've also done vestments for Norm.] Well, yes that's my sewing. [...] I combined the two and dyed the silk to make the stole. I knew I could make the stole without any pattern. Because I knew how to sew, I could do that instinctively. That was great fun. [...] I dye silk with a friend. It's quite different from painting because dyes are chemically different than paints.

**Children's guild at St. Alban's.** [Let's go back to the time when you returned, and you were a mother with small children, you were teaching, and you were at St. Alban's. What was St. Alban's like then and how were you involved?] I was deeply involved and very excited about Norm being at St. Alban's. I'd asked Parker Jones if I could start a new guild called the Children's Guild, because there wasn't anything for young women my age. So he said yes. And the Children's Guild existed for quite a few years, and we did lots of things until we all...went back to work, and that's when I went back to teaching and all of us, one by one, either moved away or went back to work. So there was nobody left to do the daytime guild. That is a thing of the past in the church. [There were daytime guilds?] They were daytime guilds because we would meet and whatever project we wanted to do, it always had to involve having our children running around us. [...] We raised money by making Christmas ornaments. I still have some of those Christmas ornaments the Children's Guild made. We'd blow eggs out of eggshells. We did fabulous ornaments, and we'd sell them at a Christmas bazaar that we'd have every year. And we'd have parties—progressive dinners. We'd hire a double-decker bus. [Oh, so that's where that idea came from...] Yes, it started there at Children's Guild. I was involved with having people over. Norm was assistant for six years before he was rector, and during those six years, Parker was very ill, obviously. For the last two of the six years they were searching for a rector. It took two years to search for a rector. The year before that, Parker had had his heart attack and he was very ill. It was a very disconcerting time. [...] I had small children. I did as much as I could. Of course, I went

to church all the time and whatever classes were there, I would take. [...] [Were you involved in other groups at St. Alban's?] It was mainly Children's Guild and any Bible studies that came up, or a prayer group.

**Not just the “clergyman’s wife.”** [How did you see yourself as fitting into Norm’s career? Did you see yourself that way (he “First Lady” syndrome)? How did you deal with that?] I knew I was a Christian and that I was Norm’s wife. I was definitely there to be a helpmate, that if he wanted me to do something for St. Alban’s, I would. For a while, I’d invite everyone from the parish over to our house. So whatever I wanted to do as a Christian, I did. That was my guiding light. I never did it as “Norm’s wife.” I did it as Velda—which was good for *me*. Church was important for *me*, not just because I was his wife. I never view myself as you said, the First Lady. I never thought of myself that way.

[Did other people see you that way and have certain expectations?] People at school, when they would find out what Norm did, were always surprised because they said I didn’t act like a clergyman’s wife. [Which meant?] I considered [this] a compliment. I think they meant it as a compliment, because they said: you’re like one of us; you act like one of us. [...] I wasn’t any more special or different than anybody else. [Were there expectations at St. Alban’s that you weren’t comfortable with?] No, no. St. Alban’s, as a community—I think the Episcopal church, as a whole, allows the rector’s wife to be a person. In many denominations that is *not* the case. I know in the Presbyterian Church, the clergyman’s wife stood next to the minister on Sunday morning and shook hands with everybody. Norm said that [wasn’t] my job. Oh, I ran Vacation Bible School for five years—started it. That’s when we had it at Steven Wise. We had 35 people. [...] And that took a lot of work. [How long was it?] A week.

**Change at St. Alban’s.** [I was wondering about the evolution of St. Alban’s as a church. You’ve been there a long time, 35 years. How has it changed for the good and for the worse?] I think there’s a broader ethnic involvement and I like that very much. It was much more homogenous ethnically, when I first went to St. Alban’s. The area of

Westwood has changed dramatically since I was 18, and I think St. Alban's reflects that. [...] [In what way?] There's [...] a wider variety of ethnicity, instead of the WASP that was always here before. There was always a large Jewish population in Westwood. That's still present, of course. I think St. Alban's is very spiritually-oriented and I think that reflects Norm's spirituality. Parker Jones took very much a political stance with Proposition 13 [...] It had to do with fair housing. He was a very brave man and stood up for minorities. A lot of people left St. Alban's because of that, and that was very hard on him. But he was true to himself, to his soul, which I'm very proud of him for doing.

For bad things? [Things that you thought were strengths and others which were weaknesses...] I think our outreach could be stronger, but it's difficult when you have a congregation that comes from so many different places. Our lives have changed so much from when I was an 18-year old and we were first at St. Alban's. Children's activities didn't take place on Sundays, the way they do now. There were no soccer leagues that met on Sunday, because people went to church. Then, as more and more people didn't go to church on Sunday, more activities outside of church now took place on Sunday. And children's lives weren't planned out the way they are right now. There were no such things as "play-dates." If there was no one around to play [with], you made up your own games and played. You didn't belong to soccer league, dance class, or art class. You weren't driven all over creation to go to different classes every day of the week. You didn't even have homework. There was no homework when I taught elementary school. Here we have a society where kids (where parents and kids) structure themselves to a frazzled state, so that going to church is no longer of primary importance. It's no longer the place where you gather as a community and meet one another. You've already met on the soccer field or you've met in a dance class. So, society has gone through an enormous change and it reflects on a Sunday morning. [...] Church is no longer a primary activity on Sunday morning. They're all exhausted. Now there's television, where you can have thousands of channels. You can watch the football game, or sports, early on Sunday morning, and maybe that [too is] why they don't go to church. [...] So you don't have the numbers in church. I don't know if that's why there are fewer out-reach activities. [...] It's very difficult for me to analyze as Norm's wife, because I have my

own perspective, and then, I see through Norm's eyes. I understand things differently. [...]

**Norm's contributions to St. Alban's.** [What do you feel have been Norm's strongest contributions to St. Alban's] His pastoral skills. The marital counseling, the family counseling, that he's done, [have] probably touched everybody who goes to St. Alban's, without exception. [...] He's a gifted counselor. And he's spiritually sound, solid. I think his sermons reflect that. He has a deep spiritual outlook, which I believe is very important. He's not a political animal at all. It doesn't interest him. And I like that he plays to his strengths. [...]

**Velda's role in Norm's life.** [I know Norm often talks about how important you are to him. What do you feel have been your contributions to him?] Well, he knows I'm a Christian. That's not always the case for a clergyman's wife. Sometimes a person comes into the priesthood after running a business or something. This is a new way of life and the spouses often don't even attend church. Norm and I often discuss the content of his sermons. It's a lot of fun just to sit and talk and share our personal theologies with one another. I treasure the talks we have privately with one another. I hear it get reflected in sermons. That's fun. He knows that I support him in the hours that he's put in the church. I don't support him in the fact that he doesn't take a day off. I've never liked that. But that's what he does and it's his deep, deep calling to be a priest. I understand that. There's a deep understanding that I have of his job, so it's not created friction between the two of us. [...] And monetarily, I support him. I believe in tithing, and so we do tithe, and that's a source of strength between the two of us. We understand the importance of that. Wherever we go to church we tithe, and we always did, even when we had two cents. It's not a very big pledge, but it's a tithe! [...] I believe in putting your money where your mouth is—kind of a crude phrase, but I believe there's a great deal of truth to that. And then I belong to St. Alban's as a parishioner. So, in those ways I've supported him. I agree with his being a priest and that's his call, his life's job. I absolutely believe that. He's a priest whether he has his collar on or not. Not to say that

when he's home he's a priest to me, but it's the way I'm an artist in my soul, he is a priest.

**Looking forward.** I'm looking forward to his systematizing George's sermons. I think that's going to be very exciting for him. [Is it going to be hard?] Oh sure [for him to not be connected to the church?] No, I don't think so because he has been fulfilled and it's time to move on. You get tired. He doesn't take a day off. He works seven days a week. That's exhausting and he's ready. At this age the body says: slow down and rest from your labors. [...] He's given it his best shot and I think he feels it's time for him to rest and not [run] at such a ferocious pace. All [the] counseling that he does takes something out of him. It's not something where he leaves a counseling session scott-free: "Oh, that didn't involve me." It *did* involve me. That's why he's so good at it! [...]

[Will Norm's retirement cause a problem at home?] Oh, logistically, it will. I'm used to being alone all the time. We've worked through so much together [though] that we will work through this [too]. I imagine in the beginning there will be adjustments [...] I don't want to diminish the fact that he changed the schedule. It's a big change. When June occurs and you stop teaching every summer, there [are] a few days when you say: where am I? And you redefine yourself. I acknowledge that will take place, but [...] I'm not worried about it. I've had a little head start in redefining myself [but] we're both good at communicating with one another. If I say: "I need to have a little space," I can say that. "I need quiet time..." I already have my quiet time in the morning. That won't stop. He will still have lunches with people. Then it'll be fun. He can be at home and have a nap or write. And he loves computers. So, I think that will facilitate his writing. [...] There will be a period of adjustment but it's not anything we're afraid of *at all*.

[...] People ask: What are you going to do with your retirement with Norm? I want to make it into something that's not *busy*. I don't go to lunch. [You don't "do lunch"?] I don't "do lunch." I don't shop. I'm not interested in volunteering, to *keep busy*. [Are there any organizations or issues that you feel strongly about?] Right now, I am so busy. My plate is over-flowing. Between church and being a math coach at Emerson (I'm

there 10 hrs/week). [...] I work just for teachers. I don't teach classes. [And your teaching has been a mission, I'm sure...] Oh, I know. I take everything so seriously, everything full force. I don't know how to do a half-baked job.

**Hard times at St. Alban's.** [Were there hard times at St. Alban's—crises?] Oh sure, there were crises. We had an embezzlement, [...] one of the treasurers, Charles Christian. [...] Norm went to Betty Ford for alcoholism. [When was that?] Jim Morandi was here [...] it was around November of '82. The vestry had an intervention. [...] He was in Betty Ford for a month. And his resolve to grow from that was remarkable. [...] You don't cure alcoholism. You learn to manage your life without it. I think it increased his empathy towards all sorts of addictions. So he became a super-duper counselor because he'd gone through so much himself! And he's never had a drink since then. There are few people who can say that. Alcoholism is one of those addictions where you go in and out of it, as a rule. But he hasn't. I'm very, very proud of him. Twenty years, this November. [...] St. Alban's was wonderful with him. They were very loving towards Norm. I think the community at St. Alban's is a loving community. Norm was a recipient of that love, as were the children and I, recipients of that love. And so when he came back, he went back to work without skipping a beat, so to speak. He just went back, acknowledged his addiction [and] didn't have to go to lots of meetings. He just had a resolve and he stuck to it. Incredible resolve.

There are events in churches: [...] parishioners may not like the way some things are going, or [...] there may be power struggles—which is very common in parishes, because people can get in control, when they can't control anything else in their lives. So, I'd say St. Alban's is pretty typical, [maybe] even having fewer real power struggles than most churches. There are churches that are torn asunder from day to day power struggles. Some parishioners come and go, but then other parishioners are there for life! [...] You have to learn to deal with all sorts of conditions of people, and I think one of Norm's fine qualities is dealing with those people. There are always people who don't like what the rector's doing, or don't like the rector [and] try to change things. That's part of a parish [...] going through those ups and downs. [Has Norm had many detractors?] He did in

the very beginning. [Over what, typically?] It's not an *issue*, it's *who* gets to say we're going to do this. It's an intangible. [The pecking order...] Yes, if there was a pecking order, then he's going to replace that pecking order with some other people, and those people don't like to be replaced. It's just the life of the church, the running of a church, what you stand for, where you stick your neck out, where you don't stick your neck out.

**Community outreach.** NYA (Neighborhood Youth Association) got its start at St. Alban's. It met in some of the Sunday school rooms. PATH (People Assisting The Homeless) started offices at St. Alban's. [But] oddly enough, even though they get their start there, St. Alban's hasn't continued the strong support. I don't know why. [...] It's very complex. Steven Wise Temple started at St. Alban's when Parker Jones was alive. [Has Norm actively sought relationships like that?] Yes, he liked giving people those opportunities to have a place to start. He thought that was important. Now Norm, as I said, isn't a political animal, so he didn't pursue prominent places on their boards, even though he was on [their] boards. He couldn't attend the board meetings because he's always with his parishioners. His parishioners came first [and they] still do, to this very day. [Do you regret that?] Oh no, because he's true to himself. That's what you have to be. In the very end, in order to be the blessing that God wants us to be, you have to be true to yourself, instead of [being] what somebody else thinks you ought to be. Do what you know is in your heart and in your soul. And he clearly is not a political person: not in the diocese, and not in the Westside community. [Has that worked against him at St. Alban's?] No, I wouldn't say *against*. It just didn't provide the outreach level that we might have had. But you can't have it all. You can have the outreach and then you don't have the personal connections. There's just not enough time to do it all.

**Mentors and supporters: Monty Starky, George Barrett.** [Who have been some of the major supporters in the parish—friends?] [...] Monty Starky was Norm's mentor, his first mentor, before he ever met George Barrett. Monty Starky had been with the company BBDO, and Monty had a lung condition, the opposite of emphysema. It was difficult for him to breathe, so he had to retire from BBDO. He had a lovely wife, Margaret. And, upon Monty's retirement, he became very involved with St. Alban's and

became senior warden. He loved Norm. Norm loved him. He was a very brilliant man, in the field of advertisement, and as a human being. So he was Norm's guide for [...] about 10 years, but it wouldn't be much more than that, because Monty and Margaret both died. He died of this lung disease and Margaret died six months later, of a heart tumor. It was a great loss, losing those two.

Then, of course, there's George, who came to St. Alban's. George had been restricted as a bishop, from Rochester, N.Y., and was living in St. Barbara and working with Planned Parenthood—very active. Norm knew of him [but] I'm not sure how he heard of him. We were going on a sabbatical in '79. [Was that the only other sabbatical?] Yes, the only one he's taken. He needed someone to take over to help Jim Morandi who was his new assistant at that time, and he asked if George could do this. George agreed. George would stay in this house when he would come down to preach. I think he came down every weekend, he and his wife, Bettina. That was George's return to active ministry. [...] This started in '79 [and ended] just recently. [He was restricted for what reason?] He divorced his wife and married another woman. [That was the reason?] There was definitely divorce in the Episcopal Church, but it was all the circumstances surrounding it [...that were controversial?] Yes. So, here's this brilliant mind laying fallow and Norm got him back into active ministry. Of course, he refers to George often, in conversation: "well, George would say this," "George thought this." Norm found someone who was a great sounding-board, to reflect ideas of all sorts. I know one of the phrases Norm and George talked about was that "justice was the public form of love." It was that type of conversation that he and George would have, that [was] extraordinarily nourishing to Norm.

**Retirement projects: George Barrett sermons.** [So Norm is going to work on George's sermons?] Yes, he wants to systematize them. It's called "systematic theology." It's what a person thinks and [it] takes [analyzing] the sermons to show: this is George's theology. It should be quite an enriching experience for Norm. Norm is a very good writer. I look forward to him doing that. I think he will enjoy it. He won't just write [though] because Norm's a people person. And writing is a lonely job.

Painting is a lonely job. So you mix it up, [so] you have activities where you're not by yourself. [What other projects does he have planned?] Rest. He's tired. We think it's our job to take care of our bodies, and fatigue wears your body out—clear and simple. So he's very good about exercising. [What do you do about exercise?] We have an exercise-cycle, and he exercises 30-45 minutes, at least 3 times a week. [It's] very good for him. He's very careful about his diet. He's a diabetic, so I make nice things for him without sugar. You can do things with concentrated fruit juices [that are] very tasty. [Are you a good cook?] No. I mean, I don't think I'm a good cook. My children and husband think I'm a good cook. I guess that's where it counts.

**Grandparenthood.** [How has grandparenthood come upon both of you?] It's exquisite. It's even better than people say. There's nothing quite like [having] these little creatures hugging you and saying all these wonderful [...] things to you. [...] We always say: out of the mouths of babes. And my grandchildren know I'm drawing them all the time. I carry my sketchbook with me all the time. I have a two-year old granddaughter [and] she wants her hand drawn, or her nose, or a part of her [drawn]. She'll sit for a few seconds. I thoroughly love it. My grandson was posing for me. I'm painting an oil painting and as he's posing for me, he says: "posing is hard." And I say: "yes, posing is hard work." He says: "I think I'd rather pose for a photographer!" [Very clever!] But then, while one was posing, the other one was quite envious [that] this one was posing for my picture. So, when I'm done with this picture, I will start one with the other grandchild. [...] This business of posing: if one poses, I must have the other one pose. Of course, I love it.

**Children's church life.** [Have your children been active in church?] Yes, they went to church with us all the time. They never knew what a PK was (that's a "Preacher's Kid"). They didn't even know what the term was until they were quite old. And someone said: you don't act like PKs, and they said: "what are PKs"? Which was right, and that's because they weren't treated any differently than anybody else. I liked that very much, and they liked that too. They're very spiritual children. They know that I've said my prayers in the morning for years and years. They know of Norm's spirituality, and so they

are naturally, very spiritual children. Church means a great deal to them. [Do they go to church on Sundays?] My son works on Sundays. He works for Southwest airlines. He's a baggage handler. He loves it a lot. In fact, he was just talking to Norm the other day. Since Thursdays are mid-week services, he said: I think I'll go to Thursday services. That [decision] was all [...] his own. And Lisa attends church with her husband and family [...], American Martyrs Roman Catholic Church, in Manhattan Beach. Monseigneur at American Martyrs had Norm be part of the service when the last baby was baptized. So it's a happy relationship.

**St. Alban's future.** [What would you see as St. Alban's future? What do you think would be good for St. Alban's?] I think new blood would be good, new leadership, a fresh start. Norm's been there 35 years and there's a lot of baggage attached to that. As well as the baggage being a rich history, there's other baggage. I believe a fresh start will be nourishing for St. Alban's. That newness is going to bring in new people. It will bring in people who left because of Norm. Maybe they'll return. [...] It's a lifecycle and I think new starts are exciting. [...] [Any specific directions?] [...] I think the parishioners have to be true to themselves. If you're an activist, you do something that's activist. If you're spiritually-based, and you want to have programs that go in that direction, you do that. Do something, whatever it is, but be true to yourself. Be the blessing that God wants you to be. I don't think one is better than the other. I think all are part of life. But it's important to become involved and committed. For whatever purpose, for whatever direction people want to go... New leadership is very exciting. There's both sides. [...] There'll be the difficult times, but then there'll be the exhilarating times—like in a marriage. When you're newly married, it's all very exciting [...] Then there's the issue of two people learning to work out a life together. It has its ups and downs and St. Alban's will go in an exquisite direction because I believe there are wonderful people at St. Alban's. St. Alban's is a very *talented* parish. Many parishioners are highly skilled, [...] in a broad area. They're highly educated. I think St. Alban's parishioners have a great deal to offer [but] I think their lives are probably too busy. It might be nice to slow down too. [...]

**Norm's legacy.** [What do you think will be, or should be, Norm's legacy?] That he was Christian. [That] he loved his fellow man. He was a priest who was there for his parishioners *all* the time, through thick and thin, always. I think his preaching has grown. It's been fun to watch that develop. I think his preaching has become very spiritual. He's able to express that spirituality in a context that makes sense to the parishioners. He knows the audience, he knows who he's talking to. He can reach them through his sermons, which have become excellent. And it took a long time for that develop, but it's become something of great beauty. And, of course, his being a pastor. That's his greatest shining point: [...] he is a pastor to each and every person there, and has been—[to] every single person that goes to St. Alban's, he's been a pastor. Everyone has a crisis in their life. [...] It's what life is made up of (part of it). [...] And he doesn't play favorites. He's there for everybody.

[How would you like for Norm to be remembered?] As a wonderful pastor—and [as] a Christian. There are some priests who are *not* Christian—I don't know if you know that. [...] They fall away spirituality. [But they stay in their jobs...] Yes, [it's simply] their job. Think about professors that you know who are no more professors than the man in the moon, but that's their job, and they stay there and make everybody miserable. It happens in every walk of life, whether you're a doctor or a lawyer [...] But that hasn't happened to Norm. He tended his flock. He was a good shepherd.

Interviewed by Luisa Del Giudice, September 9, 2002  
Director, Italian Oral History Institute  
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