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Dick and Carol Cronk interview for a Wright State University History Course

Janell A. Tebbe

Dick Cronk

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Profile

Narrator Name: Dick and Carol Cronk

Interviewee: Janell A. Tebbe

Author: Janell A. Tebbe

Date of Interview: February 21, 2011

Subject: Restoring and Strengthening Marriage in the Miami Valley: An Interview with Dick and Carol Cronk

Key Words:

Hammond, IN

Aerospace Engineering

Marriage Mentoring Ministry

Communication Skills

Issues

Drinking

Divorce

Struggles

Friends

Couples

Marriage Encounter Weekend

Transformed

Christian Life Center

Strong-Willed Child

Disappointments

Hard-Work

Throw-Away Society

Dr. Gary Smalley

Dr. Gary Chapman

The Five Love Languages

Smart Marriages Conference

Divorce Lawyer

Training Programs

Federal Grant

Marriage Works Ohio

For: Oral History Interview Project, HST 485-01, Professor Marjorie McLellan, Winter 2011.

Dick and Carol Cronk

Dick and Carol Cronk were both born in Hammond, Indiana. Dick was born on October 1, 1947 and Carol was born on December 28, 1950. Dick is retired Aerospace Engineer from Wright Patterson Air Force Base. Carol is a preschool Teacher at Creative Learning Center and the Sunday, Nursery and 2's Coordinator at Christian Life Center in Dayton, Ohio. They have been married for almost forty years and have one daughter, Jennifer who lives in North Carolina with her husband. Carol is a licensed American Sign Language Interpreter. She was a stay-at-home mom in her earlier years. Dick and Carol are volunteers at their church, Christian Life Center and are the directors of the Marriage Ministry there. Dick also volunteers at the Air Force Museum giving tours to families that

come to visit.

The interview was conducted at the Cronk's home, in their dining room at 6400 Rosecrest Dr. Dayton, OH 45414.

Dick and Carol have been working with marriages in the Miami Valley for fourteen years. Some of their own personal experiences has prepared them to help couples who are struggling in their marriages. Dick and Carol have served on volunteer committees and have worked closely with large organizations to provide quality mentoring to couples in the Miami valley and surrounding areas. Their work has helped restore numerous marriages that were on the brink of divorce.

Dick and Carol have lived in the Dayton and Indiana areas for most of their lives, and were aware of a need for marriage ministry in their church. Christian Life Center is a church with a congregation of near 2,000 people. They desire to see families stay together, and the divorce rates to decrease in America.

Dick and Carol's involvement in the community has led to other churches creating their own marriage ministries. They continue to provide support to others who are facing divorce or separation. Their own marriage is a testimony of the work that they do for other couples. Had it not been for their friends encouragement, when they were struggling they may not be together today to help other couples through those challenging times, life brings.

I was initially interested in interviewing Dick and Carol Cronk because my husband and I went through the pre-marriage mentoring from Christian Life Center, and greatly benefitted from the tools we learned about through the mentoring process. I felt that the work they are doing is invaluable and is making an impact on the people they work with. I wanted to document their story so that they could recognize the difference that they are making. I have known Dick and Carol for many years, and felt it was an honor to interview them, and acknowledge along with them, the value of their work in the Miami Valley.

Oral History Interview

Name of the Project: Restoring and Strengthening Marriage in the Miami Valley: An Interview with Dick and Carol Cronk

Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University

Archives or repository

Interviewee/narrator name: Dick and Carol Cronk

Interviewer name: Janell A. Tebbe

Others present

Place: 6400 Rosecrest Dr. Dayton, OH 45414

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Length of recording: 0:55:35

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Indexed By: Janell A. Tebbe

Index

0:00:00-0:01:25 Introduction to the recording, Dick's Childhood Overview

Information listed above. Dick discusses where he was born and the type of family he grew up in. He relates his parent's lifestyle to that of Archie and Edith Bunker from the show, "All in the Family." He discusses that he graduated high school in 1965 and went to Engineering College and majored in Aerospace Engineering. He worked as an Aerospace Engineer and pilot, and married his wife Carol.

Keywords:

Hammond, IN
Blue Collar
Engineering College
Aerospace Engineering
Private Pilot
Carol

0:01:25-0:02:05 Carol's Background

Carol discusses that she grew up in Hammond, IN. Her father worked for American Oil for thirty-five years, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. Carol discussed that she is the youngest of nine children, married Dick in 1971 and was a stay-at-home mom, and they had one child.

Keywords:

Hammond, IN
American Oil
Stay-at-home Mom
Nine Kids
Youngest
1971

0:02:05-0:04:03 Preparation for Community Work- Dick

Dick discusses that his background in engineering has helped him in the work he and Carol does with Marriage Ministry. He discusses his desire to see how things work and that the problems they faced in their early marriage

helps them. He discusses things he has learned doing this work, and his desire to have had those resources when they were struggling in their own marriage.

Keywords:

Engineering
Marriage Mentoring Ministry
Problems
Practical Advice
Tools
Communication Skills
Personalities and Temperaments

0:04:03-0:05:15 Challenges and Preparation

Carol discusses the challenges her and Dick faced in their own marriage at the fourteen year mark. She mentions there was some issues with drinking. She discusses how that point in their own marriage helped them to grow in their relationship. She tells how those struggles help them in their work with other struggling couples.

Keywords:

Issues
Drinking
Divorce
Struggles
Friends
Couples

0:05:15-0:06:18 First Involvement in Marriage Ministry

Dick discusses their first introduction to Marriage Ministry back in 1993. He tells about a communication technique they learned about at a Marriage Encounter Weekend. He feels that technique transformed their marriage, and led to them becoming a presenter couple at the Marriage Encounter, then eventually starting Marriage Ministry at Christian Life Center.

Keywords:

Marriage Encounter Weekend
Communication
Transformed
Marriage Ministry
Christian Life Center

0:06:18-0:08:03 Expanding on Life Experiences

Carol discusses her struggles with their daughter, and being a young parent. She discusses that it was a very trying time in her life, and some mistakes they made. She feels like they learned from their failures and realized children affect your marriage and with children you must make time for your spouse.

Dick discusses his struggle with their child and the disagreements he and Carol had over disciplining their daughter. He feels that experience helps them today with couples going through similar struggles with children.

Keywords:

Child
Strong-Willed
Discipline
Issues

0:08:03-0:09:33 Obstacles and Frustrations in Work

Dick discusses his disappointment when a couple is struggling in the church and does not seek out any help, and go ahead and separate or divorce without trying to work on their relationship. He feels that they can help couples through the issues in their marriage and he gets frustrated when reading the divorce columns in the newspaper and recognizes people's names and they never sought out any help.

Carol discusses that she also feels frustrated when a couple is not willing to stick with the mentoring program and put in the hard work needed to grow their marriage.

Keywords:

Disappointments

Effort
Frustration
Divorce Column
Willing
Hard-Work

0:09:33-0:10:33 Expanding on Disappointments

Dick discusses his second highest frustration in the work that he and Carol do. He gets frustrated with our “throw-away society” that tells people they “deserve better than this” and are willing to throw away five or ten year marriages. He discusses the impact that encouraging friends can have on a couple, and credits friends of he and Carol’s to helping encourage them to work through their relationship.

Keywords:

Throw-Away Society
Encouraged

0:10:33-0:11:18 Obstacles

Dick discusses the obstacle when working with couples, where one spouse wants to work on their relationship and the other does not. He feels that is a tough situation and it is hard to talk with the couple and they just walk away leaving their other spouse in tears.

Keywords:

Obstacles

0:11:18-0:13:26 Interesting Involvement in Programs

Carol discusses their work with Smart Marriages, a conference held each year where marriage counselors, therapists and social workers are some of the speakers present. Dick and Carol have volunteered at this event twelve times. She discusses some of the well-known authors and Pastors who work with marriages across the country. She discusses the resources she and Dick have gotten at this conference and been able to bring back and use in their own ministry in the Dayton area.

Dick discusses the fact that the Smart Marriages conference typically is scheduled near their own wedding anniversary and it is like a mini-vacation for the two of them, celebrating their anniversary.

Keywords:

Smart Marriages Conference
Volunteer Staff
Dr. Gary Chapman
Dr. Gary Smalley
Diane Sollee
Programs
Anniversary

0:13:26-0:15:12 Implementation in Work

Dick discusses resources they have acquired from conferences, tolls they have learned from Marriage Encounter, Weekend to Remember, and their involvement with the Step Family Association. They compiled various resources and presented the idea of started a marriage ministry in their local church to the Church Board. He discusses their growth over time, and they now have twenty-five other couples doing mentoring with couples.

Keywords:

Marriage Encounter
Weekend to Remember
Smart Marriages Conference
Church Board

0:15:12-0:16:58 Motivations over Time

Dick discusses the passion he has for working with couples and the struggles he had when he and his wife were struggling in their marriage. He tells that Carol returned home to her mother’s and had an initial consultation with a divorce lawyer. He begins to get very emotional just thinking about how close they came to losing their marriage. He discusses how passionate he has been about marriages since the time of their own personal struggles.

Carol discusses that there are other people working along with them in the marriage ministry.

Keywords:

Passionate
Divorce Lawyer
Precious
Mentor
Friends

0:16:58-0:21:07 Mentoring Training Process

Dick discusses the process to becoming a mentor couple. He explains that they have a eleven-hour training over a weekend. He tells that the couples interested in mentoring go through the entire mentoring process during the training. They cover assessments and training techniques, each couple takes the Marriage Satisfaction Inventory, Florence Litauer's "Personality Plus" the male-female differences, verbal dialogue techniques, including the "wooden Spoon." They also cover Dr. Gary Chapman's "Five Love Languages" the Five Languages of Apology, and with engaged couples, they work on a Financial Growth Plan. Couples are qualified to be marriage mentors in the church after going through this training and can decide whether it is something they are interested in doing.

Keywords:

Healthy Marriages
Training Program
Assessments
Training Techniques
Marriage Satisfaction Inventory
Personality Plus
Male, Female Differences
Verbal Dialogue Techniques
Wooden Spoon
Five Love Languages
Five Languages of Apology
Financial Growth Plan
Crown Financial Ministries

0:21:07-0:25:00 Other Involvements in the Community

Carol discusses her and Dick's involvement with the Vandalia Community Expo, and getting their information out into the community. They wanted to allow people outside of the church to know about the work they do with marriages in the Miami Valley. She mentions that the mentoring is free of charge, and is a ministry of Christian Life Center.

Dick discusses Marriage Works Ohio, which he and Carol have both worked in coordination with over the years. Marriage Works is a federally funded program that also assists couples in the Miami Valley, to better their marriage relationships. He discusses the fact that their grant funding runs out this coming year, and they are working to become self-sufficient, which has caused them to have to charge for some of their services to the community. He also discussed that they have attended the Ohio Christian education Association Conference and presented their. They have travelled to other churches throughout the state of Ohio to help establish marriage ministries in other churches. They also attended the Bridal Expo in Dayton.

Keywords:

Vandalia Community Expo
Christian Life Center
Mentoring
Marriage Works Ohio
Federal Grant
President Bush
Faith Based Initiative
Ohio Christian Education Association Conference
Other Churches
Bridal Expo
Dayton

Oral History Interview

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Name of the project director: Marjorie McLellan, Department of Urban Affairs and Geography, Wright State University

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Notes: The interview was conducted at the home of Dick and Carol Cronk in Dayton, Ohio.

Transcribed by

Janell A. Tebbe

Interview transcript

Tebbe: This is Janell Tebbe it is February 21, 2011 and it is 7:55pm. I am with Dick and Carol Cronk at their home and we are going to be talking about their work with the Marriage ministry in the Dayton area.

Dick, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood, your family and some of your experiences growing up?

Dick Cronk: I was born in Hammond, Indiana which is just outside the Chicago area, in Northwest Indiana. My family was a blue collar type family, my dad worked in an oil refinery all the years I was growing up. Uh, sort of like Archie and Edith Bunker, I tell people that Norman Leer must of met my mom and dad to come up with the characters of Archie and Edith because they looked and acted just that same way all the time. I graduated from High School in 1965 and went on to Engineering College and got a degree in Aerospace Engineering because I got caught up in the space race, wanted to become and Astronaut and never did achieve that goal. But I did become an Aerospace Engineer and a private pilot. Then I fell in love and married Carol.

Tebbe: Carol, can you tell me some about your childhood and your family, and experiences growing up?

Carol Cronk: Sure, I also grew up in Hammond, Indiana and we met later when Dick was in his, I think you had already graduated from College. And my family was kind of similar to his, my dad worked for American Oil for probably thirty-five years. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, she had nine kids and I was the youngest, so a little bit spoiled. Uh, at least my Husband tells me that. (Laughter) And, um, we got married in 1971, and uh, I just wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. So I did that for a couple years and then we had the birth of our first child.

Tebbe: Tell me Dick, a little about the background and what prepared you some for the work you guys do now with married couples.

Dick Cronk: I think some of it was my Engineering skills and work, I was a Systems Engineer and it was fun for me to look at how all the little pieces work together in the big picture. And that helped us structure our marriage mentoring ministry that we're doing. And you know, some of the problems we had in our early marriage really prepared us. After our daughter was born, marriage satisfaction went down the tubes and we, uh, just digressed from there. Finally, after about fourteen years we were able to figure out, hey we need to do something to work on this. I don't think I was ever out of love with Carol, but we just didn't have the tools to be able to make it happen, make this marriage thing work. Being an Engineer I like practical advice and practical tools, and learning those communication skills, learning those techniques, conflict resolution, learning about personalities and temperaments, all that together over time, helped us, or helped me to be prepared for all of this that we do. Our mentoring is basically, hey things I wish I had known forty years ago when we got married.

Tebbe: Carol, what do you think, what is your side of the story on the challenges or the things that prepared you guys for what you do now?

Carol Cronk: I think at about the fourteen year mark in marriage I left and went to see my mom for a couple weeks because we were really struggling with some issues and there was some drinking involved and I just felt like I needed a break. And, uh, we do encounter people here and there that we help that have had drinking in their past and it seems like we are aware of their needs. And, mostly I would say what has helped is having gotten so close to the point of divorce, and not divorcing and realizing that marriages can have struggles that are so simple and yet they let them become so big, that they feel like there is no hope and they don't know what to do. And many times they feel that they can't do anything but leave and separate. And we, we realize that's not we wanted to do, and some friends gave us some help and then from there, as later, marriage ministries came into our life, that helped us to know we can give some of the things that our friends gave to us, back to other couples.

Tebbe: So how would you say, you first got involved in the community work that you do with Marriage Ministry?

Dick Cronk: Back in 1993 we went to a Marriage Encounter Weekend, and we learned this communication technique, called dialogue where we write our answers on a sheet of paper and then exchange them. And for me, that sort of leveled the playing field. Carol prior to that time, would flood me with words and I just, felt like I couldn't compete and I would get derailed, but being able to write my thoughts on paper helped us, and totally transformed our marriage. At least I told people that and we eventually, it impacted us so much that we eventually became a presenter couple for Marriage Encounter and presented about ten or twelve weekends. And then that led eventually, to getting into the Marriage Ministry there at Christian Life Center.

Tebbe: So, can you guys elaborate a little more on the experiences that you went through that helped you in the work you do with marriage and maybe some stories that you directly relate to where you are at now?

Carol Cronk: I can think of one in particular, we just had one child and she was very strong-willed. And, I call her my little rascal and there were so many things we didn't know being new parents but now that it is all passed, and she is a young adult and married and on her own. There

were things we learned then as we were trying to raise, or TRYING, boy it was trying. And we were trying to do the right thing and I think we did a lot of right things, but we made a lot of mistakes. And so some of that knowledge of experience we can pass onto other couples. So I feel like we gained even from our failures. And, um, just a lot of things about having children, that they take so much of your energy and they play into marriage, where you don't have as much time for your spouse but you've got to make time, some of those things come into play when we help other couples.

Dick Cronk: One of our biggest disagreements was the discipline of our daughter, I was more of a draw a line in the sand kind of person, and Carol was an old softy and Jennifer would take advantage of that. So, we never were able to resolve that issue between us, so we can share with couples now, if they are dealing with discipline issues, hey we can really relate because that one was a tough one we never did resolve between each other.

Tebbe: Well, I want both of you to answer this, what are some of the obstacles, the frustrations, disappointments or challenges that you have faced in your work with marriages, feel free to elaborate.

Dick Cronk: One of my biggest disappointments is couples there at the church, that know we have a marriage ministry will go ahead and separate or divorce and never call us for help. We're convinced that we can help probably ninety percent of the couples work through the issues and save their marriages if they want to put forth the effort. And it just frustrates me when I read in the divorce columns in the newspaper, well so and so got divorced this week and never came to ask us for help. So that is probably my number one issue.

Carol Cronk: I think for me, my number one would be, and it happens quite often, that couples aren't willing to work through the mentoring program. They are, who knows, there's so many reasons why, they are afraid, it's hard work, the love has been gone and they're not willing to work back to get it. Uh, sometimes issues are just overwhelming and they feel that there is no hope and they just don't want to go forward. A lot of reasons that maybe we don't even know, but that's really sad to us, that they would be unwillingly to try, at least to try.

Tebbe: So, you will admit there have been disappointing times?

Dick Cronk: My number two issue is our throw-away society type, couples will have friends that will tell them, well you deserve better than this, God never meant you to be this unhappy. And they side with those friends and throw away a five or ten year marriage, where if somebody had encouraged them that, they can work it out. It was Carol's brother and a friend of mine here in Dayton that encouraged us to work through our relationship. And so we would like to be able to do that with other people.

Tebbe: So, do you have anything more to add? (Directed at Carol)

Carol Cronk: No, I would agree with that.

Tebbe: Were those, what are some obstacles that you may see in what you are doing?

Dick Cronk: One of the biggest obstacles that I would think, is you find a couple where one partner wants to work on their marriage and the other one doesn't. Maybe they have shut down and don't want to, try again, or maybe they've already made up their mind that, "I'm through with this relationship." That, it is really tough to talk to a couple like that and have them just walk

away and one of them is in tears, “Oh, I want to work on saving this marriage,” and the other one, “I’m out of here.”

Tebbe: Can you guys tell me about some of the most interesting programs or events you have been involved with and the impact that you’ve seen because of those?

Carol Cronk: Well, we’ve been involved with, up until just this past summer, was the last summer for a program, uh a big conference called “Smart Marriages.” We probably attended twelve of those, out of the fourteen conferences. Met in D.C., Denver, uh, Reno, just different places and had perhaps 2000 or more that attended. Different therapists, and counselors, and social workers, and we were part of the volunteer staff for that, making that happen and to me it was one of the most wonderful experiences in our work in marriage ministries because we got to meet people like Gary Chapman, Dr. Gary Chapman and Dr. Gary Smalley and just so many people that have been trend setters and been in the forefront of changing marriages, either through their books or through their speaking. And with Diane Sollee that was the, starter upper, I guess you’d call her, of Smart Marriages, it was her program. And just a wonderful person that cared about marriages and wanted to have a lot of programs that would be available, any either the key note speaker information or getting DVD’s and tapes to do programs they call out of the box. So people could go back, the therapists as well as just mentoring people like ourselves, could go back to their hometown and implement programs quickly and effectively with anyone, whether it a couple or a group setting, to help marriages grow stronger.

Dick Cronk: And along with that, the Smart Marriage Conferences are usually held in the end of June, or early July and our wedding anniversary is June 26th so we go to the different locations a couple days ahead of time, and just take sort of a mini vacation and what better way to celebrate your wedding anniversary, than going to a marriage conference. And we’d always come home with resources, books, videotapes, all kinds of stuff like that.

Tebbe: Can you tell me then about how you implement the things you have learned, to work with couples now and some of the resources you’ve gotten and information?

Dick Cronk: Well we started, fourteen years ago and we found some other couples who had similar interests, they had been to Marriage Encounter weekends, or Family Life, Weekend to Remember, or be involved with the step family association, so a bunch of us got together and wrote a proposal to the church board that, “Hey we’d like to implement a marriage ministry this way,” and Mike McManus wrote a book back in about 1995 or 6 called *Marriage Savers* that was really the inspiration for us. He said that every church needs to have a marriage ministry to prepare couples for marriage, to enrich existing marriages, to help troubled marriages get over rough spots and to reconcile broken marriages. So we patterned our marriage ministry after those four goals. And by going to the Smart Marriage Conferences we gathered up materials, we recruited a team of mentor couples, right now we’ve got about twenty-five mentor couples on the team. Some of them mentor engaged couples helping them prepare for the challenges of marriage, others mentor married couples going over rough spots, so that’s basically how we put it all together.

Tebbe: How would you say your motivation for working with married people and pre-married couples has changed over time? Do you see a difference now in what you’re doing from when you started and the reasons why you do it?

Dick Cronk: I’m just as passionate now, as I was when we started. When Carol went back to her mother’s and for that period of time during the crisis in our marriage and she even had an initial

consultation with a divorce lawyer, we were that (holds hands up to show a small distance between the pointer and thumb) close to losing our marriage relationship, and I guess when you come that close to losing something, and you're able to get it back, you treat it as something precious and you treasure it when you're able to get it back and I've been that way ever since. (Starts to get emotional while speaking)

Carol Cronk: Uh, I was just thinking how important it is to realize that we have a lot of couples working with us in the ministry, we don't just mentor, but we also have about twenty-five couples. Half of them help engaged couples and mentor them as their preparing for marriage the other half are couples that mentor those that are needing, big time help, maybe they're in a crisis or they just need some enrichment. And so, with them working with us, it is just a neat thing to see how they encounter other people's lives and the mentor couples become such good friends of those that they mentor and really put into their lives, of their own marriage.

Tebbe: Can you tell me a little about the process of training mentor couples and getting them where they need to be to help other people?

Dick Cronk: Yeah, we select couples that demonstrated that they've got a healthy marriage, or sometimes they'll approach us and say, "Hey we want to join your team." So we take them through an eleven hour training program that meets on Friday night and all day Saturday. Friday night is sort of a general overview of how we would mentor a troubled married couple, go through a step-by-step, and we give them a notebook with these individual steps. Then we talk about how to mentor an engaged couple and take them through that. Then the next day we spend the whole day having the trainees actually go through the assessments and the training techniques that they would put a mentor couple through. There is a marriage satisfaction inventory, with a bunch of questions on trying to quantify how happy or how satisfied you are with a marriage relationship. Then we do, we use Florence Litauer's "Personality Plus" for temperaments, and I have them take that assessment about male, female differences and how that translates in personalities there in a relationship. Then we give them some of the verbal dialogue techniques, we have, use a wooden mixing bowl spoon where they pass that back and forth, and whoever has the spoon has the floor and the other person cannot interrupt. That allows you to keep from escalating things out of control, the mentor couple sort of facilitates that with the couple. And it really has been helpful there, we also teach them the Marriage Encounter dialogue which is a combination of writing your thoughts on paper and verbal discussion. Then go through Gary Chapman's Five Love Languages, identifying what your love language is, his basic premise is that we give and receive love in our own love language, and that may or may not be the love language of our spouse. And even though you're sincere at expressing love to your spouse, they may not feel loved because that might not be their love language. Then we've been adding something lately, he wrote a book on the five languages of apology, and similar to the kind of premise that we apologize in different manners, and some may feel more insincere than others, so we incorporate that. Then we give them a marital growth plan to write and that sort of is to continue the momentum of the mentoring once the mentor couple turns them loose. Now for the engaged couple, instead of a marital growth plan, we have them put a financial growth plan together we use some of Larry Burkett's materials and Crown Financial Ministries materials, to develop a marital growth plan for their upcoming marriage. Basically, we run them through a mentoring process and by the time Saturday evening is done, they have been through the whole mentoring process, and then we give them the option, "Hey, if you feel like you're willing to be able to share your story with couples, we'd love to have you join the team." If you feel a little reluctant about doing that, you've had a great marriage mentoring session and it's been fun for the last two days.

Tebbe: Carol can you tell me about some other things you're involved with the community and working?

Carol Cronk: I think some years ago, we did about four years in a row where we went to the Vandalia SAC and we were a part of the, um, trying to think, it was a (Asks Dick, do you remember the Name of that?). **DICK:** Oh the Vandalia Community Expo? Yes, the Vandalia Community Expo, usually in the fall, we would have a booth and we were the only church there. And we weren't promoting, we weren't promoting Christian Life Center, per say, but we would mention we used to have a Harvest Fiesta, it was an alternative to Halloween, and we would have brochures on that and Mom's Moments that met a tour church, kind of a MOP's type group, for mom's with little children. But, um, we would just promo that there was a mentoring program in the community, not just for Christian Life Center participants, adherence and members, but for anyone in the community that so desired to get mentoring help. And by the way any of the mentoring that we do to Christian Life Center, there is no fee, it's totally free, it's a ministry of Christian Life Center. But we do help out in the community, we worked for a short time with Marriage Works Ohio, and Dick do you want to tell a little about Marriage Works Ohio?

Dick Cronk: They received a federal grant through President Bush's Faith Based Initiative to support marriages and we trained some of those folks in the mentoring program- that I just described earlier. And they went ahead and converted that to a classroom type format. And also, we're doing some other exploratory and developmental programs to promote marriages around six counties here in Southwest Ohio. Their grant runs out here this year, this is the fifth year of the federal grant and they're trying to become self-sufficient, self-sustaining and so instead of offering some of these services for free, now they're beginning to have to charge for it. But we're still excited to have been able to help those folks get that whole program established and get information about marriages out there. We've also gone to the Ohio Christian Education Association Conference up in Akron, and given presentations up there on various marriage topics. They have different tracks and one of them is a marriage and family track and we've talked about our marriage ministry and personality and temperaments and all kinds of things like that. We've also gone to different churches around the state of Ohio and helped them establish marriage ministries within their church. We've been up to Cleveland, we've been down to the Cincinnati area and gone into Middletown, it's been fun. We're currently talking to a couple now again up in the Cleveland area, that want to establish a marriage ministry at their church. Then we've gone, we tried one year at the Bridal expo out at Hara Arena, ask the question, "Hey, what have you planned for the day after the wedding," we had a banner, "A wedding is a day, a marriage is a lifetime" and you need to spend as much time preparing for your marriage, as you do planning for your wedding. So, we had fun doing that too.

Tebbe: I saw that you manage a website, can you tell me a little bit about your website and resources that people can use?

Dick Cronk: That was a spin-off of going to one of the Smart Marriages Conferences, we heard a keynote presentation by a guy who maintains the Orange County California Marriage Resource Center website and he said, "Hey I'd be glad to give you the template for that and you could go back to your home and set up something like that. And that really clicked with me because in our marriage ministry here we'd get people asking us, "Hey, where's a Marriage Encounter weekend?" Or where is this seminar, or what kind of marriage resources do you have and I would have to go digging and I would have to go look it up and I thought, "Wow I will put that all together in a website," and I expanded it to cover the whole state of Ohio. Any marriage seminar anywhere in the State of Ohio, I try to provide links to, and we also have information on counseling centers for marriage and family. We've got a resource list of videos and DVD's kits,

for small groups that couples can use. We've got a recommended reading list, got a list of 50 inexpensive dates, things you can do there., information about other marriage programs all over the state of Ohio and a quick checklist of how to start a marriage ministry at your church. And it's, we maintain it ourselves, we pay for it so we don't charge anybody to be listed on the website but we also can control what we list too. We only list the resources that we use in our marriage ministry at Christian Life Center and have really liked them and trusted the things. It's located at www.ohiomarriageresources.org. And so, feel free to go check it out sometime.

Tebbe: Carol, what other things do you take part in besides your marriage ministry that you feel like you are making a difference by doing?

Carol Cronk: Are you asking maybe about the children's work that I am in? Ok, yeah, I work at the Christian Life Center, at Creative Learning Center, the daycare and I do encounter a lot of the moms and of course dads too, but mostly the moms pick up and drop off. Just try to have a good rapport with them because these are families, families in the community of Vandalia and Huber and the surrounding areas in the Miami Valley. And to have a good rapport with them and occasionally you know once in a while someone will ask me for a marriage brochure or maybe where a conference is happening and I am just so happy to oblige and give them that information, or a book, you know I might recommend a book to one of the Mommy's. And I feel like I am making a difference in the community because I am with children on a weekly basis. Not just coloring and learning their letters but doing something bigger than that. Helping them to get along with each other and to learn to share, to learn to be adults, they're going to be adults someday. And then I work with the Children's Ministry as well at Discovery Town in Christian Life Center. And um, it's just been a real blessing to be a part of that I'm starting my tenth year. I started out with preschoolers but not I've been working with the real little-bitty's, I call them the little shavers. A Nursery/2's and that's just the beginning of life where they maybe don't know what love is, but they know what it feels like when they get it. And we even have a little Bible Class in our Nursery and 2's time on a Sunday, Wednesday, Saturday. All those times we meet, we have a little Bible class where we tell a story, and we sing some songs and we have puppets and we even do a little sign language. And you think they're too young to adhere to something like that but they seem to love it, and we ring a little bell, it's time for our little class and they come walking over, some can barely walk. And they come walking over, to where we are sitting to have that little Bible time and they just really enjoy it. And the main thing we are teaching them from that is that God loves them, has a plan for their life and that it's good, so that they feel loved and validated.

Tebbe: So you've always kind of been involved working with families?

Carol Cronk: I have, many years ago for about fourteen years, I think it was 1980, about 1983, for fourteen years, there on, I worked at Sinclair, and then Dayton City Schools and finally at Xenia City Schools working with the deaf, and I usually just had one or two students at a time. But they used American Sign Language and they some Signed English, Signed Exact English and that was a real, kind of the beginning of my going to work with children. My last year, when I worked with the deaf I had little ones that were like five, six years old and really enjoyed being with the younger kids. I enjoyed the junior high and high school, but really enjoyed being with the younger kids. So, you know, having talked about children's ministry and working with deaf children and working with the little ones at my church, and couples with mentoring, I really enjoy working with the family as a whole, where can I plug my skills in and abilities in to help them? The big thing is to know that God loves them and that they are important and they have a place in this world. That they have things they can do as they begin to get older and give back to the community also.

Dick Cronk: It was fun one time you interpreted a Automotive Fuel System Class (Carol Laughs) at Sinclair and you'd come home and ask about the carburetor so I would bring pieces into the house and we'd look at the butterfly valve or choke and you'd be able to come up with some signs for that. So, it gave her a little auto mechanics along with the ASL.

Tebbe: Dick can you tell me about the other things that you do in the community outside of marriage ministry?

Dick Cronk: Being a retired Aerospace Engineer, one of my most fun things is to volunteer at the Air Force Museum, I do that one morning a week, usually Monday mornings. And we serve for a four hour duty shift out there, and it's really enjoyable to talk to the people about airplanes. It keeps my fingers involved in my major career field. The Air Force Museum is I think the third major tourist attraction in the State of Ohio, behind Cedar Point and King's Island. And the Museum is free admission. So, last year we got 1.3 Million visitors there. So we have a lot of people coming in from all over the world. I'm a hermit and could really stay in the house all the time if I didn't have a reason to clean up and get out and talk to people. So it forces me to get out one morning a week, and Carol's glad to get me out of her hair one morning a week too. But, we've got, I volunteer at three different galleries, the Southeast Asia and Korean War Gallery has airplanes from those time frames. And then the Cold War gallery has all the strategic weapons of the Cold War. And missiles and the Apollo 15 command module, along with a moon rock. And then we've got the Presidential aircraft collection, Kennedy's Air Force One Airplane, and being alive back in 1963, those images of Kennedy's assassination are burned in your memory and to be able to walk through that airplane and share those stories with people is really a thrill. So that's one of my most fun things that I do out there.

Tebbe: Well what would you say are some of the lessons that you carry with you from your involvement in the marriage ministry, and I guess testimonies you've seen?

Dick Cronk: I think people just want to be encouraged that they can work through issues. We don't really give them answers to their marriage problems, we just give them tools, you know communication and conflict resolution tools that they can use and we encourage them. "Hey, hard heads like us were able to work through it, you guys can too."

Tebbe: What have you learned Carol, by doing it, maybe even about yourself?

Carol Cronk: Well, I think about myself, I've learned that everyone likes a little bit of attention and people enjoy being cared for and loved. And, um, when we mentor and our other couples mentor, couples will say to them, that are being mentored, "I can't believe that you'd take this much time with us. That you just met us, you don't even know us. And so, for me that just feels so good to know that they're as Dick said, being encouraged and being loved on. They so appreciate it, our sessions are usually an hour and a half to two hours, every other week. But that first meeting is just so special they just, they want help, they've come for help and they just can't believe another couple would care that much for them and be willing to give of their time and energy to help.

Dick Cronk: Couple other things I have thought of, is the mentoring actually strengthens our own marriage, we share together stories about some of our problems and it's sort of like therapy for us. We can feel that burden lifted from us as we're sharing with other couples about some of the problems. That is a real joy. It's sort of like we're redeeming the pain of those first fourteen years that we went through. It's at least showing us that, "wow, we can get some benefit out of there." Another aspect, is when we mentor engaged couples, they're amazed that old timers like

ourselves are willing to invest time in their relationship and we develop a real bond with those couples. They become like our own kids, our own family. Our daughter and her husband live down in North Carolina, so these are like surrogate children for us. Over the fourteen years, we've been doing this we've mentored, what is it, seventy some engaged couples, so we've got a big extended family here. We keep in touch with a lot of them and their like our own kids.

Tebbe: Can you see an impact from your work on your family and friends around you, and opportunities you've had to work with people close to you?

Dick Cronk: (chuckles) People think we're the marriage experts now, they will come to us or refer friends to us, and that's really exciting, where some of them knew us when we were going through our struggles and to be able to show them that we were able to work through it, they begin to treat us, differently. And now, Carol is going, taking some classes to become a Pastor here, so we will have a little bit more credibility there, Pastor Carol and Dick will be able to give some marriage advice to couples. That's been a real thrill, having people call us from all around the state of Ohio for marriage information and marriage advice.

Tebbe: Are you able to share any stories specific stories, of families you've helped or marriages you've seen restored or healed?

Dick Cronk: We've got a lot of those, I don't know where to start. Just about two weeks ago, a couple that we personally mentored shared in a video at Christian Life Center about how they were struggling in their marriage. She had pretty much given up, she was ready to walk and he didn't have a clue on how to win her back. They talked with the pastoral staff at the church and the pastor eventually referred them to us, and we sat down and took them through that series of sessions that I described earlier and they claimed that that spoon technique that night was the most influential and most emotional discussion they had ever had. And, was a major turning point for their marriage. They're happy now and the neat thing is they have one child and we've been able to make an impact, that child is going to have one set of parents that won't have to go to all the different exes and every, at every family function over the holidays. They won't have to go to four or five different homes to see moms and dads, and grandmas and grandpas and that was a real joy. I will let Carol tell one and then I will tell another.

Carol Cronk: I just, it's kind of a side bar on this, it addresses it a little bit. But I was thinking of a couple um, some years ago where the other couple working with us, Kent and Mary Dyer, worked with us in the ministry and they helped us. Actually we helped with them, and they got it started way back in the beginning. But, um, they had a couple come to their home for mentoring, and Kent and Mary themselves had some, had two daughters that were biracial and the couples that came to their home, when you speak to a couple on the phone, and you make the appointment you know a little about them, how many years they've been married, how many children they have and so forth, but that's about it. And so, this couple showed up at their house and they also were a bi-racial couple and Kent and Mary did not know that ahead of time, but what was so neat, is they themselves as a mentor couple had experienced raising two bi-racial daughters and now they're going to be speaking with this couple, that had that relationship within their own marriage. And I feel like that prepared them, and gave them some insight perhaps that another mentor couple would not have. And so there are things like that have happened over the years, over and over again, that we feel that God just causes to happen so that the mentoring situation would be just right for that couple. When we mentor couples, and they sit across the table from us, and I'm sure all our other mentoring couples would agree and say the same, there's only so many issues that can go wrong you know, conflict resolution is important and male and female differences, there's just so many issues, maybe five or ten, that are just typical of every couple

when they're struggling. And so, um, I think our couples that mentor as well as us, would say when there's a couple sitting across your dining room table and you're working with them, Dick will sometimes say it's like looking in a mirror and I laugh, cause he's said that so many times to so many couples and it's always true. That maybe the husband is exactly like Dick in so many ways, and I like the wife. And sometimes vice versa but there issues reflect and mirror back to some of the issues that we went through and it just happens over and over again and it's just so neat to know that we have had experience and we've walked where they've walked and can then in fact impart some good tools of guidance to them.

Dick Cronk: We had an engaged couple that met with us and they were entering into a second marriage and they came into mentoring with a bad attitude, kind of, you haven't been divorced and remarried what can you teach us? And by the time we went through and completed the sessions with them, they were like, "Oh, is it over we want some more of this." So we had some neat experience with that and later on, she got pregnant and miscarried at about five months I think. And we went over and visited with them at that time, trying to comfort and console them, and it tore us up more than it tore them up. They had little plaster paris molds of their little hands and feet, I'm getting choked up now just talking about that. So that was a really memorable experience and we got, as a result of that, we got involved with the Miscarriage and Infant Death Memorial Service. We've realized that there is a lot of other issues, not exactly marriage issues, relational kind of things that impact it.

Tebbe: Why would you say in our area, in general why is it important to work with marriages?

Dick Cronk: Because married couples are the core foundation, the building block of this country. If marriages are not strong and the kids are not raised in a tradition of strong family values, then they're going to influence their kids, their neighborhood is going to be affected, their city is going to be affected and this country is going to be affected. So we need to build strong healthy marriage relationships as that initial building block, otherwise we're going to come unraveled in every one of those areas.

Tebbe: Looking back, what would say Carol, are some of your most satisfying accomplishments?

Carol Cronk: In my own personal life or in marriage ministries or in anything?

Tebbe: In anything.

Carol Cronk: I can say, for one just marriage ministries has been an accomplishment not so much that I've done so much, but that I have been privileged to be a part of other people's lives that have progressed and grown. Because when we meet a couple, or our mentor couples give us a buzz and say they're doing pretty good with the couple they have it's so enriching, it's so fulfilling to know that ourselves or another mentor couple has reached out and are helping a family, not just the man and wife, the husband and wife. But just helping a family, to as Dick said, to have good values, and to be a strong part of their community and their state and their country. And that's so rewarding and I think the joy that we see when we, I can speak more personally of the couples we have mentored, just Dick and I the joy when it goes well and we have had some failure but the majority of the time, it does go well. We're thankful that's true and the couples is so happy by about the third session and they feel so relieved to know that they got the help, it's working, there life is better, they just love each other more and their whole future will be changed, because they were willing to reach out for help and to take the help and use the tools and the things that we have asked them. And that's extremely, extremely rewarding and it just makes you feel good to know there's other families that are going to continue and do well.

Dick Cronk: And I think it strengthens our own marriage relationship, we teach the couples to pray together as a couple during the day and to communicate and to understand the personalities and understand the male, female differences and we apply that in our own marriage relationship and it makes us a stronger, happily married couple, we're coming up on forty years, our fortieth anniversary on June twenty-sixth and we may not have made it, had we not gone through some of these struggles and learned some of these hard lessons.

Carol Cronk: And mentoring keeps us on our toes because you cannot give information and guidance and help if you are not walking your talk. So it causes us to really make sure we're doing what we're saying. And not just telling other people these are A, B and C, these are good things to do, but we are also doing those. Modeling them as well as doing them for our own benefit.

Tebbe: Is there anything else that you feel I should know about, the work you guys do together, the impact you have seen, anything?

Dick Cronk: It's just a real joy and I think every married couple should go through some kind of marriage enrichment on a regular basis. You know in our society we have licenses and certifications, qualifications for different jobs, and re-certifications and everything and we need to encourage couples to do that for their marriage too. We don't teach relational skills in schools, and so how do you understand the male and the female brain, where do you learn that. And now we're having more and more dysfunctional families, single parents, they're doing the best they can but they can't really present a two sided story there, and so people grow up kind of skewed and they've really need, where do they get that understanding of what a healthy marriage relationship should be? So, we're excited to be a part of that.

Tebbe: Before we close can you tell me just a little bit more about your family when you were a child and maybe how you seen an impact from that until now?

Carol Cronk: For me growing up being in a large family, not all large families experience this but we had a lot of stress, a lot of dysfunction, my mom and dad, we grew up in the fifties, and I had six siblings before me, they were born many years before. My mom and dad argued a lot, they didn't seem to be able to communicate well, they loved each other and cared for each other and stayed together all the years of their life, you know their married life. But, um, so as a child, kind of laying in bed hearing them argue sometimes, I would think well if my mom would do this, or my mom would say that, or my dad would do this or that, they could just resolve it and a lot of times it was just over simple, little nothing issues, nothing real major. They seemed to love each other, but you know as a child when you hear bickering and loud voices, it's scary to you, and I remember thinking then, I will not be, someday when I marry, I don't want this to be the way my family functions. And, um, even with many struggles Dick and I had in our early marriage, and we talked about the first fourteen years being not as pleasant, as we wish they could have been, still we really didn't argue a lot. We were struggling in a lot of areas but we really didn't raise voices and argue a lot, and I'm very thankful for that, because I know just the impact on a person, let alone the children. Arguing is hard, you know, I don't think families should always slip away and discuss things in private, so the kids don't see that, yes there is some harsh words that are said occasionally in a marriage, there are areas that we don't always get along. I think it's good that kids can see that occasionally, but not constantly. And not of the magnitude that voices are raised so loud that it scares the kids. So I think knowing all that, that kind of played into being in the Marriage Ministry as well.

Tebbe: Dick what about your family and childhood?

Dick Cronk: Like I mentioned before, my mom and dad were sort of like Archie and Edith Bunker, I never saw any affection, demonstrated, never saw the love. It was pretty much my dad worked his job and would demand supper be ready on the table when he came home. SO that's what I thought married life was about, you know, I was going to get a maid that would have my supper ready (Carol laughs) when I came home from work. But, I ended up marrying a youngest of nine kids who was sort of spoiled and expected to be waited on too, so we had, that caused some real disconnects in our early marriage. Just understanding the differences, I'm a firstborn, I've got one sister, who was younger than me, so we came in with totally different expectations in our marriage relationship. Also, church really didn't play an important role in our relationship; we went to a Methodist church that just seemed cold and impersonal. And, uh, I didn't get much out of it, my dad and I had a part-time job as the custodian at this church and on Sunday morning, we'd go in and everybody's, "Oh, Hi how are ya," then in the afternoon wearing sweatshirts and blue jeans, emptying trash cans, they would sort of look down their noses at us. So we, I just got turned off my all the hypocrisy I saw, and thought well if that's all there is about organized religion, I didn't want anything to do with it, and chucked it. And I left home and went on to college.

Tebbe: What would you credit to changing your perspective?

Dick Cronk: That lady across the table prayed for me, for fourteen years and my salvation and it took God a lot of hard knocks to get my attention, before I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. But without her, I'd either be dead or in jail today without her prayers.

Tebbe: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Cronks: (Shook heads no.)

Tebbe: Well I want to thank you for letting me interview you guys, been good learning more about what you do in our community and helping marriages, thank you.

Glossary

Any special terms, events, people referred to in the interview and/or transcript