

Gary Greaves Oral History Interviews Digitization Project

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David DeBarnardis Interview

Greaves: Tell me about that.

DeBarnardis: Back in February we found out she was pregnant and she was gonna have the baby so I was proud, you know. First—first time being a father.

Greaves: [? Yeah ?].

DeBarnardis: And everything was going well until the last three months. That, uh—that—the eighth month we went in there and the doctor said, "Something's wrong. I can't hear the heartbeat or nothing." So they ran—uh, ran an ultrasound on it and found the baby was dead.

Greaves: I didn't know that.

DeBarnardis: And, uh, they had to perform a, um, uh—some kind of a—I don't know what it's called. Uh, forceful, uh, uh, something or other.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: To—so she could have the, uh, child right there. We found out that what it was is some—uh, the cord got, uh—choked.

Greaves: Oh, that's too bad.

DeBarnardis: It was a little girl and, uh, that—

Greaves: [? That's a ?] real hard time, huh?

DeBarnardis: That was hard on me. She, uh—I gave her a hard time because of it, you know, meaning that, uh, I was trying to hide my feelings and I could—I just couldn't do it. And, uh, I was trying to comfort her and, uh, besides—besides hiding my feelings which was—which was real hard. It would have been our first child.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And it—and I mean it was hard. I still have nightmares about it, but she told me and she told the hospital, "I'm trying again." So, you know, there's an old saying [? is ?], "If you can't succeed the first time, try, try again."

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And that's just what we're doing, but, uh—and we lost, uh—you know, I was staying in the apartment that we do—we've had, you know, close friends of ours died. An old man died there. We had to put up with, uh, you know, the heartache of that and I just told her one day, I said, "You know," I says, "I think this is all bad luck. I think everything's falling on us." So if it wasn't for her, man, I would have given up. I would have given up totally.

Greaves: What would you have done?

DeBarnardis: I wouldn't cared if I was on the street or wherever I was. It's just that she's pushed me.

Greaves: So she—she—she was [? inaudible ?] going back out on the streets? Just so much had happened and then so—I mean that really says something for—

DeBarnardis: And, you know, they—

Greaves: —for—for people who are alone, you know, and—and—and the people who are alone—

DeBarnardis: You see—

Greaves:—out on streets, [? the ?]—

DeBarnardis: You see that—that—thing about it is I thought, you know, one year of marriage already. January 15th will be one year and it's already, you know—I mean, you know, there's little—you're gonna have little problems, but we get along perfect.

Greaves: Yeah?

DeBarnardis: I mean, uh, you know, it's—it's totally perfect.

Greaves: Whereabouts are you? You up on the other side of the freeway or—

DeBarnardis: Yeah, on Summit.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: 1726 Summit.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: Apartment 108. Uh, it's like, uh, I hear—hear people yell in our place, you know. They been married, you know, and here they come in. They're alcoholics, uh, uh, fighting all the time and, you know—and here we are, you know—and we get along perfect.

Greaves: So do you have visitors?

DeBarnardis: Yeah, we have visitors and, uh—

Greaves: People ever stay overnight?

DeBarnardis: No.

Greaves: No?

DeBarnardis: Not—uh, they haven't [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: Just no room?

DeBarnardis: No room whatsoever in our place.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: But, uh, we get along perfect.

Greaves: Yeah?

DeBarnardis: And people always say—ask us, say, "How do we do it?" and, you know, this—there's nothing to it really.

Greaves: Let's talk a little about, uh, First Step and—and—Project First Step and how you first did that. Just talk about how it works and how you think—do you think it worked pretty well and what do you think about it? Just—

DeBarnardis: At the center?

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: Yeah. Project First Step, uh, helped me out a lot. First of all, it was able to show me that I was capable of doing it—uh, doing something. Uh, it gave me a direction to go in. It gave me a direction instead of going right into, uh, a big time job and starting right there. I was starting [? from ?], uh, one step and just moving my way up gradually.

Greaves: [? Wow ?].

DeBarnardis: It got me off the streets.

Greaves: So how did that happen? You were—you would come to the center during the day and then how did you find out about [? it ?]?

DeBarnardis: Uh—

Greaves: How did you—how did you get involved in it?

DeBarnardis: Through, uh—through my wife, through Diane, through Terry, and through Chris.

Greaves: I mean like what happened? Somebody say, "Well, you wanna try it," or what?

DeBarnardis: Uh, I asked for a job there and Terry said that I had to talk to the supervisors which I did and Diane and, uh, Douglas and, uh, Ezekiel said, "Fine," and, uh, that's the way I got on it. And my wife had to train me. She had to show me what to do when I first started.

Greaves: And what did you do when you first started?

DeBarnardis: Uh, I was a doorman. My job was like a bouncer and it is really like a bouncer's job. People don't know it, but it is. You have to put up with a lot.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: You put up with, uh, [? inaudible ?] the drug addicts, the alcoholics, the, uh—the gang members, this and that. You can get, uh—the doorman could get stabbed. The supervisors are safe—

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: —but when it comes to the doorman, he—he's the one that's, uh, got his neck out.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And, uh, well, the way it originally started was, uh, I told my wife, uh, uh, that I wanted a job here and to see—I helped Terry [? lost ?] four people who were trying to rob—cash checks, uh, personal and, uh, payroll checks that—of Terry's and, uh, we had them all arrested. I told my wife to tell, uh, Terry that, "Hey the guy's, uh, leaving for the bank, I have to go, man. Just, uh, tell him where we're going." And, uh, so we went down to the bank and they were—they were just cashing the checks. I was sitting there and the next thing I knew the cops

were coming in. They arrested all the guys. Uh, they robbed the place, uh, Terry's, uh, place of all his checks and stuff.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: I don't know if you heard about that.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: I was the one that, uh, was involved in that.

Greaves: [? Oh ?].

DeBarnardis: And, uh, it's like anything goes down [? inaudible ?]—anything went down in that center, I would be behind the [? inaudible ?] [? or something ?] cause they got me—they got me out of the, uh—the streets. They got me out of the doorways. Thanks to them, I'm not in doorways anymore. Then, uh, after a while, what, uh, Terry would do is he got us an apartment and he took a little bit out each week for our rent and, uh, the check would be, uh—was for the rent was taken care of. Then, uh, after that, when our six months was up and, uh, I didn't really wanna leave. I wanted a permanent job there, but, uh, I couldn't cause I understood the, uh—the methods and all that and so later on, uh, if they needed a supervisor and all, they would call me in to work which is, uh, you know, I would do it for them anytime—anytime they needed it. Then Chris got me involved in this project. This is the first project of the center's and, uh, it's showing me how to run a business. If I wanna open a small business, I [? now ?]—

Greaves: You gotta be there at three?

DeBarnardis: Yeah.

Greaves: Well, we got five minutes. Uh, so how did it come that they got you the place? How'd that happen?

DeBarnardis: What? At the, uh—this job?

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: Chris, uh, called me up and says, uh, "Would you like to, uh—" and then he asked me if I'd like to be a supervisor [? for ?] [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: No, I mean—no—

DeBarnardis: Oh.

Greaves: —got the place that you live.

DeBarnardis: Oh, got the place. Well, I went to Terry. I says, uh, "Terry, we need, uh, an apartment," and Terry refers people to these, you know—to apartments, shelters, and all so he's the one that got us the, uh, [? rooming ?] and thanks to him, he showed—he's showing how to, uh, uh, monitor money where you have money for rent and money for, uh, you know, food, money for this. If it wasn't for Terry, I would've just gone out one night and blown the whole thing. What Terry's shown me—

Greaves: So he kind of always gave you something else to—to [? keep you ?]—

DEBARNADIS: He gave me—he gave me the guide. He was guiding me. Terry was guiding me. Even though he wasn't telling me exactly what to do, he was guiding me in the direction that I needed to go to get out of the, uh—the predicament I was in.

Greaves: Keep talking.

DEBARNADIS: I was in a predicament and I needed to get out of it and—and at the time, my wife even needed to get out of it so between both of us, he was the one that showed us through it and now I am in a position where if I wanna run a business [? inaudible ?] or get into a job, I know exactly what—what to do—

Greaves: [? So what ?]—what have you been able to do? What—since you're there, have you been able to work a couple jobs or anything like—

DeBarnardis: Uh, I'm in the process now of, uh, working on, uh, going back to, uh, uh—going to David Lee's, uh—

Greaves: Oh, yeah?

DeBarnardis: [? Yeah ?]. Yeah, school.

Greaves: So you might do [? it in ?] the next set of classes or something?

DeBarnardis: Yeah, I'll be in the next set of classes that's going up. Uh—

Greaves: And how—and how did you do that? Did you go talk to them or—

DeBarnardis: [? inaudible ?]. I talked to him, uh—I talked to David Lee and David Lee [? inaudible ?], uh, [? inaudible ?]. Get in the next class that they had which is, uh—

Greaves: Let's go down here.

DeBarnardis: [? inaudible ?] coming out, uh, teaching you how to run a [? inaudible ?], how to, uh—how to run a cafeteria and, you know, how to do not just cooking. It's just, uh, also [? a lot of ?], uh, material [? inaudible ?].

Greaves: [Possibly spoken to a waitress] Just give me three—three dollars would be [? good ?].

UNKNOWN: Okay, thank you.

DeBarnardis: And the line cook to, uh—

UNKNOWN: Here you are.

Greaves: Thanks.

UNKNOWN: You bet.

DeBarnardis: He—he's—

Greaves: Are you looking forward to that, huh?

DeBarnardis: Oh, definitely cause, uh, cooking is—cooking is my—my business, you know. That's where I'm experienced in and, uh, I want to be a chef and I wanna be a good chef.

Greaves: So—so you gotta—you gotta place now and you got—so you—you—you feel like, you know, you're on a way to that, huh?

DeBarnardis: I'm on a way. It—it might be just a sleeping room, but it's a start.

Greaves: Yeah. [? inaudible ?]—

DeBarnardis: It's a start. Next thing, uh, I told my wife is that we'll, uh, get from here up to a one-bedroom apartment or maybe a house, you know, or something, but we gotta get out of this, uh—this rut we're in because when you're climbing a ladder to get out of, um—get out of the slums, you're never out of it. You're always in it, climbing up—when you're climbing.

Greaves: One day, you'll be out though, huh?

DeBarnardis: Yeah.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: But, uh, we're making it slowly, but surely.

Greaves: Now, let's see. It's up here, isn't it?

DeBarnardis: What? Oh, no, it's—

Greaves: Oh, you're—you're—

DEBARNADIS: It's up on—

Greaves: —you're doing [? inaudible ?].

DeBarnardis: Yeah, but, uh, it's, uh—we're getting out of it, but it's like I said, it's slow.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: Slow and I mean real slow because you don't know—you don't know what, uh—what's ahead of you. Could be anything.

Greaves: Yeah. Did you have some hard times even once you got married and—and moved into the place, right?

DeBarnardis: Yeah. Real hard times cause there was, uh, times where, you know, it's like we wouldn't, uh, maybe not eat for a couple of—couple of days, but I always made sure my wife had food, you know. I'd tell her to eat, you know.

Greaves: Cause the baby was on the way and—

DeBarnardis: Yeah.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And when the baby was on its way, I really made sure she ate.

Greaves: Yeah, yeah. So sometimes you have to come Downtown and get a meal [? inaudible ?] place or—

DeBarnardis: Yeah, I would go to one of the food banks. We lived off of food banks for a while.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And there was, uh—and I mean a lot of food banks I hit. I hit three, four food banks a day.

Greaves: Yeah?

DeBarnardis: So—and I lived off canned food.



Greaves: [? Right ?].

DeBarnardis: Green beans, corn. It's what I lived off of.

Greaves: Now, it's a little better though?

DeBarnardis: Oh, hell yes. Uh—

Greaves: So like—like what are you eating now?

DeBarnardis: Like, uh, I applied—I applied for food stamps and we get food stamps so we get, uh—

Greaves: That's the first time you ever had them, huh?

DeBarnardis: Yeah. For now we eat, uh, you know, like regular foods. She fixes me when I go home, [? I find ?] [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: [? Yeah ?].

DeBarnardis: —I had—I had chicken.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: And you know how [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: Can I—can I—

DeBarnardis: —that's a delicacy. Well, to me it's a delicacy.

Greaves: Yeah.

DeBarnardis: But it's, um—it's a hard life. I just want—I just want make sure my wife is alright, you know. Make sure she has—has what she needs. [Recording cuts].

Greaves: You both have epilepsy?

DeBarnardis: Yeah. Both of us.

Greaves: And what kind of problems does that kind of create?

DeBarnardis: She watches over me, I watch over her.

Greaves: [? But what's ?]—

[Recording silent until 24:07. It seems that Greaves is now interviewing someone new who is not DeBarnardis].

Greaves: That's a whole other [? thing ?], you know. But anyway, my history is gonna be, uh— [? I'm ?] describing a little bit, you know—just gonna be the history of Seattle the last twenty years or so. [? I'll ?] talk about the different people, you know, [? and ?] part of the city and [? one of it ?] is of all the things that happened Downtown, you know, for people with drug and alcohol problems and for people who are poor, you know, need places that they—they—but, um, if you could just describe when you came into Seattle and what happened for you, uh—

UNKNOWN: Well, the—

Greaves: —[? inaudible ?] going back in the past at all. Just—

UNKNOWN: Yeah, I will. This is not the first time I've ever been in Seattle. Uh, when I was able to pivot two years ago. By pivoting, I meant [? inaudible ?] I was able to quit drinking. That was it. The booze. I was [? inaudible ?] two years [? inaudible ?] that, "Oh I won't be able to see where the hell I'm going in this world," especially being in the city of Seattle [? where I am ?]. I started living. Uh, felt that was absolutely necessary for me to just turn around [? for ?] everything. On top of having lost the boy, that things weren't getting any better. But, I—this is not the first time, as I've mentioned, that I've ever been in Seattle. I've—I was here in 1968 working for Boeing.

Greaves: Right.

UNKNOWN: Uh, that time when things were a lot more peaceful, a lot—Seattle was a lot more congenial although it's still—it still is as compared to other cities that I've been through. Uh—

Greaves: So you were doing pretty well back then in '68 [? inaudible ?], but you had a pretty job, but you—but you had some of the drinking problem, right?

UNKNOWN: Oh, yeah. Well, I was drinking for a long time, Gary. Uh, gosh, when I went in the service at nineteen, that's when it got—that's when I really started and that's a very young age, you know. And being in the military, you're—you just have to. [? Everything ?]—

Greaves: Do—do you think when you were younger you were able to handle it better? I mean it wasn't—it didn't—for a while, it wasn't affecting your work and—and everything as much or what—what—

UNKNOWN: Yeah, well, it didn't affect me as much cause I still had a lot of vigor, stamina, uh, but it—it wasn't old age that made me quit drinking. Forty—forty-eight years old, I'm not—it wasn't that [? inaudible ?] and we lost the boy and lost my family. Uh, when I came to meet

some of the people who were in the same predicament that I was at that time two years ago, it—it just impacted on me. Uh, I was becoming more and more surrounded by losers, you know, figure of speech with, uh, regards to homelessness and I grew to know more and more of these guys out here and aside from what had—had happened to me that made me quit drinking, uh, seeing these people, knowing these people even reinforced that—that urge, that desire to turn my life around and it—it worked for two years. As a matter of fact, I'm—I've—there's a few guys that walk in here that have seen me two years ago that attest to the fact that I have done a great job and that—one guy just walked in, this guy is a [? inaudible ?] drunk and drug addict. He's been clean for six months and he remembered. [? It's ?] a year or so ago. Uh, I congratulated him for—I mean it was, uh, so unexpected. This guy just walked in the door and I—it—I—was hard for me to believe today that this guy turned around and he was living up at the Downtown Emergency Center at the time [? I knew him ?]. [? inaudible ?] through for [? inaudible ?], but, uh, uh, when I knew him way back then, he was delirious everyday. Shaved clean and everything. He's just one example, but there's—

Greaves: So how—how did he turn it around, do you think?

UNKNOWN: It was the [? scene ?]—he had listened to my testimonies of the chapel and [? inaudible ?] talked to him once in a while when he was in his worst state and then he—I couldn't recognize him because he had shaved and got cleaned up and I—when he was sitting here talking, it just dawned on me. This is this guy that towered over me trying to panhandle me at the time he was drunk and drugged up and I ran off scared because I didn't wanna get hurt because this guy was really huge. He's a tall white guy—I mean black guy rather and when I saw him I shook his hand [? inaudible ?] I was surprised [? that ?] somebody out—out of the worst of all cases out here managed to do something so it's a miracle, you know, just like mine.

Greaves: Do you think a lot of times that's what it is? It's just combination luck [? inaudible ?]—

UNKNOWN: And—and the desire. Uh, I have walked back and forth, back and forth to my place [? inaudible ?] down to [? inaudible ?] center all—going on two years now. That's almost everyday, man, for two years. I walked through Occidental Park and I—guys would wave at me whether they're drunk or sober [? and ?] some of the most violent guys were like, "Hey, John! Hi!" I wave back and they keep bloodying each other up, you know, through the rest of the day, drinking. They could be getting busted by the cops and I just take it easy, walk home, go back, back and forth, but Wednesdays and Thursdays, I'll be coming down here pretty consistently [? with Reverend Myer ?]. I've been doing this to the point where I have, uh, you know, just volunteered to do just about everything around here with the exception of menial tasks. I don't do those things down at the laundry [? inaudible ?] and as far as volunteering cause I don't have the temper to deal with people who won't come in there and make their demands. As—but that happened before.

Greaves: So how did [? you ?] start to get involved [? with Myer ?]? I mean how—why [? did ?] you start working with [? him ?]?

UNKNOWN: Well, actually, right after I had decided to quit drinking, I came to the Lutheran Compass Center to look for a place to stay and he was there when I saw this man with a white beard, gray hair. It just hit me. It wasn't because he reminded me of any Biblical figure or anything, he just—because I—I'm—I'm predom—I'm—I'm a Catholic, okay? Uh, my upbringing and, uh, when I saw him I [? decided willing ?] to talk to him. I just started—I stayed in there with him all the time, all this time, talking to [? him ?] and then he was referred to me. I'd already been counseling with him all that time before the—the, uh, veterans' outreach referred him to me as a counselor and they asked me, "Who did I feel comfortable with?" and I told them Reverend [? Myer ?] and, uh, I stayed there with him [? almost ?]—although there were other priests available for the services, you know. And as I stayed with him, I just grew with him, knowing how to work with people, [? inaudible ?] Seattle. Uh, from this experience, I grew quite a bit [? with ?] these guys, a lot of them. Uh, by that I mean spiritual—spiritual growth [? inaudible ?] people. Some of them right now are in—on—on the—the—really close to making decisions as they're willing to get off the streets or move out of town. And he encouraged me, "Either get out of town if that's gonna help or just quit drinking and go start finding resources to get out of it—get out of the streets." We've had some successes in that. Reverend [? Myer ?] and I both looking out in the streets talking to people. What inspired me about him was one night, before I even sat in here and talked to him in-depth about my own personal problem with regards to being homeless and drinking, I saw him in one of the alleys late in the night helping out one of the—the, uh, homeless. I mean the guy was heaving out his alcohol and everything else and Reverend [? Myer ?] was right there offering his—his shoulder, you know? Comforting him in the middle of the night. And I says, "Man, this guy's got a lot of guts to do this kind of work in these dangerous alleys in Seattle, the ways things are. That really impressed me and so I became very comfortable with Reverend [? Myer ?] when I saw that. He didn't know that. To this day, he doesn't know that I was [? inaudible ?] walking by by myself sober looking at this man doing [? inaudible ?] this work for these people. [? inaudible ?] going to try and get in there and do that too [? inaudible ?] as he's doing and I did.

Greaves: And you've been doing it for a year or at least [? that ?]?

UNKNOWN: Over a year.

Greaves: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: Yeah. All the way back—as a matter of fact, all the way back to November of 1990.

Greaves: Two years.

UNKNOWN: Oh, yeah. Once in a while, it'll zap me emotionally because, you know, when you see somebody that just makes his demands and he expects the answer to be there right away, and if it—it tends to make you feel like it's life-threatening when you can't come up with a—a

solution whether it be immediate needs or spiritual needs or whatever and you're hoping that this guy would realize that we don't make miracles here, you know. We just work [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: Make your—make your own miracles.

UNKNOWN: Yeah. There's been a lot of life-threatening moments, but—

Greaves: Are there?

UNKNOWN: Oh, yeah. Oh, I just about got stabbed twice in Seattle—

Greaves: Yeah?

UNKNOWN: —in this two year period, but I survived that. I see the guy who tried to stab me once in a while and he's still got a sour look on his—his, you know—but it's strength inside that really counts. I can't believe that I've come this far being sober, Gary.

Greaves: Yeah. Talk—talk a little bit about what it's like, how hard it is to—to get back in. You know, you take one step at a time, but you have to take one step at a time, right?

UNKNOWN: It's the only way—only way you can do it. A little step at a time. You try to take off—off and take a giant leap into change, you—your own anxiousness may betray you in the process and I've learned that. I'm not [? inaudible ?]—

Greaves: How—how did you—how did you learn it?

UNKNOWN: Oh, oftentimes I'd be too anxious to achieve something and come to find out later on that the choices I've been making were wrong, you know, towards the goals that I've been trying to achieve and I had the right principles and I was [? playing ?] the wrong methods. That's taking it one step at a time not to be philosophical, but this is actually experience—experience. The—what I'm going through with now though is the fact that I know that I—that alcohol still [? appeals ?] to me as it does other people. Some are stronger and some are weak. Uh, it's a weakness that I must [? gut ?] my—myself against everyday. That's taking it one step at a time. Although I've been sober for two years, that's a weakness that I have. I must [? gut ?] myself against it and I gave up drinking, but I didn't give up friends. Found [? inaudible ?] and [? inaudible ?] [? or ?] AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] meetings. They say that if you, uh, abstain for a significant length of time, you're going to avoid, uh—social [? avoid ?]. [? inaudible ?] agreed with that. I haven't given up my friends. I'm—I get surrounded by people who drink and indulge everyday, but the—the sight of alcohol and indulging just makes my [? inaudible ?] that less severe. I'm not easily tempted anymore. That's the strength I [? have ?].

Greaves: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: And we apply—I apply this to the guys who wanna [? do something ?].

Greaves: Yeah.

UNKNOWN: Make, you know—if he wants to—if he wants it, it's there. Uh, once in a while Reverend [? Myer ?] knows that I've been, you know—I get depressed. I come here running to him when I get into those moments and he offers, uh, counseling to the—he's been helping me out in that respect so [? yeah ?]. These [? inaudible ?] I hope that I've been doing a good job here.

UNKNOWN 2: You've been doing an outstanding job!

UNKNOWN: Oh, thank you. I wanna—I wanna get my [? inaudible ?] button when I leave, right?

UNKNOWN 2: That's right!

UNKNOWN: What's a [? inaudible ?] button?

UNKNOWN 2: Huh?

UNKNOWN: What the heck is a [? inaudible ?] button?

[Silence for the remainder of recording].