

Life History of Catherine (Catie) Sondrol, MOT, OTR/L

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Introduction

The participant was one of 31 participants interviewed as part of a larger study, *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) with ties to North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of this project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states.

Description of Participant

Catie Sondrol graduated from the University of North Dakota in 2004. She then moved to Lake Havasau, AZ to pursue a career in pediatrics at Baby Steps. Less than a year after starting, she learned that the company was closing. She partnered with a speech pathologist, and after hard work and saving money, they were able to open a private practice called Milemarkers. Milemarkers has expanded to three locations and employs 80 people.

Catie is a wife and mother to two school-aged children. In her free time, she enjoys camping, doing craft activities, boating, going to the park with her children, and shopping.



(Milemarker's Logo)

Literature Review

- The University of North Dakota occupational therapy program transitioned from a Bachelor's Degree to an entry-level Master's Degree in 2003 (University of North Dakota Department of Occupational Therapy, 2007).
- The 9/11 terrorist attack happened shortly before Catie graduated from college. At the time, there were several PTSD-focused treatments for service members and others affected by the tragedy (Precin, P. 2003).
- There is current discussion in the American Occupational Therapy Association about transitioning from an entry-level Master's Degree to an entry-level Doctoral Degree.
- The profession made a push for more evidence-based practice and occupational therapy research (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014).

Methodology

A qualitative life history approach was used for this study. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared by the project director and modified by the researchers.

- Participants were purposively selected by the project directors.
- There were no gatekeeper issues. Informed consent was obtained.
- The Kawa Model was used to guide the interview process by asking about barriers, life flow, harmony between work-life balance, and skillset (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).
- Data was gathered via a Zoom video conference call which lasted approximately an hour and a half. Researchers were at the UND School of Medicine & Health Sciences and Catie was in her vehicle in Lake Havasau, AZ.
- The interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Additional data was gathered from the participant's Curriculum Vitae which was shared prior to the interview.

Data Analysis

The Kawa Model was used to guide the data analysis process by focusing on Catie's life flow and her ability to maintain harmony—influenced by her personal attributes (driftwood) and problematic life circumstances (rocks).

- Memoing was completed as an initial form of data analysis and to capture the researcher's perceptions of the participant's statements.
- Unitizing was done as data was coded. Twenty four codes were created.
- Four categories were developed from the established codes. The categories were: resilience, giving back, professional issues and trends, and core values and beliefs.
- Patterns and themes emerged and assertions were made.
- Through reflexive journaling and creating an audit trail, trustworthiness was established.
 - Biases were addressed throughout the progression of the study to increase validity and reliability.

Findings and Discussion

Catie's **resiliency** was key in overcoming the challenges she has been faced with.

- Catie experienced barriers during her occupational therapy education and as she worked to build her private practice during an economic downturn.
 - "...and sure enough I have a reading disability, and the OT department was fabulous about helping me to make the accommodations that I needed. I got almost straight A's through the rest of school."
 - "And then when the recession hit, we were negative in our bank more often than not. And I don't know how our bank did not close down our business."

Catie has **given back** in various ways by serving as a fieldwork educator, kinesiology professor at Arizona State University, and mentor to her employees.

- She is also creating continuing education courses and sharing her knowledge.
 - "I'm really getting into creating continuing education courses... I think that will have an impact on people's skill sets and how they treat their clients and what types of treatment methods they use."
- Catie provides family-centered care in her rural community as well as in other regions of the world.
 - "I always say that...what I do one hour once a week isn't what's going to make a difference. It's what the families do. And so I really pride myself on that family education component..."

Catie takes initiative to stay updated on **professional issues and practice trends**.

- She has concerns about the impact the transition to the OTD will have on the profession.
 - "I think if they're gonna get a doctorate there needs to [be] more clinical experience with it. I think that's huge. I really do."
- She recognizes the importance of theory and evidence-based practice, but also feels an inherent need to provide care based on first-hand results she has seen.

Catie is firm in her **core values and beliefs** of family, competency, and helping.

- Her creativity shines through in her approach to client-centered care. She values clinical experience in providing effective interventions.
 - "I love that it's science and it's an art together... We get the muscles, we get the body stuff, ... And we get the brain stuff. But we also get the creativity and the art behind occupation and therapy."



Conclusions

Catie's education, clinical experience, and core values have allowed her to give back, while also staying current on professional issues and trends and being resilient in the services she offers.

- Catie's passion and drive have helped her overcome the many barriers/challenges she faced throughout school and her early years of practice. She has used her own experiences in her approach to therapy.
- Despite the changes in practice, Catie has stayed true to her core beliefs and values to provide services that she finds to be most effective and ethical.
- Catie has made life sacrifices to dedicate herself to her rural community and the profession through the establishment of her private practice—Milemarkers.
- Catie believes God has been influential in her occupational therapy journey.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Catie for giving us the opportunity to interview her. It was a pleasure to hear her story and learn about the impact she is making on the profession of occupational therapy and her community.

References

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