

## Nancy Crowther

### Disability Rights Advocates

*Interview conducted by Dr. Sarah Rose and Trevor Engel in 2017*

Disability Studies Minor

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#### Biography

Nancy Crowther was born into a military family in Frankford, Germany. She moved to Killeen, Texas at a young age. At 15 months old, Crowther lost her mobility due to spinal meningitis. Crowther played in active role in the Disability Rights Movement prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. She applied the skills she learned from ADAPT Texas to Capitol Metro. As of 2017, Crowther lives in Austin, Texas.

#### Topics Discussed

- Childhood
- Attending Central Texas College
- Creating a Girl Scouts troop for girls with disabilities
- Years at The University of Texas at Austin
- Internship and Mentoring at UT Austin

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#### Rose

This is Sarah Rose.

#### Engel

And Trevor Engel.

#### Rose

Interviewing Nancy Crowther at her home 2102 Leway Circle in Austin, Texas on Tuesday July 18<sup>th</sup>. So I'm going to start with some basics about your family, childhood, where you were born.

## Crowther

I wanted to go ahead and spell my name for the record because if it can be mispronounced one way. It's about 15 different ways. But I understand. It's C-R-O-W-T-H-E-R.

## Rose

Can you pronounce that?

## Crowther

<topic>Childhood</topic>

Crow-dur. Like the bird. Crow. And so I try to tell people that, but crow-dur, crowd-dur, it just goes on. So anyway, a little bit about myself. I was born in '58, so I'm quickly approaching sixty years of age. Born in Frankfort, Germany 'cause my parents...my father was in the army. And my mother was a native of Germany. And they met, got married and then had children. And at the time I was born, I was the fourth of five children. He was stationed in Frankfort, Germany. Then we came back to the United States. And he...my dad, who was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, decided to retire and came to Texas next to Ft. Hood after I was born. And so basically grew up in Killeen, Texas...K-I-L-L-E-E-N...Ku-*leen* [chuckles].

## Rose

And what were your parents' names?

## Crowther

My mother's name was **Margaret Ina Crowther** and my father was Addison Charles Crowther. And he was a retired lieutenant colonel in the Army. And, as you can imagine, that kind of rank...there is a lot of control on what we did and how we did it and how. There were a lot of...I guess the way we had to be was always in good values and good moral standing because of his rank. So that was kind of expectation.

## Rose

What did that mean?

## Crowther

Well it meant that we never skipped school, 'cause you'll find out that we participated in like Sunday schools. We participated in activities after school. Those were the norm back then for the children to be involved as much as possible. And then we were outside a lot. There weren't any shenanigans going on like most children would do. So we had to behave. No toilet paper in the trees. Nothing.

When I was growing up, that was the time that polio outbreak was going on. And I'd gotten to a point when I

was 15 months old where I got spinal meningitis. Very bad. The bacterial kind. So it was very bad. They thought I was going to die, but I didn't. But when I was supposed to reach that milestone of walking, I was more holding onto furniture and things like that. So first thought was polio. That first scare. And all of my medical care was taking care through the military. So that was kind of fortuitous. I don't remember a lot about that time. But I do know that I was wearing braces, going to therapy a lot, in the medical...I want to say barracks a lot. I remember those type of shadows and memories. But eventually I was diagnosed by a muscle biopsy as of having one of the forty different Muscular Dystrophy Diseases. Just one. So when I was diagnosed, I was diagnosed with one of the forty different types of Muscular Dystrophy back then. My parents were told that I would be mentally retarded, that I'd need to be institutionalized and that I would probably not live beyond nine years of age. Which later became twenty years of age because I surpassed the nine years. I'm glad they didn't tell me because I did things just like my brother and my siblings. I had chores to do. I just did them differently. My family set up things to help me to adapt to not walking. I crawled a lot when I was younger. And then they made a little board for me that had wheels on it and I could scoot around the house.

**Rose**

Were you sitting on it or knelling?

**Crowther**

Yeah, sitting on it and pushing on my hands much like a skateboard. But that was when I became weaker. Couldn't crawl anymore. So I had chores. I had to help with the laundry folding. I helped in the kitchen, cutting up things. Whatever I could do, they'd have me do it. I upped it. [Laughter]

**Rose**

Why do you think your parents ignored the doctor's advice and pressured a point and decided, "Hey, we are keeping her at home"?

**Crowther**

Yeah, I think is just they did not want to believe it because they had traveled all around. They've never seen anything happen. All three siblings before me were healthy. And I really didn't appear to have a significant disability. And they had also recognize that I had some intelligence. I could read, speak everything else that everybody else could do. I just didn't have the strength. So I think that they said, "No, we are not going to institutionalize her. We are gonna bring her up at home."

And they did. They acclimated me right in. I got in trouble just like everybody else. And I thought it was a wonderful experience because I never felt different. I was never really...what would you call it? I wasn't brought up differently from my siblings. So I had to do everything I could. I was also the brown bag folder. Every time they went to the grocery store, they would have everything double-bagged. And my job was to fold all those bags. And to this day, I get a tickle every time I'd fold a paper bag. It was like, "I remember this used to be my job."

So I did a lot of things. Growing up though and heading toward school age is when I first had to start using a

wheelchair. 'Cause they kind of frown on people crawling around at school. Also at that age I was put into special education. Now this was a situation where my father did all the investigating to find out what school I would go to. And if you had any type of disability, you ended up in special education. And I didn't end up going to the same school that my siblings did, which really bum me out. 'Cause I didn't know anybody. My hair was with a wheelchair. My father would take me to this elementary school. The special ed department had older students in it, mixture of different disabilities, different age groups and different wheelchairs and everything across the spectrum was there in that room. The one thing I remember, not only just being stuck in a room with the same people, was that our teacher liked to play rock-and-roll music on a recorder. On a record player. So we got to listen to some songs that today, they'd bring back memories of those times.

Well apparently during that time of my career, my fourth year and special ed and all those tests you take to make sure that you can handle a normal class, I was put into fourth grade class.

**Rose**

Mainstreamed?

**Crowther**

Mainstreamed.

**Rose**

Was this just a test but also pressure from your parents?

**Crowther**

I don't know. I can't recall them pressuring anybody, but I'm sure that 'cause that all of the mainstreaming information that was going out at that year, which was probably the late '60s. Well, '68?

**Rose**

Yeah, the 504 mandates that for sure during state activism.

**Crowther**

Exactly. So I got to go into fourth grade, so that kind of set me back a year. But it was okay. I adapted real well.

**Rose**

Had you gotten as much academic education in special ed class?

### **Crowther**

I don't really remember getting any. But I'm sure we did. We had to do something. I hope that we didn't just sit around listening to rock-and-roll. That would have been funny. [Laughter] But I made it through fourth grade. Everybody wanted to volunteer to help push me in my wheelchair 'cause it was cool. Wheels were cool back then. I remember one student in particular. His name was Steven. And he's always volunteered to help push me down the hall. And then we really started to have some fun. He'd jump on back and we would go rolling down the hall. And I was becoming well-known as having a fun person 'cause I had wheels. And I thought it was fun. People would play with me. You don't always get that.

### **Rose**

I was just curious. What kind of wheelchair did you have? Was it an adult-sized one or one you could push?

### **Crowther**

It was an adult-sized. It was Montgomery Boards out of the catalogue. And my parents had it upholstered. So it was kind of a jazzy color. It was blue and green and had some other stuff on it. But it didn't look institutional color. So they jazzed it up. So it was something that I could push, but it was difficult. So having someone run with me was fun. And then again, my father was the one who had to lift me into a truck, put the wheelchair into the back. It was a hardship for them to do that. They didn't have transportation then. And of course that school was clear across town.

### **Rose**

What about getting inside?

### **Crowther**

Inside I remember the long, wooden ramp and that was it. A long, wooden ramp. So it was an elementary school so everything was short. I go back to different elementaries now and say, "I don't remember the water fountains being this short. I guess it were.

So that was pretty good experience for me to start off in a regular class. Having books, doing everything everybody else is doing. I wasn't a star student. I wasn't really picked on. I was just your Average Joe. However, I was in a wheelchair. I'd sit next to the teacher 'cause of my accommodation. I didn't understand it, but it got me in trouble a lot. [Laughter] Sitting next to the teacher, but I enjoyed it. Got to know them very well.

When it was time to graduate from elementary school, that's when I started going into middle school. And I was going into mainstream, regular classes. And we had some difficulties. And primarily I was transportation. It's an overarching theme which I will come around to eventually. I've got a lot of years to talk about. But the...my dad. Well of course by junior high, I'd gotten a little bigger. A little heavier. My dad had worked with the folks at the army base. So it'ds new help. And they said, "Okay? We have transportation. We'll just assign a few people to lift her up into the van and get her to school. We'll I'd guess a lieutenant colonel retire ask you, you say,

“Yes sir. How high would you like me to jump?”

So that was unfortunately an ambulance. Now, you got to know I was a budding, growing young lady. And it did nothing for my social life to come to school with lights on ‘cause the standard, operating procedure for vehicles was that you had to have your lights going on anytime you load or unload a patient. The guys were really cool, but that type of damage didn’t do anything for me. But everybody knew when I arrived. Everybody knew when I was leaving. So it was quite the memory. But it was one that started making me think, “Why is this an issue? Why am I in an ambulance? I’m not sick.”

It was just very strange. And they lifted me up into it. It was just a weird situation. I wasn’t on board like a regular bus like everybody else was. So...finished my middle school, moved on to high school. High school, I got a little bit weaker, so I had my first electric wheelchair. A 12 bolt, which went [humming noise]. Transporting it was hard. My father ended up buying a little trailer for the back of the car and boosting it up to the back to get me to school ‘cause why? No transportation, no accessible transportation.

Now I did like high school a lot. I got to know a lot of people because they transitioned from middle school to my high school. Being in the same class is kind of cool! And I learned to know people. They knew me. I was just a Average Joe. I had a wheelchair. [shrugs] So what?

## **Rose**

Where you involved in activities in high school?

## **Crowther**

Oh I was at every pep rally and everything that we can have. I didn’t go to the games because it was a hard shift to get there. But I listened to them on the radio. And with my father at my side, I remember this. Every Friday night, we would listen to the Killeen Kangaroos play football. And that’s actually where I learned on the radio how football was played. Now that is a unique learning experience. And I started learning he names, the players. And to this day, I still know one of them. But that was pretty neat.

The other thing is in high school, they had two areas that were inaccessible. The first area, which was probably ten steps, was where I would have taken Home Ec. Home Ec was where you learned to write checks, you learned to sew, you learned to cook, you learned to take care of your family. All kinds of things. That was like, “Cool! I can’t wait to do this.”

But that wasn’t going to happen. So I had to take a class on our lower level. It only had three steps up. And I think it was a typing class. Something clearable. Well weak fingers don’t type well. It just went well. They made some arrangements to have one of the football players come and help me up those steps. It was like *homp, homp, homp homp* everytime. And *homp, homp, homp, homp* going down every time. It was so cute! But the guys were really sweet about it and just treated me as if I was one of their own. Just a happening stance that just so happened to be in a wheelchair.

So I became very socialized. And then I had to leave for a six-month period. I had to have back surgery. Because of muscular dystrophy, you are prone to scoliosis, which is a severe curvature of the spine. And I had grown to the point where I wasn’t going to grow anymore. And that’s what the doctors were waiting for. So I had to have surgery, be in a body cast for six months, be at home for six months and I had a homeschool

teacher that had come. And we pretty much play cards and stuff, but he'd give me my assignments so that I wouldn't miss out on any of my homework. But I became socially isolated. I mean...no one is going to visit you. Come on! I thought...it was kind of scary to look at myself and see myself in a body cast. I stayed in bed all the time.

**Rose**

How old were you?

**Crowther**

I was seventeen. That age...

**Rose**

Your junior year?

**Crowther**

Well actually, it was my sophomore. Sophomore to junior. Reason being is that I was held back that year in fourth grade. So I did fourth grade twice. So I had to do that. And when I came back to school, I'd lost a lot of my mobility. So they sent the electric chair. That was very helpful, but I've forgotten people, people had forgotten me. But I had a chance to reignite a lot of those relationships.

And it was me. I was the only one in a wheelchair in these classes. So they all knew me. They all volunteered to help me for whatever reason. But that's when I started noticing my difference. Although I had a fun chair to drive around in, I had fulfilling, I had a straighter back. I was getting books out of my locker just like everybody else, except that I started noticing people were getting three or four books out of their lockers and I was just getting one at a time. And it was heavy. Oh my gosh! It was like a cinder block. It was so heavy and I was like, "My gosh! I don't want to know how people lift these things. Must be a hundred pounds!"

But then I started to figure out I had some muscle issues. But that was because I started seeing...noticing people lifting things heavier than I could. And I was like, "Wow! That's weird."

So I started learning more about my disability going to MDA clinics, which were provided to clients. I started going to summer camp, which was all kinds with disabilities...with muscular dystrophy.

**Rose**

What was that like?

**Crowther**

Well it was like having a giant class of all ages again. But they all had the same disability. So that kind of helped 'cause you realize, "Oh, other people have problems and issues like me." But we had attendants who worked with us. And that's where I first learned that there are people out there that can help you get ready for camp, get ready for activities, go swimming, go horseback riding. Oh my gosh! I was so scared about horseback riding because it was so high! And then the horse wanted to eat, so it leaned down to eat. Oh! To this day, I cannot be on a horse. [laughter] But my counselor called 'em. She and I were together for at least five different summer camps. We grew up together and we also grew up when I came to Austin. She was in Austin when I went to UT here. And so we were friends. I mean, you make friends quick. And so I think that a lot of my experience has been that I've grown out of that social isolation. And then people were talking to me again then. And they're like, "I remember you!" It just got better.

When I graduated, that's when I noticed something else. When I wheeled across the stage, after they called my name...I wheeled [zooming].

**Rose**

Did they make it accessible? Or it was just was...

**Crowther**

<topic>Attending Central Texas College</topic>

No I had to be lifted up the steps. I was behind the curtain number three. And...through the front of the stage. And all of a sudden, everybody stood up and started applauding. I think I may have been one of the first people with a disability to had graduated in a class of '77 who obviously wasn't going to make it 'cause she was so disabled. And I was just really taken back by that. I said, "They either really like me or they're glad I'm leaving." I don't know. [laughing] But I knew it was a very touching moment for my folks too and my whole family. So I was very taken back by that and it was nice to get that diploma. I'll tell ya. 'Cause it helped me get into junior college. Junior college was another step.

**Rose**

Just a couple of follow-up questions.

**Crowther**

Okay.

**Rose**

Really before we dive into college. Do you know how your parents got the powered wheelchair or where they got it?

**Crowther**

I remember they bought the powered wheelchair at Aaronn rentals. A-a-r-o-n-n rentals. It was here in Austin. It was off of Lamar. That's all my dad would say. He'd go, "Everything is off of Lamar in Austin."

And I went, "Okay. I'll remember that."

But they had bought it. It was a 12-volt battery. And of course, the first thing I did when I got my electric chair, my dad had made a ramp from the grass to the patio I drove right off the side and flipped into the side into a bush. My dad comes running over to save the chair. [laughter] I'm laying under the bush going, "Wait! What about me?"

But yeah. He wanted to make sure that the chair didn't get hurt. So during that time, it was understandable. But it turned out the ramp we had made was exactly the width of the wheelchair. So he had to widen it a little bit to get that leeway so I wouldn't fall over and break my new chair. But back then, we had liquid cell batteries and it was so dangerous. I don't know how we survived. But once the acid got in on anything, it would destroy it. So you had to be *very* careful. And so that's why he went for the chair first. And then I was counseled on how to drive a little bit more careful.

**Rose**

Did your parents modify the house to make it more accessible?

**Crowther**

In all actuality, during high school they didn't. They made a ramp out front that would go up into the foyer through the front door. And the chair pretty much stayed there. And then I got down out of it and scooted around. But they had a low foyer and so they just plugged it in there. It's a good thing because I found out I could get noxious fumes from that batteries. Yeah. Anyways...so they couldn't do much with that house. There wasn't a lot they could do. It was a three bedroom, one bathroom. Five kids, two adults. So we had four girls in one bedroom. We used bunk beds, I don't know if you heard of that. But we literally had bunk beds. I was assigned to a lower one. And we each had two dresser drawers that we could use. One was summer and one was winter. So that was kind of funny. Very ridged. When I had my back surgery when I was at the point where I had to use my chair a lot, my father built a ramp into the bedroom because everybody else had moved. My brother moved out. I was in high school. My sisters had already graduated. They were upstairs in the other bedroom. And my little sister had...I think she joined the army back then. I don't envision what occurred with her. But I had a ramp that I had in my bedroom. And so we started using that. But otherwise, it wasn't any accessibility anywhere.

**Rose**

Okay. So I was going to ask you about the activities you were doing in Sunday School.

**Crowther**

Yeah, I didn't go to Sunday School 'cause it wasn't accessible. So all of my siblings went, but I didn't.

**Rose**

Did you go to church?

**Crowther**

No, didn't get to go to church. Didn't go because it wasn't accessible. And frankly, it was deemed...I want to say back then, disability wasn't really out in public. You know...don't do that. So I wasn't seen very much. But I played with the kids in the neighborhood outside. Those were the days when we did that and had fun doing it. So it was fun growing up.

Then I...after graduation from high school, I was accepted at a junior college, which they call now The Central Texas College. It's now a university status now. But when I went, I got my Associates of Arts there. Man, did I meet some neat people.

**Rose**

And what school is it now?

**Crowther**

It's called Central Texas Collegic University, I believe. It's in Copperas Cove, which is just outside of Killeen.

**Engel**

How big was your graduating class?

**Crowther**

800.

**Engel**

800? Okay. That was quite a bit bigger when that happened.

**Crowther**

Oh yeah. But that was the only high school.

**Rose**

So right here in a military base?

**Crowther**

Yep. And that was kind of unique too. Because with the military, people got stationed and deployed a lot. So you would lose friends left and right because you'd have to move. So aside from social isolation, there was the transfers for students to where you started missing people. But we were retired. We were staying there.

**Rose**

What did your dad do during the day?

**Crowther**

When he was retired, he actually started working for a garage company as a foreign car mechanic and manager over that shop.

**Rose**

Was that part of how he was able to go take you to and from school flexibly?

**Crowther**

Yep. Well yeah when you're the boss. [laughter] Now the interesting part about going to junior college, it's that what they called it, was that there wasn't transportation.

**Rose**

Humh...how 'bout that? [laughter]

**Crowther**

Yeah. Gee, what a coincidence. So in order for me to be at my classes on time every day, I had to live on campus. That was really an accommodation for me because of the no transportation.

**Rose**

And what year was this?

## **Crowther**

This was between '77 and '79 that I went to CTC. And I met up with the neatest people at the dorm. First off, at the dorm, if you had a disability they usually put you with a nursing student. That lasted two weeks after she started to tell me what time I had to go to bed and what I had to do and things like that. I was like, "Uhm, this ain't gonna work." 'Cause I was used to my family taking care of me or whatever. I can ask for this and this or that. And I had a schedule. So as I got to know people, there was one young lady who said, "I'm a nursing student, but I've helped people with disabilities before. I'd be happy to be your roommate."

Which was good because the Rehab Commission back then used to allow aids or attendants for students with disabilities free room and board. So that was cool! And so naturally, that was a good thing for her. We didn't...she didn't do it just for that reason. She did it out of her heart 'cause she got to know me. We had a lot fun in the dorm. There are exchange students were from Venezuela. They were tennis players. And they were very handsome. I remember that. I used to just swoon over them because of they're so nice and so gracious to be here. And I just loved it. I made a lot of good friends at the cafeteria of course. Food. Kitchen tables. It's all the same. Some people I know to this day still. We'd keep in touch. Unfortunately, one of my dearest friends passed away this year. But she too was an attendant with me in the beginning.

But anyway, so that taught me a lot about attendant care. How to do things, how to work up things, how to put stuff where I need it, live away from my parents. But then again, on the weekends I take my laundry and everything home and stay the weekend at home. But that's what every student does though, right? Laundry first.

So that was a very good step for me, I thought. I don't recall all the transitions that I went through. I do remember that my mother was critically ill during that time. And we had payphones back then. And my father would call me regularly. Someone would run to my dorm room, knock on the door, tell me I had a call and I'd come zooming down. And he'd tell me her status, which was very...made me very distraught. And so my grades went up and down and up and down during the semester. I felt bad because I knew I was in class. I knew I was listening, but I just couldn't...my head wasn't there. When there's a tragedy at home, that was kind of hard. She survived, which was encouraging. It was encouraging, but it was touch-and-go there for a while.

## **Rose**

So access like on campus?

## **Crowther**

Campus actually had some access to it because this was after Section 504. It was built during that time because it received federal funds, so it had to have some accessibility to it.

## **Rose**

So it had been really, freshly built?

## **Crowther**

Yes, yes. So we were...I was very fortunate in that. I was able to get around there. Pushing in my electric wheelchair. Plus, it was a very small campus. You got to know. It wasn't 40 acres like UT. But I got along. I made a lot of friends. We had a great time. And then it was time to transition.

**Rose**

What about your professors, getting access to classrooms or note taking?

**Crowther**

They were all on one level. I could take my own notes. What I did was for...In the classrooms, I just turned the desk around so that the seat would be on that side. It was very easy to accommodate things.

**Rose**

Our students still do that. [laughter]

**Crowther**

<topic>Creating a Girl Scouts troop for girls with disabilities</topic>

But they don't...yeah. I mean you learn these things. I was in Girl Scouts too. And I learned how to adapt to things very quickly when you're a Girl Scout.

**Rose**

Do you still have any memories of Girl Scouts handle like their other kids with disabilities?

**Crowther**

Yeah. I started in as a regular Girl Scout with a troop. And the leader of the troop was blind. She wanted a troop of girls with disabilities, which was way unusual. I was like, "For me?" Because the other kids got to go through scouting and stuff. My brother was an Eagle Scout and I thought, "That is so cool!"

So we did adaptive things. Mostly in books to get our patches and stuff. We talked about things. But adapting to things, we did like...if we needed to make a fire, we would use a fire pit. A barbeque pit basically because we could all get to it and do what we needed to do. So we basically made s'mores, like everybody and just learned to adapt like that. I thought that was great because it was an activity after school, something you had badges for and you progressed. And I got all the way up to cadet before I had to move on. That was during my school years, so that was fun to do. But I do remember specifically that the troop leader was blind 'cause we were helping her as she was helping us.

**Rose**

That's really cool.

**Crowther**

That was really cool. And it came up later in my life in another story. [laughter] We may have to do a couple of chapters here, but you might want to write down Girl Scouts because I was the leader at one time.

**Rose**

Yeah, I was wondering...

**Crowther**

Yeah. Of course! To this day, I'm kind of teased for being a Girl Scout. That wasn't bad. Okay, now is the time to transition. We can do after junior college. Everybody signed up, got accepted to UT. Well, I was going to sign up and get accepted to UT when, "What the hey?! Everybody else was."

I went into my Texas Rehab Counselor, and he said, "No. no. I don't t...you will not make it through UT. No, I don't think you will be able to do that. I don't think you will get accepted."

Everything was negative. I was bummed out to the max. I talked to my father about it. And he taught me always, "Never take no for an answer."

So I applied and I got accepted. Next time I went to see my counselor with my father until I showed him my letter of acceptance. And of course, the rest is history as they say because it...I'm sure it taught him a lesson. I can't imagine what would have happened if I listened to him. Probably would have ended up in a sheltered workshop or...ooohh...something crazy like that. But anyway, I did the normal thing just like everybody else. Like I got accepted into UT. I actually...this was the on-set of computers. I got accepted three times because they were form letters and I got three copies of them to get in. And I was like, "Wow! This is weird."

But hey, it was the beginning of computers. So because my friends from CTC were going, they were my buddies to help me around and choose to do things like that. Again, I had to live in the dorms. I had to live on-campus. I had to have an attendant. So my friend from CTC Debbie, she became my first attendant. And that helped her through her first year at college because she didn't have to pay room and board. And that was good.

**Rose**

Was this Jester Hall?

**Crowther**

<topic>Years at The University of Texas at Austin</topic>

Yes. Jester Hall. I was in the same room for four years. Imagine if you will. Every semester, we had to...sometime we had to switch attendants or whatever happened, happened. But every year, it was like a

different person. We were sharing people in the dorm as we went along. The wheelchair basketball team...got to know them. They were so cool. Oh my God!

**Rose**

Can you tell us more about the wheelchair basketball?

**Crowther**

Oh my gosh! At UT, they worked over at our practice at UT. I mean at the Gregory Gym, which I believe was the only accessible gym they could get to. And all the guys that were on the basketball team were the majority of them, also lived on-campus also in Jester Dorm, but on the other side wherever the guys were. Anyway...but we got to know them real well.

**Rose**

Do you know when that team started?

**Crowther**

I don't because I remember it had already started before I even got there. If you have any history on Randy Snow...

**Rose**

The UTA alumni?

**Crowther**

Yeah, he passed away. If you have any history on him, I think he was in the original Austin basketball...wheelchair basketball.

**Rose**

That's really interesting.

**Crowther**

I think so. All of the guys were very athletic and very good-looking. So yeah, we were swooning after them. But the basketball was just fascinating. I didn't understand how they could throw it so high. You know the ball, that's hard! Have you ever lifted a basketball? To me, it weighs a ton. But we socialized together. We got to

watch their basketball games. That was just fascinating. We became groupies, as they called them.

**Rose**

Can you remember any of the teams they played against?

**Crowther**

I really don't. But I'm pretty sure that Arlington's in there. UT Arlington.

**Rose**

Houston, I think may have had a deal.

**Crowther**

And yeah, I remember that.

**Rose**

There were probably community teams too.

**Crowther**

Yeah, yeah. There was one of the regulars I think. Anyway, but that was like a side activity. My socialization skills got very good at UT. Aside from having 40,000 other student there, there was a huge population for people with disabilities that were comingling with the regular students or whatever you call them now. Normal, non-disabled students. We also had services for students with disabilities. They would fix our wheelchairs. We got what we call therapy, they call exercise. We had that service available to us, which was good 'cause I needed stretching out every once in a while. We had a social activities at The Tavern, which then in those years served alcohol. Which made a lot of social friends and good music. Oh my God! The music was so good. And it was like we go Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Sometimes, but Sunday was back to studying and stuff. I did study, I did do papers and I did use an electric typewriter. I didn't lose all my skills. But I went to an electric typewriter to end the curb on paper, if you remember carbon paper. Oh my gosh! But those days are gone. Thank God. [laughter]

**Rose**

Can you think of anyone to talk to about the 1970s? Kind of like the creation of services at UT Austin who might still be alive? Or move to an organization that might?

**Crowther**

Oh, oh yeah. I was the secretary for my...for a long time. I can think of on might Ray Baughn. B-A-U-G-H-N Ray. He's actually in my AARP group and we're meeting tomorrow. [laughter] He doesn't remember me because he's pretty advanced in age. But I think he was one at the beginning of MIGHT. **Susanne Currier, Steve Currier**...he was at the dorm. And he was into the basketball and everything. And she I think worked somewhere on campus or was a nursing student or something. Anyway, it was a love affair. It was so sweet. Those two people...I think Susanne still works at the Health Department here in Austin. I've run into her maybe once a decade. And I never knew where Steve went to, but they're in Austin. So I think you might be able to find them on the web. I think there might have been some pushing from Austin through also not only the community organization of MIGHT, but also I was involved in a student organization we developed called People Against Barriers.

**Rose**

And do you have a timing of what MIGHT...? We heard about People Against Barriers. But do you know where it developed?

**Crowther**

I just remember going to the MIGHT meetings. And then after I graduated, I became involved with MIGHT and they dissolved eventually.

**Rose**

Okay, they were already well-along in 1979 when you arrived.

**Crowther**

Right. And then when I went to what was the Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities, which was great! I was on that for about ten years. I loved it because we could work directly with the mayor. UT wasn't as forgetting on our actions and the need for accessibility. Even though we were a formal group, we had Sensitivity Days and events. Oh people just loved those.

**Rose**

Well what did you do there?

**Crowther**

Oh, you know. We bring the wheelchairs. We would ride some wheelchairs over some water hoses. This is what it feels like in a snake pit. And then we'd have them blindfolded. Try to make their way around and stuff like that. Some people were just downright mean about because they didn't want to be disabled. It was like,

“Ooohhh. I’d hate to tell you this, but eventually…And I was in the School of Social Work. This had a lot of history to it because it was the complete opposite of where I lived. It was on 21<sup>st</sup>, it’s where the gas station was. Sixth was where the School of Social Work was. And it was a renovated apartment. Two floors, no elevator. In School of Social Work, learned about the modifications and adapting my classes from upstairs to downstairs. I had no access to the resource library or anything like that.

**Rose**

But they…did you request that they move your classes?

**Crowther**

No, actually I had a wonderful counselor on campus who worked with Texas Rehab who we would work through even picking out classes and stuff. And it was like, “I don’t like that. I don’t like that one…” Well we used to have that option. We had big, old catalogues. You would have hated it. But we had to pick classes and times and where they were. But the School of Social Work was the school, but that was one building. So whenever I had my social work classes, not only was it clear across campus, but my counselor worked with the staff to make sure that my classes were all downstairs. And anything downstairs went upstairs for the folks that could take stairs. So they did that a lot. So I thought that was cool. Except when it would rain really bad. That kind of messed me up. But my family, my sisters especially made this huge poncho. I had to be weather ready. So I made a poncho, but unfortunately they put a pocket in front. So I am in this **tremental** downpour, making my way to class. And when I get to class in my pocket full of water and I lean over and it all just goes *gowash* onto the floor. And people were like, “Can we help you take that off?”

And I was like, “Thank you!”

Oh my gosh! Torrential. But it was fun. Now the school has…the School of Social Work went into a building just up the street from the dorm. And I just went, “Wait.”

I’ve been there several times and I’m really impressed. But I was kind of saddened because they’re so much closer to the dorm now. [laughter]

**Rose**

So what kind of activism did you wind up doing at UT Austin?

**Crowther**

We did a lot of letter writing to the chancellor about what needs to be done. We took…we did surveys of campus. And that’s kind of where MIGHT helped us out was because they were doing a survey of access in Austin. So they helped us with the access inventory over at UT.

**Rose**

And did you get any response? Were like the administrators willing to work with you?

**Crowther**

Not that much. We were loud enough. We weren't I guess activists enough. And back then, it was big time bureaucracy. It was like the emperor. We were taking big steps, but getting small results. That's neat. Let me tell you about our group. We had developed from the bottom down. So People against Barriers: we got the shirts, we got the charts, we got everything. Did everything right. And after the assessment in campus, we submitted that to the administration and the government there. On the side, I was involved. I was involved in a lawsuit against the university. I got to know them better this way, but it was called *Farris et. al. v. The University of Texas*.

**Rose**

Can you tell us more about Farris?

**Crowther**

F—either a or e. F—A—R—R—I—S. And the first name is Charlotte Farris et. al. And I was one of the plaintiffs and oh that was scary! But it had to do with no lifts on buses. We were forced to live on campus. That was our mantra. They were causing us to have to stay on campus where as everyone else was able to move on and we got service for them. Why didn't they have service for us? That was some of the issues back then in Austin too. I remember specifically paratransit started in 1976 because of a lawsuit by citizens of Austin against the city of Austin for a lack of transportation.

**Rose**

Was that MIGHT behind it?

**Crowther**

I believe MIGHT was behind it. And Martha Arbuckle was involved in it. She passed on. But I remember a lot of folks got involved with that. And then they won. And then that was the start of paratransit, but it wasn't on campus. We had those unairconditioned...I never really wanted to ride those. But it's a principle of the thing. So I went to court. I was in the newspaper.

**Rose**

What year was this?

**Crowther**

This was '83.

**Rose**

And you were...? You were at UT Austin from '79 'till...

**Crowther**

From '80. I started in January in '80. It takes a little bit of a transition time. [laughter]

**Rose**

So you moved out in '82. 'Till when?

**Crowther**

Well, 1980 to 1983. So I got all my four years in. And of course you know I had my Associates of Art. I had a lot of my classes taken care of.

**Rose**

You got a BSW?

**Crowther**

Yes. Very proud when I got applause. I don't know what that is, but yeah. Yay! We were involved in a lawsuit against the University of Texas. And it was Goliath...David and Goliath. The whiny wheelchair people versus elite suits. Anyway, so I was involved. I was the camera. The photo person took pictures of me for the newspaper showing me getting into a freight elevator at our federal building, federal court. It smelled of trash because that's what they hauled in. And I just kept saying, "This is not cool. This stinks."

And so they overbattled us. We got defeated, but what we did started really bringing up the momentum of what ADAPT is. ADAPT was the civil rights organization. Their first goal was to get accessible transit. I fell in love with them. They started in 1985 and they're here.

**Rose**

In Texas?

**Crowther**

Yeah.

**Rose**

So just a year or so after you moved to Colorado and after your suit?

**Crowther**

Yeah. So that was cool.

**Rose**

And how did you get involved in the lawsuit before?

**Crowther**

Some people we know. We all had the concerns. So did it as a class action based on 504 because they were getting federal dollars.

**Rose**

How did you find a lawyer? Particularly, did you raise the money?

**Crowther**

Oh we have a place called Advocacy Inc., which is now Disability Rights Texas.

**Rose**

So the PNA group?

**Crowther**

Yes. They helped us with the legal aspects and all the documents that went with it. Oh my God. Talk about tearing down trees. It had so much paper. And we were just standing by our rights to have equal access to the university and equal access to services. And what a service is was transit.

**Rose**

So there had been some awesome people against barriers. How did the group form?

**Crowther**

I went behind one of our senior members who talked about helping get it together and all. And I had some folks from the dorm 'cause I knew everybody that lived on campus. So we had probably...I'm thinking about twenty members at one time, which was pretty cool. As we started to get our word out. And it was all very grassroots getting the word out.

**Rose**

Was this cross-disability?

**Crowther**

Yep. Cross-disability. It was the visually-impaired, hearing-impaired and wheelchair. Lots of the wheelchair basketball wheelchairs some of the more difficult issues because so many barriers. I have to tell you though. Having met some of the seniors while I was a junior or a sophomore was really helpful. The buddy system. I was a big buddy to **Renee**. [laughter] But I was part of a buddy system. It was new. And they took me through campus showing me the accessible routes of going through buildings. You go through Building A, you take the elevator up one floor, you go through the backdoor, you go over through Building B, you go up in the elevator down, then you can get out to...Instead of going through the whole campus. So that was so cool. I had like a hidden tunnel kind of approach to getting around campus. But it was very helpful. It was very adaptive. And it worked!

**Rose**

What about like lack of access, classroom access?

**Crowther**

It was...actually, it was something that we had to check every time for every class. And every time for every class, a counselor had to make sure that the class was going to be accessible and that the professor understood that there was going to be a person with a disability who may need note taker services or whatever. So that and students with disabilities...they had volunteers to help do these things. So of course you wouldn't go to something that's not accessible. So I didn't get to see a lot of that. So what I do know is that we fondly called it The Six Pack on campus. There's six buildings old as dirt. We never got into them. Just over the last twenty years, I think they made them accessible 'cause the ADA went into effect and went, "Oops!"

I got involved on the President's Committee at UT after I graduated. And that was when the ADA was in effect though. My career was with Capitol Metro. And so my placement at UT on the President's Committee was shuttle-related.

**Rose**

Oh jeez!

**Crowther**

Isn't that something? And coincidentally, as I was working for Capitol Metro, the university put out bids for shuttle service. Capitol Metro was the only one that had lifts on their buses. I brought that to their attention. Surprise! They won the contract to work with UT and provide shuttle services.

**Rose**

And when was that?

**Crowther**

<topic>Internship and Mentoring at UT Austin</topic>

And that was back in I believe it was '89 or '90. It was right after the UT system started getting rid of its shuttle bus service and they wanted Capitol Metro to do it because we had lifts. But I had to tell Capitol Metro. I said, "They don't have any lifts, but we do." So that was a coup. It was good to be involved. [laughter]

**Rose**

Definitely! Did you have any experiences with professors who weren't accommodating or did the vocational counselor...?

**Crowther**

My counselor was so good. She's still good.

**Rose**

And was she in the Students with Disabilities Services or work rehab?

**Crowther**

She had her office in that office. So it was all one. So Darleene. D-A-R-L-E-E-N-E. Clemons. C-L-E-M-O-N-S. Was mine and everybody loved her. I mean she had the highest goals for us. It was like, "I know you can do it."

And she was so encouraging. Such a positive impact and mentor to us. That's someone who actually believed in us.

**Rose**

Was she able-bodied?

**Crowther**

The issue was she was Black and that was kind of after the integration and all, which we didn't know the difference in segregation and integration and everything. We had our own issues. I remember her at...it was really neat. After I graduated, I kept running into the community while I was doing my social work duties. I'd run into her in different places. And that was so wonderful because it was like, "Yep, I'm still carrying on."

**Rose**

That's great. Where did you get your social work internship?

**Crowther**

I did it of all places at the Austin State School. Yeah, that was trippy.

**Rose**

So I guess it was accessible?

**Crowther**

Yeah, it kind of had to be 'cause they had a lot of people with disabilities there. Pretty severe. But it was during the beginning of...Not money follows the person, but getting people out of institutions and getting them mainstreamed into housing into services stuff like that. So I was really pleased that a group of guys that I did my internship with that I got to do the training for their integration and their independent living.

**Rose**

How did that go?

**Crowther**

Oh God. It's hard to imagine not knowing something that everybody else knows. But they were the brightest people. They wanted out. They had severe disabilities, but they knew what they were doing. And we'd go out on outings. Stuff like that. Set up outings and stuff. But the classes were great, they loved the ideas, they loved meeting people. It was just a fantastic memory. And to see them after I graduated in the community did my heart...You know I thought, "Ha! They're here."

So it was my guys of five and unfortunately, they've all passed away from one reason or another. Of course, it's been a while. But one of them, the last one of them, recently passed away in '10. I did my internship for social work three semesters at Austin State School, which is now referred to as State Supported Living Centers. They were highly populated when I was there. I had two groups. One was the guys, who were always happy to see me because we'd go out and do fun things. But it also, having seeing them out in the community was so wonderful. And then I had my elderly women whose parents were towards death. Getting ready probably to die soon. And it was my job to counsel with them and to get them to kind of understand what gonna happen and also to get them...just let them cry. Get ready. And that was a good group because they got it. They knew it all along 'cause they saw people leaving the State School, but didn't return. And that's what they knew as death. And I was just like, "Oh! Let me help you with this."

So it was really interesting. But you had to understand these people were sixties, seventies or older. They have been in the institution for a long time. But we could speak. They could communicate. And they shouldn't have been there.

**Rose**

Yeah, that's a lot of the population now. They're older people.

**Crowther**

Yeah, there's only 2,000 people in thirteen state living centers. And they're spending over six million dollars I think to support them. And I thought, "Golly! Do you know how much we can do with that to use in the community?"

Anyway, there was a lot of good I learned from there. There was a lot of accessibility to the facility. There was activities, went Christmas shopping. That was an outing. I'll never do that again.

**Rose**

How come?

**Crowther**

Well, it's like herding cats. They all had like \$5 or \$10 to spend and they all wanted toys or something. And I was like, "No this is for your family. You wanted to get...remember?"

And so, I thought, "Oh no! I don't think I can do this again."

It was exhausting, but they did give me support with staff and stuff. But it was still like herding cats in a candy store. [laughter] So, but it was a very good experience for me because I learned what the isolation was like. I learned what the cages were like...the beds with high rails. Those looked like cages. And the smell? I remember all of that. And it was just...it was a sad, depressing time. And you were a ray of sunshine, but you're a student. And now you are going to end up leaving. Like...This was going to be another traumatic event in their life.

It was just...however, my guys transitioned out and I got to see them work in the community, being involved in not everything. So that was cool.

**Rose**

What made you decide to major in social work?

**Crowther**

I took a lot of those interest inventories I knew I wasn't going to be a rocket scientist. I knew that I wasn't any engineer. I knew I wasn't the psychologist kind of person. So we narrowed it down to social work, which was good and then it just fell into place naturally. 'Cause of my personality and my experiences as a person with a disability. And the movement at the time was for access as a civil right. And so it was just perfect. And I knew a lot of people.

**Rose**

How did your social work professor talk, not about disability?

**Crowther**

I had the most wonderful mentor social work instructor professor. Deana. D-E-A-N-A. Mersky. M-E-R-S-K-Y. She was so excited that I was a student with a disability pursuing social work. She really helped me a lot. Between her and Darleene Clemons, I'll tell you what. It was so encouraging. And then again, we kept running into each other after I graduated in different social areas or events. We kept up with each other after I graduated. So I held true to my social work goals, values and everything. It was very weird to be a social worker in transit. It's unheard of. But Capitol Metro came to life in 1985. And I voted for it 'cause we had to vote and I had the right to vote. So I voted for a pass city bus and Capitol Metro. So we were on attack with them. ADAPT was in the way. In development here, I was a Vista volunteer at the time.

**Rose**

Is that what you did after college?

**Crowther**

Yeah. Of course.

**Rose**

Where did you volunteer?

**Crowther**

I had **ARCIL**, the Austin Resource Center for Independent Living and the Coalition for Texans with Disabilities and The Coalition for Texans with Disabilities.

**Rose**

Okay. [laughter]

**Crowther**

Small world. So that's how I know Pat. That's how I know everybody else. So I started my Vista volunteer work there. And as a Vista, I couldn't participate in any social...What's it called? Anything radical. Social...no. What was that word?

**Rose**

Social movements?

**Crowther**

No.

**Rose**

Social advocacy?

**Crowther**

It was...disobedience!

**Rose**

Oh, civil disobedience.

**Crowther**

Civil disobedience. Oh!

**Rose**

Because you are a government employee?

**Crowther**

Yes, because I was a government employee. But that didn't mean that I couldn't help. So I helped with ADAPT. I helped with being on the advisory committee for Capitol Metro 'cause I was a Vista volunteer and we had helping the community. So I was doing all this simultaneously and then I got a job with ARCIL, but it was only part-time, so I had to get a second job.

**Rose**

So what was the part-time job with ARCIL?

**Crowther**

I was the attendance services coordinator. Don't cha know? I took it over from Charlotte Farris, who was in the lawsuit with me. And half-time, I did attendant services during the day. And then the other half, I got a job with the Lone Star Girl Scout council. Well that was kind of different. But at that time, I could drive. So I literally worked from eight to twelve. And then drove and went to five or six. Whatever that was. But my job at Girl Scouts was to develop a team, a troop of girls with disabilities. And I found that rather segregationist or however that term is used. I said, "Well I think we need to get girls into troops."

And they said, "Good luck."

'Cause people did not want girls with disabilities in their troops. I said, "Well I'm going to fix that!" [laughter]

So oddly enough, I had my own troop of girls with disabilities who were severely disabled. But I had a leader to step. I remember we were Troop 425 and we met at the recreation center. And we did all the starting fires and barbeque pits and everything. And I remembered we did. And my assistant had a lot of Girl Scout knowledge that I didn't remember from a leader perspective. So she helped with adapting some of the things so that they could get badges and stuff. That was fun. I was the leader. I was an actual Girl Scout leader.

**Rose**

That's very good. Cool!

**Crowther**

I couldn't sell cookies or anything. It was horrible!

**Rose**

Was this kind of like how your politics evolved and that having a dedicated troop was no longer like, "Hey! I was getting to be involved!" But also dedicating a troop of segregation?

**Crowther**

Yeah. I was one of the leading causes for girls getting integrated into troops. I had sessions with the...training sessions with a lot of the leaders. I got to know all of the leaders because I had a job of doing jobs and paperwork and stuff. So that only lasted two years.

And so did my other part-time job, but my part-time job became a full-time job. Because I worked as program manager for a 24-hour shared attendant program in an apartment complex where we had people with disabilities living next door to each other at...I think we had six. And they would share the same attendant through scheduling...cooperative scheduling on who had to get up first. You know, that type of thing. And they were from nursing homes. Severely disabled. And they wanted to live independently, but didn't have that care they needed 24-hours. And it was just attendant care. So we were able to run that as a pilot. But they needed a manager, but I didn't know that turned into a 24-hour gig 'cause we had some rowdy times over there and some problems. Not only with the residents, but with the attendants, the hiring, the firing, the everything. 'Cause this was like, "Woah nelly! I thought this was going to be a lot easier."

'Cause it is management after all.

**Rose**

So do you know if that was a common pilot? Because right around late September, they had the same kind of program. Helping to restore ability. I am wondering was that...

**Crowther**

'86.

**Rose**

Yeah, this has been '81 and we don't know how long it ran. At least through the mid-'80s.

**Engel**

You talking about The Peach Tree Apartments?

**Rose**

Yes, The Peach Tree Apartments. Yeah I was just wondering if that was a strategy that was shared among

different...

**Crowther**

It might have been because we had the support of the state HHSC to pay for this. And we had a contract with them through ARCIL. And so I was the manager. I had to do all of the bureaucratic paperwork. But I also had to do the behavioral management of both the residents and the staff. [laughter] I was like crazy at that time. But any way, What happened with the program, they called it SAP, which is not very glamorous. But it worked. What happened was our cots started to exceed what the agency could afford. That was because people were going into the hospital. So we weren't getting paid for. We had hiring issues, firing issues with the attendants working on worker's comp... Everything just blew up over time. And so, I don't know if you believe in miracles, but starting to see the end of this program as the money was dwindling and the board was talking, I had applied for a job at Capitol Metro. I found out about it because of the advisory committee I was on. They met at night, so no one knew. But I applied for a job called The On-booksman because they were having difficulties with that radical group out in the community, blocking buses. And they wanted someone of my caliber and background to be able to communicate, kind of help. They didn't know if I was a member of that group. [laughter] And I certainly didn't tell them. But I was... the night that the board of ARCIL decided to no longer run that program was the same night that Capitol Metro offered me the position. I kid you not! That's a miracle. I was flabbergasted and so excited.

**Rose**

Wow! And I'm thinking where Capitol Metro is where we want to save for now.

**Crowther**

Oh yeah. Yeah. That's twenty years. Sorry. Twenty-five? History...

**Rose**

Yeah. And what part of ADAPT's relationship.

**Crowther**

Yes. MIGHT and ADAPT didn't get along. Mine focused on the lawsuit with paratransit. And that was their means of accessible transit. And they did not like the tactics of ADAPT. And they felt that services for people with disabilities on paratransit would be reduced if they put lifts on buses. And we were like, "Uhhh, no."

But that was their perspective. So there was a big divide, which was really sad. 'Cause you know, we really would have made a great team between the two groups. But I was on both groups. I maintained my civility in both of them and knew what was going on. I started to learn the balance of what was going on in the community, who's doing what, what I can do. So that was pretty, darn interesting. And being on the advisory committee for Capitol Metro had made it even more interesting because they took over the paratransit service. So on the advisory committee was where also some people from MIGHT. So I tell you what. It was amazing!

Definitely amazing. And there was some battles of words. Mostly, thank goodness, no fist were thrown. There were battle words and so they kept themselves pretty much separated. But we loved them. ADAPT loved them 'cause they were so gun-ho on paratransit, which is fine. But what about fixed route?

**Rose**

Yeah. Mainline.

**Crowther**

Yeah.