

CONTACT Care Line of East Tennessee, an Oak Ridge icon of trained listeners, part 3

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on January 13, 2014)

As we continue the history of CONTACT Care Line of East Tennessee, we go back to the official date that CONTACT of Oak Ridge started, November 3, 1973. It was after over six months of training for potential volunteers and selection of 116 volunteers that a commissioning service was held and the first person started answering 865-482-4949 by saying, "This is CONTACT. May I help you?"

As a side note to history: The telephone number for CONTACT was so close to the one for The Oak Ridger's "Ask Incky" column, 865-482-4959, that it was anticipated to potentially cause a bit of confusion. However, an article published in The Oak Ridger on November 1, 1973, cautioned callers and assured them that mistaken calls would be courteously and quickly corrected.

The article went on to explain why the phone number for "Ask Incky" was selected. It seems it was done with careful consideration and thoughtful selection. The "49" was chosen because it was the year when the gates were opened to the city of Oak Ridge allowing the public to enter the city and the "59" was chosen to commemorate the incorporation of the city.

Back to CONTACT's official shift filled by freshly trained volunteer Edith Baxter. What follows is her personal account as presented on the 40th anniversary of CONTACT Care Line of East Tennessee. She described her personal experience by saying: "Psychology 101 was not enough. I needed training in people skills. It was then I found the brochure on the new CONTACT training classes. This was for me!

"40 years ago tonight the very first training event for Helpline workers ended. Within this last session there would be a commissioning service for all workers and the very first worker would be 'sent out' to open the phone lines for this special telephone ministry to our city.

"Did it ever occur to me that I could be that 'sent out' one? No, never even though my name was the the right place in the alphabet – surely it would be someone more outgoing and sharing in class than I did.

"As I slowly came forward I could feel the care and concern from the group (maybe relief that it was not them!) As our leaders brought scriptures, encouragement and assurance, my confidence began to improve. Our newly elected coordinator was asked to join me for the closing prayer. She would escort me to the CONTACT offices, acquaint me with the center and review some protocol. It was assuring to have someone take this step of faith with me into this great ministry.

"Some three – five calls came that evening. The first was from my backup counselor – expressing his concern and checking that we had arrived safely (it was dark.) The other calls were mostly seeking information about the ministry and its outreach. One lady wished to know if the ministry was for elderly, lonely people like her mother. I assured her it was.

"A knock on the door was a surprise. I waited. At the second knock, a voice said, 'This is your backup counselor, Ben St. Clair. I just dropped by to see how things were going.' After a short visit he and I both seemed encouraged.

"No, I did not receive any earth-shattering calls that night but some weeks later I did receive what was termed a suicidal call that was disturbing. I had listened and responded for a good bit and seemed no hope was forthcoming, so I asked if he would talk with my backup counselor. He consented, but I found that my backup was unavailable for a couple of hours.

"What was I to do? After considering possible options, I decided: I have a wonderful pastor/counselor, friend, so, I called my pastor, Dr. Lee Morris, and he said, 'Yes, I'll talk with him.' And I am still grateful that he stood in for my backup and me that night.

"My service with CONTACT of Oak Ridge lasted about 12 years. The training and experience has enhanced my life greatly these 40 years.

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“So, congratulations, CONTACT Care Line, for your success these many years. May the next 40 yield even greater rewards. Thank you, CONTACT!

What a great recollection Edith had to share with the people at the 40th Anniversary celebration who have been a part of CONTACT Care Line of East Tennessee for only the last few years. What a great reminder the recalling of this story must have been to those who have been a part of CONTACT for a number of years. And finally, what joy it must have brought to the others at that event who had been there on that singular day of beginning for CONTACT of Oak Ridge.

The first annual meeting of CONTACT of Oak Ridge was held on March 26, 1974. The following people were elected to the board of directors: Dr. Robert Bigelow, president; the Rev. Ben B. St. Clair, vice-president; Mrs. J. M. Chilton, secretary; Frank Callaghan, treasurer. Committee chairman serving on the board were: the Rev. Lee Morris, training; Keith Funkhouser, finance; Mrs. R. I. Jolley, publicity; the Rev. C. E. Weber, personnel; Roy A. Vandermeer and Mrs. Frank Wuest, recruitment. William Coghlan, Roger Crawford, the Rev. James K Harrell, III, James Luton, George Lutrell, James McMahon, Jr., Woodford Spencer, Berdell Tolliver and William Truex were elected members-a-large.

The Rev. Alan Walker, of Sydney, Australia, originator of Lifeline International and Contact Teleministeries, Inc., spoke Sunday, November 9, 1975, to the CONTACT of Oak Ridge annual meeting. The young organization in Oak Ridge was in full stride now and the networking with other CONTACT locations being formed across the nation brought Walker to the states to speak. Having him here in Oak Ridge demonstrated that our organization was fully mature and provided needed services routinely.

Next we will look at the directors to serve CONTACT of Oak Ridge over the years and enjoy the personal reflections of Linda Doyle and Betty Anne Domm.



An unidentified CONTACT listener

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George Oliphant, Linda Doyle, B. H. Thompson, George Warne, Betty Anne Domm and Wayne Russell
1978



Contact Flea Market Committee: from left sitting, Claudia Lever, Wayne Russell, chairman, and Granville Kyker; standing, Linda Goodwin and Janet Finamore, CONTACT Director 1978