

## Safe Haven/Women's Coalition Oral History Project

10 interviews regarding the organization and development of the Women's Coalition Shelter (now Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center) to assist victims of domestic violence in Duluth, MN

Interviews conducted in 2015



A Project of the Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center  
and Gina Temple-Rhodes, Cedar Story Services

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Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society*



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**Cover Images:**

*Left: 1988 Anniversary Booklet (Jean DeRider), Safe Haven's current logo*

## **Safe Haven/Women's Coalition Oral History Project Summary**

The Safe Haven/ Women's Coalition Oral History Project was undertaken in 2015 to record the memories of the founding and development of the Northeastern Minnesota Coalition of Battered Women, a group dedicated to opening a shelter and offering resources to assist battered women in Duluth, MN. This shelter was one of the first such shelters in Minnesota and the United States. Founded in 1978 as a collective and later known simply as the Women's Coalition, this group evolved into the Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center in 2001. Safe Haven currently operates a 39 bed shelter, resource center and support groups.

Ten interviews were conducted in early 2015 with women who had been involved with the original organization of the Women's Coalition, the establishment of the first and later shelter facilities, and others who were closely linked as a volunteers, staff or employees of associated organizations. The project generated over eleven hours of audio files and 181 pages of interview transcripts. Video of a few of the interviews was also recorded.

Interview questions focused on how and why each narrator became involved with the Women's Coalition, how they were trained, what work they did, what they learned and what kept them working on this important, intense topic. Narrators shared stories of organizational successes and challenges, lessons learned about racial discrimination and perceptions, and stories of women and children helped by the shelter. Relationships with other organizations such as the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program (DAIP) were discussed, often remembering DAIP founder Ellen Pence and Shelter organizer Cathy Curley, both now deceased. Women remembered working alone at night, assisting women who had just experienced violence, or advocating for them in the court system. Some memories focused on the importance of the feminist philosophy and the original Collective organizational structure to model a new society without hierarchy or rigid roles and titles. Many narrators discussed their perspectives on the role of women in today's society and the changing attitudes about violence and even the language changes from "battered women" to "domestic abuse" and the implications of those words.

Interviews were conducted Gina Temple-Rhodes of Cedar Story Services, an oral and family history recording service in Duluth, MN. Transcriptions were completed by Gina Temple-Rhodes, Abbie Scheiderer and Susan Taylor of Duluth and were approved by the narrators.

The oral history project was managed by Safe Haven Shelter and Resource Center. Project funding was provided by the State of Minnesota from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society. Interview files are housed in the UMD Archives and Special Collections at the Kathryn A. Martin Library at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

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## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Marilyn Bamford (b. 1944) - MB**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes -GTR  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded March 27, 2015**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Marilyn Bamford on March 27, 2015 for the Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project. Thank you for being willing to do this.

**MB:** You're welcome.

**GTR:** Let's start out by telling me when you first came to Duluth?

**MB:** I moved to Duluth in the summer of 1974. I was twenty-nine and I started volunteering for Safe Haven in September of 1989.

**GTR:** How did you become interested, or what did you first do?

**MB:** I had a friend by the name of Meredith Schifsky who was in a birthday group I belonged to, who was a nursing student working on her Masters program and she had done her master's thesis on the women's shelter. It was called the Women's Coalition at that time. I was interested in it, though I certainly didn't know anything about it. I had never volunteered. However in early August of 1989 I was walking home with my daughter Maria, who had been visiting a friend at St. Luke's, in the hospital. We were walking past the women's shelter, which was on East 1<sup>st</sup> street, and was a secret at that time. My daughter, Maria, said, 'That's the women's shelter.' And I said, 'How do you know that?' And she said, 'Well, it's because our class at Marshall, brought toys there.' And I said, 'Really?' But at that moment, I realized... I had just been ordained to the diaconate in the Episcopal Church, which is kind of a social ministry, bringing the concerns of the world to the church and the church into the world, that that was where I needed to go. It was sort of a call.

And then I called Mary Ness, who was the volunteer director, and I remember her saying something on the order of, 'Well, you know, we don't evangelize here.' And I said, 'I don't think you know much about the Episcopal Church, do you?' [Laughs] I said, 'We don't really feel like we need to evangelize anybody, especially people who are in crisis.' Though, I don't know

if that's entirely true anymore, but we certainly wouldn't use that as a situation to put pressure on people to become Christian or Episcopalian or anything else in particular. So, I did the training and I thought it was just superb training course. I had never experienced such a good training course as a volunteer, and I had done a lot of volunteer things by that time. I started reading about domestic abuse and I realized that my mother had been, certainly, verbally abused by my very powerful dad. She was a child of the times, she was born in 1901 and so, women didn't even have the vote when she was first born. Despite having many suffragette relatives, she didn't feel there was anything she could do to get out of that marriage and still be a respectable woman in Marquette, Michigan. Then I also, as I was sitting reading all of these books, that there were to read about domestic violence. I was really learning about Duluth and it's place in the history of preventing domestic violence, particularly the Mandatory Arrest Law, I realized all the male adult privilege that I experienced in my life. [Laughs] And even though I considered myself a feminist and was a subscriber to MS. Magazine and all that kind of thing, that I had kind of lost touch with that. I describe myself to friends as having lived in an East End ghetto for too long and not having worked outside of the home. I'd done plenty of volunteer work, but I hadn't worked outside of the home, so it was a reintroduction for me as a former social worker to what was going on nowadays and how people were beginning to recognize the toll that domestic violence took on women.

**GTR:** What was your background?

**MB:** My background was teaching. I got a teaching degree from the University of Michigan, because that's what you did if you wanted to get a job and you didn't want to go to graduate school and your husband was in medical school and you needed to work so that you could get married. That's what you did. [Laughs] And then I've been a social worker, because there weren't any teaching jobs. And teaching, it wasn't really my cup of tea. I learned a whole lot about developmental things with children. I learned a lot about families. Learned a lot about poverty, because I taught in Baltimore and later when I was a social worker and even later, when I became a family therapist. I was in graduate school when I was volunteering at the shelter.

**GTR:** By that point, the Duluth Intervention Program had begun?

**MB:** Well, they certainly had Mandatory Arrest at that point. And one of the things—I did two things after I got the training—I did the women's group on Wednesday morning, because I was in grad school for counseling at UWS and that was good experience for me, plus I had done a couple of quarters of chaplaincy education at St. Mary's and so I was pretty good at doing groups. But those were the hardest groups I had ever done, because everyone was in crisis. I will say, they were harder than doing groups at Miller-Dwan in the in-patient unit, because most everybody was certainly suffering, I'm sure, from post traumatic stress [disorder] (PTSD).

**GTR:** Those external factors, personal, emotional things?

**MB:** Right, all kinds of things going on and not very many people are used to being in a group. Generally, in in-patient mental health, you have some people who have done twelve-step groups, so there's some sense of, 'the group is a good thing, it's a positive thing, I can learn from this' you know, that kind of sense of being a good group member. I remember, at Safe Haven, we'd have these young girls who were really (not aware), they didn't understand all the social problems that had lead them to this place, the fact that we really are not clear about the place of women in this country and the whole history of women's lack of rights. They had no idea. They were just looking for a safe place to be. And they really, many times, just wanted to go right back to their abusers. Because it didn't seem so bad after they had been there for a while. And I remember that was probably the hardest thing. Oh, and the other thing was, we had to teach, in the group [laughs] I was given this job, which really makes me laugh right now, because it, I was kind of frustrated with, though I understood why they were doing it, was basically a curriculum to cover exactly what happened with women in violent situations. It was kind of an emancipation curriculum. I wish I could tell you what the name of it was. And believe me, I tried to cover it. I really felt that we probably would have been better off talking about what the women wanted to talk about, because I tell you, most of the group was not very interested. The larger philosophy of the women's movement and exactly what the dynamics were in battering situations, they were mainly interested in, 'What do I do now?', 'How do I get along now?' I don't think I could have articulated that at the time. But I thought, 'These people know what they're doing. I should be doing this.' But I remember thinking, 'This is hard to do! This is really hard to do!' [Laughs]

**GTR:** It was the history of the women's movement?

**MB:** Well, no, it wasn't... You know, it's been 25, 26 years, so it's like, all I remember was, I felt like, 'I can't... This feels so didactic. I feel like I'm teaching religious reeducation or something like that.' I was frustrated with it, but on the other hand I felt like there are things here that would be good if these women learned (them). But I wasn't completely convinced that it was going to make a difference for them. It'd be interesting to hear what other people have to think about that now.

**0:10:15.9**

**GTR:** These were women who were actually staying at the shelter?

**MB:** Yes. They were staying at the shelter. It was done, I think (because) they needed something for the women to do while the staff was having their meeting, which was on Wednesday mornings. I did the group, and later on, when I was taking a graduate school group

facilitation course, I recorded the group, and when I could, over time, I would get someone to do the group with me. And I did the group with, for the most part, with a woman by the name of Linda. But she later ran the visitation center. Then she remarried. Schubert, Linda Schubert. Her mother taught at St. Scholastica in the nursing program.

**GTR:** She was another volunteer?

**MB:** She was another volunteer. I don't think she was getting paid for anything, but she later worked running the visitation center. I remember I would do these tapes and I would give them to my professor, and she would say, 'Marilyn, when I listen to your tapes, I'm just worn out.' [Laughs] And I would laugh to myself and I'd say, 'Linda, look what we're doing! This is hard work and we're doing a good job, and my instructor is worn out.' And so, I think what was great about doing the group together, with somebody else was that you had company, you felt like you could model, you could have more fun with it. Because, I thought, 'These women needed some fun.' And they needed people who were kind of savvy leading the group. But also who could have fun, and who could have fun with them. It wasn't like, you knew very well you couldn't go in and say, 'Oh, poor you!' Nobody wants that. Even though some of the situations were so terrible, people had been so beat up and so physically ravaged, that it's just heart breaking. But nobody wants to be felt sorry for. What you basically want is to empower people. That's what the curriculum was supposed to do. And maybe if I looked at it now, I'd feel differently about it. But I remember thinking, somehow, 'I can't do this justice, as much justice as I'd like to do.' And I don't think they're quite ready for it.

**GTR:** Did they have other meetings?

**MB:** Oh, yes, they did other things. I think the groups... I don't think they're doing it, I know they're not doing a group like that now, that I've ever heard of. So, I did those groups, and I did on-call intervention, which meant you would be called in the middle of the night and you would go out, you'd be called by the shelter person and they would say, 'So-and-so, this person has been, uh, victimized by her partner and he has been taken by the police and would you go see her with your materials?' And so, I would go out and find the address, which usually was in a part of town that, you felt like, 'Okay, get out of the car, and stand up straight, be empowered.' And how old was I at the time? Let me see, I have to think about it. I was late thirties, I guess, late thirties? Oh, no, I was 44, 45. So, I felt like, pretty strong. I wasn't too worried about somebody taking me out, but I was a little nervous about it. Yes, I knew what people could do, I wasn't stupid. And I would go and I would knock on the door, and sometimes the family would be there, the woman would be there and they'd wonder, 'Who in the world is this?' And I'd say, 'Well, I'm here to tell you what's happened, and what's going to happen to your partner or your husband, or whoever it is, and to help you understand a little bit about what's happened to you.' I thought it was an extremely valuable program. I always feel grateful that no one's ever been hurt



going out there. Because, I'm just always so grateful for that, because I'd always just felt lucky, to some extent.

**GTR:** You'd go out alone?

**MB:** Oh, yeah, alone!

**GTR:** Have they discontinued that?

**MB:** Oh, no, I think they're still doing it today. But they do pay people; they paid me. \$15 a time. So, that paid for your car (gas). The hardest thing was getting up in the middle of the night and they were always somewhere around two in the morning. So, it was in the middle of a very good night of sleep, interrupted. [Laughs] But my kids were older and I wasn't working, I was going to school and so it wasn't too hard. You know, you could always sleep in a little bit in the morning, or something like that. But I think it's a great program. And I'll never forget the time that I got this call and it was for this motel that is now torn down, on the water by the Canal Park here. It's the really nice one. I went in, I forget what it's called, the Canal Park Lodge, I think it's called.

**GTR:** Was it a Holiday Inn?

**MB:** It's kind of a hotel, motel, but sort of, very big and kind of falling apart. I mean, that was the feeling I had about it and I'm not sure it was really true, but at any rate, I went in there, walked down ten hall ways, because there were a lot of hallways, and knock on the door. And this young woman was there, and she was Canadian. She said, 'I'm so glad you're here. I came with my boyfriend.' And she said he was abusing her, hitting her, or whatever it was. I really try not to remember what happens to people. It's just too hard. And she said, 'I called the police, at the desk, I called the police.' And she said, 'There had to be twelve policemen who came in to get him.' And I thought, 'That's really interesting. I didn't know they had that many (available).' And here I am, all by myself, [Laughs] you know! That was interesting all by itself. And the other hard part, was, I think, he got out the next day. So, he was just gone for a (short) period of time. But she had been talking to her mother on the phone and said, 'Someone's here from the women's shelter, or the women's coalition, Mom, to talk to me.' And her mother said, 'You give her a hug from me. Because I am so glad she is there.' And I remember thinking, first of all, 'What a good mother.' And she was one of those folks, who you felt like, you just wonder what in the world happened to her. But I knew that she would get the help that she needed, because she was very, I think, in one of those situations where, maybe he (seemed like) a really nice guy and then he just turned on her, which happens. So, but I'll never forget that, because I thought, 'How awful to be four or five hours away from your home and have this happen to you.' And, of course, the part about all the policemen, they must (have been)

worried about (this fellow), and this was 25 years ago. And over time, I realized how dangerous domestics can be. But it would be interesting to see how it is to be an on-call person now.

**GTR:** Do they go alone anymore, either?

**MB:** Yes, I don't know if they do or not. I've mentioned this along the way, I wondered if they still go alone, but I don't know if I've mentioned it in quite a while, because I thought, you know, having been involved in the board and all those things all these years, I know they take the responsibility of protecting women seriously. So, that may have all changed. But at any rate, they always were very clear to on-call advocates that, if you did not feel safe, that you could just stay in your car and go home, if you felt it was an unsafe situation. So, you were really let off the hook, which made sense to me. There was never any time where—I was an old social worker—I had called on a lot of people in kind of unfortunate circumstances and there were times when I was having to tell them very hard things, and all I was doing on this job was being supportive. (Added: Once I met the survivor I was fine. It was the walk on the dark street that made me nervous!)

**0:20:09.1**

**MB:** So, I wasn't having to deal with the abuser. When I finally went into practice, and I was working at Miller-Dwan, I felt like I couldn't do the on-call anymore because I thought there was that boundary between being a person practicing in the community and also having this volunteer job and I thought that that's just not going to work. I also stopped doing group facilitating for the same reason, because I didn't know that at the time, particularly, but there can be some mentally ill people at the shelter (that might have also been at Miller Dwan). Because the whole thing about the shelter is that it's for people who can't stay with relatives, who can't stay with friends, or who find it's not safe to stay with relatives or friends, that the abuser will find out. So, often people have very little patience with people who are mentally ill. Especially if they are not taking their medications. There you are. I think it was a good decision for me, but I kept kind of staying involved by, I'd bring Easter lilies on Good Friday because that seemed like a thing to do. Because if they weren't going through their own Good Friday I don't know what they were doing at Safe Haven. But I keep doing that because that was something definitely for the women, because, people bring candy, you know (for the children).

**GTR:** That's nice... So, you were really involved from volunteering to the Easter lilies...

**MB:** And then, Mary Ness... They were looking for, and I don't remember what year this was, I think it was 2004, maybe 2003, they were applying for a million dollar grant to build a family justice center. They had to compete against other agencies in the federal government. One of the things that the federal government wanted, ie. the Bush Administration wanted, was

chaplains involved. And Mary Ness knew that I'd done chaplaincy work and that I knew people at St. Mary's and St. Luke's, because I'd been a hospice volunteer at St. Luke's. So, she called me, well, Susan called her, I don't know how it worked out, but I ended up coming to a meeting about that and got to know Susan Utech, who had just been on the job since 2001, at that point. She came after 9/11, she often points that out.

And so, I was coming to them with St. Mary's chaplaincy department program where they had students and said, 'It seems like the perfect match. They could send clinical pastoral education students there and they could do some of their practicum at the Family Justice Center.' Then Susan said... as I was working with the Million Mom March, I like to think of it as a "sensible-gun" legislation lobby. And so, Susan said, 'We should have somebody from that group on our board.' And I said, 'Well, you know, I would be really interested in doing that.' So, I was on the board in 2004, January, if I remember. I was on the board for three terms, was board chair and did lots of work with fund raising and I'm still involved with fund raising. Oh, and I should point out that there was no (formal sort of) fund raising going on when I first volunteered, in 1989.

The first time fundraising came up was, I think, when they were building the new building in 2000. A letter went out and we sent money and then we were invited to an open house, (after the new building opened). But, you know, it was always something I cared about those how many years that I was away, I don't know, ten? At least ten years that I didn't do anything actively, volunteering. Certainly, it was something I had (experienced in my family) and thought about and felt like I certainly understood the dynamics and the wonderful chart, the power control wheel, the equality wheel, and all that. I just think those (graphics) were a gift to the women's movement and to anybody who does counseling. I used it all the time with women, when I was working at Miller-Dwan, I did most of my work at Miller-Dwan, some at Lutheran Social Services, when I was in training.

By the time I was a marriage and family counselor, I had a masters in counseling and then got my license in marriage and family therapy and then worked at Miller-Dwan for 10 years and had continued my diaconal work (in the Episcopal Church). I just tried to bring to people's awareness, all those issues around battering and women's lack of power in so many situations. And so, it certainly has influenced my life a great deal.

**GTR:** Your work with the women or with the shelter or in learning?

**MB:** Learning, learning, learning! And then seeing people I knew as clients who were dealing with these issues, but being able to say to them personally, the shelter is a good place to go, there are resources; they are going to help you deal with this problem. And it will probably not go

away. And the awful thing is that it will shorten your life. Because that is what the research says now.

**GTR:** In general or the average?

**MB:** I think it's the stress, in general. It's the stress and the drama. My husband, who is a physician, said that it became clear to him that women came to the doctor so they could get out of the house, where they felt imprisoned. And often, dermatological conditions were really made worse by the stress of battering and being controlled. And constantly feeling anxious about your own behavior, that you weren't doing everything right, good grief.

**GTR:** That stress level, and the stress on the kids.

**MB:** It's horrible. It's just horrible.

**GTR:** Did you end up working with kids at the shelter?

**MB:** No, never. I like kids, but I never volunteered for childcare. [Both laugh] Well, you know, I could say hello to the kids. I mean, I like kids, but I like when they get a little older. I liked them at the age when most people don't like kids much. I like them at about eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I like the ones that come in with fifteen piercings and are kind of taking on the world. And often, it's because they're depressed. That's just the way it always seemed to me. But, their teachers don't like them much, because they don't fit in and they don't say, 'Yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am,' all the time. To me those kids, often turned out to be more interesting than the ones who were so well behaved. My own children were not always so well behaved at school, so I appreciated that. Though I would tell them, that that was their job, to be well behaved. [Laughs] But you know what I'm saying. Those kids that people didn't always like, I always liked them. But, and I love them when they're tiny, tiny. I taught second grade, and I like second grade, but teaching is a very hard job.

**0:30:25.7**

**GTR:** Yes, yes.

**MB:** It's a very hard job.

**GTR:** I have my teaching license, and I'm not using it.

**MB:** No, no, no. [Both laugh] You know what you're called to, and it wasn't teaching. So, I taught Sunday school. I taught sixth grade Sunday school for about ten years. I loved those kids. They were really fun.

**GTR:** That's good.

**MB:** They were really fun.

**GTR:** That's a nice little snippet of time.

**MB:** It was. One hour, in and out, in and out. But anyway, the children are... It's so terrible for them. And in any family situation, when you have a kid that comes in, acting out, it's about what's happening in the family. I mean, that's one of the first things you learn in family therapy. That kid is the identified patient, because god forbid, the mom and dad can't be doing anything wrong.

**GTR:** That's hard. If you go back to the power control wheel, were you involved when that was developing?

**MB:** No.

**GTR:** You didn't know the DAIP people?

**MB:** No. The first time I met Ellen Pence, was in 2004, it was a big meeting we had at City Hall about this whole project, the million-dollar grant application.

**GTR:** Did they end up getting that one? Which one was that?

**MB:** No, no we didn't. No, you know those who got it were (representing) bigger cities and basically, smaller groups, like Indian Reservations. And to me, in many cases, that made sense. We just kind of fell into the middle. But we knew what they wanted and we knew what we needed to do, and so we raised the money.

**GTR:** From all kinds of foundations? Or individual donors?

**MB:** We had money, oh, a lot of individual donors, but a lot of foundations. Yes, that was big. I was co-chair of that capital campaign with Bill Burns. You should interview Bill Burns.

**GTR:** I haven't heard that name much (yet).

**MB:** Bill Burns is with...

**GTR:** Is he still active in Duluth?

**MB:** Oh, yes. He's board chair this year, I think. He's an attorney with Hanft, Fride, O'Brien. Well, William Burns, Richard Burns. It's sort of the big Democratic, I want to say, law firm, but I'm not sure everybody is a Democrat there, but he's a Democrat.

**GTR:** Not Fryberger?

**MB:** No, not Fryberger. Hanft, Fride, O'Brien, Burns. Yes, Hanft is gone now. Fride, I think, might be gone. O'Brien is probably gone. Gib [Gilbert] Harries is probably the oldest one still around. And then Burns. There are a lot of partners now.

**GTR:** That would be interesting to hear that. Nobody else has brought up the fundraising piece, but that would be very interesting to know what...

**MB:** Well, we raised, I think, six... Susan would know how much we really raised. I would say, if we thought about it, I think we needed a million dollars. I'm terrible about numbers. I was a PTA treasurer; I never did it again, because I have to do that at home. But Bill Burns is good, really engaging, really fun. I think this was well worth his while. But you might have to go to him. He's pretty busy.

**GTR:** What was the funding when you first started? You said they hadn't done fundraising?

**MB:** They had done fundraising, but the thing is they were getting, and they still get, the exact same amount of money for their advocacy program. So, basically, our big fundraiser every year is for the advocacy program; to keep that going. I call it the outpatient service and that's at the Family Justice Center. I always think of the shelter itself as the inpatient. Even though, they certainly are combined, and it's all under the Safe Haven brand, we did the branding things, too. Which is good, because people were mixed up (confused as to who ran what services).

**GTR:** The current one?

**MB:** People were mixed up about Safe Haven and the Family Justice Center. They thought they were two different things. They didn't realize that Safe Haven ran (the FJC). (Building the FJC) was very exciting. That whole, old water and gas building and, finding that space was a real challenge but it turned out to be a very good space for us and when we bought that building, we bought that floor, and I can't remember exactly how much we paid for it. The person who sold it to us, gave us a very good deal. In fact, he ended up making a hundred thousand dollar

contribution, so that was a very lovely lead contribution. And then we had people give pledges and if you go down there you can see all the people who gave money and it was a wonderful tribute, I think, to physicians in this town. My OB/GYN doctor basically, when I went in there to see him, I said, 'Thank you, so much, for sponsoring a room for this building.' And he said, 'Oh, Marilyn,' he said, 'I see so many women who've been affected by this.' And so, that kind of blew me away.

I mean, you know it yourself, you know it on paper, you know it's in all these studies people have done, and people are taking polls and how many people are affected by domestic violence, but this is a stand up OB/GYN doctor and he's just saying, 'This is the way, yes, this is the way it is.' So, anyway, I was very proud of the doctors. There could have been some doctors from St. Luke's, but I don't know who they were. [Laughs] People just talked to their friends. We had the big first fundraising luncheon (about ten years ago), which was a huge success. We never had a full time fundraising development person, but all the board learned how, with the staff, how to raise money through group called, Benevon. I don't remember the year we started that, but I think it was around 2006. For our first big fundraiser, my daughter (Maria Bamford) came to town and did stand up comedy. And (other NGO folks) were disturbed, a little bit worried, because they said, 'Are you guys short of money? You've never had a fundraiser before.' And we said, 'No, we just decided we should be raising some money.' And I think we made something on the order of \$9,000 on that. That was a lot of money for us. But I am sure that was how we got into it (actual fundraising, before we began the once-a-year luncheon).

**GTR:** Was there a gala evening thing? Sounds like a luncheon?

**MB:** Well, the luncheon started, I think, in 2006, but check that date out with Susan, she would know. I think it could have been 2005, because we may be doing a tenth anniversary this year, 2015.

**GTR:** I'm intrigued by the fundraising, I don't know a lot about it myself, but even just from other groups I work with in town, I'm wondering, 'How do you crack that?'

**MB:** There was a lot of support for the shelter before we even started. Safe Haven has had such a good reputation for doing the work, for when people went in there, this was what I heard in the community, 'Safe Haven is a good place. It's safe place to send my daughter, my cousin, my niece, whoever, to get counseling. To hear what their rights are.' And that doesn't mean they do anything to change anything but they know they're getting what they need. And the bottom line was, the average woman leaves five or six times. And we are not going to tell women what to do, because they've been told what to do for too long. They are going to get their own voices back. I remember thinking, (when I heard this approach) 'That is philosophically exactly right.'

**GTR:** That's a good way to say that.

**MB:** It's just exactly right. We can't be mad at them because they're doing what they've decided to do. Because it takes a while to have the courage.

**0:40:00.1**

**MB:** But the fundraising, basic fundraising is about dotting your I's and crossing your t's, sending thank you notes, thanking people. Pat Burns, Bill Burns wife does the best. She is the model, as far as I am concerned, she continues to be a model fundraiser (in Duluth). She ran the Miller-Dwan Foundation for years. People who are placed there are excellent, but Pat was, I think, one of the early people to adopt, to do all the right things.

**GTR:** Like thanking...

**MB:** Well, you just don't ever take people for granted. And people here don't, they don't (want to be thanked TOO much), they're mostly too Scandinavian. They don't want you coming up every minute, but when you talk to them about something (Safe Haven), you just say, 'Thank you. We just really appreciate what you've done.' They feel good about that. But then, on the other hand, if you were doing that constantly, or constantly inviting them to things, they'd go crazy (feel put upon). They wouldn't particularly like it.

**GTR:** There's a fine line.

**MB:** There's a fine line. [Both laugh] You have to figure out what everybody likes, you have to pay attention to who your donors are. You have to pay attention. But Benevon, that program is really good. (We learned how to do that with the Benvon program, which always just made sense to us.)

**GTR:** It sounds like you would have already had a group of donors or people who were interested?

**MB:** Not really, no! We were the first people to do the thing where we did (tours of Safe Haven)- we did tours for years, where we invited people, we just called people that we knew and invited them to come and have a tour and it was one hour, in and out. And it was a really good meaty tour, with always somebody talking who was a survivor. Always. And that drew a lot of people in, or scared the heck out of them. But they learned about it, they knew what we did, every one of our luncheons always has survivors talking, one or two. We have a video we do. But basically, we have table captains and they invite people to come. They invite a table to come. People who want to learn about it or who've been before and like to come. And



basically, we have a gathering of the faithful, every year in October, and it's Domestic Violence Prevention month. People get in touch with what's happening at the shelter. They learn what the needs are. They have an opportunity to pledge again, or at least to be there and to say, 'We're with you.' It's the one big thing we do.

**GTR:** Does it work for the people doing the fundraising, but also wearing out your donors?

**MB:** To some extent, (I believe) you can wear out your donors if you send out too many... We really don't send out fundraising letters more than, I think we send out one a year, when it just says where people are with their pledge. Susan would know better about that. Because I've been asking for that letter. [Laughs] Because I'm not exactly sure where I am at the moment. So, the luncheon has been really great for us. Even during the bad (economy) years. We've always made something. It's always better if you can get the money, right then that day, but pledges are good, too. But sometimes the pledges aren't quite as reliable.

**GTR:** They make payments later.

**MB:** (Yes, and that has mostly worked for us. However, sometimes...) people get excited and they'll give so much [Laughs] and then it doesn't work for some reason. But it's been... Susan is very careful with money. There is no money spent there (at Safe Haven) that does not need to be spent. That good management has really paid off with our donors, because they see that we are not putting anything fancy out there. We are not sending a lot of newsletters done in color, because they cost a lot. But, every once in a while, we'll send out something really nice, like an invitation to something, because we were doing the branding with the little bird, the red (origami bird- our trademark now).

**GTR:** It's nice.

**MB:** It's a really nice thing. We had somebody (on our committee) who was an artist and so we did (that invitation). I like beautiful things, but sometimes I get stuff (in the mail) and I think, the hospitals do it.... (I think it's a bit over the top as an expense for a non-profit.)

**GTR:** Fancy, glossy...

**MB:** Yes. Well, part of it is that (the hospitals) put that stuff out there for people who are patients. It's a magazine and all of that. It's a competitive thing. I don't think we (Safe Haven) need to do that.

**GTR:** Yes, it's a different thing. Were you there early enough, maybe not so much, but the attitude of the wider community when they heard you worked or volunteered there, maybe it was

different for you than it would have been in 1977 or 1978, but did you have a sense of what the local community...?

**MB:** Well, I was working at a deacon in a little church in West Duluth, a little Episcopal Church, and I would have people come and do programs, I would give a program with somebody from the shelter. And people really resonated with it. They would come up afterward and say, 'I know so-and-so... This happened to me in my first marriage...' That kind of thing would happen and then I belonged to a group called PEO, Philanthropic Educational Organization, and this is a group founded, basically to fund women's education. It was founded in 1869, and the first time we gave a program, I'll never forget this woman came up who I had known for years, and she said, 'This happened to my daughter.' And she started to cry. And she said (her daughter) got help at Safe Haven. So, it's not an unknown... And I started doing that in 1990 and people got it. Though I will never forget one person at St. Paul's Church, she just didn't get it. And she had a really nice husband, she was extremely traditional. And she said, 'Well, Marilyn, what do the men do?' And I said, 'You know, there aren't very many men who put up with this.' Not very many men, five percent.

But I'll never forget, there was somebody (a young man) I met at a dinner for some fundraising thing. He called me, not too long after that, and he said, I know you're involved with the women's shelter and he said, 'I'm being abused by my wife.' I was, first of all, I was very surprised, because I had met his wife, seemed like a nice person, but you know, you have absolutely enough of those experiences with the husbands that you know the wives can look good, too. So I sent him to Ed Heisler, who was with Men as Peacemakers, but you know, there aren't services for men. We can't, we really can't do them at Safe Haven because we've got that all-women situation (the women would then not feel safe). And there aren't that many men that come forward. And gay men, hopefully, are getting help at gay men's crisis centers or (agencies) like that.

**GTR:** You'd think that would become a more visible issue as people are more open.

**MB:** You would think. And I've read things about it, and it's not that I don't care, it's just that I think the men are going to have to take care of that.

**0:50:00.9**

**GTR:** It would be a different service. When you were there, you said you had to teach that curriculum, about the feminist idea. Some of the women that were around in the 1970s say that it was a collective and feminist philosophy that was going to be very important. Did you feel that then?

**MB:** Oh, my gosh, yes! Oh, yeah! But, you know, I was at UWS [University of Superior, Wisconsin] and the woman I had for counseling, some initial counseling class said, ‘Well, you know feminism, it’s (about) sharing power. It’s not that somebody gets more power, it’s not that women get more power and the men are left with nothing, it’s about sharing power.’ And I thought, ‘Well, good. Let’s call it that.’ So, I talked about that. I mean, most of the people, I think there was only one person that wasn’t in a relationship with a guy there, or married.

Everybody was really busy. And the place was beautifully kept. It was attractive. I knew the woman who was the cook, I knew her from the parish I worked at in West Duluth. It was a very nice place, but it was getting too small.

**GTR:** You never saw the first place? They had one for a year, right, and then they were, so you were there during that time.

**MB:** On first street.

**GTR:** So, it was nice. Any little vignette?

**MB:** It had woodwork, oak woodwork. It was really lovely. They had great posters. Somebody was saying the posters they have now, and all the great pictures from the past. I thought it was a very attractive setting and I thought that was really important to do that.

**GTR:** To make it feel like a comfortable place.

**MB:** Yes. Like it was special. And that’s what we tried to do with (the Family Justice Center)... We had a great decorator at the Family Justice Center, Suzi Vandersteen, who later did Fitger’s Hotel, did Amber Wing. She could be a fun person to talk to. I don’t know if you want current stuff about the Family Justice Center.

**GTR:** There’s so much. These projects can always be extended, possibly. People have said, you need to do the DAIP (history). I’ve talked to Coral McDonell, I know her daughter from work stuff, too, and, ‘How do we do this for them?’

**MB:** Oh, they do so much.

**GTR:** Some of this was Jean (Derider) initiating, I’ve known Jean for a long time, too, but I interviewed her for something else, and she said, ‘Oh, we should do this.’ And of course, she was there for the very early days.

**MB:** Jean was great. Jean was so, kind of, down to earth, friendly, just treated you like a regular person. I remember thinking, ‘Well, I’m a doctor’s wife from the East End. You know, people are going to identify that, can’t hide that.’ You know, how I felt about doctor’s wives when I was growing up in Marquette, Michigan, I always thought they were spoiled rotten. [Laughs] And I didn’t have to work, and part of the thing was, I thought I shouldn’t work because, I thought, ‘If I didn’t have to work, why should I take a job from somebody else?’ That was part of my philosophy about not working. And of course, I finally decided, you know, I have a degree here, I’d like to work, I’m going to work. I’m only going to part time, but I’m going to work. Because I thought, I’m just ready to do that. But anyway, so I worried about that a little bit, about classism. But people, certain people, were really, really very hospitable. And then there were some people who really weren’t, because... And I’ve seen that happen with volunteers in a lot of situations. I had that happen to me when I was doing chaplaincy at St. Mary’s. You know, they knew you were a short timer. Why should they waste any time with you? You know what I’m saying? Student internship, you know it’s just the way it is. And I understand it but I don’t think it’s quite right, honestly. Anyway, you have a list of questions there.

**GTR:** What drove you to stay involved over the years?

**MB:** I think, because I thought it was a great cause. I thought, we sure weren’t anywhere near solving it. And so I saw that it was really being well run. I felt like the executive director model was a better model. I just think, it’s hard to do, like, the cooperative, it’s like living in an idealist community back in the nineteenth century. [Laughs] I was reading a book about that and I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh. That could drive me crazy.’

**GTR:** Oh, yeah. I’ve been in part of those groups, too. And I think people I’ve talked to have acknowledged, too, that it was just too big.

**MB:** It’s tough, right. But it’s a stage you go through and then you have to change and become more corporate.

**GTR:** And do you have a vision or a hope for the future, for five or ten years from now? Obviously this is not an issue that’s just going to be done. What do you hope to see?

**MB:** I hope that we’ll have the same community involvement. Because I think that it’s a problem that is not limited to any particular level of education or status. It’s really about a feeling in this country that, I think is very unconscious, that men are better than women in some way. Men are more valued than women.

**GTR:** Have you seen any changes over your lifetime of awareness of feminism or women's positions in society, are we going up and then back again? What's going on right now?

**MB:** I see among people who are well educated, that men are doing much more co-parenting and much more in the way of housework. Women are still doing most of it, the majority of it. But men are doing much more of it. And I remember seeing this whole shift probably in the '90s, because we used to have all the new young doctors out to our cabin from the clinic with their wives and their little children and I remember when the wives would watch the children and the men would go in the canoe or take little hikes or do this or do that. And then there came a time when they took turns. And that amazed me. Amazed me and I thought, 'It's finally happening.' Because you have to keep talking about it and you have to force it and we have more women in the workforce and my own daughters are 47 and 44 and they don't, to some extent, always realize whose shoulders they are standing on.

**GTR:** How different it was.

**MB:** How different it was. I think the MadMen program, oh, my god, you watch that series, it's so obvious.

**GTR:** It's hard to believe, it wasn't that long ago.

**MB:** It was not that long ago.

**GTR:** There was just a documentary at UMD [University of Minnesota, Duluth] called, *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*, about the women's liberation movement, a documentary about that. They really touched on lots of different parts of it, birth control, childcare... some of the issues they worked so hard on.

**MB:** Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. Exactly. And we accepted so much, as just well, 'That's the way it is.'

**GTR:** How has it changed? Did you start to see women doctors coming to...

**MB:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely, absolutely. You know, Judy Arvold, who just retired from St. Luke's, but she was at St. Mary's for a long time. And she said once, what had happened, some physician's wife's records were sent to the husband, so he could see what the results were of his wife's physical. That was sort of routine. Now that had never happened in my time, to me, but apparently it happened to somebody. And she was so appalled. But it was an old men's club. Very definitely a men's club. We're talking back to the '70s and it's just, you just say, 'Holy shit!' [Laughs] That's all you can say.

**1:00:26.6**

**GTR:** Right.

**MB:** But that never happened to me. I remember once I had a biopsy and they called Joel and he called me and he said, ‘Well, they called from pathology, doctor so-and-so, to tell me what it was.’ And I said, ‘Gee, wouldn’t it have been nice if they had called me! Me, to tell me what it was!’ (the results). [Laughs] ‘Versus you, since it was...’ The doctor who was relatively young, the doctor at the time, but it was an unconscious act. It’s like this was the right thing to do. It’s kind of old fashioned. It wasn’t meant to be, but it was just one of those things where you just shake your head.

**GTR:** Yes. I can imagine. But now, it’s just common that you have women doctors as you have male doctors, but are women...

**MB:** Almost as common. Depending on what field you’re in. [Laughs]

**GTR:** But then, the situation at home, or the situation with power, obviously we still have domestic abuse happening with women and so, it seems, the more I’ve looked around, I have a daughter who is four, and in picturing what her life will be like, too, and just that idea that you can do anything you want but then, yet, are you still going to be at risk for assault, and all those things that still happen to women, even though we are equal. Or are we still expected to still do more housework, or more this and that, even though you can be a doctor but then you can go home and cook, too.

**MB:** That’s right. I think every kid is different and sometimes I’ve seen people get themselves into abusive situations because their father’s are almost too nice. They just have no idea that there are nasty people who misrepresent themselves in the real world. Don’t ever trust charm. So, you can’t be too overprotective with your children. You have to let them experience. Because, if they don’t, they won’t gain confidence. That’s the big thing.

**GTR:** But then it could happen to anyone.

**MB:** It could happen to anybody. I am just really lucky it didn’t happen to me. And because my own father was that way. I remember thinking, ‘I am never marrying someone like my father.’ And I decided I wanted to marry some man who was fun, who knew how to have fun. And my husband, he certainly knows plenty about male privilege, and he’s admitted it [Laughs] because I would say to him, ‘That’s male privilege. What you just did right now was male privilege.’ [Laughs] But with daughters, he gets it now. It helps if you have daughters. It does help.

**GTR:** Just seeing how it's different for them?

**MB:** Exactly. I think that has changed a great many things. And you have a lot more aware women. And I think the fact that they have all these feminist studies, women's studies programs are really good. I have a godchild who is at Gustavus [Gustavus Adolphus College] and she's already getting into this with young girls and expectations and, I (believe she's studying) trafficking, and writing a paper on trafficking.

**GTR:** That's just becoming in the news more right now.

**MB:** Yes. I have to be some place, Pequaywon Lake at 5:30 and I have to stop at the grocery store on my way home, so that's why I'm looking at my watch.

**GTR:** Was there anything like, lessons learned, or something that maybe institutional knowledge or something that may have gotten forgotten? Or something that should be...?

**MB:** I think what amazes me is that just a few women brought this incredible organization into being. Just a very few women. That collective was pretty amazing. That just blows my mind. The courage to start something like that and to start taking care of women and staying overnight and I remember Cathryn Curley talking about that being the first, taking the first night in that apartment building across from Crawford's. And I just can't even imagine the guts that took. I mean and those women were enough younger than I was, they were a different generation, really, because I'm seventy and they were, how old would Cathryn be now? I would say Katherine would be maybe 64. So, I always think people two years younger than I was were much more radical, they were radicalized during the Vietnam War. I mean, I protested the Vietnam War, but not like they did. I mean, I wasn't a drop-out of school. I was towing the line, while protesting. By the time they got around to being part of it, they were protesting everything, hours, you know, curfews. All that stuff.

**GTR:** And what year were you born? Just for the record.

**MB:** 1944. November 8<sup>th</sup>.

**GTR:** And they were so early, in the scheme of things.

**MB:** They were early.

**GTR:** There weren't other shelters.

**MB:** Yes, (I think Minneapolis was the first- Harriet Tubman)

**GTR:** Any lessons learned, or things that didn't go well or things we wish, looking back...

**MB:** I never had any... I had enough positives. What do they say in (a good) marriage, what is it, three to one, four to one, something like that. If you have four positives to one negative, then you're going to stay married. I can't remember exactly, maybe it's seven to one. Whatever, you have to have a lot of positives. It was the people I knew that I really enjoyed at the shelter, and there were enough good experiences that, I really wanted to continue being connected. I felt, I didn't know what I could do, and I just kept bringing Easter lilies, and I know they liked that. So, I thought, that's what I can do and that's what I can do right now, because I'm so busy, and I'm working, doing the deacon thing, which was unpaid, but a weekend thing, and then I was doing the Miller-Dwan work, after I got my masters, was a lot, a lot of work, because I had to get a lot of hours, so I just worked every time they'd let me work. I was working, but, just keeping connected. We had enough good going for us, and I knew it was a good organization and I knew they were doing good work and I knew they were unsung heroes, or heroines. I hope you're going to talk to Colin Campbell.

**GTR:** That name hasn't come up.

**MB:** He lives next door to the shelter, but he was somebody that I met, he was a fireman, but he was involved with the shelter for a long time. (Met him painting our house)

**GTR:** Helping with things?

**MB:** Yes. I don't know if he was on the board ever or not. I think that it's been a little tough to live next door to that big building. I think they've done okay with neighbors, but I think there may have been a few little issues, but he might be a good person to talk to. Just because there aren't that many men who've been involved.

**GTR:** That's true. I know someone who actually lives across the street right now, too, and the main thing is, she has a young daughter, and she'll see the kids getting on the bus, and they need a backpack or something, and so she'll send the word out.

**MB:** Oh, that's really nice. Tell her that that is lovely. Because I often wonder what the neighbors think. I don't know. I'm usually there once a month now, or I bring stuff over. Soap and shampoo. No hotel room is safe from me. [Both laugh]

**GTR:** Pass it on! I think I had one more brief little question. Having fun, I think I've seen pictures of the skits, was that something you remember? Did you ever volunteer?



**MB:** Naw, I never did a skit, naw! [Laughs] No, I never did any of that. No. I went to a workshop with, they had a woman from the Coyote Group or something like that, she was a recovering prostitute from Minneapolis and she talked about the “life” and how most people who are prostitutes have been sexually abused and I remember thinking, ‘Wow, that makes sense.’ [Laughs] And they sponsor different things like that, but I never did anything. I don’t remember ever doing anything wild and crazy like skits!

**GTR:** I was wondering if that was part of the comic relief, you know, needing something...

**MB:** No, no, I had to find my own comic relief. [Laughs]

**GTR:** I was wondering if I could take a picture? I used to have one that my video camera would take pictures. Sometimes they were really nice pictures actually. I can turn off the recorder, is there anything else?

**MB:** I can’t think of anything else. I had a cup of coffee and it was really helpful. It kept me talking.

**GTR:** Well, thank you!

**1:10:49.4**

## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Sheryl Boman b. 1953 (SB)**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR)  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded February 14, 2015  
Duluth Family Resource Center**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Sheryl Boman on February 14th, 2015 for the Women's Coalition, Safe Haven oral history project. So thank you for meeting with me. Would you mind starting with saying how and when you first came to Duluth and how long you've been here?

**SB:** I was actually born in Duluth, but I was not raised here. I was raised on the Iron Range. So I kind of traveled around, lived in different areas and came back in 1976. And actually, worked at one of the hospitals in Duluth.

**GTR:** So then when and how did you get involved with issues, domestic violence, those kinds of things?

**SB:** Well, I saw an ad in the paper for volunteers for the Women's Coalition and decided I wanted to volunteer. The summer of 1978 I started volunteering and I had not had personal experience with domestic violence in my family or for myself. I had had incidents happen in relationships where there had been intimidation and following me and that kind of stuff, and sexual assault, but not an ongoing relationship where there was battering. So I had just broken up an engagement. When I first started working there I realized a couple months later that a lot of the things women talked about with their partners were things I'd experienced in my relationship, except that he hadn't hit me. And so it was really eye opening for me. But I saw a lot of violence against women growing up in my community. It was something that concerned me.

**GTR:** What did you do at the hospital at that time? Did you work with women?

**SB:** No, no. I worked in the pharmacy.

**GTR:** And then what did you do as a volunteer? What did you start with?

**SB:** I worked as an advocate with women, as a volunteer. And I volunteered for... I think it was in early like January maybe February of '79, that I was hired. Actually, I was working an overnight a week as a fill-in paid staff before that, and then I was hired in '79.

**GTR:** And by '79 where was that, the overnights? Was that the second (location), or were you still at the first?

**SB:** When I started we were on 2nd Avenue East and 2nd Street. I think by the time I was hired, we were just in the new building on First.

**GTR:** And then being an advocate, were you just in the shelter building or going out to homes and things at that point?

**SB:** Pretty much in the shelter, working for women in the shelter. And within that first year, then I developed the volunteer program and so I also, besides being an advocate, was the volunteer coordinator.

**GTR:** That was a new position, I 'spose right?

**SB:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Had you had experience or did you sort of have any training or anything.

**SB:**[ laughs] No. No. I always knew that there needed to be some training for people coming in.

**GTR:** I wondered about that because some of the stories I've already heard is that people obviously felt like "we want to do something, we want to help," but I'm sure it gets intense very quickly and then you know, what kind of support or training would the people have. So did you come up with the trainings for those volunteers?

**SB:** Yeah, and the training was based on what the staff had already kind of put in place. It was just really a way to make sure that everybody got training on policies and how to work with women, the things that were pretty much already in place. But it just needed to be a more formal way of making sure that people got that information.

**GTR:** And who were often the volunteers? Did they come from everywhere?

**SB:** You know, women who had been battered, women who had used the shelter. Of course, at the beginning, that wasn't as true because the shelter was new. Interns from the different

colleges. Pretty much from many different areas we had, life experiences. We had mostly women, thirty years ago we did have some men, but...

**GTR:** What was that day to day life like at the shelter at that point? What was the general feeling in the community? Where people embracing this new shelter idea, where you feeling resistance from certain groups?

**SB:** I think both.

**GTR:** Ok.

**SB:** I think the women in that, and that was before I came, but the women who were pushing for a shelter, pushing really for safety for women for the community to deal with domestic violence, there was resistance. But I remember the stories of women who would come into the shelter who, some of them were in the their forties or fifties, and this was the first place that they could go to where I think they felt a level of safety because he would (sometimes) say, the abuser, would always say that, "If you go to your parents, you go to your best friend's, I'll find you, I'll hurt them." And so, you know, it really... I remember one of them, I think she was actually in her late fifties, used to sleep in her car in the winter. With her kids, she had no place to go at that point. So.

**GTR:** So it felt like it was really meeting that need?

**SB:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. So I do think that there were resistance from some of the systems, and individuals in the community were still of the belief that domestic violence was a private matter between two people in a relationship. Some of the churches. But I do feel that there was also a level of support from either women who were experiencing it, or people who had family members who had experienced it. So there was support also.

**GTR:** Do you remember any stories, you know you said some woman was sleeping in her car, but what the response was by law enforcement or any other things before there was that option of the shelter? Did anyone have stories of...

**SB:** Well, there wasn't very many options. I mean, if women were married they could try and get divorced. For women who didn't have money, that was a long wait. Worrying about their safety and the safety of their kids. Financial. Some women were stay at home moms, and so they didn't have the financial resources to live on their own, or maybe the education to be able to get a job that could support their kids and so there were not a lot of options for many women.

**GTR:** Right. Definitely. And then for the work at the shelter, did you get involved with helping women find another place to live after, or obviously people wouldn't always proceed to that next step or right away. But was that part of what you did or was that someone else kind of helping them find the next place to live, or find something?

**SB:** We would help provide the resources for them to look for housing, HRA, and programs that were available. Really, the Women's Transitional Housing Program came out of the shelter seeing the need that women needed a second safe community to live in. So two of the staff from the shelter left to start the women's transitional house. In fact, I was on the board as they were developing the program.

**GTR:** So no one else has really talked about that. What year was that, or when did that start?

**SB:** I believe that was... I was pregnant... I believe that was 1982 - '83. Have you talked to Michelle Lebeau?

**GTR:** No, I need to. I would like to.

**SB:** Because she was one of the two women, her and Nancy Burns. She would know the date better than I would.

**GTR:** That's everything fitting together, and also obviously the Domestic Violence Intervention Program, I sometimes forget what the "DAIP" stands for [laughs]. I always think there's a "Duluth" in there somewhere, but there's the "Duluth Model." So were you involved in those, that 1980, in that development too?

**SB:** To some degree I think everybody who worked at the shelter had some level of involvement, but as far as meetings and stuff like that. But I was not an integral part of developing DAIP. Ellen Pence who came up, one of the reasons she wanted to do it in Duluth was because she had a relationship with staff from the shelter and that she could work with the staff there, and wanted it to be a smaller community, not as big as St. Paul or Minneapolis to do the model.

**[11:33]**

**GTR:** How long did you (work there)? So you're here now, how did that fit in with working with the shelter?

**SB:** I left the shelter in the end of 2000. So I was there for twenty-one years. And then I did anti-racism work as a trainer through an organization based in New Orleans, "The People's Institute

for Survival Beyond.” And I came back here in, I still do training with the Institute, but I came here in the fall of 2012.

**GTR:** So then you might have more of that... I haven't talked with anyone who was there more recently with the shelter, and sometimes this can be...trying to remember that institutional knowledge that worked well in the past that maybe people don't remember now. Or things that didn't work in the past that maybe we've forgotten “don't do that again,” that kind of thing. We could switch to that section too because I've been kind of interested in even just that logistical process of how the nonprofit was first established and kind of how it evolved and what it is today.

**SB:** I would say that the non-profit, all that, was in the process when I started. So I really didn't have involvement in that.

**GTR:**Ok, so it was before.

**SB:** Yeah, I would say Michelle and Shirley, Jean... I would say that they would have more of that history.

**GTR:** Right. Ok. And then when did the name “Safe Haven” change?

**SB:** That was after I left.

**GTR:** Ok.

**SB:** So I think it was within a year. Now, Women's Coalition was not the first name of the organization. The first one was The Northeastern Coalition for Battered Women. And within the first year or so I remember because my sister-in-law was in school to be a graphic artist and she actually developed the brochure when the name changed.

**GTR:** Do you remember that process of figuring out the name? Or what it should be? [laughs]

**SB:** Yeah, it was hard. [laughs] I just remember meetings and trying to figure out. I don't remember all the specifics. We finally came to... we wanted it to speak to the experiences of, obviously, women. And looking back it was too vague. Through the years we'd get phone calls from people, from women, thinking we were something else. So I think changing the name helped with that.

**GTR:** Do you remember those years with that cooperative structure, or wanting the employees to all be at the same level? How did you experience that?

**SB:** Well, I think, I mean.. developing a collective was really balance amongst women about power. And so how do you counter on that in trying to develop models or ways for people to work together where power is not over someone else. And I also think, in looking back, that for women back then to be able to work together, support each other, that society is set up for women to compete with each other. So I think there were many reasons why it was a collective. It was both a gift [laughs] for me and frustration. I think... I'm so glad to have had the opportunity to experience working in a collective. I mean, there wasn't really models to look at to say "this is how you work in a collective." So there was disagreements, there were people who felt other people had more power, and people being afraid to use their collective power. So there were times it was really hard and there were times I feel like having decision making where everybody gets input into that decision, whether the end decision is what you want or not, at least you know your voice was heard. That was, I think, really powerful for all of us. So I was really glad to have the opportunity to do that. It seemed once we got bigger than like ten people in the collective, it got really cumbersome and it got really difficult. Which, you know, then eventually went to a collective management team where there were seven women who ran the collective and the rest of the people working there were staff. And that was a hard transition. It was hard to give up. I think for most of us it was hard to give that up.

**GTR:** When was that? Like the '80s?

**SB:** The '80s.

**GTR:** Early '80s. Was it just a few years that it was everyone until you went to the collective management team?

**SB:** I honestly don't remember when we went to a collective management team. I know it was in the '80s, I just don't remember. I got married, had kids [laughs].

**GTR:** Can you fill in the detail with like, what kind of foods people were serving, or what the meetings were like?

**SB:** When I first came, the very first staff meeting that I was at, I can't even remember if I was a volunteer or paid staff at that time, it was so... people were arguing, people were crying, and I'm thinking to myself, "What the heck did I get myself into." [laughs] It was crazy.

**GTR:** The intensity, for sure.

**SB:** It was very intense, yes. Some of the women who started the shelter had been in abusive relationships. I think on some level, what we were working towards was going to save women's

lives and children's lives. And so it was... .. intense. It was very intense. And I think we all felt a weight of doing this in a way that was going to provide safety. And the years that the shelter has been open I know it has saved women's and children's lives, and family members, too.

**GTR:** Do you remember any particular stories or families that stand out, leaving out any names?

**SB:** Oh, there are so many of them. You know, I remember [long pause] one family where the woman in the family had experienced incest where, just the generational pain, and wanting it to break that cycle for their children. I remember women who felt like they had to go back because it was the only way they were going to maintain safety because they felt he would follow through and kill them if they left, so it was safer for her to be there. I remember kids who would not want to go home. And there were kids who did, who didn't seem as fearful about going home. Maybe nervous. But there were some children who were terrified of going home. I remember some of the women that came in that had miscarriages because of the abuse. Really... brain injuries because of the abuse. Just the devastation.

**GTR:** Are there any particular success stories? Somebody told me there was a rule at some point that you couldn't volunteer until you've been in a safe spot for a certain amount of months or something?

**SB:** Yeah.

**GTR:** People who wanted to help but maybe it was too intense?

**SB:** I think that was the rule, I believe. I also believe as a staff person, you couldn't have a relationship with somebody who had used our services within six months, too. And I think that was really more about protecting the institution than protecting.... Because if somebody is going to be inappropriate they're going to be inappropriate after six months. But I think for women it was giving them some time to settle in. And again, that was to get their kids situated. Also, sometimes if they were coming back to volunteer, the women that they were staying with weren't there still in shifting that relationship from living with someone and then coming and being an advocate with them.

[23:22]

**GTR:** So any good success stories of women who came back?

**SB:** Yeah, there were women who came back and were hired and became staff and women who wanted to give back either by volunteering or by working at the shelter. I think one of the things in working at the shelter back then is it really gave women an opportunity to get job skills and



experience. The experience of helping to develop programs and having their voices be a part of that. When I worked there, besides being an advocate and volunteer coordinator, I also was a court advocate helping women in civil and criminal court, and the education coordinator and the administrative coordinator. So it was an opportunity that you don't get, there aren't many places to learn new skills and to really broaden your experience. And so that was really a gift, I think, for many of us.

**GTR:** Learning the legal process and all that.

**SB:** Yeah. I think when I came, our bookkeeping was in a shoebox. [laughs] We ended up having, I think when I left, having a million-some dollar budget. I'm sure it's more than that now. And people got training to do the accounting and to write grants, and all of that stuff. I think one of the lessons when I look back is that really the goal of the women who were organizing was to end violence against women and provide safety for women in our community. But once you become an institution and get funding, it really shifts what you have to concentrate your energy on. So really the energy was to keep the shelter going, to protect women and kids, and the goal and the mission of any violence against women lessened as time went on. So I think one of the things that I learned and I think that many of us was - it's not that groups organizing shouldn't become a 501-c3. It seems that that happens a lot because it gives groups legitimacy. They feel that it gives them legitimacy. And it also gives them an opportunity for funding that they need, and that's the way the system is set up. One of the trainers that I work with for the Institute, I remember saying at a training some time, that "if your budget doesn't match your mission statement, then it's just not a well written mission statement because you're not doing the work you're saying you're doing." And when I think back through the years of the shelter, is that the majority of our funding went in to provide services, and depending on what year it was not as much went into educate the community. There was always a level of our advocacy that was pushing against the system to provide safety for women and kids. But that more larger picture of ending violence against women was not where the majority of our resources went in to.

[27:37]

**GTR:** They're both huge.

**SB:** Yeah. And still we obviously made a difference. I remember, and I wasn't a part of this, but I remember - and Ellen Pence was and Shirley and a couple other people - that within the first couple years of Ellen being up here that they were doing training with the police officers and it was horrible the things, the resistance, that they were getting from police officers and some of the things the police officers would say. Our relationship with the police now through the years have really been developed as part of the Duluth Model. The shelter and DAIP had a part in that,

and it was Ellen's vision, for sure. The shelter was a part of developing that and we did groups of women so the voices of women and their experiences went into developing the power and control wheel and a lot of the resources that are used now.

**GTR:** So both things were working together, sort of separately together.

**SB:** Yeah, there was collaboration. And at times through the years there were also disagreements [laughs] which... is true for any organizations doing that kind of work that we were all doing.

**GTR:** Any group, no matter what they're doing can have issues. So why did you stay involved? How did you find any energy to keep going?

**SB:** It's interesting that when I first came and I think we had a support group for staff. So we were talking about our personal experience. It was the first time that I was in a place that I felt I did not have to explain my reality. That I was in a room with people who understood. I can't say how much that means. When I was growing up, I didn't have a language for what I saw. I just knew that it was wrong when my neighbor got stabbed by her husband. When women I know were sexually harassed, including myself, or assaulted. Just feeling like being "less than," all those experiences. And I felt like I was in a place that understood that and an energy and a spirit that really wanted to change that for themselves, other women, and the women coming after them. So that's what kept me going.

**GTR:** I've heard of meetings and trainings for people to get a little silly and little skits or something to try to get along [laughs].

**SB:** Well, I was a volunteer coordinator for a long time, so we used to have a party every year to thank our volunteers. That's when a lot of the skits were done. There's pictures at the shelter still of some of them. One year, when I was pregnant with my son, so that would have been 1985, or '86 - yeah he was born in the spring of '86 so it would have been that year - and I was quite pregnant, we did a skit for the volunteer party and I was Tina Turner singing "What's Love Got to Do with It" with three backup dancers. It was pretty hilarious. I thought I was going to have to go to a chiropractor after that. So we had lingerie shows for the volunteers, most of them women. Ballet things. Pretty hysterical. There were a couple that Jean did that were - I can't remember who the character was that she did - but it was hysterical. Some of those probably don't just have pictures, we probably have some videos too. So yes, we had retreats. I remember a lot of frustration with our retreats because we were usually trying to come to some consensus on something or develop something new. But all of those, there were some pretty funny... It was a group of us, Ellen was one of them, that for a number of years right after the Take Back the Night march which at that time was in September, and we would go up into the Boundary Waters. There were about eight to ten of us from DAIP, Sexual Assault Program, the shelter, and

maybe Planned Parenthood too, so that was really fun. Although we never did have really good weather, but it was fun.

**GTR:** That's good. So is there any big lesson? For me this is a little bit different oral history project because we're not just talking about something that happened years ago, obviously. It's ongoing issues, all the time. But anything that was the biggest lesson from the founding of it and the early days that you wish should be remembered today?

[34:29]

**SB:** Well, a couple. I think that one, the need to create an organizing entity that is not necessarily attached to the funding to keep the mission of ending violence as part of the work and to be more intentional about that. There were groups through the years that women who had been at the shelter would create organizing groups. I wish I could remember - LIPOP I can't remember if LIPOP came out of the shelter, and they did education and organizing. Those groups.

**GTR:** Can you spell that?

**SB:** L-I-P-O-P. I'm not sure if that was ... I know that was an organizing group but I'm not sure it came out of the shelter. I know Jill Abernathy was a part of one of those groups. And I don't know if you've talked to Jill.

**GTR:** No, is she still in Duluth?

**SB:** Yes, you can get a hold of her, and she worked at DAIP for many years. And she had a strong relationship with the shelter. She's actually Shirley Oberg's sister. Younger sister.

**GTR:** Let me know if you can think of anyone else

**SB:** Oh, Michelle was one of the women who started the shelter. With Shirley and Jean. Of course Cathy Curley is no longer with us. And Sharon Karis, I don't know where she is. I actually, I replaced her. It was her position she left that I was hired for.

**GTR:** In your early days or the later?

**SB:** Beginning. Yeah, once I began as a staff person. Nancy Burns, and Michelle would probably know how to get ahold of Nancy.

**GTR:** I'm trying to think... Jean's on Facebook. And Nancy Burns.

**SB:** No, that's a different Nancy.

**GTR:** Oh, there's two Nancy's.

**SB:** Yeah, Nancy, the Nancy Lumberg is probably the woman who's one of the women that was there when I started. That Nancy. Nancy Burns came after. But I think Nancy Burns worked in some of the development with DAIP, I believe. But she also with Michelle, left the shelter to start Women's Transitional Housing. It was her and Michelle that did that. Coral McDonald, she was a volunteer at the shelter and then she ended up working for DAIP.

**GTR:** You did speak of her, yeah.

**SB:** Yes, so I also think that through the years it became evident that the way that the shelter was developed was really from a white woman's perspective. I mean, when the shelter in the organizing effort. And through the years women of color worked there, obviously, women of color utilized the services. But I think that when you develop something like that, and of course none of us recognized that at the time, is that it's really from a white cultural framework. So as women of color came into the organization both as women who were using the shelter and women who were working there, is that it didn't necessarily meet their cultural needs.

I really learned to see how racism played out by what I saw and experienced at the shelter and how the institutions interacted with women of color in our community. I grew up on the Iron Range, which at that time was 99.9999% white. There was a very small Native American population. And so I did not have any kind of experience in having relationships with women of color, people of color. And so those cultures coming together and sometimes clashing with each other and understanding that often times we were asking women of color to do their jobs through that white cultural framework which did not make sense in their own community, from their own cultural way. Which really sometimes impacted their ability to have relationships with women of color coming in to the shelter because if they couldn't interact with them in their own cultural way through their values, then that was a problem. The problem with not being able to have a relationship with somebody for six months - I mean, we had African-American, in particular, women coming from all different parts of the country because we were part of the Duluth Model. And they didn't know any other women of color in the community and the couple that they knew from working at the shelter they couldn't have a friendship with until they had been out. That really impacted women of color in a different way than it did white women that were coming to the shelter. So I learned a lot not just about cultural differences, but also about institutional racism and seeing how the systems and institutions treated women of color differently than it did white women. I think one of the things that I remember as a struggle when I first started at the shelter was having... I grew up to believe that the police would protect me. Would protect people. And then to realize that in the case of domestic violence that women were not being

protected. Women didn't seem to have the same rights that the court system was upholding that male privilege and that relationship as, in some ways, ownership of the woman. And so that was very impacting on me and I believe it was, and I can only speak for myself, but then also to then see how women of color interacting with the systems, you know, with housing, with being told an apartment was rented, and then one of our other women who was white calling the same apartment and it was still available. How treatment by the police and the social service systems, all of those kind of systems.

And really seeing racism both individually and institutionally, which is really why I started working with the People's Institute. I went to a training of theirs in Cass Lake, Minnesota and Linda Anderson at Social Services, she was the director of Social Services at that time. I think it was 1996. And she knew the Institute and I was really, profoundly, impacted by the training and realized that as much work as we were trying to do to really work on racism in the shelter is that we didn't understand the internalized racial superiority and inferiority and how it was playing out in our organization. And that was really helpful. So I went there to think about bringing the Institute to the shelter. I was an administrative coordinator then. It was four other people with me from Duluth, I didn't know them. And we started meeting after the training and decided we wanted to bring the institute to the community, not just to our individual organizations. And then I eventually started training with them. So to me, through the years, women of color's voices have been a part of the work but it didn't necessarily transfer when policies were created.

So I know that there is still work being done on the national level for domestic violence - The Women of Color Network that is working and organizing on that issue. And so that's something that our movement still needs to continue to work on. As our country does, as our community does. And so that's as much as when you're developing something is to have a way to have the voices of everybody's experience be part of developing the policies. Because once you've developed something it's very hard to go back and change the culture. It's very, very difficult. So that was important learning for me. And I think just the strength of women. As women came into the shelter and all of what they experienced and the fact that they could not only survive, but thrive. And the commitment that they had to their children and to other women. That was the thing that probably was the most important thing that kept me there. I remember through the years people would ask me "How can you do that work? How can you do that work for so long?" I mean, it was, at many times, difficult. You can ask my husband that. But it was also so empowering and so impacting to see the strength of women. And the power of women supporting each other.

I just saw something on the national news about... there was something about the bills that had been written and introduced on the national federal level that the majority of them were done by women in Congress and in the Senate. And they were talking about how different it would be if

the majority of people in the Senate and Congress and the House as a whole were women. And they would get a lot more done [laughs] is what they said. I believe that, actually.

**GTR:** Why haven't things changed? I mean, there are so many more women in politics now than there was years ago, but it still seems like things...

[47:46]

**SB:** I always think that one of the things that we learned is once we started pushing to the point where it seemed that policies were changing, is that there was a backlash. You know? So for the people in this country who want it to be the same, whatever the issue is, violence against women, keeping women in their place, not having equal rights for women... and violence is one of the tactics that are used to keep women in their place. To not have equity for women. So one of the things I think that groups who want equity across the board is that we need to get better at long term strategies. Because the groups who are working to maintain the status quo, especially the ones that have money, and a lot of what's decided is based on proportionally money, is they have long term strategies. They have think tanks looking long term. I think that people who are organizing for change need to really develop the skills to think long term. Because that backlash, people need to understand that it's coming and what needs to be done in order to stop it or minimize it. So one of the backlashes we saw early on was more women being arrested. And the police would say "Well, if we're told that there is bruises then we have to arrest, so she bit his tongue so we arrested her." Well, did you ask what his tongue was doing down her throat? No. Did you ask to see what kind of bruises she had? I mean, does the story make sense? She said he was trying to rape her. Well, his story didn't make sense but she was the one who got arrested. And so then we had to start really, how do we provide the training so that the police look at the situation as what makes sense, and what doesn't fit. All of the stuff we were called "man haters" and "lesbian dykes" and (gender specific swear words -obviously words that are a lot worse as far as specific to women in what we were called.) That was just...

**GTR:** Was there an awareness among yourselves too that talking about feminism or having a feminist philosophy was that...

**SB:** Yes, and it was very much, I think, from a feminist philosophy. It was at a time where that was an important movement in the United States. I think one of the things that frustrated me is to me being the feminist women being able to be who they are, and to have personal power over their bodies, and be able to do and be what they want to be and not be put in a box. And it seemed like in the feminist movement, I mean I can only speak locally not necessarily nationally, is that we were put in different boxes. It's like you had to be a radical feminist. And being a radical feminist means you didn't wear makeup, and it went on and on and on. So it's like, don't put us in different boxes. If people want to wear makeup, let them wear makeup. If people don't

want to shave their legs, or do, or want to be in a relationships with a man, a woman, whatever. So it was that. And I think that is just part of our society and how we're taught to think.

**GTR:** Was there diversity among the group in that? If some women wanted to wear makeup, they felt like they could? Or was it kind of like unspoken, we're over here. I mean it was a different time.

**SB:** Um. I can't speak for other people. I did wear makeup. I do think that there were expectations sometimes. I mean, the women that I worked with, I obviously had close relationships with them. But I do think there was some level of judgement at the beginning in many different ways. I think we got through that, obviously, and had a better understanding of what that was about.

[54:47]

**GTR:** Was there a wide variety of... wanting to wear makeup? Or probably...

**SB:** I think the wanting to wear makeup was more about not actually the makeup but about being who you were and not having to enhance your looks. It was wrapped up in all of that stuff back then. And yeah. But you know, it was pretty crazy.

**GTR:** I think there was something that Kathy wrote that was even about bread. Like "should we serve all whole wheat bread?" Well, the women who were coming in wanted white bread, so give them the white bread, but then other people were like "nope, nope" [laughs]

**SB:** There was a long, long, long meeting that was before I got there. Or maybe I was a volunteer then so I wasn't at the meeting. But should it be white bread or brown bread or both. I think it ended up maybe being both. That was crazy.

**GTR:** I can see that being a bigger piece with having these radical feminists over here trying to help these sort of more mainstream women, and is that going to be weird? I don't know. It's just how to make it work together in just that people can come from all walks of life, and people needing help for all sorts of different issues.

**SB:** I think the belief in society back then was that women who are battered came from a family where there was abuse, and so they're following that pattern. I remember so many women saying to me, "I had self-confidence before I was in this relationship. I had good self-esteem. I did not come from a family where there was domestic violence." Just... could not believe what in some ways what happened. Men who use violence can be very charming. They, obviously not all of them, I remember so many women saying "I didn't say anything because I didn't think anybody

would believe me because everybody liked him. He was one person outside of the house and he was someone else when he walked through the door. And I didn't think anybody would believe me." And we see that here when we're working with families that women will be concerned about not being believed. I don't know. I'm sorry. I don't know how I got off on that.

**GTR:** No, I understand, that's very true. Just how isolating it can be, and that there's not a stereotype about who's going to need help.

**SB:** And when I was engaged I remember him trying to isolate me from my family. Particularly my sister, who I'm very close to. And I remember him lying to me about something that she said or did. I mean, there's no way. There would be nothing that would be able to destroy that relationship. I knew he was lying, I just didn't understand why. And we were supposed to move out of state when we got married. And so I would think back and think, "Wow, he was trying to get me to not have that support system back here." And I have no idea if he would have been physically violent, but I had some understanding of those tactics and just feeling like having my individual power taken away by picking out my clothes because he had better taste, and just all those kind of day to day things. And you don't often realize it until you look back. And I was lucky. I was really lucky.

**GTR:** I actually had a similar experience and it is, just feeling grateful that you did get out before something (else happened). There's that phrase, "there but the grace of God, go I."

**SB:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I just still am in awe of the strength that women have in overcoming and putting other people, especially their children, before them and their needs. What women can accomplish.

**GTR:** That huge weight that people often feel like they have to stay.

**SB:** Well you know, and I do think that the battered women's movement, to a larger degree, did help the community, the country really, to see that... the question always was "Why didn't she leave?" Instead of the question "Why does he think he has the right to hit her?" And people not understanding that number one, he's not going to just let her leave. He's going to harass her, he's going to be violent, he's going to make threats, he's not going to let her leave until he makes the decision. And really trying to reframe it to look at, why does he think in this society he has the right to physically, emotionally, and psychologically abuse women or a woman, and why does our society allow it to happen?

**GTR:** I think there's been progress more recently with higher profile football players, and that seemed like a trigger for "why I stayed" hashtag, and getting people talking about that and just having people kind of bring that into the conversation.



**SB:** You know, I think it's important to have that conversation. I think for women who are in relationships with high profiles, wealthy men... I've always had an issue - I mean I love sports - but I've always had an issue with how our society idolizes them and lets athletes get away with what they get away with. And not just on the national level, but on the local level. Not being held accountable for physical violence against women, or sexual assault against women...

(end of recording)

**[1:03:07]**



## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Jean DeRider- b. 1944 (JD)**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR)  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded March 24, 2015**

**Dewitt Seitz Conference Room**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Jean DeRider on March 24th, 2015 for the Safe Haven/Women's Coalition oral history project. Thank you very much for meeting with me. Do you want to just start by saying your name and how long you've been even in the Duluth area?

**JD:** My name is Jean DeRider and I've lived in the Duluth area for about forty-one years. And I was involved with the Women's Coalition before it started, actually. And that would be, it was probably in December, could have been January, of 1977 or December 1976. I was in a women's support group at the Human Development Center and the facilitator was Peg Anderson. Two of the people that were also involved in starting the shelter were also involved in that support group. One was Shirley Oberg and the other one was Pat Hoover. In February, Peg Anderson and her partner Rosie Rocco had set up to have advocates from one of the first shelters in the United States, Women's Advocates in St. Paul, come up and do a speak about battered women. In that particular case, Shirley and I had started to be friends. She lived out in the West End near where I did and we'd visit every once and a while.

And she was one of the women that spoke out at that particular event, in fact, I think she might have been the only battered woman to speak out at that point, and the person that presented that information was Monica Earler, who was at the beginning stages (one of the founders) of the Women's Advocates in St. Paul. I had a facilitator's training or something, so I didn't get there at that particular time. But the first public hearing was in February 1977. From that public hearing, they had a task force meeting March 1977.

**GTR:** Just a minute. So when you say "they," and "this public hearing," do you remember how it was organized, or who sponsored it? When you just say "public hearing"...

**JD:** I don't remember.

**GTR:** Ok. You don't remember the details?

**JD:** I know that Rosemarie Rocco and Peg Anderson were behind it. And the story behind that was they - there was a woman in the community that was an artist and she had disappeared. And they knew that she had been abused and she was never found. I think that really, because it was close to a lot of women in the community, that they really wanted to and were pulled into the issue.

**GTR:** Do you know the name?

**JD:** I can't remember. And from there, from the public hearing, I believe some of the people that were first involved in this task force was from the City Attorney's office, Brian Brown, from the County Attorney office. Paul Gusted. There was somebody involved, a therapist, from family services. Cindy (Clausen). And a woman in the community, Claire Deitmers, was involved in that too. And there were a number of other people, too. And I believe Cathy was also involved with the task force. From the first task force meeting they opened up an office in the YWCA, and they gave us a free space there. The people on the task force put some money together and got us a hotline. And so there was a phone line, and of course, it had to be red. So the first office was set up there. And I believe in the beginning of June, the office was relocated into the space which was called the "Free Clinic" at that particular point. It was up on Lake and 5th. Nancy Massey was the director so she assisted us in other ways too. So that's where we started our office. And it was kind of interesting because the three of us... we kind of started meeting and we met with the task force, too. And the board incorporated in June of 1977, and that's when they had their first legitimate board meeting. And then we were a part of it too.

**GTR:** When you say "we were incorporated," who was that? The Women's Northeastern...

**JD:** Initially the name of our organization was The Northeastern Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.

**GTR:** And that was what was incorporated initially.

**JD:** Yes. And then it just kind of moved forward. In the beginning there were about three of us (volunteering) and dealing with the hotlines. And we had connections to the police department too, and they would make some referrals from time to time. Some connection was Social Services, so we'd get referrals and people would call us and at that particular time we were able to forward the phones to our homes. Sometimes we'd have the line for three or four days (at a time).

**GTR:** Wow. Like twenty-four hours a day?

**JD:** Yeah.

**GTR:** You'd just be there.

**JD:** No, not all the time. But there weren't many calls. But I remember the first woman I helped was, she was trying to work on getting a divorce and was struggling with her attorney and she had been abused. One of the issues she had is that she couldn't read. She was an intelligent woman but for whatever reason some people struggle with different reading disabilities, or whatever. But he was particularly kind of mean to her. And I remember listening to him and just was appalled, the way he treated her.

**GTR:** Were you at the court hearings? Or just in the room?

**JD:** Yeah, I was at the court hearing where she was getting the divorce. And it was mainly in the hallway when we were talking that he was just, made some comment to her and threw the papers at her and said "Well, you read it then." Knowing that she doesn't read. What I found was I was able to give her a lot of support and encourage her and let her know it wasn't ok. It just was really rewarding to be able to spend that time with her, too. And I also remember later on that summer that I also had gotten a call from a young woman that was nineteen, she had three little kids, and her husband was very abusive to her. But at that particular point we didn't have a shelter or a place for her to go. She would go to her grandmother's place and what happened is that he would eventually make his way out there. And I'm not quite sure the circumstances, maybe she didn't feel safe with her grandmother or he just had too easily access to her at that particular point.

So I remember writing down information because we did get training from the Women's Advocates and some people working involved with Harriet Tubman (an early shelter in Minneapolis) and Ellen Pence, who was involved with Harriet Tubman at that time also had given us support and encouragement and training. From there we got the gist, though each community has to come up with their own way of dealing with situations. What I was really impressed with, as I think back, was how many people were willing to step up and give us support and encouragement, and yet let us do the work. They weren't going to jump in and do it, but they really helped us move in that direction.

[9:38]

**GTR:** So did you feel at that point supported by the police department? You know, in that case with that woman at her grandparents, if she had called you and said "this is a really bad situation, I'm in danger," would you have been able to call the police?

**JD:** Well. Um. I think there were also supportive people in the police department, but in general the attitude was never very positive. At that particular point a woman actually had to physically file charges and it had to be her filling the charges. And they are the most susceptible out of fear and mixed emotions because this person usually isn't cruel to them all the time and so you got to kind of, hot and cold response to everybody.

Yeah, they weren't particularly supportive, but I also do remember a little later that summer - and I had documented what she was talking about with her permission to - her oldest daughter who was three, was assaulted by her husband. And they did actually make an arrest for him and he was charged with that. The problem at that particular point was that he was fined, about \$400. Well, if they're back together, guess who probably paid it. (The woman). And at that particular point he had guns and he told her to shoot him, and things carried on. And just to finish that story off, later after we opened the shelter, I think it was March the following year - we opened March of 1978 - but probably, maybe May or June of that year, I got a call from Fred Friedman, Public Defender, and this young woman had killed her husband. And so I needed to testify in front of a grand jury. Well I had this information from that period of time of involvement with both of those situations. With that information she was acquitted because he was just horribly abusive to her. There was more going on too, but that's all I'll say about that right now. So anyway - so in June when we got started at, actually it was probably the end of May where we actually got into below the Free Clinic which is part of the Duluth Community Health Service - is that what that's called?

**GTR:** I think so. Not in that building anymore, but...

**JD:** No, ok. So we started a support group right off the bat, and actually facilitated the support group. And we went down to the Hillside Community Center there so it was just down the block. The first couple meetings there we had two women involved with it. One woman eventually was on our board. Her name was Kathleen O'Brian. And actually she was a dancer. She danced in New York and moved back to the area, but had experienced abuse herself. The other person I remember too and had some interactions, so that was cool.

**GTR:** It was such a different time as far as getting the word out. How did people know to come to that support group, or how did you get the word out about anything?

**JD:** You know, I'm not really remembering. I think we put some posters up, or maybe something was in the newspaper. I think once the word gets out - and I think also at the same time we'd been working with women too on a volunteer basis all this time. So we encouraged them to come to the support group, too. So that may have been more of the standard means. And I bet you we had something at the YWCA too at that particular point. So we started working, and

again, we're getting a lot of training and help and instruction from other people, and listening to them about how they work with women and what some issues are and you know, knowing that we need to work with the police department and Social Services and eventually we're going to have to get grants. So we planned for our first volunteer training. We did that in September. Shirley and I put that together and we did the training. There were a number of people but I particularly remember Michelle Lebeau and Cathy Tickle, also known as Cathryn Curley, both became involved at that point. But then it was a more substantial group and it was easier to all work on the issues together. So that was kind of the beginning of the more concrete beginning stages of our group working together.

**GTR:** And that was still before the shelter itself?

[15:29]

**JD:** Oh yeah. Ok, so that was like in September and Claire Deitmers, who was connected with Social Services - I'm not quite sure what her role was - but she helped us get a grant and then Shirley and I received some funding, a small amount of funding, from I think it was about November until March so we could spend our full time working on the issue and helping organize and doing that kind of work.

Some kind of humanities grants and I don't know if it was from the Human Development Center or where. But in the mean time we were also going to some churches and talking about battered women's issues, which was rather interesting too. Anyway - so that was the way we first started going. Ok. Well. So. We, at that particular point, they decided to, the state of Minnesota, was going to fund four pilot projects. It went through the legislature. And already there were two shelters involved. One was Women's Advocates and the other was Harriet Tubman which was in Minneapolis. And we ended up being the third shelter to open up. But we were working on the grants and they helped us with that and it was funny: the area that we worked in, below the Free Clinic is kind of the downstairs basement area, it was kind of cold. Shirley was trying to type the grant up with gloves on [laughs].

**GTR:** A little old typewriter?

**JD:** An old typewriter and it was really funny because the way it worked was whenever she typed an "o" it ended up punching the paper out. So when we went down to the Department of Corrections at that point they made fun of us.

**GTR:** Because it had holes? [laughs]

**JD:** Because it had holes! [laughs] But she knew how to type. So our group that we had gotten together and trained with and worked together, we know that we were going to start opening up in March because I think we knew at that point when we got the grant to open the shelter, I think it was \$50,000. And we were greatly influenced by the two shelters that already existed in Minnesota and Harriet Tubman had co-directors and the staff. So it had kind of a normal hierarchy, it just had co-directors instead of one director. And Women's Advocates was a women's collective. We really admired and respected what they did. They had started out originally as a women's support group, themselves. And after a year, it was kind of a consciousness raising group, and after a year they decided they wanted to get involved. Now it's time to take action. Well they first started working with legal aid down in St. Paul and they were kind of helping with the phone, trying to answer giving support and helping in that part. And what they discovered is that at that particular point women didn't need a lot of legal help. A lot of them needed physical help in terms of trying to be safe first.

**GTR:** Like housing, like a different place to live and things like that.

**JD:** Yeah, a different place so they could be safe so they wouldn't be abused anymore because if you're being abused you say "Oh, geez, I need a divorce," what's going to happen? It's going to get worse. Or if you try to leave, so... One of the women, I believe it was Sharon Vaughn, said at that point she was a part of the Women's Advocates, she opened up her house and women physically lived there until they got their shelter going. I don't know what their process was, but we just admired and respected them so much. So we really wanted to become a women's collective, but the board at that point thought "Geez, we're in Duluth, don't know how that's going to affect funding up here, it's kind of radical." So they decided that we should go with co-directors.

In the meantime, I remember talking to Ellen Pence about it because I was really idealized the whole collective structure thing. And so Ellen suggested "Well, why don't you call a meeting of the volunteers?" And they showed up, plus one of the board members and that was Cathy at that point. What happened is that we really talked about it and how important it was to us. So we went back to our board and in February of 1978 they approved our collective structure. So they hired the two co-directors and then they hired the other staff people, but the two co-directors were going to be in place for six months. Only.

**GTR:** And then they were going to go...

**JD:** And they were going to be a (part of the) collective structure.

**GTR:** Ok. And why was that so important do you think? Or why did you really want to do it? The collective versus the...

**JD:** Well, because it felt like number one, a couple of our principles was that no matter what role you played in the shelter, equal pay for (everyone). Whether you worked with the kids or the women or administrative stuff or whatever. And then our other principle, which we kind of picked up from them too is that everybody, for people who did administrative work, had to be advocates at some level with the kids or with the women and do *some* time working directly with the women so that way we'd always be more connected. So that was important to us that way, and so they allowed us to become a collective structure. And I don't know if it was \$4.50 an hour, we were all paid. It was pretty tricky. And then, when the shelter opened is we were a lot more grassroots at that particular point, too. I was a single parent at that time and my little girls were, I think, five and seven. When I did an overnight, my kids would come in and we had a pullout couch we could sleep on. I would get them set up and then at nine o'clock I'd run the house meeting and I'd answer the phones. I'd do everything I needed to do, but they were there. And at that time, because everybody took part in rotating covering evening or overnight shifts, I was there maybe three times a month.

[23:42]

**GTR:** Were there always people there? I mean as far as women that needed a place to go. Was there pretty much always someone there once you started?

**JD:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. In fact it filled up pretty fast. I still remember the first person that came. Actually we had two people who came very early and they had children, so we started right off the bat. So it went pretty fast. I mean, sometimes it'd get a little lower, but sometimes it'd get really high. And I think I need to indicate, too, is that when we first opened the shelter, Ellen Pence who was involved with the HRA and Harriet Tubman - she arranged with our HRA program up here, that we could have half of this duplex which is now our current Chum (Emergency) shelter, free of rent for the first six months. And then if we filled up we could have the upstairs of the second part of the duplex.

**GTR:** So it was a housing link that initiated the HRA connection in Duluth.

**JD:** Yep. I think the air... we were just really excited. We were moving fast and forward and things were falling into place. We were speaking at different church groups. I believe, I don't remember when the State Coalition for Battered Women started, may have been that summer, when we first opened up, and they formed the Minnesota State Coalition for Battered Women. It was well organized. Ellen did much of that. She had a set up so we were like in regions, and I don't know if there were nine regions in Minnesota... so we were in the Northeastern. And the goal was at this point we had four legislative pilot projects, and I don't remember where the fourth one was. Might have been Brainerd. Might have been somewhere else. So it was Harriet



Tubman, Women's Advocates, us and then it might have been Brainerd shelter. It might have been St. Cloud. I don't know. Another outstate place. And from there, what was really interesting, was the goal to get funding for each region. So you wouldn't just be focused in the metropolitan area or just a few larger cities. We were part of region three, which included Cook, and Lake, and Koochiching and Itasca, and Carlton.

**GTR:** And what was the main purpose of that larger coalition?

**JD:** The larger coalition was to work on legislative and help with the training and being the resource for new places that needed help to start up new shelters and stuff. And I believe at that point, Range Women's Advocates had started. And they were like an advocacy program because they didn't have funds for a shelter and actually never did have a shelter. So the idea was to at least get one shelter in every region to start with. And also then provide us a network to work with each other. Which we did. Being freshly trained, doing our stuff, for a while we'd go to Grand Rapids and we helped train them. We also helped Carlton County and I think Grand Rapids had a sexual assault program so they added their battered women's program. Maybe Range Women's Advocates did the same thing. The other counties, often they have to combine programs together because with the population they can't support a sexual assault program and a battered women's program. So we would meet usually about every other month, or it might have been monthly, we met with Region Three. It was very helpful because we all learned and supported, and we'd get to understand the issues in more rural areas, too, which is really important because even though the State Coalition would call Duluth "rural," which was kind of like... Yeah? [laughs] I don't think so [laughs].

**GTR:** Compared to The Cities, I suppose [laughs]. And you didn't explain anything about your background too, but you didn't have any formal, you didn't go to college to do this kind of work, or what was your background before you started?

**JD:** I had worked for the University of Minnesota for about ten years. Eight years down in Minneapolis. I was in an office supervising, and then I was offered a similar position up in Duluth because I worked closely with the Duluth branch. And I think at that point, my ex was kind of fading away so I thought I'd take the chance and move up to Duluth with my daughters which was really tough in the beginning because (or the differences with the Duluth Campus). But I took a class at a time for ten years so I had about two years then [laughs]. After I had two years there I had decided I wanted to go to school and I went to Mankato State and majored in Psychology and Women's Studies. And I so was getting further along my degree and I was there for one year and then decided to move back to Duluth and worked on my degree again for another year. I didn't quite finish it because I got involved with the shelter. So I was strongly interested in working with women. And then I also went to a workshop when I was in Mankato at Stillwater State Prison. And I went there on my own for a whole week and they had a unit

there that was called the Ascapalen (?) unit, and it was a therapeutic community where it was a certain section of the prison (prisoners volunteered to be a part of it). If you wanted to be in there, you really had to work hard and really show that you wanted to make some changes in your life, and I was really moved by being in that workshop, at that point they used transactional analysis and some therapists from the Wilder Center were doing primal therapy. So it was interesting. But the message I got was that so many of the men there, in fact one of the main people had been in prison in Sing Sing and all these other places too, and it really was apparent to me at that particular point that so much damage is done to young males either witnessing it or being subject to abuse themselves it often puts them on this other path. I'm not saying everybody gets there but for a lot of them you can go back and see some really traumatic things that happened to them in their childhood. So then, to me, it was really apparent that you really need to work with younger people and often women and children then. And then I had an experience when I did my internship up here, a residential treatment place out in West Duluth, and again, I worked with eleven to fourteen year olds for about four months, and you looked at the case history and except for a couple of them you could see the trauma stuff that happened to them too. So it became even more clear that it was important to work with women and kids. So that's why I got involved with that.

[31:44]

**GTR:** Ok.

**JD:** Ok. So I don't know what else to say. We got a grant from the Ordean Foundation, it was 1978 and Cathy Tickle that she was then, really worked on that with the Ordean Foundation. So we finally moved in I think - when did we move in - we moved in November 1978.

**GTR:** Was that money used for staffing or building?

**JD:** It was for building.

**GTR:** This was the first one still, right? The one that was in that duplex?

**JD:** No, we found a different place.

**GTR:** Oh, you found a different place right away.

**JD:** This was on 16th and 1st and it was really a nice big building and far met our needs better and I think there was a fence in the back so we could have that. It was really a good place for us. And we wouldn't be obligated - because HRA wanted to charged us money. And really, the space was not very conducive to what we were trying to do there. It was not very good for us. So

that was wonderful, exciting. And about three of the people at work, their husbands were at Builders and Laborers. So they helped us on some of the projects. We had to redo the kitchen floor, and I remember Rosie Rocco coming in and helping peeling off wallpaper and stairs and the bedrooms. So it was put together. A lot of it we tried to do ourselves. It was excited and we really filled it fast there, too.

**GTR:** People always say, you might have remembered the first person, and just you know.. any particular - you don't have to say names - but any particular memories of people who came, or would they come at all times of the day, or just kind of how the logistics went?

**JD:** Oh, well, yeah. They'd come anytime. We were in the YWCA - we had a twenty-four hour hotline. And we found that was an essential piece of what we were doing there because people would call in, and they didn't have to give their names, and they can talk about their situation and I think what we really learned from that from Women's Advocates and probably other people is not to be judgemental and not to push people one way or another. Give them information and support. And if they decide to go back they go back. If they want to come back in they come back in. So they could come and go as they needed. And even for filing charges, they didn't have to, if they decided they didn't want to follow through, it was ok. But we made a point that they needed to know we had shelter, we had space for them, we had a twenty-four hour hotline they could call anytime. At that particular point we had finally got some - August 1979 - we got legislation to get orders of protections.

**GTR:** Oh yeah. Can you explain that? Had that not been in place at all?

**JD:** People could get, if they were married, could possibly get some kind of restraining order. But they'd have to go through an attorney. And with an order of protection there was paperwork and we could assist them in that paperwork and we could file at the courthouse. There would be a judge that would listen to the order of protection and decide whether to grant it or to not grant it.

**GTR:** So they wouldn't have to get an attorney of their own and that whole business?

**JD:** Yup.

[35:56]

**JD:** Again, and it was like, it wasn't quite like the criminal court system where you have to prove beyond reasonable doubt, it was more a preponderance of evidence. Was there (reason) to support getting an order of protection? (To believe threats or physical abuse occurred?) So what I want to do is probably go back - so in '79 you get an order of protection...but no one arrested

anybody, really. (They could make an arrest if the abuser violated the order of protection but most of the time they were not arrested.)

**GTR:** And what did that say? What was probable?

**JD:** Well, I believe that you had to find, if you went out to a situation and the officer had reason to believe that a physical assault occurred, or physical evidence like bruises, injuries of some sort, and if they could get the person within four hours they could make the arrest.

**GTR:** Four hours? That seems odd.

**JD:** It's a time frame. If he wasn't physically there they'd have four hours.

**GTR:** You said it didn't happen in Duluth?

**JD:** Oh, well the mentality was not there. It's like at the city attorney or the county attorney's office, "well it's your word against his word." You know. Which often was the case. They were harder cases to do.

**GTR:** Can you back up to just when all this was happening right then: what kinds of reactions were you getting from the community, or if someone knew that you worked there or what kind of reactions were you getting?

**JD:** Well. What I'm going to do is I want to jump into when the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program started. Because they started a project in which they had made arrangements, I believe it was Eli Miletich at that point, where half the squads would do what they normally do which was tell the guy to walk around the block, have him leave, you know, try to "mediate" the situation and try to take care of it that way. And the other half was supposed to make an arrest. If they had reason to believe - and actually just follow through so it was mandatory for half the group of people.

**GTR:** Half the police officers in the Duluth force? Ok.

**JD:** And then what happened was that Domestic Abuse Project (and the Women's Coalition worked together) as part of it in which we worked with them and we did orders of protections on our side here. And then we set about a criminal court, an advocacy program, in which we had - we paid people a stipend to go out - and if an arrest occurred a police would call us and we would send somebody out in the community to that woman's house and she would have a packet of information about orders of protection, the fact that we have a shelter, information about the types of abuse - physical, mental, sexual abuse, and information about the support group and of

course the hotline number. And just let her know that we'd follow up and tell her what the main part of the program was. At that point they were trying to get them into a program to deal with their abuse issues. So it was Family Services, Human Development Center, Social Services, all had a couple counselors that would run these groups for the batterers. And then we would send out this person at night. Surprisingly, no one was ever injured.

**GTR:** Would you go by yourself?

**JD:** Yeah. (Mainly the on-call would do this with a small stipend, only occasionally I would do this).

**GTR:** Someone would send you alone? In the dark.

**JD:** Yeah. Again, a lot of who would be interested in doing that kind of work were women who had experienced abuse, or knowing somebody who had experienced abuse. Maybe their mother was abused or whatever. So the dedication was there. And we were grassroots. It was done. That was the way it was set up and we just followed through it. For a while I worked for the criminal court system and I would recruit people to do this work and then they would go out and fill out an incident report letting us know what happened, what they were saying, and then of course have her permission to report that information. And then the next day I'd follow up with the woman, let her know that her husband, partner, whoever it is, would be going to the court. There would be an arraignment hearing (that I was at), and he could either plead guilty or not guilty. When he pled guilty and it was the first time he'd been arrested for that, he'd (probably) end up on probation and have to go to six months of these groups and if she needed an order of protection we'd get her protection at that time.

[Pause to change recorder memory card]

PART 2- Separate Audio file

**GTR:** Ok. So where were we - you were just finishing up with the funding sources, and the Ordean Foundation.

**JD:** United Way.

**GTR:** Oh, United Way being in-kind support.

**JD:** The first year only.

**GTR:** Only that first year, ok.

**JD:** ONLY the first year. And then they trusted that we were able to, that we were fine as a women's collective.

**GTR:** Interesting. Ok.

**JD:** So they supported it every year after that, too. And the Ordean Foundation helped too, and there's other things. I wasn't so much in the grant writing thing, but I think what's significant to me is: number one, by starting the program, it really led to other things spinning off of that. One of the first people I worked with was Pat Gaus. She wrote a grant for up to Cook County for Grand Marais and one of our advocates, Sharon Karis, went up there. And she also then later left the shelter and helped start what's called now Project SOAR - it was the displaced homemakers program. Then Michelle LeBeau left and she started Women's Transitional Housing. So there were a number of spin-offs from that particular thing. So I think that was pretty exciting.

**GTR:** That's great, yeah. I've heard of some of those and people seeing different needs, that they felt like needed to be filled, that were a little bit different.

**JD:** So it was all really good.

**GTR:** And what was your position, or how did you stay involved as those years were progressing?

**JD:** Well, mainly I was a woman's advocate to start with and then when we started doing orders (of protection), and then I tried to do the outreach program and it was early on. It was after we got into the shelter, so I think it was shortly after that. I did that for about a year. Again, we created a little outreach center in the Free Clinic there, below downstairs. And we did a group there, I did a newsletter, we had actually a clothing exchange there, we created a poetry book with illustrations that was pretty powerful. About thirteen of the women got together and wrote that.

**GTR:** Women that were part of the collective or women that were coming (to groups).

**JD:** Yes. Women that we served (did the poetry book).

**GTR:** Ok. Is it client? What is exactly the right word?

**JD:** Well, we referred to them as women, not clients.

**GTR:** Just "women you served", ok. That's a good...

**JD:** So that was kind of exciting, but then it was kind of hard to maintain. Plus there was, at that point, the intervention part that we had five advocates working on orders of protections because it was difficult for people to do order protections and try to staff the house both at the same time.

So that's where that had to shift. Plus now, as it was happening more often, the need was out there and they just had to increase the number of people doing orders of protections at that time. And then we had to do more in particular. So I was involved with orders of protection and then I got specialized and did criminal court for a number of years. In particular, I worked more with the county attorney's office, the felony levels or the ones who were outside of the city limits. And then I organized the on-call advocates that went out to talk to women. I also kept on doing groups and was involved with the State Coalition since the beginning and probably worked with them for at least fifteen years and then Region 3, I was probably with them for about eighteen years. So I did that kind of work too.

**GTR:** What was your title?

**JD:** Women's Advocate. Part of the Women's Collective. Management Team. I was involved with a number of speaking events.

**GTR:** Speaking to the community, the wide community?

**JD:** Yeah, sometimes in the schools or the colleges or churches or wherever else. I remember speaking once up at the jail. There was shared responsibility doing public speaking, too. And then I helped organize and worked a lot with the women going down to the Battered Women's Day at the capital. And we'd take a busload of women down there and talk to legislators. So I was involved with that part, too. It was all really good work.

**GTR:** It sounds like a lot of busy... work. And that was your full time work for that time?

**JD:** I did that work my whole length of time involved with the Battered Women's Shelter.. it was twenty-three years.

**GTR:** Until what year, then? What year was that?

**JD:** 2001.

**GTR:** Why did you keep, what kept you going? Or what was your inspiration really for staying involved that long?

**JD:** Well, it just felt important work for me. And then, towards the end, I was one of the organizers for the women's in-house program, so I did that for maybe about five or six years. (Most of those years had a co-manager for the in-house.)

**GTR:** In-house?

**JD:** Well, I mean in the shelter. The women's program in the shelter. Supervising the advocates and being in charge of staff for food service and maintenance and the reception area, stuff like that.

**GTR:** That's a lot.

**JD:** Yeah.

[6:02]

**GTR:** A lot to organize. So many logistics!

**JD:** Oh, yeah, I think the part I enjoyed the most was just being the women's advocate and particularly doing court advocacy the best.

**GTR:** Because you could really make a difference in how things, the outcome of cases, or?

**JD:** Sometimes you could, but I think the main thing is that you offered support to women in crisis. It was more tangible. I really liked the crisis line aspect of it because I thought that was so helpful for people, at least make that first move. I liked doing more of the political things. I was involved with the Take Back the Night march when we first started that. So those parts were really important to me because it's a bigger issue. You just can't patch everybody up. You gotta make changes in the system. And legislative (action) is one way of doing that, and getting more involved from the community is helpful that way, too.

**GTR:** The volunteers, the wider community, donors. That kind of thing?

**JD:** Yeah. Volunteers and people on the board. We evolved... we became less collective-like but again, if you don't have a very good support system to help maintain a good collective, and we became pretty hierarchical which is unfortunate. But I don't know how to do, expand the collective thought process beyond a few members. It really doesn't work real well.

**GTR:** It is challenging. I've tried it myself.



**JD:** It was good and I'm glad we did pursue it initially, that way, because I think it kept us more vital, because we were all on that same team. And then when you start becoming management there's just some natural tension there anyway. I have no regrets that we were a collective because I think that really did fuel our energy and kept us really going really well for quite a while.

**GTR:** It sounds like, from the video I got to watch at UMD today, about even some of the women's liberation at that time, people were a little bit skeptical. You know, is it just going to be a model of the head person like a "male" model, that kind of thing. Taking that consideration as well.

**JD:** Yeah, so it was ideal, but you know what, I think times called for it at that particular point and I don't think any of us had any regrets that we pursued that way. Maybe it was something we needed to modify sooner than what we did or change it at some point, but it's ok. It all had to be what it had to be. And what I'm so proud of is seeing how many women we've helped that I now see as leaders, doing all sorts of amazing things. It's like, again, our greatest resource are our people. And if they can get out of an oppressive situation then [laughs] they can do anything.

**GTR:** Do you remember any particular woman or family? You don't have to give names but any particular?

**JD:** Well, I know one person in particular is moved out, was involved in.. and then volunteered there, and then eventually is doing the work with the domestic abuse project with Native women and is now in Colorado doing work from time to time doing some of the projects involved in Washington, D.C. So in particular, there's just amazing things that people do.

**GTR:** Yep. I imagine it takes so much energy to be dealing with a bad situation at home, and just to be free from that. And they can do more things.

**JD:** I remember one woman in particular, she had two sons and one was having a horrible time in school and was in special ed. Well, she got out of an abusive situation and he wasn't witnessing violence anymore, and all of a sudden he was mainstream. I think the main thing for us, what we were learning, is how traumatic it is for children to witness domestic violence. And how much that affects their life and their ability to do things and maybe what's going to happen to them. Well of course, it affect how they're going to be in their future, so we did a lot with the kids, and we had some wonderful children's advocates that really worked hard with these kids help them to get comfortable and start to feel good about themselves and make changes in their lives, too. It just keeps on going. I think it's marvelous that we still have a nice good shelter right now because we built a new one. I did want to stay around for that, too. That was my recent

(work). And somewhere I did get my undergraduate degree and then I got my master's degree, but I continued working there too.

**GTR:** Busy. It sounds like you were very busy in those years with young kids.

JD: Yep.

[JD's phone rings, interview ends]



## **Safe Haven/Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Coral McDonnell (b. 1940) CM**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR)**

**Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded December 29, 2014**

**Dewitt-Seitz Conference Room, Duluth**

**GTR:** Thank you very much for meeting with me. Can you let me know when you first got involved with this issue or with the Women's Coalition?

**CM:** I got involved in 1978, when I met Jean Derider at an event which was a rally and a gathering of women who were working to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. So, I met Jean and Jean talked to me about the Women's Shelter that had recently opened called the Women's Coalition, at the time. So, I said I was interested in volunteering and she told me more about it, told me to call up and they could arrange some time for me to go and volunteer. So, I did, probably within the next couple of weeks.

**GTR:** Okay, great. How long had you been in Duluth?

**CM:** Well, I'd lived here most of my life. I was away for maybe 10-15 years, but moved back here in 1970. It was about 10 years, actually.

**GTR:** Can I ask your date of birth, year of birth?

**CM:** 1940.

**GTR:** Okay, that's good for the records. So, you were fairly young at that time. Was the Women's Coalition just working on the shelter, or were there other issues that they were working on, too?

**CM:** As far as I know, that was the focus. It was on the shelter for battered women. I think they started working, at least a year before that. They started out a hotline, and advocacy, and by the time I got hooked up with them they had this shelter on 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave East, and shortly after that they moved into the one on 16<sup>th</sup>.

**GTR:** What do you remember about that building? What was it like there?

**CM:** In the first building?

**GTR:** Yes.

**CM:** It was a small, side-by-side duplex. I didn't see the upstairs, but I assume that maybe there were three bedrooms. The first night I went to volunteer there, Cathy Tickle was working. She... there were some residents there, and one of the residents was a woman who had recently shot and killed her husband. It was a horrible story, about what happened to her. She was very young. Some of the other women talked about stories of things that had happened to them in their relationships, and I had been divorced for about eight years by then. And realized, oh my gosh, way back then, I was one of those battered women. But we didn't have a name for it at the time. I had left that relationship, thinking I had just failed at marriage.

**GTR:** So, you had some personal experience, but it wasn't called...

**CM:** Yes. So, then I really did get in touch with a lot of the things that were going on for me. I think it really helped me connect with the women who were there.

**GTR:** That's great. So, was that one of the reasons you wanted to get involved, because you felt like you had some personal...

**CM:** No, I don't think that was what drew me to it. But I think I was interested in women's issues, and that's what drew me to the equal rights rally. My children were a little bit older. They were still young, but they were old enough that I could take on something besides children, so I was interested in doing some more work, working with women.

**GTR:** So was that always as a volunteer? Did you ever end up working there for pay?

**CM:** No, only at the Shelter I was working as a volunteer. Once in a while, they might pay me if they needed an extra fill-in for an overnight, or something. I think I only volunteered at the first shelter one time, maybe twice, and then they moved. Once in a while I would take an overnight at the new place.

**GTR:** Okay. So, what would you do during those shifts?

**CM:** Oh, we had women's groups every night. Answered the phones. The phones were pretty busy, and I assume they still are. A lot of it was just helping women talk through some of their experiences over the phone. It was eye opening for sure.

**GTR:** What kind of training or advance preparation did you have?

**CM:** They had volunteer training, so they would teach us about good ways to respond when people asked hard questions. I don't remember a whole lot of details about the volunteer training, but I remember some of the women who were there with me, at the time. I think it was teaching about compassion, a lot, and one thing I think that we didn't learn is how you handle these crank callers, because there were plenty of those. I think the first couple of times I was just kind of stunned by it. But then I talked to some of the other staff and they had all experienced it, especially when they were working late at night. Some weird guy would call, and act like he was abused. Then when everybody had kind of the same story, we realized that this was one of those! {laughs}

**GTR:** Something that happens? That's too bad. So, do you have any idea what women would have done before that shelter was available? Did any of them have stories, as far as if they needed to leave? Where would they go?

**CM:** I think it was tough. When I left my relationship, I had help, where I lived in southern Minnesota, I had help from a church, and social services. But had I been where there wasn't anyone that was helpful and supportive, I can't imagine. A lot of women are without support or help. My mom lived here, who happened to have a friend who had an empty duplex, an empty apartment in a duplex, so I was able to get help to move back here and move into that duplex.

**GTR:** That's great. That's good. (brief discussion of personal experience)

**CM:** So, it felt good to be able to help people, bring people to the shelter and show them around. It felt good that that was there for them.

**GTR:** That's great. Have you heard any stories... I think Jean (DeRider) mentioned that police officers, if they were called in, they would say "Well, you could stay at this hotel downtown for a night" and Jean said it wasn't a very nice hotel. Had you ever heard about any of that?

**CM:** I had kind of heard about it but I didn't know much about it.

**GTR:** Okay, you hadn't seen that. Alright. So, do you have any idea what the typical process would have been if law enforcement was involved? At that point, if women were working with law enforcement, how that went, or what kinds of reactions they got?

**CM:** I can't really say for sure. I think back then there wasn't a mandatory arrest policy. I think a lot of women were blamed for what happened to them. I think in serious cases men were taken away or taken into custody.

**GTR:** So, there wasn't that structure. What did you find the working conditions like in Duluth at that time? Were women finding good opportunities at that time, or was there really more of finding discrimination about work or housing, or things like that?

**CM:** I can't say for sure, because I had opportunities myself to go back to school and go to work and find housing. I'm sure there were a lot of women who it was a lot more difficult for.

**GTR:** What kind of work were you doing at that time?

**CM:** Well, when I started, after I sent back to school- I went to the Business School and learned accounting and office management. So I worked for a while in an insurance agency. Then I worked in a large corporation that managed boats.

**GTR:** So you found you could work and have kids and find time to volunteer as well?

**CM:** Yes! I don't know how I ever did it because now I'm retired and I don't know how I had time to work, ever.

**GTR:** Okay. This is the first interview I've done for this project, so this is a little bit of a learning process for me to figure out what to ask, or what... everyone had a very different experience. So how many years did you end up working, or doing that kind of volunteering at the shelter?

10:00

**CM:** Probably about two years, and then I started working at the Domestic Abuse Project, which we had just started. I got hired right away to work with that project.

**GTR:** I'd like to hear about how that all fit together, or when that was happening.

**CM:** I think I still volunteered some at the Shelter, and also I was on the Shelter board for a time. I don't remember the years of that.

**GTR:** Okay. Sometime maybe in the '80s?

**CM:** Sometime in the '80s, yes.

**GTR:** Okay. So, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, what years was that, that you were also involved.

**CM:** It started in October 1980, and we did like a six-month prep time, and then the actual startup of the mandatory arrest policy was in March of '81. So, it was getting things organized and getting everyone on board in the first six months.

**GTR:** Was there anything in particular about that development.... How did it all come together at that time?

**CM:** Well, the woman who started it was Ellen Pence, who you will probably hear her name quite a few times throughout this project. She was the head of the battered women's programs at the Department of Corrections. They were the designated group who would handle this money that was allocated by the legislature to help fund battered women's programs around the state. She found that the Duluth shelter was pretty strong and had a good connection to the community. She was kind of always visioning and thinking ahead. She thought that we should do more than house women and help women, we should do a little more. So, she started planning and designing how the Domestic Abuse Intervention program would work. Because there was a supporting police department and a good strong shelter, this seemed like the place to do it.

**GTR:** How was the police department supportive?

**CM:** Well, the police chief who was Milo Taskey at the time; he was due to retire very soon. He seemed to like the idea of a coordinated community response, with the police being of course, usually, the first responders in a domestic violence case. But he was due to retire, and so he didn't want to make a strong policy change when he's going to soon leave, so he wanted that to be left to the next appointed police chief.

**GTR:** And that person was...?

**CM:** Eli Milatich. It took a little while to get him on board, but he then made a policy that the domestic assault cases... now my language is getting kind of screwed up... it would be on probable cause - arrests would occur when there were visible signs of injury. So, that policy, over the years, had evolved some. It changed a little bit. That was kind of the impetus for getting the person into the system.

**GTR:** Okay. How much connection did there seem with that, getting the project going and the shelter? Some people were involved in both, or?

**CM:** Well, we all worked together. The shelter was... at the time, in the early days, we had an on-call program. I think they still have an on-call program for people to go and visit a victim of domestic assault, like right after the arrest. The jail would call them. They would call the Domestic Abuse Project, who had a team of jail visit volunteers. The jail visit volunteer would go in the morning to visit the offender in jail, and then had an advocate on duty who would go in the middle of the night or whenever to visit the woman whose partner had been arrested. Kind of to give her information, and help her figure out how the system was going to work, and see if she wanted to come to the shelter and stay for a while.

**GTR:** Okay.

**CM:** So, it was the shelter's role to do that, but we connected them so that we could all be working together.

**GTR:** That makes sense. So if the law enforcement is involved, and maybe the woman didn't know of the resources, then that was working together, there would be a call somehow. That makes sense.

**CM:** There was also, if the offender was released from jail before his court time for any reason, they had an agreement that they would call the shelter so that she could let the woman know that he was being released, if she was going to be safe at home or if she was going to be in the shelter or whatever.

**GTR:** Okay, so even if they weren't at the shelter, they (the advocates) would still come to them?

**CM:** Yes.

**GTR:** Was that ever... were the women ever surprised, or saying "How'd you get my phone number?" wondering...?

**CM:** I think part of the policy is that the police would tell them, "I'm going to give your name and address to the women's shelter and someone's going to come and see you." So. So they were aware someone was going to come.

**GTR:** Okay.



**CM:** Yeah, I was working on that duty part-time as well, being an on-call. It was kind of spooky, sometimes, going out in the middle of the night to a home, that was kind of a small apartment that was back in the alley or something.

**GTR:** I suppose. Did you go by yourself?

**CM:** Yeah, we did at the time. I don't know if they still do. It was... but most women were appreciative of someone coming to just say "What's going on?"

**GTR:** That's good. Would they sometimes come with you right away? Did you bring people to the shelter?

**CM:** Some people did. I don't recall that I ever brought anyone to the shelter in the middle of the night. But I think some of the advocates did, if someone wanted to go. Sometimes it's harder if you have small children at home, to pack them up in the middle of the night. For sure the next day, many would go. Many would go to get a protection order in family court the next day, as well.

**GTR:** Were things going pretty smoothly with the relationship between the DAIP Project and the shelter? Was there anything in particular that was challenging, or less smooth?

**CM:** For those early years, we were all working hard and building community relations with police and probation officers and the prosecutor and the jail. I think we all worked hard to get connected. Over the years there were ups and downs and turbulence, but I think mostly things were... people worked well together. As everywhere, there's always some conflict and questions.

**GTR:** If there are any lessons learned... these projects can almost be... not transition planning, but "I wish someone would have told me that at that time, don't repeat this problem or mistake again"... if there's anything like that. Like you said perhaps the whole Duluth Intervention Program could have its own oral history, really talking to those people. This one, the first idea that Jean mentioned, the shelter. You were on the board for that. Even just some of the logistics of the shelter... I heard someone mention a story, maybe it was the piece the Cathy Curley wrote up, even just trying to figure out what kind of food to serve, or that. Do you remember anything?

**CM:** Yes! I'd hear those stories, and sometimes... yes, what kind of food to serve, and do we want only whole-grain bread, or healthy food, or are you going to offer people... I'm sure you would have heard that story.

**GTR:** Well, just that little bit that was written. I wondered if you were there, or had that experience?

**CM:** No, I wasn't, but I would hear about it. Yeah.

**GTR:** I'm curious about that.

**CM:** I'm so glad that Jean had some of that stuff, that Cathy wrote.

**GTR:** I only have a little bit. There is something on their website, still, that is something Cathy wrote 10-20 years ago, on an anniversary time. And there were great pictures. I took a tour of the shelter a couple weeks ago, and they have all these clippings and pictures and things up on the wall. There are a lot of pictures of Jean, I noticed. Any time there were things in the newspaper, it looks like they kept that.

**CM:** That's great.

**GTR:** At least on the walls. Sometimes it's like, "Should we scan that, and put it in a book somehow?"

20:00

**CM:** When you're doing something like that, it's so hard to know: This is important to maintain this history and keep every single thing. But it's nice that they did. I haven't been there for quite a while, now.

**GTR:** At least quick on the tour, I saw some of that, and though we should see if it is scanned in some other part. That's always a challenge, to figure out, we have this oral history, and what do we do with it, exactly? But we never know. The historical society reminds me that today, 50 years from now, will be history. So there's things people are doing today that are really interesting down the road that we should make sure that we've discussed or laid out in the archives somehow.

**GTR:** So, you didn't help actually set it up...

**CM:** No. I heard about how it started, and then I was really interested in this group of women who were starting out in the support group and realized that we needed to do something.

**GTR:** Did you hear any good stories about finding the place, or getting food? How did they even buy food? Just the logistics.

**CM:** I don't know how they did it. I don't know about the details.

**GTR:** So, you would come, and work...

**CM:** Yes.

**GTR:** A willing volunteer...

**CM:** It seems like at the time that the women who were staying at the house were the people who cooked the meals. They kind of did shared... Most of the time when I worked it was evenings, so the day-to-day business I wasn't really "in the know" about.

**GTR:** Okay. So, evenings you were just there to answer phones, and talk to people?

**CM:** Yes. I think they had support groups just about every evening.

**GTR:** Would there be counselors at the support groups, or was it just kind of women talking with other women?

**CM:** Yes, and whoever the staff was on was kind of a facilitator of the groups.

**GTR:** And those were useful for women?

**CM:** Very. Oh, yes, it was pretty clear that it was important to them. It was really helpful for people to know that they weren't the only ones that this happened to.

**GTR:** So, people would share stories?

**CM:** People would share stories?

**GTR:** That's great. One question... what was the larger response of the community to the shelter? Was it welcomed or did people make fun of it? You said there were some crank calls. Were there any other experience that you ever encountered in the community?

**CM:** I can't say for sure. I think when they built the new shelter, there was some concern from neighbors. I assume that they all got that worked out, and met with neighbors. When they moved to the one on 1<sup>st</sup> Street, if there were issues, I don't know about them, because I wasn't that involved. I had just kind of started as a volunteer.

23:22

**GTR:** What building was around when you were a board member?

**CM:** They were in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> street.

**GTR:** Were you involved in building the new building?

**CM:** No. I knew it was going on, and kind of stayed in touch with how it was going.

**GTR:** Was there anything when you were on the board that was really interesting or challenging? Things that we should remember?

**CM:** I'm sure there was. But I don't remember a lot!

**GTR:** That's fine. If there's anything that sticks out, if you think of it later, you can let me know. What other's women's groups were around at that time, and did you work with them on any issues? You said you met Jean at the ERA rally...

**CM:** Yes. That was really my first venture into working on women's issues. Then once I started working... I knew there was a sexual assault program. I think I heard about that at about the same time. When we started the Domestic Abuse Project, we rented space, an office space, upstairs from the old Free Clinic on 5<sup>th</sup> St. and Lake Avenue. We had a kitchen and a laundry room, and the Sexual Assault program had the other rooms in that upstairs locations. So, that's how I got to know a lot of the people in the Sexual Assault program, and got to know... and then I started volunteering for that program for a while, too.

**GTR:** So that's I'm sure that was related? Women would end up working with more than one group?

**CM:** Not usually, no. Because it gets pretty intense. I don't think I was volunteering at the shelter anymore when I was volunteering at the sexual assault program, and that was also doing some on-call visits, because they always had a couple advocates on duty all the time. So if there was a sexual assault reported, somebody could go and meet with the victim right away.

**GTR:** Was that the CASVA? PAVSA?

**CM:** PAVSA (Program to Aid Victims of Sexual Assault)

**GTR:** So that's important. Did you feel you had training, did you have specific trainings for that, with therapists, or?

**CM:** Well, with PAVSA people, we were trained for that.

**GTR:** Important work, but like you said intense, I'm sure. When you joined the Women's Coalition first, did the feminist philosophy get discussed?

**CM:** It did, yeah. I think it was a pretty big piece of it at the time. I don't know where they came up with the name Women's Coalition, but I think it meant a lot to a lot of people. The name. Because it just meant that we're all in this together. That was kind of the (idea). Like I said, women staff and volunteers and residents, are one group. It's not like "we and them." So it was important for a lot of people to have that kind of relationship. We're together, we're a collective.

**GTR:** You weren't an employee, but did that come into the idea of "all employees are paid the same" or all that, equality as well.

**CM:** Yes.

**GTR:** That's a good thought. I hadn't considered that.

**CM:** It is kind of like, when a collective gets too large, it's really hard to made decisions. So I think that got to be problematic, as it did with the DAIP. We became a collective. I think it didn't start out that way, but maybe a year or two later, we started to be a collective. As we grew, it got to be more and more cumbersome, to do so.

**GTR:** Was there consensus at meetings, that kind of thing?

**CM:** That was the intention, and it was like, meet all day long, and you don't get what you're really there for done to do! You don't get to do what you're really there for, because you're processing. Probably a simple decision about where to buy your groceries! {laughs}

**GTR:** I've had that experience in different cooperative groups, yes. So, did people talk about being feminist? Was that kind of discussed?

**CM:** Yes, it was discussed regularly. I think Shirley Oberg was really the person who kind of led those kind of discussions. She found books and resources and got them out for people. She was a powerhouse in that work.

**GTR:** For the employees and volunteers, or for the women who might be using the services? Was she giving them books and things?

**CM:** Yes. Oh, sure.

**GTR:** Was that well received, or did people....?

**CM:** Maybe. I can't say for sure, but I think mostly well received. Some people kind of stood back from it a bit.

**GTR:** I'm not old enough obviously to remember those years (I was around in the 70's, I was just young)... Did people say, "Oh, you just hate men" or that kind of thing?

**CM:** Oh, sure. I think for a time there was a lot of anger at men, because nearly all the violence was by men against women. So, we all just had this kind of hostility and anger. It evolved to soften a little bit, because most of the women had relationships with men, too. So we had to figure out how we can be strong, but yet not hate men. {laughs}

**GTR:** It was all women you were working with?

**CM:** Yes. There were a few men who came on later, but in the first years there was just women. I think it's even more recently... I haven't done much work in this field in the past ten years, I was on the Shelter board for a while after I retired. It's more recent that I'm thinking that men need to be more involved. This is a man's issue. It's not a women's issue. It's men who are doing this. It's men who need to step up and make men change.

30:19

**GTR:** Were you ever involved with the Men as Peacemakers group? I don't know when they formed.

**CM:** I don't know when they formed, but I was not really involved. But I knew a lot of the people who were.

**GTR:** It's fairly newer, I think.

**CM:** Yes, but they've done some really great work.

**GTR:** Interesting. Sometimes I've heard that there were some women who might have used the shelter that then became volunteers. Did you find that happened, or did you know people?

**CM:** Yes. I think a lot of women who used the shelter started volunteering. Then, I don't remember when it was exactly, they had kind of decided they needed to have a little time to heal before volunteering. So, then I believe, I don't know what it is now, but I believe it was you needed to be out of a violent relationship for six months before you can volunteer, just to take care of yourself, and then come.

**GTR:** That makes sense. That's good. Are there any particular stories that you remember, not naming names, of women that were really helped, or women that weren't? Women who ended up going back? Things like that?

30:00

**CM:** There were many women who went back, and then came back to the shelter again. I have heard that the first time you escape is usually the first time you escape. It may be one or two times after that. Sometime in the 80's, I don't remember if it was the mid-80's... Shirley organized with some other women a group called the Women's Action Group. So, a lot of the women who had been either in the shelter or connected with the shelter with outside support groups starting being involved in this Women's Action Group. That was a real kind of a place where people really got a chance to engage the community in policy changes. Not electoral politics, but the politics of violence against women and women's equality.

**GTR:** What sorts of things would they end up doing? Would they go...

**CM:** They would do protests. They'd have a meeting and a potluck to gather as many women together as they could, and we'd have this potluck over at the Damiano Soup Kitchen, once a month, and talk about what was going on in the community. There were times when something was going on that women brought up that really made them upset. One of them was... the housing on top of Central Entrance, at that five corners, you know, now it's new housing? It's kind of mixed use housing? At the time it was a project for low income families. Someone, and I'm not sure if it was HRA or the City or who were using toxic chemicals on the grass. The women were upset, because this was where their children played. So, the women decided, we need to organize and protest whoever... I don't remember where they did this march, with signs that said "Stop poisoning our lawns." They would do that kind of thing when someone would come up with an issue and want to say something. There was a restaurant in town - Shirley might tell you about it if you get a chance to talk to her- called the Neon Parrot. It was up on the hill, near, sort of across the highway from where the Mall is now. Someone in the group had been there and one of the items on their menu was called battered mushroom- "we found these in a shelter for battered mushrooms." It was so tacky. The women said, "We just can't have that! We just can't have them making light of battered women and making fun this way." So, they did a

protest and carried signs and marched up at that restaurant in the cold dead of winter {laughs}. That kind of thing... people really felt good about doing that kind of stuff. I think that in that case, first, a couple women went to the restaurant and talked to the manager about it and said “This is offensive to us and you shouldn’t be making light of this” and they did not agree to change it. So then they did the protest.

**GTR:** And then did it change? Do you remember?

**CM:** I don’t remember, but the Neon Parrot ended up closing. I think they had some union issues there too, but I’m sure it had an impact.

**GTR:** That’s great. What years was that? Would that have been 90’s already?

**CM:** I think that was in the late ‘80s, maybe.

**GTR:** I haven’t looked into newspaper archives yet, to see if there are any interesting articles yet. Sometimes that’s fun to see those snippets and ask people what they remember about that. Did you ever end up with financial things, like how fundraising was going or how they were getting money to survive?

**CM:** No, I wasn’t there.

**GTR:** You didn’t have to do that on the board?

**CM:** We did, but I don’t remember.

**GTR:** That’s not always a fun part of being on a board, right? Were you involved at all when it was forming into the non-profit? It was just the coalition, which wasn’t an official non-profit?

**CM:** I don’t remember exactly, but I think they did do their non-profit work early on.

**GTR:** Okay, so you didn’t have to be a part of that. That also sounds like a lot of work.

**CM:** Yes, yes.

**GTR:** Was it called Safe Haven when you were on the board?

**CM:** No. I don’t remember what year it changed to Safe Haven, but I would guess in the 2000’s sometime, or maybe the late 90’s.



**GTR:** So when you were on the board, it was the Women's Coalition?

**CM:** Yes, and then forever I called it the Women's Coalition until I finally gave it up. They changed it and that's who they were, but I still felt like Women's Coalition was who it should be. Some of us, we get stuck.

**GTR:** For sure. Have you seen a change in the goals or operations over the years, or did it seem similar?

**CM:** Well, I think it's changed over the years. Of course, it's been ten years since I've been pretty much out of the work, but it seems like in the later years it was more trying to maintain, rather than organize. Of course, when you're a grassroots organization and you organize to have something happen, you're just kind of wrapped up in getting this going and doing it all. And once it's in place, you have to work hard to maintain it. I don't know if the residents are involved in the same way that they used to be.

**GTR:** In what way?

**CM:** Involved in participating in community discussions or considered part of the decision making process at all.

**GTR:** I think they do some cooking, or some of them do? Chores?

**CM:** They do chores.

**GTR:** Cleaning?

**CM:** I think they do have a cook or maybe even a cleaner but I don't know.

**GTR:** Okay. It's been ten years. Some changes that way. What changes have you seen in the community or your experience with the Duluth Area Intervention Program. Do you see a change in the community or the society?

**CM:** I think the change is that people know now that domestic violence is a crime, and that it isn't the victim's fault. It happens because someone chooses to be violent. So, I think the community knows that. The community knows that it's against the law. I think all these organizations that work to help victims of violence is an important part of the community. I think most of them get a lot of support from the community, fundraisers that PAVSDA has, the Shelter has, or the Domestic Abuse Program has... they bring a lot of community people to gather who then learn about the project and continue to support it. I think it's really good to have... people

all know about it now. Maybe I shouldn't say all, because you can probably go around and someone would say "Oh, I've not heard of that."

**GTR:** I suppose. Do you see perhaps more support? Those gala fundraisers weren't happening in the 70's or 80's?

**CM:** No. I think in the 80's they started, maybe in the very late 80s, but we did most of the shelter and the DAIP did a lot of the fundraising through grantwriting, and very little through the community.

**GTR:** Were there federal grants, or was it...?

**CM:** Mostly foundations and state, and then later into the 90's, then the Federal money because available.

**GTR:** Okay. Did that change anything when the funding sources change, or ?

40:00

**CM:** Well, yes, I think they had a lot of things that they had to do because of funding requirements. I can mostly speak of the DAIP but I know there was a time when the shelter... I believe, maybe I shouldn't say because I don't even know how it went, but they couldn't serve people who were in same sex relationships. Something like that. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it was something that you just didn't want to have money that you'd have to not serve some of the groups of people.

40:00

**GTR:** It sounds like restrictions would be hard.

**CM:** Yah.

**GTR:** Okay. Why would you say you stayed involved? What kept bringing you back?

**CM:** It became my calling to work with this issue. It was very important, and it was the place I wanted to be. But then when I retired, it took me five minutes to let it go. I still care and I still went to their fundraisers, and then I did do the PAVSDA board for a while.

**GTR:** Didn't you end up working officially with the DAIP?

**CM:** I worked at the Intervention project from 1980 until I retired in '04.

**GTR:** Alright. What was your role there exactly?

**CM:** I did a lot of different roles. In the beginning I started out as the office manager and did some fundraising, did some women's groups. Then we started a group for women who use violence. Then in later years I became the training coordinator. We had organized a lot of trainings for programs around the country. They'd call and ask what we were doing and how we'd do it, so we'd send out packets of information, and then realized it was kind of taking our time and money to do this, so we started doing a little fundraising in order to share the information. Then we started doing trainings, both in Duluth and had trainers who would go to other parts of the country.

**GTR:** Right, because it's had this national and now international profile and won that award recently. That was impressive!

**CM:** Yes, it was. Really exciting. I didn't even know about it until Melissa, who's now the current director, called and said, "We got this really prestigious award. It is really important!" Then she told me it was the United Nations. It was from the policies that were developed and designed in the early days.

**GTR:** So you were there? It was a policy award, right?

**CM:** I think it was the policy about having interconnected policies in all the community agencies that responded to domestic violence.

**GTR:** That's important. I saw the picture with (Vice President) Biden.

**CM:** It was so cool. I just saw the picture in the newspaper of Shirley and Me and Biden. I think Nolan was behind us, so I called the newspaper to get copies. Shirley's birthday is coming up so I'm going to put it in a frame and send it to her for her birthday, and keep one for myself. It was just fun to have that experience, after all these years of working so hard. Then this international honor!

**GTR:** That's great. Were you director, ever?

**CM:** No, no.

**GTR:** But you were very involved.

**CM:** Yes, I think all those times we were trying to be a collective, and then we kind of became a team management. So, we had someone how was kind of a team manager, or working in the National Training Project team. Then someone was the DAIP team manager, or supervisor. We didn't like the names manager and supervisor. But it was the coordinator of that particular group. Now they also have a director. But it's been a long hard process, too, the same as it was for the Women's Coalition to change into a director. I think Susan (Utech) was the first director hired, so she's been there maintaining for quite a while, now.

**GTR:** Ten years at least.

**CM:** At least, probably 15, or a little more.

*(discussion about project logistics)*

**GTR:** Do you have any hope for the future or what you hope to see in these groups ten years from now?

**CM:** I'd sure like to see them fade away because they don't need them anymore. But after doing this, this has been going on now almost 40 years, and it still happens. Men are still perpetrators. Times are not... I'm sure it's better for women, it's not as bad. But it still goes on. And they just keep thinking of new ways to be abusive.

**GTR:** Electronic stuff?

**CM:** Yes, yes. It's frightening.

**GTR:** Are there good statictics to know how things are today compared to 40 years from now? Were things reported then?

**CM:** I think things were reported so much less, so it's hard to say. If they say there's more now, there's more domestic violence now, but it's because it's reported more. But it gets deeper and deeper into what we need to do about society. Now, one of the topics people are putting a lot of time and energy into is trafficking. So, it's horrible, what happens to young women and girls.

**GTR:** Yes, it's more that things are coming to light. Maybe it happened forever, but now we know more. That's good that we're starting to learn, but it's awful. HBO recently did a documentary about domestic violence. They followed some women and went to a shelter, I can't remember where, and followed some of the workers. But the challenge, just how hard it is for some people to leave and get out, the logistics of where you live and if you don't have a job. It's so hard!

**CM:** Yes, it's so hard.

**GTR:** Has that really changed? For women, hiring there shouldn't be discrimination anymore against women being hired somewhere, but still it's hard...

**CM:** It's harder. You usually make less money. The (movie) you saw recently, do you remember the name of it?

**GTR:** Private Violence.

**CM:** Yes! I haven't seen that one yet, but the women who did it spent a bit of time in Duluth talking to people about it. I got to know her a little bit, but I haven't seen the film yet. I don't have HBO. I know she's mentioned a few times where it's been showing. I think she might have won an award for it. I haven't seen it yet.

**GTR:** They have a website. I was actually down in Madison at an Oral History conference and they played it there.

**CM:** Oh, great.

**GTR:** It is kind of oral history, interviewing people... women, the victims. So it was there. I want to say they had an official release date, and maybe it's available on the website?

**CM:** I haven't looked at her website. I forgot about that. I should do that. She did tell me that the Minnesota Coalition was going to show it, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women, and maybe they did but I didn't hear the details and I didn't want to go to the Cities to watch it.

**GTR:** I just happened to be there, and they had sort of a public campaign, about this happens and this is what you should do about.

**CM:** She actually interviewed Jill and I in Duluth, Jill Abernathy who worked with us for a number of years as well.

**GTR:** Great!

**CM:** That probably got cut on the cutting room floor because she had so many more interesting things. She was following women...

**GTR:** I thought it would be about a lot of different women, but it ended up being like one case in Kentucky, where the women had some really awful experiences and her process of going to court, and putting her life back together, and this women trying to advocate for the guy to get a bigger sentence, just all that. They really did, instead of lots of different experiences, there was a lot of focus on that particular case, and some of the women at a shelter who were working with her and trying to be an advocate in the legal system. So, there weren't that many different shelters discussed. But it was good, powerful. If I can find that link... She did have some advertising cards. They must be in my materials from the conference. That would be good to show locally. Did she have the whole camera thing, or was it just more for background?

**CM:** She had the camera thing, too. I'm sure she had hundreds of hours, because she travelled around the country quite a bit.

**GTR:** Well, was there anything else that I didn't ask, that you remember, that you'd want to get into the archives?

**CM:** If I think of other things I can let you know!

**GTR:** Definitely! You have my email. Thank you!



## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Mary Ness (b. 1952) MN**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes - GTR**

**Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded May 12, 2015**

**GTR:** Can you tell me a little bit about your background in Duluth, when you came to this community?

**MN:** It was in 1972. I grew up in Southern MN and then came up here to go to school, because my at that time, boyfriend was up here. I went to UMD. I was home raising kids, four sons. I started at the shelter in 1984, I believe, as a volunteer. I had applied for a couple of positions prior to starting to volunteer. I was talking to a relative, and said, "Oh, I didn't even get an interview at the shelter, and it's probably because I don't have a college education." She said, "Oh, no, that would not be the reason. You should volunteer at the shelter, and that's how you're going to get your foot in the door." Which I did, and then I think six months later I was hired as part of the Collective Management team. When I started the Collective was... I think, at that time or shortly after, we were up to 12 or 13 members, which was a wonderful and challenging way to try to make decisions (laughs). When I was very first there, the Collective Management team... our meetings were open to the residents as well. So, anyone who was staying at the shelter could come and participate in the decision making about what went on at the shelter. The challenging part of that was that our consensus and the people who came to the meetings changed on a weekly basis. So, decisions were made and unmade and made again [laughs]. That was challenging. But it was really, really cool, too.

**GTR:** They would participate in the actual consensus making, too?

**MN:** Yes! And they could vote and everything. So, they could participate in all of the discussion leading up, and actually the decisions. It might be things that were day to day sorts of things. I don't know if anyone else has talked about the bread [laughs]...

**GTR:** Tell me! Tell me more about those little stories!

**MN:** Actually, that is an organizational myth. I wasn't there when that happened, but it had happened shortly before I came. Yes, so there was just this big debate about if we should buy white bread or should we buy whole wheat bread. We want to encourage healthy eating. But shouldn't people get to make choices? So, I think that raged on for weeks or months [laughs].

**GTR:** Did they have both when you were there? Did they have both by then?

**MN:** Yes! (laughs)

**GTR:** That's good.

**MN:** Yes, they finally came to that conclusion, that maybe we could have both. You know, something that's interesting about that is that those kinds of discussions did come up later at the shelter as well. There would be people who maybe had some judgment about residents who would come and for example, give their kids Kool-aid instead of juice. "Why would they do that? It's one thing if you can't afford to get juice, but while they're here..." So, it led to a lot of conversation about class issues and kind of what people are used to, what is familiar to them during a time of huge transition, when they are staying in a shelter, surrounded by all sorts of folks that they don't know. So, I think that the whole idea that the "personal is political" played out in a very regular basis at the shelter.

**GTR:** Do you have any other examples besides just food? Was there anything you remember?

**MN:** Well, yes. I think that probably the most striking thing for me about my work at the shelter, and you may have heard this from other people: I think we often talk about kind of growing up together at the shelter. The people that I worked with, there are a number of them who are still my best friends. I think my first week at the shelter, I got bundled into a car and taken down to a school in the Metro area, what would be an "inner city school"... very diverse, a high population of kids in poverty. We went there for a workshop, an all day, two-day workshop. Angela Davis was speaking. It's just full of people I had never had contact with before. A lot of people of color, a lot of people who had lived in poverty. Which I had also, but in kind of a different context. People who were strong feminists, coming from that perspective. I'd never been aware of having contact with lesbians before. People just really out there. My eyes were huge! I grew up in a little town of 325 people in Southern Minnesota and there were literally no people of color in my town.

So, the commitment that the shelter had to working on issues of racism, and classism, and sexual preference, ableism... all of that was very integrated into our work. There was an understanding that if we really wanted to meet the needs of battered women, we needed to have at least some



basic understanding of their lives and the context of their lives. So, that was built into... time was made for us to spend addressing those issues.

**GTR:** In the trainings, or in day-to-day life?

**MN:** Both. There were trainings like going down to the Cities. It was built into our staff meetings. It was built into other meetings. There was a long period of time where we would... I forget how frequently... it might have been every other week... the white women in the organization would meet to try to address our own racism and privilege. We did things to educate ourselves. There was an amazing degree of people being willing to confront each other, and educate each other, and call each other out when we were messing up [laughs]. Well intentioned or not, that was something that was part of the dialogue that was going on. Actually, some substantial money and time was given to working on those issues.

**GTR:** Trainings. That was one of my questions to other people too... When you first started, you addressed that a little bit, was there a formal program, or was it more like “Hey, there’s this workshop down here, let’s go!”

**MN:** Yes, it was more like that. There wasn’t any kind of curriculum that new staff went through. It was more just the process of being involved in the conversation, in the ongoing conversations. So, the personal being political... here’s an example. We said that we were a collective, that we wanted to share power. We wanted this flat organization, and there were hierarchies in that group. One example is that there were different groups of people who tended to socialize together and who would get together after hours and just had really close relationships. So, we might find ourselves having conversations that were coming up... so, there were times that we would walk into a meeting, and have had an hour or more of already having discussed this. So, the people that weren’t involved in those conversations felt like “Hey, this is a done deal! This is not power sharing. This is not equal. This is about a clique is kind of a power source and is going to come in and say how things are going to be. Of course, there was, I think, the sense of white privilege was part of that. That there were more white women than there were women of color...

**GTR:** On the management team?

[11:30]

**MN:** Yes. Eventually, we did have a commitment to having the management team be representative of... or having our staff even outside of the management team... be representative of the families that we worked with. There was a period after many years of kind of working on this that 50 percent of our staff was either women of color or lesbian or had disabilities or were

older. It kind of took us a long time to get there and it didn't always last a long time. I think that there were mistakes that were made in terms of bringing women of color into an organization... I think sometimes women of color felt like there was tokenism. It was just hard for them, because we didn't know what we were doing. I would say that for myself, I was wanting to learn, wanting to grow, wanting to become more sensitized. I just made mistakes left and right that were hurtful to people. I think that that was a really difficult time in some ways, for everybody. It was hard growing.

**GTR:** That would have been the late 80s, as you were trying to figure out...

**MN:** Yes, early 90s...

**GTR:** Okay. At that point, was there a standard breakdown in the population of women who were coming? I'm sure it varied every day, but did you find a large, or big percentage?

**MN:** I think there were a higher percentage of women of color or women living in poverty who stayed at the shelter... not because those populations necessarily have more domestic violence, but they have fewer resources. So, they might not have that credit card to check into a hotel, or a car to travel to Mom's down in the Cities. They might end up at the shelter more frequently.

**GTR:** Was that sometimes a conversation? I think sometimes, nowadays, it's the idea that domestic violence can happen to anyone.

**MN:** Exactly!

**GTR:** But in that situation, it's obvious that it might be people who can't drive to mom's like you said. Was that ever part of the conversation? It's okay, this could happen to anyone. Would you ever have a volunteer who would have been from a different socio economic background who could say, "Yep, it happened to me, too."

**MN:** Absolutely. There were definitely volunteers who fit into those categories. I remember over the years... I worked there for 18 years, so I was there for a long time. It wasn't like it was just unheard of for a woman coming from her half-million dollar house, where her... There was a woman who was in the situation. Her husband had money, built this gorgeous house, but was incredibly controlling. Would not allow her to use water for most of the day. She had this fabulous laundry room, but could only do laundry on a specific day of the week. He was just extremely controlling of all of her time and contact with other folks. Sort of the typical batterer activities and behaviors.

[15:30]

**GTR:** So, you were working with your own staff. Was there ever, for the collective management team, was there ever an effort to do community outreach, telling people this can happen...

**MN:** Yes. Joan Sargent, who I mentioned earlier, she was our education coordinator. She did work in the schools. She did work on dating violence and in education of teachers about kids who might be in the classroom. We were getting reports from the faculty at school saying, "It's like these kids have been in a war zone. They are tired, they can't concentrate." So, she'd go into the schools and meet with teachers. We also did... We were one of the first, probably the first that I'm aware of in this community to do anything public in lesbian battering. We held a conference that was very well attended, and generated death threats. We would get calls. There had been a gay man who was killed in Wisconsin. I don't remember what the time period was. We were getting calls that said what happened to him is going to happen to you. There was a lot of positive comments that we got from the gay and lesbian community, and also the backlash against taking stand and making it clear that we were opening our doors to victims of gay and lesbian (battering)... well, probably not gay, because we didn't have men at the shelter. But lesbian battering. That got complicated, too! We also did work on working with women who were used in prostitution at that time, and worked in conjunction with organizations down in the metro area, and did some joint training on that issue.

**GTR:** What era was that, the event on lesbian battering?

**MN:** Probably the late 80s. It's probably written down somewhere.

**GTR:** You guys were busy, it sounds like!

**MN:** Yes, very busy.

**GTR:** So, you were helping sometimes in the trainings, or was your official role volunteer or training coordinating?

**MN:** Yes. Initially I was part of the Collective Management Team, and then I was the Volunteer Coordinator. At other times I was the Children's Program coordinator, or both. I worked with volunteers in the kid's program. I was the shelter manager for a period of time. I did some grant writing, I did some program evaluation. In this, again, the gifts that I took from this agency, first and foremost would be the exposure to issues of diversity and other-isms. The other piece was because there was such an emphasis on... a de-emphasis on having a degree or professionalism. There was more of an emphasis on decreasing power differentials. I probably wore tennis and jeans every day of my work there, unless I was doing... I did do a considerable amount of speaking in the community at that time. I had a chance... I had a high school education coming

into my work at the shelter. I was doing program evaluations. I had an opportunity to write a federal grant that funded an exchange program with our sister city in Petrozavodsk. So, I wrote that grant and kind of facilitated that project. And how cool was that? It was just amazing!

**GTR:** An amazing project. What a topic to address in Russia. Did you feel like you learned things, or you were able to help them?

[20:00]

**MN:** Both! It was interesting because we submitted this grant. The federal agency, it was something like the US information agency that is no longer a part of the federal government. We submitted the grant, and we had proposed that it would be this many people for this length of time. They wrote back and said, “We’d like to give you MORE money so that you can have more people and have them stay longer.” So, that was cool. Yes, just learning about their culture and the obstacles they face. Some of the ways they were trying to work within their system. I think we went there in ’98, and at that time, the women that we spoke to... alcoholism was something that really was not discussed. When we started just sharing from our own experience and just talking about this, their eyes got wide. We had women coming up to us afterwards and saying “Thank you for talking about this. This is not something that we’ve had an opportunity to have a discussion about.”

**GTR:** That would be a very different... did it feel like going back in time a little bit?

**MN:** Mmm-hmmm. It was sad, because we’d be walking along the street and there would be people begging, knowing that they did not have a safety net. There really weren’t programs to help take care of people in extreme poverty. That was during the time that people were buying toilet paper on the black market on the side of the road. I don’t know if Trish or other people mentioned we drove around in this van and we had a driver, and we had a guard with a little tommy gun who rode shotgun, literally. They were afraid that people could see or find out that there were Americans in the vehicle that they would stop and rob us. Even police officers that that could happen. Anyway, a totally different experience.

**GTR:** Did you bring anything back here that you could feel like we could use in this community?

**MN:** I think that it was an experience that developed intercultural communication, and that that is something that is applicable to so many different situations. They were very aware of use of us as a symbol of legitimacy. We spent way more time than we wanted to meeting with mayors, meeting with other politicians. Here are our American co-horts saying that this is an issue that we need to work with and address. Our grassroots orientation, we would have much rather been

hanging out in someone's kitchen talking to women, you know. Kitchen table advocacy was a big part of where we saw our effectiveness. But that was important to them. I'm trying to think of other things that we brought back. Nothing comes to mind.

**GTR:** It was a really busy time. You said you learned lots of roles yourself as you were working there. Were you there then during the transition from the Collective to the Collective management team, and then it went to the Director. Were you there during that transition?

**MN:** Yes, I was there during that whole process. So, the Collective was when the residents were involved. The Collective Management Team kind of shrunk over time. Originally too, everyone was paid the same, if you were writing grants or if you were watching kids or working in the kitchen. As time went on, there was more financial hierarchy. The Collective Management Team shrunk from the largest of 13 people to at the end I think there were three of us. Three or four. That process was really difficult. I think that collective ideal and vision was really foundational for a lot of us who had been there from the beginning. And, there were, in the imperfections of that, it played out in different ways. At one point, our staff unionized. Has anyone mentioned this?

**GTR:** They mentioned it. That was not you... it was the other staff?

**MN:** Exactly. Not the management team, but the other staff. It was uhhh, like a knife to the heart! Because you know, here we were, this women's organization and had all these very high-minded ideals, and our staff are saying we need someone to advocate for us because we don't feel like we're being heard. That was very difficult. I would say that in the end, it wasn't all bad. The whole idea of unions... it's not like we were opposed to that idea either. That is kind of a collective, progressive value. But it was hard to accept that we were falling short in those ways. And I think we were.

**GTR:** When you say ideals, was it feminism? Did that word come up a lot?

**MN:** Absolutely. Yes.

**GTR:** Did it kind of evolve as you were there?

**MN:** Yes, I would say so. I think that... and Shirley may have talked about this. At the very early days and even pre-when I was involved. I think that being part of a movement rather than having a job... that was clear in people's minds. It really was about activism. It really was about changing the system. It was about being in a movement. I think later, that there were people who felt that it moved more toward service delivery. We're providing space for women and kids, and maybe some of that philosophy was lost along the way.

**GTR:** Was that a function of the time or the era, too? Were people talking about that less? Or was it just kind of the reality of day to day life?

[29:49]

**MN:** Yes, I think in terms of organizational development, it's not unusual for that to happen. But as a collective, we felt like we were failing people by not having instilled that in a more effective way. Why that happened... I do think part of that was just zeitgeist and it was about how people viewed things. I did a lot of speaking at colleges, and feminism for a lot of young women was considered kind of a negative thing. I was always interested in teasing that out with them and exploring why they felt that way, and what it meant to them, and really trying to dig into the definition of "What is a feminist and what else does that mean?"

**GTR:** Right. And what else was going on in Duluth at that time? I wonder what was going on in other groups, or even perceptions in the community when you said you worked there? How did you see that evolve?

**MN:** [laughs] Oh, golly. Well, there's always... I think from men, whose partners were staying at the shelter, that lesbian feminazis label was tossed around. I think that there were probably people, well there were, and there ARE still people who believe that the shelter recruits people to come from other communities to fill up their shelter so they can get money. So, people from Chicago or Detroit or Minneapolis even. That we're recruiting people. It was, I think, code for not the right kind of people. It was people of color, and they're a pipeline to bring people who are going to be dealing drugs or whatever, that that was a perception. Man-hating lesbian, that was pretty clearly tossed around in different circles. Then, there was also our connection to DAIP, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, and really the incredible work that was going on in the whole Duluth Model and creation of that, the way that that was being embraced by other communities nationally and internationally. So, there was another contingent of people who said, "Oh, my gosh, you're from Duluth! We use the Duluth Model. We use the Power and Control Wheel (model developed by DAIP)." So, it really just depended on who you talked to.

**GTR:** Right, famous in some circles. Were you involved in that evolution of DAIP, or how did you work together?

**MN:** Certainly we had close connection with DAIP and Ellen Pence as a huge force to contend with [laughs]. We did a lot of grants together. People will also talk about how during that period, how whether it was the Sexual Assault program, the shelter, women's transitional housing, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, there was communication. There was more of a sense of cooperation, in the sense of how grants were going to be approached. There were times that the

Shelter might say DAIP or PAVSA, why don't you take the lead on this? There was conversation before that. Although it's also true that Ellen, who was such an idea person that she would get ahead of herself. Suddenly there would be this big grant that she wrote us into and we didn't really have many if any details about. But it was great.

[35:04]

**GTR:** Were you seeing a change at the shelter? Any results, or clientele? Was it different as they were working with the police department and things. Did you see changes?

**MN:** I think, again, I was doing volunteer coordination. Part of that was our on-call advocates that whenever there was an arrest, we would have people who would get up at 2:00 in the morning and go out to whatever neighborhood the arrest took place at and go knock on women's doors and talk with them. So, I think that the reporting, the communication, developed over time. There was certainly tweaking of that system, just in terms of what police officers say to women, how they handle it. The mandatory arrest policy had a huge impact, where women would come in and say, "Gee, when this happened two years ago" ... and maybe it was here and maybe it was in a different community, "The officer just said 'Oh, go take a walk around the block, go cool off'". And half an hour later, they might be back in the house and the woman getting beat up again. I think we saw those kinds of changes. You know, in terms of actually seeing decreases in domestic violence, I can't say that we really did see that, that I'm aware of, anyway.

**GTR:** But maybe different results, with the men being prosecuted, or something like that?

[37:00]

**MN:** Yes. I think that it certainly was... that part was true. And how our legal advocacy developed, and orders for protection. Our role in court advocacy just developed and grew stronger over time.

**GTR:** Did that advocate program where the women actually go out (to homes) last through that whole time?

**MN:** It did until I left, which was in 2002. I think that they still do that, but I'm not sure. It may be that they make a phone call and go the next day or something. I don't know if they are actually going out. We had women who were so, so committed to that program. I remember this one woman who was formerly battered, and I don't know how long... she did it for six, eight years during the time that I was there.

**GTR:** As volunteers, or something else?

**MN:** No, they were volunteers.

**GTR:** How do you train someone to do something like that?

**MN:** All the volunteers went through a fairly substantial training program. We'd meet on Saturdays and go over some basics about violence against women. There were some people who wanted to volunteer who were kind of counseled out, just feeling like worries about them working independently with battered women, and what their attitudes or how they might come across, or maybe not feeling confident about their ability to handle that level of crisis. The training varied to some degree depending on what work they were going to be doing. We did role-plays, answering crisis calls, interacting with battered women. It was a pretty substantial training program at that time.

**GTR:** Someone else mentioned, too, that if a women had used the services, if there was a waiting period until they could then volunteer, after they were in a better place?

**MN:** Right. That was actually a change. I think in the really early days, that would have been frowned on, big time. Shirley would talk about getting women involved while they were at the shelter. "Come, get involved, this is your life, be involved with this in terms of advocacy or helping other women." I forget what the wait time was, it might have been... I don't think it was real long, it might have been 3 months, or 6 months. And there were things women could do short of being an official volunteer. We would do a bus down to Battered Women's Action Day down at the Capital. That could be quite life-changing for some women. Talking to women about voting... We would arrange, we could have people vouch for women staying at the shelter that they were living in the neighborhood at that time, and get them same-day registered. For some women, that was the first time they had ever voted. Seeing the pride and just the sense of accomplishment... having women come back from the Capital and say "Senator So-and-So listened to me and heard what I had to say!" These were women who felt so beaten down in so many ways. That was very substantial. That, too, is the stories of how limited women's choices were, living in controlled households. I remember there were times when I did overnights at the shelter. I remember it was, 2:00 in the morning, a woman who had just come in that day, and we were sitting at the dining room table talking, talking about choices. I said, "If you could just do anything, what would you want to do?" I'm thinking, go to college, I'd like to end up in this careers... and she said, "I would like to have an afternoon for myself, and take the bus downtown, and have a grilled cheese sandwich at the Woolworth's, and window shop, and come home and not feel guilty or not have somebody asking me a million questions about who I saw and what I said." That was the extent of what she could see for herself.

Another woman... I was organizing a picnic for the shelter residents, and I just grabbed one of the residents and said, "Hey, why don't you come with me to the grocery store and you decide



what we should buy, and you can help me shop.” We did that and went and had our picnic, and it was fun, and we were down at Brighton Beach. I think it was three years later, she was volunteering by that time, and she wrote this article for our shelter newsletter. She said, “Someone asked me to come and make decisions about what we were going to do, and what we were going to eat” She said, “That was a turning point in my life! Somebody trusting me to make decisions for myself and others.” I never would have thought anything of it! So, I think those little things were really significant.

43:50

**GTR:** That’s great. Do you remember any other women who maybe came back, success stories?

**MN:** Well, when we hired people we did give preference to women who had been in violent relationships, so a lot of our staff had been abusive relationships. If I were going to guess, I would say probably 50 percent, most of the time, had been in violent relationships, or who had been battered. It’s lots and lots of women.

**GTR:** Do you think people can be effective in that work, even if they hadn’t experienced that?

**MN:** Well, I had never been in a violent relationship. We would talk about how what we each brought, might be different in some ways. I didn’t mind getting up in front of a couple hundred people and talking. My writing skills were pretty good. There were skills that I brought to the work, and I probably would hesitate to say or do some of the things that formerly battered women would do with residents. I remember a staff person who had been battered, taking a woman who was thinking about going back to her partner, and standing her in front of a mirror and then looking at her bruises together in the mirror, and saying “Is this what you want to go back to?” She could do that, I think, coming from that place. I would have tried a different approach with her. I think valuing what people bring to the table, that that was something that was acknowledged in having women of color and people from various kinds of diverse backgrounds coming to the shelter, that they were able to connect.

There was a woman named Sheri Standingbear who was an advocate early on in my process... I’m organized, I want to get things moving, I want to get stuff done. The way I would interact with women staying at the shelter... Sheri finally took me aside at one point and said, “You know, Mary, the way that you’re going about things is kind of racist. You are not leaving room for me to operate in my strengths and what I can bring into this work.” Because where I would come in and have my little task list and, “Okay, let’s get that OFP and let’s do this and this...” Sheri might sit down with other American Indian women and talk for an hour and a half. She was able to connect with them and able to build trust with them in a way that I wasn’t. She said, “You’re just not making room for me.” And I am so grateful for her for her willingness to risk

saying that to me. It really made a difference in my worldview, and recognizing how I was not taking other people into account, and just other ways of being.

48:15

**GTR:** The relationship-building, ahead of time. I'm sure it's different... So, what kept you coming back? You were there for a long time!

**MN:** Yes, I was there for a long time. I've been so lucky in my career to always have a job that I felt was worthwhile and worth doing, and worth the effort. My family probably at time would shake their heads or worry about me. I'd come home from a really intense staff meeting and be in tears. The issues of addressing racism... that was huge. I took that so seriously, and I felt so... I think I went through what a lot of white people do in their process of coming to terms with the fact that, hey, I've been clueless, and I have not recognized just how living in the privilege that I live, it has impacted other people's lives. So, they saw me being impacted. They say when I was shelter manager, I'd be getting calls in the middle of the night, having to go cover for people. But it always... it fed me in a way, to feel that I was doing work that meant something. And the sense of camaraderie that I had with co-workers was very substantial.

**GTR:** That's great, yes. When you mention that learning, of working with people of color in that space... did you find, just personally, how do you then approach a person, and kind of... I was speaking with a Native American woman the other day, and she was saying, "We have this horrible history, with boarding schools..." I had taken some Native American studies classes, and was thinking, "I know, I know... But how does one convey that, that you know some of the history? How do you communicate some of that, or how do you connect?"

**MN:** Right. I think we were also very fortunate... this was about how we prioritized things, too, but we would do retreats and go up the shore, and stay overnight. I think those times were really amazing, and for me, life-changing, just to be in that kind of intimate conversation that you get at 1:00 in the morning, after hanging out in the living room. We watched *Thelma and Louise*, that movie about two women. Something happens, and someone gets shot. One of the women was like, "We need to report this to the police!" And the other woman, who had had... they were both white women, but the other woman had had some negative experiences with the police, and she was like, "We're not telling them, we've just got to get out of here!" After we watched that movie, it just led to this conversation. I remember, there was a woman of color there, and she shared a personal experience of having been... she had been being sexually abused at home, ran away from home, was picked up by the police, and not only was returned home but she was sexually assaulted by the police before she was brought home.

So, her perception of the police, and who the police would be in her life, and what she could expect from the police, was so different than mine. I remember her saying, too, talking about having her kids, and the fear that she had for her children, especially her sons, interacting in the community. She said, “We birth our sons for the jail cell, and we fight against that every day.” The intimacy of those kinds of times, and the sense of ... I felt really honored by what I was privy to, and people sharing their pain. Another staff person, who was Hispanic, talked about...of anyone at the shelter, she dressed really nice (laughs). Way, way better than I ever did! But she talked about being... she was buying food for a special occasion for her family, and had shrimp and steak or something in her cart. She’s standing in the grocery line and the person in front of her looks back and says, “Oh, I didn’t realize you could buy steak and shrimp on foodstamps.”

While I was at the shelter, there were these two little girls, seven and eight or something, and walking a couple blocks back to the shelter from the bus stop, and had this white man in a car pull over and start calling them the N-word. Seeing them come and tell their mom, and seeing their mom’s pain. You can’t help but be changed by having been kind of a witness to it in that kind of setting. So, I’m really grateful for those learning opportunities.

55:00

**GTR:** How do you communicate that, or how can the shelter communicate that they know some of these things, and that this is a safe place. If you just meet someone, you’re some white lady, but how...?

**MN:** Yes, I think that that is hard... There was... shortly before I left the shelter, and I’d been there a long time. I probably felt like I had greater understanding then I had had previously, and I remember talking to this one African American woman who had come from another community. I was like attempting to be kind of like, just what you’re saying... I understand a little bit about your experience. I said something like, “Yes, this is a really white community and it’s kind of an adjustment for people.” Well, she took it... I’m meaning it as “I want to be empathetic about what you’re facing.” She took it as I was kind of giving her a warning, “This is a white community, this is not where you might belong.” Again, I’m so grateful, a woman of color, who is a staff person, she confided that to her, and that other staff person who I knew very well, had a good relationship with, she brought that resident to me, and said, “There’s been a misunderstanding here, and I want to straighten this out.” And then we had this fabulous conversation, that led to her understanding what I was trying to say, and more trust. But I think a lot of it just comes in relationship. I don’t know, I don’t think there’s good answers. It’s different for each person.

**GTR:** What about the name (change, to Safe Haven)? Were you there? And you mentioned battered women's day at the Capital. That transition to "domestic violence" or "Safe Haven". Were you there during that transition?

**MN:** I was. Women's Coalition is what it was called when I was there. Actually, I don't know that I felt like that was the most descriptive name, either, because a coalition is often different organizations coming together, and it wasn't that. But the sanitization of... I think that talking about women who are battered, women who are abused, is different than "domestic violence." There were conversations that happened around that. That we need to call this what it is, we need people to really be willing to face (it). I found myself doing it even in this conversation. "Women who were in a violent relationship" Well, no, most often it's "women who are getting beat up." Women who was getting the sh\*t beat out of them by their partners. "Being in a violent relationship" has more of a feeling of mutuality, or gee, this somehow just happened.

**GTR:** Is it kind of government, PC, or when we're writing grants we kind of have to use "governmentese"?

**MN:** Yes.

**GTR:** I hadn't thought of that before this project, that that's kind of a watered down term. Do you remember the Safe Haven name coming up, or how that was selected?

**MN:** Yes. Susan Utech was the first director, and she's still the director of Safe Haven. I think... do I even remember. I think it became Safe Haven maybe in 2000, 2001. I left in 2002. There was... people had an opportunity for input. I was okay with the name, I thought I was kind of generic, but descriptive. Really in more ways more descriptive than Women's Coalition. You know, the transition from being a collective to having a director, and what led up to that... sometimes when it's everybody's job, it's nobody's job. Personnel issues were difficult. So, board members got pulled in to facilitate some personnel issues that were very time consuming, and I think they just got fed up with that! (laughs) So, I think that was part of that transition to a Director.

**GTR:** So, it was a board decision at that point?

**MN:** Yes.

**GTR:** Do you find fundraising, in the community... how does that seem different from when you started? Now there are galas...

1:00

**MN:** Right! Oh, man, that is so different. You probably heard kind of this organizational history, but the receipts in the shoebox was the first (system). Seeing that transition from the little bits of grant money that we got... as things got tighter for shelters and battered women's programs, there have been some very scary times. Actually, the shelter closed at one time because of funding issues. That might have been when the State shut down. The shelter actually closed and women had to go and stay with people in the community. So, I think that lots of non-profits have gone that direction, and have gone to that model out of necessity.

**GTR:** Foundation support? Or people are more willing to donate than they would have been in 1984?

**MN:** Maybe, yeah. That could be. Mostly, I think we didn't have our act together enough to do really effective fundraising. This was prior to my being involved... I think prior to and after I was at the shelter, there were some attempts at creating businesses that would provide a funding source for the shelter. I'm trying to think who would know about that. Jean, maybe, would have known about that. Cathy Curley would have known about it. I think after I left, there might have been a short period where they attempted to do some online, ebay selling stuff thing that didn't go that well either.

**GTR:** Someone mentioned coupon books, selling those...

**MN:** We tried to sell some calendars. We had some really nice calendar art. Some local artists had donated work. That turned into a conversation also, because it's like, "What dates do we put into the calendar?" There were people who wanted to put in when Roe v. Wade was passed. Other people were like, "This is for the general community! You do that and there might be people who aren't going to buy this calendar!" How politicized do we want this to be? Being the volunteer coordinator, I will say... I don't know if anyone's mentioned our volunteer appreciation dinners?

**GTR:** Oh, yes. I've seen some pictures... they were kind of fun!

**MN:** Oh, they were really fun!

**GTR:** Did you organize those?

**MN:** Yes... they had been happening before I came, too, or was working as the volunteer coordinator. They were a riot. The staff would do skits. One year we had Sumo wrestler costumes that people put on, and gave out awards. Those were really fun, and I think that that was one of the things that went by the wayside when there were budget constraints. There were

staff that really grieved that, that they felt that was a time that people looked forward to. Both staff and volunteers really felt the loss of that.

**GTR:** A bit of comic relief, something fun...

**MN:** Yes, there was a year when there had been an outbreak of scabies at the shelter... the staff, we all painted. I and other staff actually got scabies at that time. So, for the volunteer appreciation dinner, we painted red spots all over ourselves and we sang a song... "Scabie Baby"... (laughs). We had a fashion show one year. There were lots of fun things, fun times.

**GTR:** There are good pictures. I took a tour, there are lots of pictures in the basement, on the wall. I always wonder, when doing oral history, this is just recording, and I hope those are somewhere in a book, not just on the wall...?

**MN:** I know. I don't think there are. It would be good to make digital reproductions of those photos, to save them, because I don't know that they are. There are lots of pictures of our retreats. We'd do lots of educational things during the day, and then have conversations and discussions, make decisions, and then have fun at night.

**GTR:** What lessons would be the most important things to preserve, 50 years from now, Saying, oh, that shelter... What would be the most important thing to communicate?

**MN:** Well, I think that probably one shift that's happened in the battered women's movement has been what people see as the cause of battering and abuse. I think that there are kind of 2 schools of thought about that. The more feminist view would see it was a real social issue, not about individual pathology but how society supports violence against women. I remember the first time I heard Ellen Pence say that (of DAIP), I was like, "Give me a break! What are you talking about? That doesn't make any sense." And as she talked about it, and every time that a police officer is kind of like, "Well, you have to keep them in line..." That supports violence against women. How the patriarchy is played out in families, and that women are seen as less able to make decisions, or that their viewpoints are less valuable... that supports violence against women. So, I think that that perspective or that world view, when it comes to battering, has at times kind of moved toward, "This is an issue for therapy."...

**GTR:** Individuals?

**MN:** Exactly.

**GTR:** Individuals can work it out...

**MN:** If they could communicate better. If they knew better conflict resolution skills, if they could have learned stress reduction techniques. And not that those things aren't all good, but without that kind of foundation about how societies and organizations really can help this continue... I think there has been progress when it comes to those things, just has there has been in terms of institutional racism. There's progress and there's still a long ways to go.

1:10

**GTR:** Some backsliding? I wondered. Do you have feelings about what ten years from now will be like? Hopes?

**MN:** Well, I've been here at St. Louis County for 13 years. The overlap of how, what is here called Domestic Violence, DV and Child Protection issues overlap, and how the system is used to continue to control women. Batterers making false reports... there's just all kinds of dynamics. I see that continuing to be needing work. I think there are efforts that have been made in different times when there's been better communication, and less communication between battered women's programs and county social services. I'll tell you, coming to the County was like coming to the dark side (laughs)! Coming from an advocacy position to a child protection position... I think that there have certainly been areas of tension and mistrust on both sides. Of Child Protection workers against advocates, and advocates against child protection workers.

**GTR:** That's unfortunate.

**MN:** Yes, so it's been interesting to see both sides of that.

**GTR:** That would be hard. It's not like it's going to be done, unfortunately.

**MN:** No, unfortunately.

**GTR:** But, some progress. Things are better than they would have been in 1972, hopefully?

**MN:** Yes!

**GTR:** And that's not been that long ago, people trying to remember that in this little window of time. And even finding some women who might have remembered the time before the shelter and what did women do. It wasn't that long ago, just remembering that. Anything else that I didn't ask?

**MN:** I just continue to be grateful for the people that do the work, and for the women who are strong enough and brave enough to make the changes for themselves and for their kids. It

continually amazes me. The system, whether the social services system, or the court system, it's so intimidating. I remember when my mother-in-law was dying, and she was going through needing to find different places to live, and getting her the care that she needed. Here I am a social worker with a master's degree, and her worker, my mother in law's worker, was a friend, was right around the corner from me, and I was completely baffled with trying to deal with the complexities of that system. The rules, the policies, the spend-downs, this and that. I would consider what that would be like for a women who has been told every day for her adult life that she's worthless, and stupid and nobody cares what she thinks. For her to go brave enough to go into a courtroom and to say what has happened to her... it amazes me that anybody does it! So, I'm just kind of in awe of the women and what they are able to accomplish.

1:13:57

**GTR:** Have you followed some of the more recent, I think it was with football players and their wives, and there was a little social media thing called "Why I stayed"... that idea, of people saying, why does she stay? So anything new? Do you think there are some new good things?

**MN:** I think those things have been said for many years, and decades... the power and control wheel, you've probably seen that... that was sitting down with battered women and saying, "What has your experience been? How does this play out in your life?" That's an amazing tool. Women come into the shelter, feeling so isolate and so alone, and like it was all about them, because their batterers told them that. And then to go around that wheel and say, "This is my life! How did you know this?" And to talk about the tactics of control, just the women's wonderment at their shared experience, and the power that they gained from that shared experience.

**GTR:** Learning that it's all been laid out, that it's a pattern. I can see how that could be important. I've grateful to hear stories about it, and get these into an official archive. These are things that don't get recorded, sometimes.

**MN:** Well, thanks for the opportunity. I do think it's really important.

1:15:00

(Discussion about project and similar book being written locally by Beth Bartlett)

1:17:00





## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Shirley Oberg (b. 1942) SO**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes GTR  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded February 23, 2015**

**Shirley's Home**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Shirley Oberg on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 for the Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project. Thank you. Could you start out by telling me when and how you ended up in the Duluth area?

**SO:** Oh, my!

**GTR:** Were you born here?

**SO:** No, I've lived here since the early '70s and I'd like to lay a little ground work here, going back to the '70s. There was still the ambience of the women's movement, the '70s were the struggle for the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA], Roe v. Wade was passed in 1973, there were marches, protests against pornography. In New York City there were women who really championed the cause of women's rights. Gloria Steinem started Ms. Magazine, Bella Abzug, Andrea Dworkin against pornography. So, it was in those years.

For myself, I was in a support group for women, and that was the first time I had talked about being battered. So, historically starting in 1977, in January of that year, although we had already caused a rumbling in the bowels of the established order with the ERA, and the Roe v. Wade, there was a flyer that went out about battered women, and women from Women's Advocates came to Duluth. There were the institutional representatives from the county attorney, the city attorney, the social services and victims. All of these people went home, and there were three of us, battered women, who stayed, who really were inspired that this might be possible, that there could be a shelter for battered women.

We began in the year of 1977. We were poor women. It was certainly a grassroots movement. We had no bureaucratic skills. [Laughs] We were told that we should form a corporation; that would give us power. We were given these articles of corporation for a chemical dependency

agency and we just changed the name, so we became this corporation. We got an office at the YWCA and we got a red telephone. And this red telephone was going to be a hot line. We started having board meetings and support meetings and women would come to the Y, the YWCA, because they thought it was a support group and they ended up being on the hot-line, answering. So it was just women—

**GTR:** —to help each other. So, they thought they would be getting assistance, but they ended up helping other women?

**SO:** Yes, yes. We were told, ‘Well, you need a needs assessment’, as if people didn’t know there were battered women. We went to social services and asked, ‘What are you doing for battered women?’ ‘Well, we will give battered women twenty four hours in the Lincoln Hotel’.

**GTR:** How was the Lincoln Hotel at that time? Was it nice, or not nice?

**SO:** {Laughs} No, it was a fleabag hotel. So, we went to the Miller-Dwan Treatment Center and asked, “What do you do for battered women?” They said, “Well... Of course, men talk about beating their wife, but, of course, once drinking stops, the violence stops.” So, there was our needs assessment. That year, 1977, in our beater cars [Laughs] we went to St. Paul. We talked to the women of Women’s Advocates, the shelter there, and what was so inspiring was that women could do this. Women could put a shelter together.

**GTR:** It was a good model. You watched what they did?

**SO:** Yes, yes. We moved out of the YWCA and we moved into the Free Clinic. It was called the Free Clinic, at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East. We brought a portable typewriter, some folders, and the red telephone and we used the typewriter case as a filing cabinet. {Laughs} That’s how we started. That was 1977.

**GTR:** Nice...in that building. How often was it staffed? Was there someone there all the time?

**SO:** What we would do with the red telephone, because we said we’d be twenty-four hours a day, we learned how to, from the office there, connect to Kathy or Michelle or Jean or myself so that telephone would always be answered.

**GTR:** How did you get the word out about that phone number?

**SO:** Flyers would go up. Women who needed shelter would stay at one of the women’s houses. Michelle’s house or Cathy’s house, or Cathy Moore.

**GTR:** Word of mouth?

**SO:** Word of mouth, yes.

**GTR:** It was such a different time, with no Internet. It's hard to picture.

**SO:** {Laughs} It is hard to picture, yes.

**GTR:** How often did the phone ring? Were you getting calls right away?

**SO:** No, not right away. There were the women and children that we served, it was mostly just support. It was recognition. It was someone knew what you were going through. It wasn't a shameful thing and you weren't to blame. So, it was mostly telephone advocacy.

**GTR:** Was it starting to be every day someone would call? Were you seeing a huge...

**SO:** No, not every day. But there was an increase in calls. That year, 1977, the legislature appropriated \$500,000. This \$500,000 was to start four pilot projects in the state and to do community education, to inform people about the plight of the battered women. There we were with our typewriter and struggling with these terms such as RFPs [Request for Proposal] and {Laughs} what else were we doing, budgets and going through the objectives. That fall we started looking for, even though we had no money, we would get \$2,500 from the Minnesota Humanities Commission, we would get some mental health money from HDC [Human Development Center], on the theory that nothing would improved a battered women's mental health as to be safe.

**GTR:** Was that the Women's Coalition that was getting that money at that time? That was the name?

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** Do you remember the process of that name coming about?

**SO:** Oh, my. First, it was labeled the Northeast Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women. In order to shorten that to Women's Coalition, we again had to apply to the state to get it shortened. So there we were, the Women's Coalition. We had no money, but we wanted a shelter, and we knew we needed it. So, we wound up at the HRA [Housing and Redevelopment Authority]. They gave us a house, rent free, on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. And this was one half of a duplex. This house was for...to house people who had suddenly lost their home, through acts of God, floods, lightening, fire, that sort of thing.

**0:10:14.0**

**GTR:** The other half, too? They were still using it?

**SO:** No, only this one half. It was a three bedroom. We started getting donations. We would get—now this was before we received the \$50,000 from the Department of Corrections—and we would get donations, Happy Sleeper donated mattresses. We didn't have bed frames. {Laughs} We had mattresses. What this duplex was, it was just this ordinary apartment, it had a washer and dryer in the basement and it had a regular kitchen, it wasn't... What is it, the fire department, or the health department have to go through, if it had so many people in there. But this was just an ordinary house, full of these women who had no skills, but believed that women and their children had the right to be safe.

**GTR:** How was that, the first opening. Did you have...

**SO:** The shelter opened, ready or not, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1978.

**GTR:** That was fast.

**SO:** Yes, it was fast. It was fast. We weren't prepared administratively. {Laughs} What we did, the women, there were, I believe, eight women, and some volunteers that had been together since January, February, March of 1977 and we were the women with the passion. So, we hired each other and we started at four dollars an hour.

**GTR:** What are the names of some of the other people involved?

**SO:** Jean DeRider, Cathy Tickle, Michelle LeBeau, Kathy Moore, Pat Hoover, and Nancy Ahmed. These were the women who were going to staff this shelter. We decided that we wouldn't have directors. What we wanted was a collective, because we were all equal in all the work we did. We each chose to be on a committee, was it for the house, was it for the administrative stuff, was it for training, whatever it was. It was this kind of energy, and the kind of empowerment that we all had, that we were able to cover so much, to become, if not a fully functioning organization, an organization that had credibility in the community.

**GTR:** How did the operation run, day to day? Did certain people take on cooking more or certain people doing—

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** What did a typical day look like there?

**SO:** Oh, my! Chaotic! Chaotic! The children, and the... The women would do the cooking, whoever was on the house committee, they would make sure the food was in there. Always someone would be answering the phone, because we said we were going to staff twenty-four hours a day. And here we were, for four dollars an hour, and we said, 'Well, we'll work forty hours, but get paid for thirty,' because we were so passionate about there being a shelter.

**GTR:** Some of you had kids? Were there people bringing their own kids with while they were working?

**SO:** No, they would, well sometimes their kids would come with. But it was very loosely.  
{Laughs}

**GTR:** A little chaotic. I don't know, minimum wage, four dollars an hour wasn't very much at that time?

**SO:** No, it was not. {Laughs}

**GTR:** And food, did you have to do donations or was there a budget?

**SO:** No, there was a budget for food. There was \$50,000 and we were going to stretch it as far as we could. But we were going to be a force in the community. There we were. There was a shelter. Then the following year, I think \$3 million was allocated to the Department of Corrections for shelters. That's when shelters—the Duluth shelter was the third shelter in the state.

**GTR:** Where was the second?

**SO:** One was in Minneapolis, the Harriet Tubman Shelter and one was in St. Paul, the Women's Advocate and then the Duluth shelter. There was always a flurry of activity and communication between all of the shelters. There was all of this sharing going on about—Women's Advocates would come to Duluth for a so-called training and we'd all sit around and drink coffee and eat donuts and {laughs}.

**GTR:** And talk, right? There was no email! So you would just have to get together to get that communication, that sharing and information.

**SO:** Yes, right.

**GTR:** What was the reaction in the larger community? Do you know? Did people welcome it or were there some people not supportive?

**SO:** Yes, yes. There were, let's see [refers to notes], we were inundated, we were open twenty-four hours a day, we were traveling to Virginia, Gilbert, Aurora, Cloquet, to pick up any woman who needed our shelter, we became all things to all people. We traveled from one victim's panel to another talking about our experiences and the need for protection for women. We took on the police department. We went in three days a week for a month and under withering interrogation defended our shelter and every woman's right to be safe. They were hostile.

**GTR:** The police department?

**SO:** Yes. Very hostile. We took on the mental health board. They refused to give us monies that had been promised. And so we called a press conference outside their boardroom and protested.

**GTR:** Outside the mental health organization?

**SO:** Yes. We took on St. Louis County Social Services, when they refused to mail women's AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] checks to the shelter. We took twenty women and children to talk with them about this issue. When they stalled on paying a ten dollar per diem for women and children staying at the shelter, the entire staff went to their board meeting to explain the right and the necessity of this. There were always women. There was this recognition that, first of all, one woman alone, did not have the weight of many women and their children. That recognition that we—that women—were isolated. So, it was that community, that we, women, coming out of isolation and into community and that was empowering. We became a force. We housed over 200 women and children in 1978 in a three bedroom duplex. The kitchen was nine by twelve. We had our first retreat—the collective—we went to a private home on the shore of Lake Superior. We tried our hand at process therapy and we cried a lot and we ate chocolate.

In August of 1978 we bought the house at 1610 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street. We wrote a grant to the Ordean Foundation for an interest free loan for \$43,000. They were to be paid back at \$139 a month for eternity! {Laughs} We were proud that they had such faith in us, because we were chronically short of money and kept all our dollar bills and receipts in a shoebox. {Laughs}

**0:20:07.1**

**SO:** We moved in in October. We never missed a beat. Twenty-eight women and children moved with us. Convicts from a reformatory helped us move, hoping to get time off for good

behavior. Three women and five children showed up on the doorstep of our new house. We had been trying to keep the address secret. The kitchen wasn't done, the bathrooms had no running water and two days after we moved in we had our second fight on the third floor of our new shelter. We were already suffering from chronic mental anguish and battle fatigue. So, we gave ourselves over to horizontal hostility. {Laughs} But, we realized that our shelter had not stopped violence against women and we were realizing that we probably needed a shelter in every county in the state. So, it was that kind of overwhelming knowledge that violence against women was big. It was overwhelming. The Junior League began a childcare project. It dwindled and died due to the lack of energy to struggle along class lines. The year ended with a public hearing at the Ordean Building where many professionals gave testimony for the need of the shelter and what a good job the shelter was doing. (finishes reading)

**GTR:** Nice! Can you remember what was the actual justification for the mental health people and the AFDC saying we're not going to send stuff there, and this is not a good idea? Did they say people should just go home or what were they saying?

**SO:** The bureaucracy of the St. Louis County social services did not have anything in their protocols where they would be able... A woman had to have an address in order to receive a check.

**GTR:** It's just hard to think of objections to a place like that now, it wouldn't be 'politically correct' to say that they were against that. Back then, what was the official justification for saying that? Not having an address, I understand. Or people not wanting to acknowledge that it was needed?

**SO:** Yes. Or facing all these hostile police who would say things like, 'Well, women get battered because they let their alligator mouth run their hummingbird brains.' Or, there was so much women-blaming, victim-blaming.

**GTR:** I understand. That probably happened everywhere, but did you see that happen particularly in Duluth?

**SO:** The police departments all over the country were opposed to this.

**GTR:** Then you moved in. You worked with the Duluth Model. Can you explain how that then fit together?

**SO:** The Duluth Model did not come along yet; I'm going to get into that. Your question about the attitudes—so 1979 was the year that shelters blossomed all over the state. The Department of Corrections was allocated \$3 million. Advocates from the Duluth shelter would go to other parts

of the state; advocates from other parts of the state came to Duluth. It was the year for legislation, 1979. Besides more money for shelters, an earnest little item called the Probable Cause Arrest Bill somehow slipped through the House and the Senate. Now the Probable Cause Arrest Bill said that police, law enforcement, could arrest, without witnessing the assault, if this couple lived together, if it happened within four hours and if there were visible signs of injury. So, that became law. But none of the police officers acknowledged it. But I will get to that Probable Cause Arrest Bill. Another interesting bill that passed into law in May of 1979 was called the Domestic Abuse Act. It got lobbied through as the Anti-Divorce Bill because so many women testified that they could not get restraining orders against their husbands unless they filed for divorce. And point-of-fact, what came to be known as the OFP, Order for Protection, became the fastest temporary divorce a woman could get, knocking out all the civil matters from the docket as it took precedence. While it brought fast, fast, fast relief to women across the state, it brought incredulous snarls from attorneys who were shunted aside as women proceeded pro se to get safety by the week, by the month, and by the year. Amidst the plaster sifting down from the ceilings, and the walls of the Women's Coalition, the frightened, courageous women and the confused and crying children packed on top of each other, battle fatigue began to take its toll. [Emotional pause] And in December of that year, we said, 'Well, so much for living on high principles and low wages', we raised our pay to five dollars an hour.

**GTR:** Wow. So moving.

**SO:** In 1980, because the shelter was a collective and we had an openness about it, we were able to start this project, called The Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, in which we were going to utilize the Probable Cause Arrest Bill, where advocates in the shelter would be going out into the community, that we would be visiting women in their homes, right after the assault. So, that is how the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project got started, it was out of the shelter and then it became, well, we know what it became.

**GTR:** –going into the homes. Coral was telling me a little bit about that process of going into the homes after an assault. How much was helping women then, instead of just saying, 'Come to the shelter', helping them with the next step of finding some place to live or someplace different?

**SO:** Visiting women in their homes was like going into caves in which, we'd say, in essence, "He's been arrested. You did not cause this. The law says it is the State of Minnesota versus your partner or your husband." It was our role to educate women, as I mentioned earlier, to bring us out of isolation and into community. There was always the invitation; there was the connection, first of all, the connection that we could be trusted and that there were services and that were educational groups and there was childcare and she was invited to participate. Participate in her own liberation!



**GTR:** Or just knowing those things were around. It's a terribly isolating experience.

**0:30:03.0**

**SO:** Yes, yes. It was for the advocates, where the shelter was a be-all and end-all and that how we sweat blood and how we worked so hard to bring that shelter into existence. And then, to me, women said, "We don't want to go the shelter." It was an education for us to understand, of course, why shouldn't you be safe in your own home? Utilizing the Probable Cause for Arrest, the Order for Protection, especially the women's educational groups. I don't know what to say, Gina, that the educational groups no longer are a big part of the shelter and the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, because they were so liberating. Again, from isolation to community and from community into action. That women could find...women found their voice.

**GTR:** And that worked.

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** That is really interesting, that evolution, from the shelter to the bigger picture. You saw the support groups fading recently?

**SO:** Well, I don't really know. In the '80s, in my experience, and again, this was thirty years ago, at one point, four women's groups were going and women do come into those groups to talk to other women, to listen to other women, to find out how... Going back to the '70s, when women would have consciousness raising groups and that statement came out that "The personal is political". Women realized that it wasn't her, it wasn't me, there were things, there were attitudes, patriarchal institutions that got set up. So in the women's groups, the education was about that. What is it that allows this man to get away with beating you? When you go to the police, when you go to the church, when you go to these institutions, what is it that they do or don't do which keeps you isolated and in these dangerous and oppressive situations?

**GTR:** Right, it's bigger. Going way back to the '70s, you started out by introducing the times, things that were happening everywhere, was that happening in Duluth? Who started? What was the spark that started in little, tiny Northern Minnesota, Duluth. It doesn't seem like it was the cutting edge.

**SO:** No! It was not the cutting edge! {Both laugh}

**GTR:** How did it start? What were those groups coming together right away? From the ERA stuff, you said, a few of you getting together. Were there other groups already? Or was it constant consciousness raising groups? Was that happening before?

**SO:** I know that there were women who would meet, who would gather at one another's house, but in terms of public demonstrations, it was through the shelter that the Take Back the Night, that these new things that were happening in the country, that information, and getting that information, and being able to act on that information.

**GTR:** The focal point. Where people could find out about these other things that were happening?

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** I can see that being a big, good role. It's interesting, some of this, in this case, not transition planning, but remembering things that worked well, or things that the organization used to do. Can we learn from that to improve something now?

**SO:** Yes!

**GTR:** Can we learn something not to do now?

**SO:** That is a critical question that you're asking. Yes.

**GTR:** Is there anything in particular you think, for efforts today, that they should remember?

**SO:** Remember the power of women, women's groups. To remember that it is together and doing critical thinking, doing action. What did happen, I spearheaded it, if you will, that women, once the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project was in force, and my position was to bring education to women's groups, that education was based on Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and bringing women information that would empower them and their voices be heard. We were called the Women's Action Group. How we would determine an action was, 'What was the issue most critical to their reality?' I'm remembering something very important, women and religion, women and the church, the many educational meetings, and then the planning for the conference where women in the church would come to speak and to dialogue. So it was... that, I believe, is what's missing. That women are... There are shelters, very important. And then what? How do women go from submerged consciousness to that emerging consciousness? That was one of the most exiting things for me, to be involved with women who grew from submerged consciousness to that emerging consciousness to critical consciousness. That was just the most exciting part of my work.

**GTR:** Do you remember any particular people or stories? Without names, an example?

**SO:** Oh, my. Okay. Many examples of women whose husbands were arrested or women who, because of economics, couldn't leave, and how in these meetings, in these groups, with this education going, were able to find the wherewithal to find the tools they needed. Women in poverty, you know, holding workshops on that. And we would, the women, in particular, I don't remember what year it was, they wanted to hold a conference with women who had been in shelters, or who were in shelters, all around the state. So, that whole thing, the whole organization to reach out to shelters in Marshall, Minnesota or in Thief River Falls, to communicate, to raise money, to bring all the women together. They invited the governor's wife, Rachel Quie, it was Governor Quie, a Republican governor. And she came to Duluth to give the keynote address. So, all of these things about the power of women, acting together.

**GTR:** How much would you say people would talk about feminism, or feminist philosophy? How much did that affect everything?

#### **0.40.00.1**

**SO:** Not as such. Not as such. Not like the '60s and the '70s. Not quite that radical. What women... Women were more than battered women. And so, what began to form in these groups, and in these women's communities, was through that educational process, 'What do we value? What do we want to focus on?' and certainly in the educational process, to recognize that in this society, in this culture, dominated by men, what was valued was institutionalized. So, okay, law and order. We have law enforcement. Money, so we have banks and we have Wall Street. Those get institutionalized. And so women would talk about, 'What is it we value?' We value children, we value a community. So, how would we go about institutionalizing that? That was the kind of critical process that happened with women, who came into those educational groups.

**GTR:** Institutionalized, that's funny, to think of that as a positive word, often it's a negative word.

**SO:** Yes, yes!

**GTR:** Was there focus on schools then, or childcare, that kind of focus? Schools are places that children would be, or a focus on improving schools or improving access to daycare?

**SO:** That, I'm not aware of. I was not involved past 1990. So many women applied to get into college. So, education, to be able to get good paying jobs.

**GTR:** Change their lives a little bit.

**SO:** Yes. Because their lives changed; their children's lives changed. I know there were groups, when you talk about children and education and school, I know there was some women in the groups who would go with the person who had access to... I'm confused about that... But the world opened up, and to find out their place in the world, our place in the world was incredibly liberating.

**GTR:** Would that be—it sounds like such hard work—to see some of that was it very fulfilling to see that?

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** What kept you going?

**SO:** Oh, my! {Laughs} Well, I guess I did burn out, because I left the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in, I think, '91 or so. Both liberating and exhausting. Very rewarding, very rewarding. I guess, that isn't happening now. So, from this shelter, from a support group at the Human Development Center in 1976, through, just the dream of the shelter, and the passion, and that this passion trumps bureaucracy. {Laughs}

**GTR:** What were your years? Were you ever on the board of, well, the Safe Haven name is very recent, right? So, when did you leave working at the shelter and did you work more full time in the intervention program?

**SO:** 1980, so from '77 until 1980 was the shelter and then, I regret this, but the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project would not have really been able to get a foot hold in other shelters around the state, which were with directors and with hand picked board of directors, but because we were an open collective, the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project had a chance to start, and that's when we moved out of the shelter and into the community.

**GTR:** But as a separate entity that had other leadership, too?

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** You were working with, was it Ellen and Michael, too?

**SO:** Yes. Well, if I may, Ellen and I were the once with the, who began it. That was the nexus of it. And then Coral and then Michael and then the police department and {laughs} then the probation department and all of that. Always the umbrella. [Laughs]

**GTR:** Quite the project! I know Coral has said, ‘How do you do these Oral Histories? We should do one’.

**SO:** On the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. Yes.

**GTR:** Yes. So, that could be a different focus. I know Ellen has passed away.

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** That’s unfortunate. What was it like to work with her?

**SO:** Oh, absolutely fantastic! It was fabulous, it was twenty-four/seven, it was just exciting. Talk about the dreams and how could we make this happen?! She was a tremendous organizer.

**GTR:** Good energy. Sounds great.

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** I found a little thing on-line today, I’d not seen it before, it was ‘Ellen Pence as a rock star of the domestic violence world’ with pictures and things.

**SO:** Yes! Okay! Oh, wow!

**GTR:** I don’t know who put that together.

**SO:** That’s just awesome. She was awesome because she knew who could, she was a leader, but she also knew who could do what, and who would be good here, and who would be good there. Yeah. Great.

**GTR:** She came from a different place. She wasn’t in Duluth right away?

**SO:** Not right away.

**GTR:** She wasn’t at the shelter; she wasn’t with the original Women’s Coalition group?

**SO:** Right.

**GTR:** She had worked with other things. I know that could be a whole separate project.

**SO:** Yes! {Laughs} Look into it, Gina!

**GTR:** Maybe. Yes, definitely. We can look into it. I know Coral's daughter, as well, and she said, 'How do you do these things? How can we do this? How can we get this going?'

**SO:** Yes! [Whispering] Wonderful! Fascinating! It's just really wonderful. Aren't you glad?

**GTR:** I asked a little bit about how you stayed involved, how you had the energy to stay involved. [Both laugh] Do you have hope for the future? Obviously, this is an on-going thing. What do you hope to see in Duluth, in five or ten years?

**SO:** Well, it's true that violence against women continues unabated. And it's sometimes... but then I live in a sheltered environment, and I'm leading a contemplative life, overlooking the lake, but I think that [thoughtful pause] it's rather depressing, it's rather alarming, that women don't seem to be free. That they, well, I'm remembering women's groups watching the film, *Women in Advertising*, this was in the '80s, and I believe it's worse than ever how women in advertising are sexualized and objectified and wearing six inch heels and a form fitting dresses and they don't look free. {Laughs} They don't look free.

**0:50:02.1**

**GTR:** Right. Yes, 'We're so liberated now, we can do anything!'

**SO:** Yes, there is that, isn't there.

**GTR:** We could be doctors, we could be... But we have to wear the heels, too. It is interesting. Women's studies is fascinating to me, but I have an English degree and a biology degree, I never had time to do the women's studies classes in school, but it does sound fascinating. I did some interviews with women—their birth stories—starting in the 1930s. I talked to 100 year old women about them giving birth and that process—oh, my gosh. The group I was working with has folded, unfortunately, but I wanted to do some sort of product, presentation, something. There's a lot of books... "Birth as an American Rite of Passage", I forget who wrote that, but it was written in the '70s by a woman. Women's studies classes read it all the time.

**SO:** Giving birth?

**GTR:** Yeah, well just, asking the women, in that project, 'How did it all happen? How did you know what to expect?' or "How were you treated during the birth?" The whole process of, wow, things have really changed, for the better, I think, hopefully. How that would reflect the rest of their lives. These women often had no idea what to expect, the doctor wouldn't tell them.

**SO:** No prenatal...

**GTR:** Right. They wouldn't talk about it.

**SO:** And it was all so hidden.

**GTR:** And apparently, it was all so horrible sometimes that you didn't want to scare each other that it was going to be so bad, so you just didn't talk about it. So, these poor women.

**SO:** Oh, oh.

**GTR:** But that's a whole other topic. Crazy times.

**SO:** If I can ask you, the interviewer, Gina, what do you think about the state of women in 2015?

**GTR:** Well, I'm 43 almost, 42. So, I'm sort of just old enough to feel like I'm not part of that younger group right now, where the women feel like they... Like when I was in high school, if your bra strap showed it was really embarrassing. And now, it's like, (very open). And I can't quite get my head around that. Like everyone having tattoos, and all that, I'm just not quite of that age... But I have a four-year-old daughter, so, what is going to be happening when she is a teenager? I have no idea. I haven't quite gotten my head around that. I'm sure there will be some completely new trend that everyone will be obsessed with. So, it's scary. So, we kind of try to live outside of the mainstream as much as we can, too. Although we were just at a store yesterday and my daughter was looking at a mannequin and she asked 'Mom, why don't you wear high heels?' [Laughs] And I said, 'They're not good for us'. [Both laugh] But my son has had a female doctor his whole life and when we went to the dentist for the first time, when he was about three, he said, 'Look mom, a boy doctor, hee-hee-hee!'

**SO:** Ohhhh! [Both laugh]

**GTR:** So it's this, "We can do anything..." So, there are probably more women in science now than ever before.

**SO:** Yes! Yes!

**GTR:** So, it's great that way, but they might be going to work in high heels.

**SO:** There, there, the pressure... and glass ceilings... oh, yes.

**GTR:** And women do more of the childcare, the cooking, the cleaning, still. Even though you have men who are more helpful than they used to be.

**SO:** I did note that the pressure now in terms of domestic violence and children and visitation centers, that more men are getting custody and using it as a power ploy against women. So, there are some grim issues. And yes, there are more women doctors and there are more, women are more educated, there are more graduates and more college students who are female than male. So, what will the patriarchy do to keep ahead of us? {Laughs} Even, Gina, even in 1977, '78, '79 when we would give talks in the community and someone would say, 'What about shelters for men?' And shortly after the shelter started there were men's groups that coalesced together to see what they could do about not being able to have access to their wives or their children, so always the dance.

**GTR:** What about any groups, like the Men as Peacemakers?

**SO:** Oh, yes.

**GTR:** Some good groups?

**SO:** Some good groups, yes there are.

**GTR:** Oh, it's hard.

**SO:** Yes.

**GTR:** Even doing this oral history project, it's so different, because it's so ongoing. We can't just talk about that interesting thing that happened thirty years ago, because it is still...

**SO:** Ongoing. Yes.

**GTR:** And I think Safe Haven, they just would like to document their own history, but it's still going. And some of that is more recent, about the board and changing the name.

**SO:** The board and changing the name?

**GTR:** Safe Haven. How it became Safe Haven, who was on the board, when? Was it a non-profit? Was the Women's Coalition, you said starting a corporation?

**SO:** A non-profit. A 501c3.



**GTR:** A 501c3. Okay. Because that was not an easy process back in the day? A lot of paperwork.

**SO:** Oh, there was, but we were dreamers and believers.

(discussion about logistics of this oral history project)

**GTR:** Well, that's great. Thank you very much!

**SO:** Well, thank you for coming all the way out here! I'm glad we finally connected.

**1:00:15.1**



## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Trisha O'Keefe, b. 1954 (TO)**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded May 7, 2015**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Trisha O'Keefe on May 7th, 2015 for the Safe Haven Women's Coalition oral history project. Thank you for meeting with me.

**TO:** Mmhm. Certainly.

**GTR:** Now, let's start out by just telling me when you first came to Duluth and began work with the group.

**TO:** I came to Duluth in 1989 and started at the shelter shortly after that, but prior to that I had worked at a shelter in St. Cloud for about seven years. So I had had some experience prior to coming here. But the shelter had been up and running, I think it started in '78, or '79, so it had been up and running for a number of years prior to my starting there.

**GTR:** So how did you first hear about it or become interested in being involved?

**TO:** When I was in school, I majored in Women's Studies and had attempted to do an internship at the shelter in St. Cloud. Actually, I tried to get hired there and didn't get hired and then did an internship there and then had the possibility to write a grant to fund a position for a fundraiser because that's what they really said they needed at the time. So I wrote a number of grants. Looking back, they're all very poorly done [laughs], but I learned from that that funders don't fund your style, they fund an idea, and this was an idea (whose time had come) - because a lot of shelters had started up and now were looking and trying to figure out ways to continue funding themselves. So it was an idea whose time had come and I just stumbled upon it. So with that I worked at the shelter in St. Cloud for about seven years, so I knew of the state wide network of shelters and was aware of the shelter in Duluth. The Intervention Project in Duluth was starting to branch out to other cities. It had come to St. Cloud and met with some of the women who were involved with the Duluth Intervention Project - Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. So I had a

few connections there. Then a position opened up shortly after I moved here that I applied for and then I started there.

**GTR:** Ok. And what was your position?

**TO:** Um.. I was a member of the Collective. Did I have a title? [laughs]

**GTR:** The collective then too, you were all kind of trying to be equal or having no particular title.

**TO:** Right. I was a member of the Collective management team, but I originally started out doing most of the grant writing and program development, reporting, but then really everybody kind of did whatever was needed. I did some repair work, some construction work. I did women's groups, I did men's groups. My last position there I ended up doing all of the financial piece, doing the books, the payroll, the budgets and all of that.

**GTR:** When did you leave? How long were you there?

**TO:** I was there for fourteen years. And then the last big thing that I was involved with was the development of the new building, the present building. We were still in the building on First Street when I started. It was very obvious that that was too small, and a lot of shelters around the state were going through this at the same time. (Shelters) had gotten their original funding and then very quickly they knew they were too small. So I was very involved with purchasing the land and writing the grants and overseeing the design and the construction setup for the new building.

**GTR:** Can you explain that site? Choosing that site? Or looking for that?

**TO:** Yeah. It was, you know, for many years, shelters kept their addresses confidential. And as shelters started to need to build bigger places and get bigger places, it became obvious that that was impossible to keep that confidential. So shelters started saying "We're not going to be hiding anymore, this is a community problem, this is where we are." So when we started looking we looked at renovating places - buildings, we spent a lot of time looking at the various possibilities. I like the idea of renovating something just because I like the idea of recycling in general. The home (shelter) that we had had a lot of character and charm. It had a homey feel to it. But to renovate an old building like that, that was just so costly with the kinds of technology needs, safety needs, and upgrades that were required for a public housing unit. It just becomes really prohibitive. So we found the current space, and many of the - I don't know if I'd say many - there were certainly some neighbors who were not happy about it because it was undeveloped space at the time. And people were worried about bringing into their neighborhood dangerous

persons. So we had a number of meetings scheduled. I remember Greg Gilbert, who was on the City Council at the time, tried to help mediate a couple of meetings with the neighbors. We ended up being sued, but we won that case. Because basically we had to get a variance for the building project that we were doing there, and that was granted. So it wasn't that they were suing us, they were suing the planning commission because they were the ones who gave us the building permit... but we were named in the suit (even though) they were the ones that granted us the variance.

**[6:04]**

**GTR:** Because of the size? Or because of the particular use?

**TO:** Because it was zoned there residential, and I don't remember now the various classes of zoning. And the building that we were doing was big enough that it didn't fit a residential zoning, which was how it was zoned. So it had to go to the next level which required a variance which they granted to us.

**GTR:** Was it city land or county land?

**TO:** No, it was a private individual that owned it. So purchasing it was no problem. And we looked into the variance prior to committing to it, and felt confident that we could but it was just a long process.

**GTR:** And then it is right by that ball field, was it felt that that would still be kind of private enough? Or not?

**TO:** Well, again, we realized – (since) we got federal money; so everything just has to be public when that's the case to build a building - and also when there's a variance being proposed, the planning commission must notify the neighbors. So, of course then everybody knew what the building was going to be. So there was really no way to keep it confidential anymore. Building a building of that size, people are just going to wonder what it is.

**GTR:** There's no sign out front or anything?

**TO:** There's no sign out front, no. And we took some additional precautions, with building new you can do some additional precautions in terms of the alarm system that we put in. There was bulletproof glass put in on a variety of windows. So those things were all precautions we could take by building it versus renovating something.

**GTR:** That makes sense. There were certain lessons learned in the old building, I assume. When you can design it from scratch you can do it like you wanted to do it.

**TO:** One of the things that I [laughs]... I used to walk around with a set of keys that was like, thirty or forty keys, and different people had a key to the front door because people would be coming, different staff members, and people would be coming at different shifts, and many different people had to have a key. And if one person, somehow, lost their key, then we'd have to get a new lock put in. And so, I don't know, I remember thinking, "When we get this new place I want to have one key that opens just about anything - a master key that could open everything." Because we had closets and locked spaces and just all these keys. So that was one really nice thing. And also an intercom system so that people had to buzz in before they could enter. We could see who it was. Those kinds of things.

**GTR:** That's great. So were you there after it opened?

**TO:** Yup, I was there for a few years after it opened.

**GTR:** How did that process go? Like the moving in. Are there any interesting memories of that?

**TO:** You know, that all went pretty smoothly. I think in part because we had a lot of things built-in to the new building. For example, dressers and drawers, and shelving, and a lot of things that were just built-in that we didn't have to move, and were also less able to be taken away. Women were leaving our place with nothing. And they often saw things that could help them in their new apartment and, you know, helped themselves to some of those things. And we were having to replace a variety of things. So we were able to kind of build in ways to (improve that)... we had a big kitchen pantry, for example, that now had a lock on it. Just things like that that we knew had been problematic in the old place that we could think about how to have that be different in what we were designing. So we had a lot of staff and resident discussions about the new building and got input from a lot of different people about what kinds of things they'd like to have. I know women would often have things, if they ended up sharing a room, they had valuables, they were worried about leaving their valuables or maybe their medications, or whatever confidential information. So we had one main safe that we could lock women's things up in, but then it was easy to get at. So one of the ideas they had was to have each room have a locked drawer, and they could get the key when they checked in. So just listening to some of the stories that the women had. We were always refilling soap things, so we ended up getting soap dispensers on the wall that we could fill up with, and all the soap wouldn't walk away [laughs], and shampoo, and those kinds of things. So yeah, we learned a lot. We toured some other buildings that had already been built in The Cities and got ideas from them.

**GTR:** Is there anything that you wish people remember that you really put effort into designing this that maybe would not be used the same way? Or something that you just really hope - I mean, this is really almost institutional memory. And opportunity to record “Oh, I worked really hard on that little piece. This is important.”

**TO:** Yeah. Well, let’s see. I know that it was really nice to end up having meeting space. But thinking about the space for the women, first of all, we went from a capacity of sixteen to a capacity of thirty-nine. So many, many more women were able to be housed and also have their individual rooms rather than always needing to share. We always had a huge thing with donations. We’d get donations, and we’d just get overwhelmed with donations. There was no way to sort them out. So we planned a whole kind of donation area. And the kids room was really nicely done with easy access to the out of doors, compared to the other one. What was the question? [laughs]

**GTR:** Just if there was a piece that you would hope would remember the original purpose, or that you felt was a really important piece of the new building. I don’t know if you’ve been in there recently to see it.

**TO:** I haven’t, recently. I’m trying to think of the last time I was there... It’s been a few years. Yeah. I know when my dad passed away, I was still working there, and we had memorials go to the shelter and with that money we had a really nice table made and built. It has a little plaque on there that says in memory of him, or donations because of something like that. But someone in the community who’s quite a nice builder created it. So that, personally...

**GTR:** The big eating area?

**TO:** No, it’s in the big conference room where we had meetings and trainings and gatherings. So I like that personally. It’s probably not that big a deal to anyone else, but...

**GTR:** No, that’s a good memory to have. Very substantial. I had a tour for a little bit, but I didn’t go into the rooms. They were full, really. Usually. So you were in there long enough to see how things flow. Did it work how you envisioned?

[14:32]

**TO:** There were always things. The heating and cooling things seemed difficult just because there was a centralized system and some of the offices in the front that get really south facing sun could get really quite hot in the summer. So if they were cool enough, everybody else was freezing. It seemed like we had a lot of issues with that system, to getting everybody’s temperature to be comfortable in the building. I remember that kind of went on and on. But

changing over our phone system was a really big thing to figure out. The technology, of course now, is well advanced from then. Things probably would have been really different. We probably would have had internet - well everybody's got wireless now - I don't even know what might have been. Maybe everything would have been automatic, temperature wise, alarm wise maybe they'd just all go automatically.

**GTR:** Then you also have the issue now of technology and people tracking each other, or not wanting people to use it. So it sounds like it's a whole new set of things they should talk about.

**TO:** Yeah, some advantages and some disadvantages.

**GTR:** They didn't have wi-fi or a hot spot there, I don't think. I was trying to use my phone and couldn't. I mean, you could do cellular, but no wi-fi because it's more trackable.

**TO:** Yeah, we weren't even aware of that issue.

**GTR:** Would that have moved with you from the other shelter?

**TO:** Mhmm. It was like one big day, take it all over there. And I think a few of us moved over there first. I was one of them. A few of us moved over there just to kind of deal with the phones and get things set up before all the women came over. So some of us went over there early to see how things were going and then everybody came on one certain day.

**GTR:** How did it feel to move in?

**TO:** It was kind of amazing after all this time, and planning, and funding. I was kind of in the process myself of building my own house. I remember sometimes getting a call from a contractor and he or she would start talking about something and I'd be like, "Ok, are you talking about the shelter or my house?" [laughs] But there are so many decisions with - besides the big decisions - like colors and carpet and paint and wood and really, really a lot of choices about things. And we were worked a couple of really great architects that were really, really very helpful.

**GTR:** Who was that?

**TO:** It was Randy Wagner and Rebecca.. from DGWS. They're like on First and Lake or First and First.. Randy Larson and Rebecca Wagner? [laughs] Something like that.

**GTR:** Yeah. Ok. I know at least one of those names I think.

[18:38]

**TO:** Yeah, so seeing the plans, we had the plans all drawn up and had various opinions about the plans. It's great to get everybody's opinion because then you get really, a lot of well thought out things, but it's certainly not as easy if there's just one person saying - as with the collective structure - it's not as efficient as having one person saying, "We're doing it this way." But then you have people who are happier and more behind the decision than if one person makes it and people are not happy about it. So.

**GTR:** Were you there during the transitions from - it sounded like there wasn't even a collective management team at first there was just a collective - and then they went to the management team. So was it always that management team in your time?

**TO:** Yeah, mmhm.

**GTR:** Ok. So you didn't see that transition, but the transition to the director model?

**TO:** I had taken a leave I think, to finish my house, I took three months off. Some of that happened during that time. I came back, and I always had kind of thought once this building is done it just might be time to move on, and then that happened and it was a very difficult thing - I shouldn't speak for others - for me. Because it was kind of a belief in modeling, a way of being in the world, a way of sharing power that felt like we were trying to model that to women and their relationships about equality. The fact that the board made that decision was very hard for me, personally. I wasn't very happy about it. That reinforced my decision to leave.

**GTR:** Did you have a position at that point when you left or a title? A name?

**TO:** You know... I was probably called the Financial Coordinator? Probably. Everybody probably had "coordinator" as their name. Like the Women's Program Coordinator, the Children's Program Coordinator, there was an Administrative Coordinator. I think that's kind of what we were all called. And I was probably still called that when I came back. So yeah, that was a hard transition.

**GTR:** Do you think that the women who were there could see that collective? It was important to the people working at the shelter, but how much do you think the women could see that model? Did they understand that?

**TO:** That's a good question. Probably not as much as we would have had in our heads that that was happening. And I might know less about that than women who, staff members, who did direct services with women. I think that talking about that in women's groups, but not so much



about our structure but about equality and shared relationships. I don't know how much of that really came across to them.

**GTR:** When did you do groups? Earlier before you were working more with that - you said you had done some groups?

**TO:** I did women's groups long before the new building process started. I did men's groups first with DAIP and then I did women's groups outside of the shelter. We had community groups outside.

**GTR:** Where you employed there [DAIP] too?

**TO:** I was. I was a grant writer. When I first moved up here I was doing some grant writing for them on a part-time basis. And then did men's groups.

**GTR:** Lots of different jobs, a really different skill set.

**TO:** [laughs]

**GTR:** But it's good to have that!

**TO:** Well, actually one of the things that was kind of nice about it, I thought, was that people had the ability to kind of move around. I think so often administrative type people, they really can get out of touch with the program needs and then you have program people saying "we need this and we need that" and then the people who have more power in the administration who get to make the decisions don't see that and so they don't value it the way the people doing the work value it, and so wouldn't necessarily agree to fund it or do that. I think that it gave all of us a much more well rounded picture of the situation - that everybody has to navigate. Like going to court with women and hearing about it is one thing, but actually being in the courtroom and see what the court advocates, what their days are like. On the other side too, people having to see what budgets and grant writing and reporting. "Well, who cares about these stupid statistics." Well, right except that...(we need to report them for continued funding). So I think it did help to give everybody a well rounded picture of the totality of the organization and what was required.

[24:36]

**GTR:** So then with DAIP, how were you seeing that connect? The day to day operations at the shelter? Were you seeing a connection to how to relate it?

**TO:** The two interacted mostly around the arrests. I, again, didn't work in this so I'm sure there's others who have spoken with a lot more knowledge about this than I would have. With the

initiation of the Mandatory Arrest law that, of course, brought a lot more men into the system, and then the police would call the shelter who would then send out advocates whenever. DAIP was attempting to monitor the police to kind of see how they were doing, so they went off to get the police reports. Many of the men who were ordered to the groups, we were working with the women. I remember one time when I was doing men's groups, and it was kind of like having to really be aware and conscious about how I might know her story from being at the shelter, he may not know she's at the shelter and he's telling me all he did was X, Y, and Z and I already know from her that he did a lot more than that. It's like trying to remember "Ok, I can't really say that to him." Just trying to... I don't know. Not say that, but yet try to confront it in a way that...(would be beneficial). In a way, having the police report we could say, "You know, the police report says this and that and it's kind of not the story you're giving us." And often times they would much rather - I call it when we'd ask them how their week was, they'd rather give us the fishing or the hunting report. And they'd kind of talk about how they, well, went out with their buddies. And it's like "Ok, that's great, but what we're really talking about is your relationship to violence this week and how did that specifically play out?" [laughs]. So, of course. I mean, no one wants to talk about moments you're not proud of.

**GTR:** Did you feel it was effective? Do they do some of those same groups now? Did you feel that what you were doing then was helpful?

**TO:** I do. I think that education is really, for any of us, is really the only way that change happens. With new information, that then changes attitudes and then attitudes change beliefs and beliefs change behavior. But it is very slow. We're all conditioned to the ways of women and the ways of men, and that's a very long undoing. And to convince men that giving up their power is somehow beneficial to them is not easy. When men say they were using violence to get her to stay - yes, she would stay, but is that really the kind of relationship you want? That she's trying to get out at any possible moment? Can you even imagine a relationship where you're not using that and she has the freedom to come or go based on how she feels about you? You're giving up power but you're gaining, perhaps, a level of intimacy that you may think you have now but you don't. When someone is afraid of you, you don't. But that's a tough sell.

**GTR:** Did you feel that you were trained? Was there a long training process or did you feel adequately prepared?

**TO:** Oh, no [laughs]. Um, there was a training. There's a curriculum that could be followed. We were always working in pairs and one time we tried it with two women and one man as facilitators which was really nice for me as a facilitator because on one level the male facilitator can kind of, he's got the same privilege that they do. Just to have one other woman in there felt great. I could just say something and I knew she completely got it, and most of the male

facilitators would get it, but they didn't get it like another woman got it [laughs]. But I'm sure they couldn't afford to do that.

**GTR:** And men reacting different to a male facilitator as well?

**TO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** We could do a DAIP (oral history) project at some point. I've talked with Coral, and it could be a whole separate project and how that all evolved. Obviously the two are tied together.

**TO:** Well, and men's groups came out of women wanting that. They didn't want men's groups, but they wanted him to change. They didn't necessarily want a divorce they wanted to stay with them, they just wanted him to be different; and how to get him to be different.

**GTR:** Do you remember any particular success story? Were there success stories? Maybe not specific names...

**TO:** Well there certainly were men who had been abusive and then came through the program - like some of the male facilitators were men who had been abusive and who had come through the program. I mean, Ty Schroyer was one who would regularly speak in the community about his past use of violence and those were very powerful examples. I don't think he's in the area anymore.

**GTR:** In those, with the men's meetings too, was there any, and if you think back to the shelter in earlier days at all, was there discussion of feminism? Did that come up in conversation with the women saying "We are doing this as feminists" or the men saying "No." That negativity towards that...

**TO:** Yeah. I don't think that we used that word with residents very much. I don't think they saw themselves as feminists. They didn't necessarily see themselves as battered women. In fact, there were a lot of conversations about using that word that so many women... they think that things would have to be a lot worse to be considered a "battered" woman. In fact, what was the name of the book that Ann Jones and ... what was her name, she was fabulous... big hair [laughs]. She's passed away now from breast cancer. It will maybe come to me.

**GTR:** A book?

**TO:** A book. Yeah. It was something about "When Love Goes Wrong" I think was the name of the book. But there was conversations about how women relate to those words and not thinking of themselves as being "battered." That that meant a lot worse than what they were going

through. But then (there was) that whole development of the Power and Control Wheel. I think that really kind of (identified the tactics of abuse that were used) - and those again came out of women's groups. Women talking about ways that what happens when you wanted to go to school, or how are the children used in these dynamics? A lot of times women might not use the words that maybe the staff people would use, but when you got women to talk about their stories, then all of that would kind of come out. So we didn't talk about feminism, I don't think. I don't know. Because I think - maybe not so much in the beginning - it's gotten a bad rap. You're this flaming mad woman if you consider yourself a feminist. I think when talking about individual situations and talking about "how is that he has the belief that he gets to do that?" So it was kind of talking about it in a very gentle way.

**GTR:** The motivation that I think Jean, or other people, have said was that we had this feminist philosophy especially in the 70s...

**TO:** Yes.

**GTR:** That movement at that time, and using those words. But I'm sure for each individual person it was different. For you, yourself, or not? Using that word out there?

**TO:** Again, I came into it ten years after they did. I wasn't there at the very beginning at St. Cloud either, but shortly after that one opened. Probably those words were (used) a lot more - and people thought of it as that way. Even now, I mean, I think people of my generation still kind of have that same political analysis which might not be as common.. I don't know newer people come into.. I don't know if I'd call it a "movement" anymore. We called it a movement, but is it moving anymore? I don't know.

**GTR:** It's very interesting to hear from people. Have you ever seen that documentary? The woman, "She's Beautiful When She's Angry"?

**TO:** No, it was at UMD and I missed it.

**GTR:** It was good.

**TO:** Now I'm just hung up on trying to remember this woman's name. Ugh. She was a social worker but she loved to say that she was a social worker because she was such an activist and she felt like that's what social workers should be.

**GTR:** That was the "When Love Goes Wrong" book?

**TO:** Schechter! Susan Schechter!

**GTR:** If we're talking words - "domestic violence" words like that. Someone told me that it actually watered things down when you stopped saying "battered women" but that person it didn't have the perspective that the *women* might not have chosen that title. What kind of perception did you see in the community to what this was called or just your work at the shelter? How did you see that be... ?

[36:56]

**TO:** Yeah, I do think it kind of waters it down because I think people so often they want to say "Well what about the men? What about the men who are battered?" And it just... you know... Which domestic violence is not exclusively women. So I do think it waters down and it changes our image of what is really going on. It's 99% of the people battered are women.

**GTR:** So you would say domestic violence is not really... "women" is not in there so it could be anyone?

**TO:** Right. And I think it was more palpable to the general public, to think about it in that way. And it's kind of like, "Oh, men hit women, women hit men." So it neutralized the politics of it which I think that kind of happens with a lot of movements. They start out kind of as purists and small, so once they grow bigger you get all these people who maybe aren't "purists" is kind of the word, but you get a lot more people involved and then the politics change. That core group was very solid in their analysis and their goal and their vision and all that. And as you get more people in, people have a lot of... their not quite as centered about it. But you have the benefit of having many more people involved when you start getting other institutions involved, bringing in the police, bringing in the social services, the courts, and the judges, and probation. It's kind of a way to get those services improved for women, and so much of that is about relationships doing that work. And if people like you, you get a lot more done.

**GTR:** Relationships between the agencies...

**TO:** Yeah, with the institutions. And if they don't like you, they might put roadblocks in your way. So I think using language that's a little bit more neutral was easier for some of those groups to get behind.

**GTR:** Interesting. So it's not just a "p.c.", as things just change, there's some deeper meaning there.

**TO:** Yeah. There was a time when there was a real backlash by men and they started advertising that they were going to have a battered men's shelter. And I just always said "Great. Go for it."

You can have a bake sale and fundraisers. Do it.” We would get blamed for not providing services to men. “Why don’t you house men! What about the men who are battered?” And I’d always say, “You know, this is how we did it. Go for it. Go ahead.” [laughs]

**GTR:** Didn’t do it.

**TO:** No, no.

**GTR:** Did you see in your time there different perceptions of someone, that you worked there or was there a different reception, or “do we really need that?” Just that change in perception over the years?

**TO:** Like, are people still wondering do we still need that?

**GTR:** Well maybe not even today, but like when you first started - you were in St. Cloud and then came to Duluth - could you tell the perception of the community, or how the community welcomed a shelter?

**TO:** Yes. Well, I wasn’t involved at the very beginning in St. Cloud but I heard stories and read articles about when they were trying to get a shelter, and going to the City Council and the city council had a belief that that didn’t happen in St. Cloud, it only happened in the Twin Cities, for example. That this problem wasn’t a problem that they had. And we all know it was a very private and hidden problem and it wasn’t recorded as such. Women would call the police and when they did they wouldn’t recorded it as what it was, and they often didn’t do anything. They just told the guy to walk around the block and that was it. It wasn’t recorded as anything. Over the years, and I think the statewide coalition did a lot to help publicize the issue. I think there’s just been some horrendous stories that have come out in the press about women and the abuse they’ve suffered. The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women and the statewide organizations, they’ll do a femicide report every year. They list how many women have been murdered in Minnesota. It’s always like 25-30 women. I think the public perception has certainly changed about it. I think people still blame women, but I don’t think there’s the kind of denial that it doesn’t happen in our community anymore. So that’s good. But I think way back then, I think we thought once we got shelters then at least women would have a place to go. But you just realize how complex the issue is the more it goes on and the more you work with it.

**[42:46]**

**GTR:** And it’s not just about getting them a place to be.

**TO:** Yeah. For two weeks. And then what?

**GTR:** I can see that was a challenge. This is a little bit different even from a historical perspective because we can't say, "That thing that we did thirty years ago." It's still very ongoing. But, like you said, perception, we don't want to lose in the historical record and people think "Oh of course, women can just go get help if they need help." But remembering that it hasn't been that long that people have been talking about this issue or doing something about it. And what was the situation like in Duluth before shelter was an option.

**TO:** Yeah. I think if they wanted to get out the only option was to get a divorce.

**GTR:** Or where *could* they get a divorce.

**TO:** Right. And then you had to prove something. And if there's no evidence of abuse... I don't know what you had to prove. Which is a pretty extreme jump. If you've been a traditional stay at home wife and mother and you have children or children you're still supporting, you're kind of stuck.

**GTR:** People say these women are very strong because they've had to deal with so much. Are you seeing then more support from funders if you were in the funding world? And now there's big galas and people... How did you see that evolve?

**TO:** Yeah, you know, one of the things about the funding was that it was always easier to get funding - like to get funding for the new building was pretty easy. Because it was a one time thing. To get the on-going funding was always a lot harder. It always meant, "well, let's start a children's program" before there was specifically that. Anytime you could do something new you could often get funding for it, but then your one or two years were up and you had to keep adding these things on that you couldn't sustain. Funders are not designed to be an on-going source of funding for the whole life of your institution. But then you start up and kind of there you are. So it was always trying to see what their angle was [laughs]. What kinds of things they wanted to fund and figure out how you could write something that would meet that but would still pay for what you need, anyway.

**GTR:** Did you see more opportunities happening when you first started, and how did that changed things? You're saying the terminology changed and things get diluted when you start looking toward federal funders. How did that change? Just your experience there?

**TO:** Well, we did have strong state funding. I don't know if i'd say strong... but it felt secure, at least some of the funding felt secure. But as you looked around you could just see that there was so much that could be done if you had more money [laughs]. Legal help, and I don't know, there's just so many things that could (have been) be done other than just providing the basic

services which are certainly required but they would take up all your resources. Women come in, women go out, and that takes up all of your money, time, and energy, and resources just doing that. So it gets harder. Which is why I think the Intervention Project - they didn't have to maintain that kind of a system. They had more of an ability to create and to try different things that would change the system.

**GTR:** There's so many logistics just to get food, and... Did you have to deal with that? Food budgets and figuring all that out?

**TO:** Oh, yeah. If we'd have somebody that would come in with lice - I just remember the lice. And then it was like treating everybody with that shampoo and taking all the bedding to those commercial laundromats that had really high temperature settings [laughs]. Just stuff like that. And just the ongoing maintenance of a place that has so many people living in it. All of that. Repairs, replenishing supplies, kitchen stuff, all those kids, and things break. It's just a lot to maintain.

**GTR:** So what would keep people? How did you prevent burnout? What kept you going?

**TO:** Well, I always felt really privileged to have work in something that I cared about so much and believed in. So, like when I ended up doing the financial work, you know, that's not exactly thrilling necessarily. So I knew how to do it, but if I were doing it for McDonald's or something it wouldn't be the same. I felt like I was a part of something that I cared about and that I believed in. Even though you would hear stories that were heart wrenching, you also heard stories of women getting out and it was just... knowing that you were providing a possibility of hope for women to do something different with their lives and for their kids was a very strong feeling of contentment with the work. And also working with like-minded people, even though we had, obviously, individual disagreements, we all agreed on one thing. So that also was very supportive. Especially when we were met with sometimes a hostile public. There would be comments about "the shelter this and the shelter that, they didn't do this right" [laughs] and whatever. I think we just had that sense of sisterhood, or solidarity amongst ourselves that we all believed in the work that we were doing. So that was very life sustaining to be working in an environment like that. And I've been in environments that are not like that and that (the shelter environment) was very life sustaining.

**GTR:** I've seen pictures actually, in the shelter basement, there are still pictures of little skits and little things [laughs] so you had some fun?

**TO:** [laughs] Oh yes, we had some fun. That was probably mostly our volunteer appreciation parties that we'd have every year. And the staff would often dress up in some of the donations that were given [laughs] over the year and we would do skits about what some of the issues



were. So a skit about lice, or a skit about funding cuts, silly things. That was fun. I think that the volunteers who worked there thought it was fun.

**GTR:** Yeah, you have to laugh at some of that stuff. There's a lot of articles and things down in that basement so I don't know if anyone has ever compiled it into an actual book or archive, but there's some good history down there. Were you there when the "Safe Haven" name came to be?

**TO:** No, that was after I left. And I didn't really like it [laughs]

**GTR:** Was it just called "The Shelter" before? Did it have a name?

**TO:** It's true, that the name didn't say what it was, it was called The Women's Coalition Shelter, but most people referred to it as the Women's Coalition. I don't know what some of the other people who started it said about it whether it was about the collective feeling and cooperation and working together, if that was part of the reason. In the very beginning there was just kind of a "hot line".

**GTR:** I think they may have had the Women's Coalition for Battered Women, maybe, and then it was too long or something like that.

**TO:** Wasn't it called the Northeastern Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women?

**GTR:** Yeah, possibly.

**TO:** It seems like I saw that in the bylaws years ago.

**GTR:** Yeah, it was a very general name because it could mean all sorts of things because it was so general, if it was just the Coalition.

**TO:** Yeah, so is Safe Haven, in a way. I know a lot of animal shelters that are called Safe Haven. But. What I liked was the specificity of "women" being in the name. Because that's... what it was. The other thing was that I learned so much about racism working there. I mean. Really. We struggled with it. A lot. But the state coalition, very early on, did a lot of work on racism and women of color speaking out about their experiences working in shelters, being residents in shelters. And we were a mostly white group, so we saw the world from our perspective. But I learned so much about racism from working with women of color there that they didn't necessarily intend to be teaching me but just by being there and listening to their experiences was... yeah... I learned really, really a lot there. And the state coalition was really good about addressing issues. They did work on homophobia, and what was the other big one they had...

well, social services and child protective services and how they interact. But there was a lot of good thinking that went on and that came out of that. I learned so much by working there.

[54:58]

**GTR:** Are there any new policies on what things were done to try to assist women of color and making them feel more welcome?

**TO:** Well, one thing that came up was we had this policy that if women were disciplining their children by hitting them, that staff would talk to them about it. And this became quite an issue with women of color. So I don't think we understood that their feeling was they have to make sure their kids do not act out because if they do that out in the general public, well as we've seen so much lately coming out with the police response to mostly young black men, they felt like they had to be firm in their discipline to teach their children in order to protect them. But this was a big dilemma for a lot of us because seeing them... it's kind of like.... I don't know. It was a big dilemma. Even hearing their perspective about that was informative to me. Instead of just thinking something about them I came to learn what was behind that was the ultimate protection of their children, even though the way they were going about it, to me, felt violent. And then there were women used in prostitution, women who were still having contact with their abusers while at the shelter - was that allowed? was that not allowed? We had a lot of conversations about this. Anything we tried to mandate (against) women would just figure out how to do it anyway. [laughs] We'd have women whose abusers would pick them up at the shelter [laughs] and they went out with them and did whatever and came back. It was probably unrealistic to think that suddenly you're going to have no contact whatsoever with this person. And then the whole thing with lesbian batterers - we had a situation where a woman called up and said her female partner was abusing her and then the partner called saying the same thing. And there we were. Our philosophy always had been "we believe women." We cannot be there at every dynamic. So as opposed to historically, women were doubted or blamed or whatever. You're telling me this, we just believe you, and we act as if this is absolutely true and we're advocating for you with what you want. So here we are with two women each saying this, so then what do we do? Yeah.

**GTR:** What did you do?

**TO:** Well. Since we knew we couldn't decide who was the real batterer, we just decided, and I don't know if this has changed now, this was many years ago, we just decided to accept the first woman who called and then if the partner called we'd refer them to the services of DAIP. Because they also did their own women's groups. It was a real hot topic for a while.

**GTR:** I'm sure there are all sorts of dynamics too with staff or men saying, "They're all man-haters" or something like that.

**TO:** Yeah. Oh yeah. Men would say that in the group that all the women at the shelter are lesbians. I always think, "No. I'm the only one. I kind of wish there were a few more, frankly!" [laughs]

**GTR:** Some were married, right?

**TO:** Yeah. Most of them were. Maybe they didn't all stay married but most of them were married at some point.

**GTR:** There was a mix of people right? Over the years?

**TO:** Yeah. Sure.

**GTR:** That were not straight.

**TO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** There's probably so many things, and this isn't analyzing any of the women's dynamics with women coming as clients needing a place to stay but, are these women... I'm sure there's just so much there to figure out and people from lots of different backgrounds, and... wanting... interesting. What do you think was the biggest success of your time there?

**[1:00:13]**

**TO:** Hmmm. You know, I think it would be hard to name one thing. I think just in general, thinking back on that time, changing public attitude about women and women telling their stories. Which was something we did a lot of because, and I really think it's a very compelling strategy, if you're talking to people and trying to convince them that this happens it's easy for people to (negate it) say this or say that. But if a woman is just telling her story - this is what happened to me. It's hard to refute that. "Well, no. It didn't." [laughs] You know? It's really hard to refute that and it opens up the heart in a way that I don't think a lot of other things do. So this was done a lot where women would go to trainings with police, with probation officers, and judges, and tell their stories. It was a very heart opening kind of thing that was done. I think over the years that's been one of the best things besides the growth of services for women. I think the change and the general public's perception about the issue has changed. I think that ripple effect - because you as an individual, woman, experiencing violence, interface with all these different institutions. If everybody's gained some knowledge of it you're not going to keep hitting up with

those same old attitudes with “what did you do to provoke him” and those kinds of things that were just common then.

I think that’s one of the things that we’ve done well with such a private, personal issue. And I always remember my first day at the shelter in St. Cloud. I didn’t know anything. I hadn’t experienced violence, I was a feminist, was a Women’s Studies major, knew that I felt this was wrong, but I didn’t know anything, really. And I went and they said just start talking to women [laughing]. I just started sitting with the women, I don’t know what, “How are you doing?” or something very general and bland. And she just told me this incredible story about what had happened to her. I was just stunned, number one, about what had happened to her. But also that this complete stranger would just tell this to me. It was clear that she knew this was a place that she could say those kinds of things and wouldn’t be doubted, wouldn’t be judged, wouldn’t be criticized. Very early on I remembering wanting to say things like... I knew it was wrong so I didn’t say it but I wanted to say things like, “Well, but if you just get general assistance and get away from him and get your own place and get an education,” you know. All these things.

I could feel myself wanting to say them because I just wanted to fix it. I had this tension in my stomach because I just wanted to say “If you just did this, that, and the other thing,” but I knew that I shouldn’t say that. I knew enough to know that that isn’t helpful in those situations because if they could do all that they just would. But the more I listened to women talk about their stories the more that went away because I knew it in my heart that that was just not possible. That thinking from my privilege of being white, being middle class, having not experienced violence, the kinds of things that were possible for me to do in the world were just not things that they could do necessarily. I remember doing a women’s group once and I used to do this with my friends around New Year’s Day and we’d say if we had no barriers of money or time or anything, what would you want to do with your life, or what adventure would you want to do? So I posed this to the women in my group. And I’m doing it too, I’m thinking, “Oh, I want to go to some exotic country and work with wildlife!” or something. So I was going to be the last one to go, and the women were going around and they were saying things like, “Well. I’d just like to get my GED.” And another woman said, “I would just like to be able to afford a birthday gift for my daughter.” And one woman said, “I’d just like to be able to sit with my back to the door in a room and not be afraid.” And I thought.... that was one of the very first women’s groups I did, and I’m like... These are your parameters. The question was to be as far reaching and just imagine the BEST thing you could imagine and this is what they were coming up with. So it got incorporated into me, somehow, that these are really the realities that women are facing. And to think that they can just do X, Y, and Z that I might be able to do and their lives would be better is so... you know. But at least it got rid of the tension in my stomach [laughs]. Because I no longer believe that it would just be so simple to do that.

**GTR:** But then how do you balance that with saying like “Well, there is this program that maybe you could try this” to try to help a little bit somehow? To help them at least see what is available?

**TO:** And I think that is certainly something that does happen and can happen and should happen. But not with the initial conversations.

**GTR:** Just the listening and being heard.

**TO:** Yeah, and this might be the first or second time they’ve ever told their whole story.

**GTR:** And so that training too, you were just kind of thrown in and learn as you go? I’m sure they have some sort of official trainings now, but...

**TO:** Yeah. It’s much more institutionalized now. I mean, back then it was just like “OK. c’mon in.” There’s so much to be done and so little resources.

**GTR:** Just figure it out as you go.

**TO:** Exactly.

**GTR:** That’s great. What do you think might be in five or ten years? Do you think things are changing? Or how?

**TO:** You know... I kind of don’t. I kind of don’t.

**GTR:** Some people say “we’re going to solve this! we’re going to fix it!” and realizing it’s been forty years.

**TO:** I mean... [sigh]... there’s certainly a lot more available once the woman has experienced violence, but in terms of changing the social dynamics and the power structure between men and women so that they believe they don’t have a right to do that or whatever.. I don’t know.

**GTR:** What about women today? How is it more... the state of?

**TO:** The state of women?

**GTR:** Yeah, the state of women today. Just yourself, seeing this evolve.

**[1:08:33]**

**TO:** Yeah, I mean, you know certainly there has been a lot of improvements. Do you know Beth Bartlett?

**GTR:** I've talked with her a little bit, we didn't know we were both doing this.

**TO:** Yeah. So I've done interviews with her not only about the shelter but about Aurora, which was the lesbian center which is no longer here. But going back to the (beginning) and this does this too, thinking back about what it was like then. When you're kind of going along, along, along, and you're just like "Ugh! So many changes that have to happen." But it was good, in that case, to think back that Aurora couldn't even have "lesbian" in its name because women would be afraid to be associated with it because they were so frightened of it. Now it's legal to be married. That's such a huge change in my lifetime. It's just like... "Yeah. Wow." To kind of put myself back and remember what that was like in the beginning and being on the board and trying to decide the name. We had this whole thing about, "Well, some people feel like we can't have a lesbian name but how are you going to know it's a lesbian center?!" [laughs] It's like, who else has to have that conversation? But also, just some of the additives, certainly with systems people that are involved with women, I think have really changed for women. The changes are just always slower than people would like to see, but it doesn't stop. The changes keep going.

**GTR:** It's changing in a good way, still?

**TO:** Yes, right. In a good way.

**GTR:** Not any backlash or sliding or anything.

**TO:** Yes, so it's not fast enough for people who are experiencing this or that but it does keep moving.. slowly, but it does keep moving. So that's hopeful.

**GTR:** Good. People do forget I think how quickly things change. That's why we want to do an oral history because it really wasn't that long ago. And to really record some of the stories.

**TO:** Did someone tell you about the story of the battered mushrooms?

**GTR:** Oh, yeah! Someone did mention that. Was that your time?

**TO:** No, I've only heard that story. But that's just an example of how people used to think it's funny. And we used to make a lot of jokes about battering. And I know when I went with the group, we wrote a grant to go to Petrozavodsk, Russia and do an exchange regarding domestic violence. Four of us went there for three weeks and then six of them... they came here first. Six

of them came here for three weeks and then some of us went there. So we went around kind of like the “county” of Karelia and met with small women’s groups around the county, or what would be comparable to our “county.” We’d also meet with police and jailers and different people in the systems and this one time - and we had brought a lot of materials that were translated. I remember this one time the state coalition poster campaign where it was a photograph of a woman from about here to here (upper neck region of her body) with many stab wounds in her body and the poster said something like “My boyfriend says he loves me. This isn’t love.” So those were some of the current materials that were being published at the time we had with us.

And we were in this police chief’s office meeting with him and a number of other officials and with a translator who was translating for us. So we were kind of talking and then the police chief said something in Russian and everybody laughed and the translator translated it for us and she said, “Oh the police chief said ‘We have a saying in Russian, ‘if he doesn’t beat her it means he doesn’t love her.’” And none of us laughed. And she said “it’s a joke.” It was a very awkward moment and we said we don’t find it funny. And then we pulled out this poster, but it felt like we could push the limit there because then we’re going to go away and they’re not going to take it out on the local women’s groups, so we felt quite free to push it. That wasn’t that different here a number of years ago... twenty or thirty years ago. People would just make jokes about that “How can you stand to live with...” those kinds of things about men being so controlled when they get married. It’s like all the jokes about women drivers, you know, where women historically are much safer drivers than men. It’s just kind of typically that people would make jokes like that. That really has changed. The laws against sexual harassment, I think there’s a lot of protection in place, not that it doesn’t happen, but at least there are some avenues for recourse. So things have gotten better, and it’s on the backs of women who raise and push these issues and take risks and speak their truth with a lot of courage and make things happen.

**[1:14:42]**

**GTR:** Anything else I didn’t ask that you did want to share?

**TO:** It’s been a very life changing part of my life. I learned a lot. Some of my best friends. Some of the people I just see on a regular basis, some I don’t see but when I do it’s just... you know, those kinds of friendships are lifelong friendships and so I feel really privileged, and lucky, and fortunate to (have)been a part of such a wonderful movement; with such a wonderful group of women. To be able to work at something that I cared about for so many years. So I feel very lucky about that. And the things I learned, you know, I would have never really learned any of that. And the things that made the most impressions on me were, again, women’s stories. It’s nothing that I would have ever learned (elsewhere). There’s probably courses now on domestic violence, I’m sure there are in schools, but I just don’t think I would have gotten the education

that I got without working in the shelter and talking with women. I don't think anything like that could have been taught. Certainly some things can be taught, but it's the stories of women that leave the most impressions. And those are what I carry with me.

**GTR:** Are there any that you want to share that really stand out?

**TO:** Just some images when I start thinking about it. When I first started working at the shelter in St. Cloud, this little baby came in who was three weeks old with dried sperm on her head. I mean, and this other woman talking about her abuser pouring car oil - because when she came in [to the shelter] she had shaved her head - and I remember her saying because she was like captive and he had poured this car oil over her head. And so the only way to get rid of it (was to shave her head... you know.

**GTR:** Also any you remember people did, leave, or just somebody that turned their life around and was able to. Were there any particular ones like those?

**TO:** There were certainly women who (did)- one of the beliefs or philosophies that we had at the shelter, which I always loved, was our attempt to hire formerly battered women to be staff. So we never, and I think this is probably changed, but we never had a degree requirement. So we had some women who had been formerly battered who were hired as staff who just went on and did really amazing things. I think in part working there was a constant support to them, and to be able to give that to other women, especially women who could say, "that happened to me." As a victim, kind of listening to that it's like, "Oh." It's so different than somebody saying, "Oh, I can understand how you feel" but to say "This happened to me." So there were definitely women who had been abused and came through as staff people. And some were not as successful. Women were damaged. And things would come out in the workplace that were difficult. But. One of the things we always wished we could have done more of but never had the resources was to do follow up with women. Any maybe they do it more now, I don't know, but we never had the resources then. Women would come in. Hopefully they'd come to groups for a while, and then we might not hear from them again... And we couldn't even really contact women because it would blow their confidentiality. And there may be others that did more work directly with women that kind of... I just remember seeing women out in the community and we couldn't even acknowledge that we know them - And we couldn't even say hello because they might be with who knows, and then they'll say "oh, how do you know her?" It wasn't easy to keep track of women other than women who somehow stayed connected with the work.

**GTR:** You said the other people telling their stories at that point. Was there ever, or do you yourself have any ideas how to honor that? How to bring that into their community? Is there some way to help that process be even more powerful, or formalize that process of sharing your



story? There's a documentary but it really focused on one particular woman. I'm just wondering as an interview.

**TO:** You know, I think that, and I don't know what they've done lately, but DAIP did an awful lot of - and they used them as training vignettes, scenarios - but they were based on real situations.

**GTR:** Reader's theatre or something.

**TO:** Yeah, but that would be great. What was the one that you know about?

**GTR:** A new documentary called "Private Violence" that HBO did in the last year. They came through Duluth and interviewed some people I guess, but they then ended up focusing on one particular shelter somewhere in the South, I think. And one particular woman's case that was horrific, and watching it go through the court system and watching her go back to school and get a job, so they did do that. I was more expecting a variety of stories showing how many different people this can happen to. I watched it at an oral history conference because it was interviews, but they had a website about the campaign and trying to get the word out.

**TO:** There was a photographer called Donna Ferrato. Have you heard of her? She's out of New York. And she did a book. I don't know how she got some of these photographs. I think it was like "Living with the Enemy" or "Sleeping with the Enemy," and then it seems there was a Hollywood movie called Sleeping with the Enemy but it was Hollywood-ized. But Donna got some amazing photographs in people's apartments, but she came here years ago and did a photographic display. But I think a video of women telling their stories - I haven't ever seen that.

**GTR:** There's still is... it's private. Different grants, different process [laughs]. There was a homeless photography project where they had the people with portraits, but they interviewed them too and so they had a little audio and you could push a button and hear their stories.

**TO:** That would be really cool.

**GTR:** It's just part of that listening. There's this movement now with like Storycorps and people having that understanding power of stories, and listening to anyone. "Listening as an act of love," is the quote of the story core founder.

**TO:** Yeah, that would be a great idea.

**End of interview**



## **Safe Haven/Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator: Tina Olson, b. 1953 (TO)**

**Interviewed by:  
Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR)  
Cedar Story Services**

**Interview conducted May 5, 2015  
MSH conference room**

**GTR:** This is Gina Temple Rhodes, interviewing Tina Olson on May 15th, 2015 for this Women's Coalition oral history project. So thank you so much for meeting with me. Can you start by telling me when you first came to Duluth?

**TO:** Well, I moved to Duluth in 1976. I'm originally from California, from the Bay Area. And I met my partner in Duluth during the Vietnam War. He was a Marine and I was a protestor and he was guarding the naval base. A lot of weapons were shipped to Vietnam and we just met. I was in the USO and me and my girlfriend wanted to join an organization or a club where we could talk the guys into going AWOL because we were avid peace demonstrators. I'm 62 now, we grew up in that era. 60s and 70s era. And so I went to an all-girl Catholic school, a college preparatory school and I think that's where the nuns sort of really... I went to a Catholic school all my life so my activism and social justice was... the seeds were sown with the nuns and the fact that I went to an all-girls school and it was during that era of free love and protesting and stuff.

Well anyways, I met my partner up there and we lived in Oakland which was a very high crime rate. Our house was broken into about 4 or 5 times, I was attacked on my way to work, I was attacked in the park. He was from Duluth, Minnesota so we just decided to come and move here. And so I came in 1976 and it was very difficult for me to get a job. I had banking experience, loan officer experience, and I'd never been in a community that was so white in my life. It was pretty scary. And my partner is white, he's Swedish. He's blonde, blue eyed. So it took me a while to find work. I worked at Jenos flipping pizzas, I worked for Abrasion Dynamics flipping these things for the mining industries and driving a forklift. I went to work for Jenos advertising company.

Between all that, we had started to settle in and my sister came out from Sacramento. Her and her partners came out to live with us. And she got a job at the Women's Coalition. I didn't. And just listening to her, she was an advocate, a women's advocate. And her name is Madeline Tjaden. And she would tell me these stories, and I started volunteering there because I was interested. My mother was a battered woman. My grandmother. We can trace violence all the way back. And the violence in which they grew up with was influenced by poverty and dislocation. On my mother's side, my grandmother is Yaqui Indian. And on my father's side I didn't know my father's mother because she spent time in prison. Her husband died when her children, my father and his sister, were very young. She ran a juke joint, and liquor when it was prohibited was caught and spent her time in prison. Well my father was so ashamed of her when she got out of prison that he wouldn't let us see her, or visit her as kids and we have 5 kids in our family. 4 girls and a boy. And when she died, my father was Italian and he'd always talk about being so pure, and Italian, and my mother was half Indian half Mexican. And the funny thing about it is that we never knew about my grandmother, Katherine Lambert was her name. And it wasn't her birth name, it was her boarding school name. My kids, as they got older, started to trace back their roots and found out that on my father's side she was full blooded North American Indian. But it didn't say what tribe she was from. And that could be anything, from Canada all the way down to Mexico. But she passed never knowing.

And I say this because I think everybody as this DNA. Everybody has these things inside of them that they inherit that move them in a certain way through life. And that's, I think, how I got here. But anyways, I started volunteering at the Women's Coalition because my sister worked there, she was part of the collective, I wasn't a part of the collective. They needed volunteers, and I volunteered in every department, as a child advocate, fundraising, in-house. And then I got to know Jean DeRider. And she had this great idea of on-call advocacy, and that's when I really started working during the 80s when mandatory arrests came to Duluth. An officer would be dispatched to a house and they'd make an arrest, the shelter was on 24/7, they'd dispatch an advocate to go talk to the woman to inform her about the criminal justice process, his bail, if she was safe, getting her to the hospital if she needed, bringing her to the shelter if she shelter.

So I did that for a long time. I probably volunteered for about 10 years without any pay. A little stipend of \$20 every time I'd go out on a call. And then I worked so long in the legal advocacy department, just self-teaching, that I'd go to arraignments, I'd meet women at courts, you know. I just got to know the issue really well. Back-door judges. When I knew somebody was, I thought, was really dangerous because he had multiple arrests. I wasn't afraid to go to back-door judges and ask them to raise their bail. And you could do that back then!

**GTR:** What do you mean "back-door judges"? I haven't heard that before.

**TO:** I'd go and find out what judge was going to be sitting on arraignments, and talk to their secretaries and go and meet them and give them a list of who I was, and talked to them about how dangerous this guy was and how many charges. Because often times, back then, I didn't think they had everything in front of them. And there'd be a lot of batterers who had maybe 5 different arrests and no convictions because they'd use the justice system. And they'd be on their second, third victim. And I got to know Judge Campbell really well, but I didn't just save my back-door for Judge Campbell. There was Judge Frank, and other judges, too. And I just got to know the criminal justice system really, really well.

[7:57]

**GTR:** And that was still as a volunteer?

**TO:** Yep. Still as a volunteer. And then there are countless stories, I don't even know where to begin on some of them, being dispatched at one o'clock in the morning and coming to Central Hillside and trying to find an address in the dark, and having dogs chase me down the alley, and being scared to death only to find out it was just a small dog, it wasn't any pit bull or Rottweiler or anything. Or having the jail make a mistake, or an officer make a mistake, a lack of communication between the Duluth Police Department and the shelter. (They) called one time during the day when there was an arrest and I was on call. They dispatched me to a house. I knocked on the door and went to talk to the woman, and while I was there her husband came in. The boyfriend. And he just tried to intimidate me. We were in the kitchen walking around the table, and I walked up, moving around. You could see how frightened she was. And I got out of there without getting hurt, but, I mean, other situations... When you work in this field, on those early days, even though you had all these protocols and procedures, they weren't really firm and consistent. So you had to be able to - what's the right word - look at your own danger, too, when you were going to do something. And my philosophy was always "If I'm feeling this way, can you imagine how a victim is feeling?" You know. If police can't prevent her from being brutally assaulted? Or arrest him? Or deal with him? Can you imagine what she has to live through?

I always had the utmost respect for battered women because people would like to label them as "co-dependent" and "victims" and they were always the bravest women I ever knew. I mean, the things that they go through. I couldn't understand why they'd keep going back to their partners until much years later when I understood that. But I always had the utmost respect for them. I remember another time, I was volunteering at the Women's Coalition, and my priority area was always the criminal justice, or civil justice. So I was probably about eight months pregnant with my second daughter and I was sitting on the third floor of the courthouse waiting for a woman to meet that I had been talking to. She was getting an order for protection. It was her initial hearing. I was so big at the time I was pregnant, I was sitting on a bench waiting, and this guy comes up. And he must have just thought I was safe to talk to. He sat right by me, and just started striking

up a conversation. He was real friendly at first for the first couple minutes and then he started talking about “those bitches” at the Women’s Coalition, and how his partner - he didn’t say his “partner,” I can’t remember what he said - was being used and all this other stuff. And then he was talking for about ten or fifteen minutes and then he put his hand out to ask me my name and I told him. And then he told me his name. And he happened to be the defendant. So I was sitting there thinking, “ok, I have two choices: either when we go in there, and his partner, that I’m sitting by her and blindside him and he’d be even more furious, or I can just be honest. I mean what was he going to do to me? I was pregnant. So at some point I stopped him and I said, “well we’re not all bitches, and we’re not all dykes.” Because he just used awful words. “I’m an advocate here and I’m meeting your partner here because she’s afraid of you.” He was so flabbergasted, he just clenched his fist and got up and walked away. I knew he wasn’t going to hit me. I didn’t *think* he was because I was pregnant.

And then I went up meeting her and seeing her and we went into court, and she got her order for protection and he was furious. I thought, “Geez if I had been his partner, the way he clenched his fist, he could have clocked her and took off.” So stories like that, I mean, there were many of them. And it just kept me going.

[12:38]

**GTR:** Kept you going that you felt like you could see that you were doing good? Or that you were helping?

**TO:** No, it wasn’t so much helping, it just was that I was passionate about it. Advocating for women and then learning so much about the criminal justice system and the way these institutions are set up, and the way they favor batterers and support that kind of behavior, the mentality, that they have. I had opportunities that most people don’t have like.. and they’re not all good, but it was that they were teachable moments. Like when you’re in the courtroom for the next case to come by, and having the judge sitting there, and after a while the bailiffs, and the judges, and the public defenders knew who I was. And waiting for the next one to come in, and having the public defender there. And then I remember this one thing - I would also go when women were arrested and go visit them in jail. And women, I’ve found through my experience, when they hit somebody, they would admit it right away and be honest, not knowing the unintended consequences and the impact of what happened to them. If they would plead. They’d lose their housing, the batterers would use that against them. They could lose their kids. They’d lose their jobs. But nobody would explain that to them. So I wanted to go to the jail and talk to women just to tell them even though I wasn’t an attorney, but what they could expect and talk to them and tell them to plead not-guilty, just tell them what my experience was. Because I saw women get a raw deal, but in one particular case I was waiting for the next woman to come in and she comes in and, at this point, I’m just monitoring arraignments, I’m not with anybody and

I'm writing down stuff. And they set a date for a pre-trial and she leaves. And then the guys are out joking in front of the judge there. And the public defender says, "if she were my girlfriend I sure might hit her too." Said that right in the courtroom. There was a recess; the court clerk didn't take it down. The judge didn't even say anything. And it's his courtroom! You know. And I thought to myself, "Jesus Christ, these guys, these white guys, are just horrible, horrific." I mean stories like that. That just seem to stay in your head.

I got to be really close friends with the city attorney, Mary Asmus, who was prosecuting a lot of cases. I'd get her information all the time so that she would have it. I'd find victims for her if I knew where they were I'd talk to her. She had this - I don't know what you'd call it - he worked in her office, but he'd go through subpoenas. His name was Casper. And I got to know him really well. And in one particular case of this guy who had beat up his partner, I don't know many times. He was arrested like five times, never one conviction because he'd always talk her into not going to pre-trial and they'd dismiss her. That was a common thing they'd do for a while. One in particular case - I had worked with her twice before - I went to pre-trials and I went downstairs to get me a coffee and I saw her down there. And then I went upstairs and they were calling names and then I saw her batterer. And Mary Asmus came out and said "We're going to lose this one again because she didn't show up." And I said, "No, she's downstairs in the coffee shop." And she said, "Really?" And I said, "Yeah." So she called Casper, and he went over and got a subpoena, got it signed by a judge, went down and they brought her up. Escorted her up. And she was furious with me. And I felt, they went into pre-trial, and this time he knew that he didn't have a way out. And he plead. She left the courtroom, went, I don't know where he went, I can't remember. But then Mary Asmus was really happy, but I felt a sense of emptiness. And betrayal. To her.

[17:16]

**GTR:** To her?

**TO:** To the battered woman. Because I sold her out. That's how I felt. Even though he got convicted, my role as an advocate was to support her decision, to keep her confidentiality, not to out her like that. And that stayed in my head and my heart for many years. I saw her like five years later, and talked to her on the street. I said, "Are you still mad at me?" She said, "I was made at you for a long time. But he's not in my life anymore." And even though he was convicted, it wasn't my role to work for the city attorney. My role was to advocate and raise her voice. I tell that story when I'm training from time to time to tell advocate that we have to be really careful that you're first principle, value, or ethic is first do no harm. Because she could have been killed that night. Lots of stuff could have happened to her.

**GTR:** Because he would be...

**TO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Yeah, but you were motivated to try to get him...

**TO:** Yeah

**GTR:** ..A sentence

**TO:** Yeah, but I just felt like I betrayed her. And Mary Asmus uses that in her training. She would involve me, I was really good at what I did back in that day in the 80s and early 90s. Advocates were training with the city attorney, Mary Asmus trained law enforcement, and I'd go and train with Mary Asmus.

**GTR:** What is Casper's last name?

**TO:** Casper, he's retired. I think his last name was Weinberger, I'm not sure. But Mary Asmus, she's recovering from a fall. She's on London Road and... I don't know what they call it... home. She's sort of...

**GTR:** (Bayshore Rehabilitation)...down there.

**TO:** Yeah, I think she's down there. I just heard about it a week ago. I thought I'd go see her.

**GTR:** That would be an interesting perspective. So in that time, in the 80s early 90s?

**TO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Was DAIP started?

**TO:** Yeah, DAIP started too. Because I got to know Ellen Pence. (She was the kind of director of DAIP). They were making some videos, teaching videos, and she wanted me to be in a video and just act out my role as an advocate. So I've worked for probably about ten years for the Women's Coalition. And then they got funding for their legal advocacy program, and I applied for a position because I had all this experience. And the collective group wouldn't let me apply for the position.

**GTR:** They wouldn't let you?

**[20:10]**

**TO:** Nope. Even though I had been filling out all these years, legal advocacy paperwork. Because they had a policy that relatives couldn't supervise relatives. My sister worked there, she was part of the collective. And I thought that was a bunch of bullshit. Here we are, working tirelessly and passionate to raise women's voices, and we understand the cycle of violence and the generations of violence and sisterhood, yet they created this policy that prohibited me. So my work was coming to an end because they had gotten funding to hire people. And so Jean DeRider gave me a big going-away party at her place by the lake, or somewhere. And everybody came there. It was a big barbeque outside and everybody from the collective and the other staff there. I was burning about this. And Jean DeRider said.. well not just Jean, but other people said, "Well, Tina, do you want to say anything?" and I said, "Yeah, I do." I said, "This is a bunch of bullshit. I've worked here for all these years, and for you to have a policy like that is ridiculous. It's insane. I'm going to miss the women, but I'm not going to miss you all." And I had *years* working with them. Well, Michelle LeBeau, who works here, was one of the board members and had heard about it, and got an emergency board meeting together and, I don't know what the right term was, but they changed the policy and said it was a ridiculous policy. And Jean DeRider called me up and said I could apply now if I wanted to. And I said, "No, I don't want to. It's too hard for me to come back and work with advocates and people who I thought one thing, and really were doing something else. I can't do it."

So for a couple of weeks I just sat at home. In between this time I had raised four kids, in and out, selling real estate, working on jobs. My partner was always supportive. I had always been the type of person that I don't go out to lunch, I'm not a shopping person, party person. I have to actively be doing something. I wasn't the best mom, I wasn't a mom who encouraged her daughter to go to cheerleading and be prom queen, which I regret sometimes because they wanted to do that and I should have supported that. So I was at home and Ellen Pence had known me from my work and called me up one day and said could I come into her office and meet her at the Damiano enter. I met her and she said, "We have this fifteen hour a week position monitoring the police department, police reports. I know you're not going to work for the Women's Coalition, will you come work for us?" And I said, "I'll think about it." So I went home and my partner said, "You know, even if it's fifteen hours a week, you gotta get out of the house and this is what you love to do." I kept arguing and I said, "Well, I'll try it out." So I ended up trying it out working for DAIP. One thing led to another. I started monitoring the police department, I started again getting involved with Mary Asmus and training law enforcement. I went through one, two, three, four Chiefs of Police.

**GTR:** Which was the first one?

[24:06]



**TO:** Militich He was that Fedo group of West End boys. And then there was Scott Lyons, he was another one. Gordon Ramsey, I remember Gordon Ramsey from when he was a beat cop. When he got Chief of Police I went in there to talk to him and congratulate him. I said “You’re just a patrol officer!” You know, he’s so young looking.

**GTR:** He is pretty young.

**TO:** Yeah. And I managed to, when I was monitoring the police department, one of the things that I found out very shortly was because of the color of my skin and who I am. I’d go, there was an arrangement that DAIP had with the DPD to go pick up police reports. So I’d go to the city hall to pick up police reports in the back there. And these cops would just make me wait, they’d be so rude to me. They’d make me wait, and I’d just wait. And then after a while I got really tired of that, and I figured out who has power. And this is the thing about this work - you’re always thinking far enough in advance. Who has the authority and power to make those cops behave?

So I became friends with Militich and Bob Larson, and said one day, I asked to see him and meet him, and I can’t remember which Chief of Police it is, but I said, “You know, every time I come to get police reports your officers are rude. And they make me wait there like I’m nobody. How can we stop that?” And he said, “Well I didn’t even know that was happening.” I said, “Yeah.” So he must have done something because they never made me wait again. And every time I needed to get to a detective or somebody in a higher rank, I had access to do it. And that’s the thing about this work, is that everybody comes to their work with a certain belief system and mentality, and some of those cops were sexist and racist.

I remember one in particular time, Bob Larson was the Deputy Chief, and he was in a police training, and Mary and I were training him when she was up there I’d be sitting down with these cops there. And then I’d get up there and train them. We took a break, and I remember Bob Larson just being an asshole and sarcastic and prodding me. And saying awful, sexist things. And I’d had enough, and I was outside smoking and I said, “You’re an asshole.” And I made some comment about him being “Were you born an asshole or did it take you a long time to become one?” And he just thought that was hilarious. Which made me feel even worse that he just minimized me. Because that’s what batterers do to their partners, they minimize their behavior. And he thought it was funny. Well it got back to Ellen Pence that I called the Deputy Chief an asshole. And she took me into a room, and Scott Lyons... it wasn’t even Scott Lyons, it was somebody else. I can’t remember who the Chief of Police was... in the room, and he said “Did you do this?” and I said “Yeah.” He said, “Well, you have to apologize to Bob Larson.” And I said “I’m not apologizing.” And then whoever it was, whether it was Scott Lyons or Militich or Radulavich said “You know, he is an asshole.” And I said, “I’ll never do it again, but I’m not apologizing to him.”

So then he left and after a while there was an opportunity at DAIP to work in the National Training Project which was a full-time position instead of monitoring. So I ended up working there for a while, learning the ropes around there. No that wasn't it. Before that when I was doing a court watch, we were right across the street from the CAIR Center, and Norma Wallgren was an Indian advocate. All this time that I had been volunteering, I got to know a lot of Indian women because I thought they were treated differently when they'd come into the Women's Coalition. And because I'm Native, and I'm Mexican, I'd always gravitate towards them. I'd hold their babies, I'd give them rides. I got ripped off a couple times, which I understood because they were poor and people do things when they're poor. But Ellen had introduced me to Norma and I knew her from the community and she was an advocate for Fond du Lac. They had this money, this pot of money, it was a very small amount like \$15,000 that they got left to spend from the Department of Minnesota Crime Victims but that wasn't called that back then. And the money was earmarked to get Indian women to come to group. And Norma was having a hard time...

**GTR:** The group at the shelter?

**[29:38]**

**TO:** Not at the shelter, at the CAIR Center. Because what started to happen was that more Native women started to develop their own little clusters of support for Native women instead of just the Women's Coalition. And they couldn't figure out how to get women in group and they asked me what I would do. And because of my experience at the Women's Coalition legal advocacy, and my experience working with the police department, I told Ellen, "You need to have a gathering and bring people together. Model the DAIP, the intervention program, model it out in Cloquet." Because Cloquet, at that time, was having an incredible amount of brutal assaults on women. One woman was shot by a shotgun in her face by her partner. I remember going out to visit her in the hospital and half her face was missing. And her partner was arrested. And she still would not give him up. And I understood why. It wasn't just because she didn't care about her face being shot off, she wouldn't give him up to white institutions that were going to treat him. And you find that a lot with Indian women. In closed environments we make up the smallest percentage of the population, but our numbers are the highest that are incarcerated. And the highest on every socio-economic background. There are eleven year olds on Indian reservations committing suicide. Why would an eleven year old commit suicide? You know what I mean?

So anyways, so what I did was I worked with Norma and I said, "Let's get people of authority to make change in Cloquet, in St. Louis County, and in Duluth. Let's get the chairman, Sonny Peacock, of the Fond du Lac reservation and Carleton county prosecutor, and St. Louis county prosecutor, and St. Louis county sheriff. Let's get people invited to a dinner and talk to them and

create some case scenarios - and retract, don't put the names in there - but real scenarios. So by invitation only, fifty people. I did a budget, I learned how to do that in the training project. I said, "Let's invite fifty people by invitation only, serve them a nice dinner at the Chinese Lantern (when it used to be right there on first [street]) and have this show. Have Sonny Peacock come ,because he's a leader, and talk about the lack of having a consistent protocol assisting women. So we did. We sent out these notices, other people wanted to come, we didn't have enough. We couldn't. People were upset that they weren't invited. And we had it and that night, it went so well, that that night, people were mingling afterwards and said, "We want to create something. We want to engage the Indian community, we just don't know how to engage the Indian community." So that's when Mending the Sacred Hoop was first started. We took that money that belonged to people at CAIR and Norma, and created this interest. Shortly after that I wrote a grant to a private foundation to keep it going. And Ellen was such an advocate and supporter, just.. marginalized group that she sort of gave me the go-ahead to do that.

**GTR:** What foundation was that?

**TO:** It was the Blandin Foundation.

**GTR:** So when you say "CAIR Center"...

**TO:** The Center for American Indian Resources, on Fourth street. It's an urban office at Fond du Lac enrollees. Support.

[34:42]

**GTR:** So it kind of was an offshoot, I read your website a little bit. But that offshoot from DAIP and then having your own. Because I've heard this before, so when you say that you were feeling that Native women were being treated different...

**TO:** At the Women's Coalition they had a curfew for women. And Native women always would also be strict to it, but white women wouldn't. Native women would be kicked out. This is what I saw from my eyes, and my perspective. And there's going to be people who argue with you. There are different values there. They'd have retreats at the Women's Coalition where the collective would get together and they'd go out at a cabin and people would get butt naked and I remember one time there were jumping in the sauna and stuff. And I can't remember who it was, but they said to me "Why don't you jump in the sauna? Why don't you get naked, you don't have to be ashamed of your body." I said, "I'm not ashamed of my body. I'm just not like you. That's not my values."

And it's things like that. They're miniscule to other people but it's who I am as a... so things like that. To me, Indian women are held to a higher standard of rules than non-Indian people. Indian women, any woman, who came into the shelter had chores to do. Their parenting... Indian women let their kids run around and staff... say you can't let your kids run around here. Well, these kids are in a chaotic place and they run around at home. Indian women would wrap their babies really tight in a hammock and have it in their room. And staff would think that that was not cool to do. So it's things like that that would happen. The more argumentative, the more angry a Native woman was, the more she wouldn't be accepted and found reason to leave there. And if you understand anything about battered women, especially Indian women, their victimization isn't a one-time event. It's multiple events. Multiple years, and multiple generations. And that brutality and that violence just layers one on top of the other. I'd be angry, too. In fact, I'd be enraged, what I've seen happen to Indian women. And I'd be shooting people. I mean, I shouldn't say that but... just knowing. You can't be afraid of women's anger. They're not threatening you. They're yelling and distracted. It's not because they're not following rules. It's because sometimes they zone out because that's what they've had to do to survive the trauma of violence and sexual assault. Sometimes they drink to excess [wavering voice] because they've been raped by a brother or a stepfather or neighbor, a boyfriend, a husband. And they don't find any justice, or they go and they try to seek justice only to be re-victimized. And so I saw a whole different way of advocating. And it's not like I wouldn't advocate for white women, I don't care who you are. But my sisters [emotional] are the core work that I do because I understand where they're coming from. When I'm advocating for women I see my grandmother, my mother, my aunts. And my sister. You know.

**GTR:** How is the advocacy different then?

**TO:** What do you mean?

**GTR:** Well you say you advocate in a different way, are you just having that all in mind? Or is there a certain way?

**[37:50]**

**TO:** No, I don't think we're as judgmental with women. I'm not going to say all Native women because I know some other women who are Native in this community who are advocating who have picked up the same sort of institutional approach, and do case management with women, and if they don't fit into this box... dump her. In this community they do a lot of dumping of too many issues because it takes too many resources. It takes too much risk out there. Like, there was a time at DAIP, even, where we could tell you, just by looking at their database, what officers were being biased when they'd respond to an Indian family. And nothing would be done for a little while because, in my opinion and I have challenged them, they would collude with cops.

They didn't want to interfere with that relationship. And that coordination, it was building good help.

**GTR:** DAIP would collude with cops?

**TO:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Ok.

**TO:** The leadership has changed. Now this is all coming from my being there. My experience, my eyes, my seeing. But it's changed. And that's another thing about this work. The funding, the money changes how you do this work. You become bigger than a non-profit program, a small grassroots program. You become an institution that's so dependent on funding and having enough money and enough funding, that the higher you get in management and authority, the more you want to keep that status, too. That's what I think.

**GTR:** And follow certain rules? Or, is that a problem?

**TO:** Policies, and rules, and procedures, or looking the other way. You know. Ellen Pence left and founded her own company, Praxis, because the work had changed so much at DAIP. Anyways, I ended up doing a number of things. Writing grants, creating a Native specific program. Ellen said, "You can do that. But what you have to do is earn your own funding." And so I wrote my own grants. When the Violence Against Women Act was passed in 1994 people like Karen Artichoker, Elizabeth LaPrairie. She was one of the founding mothers of Mending the Sacred Hoop. When I put this thing together, then I got this private grant, we were able to hire two part-time Native women to run that. And I was still involved on a volunteer basis because I worked at DAIP. So my salary was funded but my heart was forming this other offshoot organization. So when the Violence Against Women Act was passed in 1994, Tillie Blackbear was the Indian mother of the Native Battered Women's movement.

**GTR:** She's local?

**TO:** Yeah, she's from Rosebud (Reservation in South Dakota). She was doing this work in the 70s, long before any money. A lot of people were doing this work when there was no money. But a number - about 5 - women went to Washington and petitioned the newly formed Violence Against Women office, told them that the United States had a special responsibility to Indian tribes and that some of this funding that congress passed when they passed VAWA should be set aside for tribes. And they did. Mending the Sacred Hoop was the first tribal TA (Technical Assistance) provider. In 1995 they gave us the first TA, and I think there was like fourteen tribes that were funded. We were funded to provide TA to the fourteen tribes - Technical Assistance

and training - help them to develop programs. And Elizabeth LaPrarie and Eileen Hudon and some other women were hired and the office was down in Minneapolis. I'm still working for Ellen at NTP and...

**GTR:** NTP?

**TO:** National Training Project was part of DAIP. But it was called NTP. I was still involved in ensuring that the staff at DAIP, in any work they did, would ensure that Native people - women, batterers, and programs had it covered because the TA was funded for national work, I wanted to make sure. So I also petitioned Minnesota Crime Victims. I wrote a grant to fund an Indian advocate, Native women's advocate at DAIP. Which still exists today, but they're not funding it because two years ago Alexis, who was one of our staff and she left that position and came to work for us and they never got anybody to replace her role as a Native Women's Advocate. It was a position that was funded in probably 1999, and has been funded every since. And that's a whole thing about making sure those relationships that people have the power to change things for Native people, are always there. And Aida Tosca, who works for OJP...

[44:00]

**GTR:** OJP?

**TO:** Office of Justice Programs at Minnesota Crime Victims down in The Cities. She always supports our work now and comes up to all of our trainings and knows we are a TA provider is. We've been funded every since 1995, and went from fourteen tribes, and I think the top is 172 tribes. In 2007, because we were doing all of our own work anyway, I applied to - well we had heard that the funding at the federal level, DOJ, the money that was going to be set aside for tribal TA and tribal tribes was going to have these new rules and in order to be eligible for the money, Mending the Sacred Hoop couldn't be *under* DAIP, they had to form their own non-profit. So we wrote, formed our own non-profit, got IRS employee number 2007 filed with the state of Minnesota. Dr. Ellen Pence and DAIP (the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs) agreed to give us our name back, Mending the Sacred Hoop, (the name had been associated with one of several programs under the DAIP)

**GTR:** When was that?

**TO:** That was in 2007.

**GTR:** This could be another project...

**TO:** It's just a whole different part.

**GTR:** No, it's important and it could be a separate project if you ever wanted to explore this in more depth, too. Because I'm out of my depth at the moment, as far as keeping track of all the different names and things, it's good though! It's fine. We could do it justice by doing it by itself and talk to other people that are involved.

**TO:** There's lots of people besides myself. I've lost a lot of, in the last two years, I've lost like five people. Including Ellen and her mom, and Elizabeth LaPrairie, and Betty Sky, and Tillie Blackbear. So we've lost a lot of people in this work. But the point of this is to tell you from where I started as a volunteer to where I am today. Even though I don't agree, I cut my teeth on this work at the Women's Coalition. I had a gift that was given to me, and even if I didn't agree with some of them, I still have friends. Like Jean DeRider and Shirley Oberg and Sheryl Bomen. I still have a relationship with them that's respectful. It was just time for me to do something else if I had that kind of passion. Do you know what I mean?

**GTR:** Right. And did you feel like perhaps, we didn't talk about the training or about how people kind of, how it was structured there. You had all this knowledge or experience or seeing these things, so it was all in you. Did you feel like it was something somehow communicated to new staff, or was there something in place in the group?

**TO:** No, they never trained - not at the Women's Coalition - they never gave you a training and stuff. But my training came from attending an all-girl high school, being a social activist, protesting the Vietnam War, going to Berkeley, listening to music at People's Park. I listened to the Doobie Brothers and The Eagles when they weren't even selling records! So all those eras and experiences molded me to what I am. So anything that I read after, I went after full force. But this whole perspective and theory mentality, that it was possible to change - because it was! I grew up... I'm so lucky to have grown up in that era where it was the public's perception of right and wrong that stopped the Vietnam War. All those pictures on TV and in the media, you don't see that today. And it wasn't ever called a war, it was a "conflict". But growing up in that time and going up to Haight-Ashbury, and I mean... I used to wear bell-bottoms and tie-dyed shirts and white gurus, you know. All that stuff. All that stuff I brought with me. All that experience, that perspective, that theory to a community that was scary because it was so white. And it could have changed me. It could have made me isolated.

**GTR:** And not just white, but more traditional in some ways.

**TO:** Conservative, middle class, you know. Growing up in the inner city and growing up poor always had this mentality, this theory in my head, that middle class people had it made. I grew up on Donna Reed and Leave it to Beaver. Then I married my partner, and they're very conservative Christians. I'm the only one in their family that married outside their class, their

culture, their religion, their race. All the women married either preachers or pastors. All the men went into that field. And my partner converted to Judaism twenty-two years ago. So my whole life path, for whatever reason, has been filled with a lot of things that are gifts and blessings and learning opportunities. My daughter are the same way. They're all in the helping fields... I'm not college educated, they're college educated. That's a huge feat for a working class family. And I think they are because they were brought up - they were putting training manuals together at the Damiano when they were nine and ten, for (a conference called; "Social Change in the 90's") that I was organizing for Ellen Pence at the DAIP, the keynote speaker was) Paulo Freire, (a Brazilian Educator who used a theory of social change to reach children in poor communities to read, his methods focused on community organizing), and they (my daughters) couldn't even spell his name. They went to The Cities to go with me and they met him and shook his hand and they didn't even know who he was. Being around this stuff, it's like immersion in a particular theme or topic, like immersion in language or something. When you can't speak English and you're just surrounded by Spanish or another dialect or something, and everything is labeled and people are talking like that, the food, the clothing, the smells, and stuff like that. You pick that up. Well, I think my children picked that up in the same way. But it came from, to me, my hero, and my mentor, was my sister Madeline who was one of the collective members.

**[50:45]**

**GTR:** And where is she?

**TO:** She's retired now. There's a history there. She was run out of the Women's Coalition for her behavior or some kind of thing.

**GTR:** Why did she come here?

**TO:** She was living in Sacramento, California and she got into a lot of trouble from her buddies. She's a lesbian woman and her girlfriends were cooking on a ranch and just were fighting all the time. She worked in Sacramento back in probably the late 70s which was much more of a cattle town, Bakersfield, and all that area. They wanted some place new so her and her two girlfriends who were both lovers of hers moved to Duluth, Minnesota and god, they caused me and my partner a lot of trouble.

**GTR:** Because you were here?

**TO:** Well, we were here and they competed for her affection. She was the first battered woman I ever advocated for - my sister, Madeline. She was fifteen when she got pregnant and back in the 60s they made you marry your partner. And her husband took her to Oregon and abused her for many years. She'd come to Oakland from time to time to run away and I'd hide her, I'd give her



money. I was in high school, so she was really the first woman, battered woman, that I ever advocated for.

**GTR:** It's always fascinating to know why certain movements started. I didn't think of Duluth as the most progressive place back in those days. So if you were coming from a totally different state, a totally different place with all these other experiences, that's really interesting.

**TO:** I don't know what it is about Duluth. I happen to think it's the water. The body of water. My favorite places to go to, like when I'm traveling and I go to Flagstaff, or Mexico, or Colorado, I can feel the mountains even in the dark. I can feel this big body of nature. It's got a power. When you go to South Dakota in the Badlands, I can feel the sacredness. And with the lake. I think it has something to do with it. I'm not mystic, or spiritual or anything it's just how I feel. I think it has something to do with it. The other sort of heroine for me is Ellen Pence. She gave me an opportunity. I was a nobody in the battered women's movement, no education coming from volunteering at the Women's Coalition.

**GTR:** That's so much experience. It sounds like that happened to a lot of other women. You can't go to school for these sort of things. You have to learn them on the job, and then it's just an opportunity to expand your involvement.

**TO:** Yeah and there's certain women that reinforce that with you. That, for some reason, you're drawn to. That you learn from. Ellen was such a brain. Such an advocate. And so smart and stuff. When she created Praxis (International; Ellen's new company) our relationship started to change a little bit because she started to tell me to do something, and I'd say, "Well, no I'm not doing it that way and this is why -" And she'd get mad at me. There was a couple years where we didn't talk because I called her racist. And she said, "I do all these things for all you people and you still think I'm a racist!" She said, "I share the same experience with you because I'm a lesbian woman." and I said, "Oh no, you don't. Because if we're both standing in front of the bank, you're white and I'm not. You're going to be treated differently." And so she got really offended by that and yelled at me. We had a big fight. We didn't talk for almost a year. And then one day we just sort of ... "I miss you" "I miss you too". But she was that kind of a friend, where you could be honest with. And your relationship could be passionate as well as loving. And I could never replace somebody like that in my life [wavering voice]. Her mom, Anne Marshall also taught me, the gifts she gave me.

**GTR:** Is her mom in town?

**TO:** Her mom died about six months after Ellen. Her mom had cancer, too. And she just wasn't going to go through chemo. She wanted to stay alive for her daughter, and then after her daughter died she died shortly after that. She couldn't hold on anymore. And she was even a

powerful woman. She was one of those war brides. She met her husband, Ellen's dad, over in England in World War II. And came here.

[56:02]

**GTR:** It would have been interesting to interview her. There are people that, I've talked with Coral McDonnell and others, who have said "We should do the DAIP story and talk more about it." Unfortunately, Ellen's gone, but people's memories of her and what she was doing are still here. Is there anything for the future that you feel like is really - this is such a different history project for me because obviously it's not something that happened thirty years ago and it's all done. This is so ongoing and very active, so do you have any... what do you see happening five or ten years from now?

**TO:** This is what's happened so far. There's been three, four reauthorizations of the Violence Against Women Act and each authorization Native advocates pushed and organized. We're still in a sort of -work in progress stage, I believe - in a grassroots mentality. We fight hard. The recent passage in 2013 of the Violence Against Women Act, the conservative right did not want to pass it with Title IX intact. And Title IX is a piece of the Act that is entitled safety for Indian women. Never before in the history of the United States has there been a piece of legislature that has said safety for Native women. And this recent passage in 2013 finally allows tribes to prosecute non-Native offenders for beating up Native women. And most people don't know, prior to this passage, you could beat up, if you're a white guy living on a reservation, beat up an Indian woman and the tribe cannot prosecute you. They could only prosecute you with a very minimal fine, but you can break her jaw. It's a U.S. Attorney that has jurisdiction. There's a federal law that (limits tribal nations protecting their people, members of the tribe, it's called the Major Crimes Act; the impact that manifests itself in saying that) says Indian women aren't valued as much. Go look up the history of Title IX.

**GTR:** I like the "safety" term. It's one of these things associated with violence against women, it sounds like you're advocating for violence. The safety of it, that seems...

**TO:** But it doesn't cover Alaskan women. They tried to have a fix for it now. Because the villages in Alaska aren't defined as "Indian country." When Alaska villages and their sovereignty was recognized they were organized differently. They were recognized as corporations. Not as Indian tribes. A whole long story, it's too long (to cover in this interview, however, people need to know the different challenges and barriers for Tribal Nations)

**GTR:** Have you ever heard of epigenetics?

**TO:** What?

**GTR:** There's this whole thing called epigenetics, which is over, you say your DNA, whatever DNA that makes our skin color or whatever, but they're also saying - I have a biology degree from twenty years ago and I didn't learn about this in school - but they say that experiences and things that happen to your grandparents and parents, it can have an effect on how your genes are expressed. It's not just about the genes, it's about experiences.

**TO:** They called it something else.

**GTR:** Yeah, it's just interesting. Scientists are even figuring this out now. What do you do about that? If there is such a history of trauma.

[1:00:01]

**TO:** I think that it has to pass through generations and be addressed differently and you have to let it pass. Because I do every year a keynote and workshop for elder abuse in Minnesota, and I couldn't do it this year. I asked somebody else to do it. I train and provide education on historical trauma. And one piece of it is the *memory* of historical trauma. Elders. Who in communities, die never acknowledging the memory of trauma, they're more depressed. Their bones ache. Some people would call them "mean," but they're not mean. They're sad. They didn't have the same options that we do today. I just wrote a small grant months ago for the National Victims Crimes Rights Week. We got this really small grant, so we have this other group called the Native Sisters Society. It's a group of about eight Native women who work for different programs in Duluth and we meet like once a month (in an effort to build leadership and share with each other knowledge and sisterhood.) Anyway, I wrote the grant to get - part of this work is about leadership. When I retire, I want other women to take up where I left. I want them to have the same sort of passion and advocacy. We were awarded the grant- and so not last week, but the week before there were three events that we sponsored through the funds we were awarded through the grant. One of them - and it had to be on all victims of crime, we had this \$3,000 supplement - was a light brigade over by M & H, "Native Lives Matter." And the second one was a performance here at Trepanier (Hall) called "The Faces of Violence." We had some keynote speakers and then we had residents here at Gimaajji (women) read stories, a real live script, of stories. And then the third was a bonfire out on Lake Superior to honor our ancestors who were victims of crime. We light a fire and threw some tobacco on it and had people come sit around the fire, remembering people, especially our ancestors who were/are victims of crime.

Somebody came from the newspaper and was asking silly questions, he knew he was asking silly questions, he was really nice, what the tobacco symbolized and where I was from and stuff. But I remember when I threw my tobacco in, it was really really quiet. And I everybody there was throwing tobacco in for our ancestors who were victims of crime which is literally millions of

them. For the history of this thing, violence committed against Native people, the whole era of colonization And so it felt good to be by the lake and have this fire. To have people and gather. And it was cold out. And to honor them. And if there was anything, and I hope and wish for, is that my grand daughters or grandchildren will see different sanctions against non-Natives. Title IX and the reauthorization in 2013 that included the special prosecution jurisdiction of domestic violence, it excludes sexual assault. And there's certain criteria: you have to be married, or have a job, live on the reservation, the tribe has to provide you a public defender, all these due processes protections have to be in place for a tribe to be authorized to prosecute domestic violence cases by non-Natives against Native women. Not just tribal court, your judges and attorneys have to be law trained. (Many tribes in this country do not have the resources to prosecute; tribal court, tribal court judges, prosecutors, probation officers; many are poor tribes. So a common issue is when Congress passes legislation intended to help tribes, there is a huge gap by Congress in authorizing funds to ensure that the legislation is successful, creating resources to follow through.) And we have over 566 fully recognized tribes in this country. Some of them a lot of resources, some of them very few resources. So my hope is that my daughters or people that I know will keep working in the same way so that tribes can prosecute and have full sovereignty. Not be a dependent nation, but have full sovereignty. Which means they control and they have the authority and the jurisdiction over their land, their people, their members. Because if you, walking away from here, if you go find out more information, our women have the highest rate of sexual violence. 3.5, I think that's just from what's recorded. It's higher than that.

**[1:04:34]**

**GTR:** Will the prosecution be different for people even, like in Duluth?

**TO:** No.

**GTR:** Just on reservations?

**TO:** No, we've done our studies in Duluth about Native women who've reported sexual assault. In approximately thirty to fifty reports, in two years we did this in 2007 to 2009, the safety audit. And out of, just tons of women in all that time there was only one prosecution of a sexual assault. Even women who had pretty good evidence (and were willing to cooperate with law enforcement and prosecution, had their cases slip into a "black hole" of sorts.)

**GTR:** So, if things in the past were funded, would it change? Things that are happening in Duluth, or just that, what would that larger power have on a reservation?

**TO:** I think there's two things we're talking about, but they all blend to the same. It's societal bias, and society's version or image of Native people. They're either all up to the right,

Pocahontas princesses or drunken Indian women. Many of our women are articulate professional, old, young, women. But a great part of society doesn't see that. I think the more that we're visible the more that we open programs, we do good work, we continue to raise voices, it'll change. But we have to be mindful that we're always taking a reflection and looking at ourselves in the mirror. Are we still doing what we said we (were going to do when we began this work)? Or have we become part of the problem and assimilated into an institution? Because it's not just about Indian women in thinking about the totality of the work and movement. That's my passion. This country, this community is so misogynist, so sexist when it comes to women. You don't have to be a Native woman or Black woman or Hispanic, you just have to be a fucking woman.

**GTR:** Have things gotten better though? I mean, since you, around...

**TO:** I've seen it's gotten better.

**GTR:** So it is better, but it's not...

**TO:** But no, this country is founded on such English archaic law. I've seen it. Changing the VAWA act, I can say it's better, but I don't want to get to that place where I'm apathetic and think we've done enough.

**GTR:** Women today, there are all these debates, "Are you a feminist or not?" "No, I'm not a feminist, no, no." It's like, yes you are

**[1:07:13]**

**TO:** Well, I thought that for a long time. And Jean DeRider said Ellen said that, and I said, "Don't call me a feminist," and they'd say, "Well you are." And I'd say "Don't put a label on me. Because when you put a label on me I have to become that. I'm a strong Indian woman. I'd rather... Scott Lyons wouldn't diss me and say "This is a strong Indian woman, see?" And Scott would do stupid... he would come and see me and he'd come down to the office, and he'd put my head underneath his shoulder and rub my head. "Hey, Tina!" And I'd have to say "Scott, stop doing that in trainings and in public because it makes me feel like I'm a child!" And he'd say things like "I do it because I like you so much." "If you like me so much, you'd respect me." And he wouldn't do it again. But this is what I'm talking about. How good relationships - he now works, he's a professor out at Fond du Lac. And he hasn't been the Chief of Police for a long time, probably ten years or maybe more.

And about three or four years after he left to work there, one of our staff was doing this training for law enforcement. The only way to get law enforcement to attend a training is if you feed

them. We didn't have any money in the budget for feeding them. So I called Scott up and said, "Do you know what I can do about this?" And he said, "How much do you need for the food, Tina?" And I said, "About \$372." He said, "Um. Come pick up a check." He wrote a check for \$372! I hadn't seen him in years! But those relationships are based on, I don't want to say truth... transparency. Sincerity. Do you know what I mean? And I think when you do this work for this long and you're known in the community you can walk in those stores where you have institutions and criminal justice personnel, and in those communities where you have survivors. And you're respected by both. Even though we have different philosophies and approaches and all those. And that's what I want to see more. Transparency.

I want to see more women, strong women whether you're a feminist or not, speaking up. I don't want somebody else speaking for me. I can speak for myself. You know. I want to see men support women. Men say no to pornography. Men protect women. Men stand up for women. Because in the last five years we find more men to engage in this work and you see more men, but it's so institutionalized in our society that some men get into this work and they become heroes but just simply being men. They get patted on the back for supporting women. It's like.. why? Look at this whole Mayweather & Pacheco fight. This guy is brutal,(Mayweather, he is a batterer and Pacheco is homophobic, yet people were paying soooooo much money to see them fight and were lining up to support one or the other fighter, like they were some kind of heroes, role models!)And nobody is looking at (the underlying contradictions) at all! He makes a hundred and eighty million dollars? And you have all these celebrities who go and give money to battered women and... what kind of values and principles are that?

**GTR:** Do you think any of the recent news of the football players and things, is that changing any attitudes, or anyone out there in the public getting it or they don't get it still?

**TO:** To me, that's just too big to think of. Sometimes I engage in Facebook on those discussions and sometimes I'm just too tired doing my day to day work and somebody else has to take out on this whole Mayweather and football player thing. Somebody posted on our Facebook this thing... something about - I didn't read it - but the picture of the little girl, and why are people so less interested in real violence and really interested in violence in the boxing event... And they were talking - fine, I'm just going to go post something - and I just didn't. Because it would just lead to other questions and other inquiries. Sometimes you have to stop. Sometimes I have to shut it off when I go home. I got my daughter and my grandsons living with me and one is three and one is six. I just walk into my yard and they just say "Hi Grandma!" and they're running around. And there's something about the grandma word and the little voices, and those little bodies that just makes the whole day go away. I don't drink, I've been sober for 27 years. 27, 28 years. I don't... yeah. This is my medicine., to keep me going, my grandchildren, this is what completes me and makes me whole. And then there's some days I need to go take a walk because, a couple times here, I think of stuff and I don't... understand. Still. I just don't see how

some people can brutalize someone they love so much. That they leave them on death's door. Or their children. Or do it in front of their children. I don't know if I gave you what you want.

**GTR:** Nope, this is good. Thank you so much.

**TO:** Sure.

**[1:13:08]**



## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Rosemary Rocco (b. 1949) - RR**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes -GTR  
Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded May 23, 2015**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR):** This is Gina Temple-Rhodes interviewing Rosie Rocco on May 23, 2015 for the Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project. Thanks for meeting with me.

**Rosemary (Rosie) Rocco (RR):** You're welcome.

**GTR:** Would you start out by telling me when you first came to Duluth and how you got involved?

**RR:** I came to Duluth to go to St. Scholastica in 1969, graduated. My first job was in health planning and my degree was in psychology. Again, to that time in the '70s, when it was a recession, no jobs, so I was working in health planning. And really, it was at that time, and years get fuzzy, that '72, '73, '74 when dollars started to flow from the Federal Government to the law enforcement assistance administration for both sexual assault prevention programs and advocacy programs and then following on that for battered women's shelters. Well, and advocacy groups actually, first before there were funds for the shelters. So, '75, '76... Well, really it was through my partner, Peg Anderson, and, who was friends with Shirley Oberg, and really was through that group of women. If you went back to that time, consciousness-raising groups, so a lot of us were meeting in consciousness-raising groups. And there was a thing called the North Country Women's Center, which was... and almost nobody knows this history, we've had them check in the attic of Chester Creek House, because that's where I thought a lot of the papers were. So, it was housed at UMD [University of Minnesota Duluth] at the lower campus, the old, what was called the Old Normal School, like on 8<sup>th</sup>, in there.

**GTR:** I used to live down there, Old Main.

**RR:** Right. And part of how that got located there, this is a funny connection, there were funds for health planning, health emergency services development, health education, and I'm doing



this because it was like, 314C, 314B, 314D, 314E funds, you know how the feds do it. The “E” funds paid for the start up of the Coffee House, the Coop, even back then we had the counseling and information and research for the Homophile.

**GTR:** I haven’t heard that name here. Was it a publication?

**RR:** No, it was a one-man show who referred people who were coming out or needed services. The Free Clinic.

**GTR:** I’m interested in context. What all is going on at the same time?

**RR:** So, all of that is really popping at the same time. So, the sexual assault program formed first, PAVSA (Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault) and I was on that board, part of starting it up, was the first board chair.

**GTR:** About what year? 1970?

**RR:** ’73 we got started doing advocacy. ’74 was the first grant. ’75 or ’76 was incorporation.

**GTR:** Were you involved with that process?

**RR:** Yes. All of it, yes. Initially those federal funds, they had to flow through a county or a unit of government, so they came through the county, either the welfare department, which is now Human Services, or the county attorney’s office. Sexual assault funds flowed through the county attorney’s office. So, that’s why that process, that first were advisory, then incorporated. Then, parallel to PAVSA getting up and running and the women of the Battered Women’s Coalition, now Safe Haven. Starting to meet and, I think they rented the first shelter (laughs).

**GTR:** I thought it was HUD (Housing and Urban Development) Funding, there was a HUD House.

**RR:** Yeah, well, there was HUD, I think they rented it first, then they bought it and that was before there were per diems, right? Yes, because I remember putting up wallpaper in the first shelter and everybody bringing their extra furniture.

**GTR:** So, that was when you were officially working with PAVSA and this was something else...

**RR:** Well, I was on the board of PAVSA so this was, yeah, this was all volunteer at this... I didn’t work for PAVSA. 1981, I did a nine month stint on contract doing the family sexual

abuse treatment project to get, which now is First Witness, so that was the precursor to getting First Witness in place. Peg Anderson, Maggie, my partner, was much more involved with the shelter, I was more involved with PAVSA, but you know, you're crossing over and everybody's helping out, doing everything.

There was not as much funding for services for battered women as there were for intervention and sexual assault and other crime victims. Well, part of that, just because you're looking at, until you break a bone, you're still looking at misdemeanor, gross misdemeanor. We still have not, in my view, have not elevated it to the place it needs to be. You can do a lot of damage, without breaking a bone, or without visible... So, I was doing health planning and then I move over and I'm working at Miller Dwan as a therapist for eleven years and I'm bringing that piece in because I saw a lot of sexual assault victims, battered women. And my point, is that one of my clients, her husband was a boxer, she eventually had to have both of her kidneys replaced, transplanted. But there was never an external mark. Gross misdemeanor. So, I think that was a part of the, not as much funding. And as things evolve, though, it's interesting because, as things evolved, it was much more acceptable to talk about battering than sexual assault out in the public, because it was like, 'Oh, we can talk about this, we're not going to talk about this'.

**GTR:** It's interesting then that the sexual assault would have been first? That was more talked about? It's not visible.

**RR:** Right, you would have thought just historically, developmentally, but I think about societal acceptance.

**GTR:** Also, at that time, thinking, even if people weren't prosecuted, this isn't really happening, or we don't want to talk about that.

**RR:** It's a family problem. Private family problem. And we can intervene, but she's going to go back to him anyway.

**GTR:** What would women do before there was a place to stay?

**RR:** I think go to stay with friends. There's a famous story, unknown whether it's true or not, of my friend's older aunt who had a friend whose husband regularly would go on benders and beat her up. She would go stay with my friend's aunt. And then back home after a few days. Well, one day she went back home and he was lying on the floor having had a stroke. And she closed the door and didn't go back for four more days. That's what women did.

**GTR:** Were there any stories of other places of where they could go?

**RR:** No.

**GTR:** Someone remembered the Lincoln Hotel, that the police would say, ‘well, go stay there for a night’, or something, if they needed help, but that wasn’t very helpful.

**RR:** Oh, um, well maybe. Yes, so the Lincoln Hotel, the Salvation Army paid for rooms for people who were homeless, so that’s in my memory, in those days, what would have happened. It would have been a place that was paid for, but certainly not secure or safe.

**GTR:** Right. I think for this, too, as people are remembering, we say, ‘oh, that’s nice, there’s a shelter’, but remembering what it was like before that and what people had to do.

**RR:** Go into various homes. We had women stay with us, at times. I mean even after the shelter, they had limited capacity, to begin with. I think there were maybe four bedrooms, maybe five. It was a big old house on First or Second Street.

**GTR:** I think it was First Street. So, it would just be meeting some of the women that needed help and saying, ‘okay, come home with us’.

**0:09:52.9**

**RR:** Or, of somebody who needs a place to place to stay tonight, so the network, and I imagine some of this survives today in Duluth. A strong network of people who will step in or weigh in and that advantage of a smaller town, you can make things like that happen. I think that’s a part of, you know, so I did (the interview) with Beth Bartlett (UMD professor), what she’s doing, and so all that reminiscing and why is it, why did all of these things come out of Duluth? Some of it for me, I think it was just the right size. Big enough, at that time it was still a city of first class, well, still is because it’s grandfathered, but 100,000 population. So, it was just big enough to get... And I’m saying city of the first class because then you get federal funds, state funds, there are things in that that give you more funding. And then the consciousness, and so, and a very strong women’s community.

**GTR:** Where was that coming from? Were people moving in who had been in a group in New York or somewhere? I just feel like, Duluth was a bigger city then, but...

**RR:** Well, I’m thinking of in my own group, so Maggie, Peg Anderson, my partner, but she had been in Duluth since the ‘60s, she was Canadian, but she came here after she, well, she worked for a time in Pennsylvania. She came to the states to get her graduate degree at Smith. So, yes, she was a transplant. Susan Johnson and Carol Bentley directed all of those 314C, D, E and F funds, which is, so here is this lesbian couple, radical... Susan taught at UMD.

**GTR:** Susan who?

**RR:** Johnson. Yes, and Susan's written a few books. *When Women Played Baseball*, she's just done a memoir, the name of which is alluding me.

**GTR:** Is she still local?

**RR:** Nope, she lives in Washington State on Bainbridge Island. Carol Bentley's in the Cities [Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis]. Judith Niemi there was a group of us who met as our own support consciousness-raising group, about thirteen of us, for years. I mean we even had our own therapist. Well, this island that I'm going to, I'm still there because, we all rented it, as a group, sight unseen. So, Susan and Carol - Susan was a PhD, Carol was a PhD. Susan graduated Magna Cum Laude from Bryn Mawr. Carol got her graduate degree from the Sorbonne. Then there was Judith Niemi who was teaching at UMD in the English Department. She was working on her PhD at McGill. And I'm saying this because yeah, people with wide vision. But Judith grew up on the Range [Iron Range of Minnesota]. Peg Cruikshank, Margaret Cruikshank, who grew up on Park Point, she's written a few books, she was a Villa girl, went to St. Scholastica.

**GTR:** I've heard that name somewhere.

**RR:** She was the first director of the Women's Center at Mankato State.

**GTR:** Okay, so people were moving around.

**RR:** So, high consciousness, high political activity, Georgia Sable, who is out in Washington State. It was the time. Ms. Magazine is being published. You know, thinking back, Gloria Steinem's hitting the scene in a big way. She right now is walking across the DMZ [Korean Demilitarized Zone] in Korea with a group of women, walking into North Korea, in the name of peace. So, you know, the time, lots of things happening. NOW [National Organization of Women] is founded. Women are starting to find their political voice, which was an important piece. So, in the '70s, early '70s, there was one woman, one woman in the Minnesota legislature. It really tells you... I mean, that started that second wave of feminism.

**GTR:** Second wave. The first wave being?

**RR:** Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1919-20's. Although the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was first written in 1846, at the Seneca Falls Convention. And we're just now reviving getting it into the constitution.

**GTR:** Long ways to go. And talk about how you think today is going? Even back then, just the evolution here in Duluth and women's consciousness-raising and women going to out work more but how then did that transfer to 'let's set up a shelter for women'?

**RR:** Action? Because that's life, 'let's show up, let's do a program'. 'Let's set up a shelter for women'. Four years later, Tina and I, 'let's do a building'. 'Oh, sure, we can do that'.

**GTR:** The Building for Women?

**RR:** Right. [Laughs] I mean, there is a pioneer, I don't know if it's explorer, pioneer, entrepreneur, 'we can do that'. A belief in, 'we can do that'. Here's the need, let's fill it. And I think generally, whether you're talking about feminism or whatever, there is that consciousness in Duluth.

**GTR:** It's been here a while, and it's been evolving.

**RR:** Well, the 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional, the old historical 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District is the only district in Minnesota to ever, we sent a Socialist to Congress in the '40s, John T. Bernard.

**GTR:** Sure.

**RR:** The Wobblies, over there in North Dakota coming over into Western Minnesota. The Farmer-Labor, so the DFL, the Farmer-Labor were Socialists! Still are.

**GTR:** Yes, right.

**RR:** The last remaining Communist Park in the country, Mesaba Park, so you have a confluence.

**GTR:** I've done twenty-five interviews over there in the last few years. Great history, really fun.

**RR:** Ah-ha!

**GTR:** There aren't many Finish people any more, but it's been really interesting how that all evolved. People from all different backgrounds in the '70s and '80s came together with this co-op idea, people from whatever background, learned from the old Finns and learned about the cooperative model.

**RR:** Yes, that was a cooperative park, I think it was in the '30s it was incorporated as a co-op.

**GTR:** 1929, I want to say.

**RR:** Yup.

**GTR:** So, with that, I'm curious about some of the more recent history that I've read, like debates about 'should we have whole wheat bread or white bread' or whatever for the women we are helping.

**RR:** [laughs]

**GTR:** Where they saying, 'yes, we're feminists, too'?

**RR:** No.

**GTR:** So, how did that...

**RR:** Yes, well, so back to Safe Haven which started as a collective and that's when you and I chatted on the phone that when I go back to that piece, there were many things happening in Duluth. From my perspective, being a volunteer, being a support, and then I worked with the collective as their facilitator in staff retreats.

**GTR:** Peg would have been part of the collective at that time?

**RR:** She would have been helping with that as well. Eventually, I just segued into being the collective's therapist. She saw people individually; I saw them in the group. [Laughs] I'm laughing because not only were they trying to address... so, you know, there are a lot of us pioneers, and I'm doing the sexual assault, but the women who founded the Battered Women's Coalition were not only trying to address something society didn't want to look at, battering, that was very difficult, very difficult, you didn't really even have a set of laws that were helpful as we had minimal laws, at least, in sexual assault. And trying a new model of running that non-profit, a collective model, no hierarchy, we're going to do... well, of course, as I'm sure others have said, things evolved and it didn't matter if everybody was equally responsible, everybody wasn't equally responsible, because everybody didn't take on equal tasks or respond equally. And so, I'm the therapist through all of that, and coming to adjusting and how are we going to go forward. I always had the greatest, and have just the greatest respect that here we're going to deal with this societal ill and we're going to try to break the model in terms of getting rid of a hierarchy in administration. And they made it work for, I don't know, ten, eleven, twelve years. It wasn't like it didn't work. But not without a lot of effort. I think we had, I'll bet we had staff retreats for a few years, three or four times a year. Just because people would... Back to your question about white and wheat bread [laughs]. Meat, not meat. Feminist, not feminist. Really, all of that was played out in the collective, not with the women that they were serving.

**0:20:10.7**

**RR:** [continued] Which, again, I think speaks very well to those women who founded that collective, that they could manage to keep that, certainly, I'm sure it spilled over at times, you know, but you keep that whole process separate. And understanding, well, most of them may have been coming from a feminist consciousness, that wasn't where women coming to the shelter needing battered women services were going to be. And, really, so DAIP is at least, at least six, seven years into start up of the shelter, at least. I mean, it was going to the cities, but in terms of Ellen moving up here and starting that. That's more...

**GTR:** That's early '80s, mid '80s?

**RR:** Mid 80's, yeah. So, again, you're talking a good seven, eight, nine, ten years. And the significance of that, there was no mandatory arrest. The collective itself would get, uh, the staff, disheartened, worn out, women going back and back and back. Yeah, those were the earlier years. And not that that isn't some part of the process now, but in the early years it was a routine.

**GTR:** Because there was less prosecution possibly?

**RR:** Yes, I think, less prosecution, less understanding, on a scientific level so the wheel of power and anger, all of that, didn't exist yet. You knew it intuitively. You could talk with women, know that there was no intervention with the men and as was true then, is true today, women who are being battered are most at risk of being killed when they leave. And we had a couple of those. Small town. I mean, Duluth is a big small town.

**GTR:** Women that were killed after they tried to leave. There were cases, too, a woman that killed a husband or something...

**RR:** Several.

**GTR:** Someone was able to, Jean or someone, was able to be in the trial and help document what had been going on.

**RR:** Yes, and I think it was the second case in the country of a woman defending herself based on being battered. And she was acquitted. And when I say several, there was one that went to trial. He was in the air force as I remember, and he threatened her many, many, many times. She told him, 'if you do it again, I'm going to kill you'. And he did it again. But she was acquitted.

**GTR:** Those people felt that they were able to make a difference because of the work. Were you around during the days of the, not the intervention, but the women's advocates, where they would go out to the homes after the police were called?

**RR:** Right. Sure. So, the Women's Coalition, Women's Advocates, came out of the Women's Coalition. They were all part and parcel. So, working in the shelter and working outside in homes, oh, yeah. Dangerous, dangerous!

**GTR:** They were talking about training. Were you ever around during the training? Did they feel prepared to do that? Or they just, 'we're going to go out and do it'?

**RR:** Well, training at the beginning, for all of us, was minimum. So, now there's forty hours of training to be a sexual assault advocate, training certified by the state, proscribed, in terms of what you... Well, Tina Welch and I and Nancy Beal, went down to the Neighborhood Improvement Center in Minneapolis for eight hours and came back and put ourselves on call! You know, and I'm sure Jean and Shirley and the early folks, I'm sure that they had some training, but flying by the seat of our pants!

**GTR:** Oh the job, kind of. Figure it out.

**RR:** Yes. Because, who was going to do the training? We were all pioneers.

**GTR:** Exactly. In setting up the non-profit for the Women's Coalition, were you right there with them in that?

**RR:** Yes, I helped out with that because we had already been through the process for PAVSA. And also, as I'm doing this, I'm also very politically active and could find attorneys that would help without cost, you know, to do the legals and the paperwork. So, really, it was just, I mean, forming the non-profit, I don't remember that as being such a hurdle, but you know, memory fades. It was forty years ago.

**GTR:** You hear stories about an old typewriter that would pike holes in the paper, and they were just laughing about it, 'we just had this old typewriter and we just figured out how to do the applications'.

**RR:** Oh sure, you typed everything. There were no computers. There were no computers.

**GTR:** They laughed that it would poke holes in the paper, the 'O' would...

**RR:** Cut into the paper, right. We did our newsletter off of stencils. You know, the old drum.



**GTR:** Actual cutting and pasting.

**RR:** Uh-huh. I'm trying to remember, I think the first copier we had access to was at the Free Clinic and it was a table top thing that did ten sheets in five minutes. I'm exaggerating, but you know. We were in heaven. We don't have to crank them out on the copy machine or take them to Jim Fuhr, who was Fuhr Printing, and I don't know if he is still in business, who did all of the political printing. And, of course, we got at a good rate.

**GTR:** How do you spell that last name?

**RR:** F-U-H-R, Fuhr Printing, Jim Fuhr.

**GTR:** That's great. Well, that's fascinating to me too, is how the word got out. Now we'd say, 'put a website and put this up on here', and that and people didn't, you had to put postings up. How did the word spread? Do you remember any of that?

**RR:** We flooded bathrooms in bars.

**GTR:** Oh, the posters?

**RR:** Posters. PAVSA had a little red card. Women's Coalition got a little card. Through therapists. The clergy were always more helpful in the history, with dealing with battered women or domestic abuse than with sexual assault. Well, one was felony, one was not. In some (cases)... Who knows. Lots of myths. But the myths that still, I'm sure, survive were just rife then. The first, so you get into doing sexual assault, get evidence collected properly, police arrest, then the county attorney wouldn't charge, so we'd get a new county attorney, Al Mitchell, who just died here six months ago. Then we get charges and we go to court and we get our first jury, where we think, 'oh, yay, we're going to get a... this is a balanced jury'. The defense attorney, sat with a coke bottle at the defense table, victim is on the stand. Coke bottle is on it's side, twirling the coke bottle around and trying to poke a pencil in the neck as he's saying to the victim, 'you mean to tell me that a women can't run faster with her skirt up than a man with his pants down?' That was said in court! So, just take it from there.

**GTR:** Right.

**RR:** I can remember a whole six-month period at the shelter where we had to deal with the issue of women who had some mental illness. And I'm saying dealing with the issue because there were in some staff people's minds, 'well, she's crazy, that's why she's getting hit'. Yeah, well, she might be crazy, but there is no reason that it justifies. And I'm saying a six-month period,

because now you have to overlay in the '80s we're getting drug and alcohol addiction erupting big time. Victims of sexual abuse, victims of battering.

**0:30:00.0**

**GTR:** Not just money available to help it, it was happening more.

**RR:** It was happening more. It was happening more in the society.

**GTR:** In general.

**RR:** Just in general. We were coming out of the '70s and you know, the end of the '60s, '70s, 'drugs, sex, rock and roll'. [laughs] 'Live fast, die young'. You know.

**GTR:** Why in the 1980s would it be increasing then?

**RR:** Because of the time of use and people who had a propensity to addiction, then that coming full bloom.

**GTR:** Once they get older.

**RR:** Um-hum. Yeah. And, I think, '80s, some trends hit Duluth later than the big city, so that's some of it. So, if you take and set these things in the overlay of what was happening in the society, so you've got the macro and the micro and they are having to deal with all of it. And ever increasing demand and the children, and dot-dot-dot, you know it's like, today, having to deal with cell phones. And that abusers can track a woman to a shelter and endanger... So, those safety issues that have, then it was just, 'don't tell anybody where you are', and the numbers, phone numbers were all blocked so nobody could trace them.

**GTR:** Yes, different issues all the time. And then at that time, the Coalition was, they were still trying to figure out how to run themselves and increased demand and logistics. What was your understanding about their focus? Some people have said they wanted to change the world? And then we have to figure out what food to make. You know, so just those logistics of, 'wow, this isn't just going to change the world'. Just giving people a place to stay isn't going to change the world exactly and we need to do more. But how are they able to do that?

**RR:** Some of it is on going working at it, talking with one another, expressing those things, so at some of those retreats. And, what does it mean to change the world? And who's to say that if you save one woman's life or you get a woman out of a battering situation that that hasn't changed the world? So, a continuing discussion of putting it into context and into perspective. I

think we all started to come to the awareness that it was going to be a lifetime. We were going to work on this for a lifetime. And more. And that's true. I mean, we're certainly at a very different place today with all of it. Especially with battering.

The last, this is where Ellen Pence's amazing brain would be helpful. The last laws of the Rule of Thumb, the Rule of Thumb comes from, 'a man could beat his wife with a stick no broader than his thumb. That's the Rule of Thumb. And the last state law, somewhere in the South, fell in the '40s. So, you have to think about inculcated, in law, that a man could beat his wife, but with a stick no broader than his thumb. So, you have a behavior, carried out in the notion of possession of chattel and carry it over, well, that's going to take generations. Generations! Generations! Not a half-century to root out. Sexual assault. I mean, that we've been, in the society, focused on the 15% of offenders who are serial rapists, psychotics, and sociopaths. 85% of offenders are on a pretty normal curve. We're just coming to grips, we're just coming to grips with the fact that we're teaching sexual assault and how in our psycho-sexual-socialization of boys and girls. At some level, we are teaching. Date rape – 'boys will be boys'. You don't take that too far down the line and you have date rape. So, how did that stay in balance? You do what you could do each time. That's part of what gave rise to the component for how it works so well to DAIP, the education, the models, and that's to take what was learned here in this nice kind of lab-school of Duluth and take that nationally and internationally.

**GTR:** It's won international awards recently.

**RR:** Yes. I know.

**GTR:** So, acknowledgement of that, but how did you see DAIP's supporting the shelter or...

**RR:** By that time I wasn't... I was then working, in the 1990s I started to be the executive director of PAVSA and, of course, shortly after that taking on to Building for Women and that was all I could do. [Laughs] You know that whole building project turned out to be something way different than what I imagined.

**GTR:** Did you talk with Beth about that?

**RR:** Oh, yeah.

**GTR:** Oh, good. Sometimes with these interviews, I think, 'oh, that has to be a whole other project!'. We talked about DAIP should probably be a separate project as a whole.

**RR:** Well, and you had politics underneath, so there was some competition, I know. Competition, friction. Women's Advocates, Women's Coalition, Safe Haven, DAIP, Sexual Assault Program that...

**GTR:** The nature of...

**RR:** Well, I think the nature of it now, having had some distance from it, we were all working in forms of oppression in a sociological concept, the oppressed oppress one another before finally throwing off the shekels and finally taking on the oppressor. And, you know, in those days, when you see somebody having a little bit of success, you know, Ellen could get herself into talk to the sheriff and the police chief who wouldn't give us the time of day, in sexual assault, right? Well, you know, in that time, it's like, you don't do that. Make sure they're talking to us, too. You want that.

**GTR:** You have to play nice or figure out who you have to listen to?

**RR:** Right. Well, I think, yes. Or change the sheriff. So, it wasn't like it was all picnic and roses and everybody was supporting everybody, there were tensions and politics and fights and arguments and people who left and didn't return and changeover and change and growth. And you always have that core, Jean DeRider, Cathy Curley, Michelle LeBeau, who went over to do Transitional Housing, but Michelle was part of the original collective. So, there was a core of people who carried that history forward and kept things steady. You know, I'm sure people have talked about Kathy, who was quiet, in the background, but was like a rock, an anchor. From anything, because besides being a shelter staff, she was bookkeeper. She did all the bookkeeping for the coalition, she did all the bookkeeping for the building and then eventually PAVSA.

**GTR:** That'd be a good skill to have. I haven't heard as much about her. I don't know if everyone just assumes we know or...

**RR:** Well, one of those quiet... quiet, didn't toot her own horn. But she was steady, always steady. Could always predict what Kathy was going to say or not say. Just a, so, these retreats, I think it was Jean DeRider's apartments at the time, one of those that's now rehabbed right up off of Mesaba Avenue. Kathy was pregnant with the twins, she had twins, which are her only children, but she came, the Saturday morning, and she said, she was almost to term, 'I had a dream last night, a terrible dream, that I had guppies instead of kids'. [Laughs] So, we always called her girls the guppies.

**GTR:** I always wonder, how do they keep going? So much work and hard work and they were raising kids. What kept everyone going so long?

**RR:** Each other. Each other. And the collective, I think, gave us all the gift of talking about a collective, a non-hierarchical model, because we could start, long before it was a subject of, you know, leadership and development and degrees and highfalutin talks, talking about how we needed to be like a wing of geese. And that who was leading that wing of geese changes, because that lead goose is breaking wind and the wing shifts so that they get a rest and that that shifts off. And I think we tried to do that.

**0:40:21.6**

**GTR:** That's good.

**RR:** I believe we did. And that was a part of keeping going.

**GTR:** And you had some fun.

**RR:** Exactly. And we had some fun.

**GTR:** Volunteer appreciation dinners?

**RR:** [Laughs] Yes! Yeah.

**GTR:** Were you involved?

**RR:** Oh, sure, sure. I'm chuckling. Back to your white bread / wheat bread, when they got to the days where they had to start locking the refrigerators. I don't know if they do any more, but that was a whole discussion, of course, for weeks. Because, somehow that was terrible, to lock the refrigerators, well yeah, it was terrible to lock the refrigerators but if somebody was emptying them at night, nobody else was getting food! Dealing with those kinds of questions.

**GTR:** That's a lot.

**RR:** Yeah, yeah, right.

**GTR:** Were you around when, maybe that was after your time in Duluth, but that it became, that it shifted, then to, then there was the collective management team and then became the executive director model. Was that a little after your time?

**RR:** It was emerging. So, I think they started that around '97, '96 or... Safe Haven was already built, up on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, I'm assuming they're still there.

**GTR:** The blue-grey building, yup.

**RR:** Yup, so that was already built before I left. So, that model was emerging out of... yes.

**GTR:** There was sort of an in between stage?

**RR:** Well, an in between stage before, I think, they formally went to that model, but effectively, even when it was the collective, effectively. Somebody was always in that position of executive director. Or the financial. I mean, you had those titles. We would talk a lot about, it didn't matter what structure, what the title was of what you were trying to achieve, was some equality and some fairness and some equal distribution of responsibility. Then it didn't matter what you called it. And that that was one of the fascinating things. So, my degrees are in psych and soc, so for my anthropological sociology self that even that collective model, you had things that should people taking on those roles that you would find in a hierarchical structure? Whether done in a hierarchical way or not.

**GTR:** People have different skills.

**RR:** Different skills, different interests and different abilities to respond at different times. So, again, the thing about, so women just coming in to being in the work place, I love this statistic I got the other day, just because I wanted it, because I'm working on ERA. 63% of women in Minnesota are in the work place, today. In 1974, 27% of women were in the work place. That's a ginormous shift, in that time. But so back in those early days, we're just getting in the work place, just tasting power. And that really was a lot of the discussion is how do you handle power? And is it okay to want power? Does that make you a terrible, rotten, non-feminist bitch, if you want power? How to handle those issues, acknowledgement, recognition. So, all of that is layered all at the same time, which is remarkable when you think about it.

**GTR:** Right. It is. I saw the, "She's Beautiful and She's Angry" documentary. There was quite a bit in there about people that kind of got pushed out because they were too... leaders, and that just sounded really...

**RR:** Yes, yes. I can say that I was certainly a target in Duluth at that time. As that building, my visibility and my, well, I've always had a big mouth when I've been out there. Yeah, I think we're doing less of that, now.

**GTR:** How do you see the state of women, I suppose, and even, how far have we come with the issues of...

**RR:** I think, if anybody had told me that I would live to a time to hear a president of the United States black, at that, talk about date rape, I would have said, ‘what are you on? I want some’. That that would have transpired in my lifetime. I mean, initially, when I got into sexual assault, and battery, I’m in my twenties. I figured we’d just bring it to people’s attention and we’ll get it cleaned up. It didn’t take too long to realize that whole thing about ‘this is lifetime’ murk. So, we’ve come huge amounts of way in terms of talking about it in public, being able to claim our reality as women that these are things that we are vulnerable to, this is part of our history, this is part of what we have to deal with in coming to equality. I get concerned from my perch of being not as involved in anything, battered women, sexual assault, I’m on the outside. I get concerned that we’ve become, because of what we have, that we’ve stepped back in our boldness, because we don’t want it taken away. And so we have to preserve the funding, so let’s not piss off the legislatures, let’s not piss off the county commissioners. And you don’t need to piss people off just to make them mad, but my perception, we’ve just become a little careful. That when we had nothing to lose – we were a lot bolder – because we had nothing to lose. Now there’s a lot of people’s salaries, a lot of people’s livelihoods dependent as well as these services that women have come to expect to be there that we have to preserve.

**GTR:** Has there been backlash that you’ve seen? Has that happened?

**RR:** Sure it’s happened. What we had to go through to get the Women’s Against Violence Act reauthorized at the federal level. That’s huge politics... and being careful and walking it through and walking it through... and having to marshal... and huge political capital for something that should be a no-brainer.

**GTR:** Right.

**RR:** And that’s a part of... it’s like we’re expected to be grateful, because we’ve gotten a half a loaf of white bread and we’ve gotten a half a loaf of wheat bread. Well, I’m not. I’m not. I want all loaves and I want rye and I want several choices, thank you.

**GTR:** And we’re not there, yet?

**RR:** No, we’re not there yet. We’re not there... So, the Equal Rights Amendment was first introduced in the ‘70s, with an extension on ratification one time to ‘82 it goes down with three states short. In those days I worked on the ERA, really more as an ideological feminist consciousness, ‘yeah, I want my Equal Rights Amendment!’ Coming back into it now, we actually, in fact, must have an Equal Rights Amendment into the federal and we need one in the state constitution because we can do that sooner than getting it into the federal. And here’s where we need it, we need it in equal pay, despite the recent article in the Star Tribune [St. Paul and Minneapolis newspaper] that really it’s only about five cents on the dollar, if you take the

seventy-seven cents. First of all, that's white women at seventy cents on the dollar, you leave out women of color. So, we need it for equal pay because there is no basis, and there have been suits under the equal pay laws brought to, all the way to the Supreme Court, in the words of Justice Antonin Scalia, 'Certainly the constitution doesn't require discrimination on the basis of sex, the only question is whether it prohibits it, it does not.' End of quote. So, equal pay. Equal treatment or accommodation for pregnant woman in the workplace. Gender based violence and being dealt with as gender based violence, because sexual assault and battering is gender-based violence. And that's a civil rights violation as much as it's a civil rights violation when someone's of color.

**0:50.16.7**

**GTR:** Those are somewhat prosecuted, there are some laws, but you think this would help?

**RR:** Well, yes, because you need the legal basis to establish... If you're going to litigate up to the Supreme Court, you need to have the constitutional basis on which to have standing. The only think we're mentioned is the vote.

**GTR:** That was a long time ago.

**RR:** Right. We also now have women in the military in huge numbers. The military code of justice derives directly from the constitution. Women who are sexually exploited in the military have no recourse beyond the military court of justice. So, I would say, that when people say this is the last step in big human rights unfinished business of the twentieth century, it is. So, all this that we've accomplished, we need to carry it back to a constitutional base. Sorry.

**GTR:** No, that's okay. Yeah, so that's in the future. Do you think it will happen?

**RR:** Yes, I do. Yes, I do. We've got a resolution to congress memorializing them to lift the sunset on ratification out of the Minnesota State Senate, bills have been introduced in both the US House and the US Senate, with bi-partisan, Republican-Democrat, introduction. Two women in the House, two men in the Senate to lift the sunset of ERA ratification. There will be legal tussles, but yes, I do think that it will happen. And I think it will happen because there are 63% women in the workforce now, as opposed to those low numbers then. We're recognizing, we're talking about this as gender based violence, we're beginning to see the price we're paying as a society when women, when women and children are victimized. We're finally getting our heads screwed on about sex trafficking. You know, finally, finally. I mean, we could not get arrests, so what we used to call the women who worked the boats at the docks in Superior were the 'Port Girls', who would have sex for a bar of soap or a pair of nylons. I'm exaggerating a bit, but not much. That's fifty years ago. We couldn't even get arrests.



**GTR:** Really?

**RR:** They'd get beat up, 'gee, too bad. Shouldn't be doing what you're doing'.

**GTR:** What about language, too. You said 'battered women' versus 'domestic violence' versus 'gender violence'. Do you have thoughts on that?

**RR:** Because it's all developed and, you know, I'm back in the... because now it's domestic...

**GTR:** Some people really take issue with that name, they think it...

**RR:** Domestic abuse?

**GTR:** Yes, that it takes women out of it.

**RR:** Yeah.

**GTR:** That it's not battered women, it's, 'oh, it could happen to anyone'.

**RR:** Right. Well, I think that part of the... yes, I think it does take women out of it, but men can be abused as well, I mean, I did see one. One, in my time as a therapist, I saw one. I don't mean to minimize this, but it is predominantly visited upon women. I think when we start talking about domestic abuse, not only does it take women out of it, but it sort of 'nicens' it up.

**GTR:** PC [politically correct].

**RR:** Battered... battered puts the image here. And I think rightly so. Some people get concerned when we say battered women, that victimization. And that's the whole piece, I lived through that time of moving from, they aren't just victims, they are survivors. And not identifying, so both in how you treated people who were victims of violence, but also their own self concept, because we know that, we know now, imperially, that working through that is to identify oneself as a survivor and not to stay in victim behavior. So, I think all that comes together in our language and in what do we say?

**GTR:** Survivor.

**RR:** Yeah.

**GTR:** I notice that, even with legislation of things, like the Violence Against Women Act, should we have ‘violence’, rather than having...

**RR:** Well, we’re quickly getting to the point where people are saying, ‘should we have ‘women’?’

**GTR:** In legislation?

**RR:** Right, the Violence Act. Men are getting, men are victims, too.

**GTR:** Interesting. Well, enough about that history.

**RR:** The thing about Black Lives Matter, okay? The genesis, now this is a very quick turn around. So, what, Black Lives Matter is what, eight months old? Now we have a group of black women, saying, ‘yup, black lives matter, black women’s lives matter’ and yes, we need to be standing up for our black sons, brothers, and fathers who are getting pulled over and killed and shot. Black women’s lives matter as well. Getting women’s faces into the picture. And so that’s a whole different perspective.

**GTR:** And to get it more specialized. That’s interesting. The power of language. You think of politicians and how they use language.

**RR:** Right. Language and ethnicity and where we are, each of us. You know, you’re getting this from a white face, a white perspective. You went and talked with women at Fond du Lac and they’re coming to consciousness about battering and sexual assault on a much different path; certainly for sexual assault. Because they weren’t going to turn their men in because what they know historically and probably still somewhat today, same crime as a white boy, their men were going to get arrested and put away for a long time.

**GTR:** Right. And not trusting...

**RR:** And they weren’t about to be complicit in that; which one can understand.

**GTR:** Right.

**RR:** So, that’s the other piece that’s all textured and, you know, there’s some diversity in Duluth but not... So, the story of Duluth, that’s another piece, that it’s fairly homogenous, you know, because if you go down to the cities, you have Women’s Advocates, which was the first battered women’s shelter in the country. And not long after Harriet Tubman. Well, Harriet Tubman goes through so many iterations and deaths and revivals and they were serving women of color. So,

different path. Because that's the other thing we're all coming to grips with in the '70s and '80s as well, is on color and diversity and racism. And learning about our own racism and our own, I mean, it was all together, all at one time.

**GTR:** And it's not done.

**RR:** No, it's not done. But again, even more incredible, what the women did of the Women's Coalition, because not only were they doing advocacy, they're living with them. They're living with these women.

**GTR:** Right, yeah.

**RR:** It's a twenty-four hour sexual assault, you're doing the deal, but it's not 24/7. So, they're dealing with all of that, all at the same time.

**GTR:** Right, and to figure out how to help those women, and even the idea of, I think someone mentioned that they would sometimes would have residents or people come to some of the meetings, some of the collective meetings, because they wanted to show or model that empowerment, or model that, and just trying to bring that in sounds like a whole other layer of...

**RR:** Yes.

**GTR:** At least having people at meetings.

**RR:** Well, it was a whole other layer. How do you empower? And, I think we all struggled with it for a while, so you bring to meetings or whatever, before coming to the point of recognizing that again, yes, opportunity, but it's as much about a consciousness. If my consciousness is one of empowerment then it's going to happen no matter what we're doing. Form follows function. So, whether it's to a meeting or whatever, it's developing that awareness.

**GTR:** Classes, some people mentioned groups and having this curriculum that they were trying to use in groups and some people liking it and some people thinking, 'oh, it's not...'. Do you remember that?

**RR:** Yes. [laughs] Right, right. Yes.

**GTR:** Do you think it was helpful?

**0:59.47.5**

**RR:** Sure, I do. I think it was. I'm probably by and large the people who were the old hands like me, 'like curriculum? Oh, please, give me a break'. Because again, we were flying by the seat of our pants and did just fine, thank you. And that's another reason why it's good that people ebb and change and flow and new people come in because you get... I mean, I think I'm still pretty open minded, forward thinking, I'll be sixty-six. But also I see where, just, not as much energy, probably, a little more fearful of my own personal safety makes me not as bold. So, I can see that why it's important that you have that infusion of youth. Because of course, in our youth, we think we're indestructible.

**GTR:** I suppose. [Both laugh] Do women, like college students today, there's a debate about, 'are you a feminist or not?' 'What does feminism mean?' This effort of women, so, this is what a feminist looks like, and people just not... or women saying they're not feminists. It's like, 'of course'. It's just a different perspective.

**RR:** Well, perspective, and you go back to the history, because 'feminist' meant 'man-hater'. And then we have the whole, that within feminism, all the lesbian bating. So, if you were a feminist you were a man-hater, lesbian. Well, people who weren't lesbian or man-hating, certainly wanted to walk away from that. But that was a construct foisted on us by the Phyllis Schlafly's of the world.

**GTR:** I can't remember her.

**RR:** That's what it meant, Phyllis Schlafly, that's what it meant. That these were frustrated women who couldn't get a man and that they were male-haters. Just a bunch of lesbians running around. So, all of that was heaped upon and we're working back through it and so what does it mean? Well, read the definition of feminism. It's about equality, for all people. For all people of all genders. The Equal Rights Amendment, that no law nor rights shall be abridged on the basis of sex, covers all people.

**GTR:** Right, yes.

**RR:** Not just women. So, I think some of that struggle of, 'am I a feminist or am I not', is just because of those left-overs. That, 'am I defining myself in relation to men?', rather than am I defining myself in relation to myself? And if I'm a feminist, then I'm standing up for women. And we're also stuck in this dualism that if women gain more equality that men are going to lose something. We're still in a zero-sum head thinking game about that.

**GTR:** Right. Did you see that in Duluth, too, when people, even the wider community, I think I asked Tricia O'Keefe, 'what did people think?' She's like, 'oh, they're all man-hating lesbians'. She said, 'I would have like some more lesbians, because I felt kind of lonely!'

**RR:** That's right, Tricia. Of course, Trisha O'Keefe. Yeah, right.

**GTR:** She's like, 'these women are married with kids, they're not...'. It wasn't the exact perspective that people thought. I wondered with the residency at the time, you know, of course men are going to say, 'oh, you're going to go to that shelter with a bunch of man-haters', but even those residents, they were just happy be somewhere or were they, like, 'oh, I don't know'.

**RR:** I think for the most part, that was out of the residents' consciousness. I mean, sure, some of it had to seep up in the community, 'oh, you're in', or getting it thrown in their face when they went back home, I'm sure. But it wasn't as much...

**GTR:** In the wider community and then you started to see the support, of course, now there's big galas and it's being supported and it's not like, 'oh, this is...'.

**RR:** It's all passé now.

**GTR:** It's all very accepted that there's this facility and people support it financially.

**RR:** Yes, in the '70s, coming out as a lesbian feminist was being radical; today it's run of the mill. [laughs] Which is good!

**GTR:** Yeah. But the women working at women's shelters, you know, it's not, people aren't saying, 'oh, those are the lesbians over there' now. It's, 'oh, that's the women's shelter'.

**RR:** And quite simply, today is different because you have lots of lesbian and gay folks raising kids. In those days you didn't. We had more time. I mean, really, I think some of... So, why was there big surge of lesbians among... because if you go into almost any feminist thing, you're going to find a bunch of lesbians, they're generating energy. We have the time!

**GTR:** What's going to happen now? Where people have families?

**RR:** It's going to have to be the millennial who aren't having families and who aren't getting married.

**GTR:** Oh, it's an interesting perspective. I hadn't thought of it that way. It's true, kids...

**RR:** Take a lot of time!

**GTR:** Yup! Interesting! Wow, what's going to happen, ten, twenty years from now, then?

**RR:** Right.

**GTR:** Do you have a vision of the world, well, you talked about the ERA and that, but even just what will...

**RR:** Well, I don't have a... I get tantalizing views of it. Because as I look at the millennials, they have their heads right about what's important. They don't really care about gay marriage. They don't really care about transgender. They'll get out there as a cause. They're concerned about the earth. They're concerned about the water they drink and the food that's not genetically modified.

**GTR:** That'd be refreshing.

**RR:** Exactly.

**GTR:** I'm old enough. I'm not a millennial and I have worked in environmental education in the past and get really frustrated because people don't really get it.

**RR:** I think part of what we have to get to... We've talked a lot about saving the earth and saving the water. I think we need to shift pretty quickly to understand, we're saving ourselves. Mother Earth is going to do just fine, thank you. And that's somewhat... if you think the right wing and the climate deniers about the tens of thousands of years and the earth changes, and they're right.

**GTR:** Things have changed.

**RR:** Well, they've changed before. You've had mass extinctions. Things have changed before. The earth had, you know, had mass extinction. And look what we have today. It's true, Mother Earth will survive. It's us. And, you know, we're getting up to apex predators with the polar bears; we should be a little afraid here. Because we're right on that plane.

**GTR:** It seems so obvious to me, but it is, yeah.

**RR:** But, yeah, I think people think about conservation and environmental as seeds and nuts tree huggers.

**GTR:** Right.

**RR:** And don't get it, that it's about saving themselves.

**GTR:** Even the language is really frustrating to me. Like, 'I'm going to help the environment feel better for a little while'. It's like, oh, 'it's not about improving the environment, it's about not destroying the environment'.

**RR:** It's about preserving the resources we need for us to live!

**GTR:** Right, exactly. Well, it'll be interesting to see, to see how that goes. We're, I suppose, generation X, so, we'll see how that fits my kids.

**RR:** I think in terms of violence, I think it is going to decrease, because you're talking about awareness. Name the problem. I think there will be less.

**GTR:** We still have the gender things and we still have... I mean it's been in the news, football players, or whatever.

**RR:** But it's in the news! But it's in the news!

**GTR:** That's true.

**RR:** And they are held up as abhorrent.

**GTR:** There was a little movement of, 'Why I Stayed', a little social media thing, because people were, like, 'what's wrong with her? She should just leave.' And people were talking the complexities of everything. So, it's been out there.

**RR:** Yes, indeed. That's a very good way to talk about it, is the first step. And then to talk about it in a way that it becomes normalized behavior. So, with environmental education we've got now, generations of kids who are back to recycling and who are talking to their parents about recycling. Right? So, you norm that behavior. Now, how quickly it can change. Because, I grew up recycling.

**GTR:** Right.

**RR:** Before it was called, 'recycling'. [laughs]

**GTR:** The history of recycling is interesting, and the bottle companies. They didn't want... returnable bottles was the thing. But there seems to be waves, in the early '90s I remember there were, 'kids to save the earth' clubs and things, and then we got away from that. Could be a

whole other project. But it's interesting. It's depressing at times as an environmental educator because I'm not sure we did any good these past twenty years, I'm not sure.

**RR:** Yeah.

**GTR:** Well, thank you. Anything else I didn't...

**RR:** Nope, no. Thank you for doing this. I'm glad it's getting captured. And I was talking to somebody about doing this and just recollecting and that piece that I really do have off with those women at the coalition and somebody saying to me, 'well, but look at all you did with sexual assault'. And I really do think it's different now. And I really want to close with that. Because of the number of dynamics that they chose to be dealing with in that administrative model, management level, but also we're dealing with because of the set of things that there were around violence, domestic battering violence.

**1:10:28.8**

**GTR:** You said, just very different than the sexual... what did you say at first about the sexual assault? That people thought that was a separate issue or that it was a done...

**RR:** Well, it was a separate issue but also there were some basis in laws; you had criminal sexual conduct.

**GTR:** Right, okay.

**RR:** You didn't even have gross misdemeanor on battering. I mean, we got... that was...

**GTR:** And figuring out the judicial system and how they could help and be advocates of that system and just learning what they had to do.

**RR:** Well, paying a ticket is not as deterrent as jail time.

**GTR:** Right, sure. It's amazing. I had known Jean for years and I hadn't known all that she had all done. And Jean was really the one. I met her years ago, actually, for the Mesaba Park Project, and I stayed with Jean almost fifteen years ago for just a few months when I was doing an internship, and so I've known her for a long time, but I didn't know what she had done. She's the one who said, 'hey, you do these projects, we should do this one for the Women's Coalition.' And I didn't understand the whole, Safe Haven, Women's Coalition and the whole thing. But she really is the one who was really pushing this forward.



**RR:** And that's another stalwart, is Jean, because she was there from the beginning. And Jean always was a 'get this person together with this person' and another background person, a fixer.

**GTR:** You said you're sixty-six.... Your year of birth?

**RR:** 1949.

**GTR:** Thank you.

**RR:** Older than dirt. [laughs]

**End of Interview**



## **Safe Haven Women's Coalition Oral History Project**

**Narrator:**

**Nancy Wangler, b. 1937 (NW)**

**Interviewer:**

**Gina Temple-Rhodes (GTR)**

**Cedar Story Services**

**Recorded April 17, 2015**

**GTR:** Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. Can you start by telling me just how long, or when, you first came to Duluth?

**NW:** Well, I grew up in Ohio and I came to Duluth in 1972 with my husband and children, and my husband was in the military and was stationed in Duluth advising a Reserve Unit. And so at that time we stayed almost three years and then left for an overseas assignment and returned in 1978. So we lived in Duluth then until 1989 when my husband and I divorced. And I left and moved to Buffalo, New York for several years. So I am pretty familiar with Duluth and it really holds a special place in my heart.

**GTR:** So then when and how did you first become involved with the Women's Coalition?

**NW:** Well, during the early 70s I had become very interested in the feminist movement and, in fact, was a charter subscriber to *Ms. Magazine*, and just did an enormous amount of reading and joined some organizations and things like that. So when I returned in 1978 I decided to go back to school at UMD and somehow, I guess I saw a poster or something about this training or information session that the Women's Coalition was having, educating about wife abuse or battered women. At that time the term "domestic violence" didn't exist [chuckles]. So I went to this session, and in fact, I think I took my daughter who was probably about 16 at the time. And it was just a tremendous revelation to me. I think I had heard about violence against women and everything and just didn't have any idea, just didn't really ever quite register until people talked about it in that session. I couldn't even imagine that this was as prevalent as it was and that people were protesting against it and that women were coming together to do something about that. It was just totally new in my experience. So that was the beginning. And then the staff that was there, I think, made it known that volunteer positions were available and so I began, took some more training, and volunteered on the phone, did overnights at the shelter. It was just so

memorable, I guess you'd say, to be answering the phone and talking to women and actually welcoming women to the shelter when they came in. The whole thing.

**GTR:** What was your degree, or what were you studying in college?

**NW:** Oh, well, at that point I didn't really know. I finally decided to major in, what was called at that time, "Social Development." A form of macro-social work, I guess you could say. It was community organizing, planning, program development, administration, things like that. Then again, when I got my master's, that was in *Social Work*. But it wasn't a clinical program, it was again, the administration and planning and social policy, which I really grew to love. But, you know, the macro perspective. When working at the Women's Coalition you never said you were into social work or that you were studying social work. No, no. Because the only social work that anybody knew about was the Child Protection worker. And we didn't want anybody to think that that's what we were doing.

**GTR:** That would feel uncomfortable.

**NW:** Right.

**GTR:** Telling their stories or something like that...

**NW:** Oh yeah, absolutely. Yeah. No, we were all non-professional and made sure that everyone knew that. That, you know, we were just "one of them". During that time, I think, I was probably five or six years older than the younger staff, at least.

**GTR:** When were you born, can you say, just for the records?

**NW:** 1937.

**GTR:** So then you started volunteering. Did you feel adequately trained, or how did that kind of background or training did you get before you..

**NW:** You know, it's hard to remember what kind of training we got. As much education as they could give us about, you know, what was known at the time about, I'll say "domestic violence" even though we didn't use that term at the time.

**GTR:** What did you say? Battered women, or...

**NW:** So yeah, "wife beating," "battered women." I didn't use the term "domestic violence" for many years. When the whole scene began to change was when those terms came into it. And it

had the effect of watering down the impact, I would say. We had, you know, as much training as possible and probably role playing, I don't recall, but we probably did that. And I did feel adequately prepared, very much so. Of course, it was scary and you learned by doing. I think the thing that made an impression on me was that we were trusted to know what we were doing and to be able to help somebody else. Trusted to run the place by ourselves overnight, and so on. That was, I thought, really something.

**GTR:** So more empowering than, scary.

**NW:** Yes.

**GTR:** That's good.

**NW:** Yes.

**GTR:** And you would have been, 40 something?

**NW:** Around there, yes.

**GTR:** You said you were a little bit older than some of those other women at that time. Ok. Did you feel different because maybe you yourself hadn't personally experienced that, so did you feel like you couldn't relate, or was that challenging?

**NW:** Um, I think we could all relate in spite of our experience perhaps not being the same quite as those who had been through hell and back. I'll only speak for myself, not having experienced physical violence, but in, I believe, in many relationships but certainly in mine, there were plenty of times when there was emotional abuse, you know. Just emotional. And I will say that certainly I was capable of that too. And I wouldn't say that I didn't provide some of it as well. I think in that sense, the sense of not being a victim so much as disempowerment, I would call it. It was easy to relate. Definitely.

**GTR:** Did you feel like that you were a charter member of Ms. Magazine, did you feel like this is a feminist thing, an effort that we're working on here. Or is this just going to keep men from hurting these women. Was it a bigger picture?

**NW:** I think most of the founders, although I can't remember now and can't really speak to that, had the feminist perspective. I certainly did. And I think we all built on that. At first I remember kind of floundering around the first few years, wondering, "well, I don't really know if I were to go out and do community education. And speaking, and trying. Basically some of it was fundraising. You have to do community education to keep going. And I thought, I don't really

have a framework. Theory. Practice. What works. All this kind of thing, for this problem. But I think at the time from all the reading I was doing over the years, that it was just being developed at that time. All of the researchers and so on were writing and kind of, building on each other's work. I'm trying to think of some... I remember Ann Jones. A professor Finkelhor from one of the universities in Canada. Susan Schechter.

**GTR:** Were they in the social work fields, or were they mostly...

**NW:** Finkelhor was a sociologist, Schechter had her doctorate in social work. The Dobashes. I don't know if anybody else has mentioned these people.

**GTR:** No.

**NW:** Who were at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. Wonderful work. They did some great work. And it was all right on the button.

**GTR:** So you were learning.

**NW:** I was learning just basically by doing all that reading.

**GTR:** Were you taught yourself, or were you sharing it with the staff, or just you yourself figuring all that stuff out?

**[13:10]**

**NW:** That's hard to remember, too. I think in discussions I think we shared quite a bit of it, yes. I think there were some people who {.....} did not buy into that perspective because there were such a variety of women who worked at the Women's Coalition from one to another, and stuff. Now whether they all shared that same perspective, I don't know.

**GTR:** I wondered, there is actually a professor in Duluth who was doing more general interview about the women's movement in Duluth. I don't know if you spoke with her. Some of the people, like Jean, have spoken with her, and I think she might be writing a book too. But I am curious in 1977 or 1978 in Duluth, Duluth would not have been on the cutting edge of various social movements, I would think. And so I'm wondering, you kind of came from elsewhere for a while. Was there a particular person that was like "hey, I heard about this thing out in New York," or "this is happening here," kind of bringing that to Duluth. Or did *you* have some role in that? How did that happen?

**NW:** There again, that's, I'm not really sure. I know Duluth wasn't on the cutting edge of a lot of social movements, I would say. But on the other hand, with feminism it was a very small group of women but they were certainly there. And they certainly made their voices known. Now where they all came from, I can only, I remember Jean of course, who was definitely a Minnesotan, came from Owatonna. And Shirley Oberg who I believe, as I recall, grew up in Brainerd. Or somewhere. And then when, I don't know, it was maybe a couple of years into it after I arrived here, Ellen Pence, of course, who, as far as I know, had lived in the Twin Cities and worked in the Department of Corrections. She brought, of course, so much, and I know others have talked about that too. She really tied it all together with her ideas about a model that we could use to address the issue.

**GTR:** Were you involved much with that? The Intervention program?

**NW:** The Intervention project (Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, DAIP) yes. It was very exciting. And as I recall, those of us who wanted to be involved, could. I think everybody wanted to. I remember, again, being trained and going out at night by myself to visit women who had just been beaten up, and whose partner had been arrested, knowing that the partner wasn't in the home anymore. I can't remember how we were notified of this, when we were supposed to go out. But I remember going out maybe two or three times by myself, and it was just amazing.

**GTR:** The interactions with the women?

**NW:** The interactions, plus thinking, now when I look back I think, "did I really *do that*?"

**GTR:** It wasn't safe, or it was just...

**NW:** I think a lot of people would have thought it wasn't safe. But in those days, at least in Duluth, I think it was. I remember years later trying to begin a project like that in another state and being told "No, nobody would ever do that. That wasn't safe." In a smaller town, you know, than Duluth and so on. No, they wouldn't ask. We wouldn't do that.

**GTR:** In your time here, I'm not sure, if they still do anything like that, or...

**NW:** I don't remember how many years we actually went out like that to talk to women right away. I think sometimes they were given, maybe after a while, I can't recall, that they were given cards and told to call or asked if we could call them. And we did a lot of that too from the office. We could call, we'd been given permission to call. And so that would be the way that we would get in touch with them first.

**[19:13]**

**GTR:** With sharing that information, did you have any sense of...you were offering them options like “there’s this shelter, there are other things you can do,” did you have a sense of what people did before there was a shelter, or in stories you’ve heard. What happened earlier?

**NW:** I think there were a few safe homes where women would open up their homes to battered women who needed a safe place to stay. I don’t know who those were in Duluth, though. And aside from that, if they couldn’t go to a relative or their mom or their sister or something, I don’t know what they did. And that was the problem.

**GTR:** And then when you were doing this work what was the reaction usually from either the women or from community members who might know that you were working there? How was the reception? Like, “Wow, that’s great!” or “Why are you doing that?” You know, that kind of...

**NW:** Well. Kind of amazed, or not understanding or for example I had a very good friend who I thought was pretty cool about many other subjects and everything, but when I told her I was working at the battered women’s shelter, she said “Are you going to teach the rest of the staff not to be man-haters?”

**GTR:** Because you were married too? Because were you married at that point?

**NW:** I was married. Yeah. And I was really shocked. I said, “Well, they’re not.” I don’t have to teach them not to be man-haters because they’re not. Most of them were in relationships. It was very difficult to understand. And mostly my friends and relatives didn’t want to talk about it. They wouldn’t ask about it, they wouldn’t talk about it. My mother and sisters would just say, “No man is ever gonna hit me!” That is... yeah... right.

**GTR:** You never know...situations. Did you ever end up working with the police or other agencies that were either pleased to work with you or not please, or something like that?

**NW:** Well, you know, Ellen and Shirley did all of the footwork, let’s say. Negotiating with the police and the city attorney and instituting ways of monitoring if they were really following through with what they said they would do. Even getting the police to actually make an arrest on probable cause. They had never done that! [chuckles] And then they had to start doing that. And eventually I think it took years, they became, they liked it, they saw that it was effective - to do things in that way. But then, in every step the process had to be negotiated and monitored. There was at least one judge who was on board as far as I recall, from the beginning, and that was Judge Campbell. If there were others, I don’t remember. But in terms of how closely I,

individually, worked with them, not so much. But I was certainly free to call the city attorney and talk to them if I wanted to. Sometimes I think I had a chance to see a lot of different aspects of the domestic violence intervention program.

**GTR:** You started as a volunteer but did you work?

**[24:20]**

**NW:** Yes. I was hired eventually.

**GTR:** At the shelter, or at the...

**NW:** Yes. At the shelter. And at first I was just an advocate within the shelter, and so on. But then as I recall, the intervention project got off the ground, got funding and so on and so forth. And then, I'm not sure, I don't know if then I was working exactly fully in the intervention program or if the women I was working with were a part of that. That's hard to remember. I remember having the assignment for a period of time, going to the police station... was it every day? Once a week? For some reason, and talking to, I can't remember if he was the police chief or who he was... but I was collecting statistics or something. It's so hard to remember. But I was really so impressed with that program and the thought that went into putting it together and how well it worked. At first, I couldn't kind of switch my mind to the idea that we'd be working in the criminal justice system or *with* the criminal justice system instead of just these poor female victims. That's what I was used to and that's where I felt safe. So I had to kind of make the leap. And it wasn't that easy.

**GTR:** Working with the prosecutors or lawyers. Did you have to be like in court sometimes?

**NW:** Well, you know we always, even before the intervention project began, we always were advocates for the women. We learned how to write out the (petition for the) order for protection, affidavits, and then we would take them down to the court clerk to get them assigned a hearing date if they were requesting an ex parte order.

**GTR:** Order for protection?

**NW:** No, it'll come to me. I think it's Latin words that mean "in effect immediately." (*Edited to add: it means "at the request of one party or for the benefit of one party only"- a temporary order pending a formal hearing*). But then when it isn't in effect immediately, you have to wait a certain number of days to have a hearing in court. So then they would be assigned a hearing and if we were working with that particular woman, we would go to court as her advocate. That was, yeah, there again, a very nice experience to have. Very good experience to have. Even though an



advocate was really though, in my experience, in my opinion, only there as a body. If the assailant had an attorney, the woman's advocate couldn't say anything (only provide support).

**GTR:** Did the women have attorneys often then too, or not?

**NW:** The women almost never had attorneys, as I recall. But if neither side had an attorney then the advocate could speak if she thought it was necessary.

**GTR:** That's a variety. Other people have talked about that, the legal system. Do you remember any particular - without names or anything - but any particular stories that stuck out or women that you worked with or helped and really felt like you were making a difference, or not. Any memorable moments?

**NW:** I think I made a difference in many many cases. And I think everybody would agree that they did. I know they felt like this is really important work, it's something we need to be doing, we need more *help* in doing it. I don't remember individual cases that much, or women's names or anything like that. Or even horrendous experiences they might have had. But there was one woman who I worked with, I don't remember her case at all. But years later she met my daughter and told her how much it had meant to her that I had helped her. So it was things like that. You never know what kind of impact you're going to make. Maybe you don't know at the time, but...

**GTR:** I'm sure it was exhausting, but what kept you going? Or doing that?

**NW:** It was exhausting. I think a lot of us got burnt out from time to time. What kept me going? I wanted, partly it was for my own career and advancement in the end. I wanted to have the experiences and be able to say that I had done this variety of things. I think I haven't talked so much about the idea that the coalition was a collective.

**GTR:** Right.

**NW:** And that was radical. Maybe in the 70s it wasn't that radical... 60s and 70s for other places and stuff. But I think for Duluth it really was. And the idea that women would form a collective. That meant so much to me. I was very much accustomed to the hierarchy. I was a military wife. We took our husbands ranks. That was the way it was. We had no rank ourselves, but I knew about hierarchy all right. So the coalition being a collective, we all had an equal role as much as we chose. And an equal voice. We were all on the board, and then I think there were other community members on the board as well. So that was important. But as far as what kept me going, I think wanting to have the experience and wanting to advance more and learn as much as I could... I don't know what other people did to keep from burning out. But especially when I was in grad school I was working, I think almost full time, and going to school almost full time.

It was crazy. And I would go from having these intense emotional experiences working with the women, to sitting in a seminar. It was just almost impossible. Sometimes my brain would just shut off. I didn't even know what people around me were saying. In my experience working at the shelter with the coalition, there wasn't an opportunity and sit down and debrief with each other. Either there wasn't, or, that wasn't wanted. That was like, frowned on. You just didn't do that. Oh, you feel bad? You feel emotional after this experience? Suck it up. [chuckles]

**GTR:** Were there any trainings or parties? I have seen pictures, I don't know if that was volunteers? I've seen pictures of people doing skits or kind of being silly. Was that in your years at all?

**NW:** Ummm.... I'm sure there were those things. I don't remember in what context those were done. Were they trainings? Or were they volunteer things? I don't remember. I know we had retreats, though. We did have retreats.

**GTR:** People were sharing something, when they talk about their own experience..

**NW:** Yes

**GTR:** Had to be interacting, right? So would that come up?

**NW:** I really don't, in my memory, it really didn't. Their own experiences, personally, with the issue, I really don't remember.

[35:05]

**GTR:** Get the work done, we're just going to do the work, and then do this...

**NW:** I think that was it. And I really do wish, I found out in years after that, the value of being able to talk about your feelings about what you're doing - to somebody! And I felt that we didn't do that. Might be different from other people's experience.

**GTR:** But that was a function of the time, the era. People not so into that anyone, or was it that particular topic? Or what?

**NW:** I don't know. Yeah. I don't know. A collective isn't *exactly* non-hierarchical. It isn't *exactly* everybody's equal. By definition, of course, it is. In practice...

**GTR:** Efficiency wise, how did the meetings go?

**NW:** Oh, you had to have consensus.

**GTR:** It took a while?

**NW:** Oh, never ending. Yeah, never ending. And, of course, it was going to be that some people had more power than others. And that's just the way it was. I think it took so many years for me to find my voice in a setting like that. Even in a setting like that where you think it would be safe.

**GTR:** There were some that were more vocal..

**NW:** Who were more vocal, more assertive, more go-getters. And one of the ideas was that we could learn various tasks, and we could take on various tasks as we wanted to. Well.

**GTR:** And people didn't want...

**NW:** They didn't want to give them up.

**GTR:** Ohhh..

**NW:** Whoever was doing it as they liked didn't want to give it up, or share it even. Oh, it was fine that I was an advocate and ran all over town and did whatever was necessary, and worked with the women, and I loved that! But I also wanted to learn public speaking, community education, and grant writing. Those jobs were taken. It was never that in so many words. But I never got to do it. And in the end, that's why I left.

**GTR:** People found their niches and stayed put. Ok. How long were you there?

**NW:** Between the internships and all of that, and then the paid employment... gosh... I think it was the mid-80s (5 or 6 years). And then I worked for a couple of years at a few places. I went to one of the counties, not St. Louis County, for a couple of years. I wished that I had never left the Women's Coalition.

**[39:37]**

**GTR:** The same kind of energy? Or structure?

**NW:** Not the same kind of, yeah, I will say support. I didn't appreciate it when I had it. And the case work (at the county)... it wasn't about the people. It wasn't about the clients. Not really. It was just performing what you had to do and that was it.

**GTR:** Do you feel like the shelter was more personal or with those women? What was it, you were staying overnight. Can you even describe what that logistically was like? Or what was a day like at the shelter in 1979? Just a little vignette.

**NW:** Some things were funny. Being at the shelter constantly, you had to kind of be a house mother, and make sure everybody got their tasks done. That they did the dishes, that they did the cooking, that they cleaned up the kitchen, that they... I don't remember if we told them when to go to bed. They were supposed to be leading their own lives and making their own decisions and everything while they were there. For some of them that was the first time in a long time they had that much independence, if ever. There were some things that were really... I know I wasn't supposed to do this, but I was there overnight one time, and the women could go out when they wanted to. They didn't have to stay there. I think they were supposed to be in at a certain time, but they could go out. And one went out and I think every body thought or knew that she went out to meet with her abuser at a McDonald's or someplace. A couple of the other women, I think, wanted to go and rescue her. Or at least give her a way to come back if she should run out of there screaming or something, without having to involve the police. So as it turned out, I think they begged me to give them a ride and I think it was from where the shelter was then down to, I think it was Canal Park. And I did. Some of the crazy things you do, I did. I never told any body that and [laughs] I dropped off these other two women and they went in and I drove around and I saw... I was supposed to park and stay there, but I saw one of the women who went in to rescue this other one pick up a butter knife off of the counter and kind of... And I thought "Oh, what is going to happen." And I just took off. I mean, like, I just took off. And finally ten or fifteen minutes later I came back. Nothing had happened. But it sure looked like it was going to, and these women would have known how to get into something like that. I'm sure they would have. (They were waiting outside when I returned). "Well, where were you!?" [laughs]

**GTR:** Because you went back. And you were supposed to be overnight at the shelter?

**NW:** Yes. Yes. You know, I wasn't gone very long. But I had to take care of my women there.

[44:23]

**GTR:** Were people doing their own cooking? I heard some stories somewhere that it was whole wheat versus white bread. So many decisions that had to be made.

**NW:** There were. Those kinds of decisions. The people who were really into healthy food and wanted to convert everybody else to that, but I think most of the women were still eating white bread and what they were used to.

**GTR:** Was there much discussion of feminism or other things with the women that came?

**NW:** Uhh... that... now it's so hard to remember. I think there were meetings during the day that all the residents were supposed to attend. I don't think they always did. But I think a lot of it was discussed at those meetings, but one on one too. But not as, "I'm going to teach you about this great theory about why this happened to you." [laughs]

**GTR:** Shirley, or something, mentioned earlier that there was curriculum and they were supposed to teach.

**NW:** Yes, there was a curriculum definitely. But as I recall, that was done at the meetings. The residents and other women in the community who had worked with the program attended these meetings, I forget what they call them. Group support... education and support groups. So the residents had their own meeting I think, or else they were all combined, I can't remember. So that curriculum was used at those meetings and it was really... it was good. I think the goal was to politicize survivors of domestic violence, if that's the word I should use. And convincing them that it wasn't their fault, and these are the reasons why this happened. And here is what you can do, you can now be an activist. You have a voice and you don't have to let this happen to you anymore and you can go out there and change the world. It seemed like that was the goal of the curriculum. It was good. It was a good one, I thought.

**GTR:** Do you remember any particular women who were like, "Wow, I'm going to go and do this now!" Or even came back to volunteer? Or anything like that?

**NW:** There were some. I can't remember anyone in particular. Some of them got it right away. There were others who didn't. You know, there was always the clash between the religious perspective about how a woman is supposed to behave, and how men are supposed to dominate women and the husband is over the wife, and so on. And that was very, very difficult.

**GTR:** Because you were diverse, I'm sure. People from all walks of life, kind of?

**NW:** Yes. I would say all walks. I mean. I think it was always too that low-income women in particular, and young women in particular, needed to avail themselves of the shelter. If you were middle class or had a job or had other options, you just had other resources. Yeah, so, it was...

**GTR:** Makes sense.

**NW:** I would say, over the years though, that everything changed so much. I'm not sure that the whole feminist framework is there anymore. And it's understandable I guess, not that I have anything to do with the present shelter or program. But when you have to accept funding from

the state and so on, the county and social services, you just become an institution. Which we weren't back in those days.

**GTR:** How was it surviving? Do you know where your salary was coming from? Some funding somewhere..

**NW:** Ummm... well in those days there were grants, I remember. The Bush Grant, McKnight Grant, different foundation grants. And then right away, the women applied for welfare. But that's not what they called it in those days.

**GTR:** Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

**NW:** Yes, and if you couldn't stay in your own home and you were at the shelter, then you had to apply to the county and the county paid per diem payments to the shelters and all shelters around the country operated that way. They still do. Otherwise they couldn't survive. I did take what I learned to a job that I got after I divorced in New York state. I worked in Niagara Falls, New York at a family service agency. I managed a program that had a battered women's shelter and outreach program and education, and I even, in that county, I took the ideas that Ellen had brought to us and promoted them to the county attorney in Niagara County. He liked it!

**GTR:** So it was new?

**NW:** Absolutely it was new, yes. So they began a program there. I would say some flaws, not quite as good as Ellen's program, but I think it was the best I could do.

**GTR:** Spread the word!

**NW:** Yes! So that's where it ended up for me. And I was there for 11 years.

**GTR:** The Women's Coalition was very new and the shelter. There weren't very many shelters when it started, correct? So even when you were there here in Duluth did you find the sharing of information, or people coming and finding out how you were doing it or anything like that?

**NW:** I remember going to conferences, and that was what that was about. Plus the State of Minnesota has a state coalition. We went to those meetings and things. And there is where we shared information. It seems to me that we got a lot of guidance and information from St. Paul Women's Advocates. I just read not too long ago that one of the founders of Women's Advocates was killed. I don't know if anybody else talked about that. She was in Cuba and she was hit by a car.

**GTR:** Just recently?

**NW:** Yeah, it was only a couple of weeks ago.

**GTR:** What was her name?

**NW:** Sharon Rice Vaughn. Yeah, I think a lot of good stuff came from Women's Advocates. And I think that a lot of the shelters around the state, I don't know if everybody was all on board with all the same kinds of structure and program. I'm sure they weren't. I'm pretty sure they weren't.

**[54:46]**

**GTR:** Just the concept of keeping things, in some way... Inspiration

**NW:** Yeah, I wonder about well.. there was such an emphasis on keeping the location secret. Keeping the shelter location secret. I don't know if all other shelters around the state or around the country always did that. In some cases a shelter would be in a small town, and how could they? They couldn't. They couldn't keep the location secret.

**GTR:** Do you think it was safer that way? Were there any issues ever where safety was an issue when you were there?

**NW:** If we could believe that nobody knew where it was. I don't think any abusers ever showed up at our door. Once, the day after Halloween, we looked outside and the whole front yard was full of gravestones.

**GTR:** That would be creepy.

**NW:** Yeah... so I just wonder whether today, Safe Haven is that what it's called? Is that location secret?

**GTR:** Somewhat. I mean, it's a fairly big building that they built for that purpose. So even from the outside it doesn't really look like just a house. It looks a little bit institutional, but people might think it's like a group home or something. It doesn't have a big sign out front or anything. So I think it is a little bit quiet, but I'm sure it's not completely secret. And they have locked doors and you have to call ahead for things. But they have a family resource center down on 1st Street.

**NW:** I remember that. I was there when Cathy (Curley) was still alive. She took us on a tour of the place. I'm so glad I got to do that.

**GTR:** So you weren't around then with that transition to the different name, or different structure.

**NW:** No, no.

**GTR:** It was not always the easiest.

**NW:** Yeah, so things just evolve. They change. They can never stay the same, and I suppose they wouldn't want it to.

**GTR:** Change is hard sometimes.

**NW:** I was gone by that time, I guess, in New York. And I don't know how it was for the people who remained.

**GTR:** I'm very outside the loop so I'm just trying to get different interviews. I mean they changed the name, and the structure and they have a director from outside and so it's different for people. But it's doing well in the community. They have disability and fundraising and it just seems like it's now, such a different time than perhaps what Jean or somebody was talking about, advocating to the county or they weren't being supportive of some things, or they weren't forwarding the FDC checks, or things. And it just seems like anyone resisting helping a shelter or helping women be at the shelter just seems... odd.

**NW:** I'm sure they are a lot more supportive of it at least that aspect. I don't think they were ever supportive of the whole feminist theory of domestic violence at the county. Oh no no no. It was two people and two people were at fault. And that was their... and I don't think they would ever change that.

**GTR:** It would be hard to see a feminist government agency probably. And then you were New York, and you retired? Have you been involved with anything locally?

**NW:** After I returned, which was just before 9/11 in the year 2001, I had a position and I (was a counselor at a crisis hot line in Minneapolis for 8 years before retiring in 2009.

The younger generation, my daughter and my granddaughters... I think they have more opportunities. I think they're better educated than probably the generation before them, and they understand a lot more. I think they're just more ... they're not going to let it happen to them. At least that's my hope. Laws and policies have come a long way, and so there is help. The legal



system is.. meh.. there's still a lot to be done. I think the problem will always remain. It's a power and control problem and who controls the resources has the most power in the relationship, usually. That's another problem. But it seems to be that the young women of today, they realize that. That they've got to have a balance there.

**GTR:** There's been some things in the news... football players and that, if you're familiar with that and people say "Why would she stay? It's her fault that she sticks around when he's mean." There was even a movement where people were posting stories of why they stayed in a bad situation - because they had to, or because they didn't have any money, kids or something.

**NW:** That's a big question on people's' minds: why would she stay? Why wouldn't she just leave? There are so many reasons.

[talking about HBO for a second]

**NW:** It was a pleasure. This work is... I'm glad that somebody is still doing it and that it needs to be ongoing and that it just needs to be educating, educating, educating. Go out and speak, talk about it. I think it's a really good thing to talk about it. And if it's happened to you or somebody you know, talk about it. Statistics will go in one ear and out the other. They want to hear personal stories.

**GTR:** Certain groups of women might think "That would never happen to me" and then it might, and then what do you do? Are you embarrassed to tell your family that this happened to you because "this doesn't happen to people like us" and things like that. I think there's still a lot of that isolation. All the things that can happen, unfortunately.

**NW:** Yes.

**GTR:** But I think it's really interesting, just for the history for this project too, to just understand that a small group of women in Duluth said "We're going to do something about this" and there just wasn't a lot of that happening around the country.

**NW:** That's right.

**GTR:** And just remember that energy, or "why", or all that was here. Or even remember what it was like before that. We think now, "Oh there's a shelter and you know...". I'm just remembering that that's a fairly recent piece. It sounds like you were moving here right about that time. There weren't as many options.

**NW:** Right. It was just a tremendous program, and I have to give a lot of credit to the founders. The women that were there at the beginning. So I thank them. And some of them are gone now. It's really good that we're doing this history project.

**[1:05:36]**