

Interview with Marcia Anderson

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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KB: I'd like you to start off by giving us an overview of your involvement with Minnesota Women's Press.

MA: I knew Mollie Hoben [Co-publisher of Minnesota Women's Press] from our work with community newspapering in the 1970s and early 1980s. She called me and talked to me--in 1983 or it could have been early 1984--to ask me whether I would talk about the hurdles regarding the idea she had for starting the paper. So we talked. I was definitely interested in helping with a woman's newspaper.

Somewhere in early 1984 she started to form planning groups and I started to participate in those planning groups. As time went on, we started developing more specific responsibilities for kinds of positions, and I signed on for coming on the editorial team. I'm not sure exactly how it evolved but I became an assistant editor to begin with. Mollie was editor in charge of overall editorial, and I was in charge of specific editorial production, planning of issues, and contacts with free lancers, and then some reporting and writing responsibilities. We continued to meet as a planning group--a broad planning group--to get the initial pilot issue underway. There were also people working in the financial angles of getting the paper started.

KB: And you stayed as editor for how long?

MA: Until about August of 1986. I was, at the same time, beginning to teach at Metro State University--or I had been teaching at Metro State University--and was starting to see my career evolving into higher education from having started in journalism. So I decided to make a break into higher education when a position became available there. It was one of the harder decisions of my life because it was such a good place to be at the "Women's Press". At the same time it was still so young an organization and financially I wasn't able to continue to operate with a limited income. Although one of the things that allowed me to start and to continue at the "Women's Press" was that the wages were fairly reasonable for community newspapers at that time. It was the best pay I had gotten, so it was hard decision. It wasn't anything to do with the "Women's Press". It had to do with me and my life cycle issues. [Laughter]

KB: When Mollie first talked to you, how did she describe what she was trying to do? Do you remember? What was the initial perception that you had of what this was going to be?

MA: I don't really remember the initial conversation but I do remember quite vividly the principles that came out in the initial planning meetings. Initially Mollie said she wanted to start a paper that was by and about women--from a woman's perspective. That theme got amplified and deepened through all the planning meetings, in terms of how that was going to materialize into a different kind of publication. I don't know whether Mollie knew when she started how different it would indeed turn out to be journalistically. The process of the planning brought out all the ideals of the women involved of what it could be. It just up-lifted everyone's expectations, really, or everyone's hopes of what could happen. The energy that started to build then just kept everybody aloft in carrying out this project.

Although Mollie and Glenda [Martin; Co-publisher of Minnesota Women's Press] had a strong vision themselves of how it was going to be, I think there was a collective spirit that buoyed the whole project up and heightened the expectations of what could happen as the planning continued. I think the "Women's Press" since its origins has done some very bold things journalistically and I don't know whether any of that was anticipated at the beginning, but it came out of the strength of all the women involved and the combined strength that they all felt. It was like someone was giving us permission to do these things, so we were going to seed this and do it.

I do remember, when Mollie first talked to me, feeling kind of a chill up my spine, thinking, "This is a wonderful opportunity. This is something that will be thrilling and momentous and worth being part of." Indeed it has been...for many, many women as well as readers.

I remember her talking about how it would be different because it would be from a woman's perspective both editorially and as a business. The women's perspective would inform everything that was done both editorially and business and financially. It's really hard to separate what was being discussed early on, and look at it as it has evolved. It seems to me that one of the things that has been a hallmark of the "Women's Press", since the beginning planning stages that Mollie and Glenda set up, is to very thoroughly think about, reflect on and process all the minute decisions that need to be made in setting up this organization. They should all reflect back on core principles--being from a woman's perspective, supporting women as important and valid, and being collaborative, supportive, principled, and a healthy workplace or organization. So there was a content and process principle and there was a process principle of how we were going to do this, in a healthy, supportive and principled way. I've not encountered that combination very often.

KB: What was going on with other feminist organizations at that time? Do you know, off hand? Was there anything about this time--the early to mid 1980s--that made this a good or bad time to [start this kind of organization]?

MA: I can't really answer in terms of other feminist organizations, because I had less involvement. I was always involved or supportive on the sidelines, but never really involved in working with any particular women's organizations. I can comment about journalism. In the 1970s, the Twin Cities had the largest number of community newspapers--neighborhood newspapers--of any city in the country.

KB: Really? That's interesting. I had no idea.

MA: There were thirty-six at one time. I was Executive Director of the Neighborhood Press Association, which was a little professional association that grew out of those newspapers. There was some consolidation and dwindling of them that had happened in the early 1980s, but there were still many strong ones.

That was a historical phenomenon in journalism, related to technology. More people could produce newspapers, and more people were interested in getting their own information out and not relying on mainstream media. That was part of the politics of the time, and so there were many, many, many kinds of neighborhood or special interest papers that were produced. I think the "Women's Press" is one example of that trend. But there weren't very many that were done for women. There were a few others nationally that existed at the time. Check with Mollie--she researched that.

KB: In terms of survivors, have you been aware of the local scene enough to know other survivors of that time period that were special interest papers?

MA: The Twin Cities is still a hotbed of journalism nationally. We have lots and lots of publications. But there are not nearly as many neighborhood papers, and I think that is mainly because of the difficulty in financing them. I'm not going to remember the dates--but I'm pretty sure it was in the 1980s--there were some changes in federal spending that came down through cities. Some of the papers were funded by city governments, and there was some shifting there and some reductions and limitations on where those monies could go. Some papers dried up because they could not get city funding.

There has been consolidation, but there are still are many neighborhood newspapers in the Twin Cities compared to other cities. There are lots of newspapers and other kinds of publications in the Twin Cities. We have Minnesota Parent, Minnesota Seniors, and the other one on families--Families I think it is called--and lots of other kinds of special interest publications. We have alternative city newspapers that not all cities have. There is something about the Twin Cities that fosters this. When you have a lot of papers, it fosters other papers and it encourages and trains people.

KB: What do you think that something is, just out of curiosity?

MA: Well, we have a highly educated populace. We have a reading population. This is one of the highest populations of readers. There are more books sold here and taken out of libraries than many other cities. I don't know the statistics off-hand but there is a highly educated, highly reading population.

Minnesota has also always had citizen activists. We have always had "populists"--citizens being involved in action issues, politics or city governments. They dovetail. Now, I think we're going to start seeing that on the web--that's the next horizon for that kind of activity. In Golden Valley where I live, there is a citizen's organization that put up a web site six months before the City government did. And it has the kind of information on it that...

KB: Do you think we'll see the Twin Cities or Minnesota phenomenon on the web then?

MA: In terms of publications...

KB: Interesting.

MA: As an old-time journalist, I get to speculate. [laughter]

KB: That's fine. So, you left the community newspaper that you were currently working for at that time.

MA: I think I was free-lancing at the time.

KB: Did you work full time for the Minnesota Women's Press?

MA: I don't know whether it was full time or not. It may have been three-quarter time. There were a certain amount of hours that I contracted out. It probably wasn't full time because of the finances of Minnesota Women's Press. When we started, they probably couldn't afford to pay me full time. I don't recall that specifically. I was teaching at the time too, at Metro [Metropolitan State University], so I bet it wasn't full time.

KB: I'd like to have you talk about what those organizational meetings were like. Can describe the way they operated and what got done?

MA: My sense was that Mollie and Glenda [Martin, Publisher of Minnesota Women's Press] made a concerted effort to involve lots of different women from diverse backgrounds. From the feel of those meetings, they succeeded in doing that, because they were really interesting groups of women to be involved with. As I recall, they were also amazingly very collaborative. I'd been in other groups that were supposed to have been collected to collaborate on something, and there wasn't much collaboration that

happened. [laughter] These groups--and I think it was because everybody wanting to seize this great idea, and run and help with it--these women were very collaborative.

There were a lot of really fun brainstorming sessions. I remember one in particular. We were trying to brainstorm a "tag line" for promotional purposes, or else to put on the newspaper. Everybody was supposed to come to the meeting with ideas. We did that and we shared them. I'm pretty sure we took a vote, or several votes. There was lively discussion about why this tag line was better than that tag line, but it was all done in the spirit of what would do best for "Women's Press". I don't remember it being contentious. Then the choice was made, and I'm pretty sure it was a vote. You can check with Mollie and see if she remembers it differently.

I'm pretty sure that there was a vote of the planning group that we would use, "A woman's place is in the news." That then became a "tag line" that we used on all the early press releases and promotional materials. I had done four or five years of free lancing in promotions at that time, in PR [public relations], and I was going to be one of the people to work on promotion. I really liked that one [tag line], because I knew that it would be memorable. Indeed, as I went out and put up the signs with the racks of the pilot newspapers--and got back to people as to whether we would continue--people sometimes remembered that tag line as much as they remembered the name of the newspaper, at least the first time. They got a little chuckle out of it, and it was kind of feisty.

KB: You didn't run into lots of groups that thought, "These women are dangerous"?

MA: I'm sure that was out there. Dangerous...I don't think I encountered too many responses of being threatened, but I did encounter people thinking we were uppity and silly to think that we could do this. I don't think there was much belief in the mainstream media, especially, that this would fly. It was: "Oh, this is kind of cute. Oh, this will last a little while and then it'll go away." Mollie got interviewed on a number of radio shows and so on, so we were taken seriously, but there wasn't much confidence behind it. It was news that there was a woman's newspaper going to be published.

KB: Are you referring to primarily media people that responded that way?

MA: Yes, media and then probably some potential advertisers. It took a long while for advertisers to think there was any point in advertising in a women's newspaper--except organizations that were already women-directed, with women organizational advertising. In terms of response, it's the whole thing about women being treated somewhat dismissively. I'm not sure that would not still happen today for a new paper. However, I don't remember encountering any open hostility or sense of being threatened.

KB: Some of the things that you did as the public relations consultant on the planning committee...am I phrasing that properly?

MA: Yes.

KB: You secured distribution sites?

MA: Right.

KB: Describe that process.

MA: Well, I think Denise Sheibe [original Distribution Coordinator] did most of that. We were looking for places that would be frequented by women. We also made an effort--and this was part of our being somewhat bold--we made an effort to be in places that other newspapers were, for the legitimacy factor. We wanted to be seen as equal to other publications, and to be specifically in places that would be seen by leaders and movers and shakers, so there would be an opportunity for them to be exposed to the "Women's Press". We did mail the "Women's Press" when we started publications to all the city council people, to a number of legislators and heads of commissions, and so on. We put them on our mailing list automatically, because we thought they ought to know.

KB: Did you hear back from those people when you sent things out to them?

MA: Mollie would probably know more than I would, because she would have gotten letters. I don't really remember.

KB: Did you do any other kind of public relations?

MA: Yes. We did distribution of signs. Mollie and Glenda were in print, and on the radio. We tried to connect with existing organizations. Part of the principles of the "Women's Press" was to be in connection with other existing organizations, and to do networking.

We did broad promotion, emphasizing other media--trying to get our articles in other publications and on the radio. We also did targeted promotion to specifically women's organizations, and Mollie and Glenda did some presentations. We asked to deliver a packet to organizations at various meetings, so that they could have us on their agenda in order to announce the organization's founding and the beginning of publication. We sent out press releases.

When we did mailings, we sent out a little flyer that had an additional "tag line" besides, "A woman's place is in the news". It was printed along with the logo. It was, "Just what do women think they're doing? Find out starting April 16th in Minnesota Women's Press." Then we printed a little description of the paper. I think the original language we used was a way to talk about the values.

KB: Absolutely.

MA: We talked about it in a flyer, for example, as, “The central source for news about women and women’s issues. It will have helpful information and stimulating ideas.” This is the more spiritual piece: “It will celebrate women’s diversity as well as the experiences we share.” We had an emphasis from the very beginning on not letting ourselves be stereotyped as a conglomerate of women who were the same. We had an emphasis from the very beginning on celebrating diversity, and demonstrating women’s diversity of positions, of perspectives, of experiences.

The Profile article was one way we would continue to do that, besides having diversity among our writers and diversity among our topics. We wanted to profile women every issue. We spent a lot of time--I remember this distinctly--when we were planning issues, thinking about whether we could be perceived as categorizing women through the profiles. We talked about whether we were having enough balance of all kinds: age, race, culture, experience of being a woman, perspective on feminism, sexuality, parenting or not parenting, all those kinds of things.

KB: Was this at that point in time that you did the prototype issue? Or is this something that evolved?

MA: I’m sure it was something that evolved, but that part of it was there pretty early on. It was also one of the things that inspired the sense of collaborative spirit--because different women felt that they could have a place. There was not one kind of feminist position, or viewpoint, or set of positions that had to be maintained. It was the diversity of women.

KB: Tell me, was it explicitly feminist?

MA: I would say it was a-politically feminist. It was not feminist from a political perspective or from a particular academic or theoretical approach. It was feminist from the fact that it was from a woman’s perspective. It was de facto feminist.

KB: A nice distinction.

MA: It was progressively feminist because of that. I’ve done some studying, from my academic perspective, of stages of recognition and handling discrimination and oppression. I see the "Women's Press", both at the beginning and also now as it has evolved, at an advanced stage of dealing with oppression. There are early stages when you are just becoming conscious of what’s going on. There’s a second stage of being very resistant to what’s going on, and not seeing complexities and so on. The "Women's Press" has always seen complexities. It’s always been conscious of ambiguities, depth, and layers of experiences and perspectives. It has always made an effort to try to reflect that comprehensiveness and that level of complexity. It has never had a simplistic point of view. It’s always been complex. I see that from an advanced feminist perspective.

KB: Why do you think that is the case?

MA: Well, I think that it results from the vision of Glenda and Mollie. Once they set things in motion--once they said that these are going to be our principles, and invited in other women to be invested in those principles, and to feel like they were owners and be part of how the process would evolve--it happened. It carried itself out based on principles of collaboration, coming from a woman's perspective and having a healthy and supportive environment. Once you say, "These are our principles", if you keep looking at what you're doing in terms of those principles and let everybody keep you honest, then it has to happen that way. The organization would have fallen apart if it had been inconsistent with its goals.

KB: You're describing a set of principles that were in operation at the planning committee level, as well as within the organization?

MA: Yes. I have notes from very early on of those principles being talked about and formulated--as we began the editorial process. I was impressed then and I continue to be impressed with how thorough our thinking was.

I have not had many opportunities in my life--and I don't think very many people have--to be thorough and thoughtful and reflective about small decisions. We wanted to see how they would relate back to core principles. Lots of things got discussed at a very deep and thorough level. Mollie is very much like that personally. That is part of who she is. I remember her coming to each meeting having already thought about things, and having something to say, and then all of us building and determining and processing through those ideas.

For an example, we spent a lot of time talking about the language we would use in the newspaper. That's another thing that I see as being something that the "Women's Press" has contributed to journalism...as an accomplishment. We worked on our style--what style we would use, and what stories we would cover and how we would arrange them. We spent a lot of time talking about the actual language we would use--what expressions would we use, what pronouns would we use, and how would we refer to people when they gave us a title. Would we use the title that they said if it was "Mrs.", for example? Would we use an expression that we felt was discriminatory or offensive if somebody else said it in a quote? We talked about those

KB: In advance of ever facing those issues, in other words?

MA: Well, some issues we dealt with as we came to them. My point is that those decisions were not made lightly; they were made with conscious thoughtful reflection, in tune with principles. That is just so amazing and exhilarating. It was an exhilarating

process to be able to feel like you were in on making those decisions that we saw as important, as significant.

I had a media column where I would monitor things I would see in other media--with respect to how women were covered, or how women were referred to. Those kinds of language issues are examples of one of the themes we saw as significant in how women's perspectives lost power or gained power or strength in the world. We talked about those early on; all of my experience with the "Women's Press" was early on, so it must have been within the first two years.

I remember also discussions about the financial and business aspects of the newspaper. There were always things being juggled. "Here's the way people are telling us we have to do it to be successful business-wise. How is that going to fit? How do we need to modify that in order to make it acceptable according to our principles--so that we don't do anybody any damage, so that we don't end up being hierarchical, so that we don't end up selling our store to somebody outside the organization." Debates or discussions about principles on the financial side were going on too, very early on.

As I was saying earlier, because there was a process orientation on being collaborative, there were perspectives coming from all sorts of places. I was in editorial discussions with people--planning the editorial content of the paper--with people who didn't have a journalism background, but had something to say from their own perspective, from their own experience about what they liked or didn't like about newspapers in the past. That was really useful, very refreshing.

The other thing about collaboration and diversity was that it forced on us a broad worldview. We couldn't just do the standard textbook of promoting this paper. We were going to do it with a twist that made sense for women and the principles of what we wanted to do in the organization. That was one piece that got added. Of course we were going to promote with all the women's organizations, we were going to do networking, we were going to talk with other women. That's a piece of what women are. Talking--and this oral history project is a carryover of that--talking with other women is a piece of that promotion.

KB: Do you remember any particular problems associated with this collaborative approach in those early periods?

MA: Well, it's long. How do we get everybody together? How do we get the planning done? I don't remember precisely but there was a point somewhere in the first year when some of us told Mollie that she should decide some things. [laughter] Some of us on the staff said, "Mollie, you just have to decide some of these things...so that there is somebody who will decide, who is higher. We re-instituted that piece of hierarchy. It wasn't because we were unable to decide; it was just for efficiency sake. Also by that

time, we had come to rely on one another...to know which kind of decisions each of us could make. We could rely on Mollie for certain things.

Beyond that memory, I don't remember anything specific. It would be interesting to check with her to see whether she recalls that. I do remember, when Becky Coleman was there [at the "Women's Press"]. Becky was very practical and very organized, and it may have been something that came from Becky. We didn't all really need to be in on all these decisions. Once we had some groundwork laid, we said, "Mollie you need to do some of these things, and we'll do these other things". So it got divided up a little bit.

KB: There was some task specialization?

MA: Yes. That's exactly right. There was task specialization. Well, there had been some task specialization from the beginning in terms of actually producing the paper and the tasks that had to be done. There were certain things we kept trying to decide as a group--and I'm struggling to remember what the nature of those things were. It may have been something like themes for a particular issue--which would bridge the editorial and the advertising piece [gap]. That is an appropriate example, even if it wasn't an actual one. We said, "We could talk about these, and try to allocate them on a calendar forever. Instead, talk to advertising--come back to us with them. We'll brain storm a list. Then you decide." I don't know whether that was an actual situation, but it could have been. That was the level. You can't plan everything by committee. That was one of the struggles early on.

Then, of course, the financial--trying to get the money. I know this was really a hard thing for Mollie, because she wasn't necessarily inclined to do all that in terms of her own interests or background. She really had to do all that in the beginning--finding investors, and setting it all up legally. I know that a struggle for me was that it felt like I should be more involved in that side, but I just didn't want to--even though it was for the good of the organization.

KB: Some things you just can't take on.

MA: So there were those struggles with the financial side, and it was nip and tuck. We were involved in this venture, and we didn't know whether it was going to fly financially. There were things that would pull Mollie away from the editorial side--to do those kinds of things that had to be done on certain schedules. That was difficult in terms of staff resources.

KB: Speaking of resources, it is very hard for me to distinguish between your planning committee time and your staff time. I wonder whether that transition was as complete as I'm sensing from your conversation....

MA: Well, there was an advisory committee--an on-going advisory committee. The planning committee, I believe, merged into an advisory committee or board.

KB: Then some of the planning committee went on staff, such as yourself, but not the entire committee.

MA: Right. Some of them became investors, so they also came on the organizational board. I'm pretty sure there was also an advisory committee that was an amalgam, or had some additional people on it. Mollie and Glenda really monitored those higher boards--not higher, but external to the operation. At the point where we started the pilot and did that first issue, I was primarily with the editorial piece. I did some ad sales too.

KB: What was it like to sell ads?

MA: Oh I had sold ads before, for community newspapers.

KB: What was unique about the Minnesota Women's Press, if anything?

MA: I've always contended--I don't know what the advertising people think now, or how they're being received now--but my attitude going in was that this was the perfect way for someone to get to women in the Twin Cities. Why would you NOT advertise in the "Women's Press"? We tried to target our efforts to organizations that were already serving women, or had women as primary customers. Theoretically that isn't a hard sell. However, it is a hard sell to buck tradition, and to present a new, fledgling--is it going to be fly-by-night?--publication. That was a hard advertising sell. I had as one of my accounts the YWCA, and it was a pretty easy sell. It was somewhat difficult because they had a limited advertising budget--that was pretty much true of all the places that were targeted advertisers for the "Women's Press".

KB: So there were no philosophic differences? It was just a matter of allocation of scarce resources?

MA: Right, right. The philosophical or the hesitation areas would be in restaurants. We thought restaurants and other kinds of service businesses would be a natural because women use them, but apparently the marketing principle that operates there is mass distribution. We had targeted distribution and, given limited resources, it took a long while to get any of those ads. Also, places like bookstores we thought were a natural, because when we did our initial readership surveys, our readers read books. Some bookstores would advertise and others would not. There was an arms length response: "Well, we'll consider it."

KB: Is that the targeted issue again, versus mass distribution?

MA: I think that's a lot of it--also the women's piece. I think there was the credibility of a new publication. It was too specialized--it was just women. I think marketers have gotten a lot smarter about women spending money since then.

KB: Well, I'm interested in what you thought the probabilities of success were likely to be, in those early years. Did you think it was going to make it?

MA: I worried that it wouldn't make it. I think I had much more confidence that it would succeed journalistically and in terms of readers than in terms of the financial/advertising side. I wasn't sure the two would ever meet up in terms of success. But as each year has gone by, I've been very happy. I mean, almost every month when I see the "Women's Press" on the newsstand I go, "Yes! Good for them. It's still going. Good for them!" [laughter] I did have that experience in the early days when it wasn't known.

KB: I would like to talk about your work as associate editor and contributing editor, because you had a direct impact on content through that work. If you could, talk about content that you saw unacceptable and content that excited you. Is that a reasonable question?

MA: Yes, if I could just collect my thoughts on it a bit. [Pause] What I can start from is what I had thought about previously. One of the things we tried to do differently from mainstream press, from traditional newspapers or journalism, was to re-envision or re-invent what we considered newsworthy. So, news--what was newsworthy in the "Women's Press"--was not going to be just about what was new or alarming or sensational, or political or crime.... It was also going to be about how women lived their lives. It was going to be about everyday life experience.

KB: Stories about how women live their everyday lives was a big departure?

MA: Right, it was a big departure from everyday news because everyday mainstream news is about things that are extraordinary. One of the things we tried to do was to reflect women's experiences, not just extraordinary experiences but everyday experiences and the on-going challenges and encounters and thoughts that women have.

The Profiles [front-page story about a woman in every issue of the paper] were about interesting women but not necessarily about extraordinary women. They were not just about whatever aspect of their lives was extraordinary; it was about the fullness of their lives. We were trying for a much more holistic approach in presenting the experience of women and, also the multiple perspectives of women. I vaguely remember us saying, "We don't want people to be able to predict who's going to be on the Profile." We wanted people to be surprised and interested, to say, "Oh here's another interesting woman." The emphasis on how lives are lived and what goes on in the living of lives, not just the peaks or the valleys, has always been an editorial theme, I think, in addition to the process of experience, the process of thinking.

I have notes from some of our early editorial meetings where we would--I'm kind of amazed at our hubris--but we wanted to tackle things like: How do women deal with the conflicts in their lives? How do women decide their spirituality or live with their spirituality? Big topics, the philosopher's topics we wanted to bring into discussion in a newspaper. This was not a journal or a periodical that comes out once a month or quarterly. This was a newspaper, so these topics would be combined with actual news stories on these broader themes.

We wanted to talk about the thinking of women and the feeling of women, and how they were reflecting on issues and topics of concern to them, not just about action. The traditional newspapers are about actions and we wanted our newspaper also to be about feelings and thinking.

KB: Did you have trouble conveying this to free-lancers, who presumably had not been asked to do this before?

MA: Yes, to some extent. That is some of what I did to begin with. I did work with free-lancers and I did coach them in what we were trying to do. Many of them took to it immediately, but there were others who were very trained in the traditional style [of reporting]. Even if they weren't trained, they hadn't seen anything else and couldn't conceive of it being different from what was in the traditional newspaper. So they would take some coaching. I remember sending back drafts with: "Can you go back and ask this person whether they experienced any conflicts about this?" Or, "Can you go back and ask another person who hasn't had the same kind of experience?" Those are random questions that might have been asked. So there was some coaching involved in that and I would interested to know whether that's still needed.

The other thing--besides the language--about editorial and what we tried to do, was to modify the "objective reporting" style from traditional journalism. We tried to acknowledge the subjective reporter, who was a woman, and allow her to reveal additional information, supplement the information, and go off on a tangent that occurred to her during the process of reporting.

KB: Now how successful was that effort?

MA: It wasn't as successful as I wanted it to be. I was kind of marshalling that. I've got somewhere in my records what we called "sidebars". Say there was a major article about either an issue or some action or even an interview that had occurred. There would be a little sidebar box allowed to the reporter. I'd say: "You did the rest of this fairly objectively". Or, "You weren't really in it as a writer as you wrote it. Here's your chance to 'write from I', and to say something that related to your own experience or a concern or conflict you had in the reporting, or something that came up that didn't fit the rest of the article, or a response." I thought that was one of the best things that we did

early on, to try to break the pattern of traditional journalism, and what I think is the myth of objectivity. I think that was a really important piece. I don't think they do that very much any more. I've seen it occasionally, but I think what they do much more now is to allow people to "speak from I" right in the body of the articles. That's an evolution.

KB: That's an evolution in general in journalism, would you say?

MA: No, I meant that's an evolution at the "Women's Press".

KB: Have you seen something similar outside of the "Women's Press"?

MA: There is much more first-person journalism reporting now than fifteen years ago but I think that's more a function of a trend toward memoir than it is recognition of the myth of objectivity. I don't see very many reporters saying, "I have a bias about this". Or, "It was really difficult for me to interview this person, who I thought was discriminatory toward women." They don't say things like that. So I don't think there's that trend in the mainstream press.

KB: You've talked a lot about what you were trying to accomplish. Can you talk about what was simply not acceptable? I'm thinking of it from your own perspective, perhaps a story that wasn't going to work or an ad that you would not accept, something that just clashed.

MA: I do have an example about an ad that was run, and then we got response from readers. We had a discussion and decided that it was not going to be run again. There was some language in it that was both stereotypical and dismissive to women, or could be interpreted as such. It wasn't VERY BAD, but it did raise our hackles. It turned out in that instance that the advertiser had already heard from customers.

KB: Customers of the Minnesota Women's Press?

MA: I don't know that. They had decided not to do that ad themselves. I know there were other examples like that, where there were ads that needed to be tweaked and needed to be revised to be a little bit more...well, we didn't come at it from an editorial perspective. We came at it from a perspective of: "This is not going to serve you in your advertising if you are targeting to this readership. This readership is not going to find it appealing, or will find it offensive." So we came at it from that perspective.

That was really also a fairly radical difference in my experience in terms of the relationship between advertising and editorial. The advertising folks were always involved in our editorial policy...not policy... They were always involved so that they knew what the editorial principles and orientation was--so they wouldn't be going out and selling ads that didn't match the principles. They were in it from the foundation, and

were committed to those principles too. There really wasn't the kind of conflict that sometimes can occur.

KB: That's very atypical you're suggesting?

MA: That's atypical, yes. The other piece was that we had the advantage of being able to say: "We have a focused readership who is not going receive well ads that are discriminatory or offensive to women, so it wouldn't make good business sense." That's always a good argument. So we had that advantage. Now I've forgotten what your original question was...

KB: I had asked whether there were things you objected to...

MA: Oh, yes. In terms of articles, the only thing that I remember is there were not very many of those problems because we were so collaboratively oriented in terms of editorial planning. We just didn't plan anything that hadn't already passed muster.

There were things that came in, unsolicited, that did not get accepted. The ones that I recall, weren't accepted because they were more confessional than any thing else. They were purely--and to an extreme--one individual experience, with no context and maybe not well written enough to overcome that, or to provide a context by metaphor. Those were the ones I remember not being able to print, and feeling conflicted about that. They were still women's stories and still good stories, but they just weren't skillfully enough done or they would be read out of context. There were some of those that we ended up being able to revise, or ended up being merged into a theme issue, for example, so that they were just one piece of a theme.

I don't know why, maybe that's my old journalism training, of being strict about having to have certain facts substantiated. Many of these would come in, and we would have no chance of substantiating facts. Many of these would come in and we would have no chance of substantiating facts. I'm not sure the writers realized how exposed their stories would be.

Another thing that probably has made the "Women's Press" different is that we--at least when I was on the editorial staff--we did think about what the impact would be for the writers and for the people featured. We didn't want them to be harmed in any way by Profiles or personal stories--other than if it was just a straight news story that they happened to be featured in. Those are the only ones. I don't remember any arguments over this being in and this not being in.

KB: You've described earlier a process of purposefully inserting some hierarchy into the system with regard to decision-making. Do you remember any changes like that which happened in terms of editorial content? Or in the operation of the business? Changes or

shifts as a result of experiences? I suspect it happened all the time and the question is whether there are any that come to mind as being significant.

MA: There was a time, because of personal things in Mollie's and Glenda's lives, that they shifted some things, some responsibilities between them. Gee I don't... It was time when I was journaling, so I may have something in my journal about that, I don't remember anything right off hand.

KB: Okay. It's all perhaps incremental, gradual change.

MA: There was a time we would have--I don't know whether they were biweekly or monthly--but we had monthly at least meetings in which we talked about not only content but process. So there would have been incremental changes happening all the time.

KB: You talked earlier about the values of the Minnesota Women's Press and I wonder if you could ...

MA: I have a list.

KB: Oh, great, great.

MA: Yes, I thought that was something that you would ask.

On the editorial side: News, ads, information and commentary from women's perspectives; multiple perspectives and perspectives that were changing, not static; and that the women's perspective was primary rather than secondary or sidelined, and that it was strong and centered rather than marginalized or victimized. So we were not trying to be bitchy, and we were not trying to be reactive. We were trying to be from a core position of strength, and do our thing.

Then, we wanted to be healthy, productive, and supportive both emotionally and financially, in a principled workplace. All things were tied to the organization's mission and vision. Part of that was being collaborative rather than hierarchical, except as you know, the evolutions that we came to.

The employees all felt, and all the people involved, whether on advisory boards or whatever, felt a strong sense of investment, including the financial investment that was encouraged. There was a corollary sense of ownership and responsibility. I felt honored and grateful to be part of the organization. It was a rare experience. That it was so values-based was the main feature of how rare it was, and consistently so.

Every organization has a mission statement but not very many of them visit it, check into it, almost every day!

In terms of impact...

KB: Well let's finish up with values. I'm wondering if you could think about stories or examples of...I'm interested now in shifting focus from the editorial side now down to the way the organization actually operated. Given those values, can you think of ways that the Minnesota Women's Press was perhaps different from other organization--in terms of the way they interacted with employees, motivated, rewarded, corrected--traditional managerial things, organizing, allocating space, organizing jobs, tasks, that sort of thing? Is there anything that comes to mind that was shaped by those values and falls into some of those categories?

MA: Well [pause] I guess the main thing--and this may be a repetition of what I've already said--is that all of those things were discussed collaboratively. We talked about what the office was going to be like. We talked about who wanted space where. I remember saying: "I want a separate office." [laughs]

KB: You did say that?

MA: Yes, and I got it. Other people worked in the big space but I wanted a separate office, and I got one because I needed to work that way.

KB: Was that over in the Security Building that you got the separate office?

MA: No, well, next door..over here....wherever we were.

KB: Above the liquor store?

MA: Right. [An understanding of] individuals' needs was sought and acknowledged by the process. That went for not only physical space, but also working style. I'm not a morning person, so I did not get here early in the morning. I set my own hours and that was okay. We managed that so that it would balance out. Physical space things...then the collaborative things--the decision making was done collaboratively.

I have to say that I think much of what made this then a successful feminist business was Mollie and Glenda. They both have such deep commitment to their principles, and are willing to give so much in order to carry it out, that with different people--even with the same principles--I am not sure it would have succeeded. In fact it probably wouldn't have succeeded. They have such a level of devotion and intuition and wisdom of what needs to be done, and a willingness to accommodate and do what needs to be done to foster the growth of the organization and the growth of the individuals in it. I don't remember ever feeling...[pause]...some of the things that you feel in traditional organizations like the pressure to produce without any reason for the production. Other than the [stressful] nature of newspapering, I didn't feel stress from supervision or

anything like that. The atmosphere was different than anything I've experienced anywhere else.

KB: How about in terms of interactions with customers, suppliers--you know, the outside world? Are there any ways you can think of about how those values manifested themselves in relationships, that you haven't already discussed?

MA: [pause] This organization has a mission, you know. It's not just a mission to put out the news. It is a mission to impact women's lives and the condition of women. So, there is inherently an educational factor--a piece of that. I think in terms of relations with the external world, that's where that piece came in. There was a lot of educating that needed to be done about what we were about, and what women are about, and that continues to be one role the newspaper plays. It is not just information, not a neutral thing. It is from a position of education and of changing views.

So, when an advertiser says, "Why would I want to be in that newspaper?", that's a big window of opportunity for education--about why he or she would, about why women are important and why women do spend money. [laughter] So I see that as another function that comes in. We talked about that less. It was a piece of the editorial side, but I know that came out in our promotions and our advertising and our external relationships.

That's what Mollie and Glenda had to do all the time: educate people about "Women's Press". So that's one piece. They have done that, and the organization has tried to do that, not from a snide or a one-upmanship position, but from just wanting the word to get out. Wanting to support our mission is another hallmark of this organization. It hasn't ever been snide, or stereotyping...it hasn't been anti-anything. It's been pro-women. When you're not anti- anything in particular, then it releases you from needing to nag or be snide or anything like that.

KB: Well, I think it also ties in with the whole idea of "feminist business"--that is, when you start talking about interactions with the external world. Is this a feminist business? Why?

MA: There's also a piece of it being an enclave. This is a place of refuge in that it is all women--or it was then pretty much all women, although there was never a rule. It was a safe place, and people could speak their minds safely and be respected. There has always been that function of it organizationally as an enclave or a safe place.

KB: I suspect that passes from both employees and customers, and the book groups, and that sort of thing.

MA: Yes, very much so. I guess that's part of what I see as the nature of a feminist business--that it is collaborative, that it emphasizes people's needs beyond just legal or financial needs, and that employees get to be invested or involved in some way

differently than they would in a strict employee relationship. Those are some of the things that are characteristic to me [of a feminist business].

KB: Now I'd like to talk about impact.

MA: Okay.

KB: You've made allusions to impact all the way through this. Perhaps you could think about impact in terms of your own personal life, or on women in the community, or journalism in general.

MA: As I've said, the "Women's Press" has been pioneering in a number of ways journalistically--in terms of language, in terms of what it has emphasized in perspective, and the way it's done that organizationally or in terms of process. There's one more piece of that I want to mention. The editorial piece is that the "Women's Press" has covered things that were considered taboo by the mainstream press, or were considered either not newsworthy or just off limits. I think that's another way in which it has been pioneering.

KB: Can you give me an example of a taboo?

MA: I know from my own tenure, we covered in a much different way than the mainstream press did the trial of Mitch Lee, who was a [University of Minnesota] Gopher athlete in 1985. He was accused of rape. He and several other Gopher athletes were acquitted. We covered that in a much different way than the mainstream press did, and we covered aspects of that that I think were taboo to the mainstream press.

We covered the angles of it from the plaintiff's perspective, and issues in law that the case really ended up turning on that were gender issues and sexual assault victim issues. We talked to people that weren't considered people that would be interviewed for that kind of a subject. We talked to sexual assault counselors and talked about sexual assault and the victim's feelings on reporting--the danger for reporting to them, having their whole lives scrutinized and so on. Those were the kinds of things that may have been side-lined or referred to by the mainstream press as either part of the defense strategy or the plaintiff lawyer's strategy, but not in the same way we did. So we had impact because of that.

KB: That's a great example.

MA: That's when we were sending our newspaper--"Here, read what we're doing!"--to the Star and Tribune and to the District Attorney and so on. So, we know that we had some responses from that, and that the consciousness at least was raised. Changes are made incrementally, but I think some of those things have changed in the mainstream press. More of those background/context issues or perspectives--or people who would

not have been noticed before--are included a little bit more. They continue to be included in the "Women's Press". The "Women's Press" keeps doing that. So that's one example of impact.

If you are doing something that nobody else is doing and you are doing it in a public sphere like a newspaper, then it has to have some consciousness-raising impact. If you are not changing the actions of people who are doing similar coverage, at least there are victims out there--in the case of covering sexual abuse--who are glad to be acknowledged. We did get letters from a couple of the sexual abuse counseling centers, thanking us for the nature of our coverage. That's the kind of impact that can happen editorially.

It constantly has an impact by asking questions that don't get asked otherwise. You ask, "How is this going to affect women?" Nobody's thought about that before; then they have to think about it. That's what the "Women's Press" constantly does.

KB: Do you think that's as significant today as it was when you started?

MA: Well, I don't know. I'm not a good judge of that because I'm not involved day-to-day any more. I think it continues to be necessary. That relates to an impact in my own life. Now I'm in education, I'm teaching students. Part of what I do is teach critical thinking, and part of what I do in that is help students see the importance of perspective in analyzing anything or researching information. It is not something that's automatically learned. Students, male and female, don't necessarily ask questions such as: "Is this going to be different if it's about women or about men? Or, "How are women affected versus men?" They don't automatically ask those questions. I know that my experience with the "Women's Press" has helped me in my academic side to help students see how critical that question can be. I've used examples that are gender examples in our critical thinking instruction.

I also have seen the impact on a more personal level. I always say--when I give my introduction to my students the first night of class--a little bit about my background. I always say I was part of the founding of the Minnesota Women's Press, and was one of their first editors. I'm always just gratified to see the responses. There are always several women--and sometimes men--who look very pleased at that, and also somehow relieved that I will be a kindred spirit or receptive in some way to their experience.

KB: Interesting. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think should be included.

MA: [Pause] Well, this is what we called "the process pieces." We called those little sidebar things "process pieces", and here's a list of some of the things that people (reporters and writers) could do in their process piece.

KB: [reading] "In doing this story, I felt..." "Here's how I went at this story..." "This story seems important because..." "Some difficulties, frustrations I encountered..."

MA: I'm going to turn over a lot of these files and somebody may want to go through them. There will be notes on early planning sessions and early editorial meetings.

KB: That's wonderful.

MA: I think from that you'll be able to see some of the topics that came up--what rose to the surface and the discussion about those--and also you will see a demonstration of the nature of the thinking process.

All I have to say is the more personal thing, that I'm really eager to see what comes out of this process. I've been away from the day to day, or even very close observation of "Women's Press" for a long time now....in other realms. I want to see what everyone else thinks it has come to, and what the evolution has been. I'll be very eager to see that.

KB: Great. Well, thank you very much.

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