

Interview with Deborah Jean Campbell, Carol Schuldt, and Jane Hilken

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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St. Paul, Minnesota**

KB: I'd like to start if I could with each of you talking about how you've been involved with the Minnesota Women's Press over time. Carol, why don't we start with you? When did you start working here? What do you do? Give us a little background.

CS: I started in March of 1990 so I've been here a fairly long time. I started out working almost immediately in the bookshop and front office. I recall now how I used to read books in between anything that was happening. There's no way that I could read a book or part of a page now when I'm up in the front area.

KB: So you're that much busier? Is that what you're saying?

CS: Oh, definitely, yes. Many more people are coming in--not just customers, not just people looking in the bookshop, but service people and deliveries and so forth. ...And of course lots of phone calls.

KB: So, how has your job changed besides the fact that your volume has increased?

CS: I feel that it has become broader in that the whole responsibility of the "Women's Press" is bigger in my eyes. We have more staff of course, many more clients, more people advertising, people coming into the shop, so therefore it's just broader. We're touching more people. Our emphasis is broader. We speak with women, not only from all over our area here, but all over the country and even internationally. We'll have phone calls from overseas--people wanting some resource, talking about visitors coming, and can they come tour our place?--so it's become bigger and more encompassing.

KB: Just out of curiosity, who says, "Can we come and tour your place?" What kind of people might that be?

CS: There's a couple of organizations. There's an international... I can't think of the title... It's an organization that brings in people, leaders quite often, from many countries. Then they like to have them visit agencies, and see events that are going on. A lot of schools bring youngsters. We sometimes have classes of girls come in--Campfire Girls, Girl Scouts. ...A lot of groups. It's fun to bring them in because we show them around

all the staff. We alert the staff and then the staff tells each one what they do, and what it took for them to have this responsibility, and it's quite fun and very educational I think.

KB: What do you think are the favorite parts of your job? What do you like best about your job?

CS: I like that: tour groups. I've done a few presentations to small groups--moms and babies, and the senior groups here and there. Those are kind of fun to do because I can tell them what the "Women's Press" is all about. And I like selling books, helping people pick out books for their friend or themselves, and talking about what they like to read.

KB: What's your least favorite?

CS: When the phone rings and rings and interrupts me when I'm talking with someone else. That pesky phone! Really, the phone is so important because I feel can impart to the person calling, a sort of a feeling to what we are like. I feel that we can help then in some way. I pass them on to somebody who can give them the answers they need. So, it's challenging, and often people call and they don't know what they want, or they're upset at something, and one has to deal with feelings and emotions as well as just the question they are asking.

KB: I'll go to Deb.... Could you talk a little bit about what you do at the "Women's Press"?How long you've been here?

DC: I started volunteering in the library early in 1991. Then I was hired in August of 1991 for a time to work in the bookstore.

KB: What are some things that you are involved in?

DC: I keep track of the book inventory. I go out to the bookstores, and buy and look for books that are out of print on our Great Books List. I used to do some of the outreach stuff but not too much of that anymore.

KB: What is the outreach stuff?

DC: We would go to conferences and sell books. I keep track of the card inventory, order new cards, look for new companies to bring into the store to sell. I keep the lower level clean and organized.Build shelves.

KB: I happened to go into the supply room today for the first time, and I was told that you had constructed all of those shelves in that supply room.

DC: The little stuff that nobody thinks about, I do.

KB: Do you come up with the ideas, and say, "Oh, this needs to be done."

DC: Sometimes. I organized and separated all the newspapers. That was probably the first major job that I did, because when I came here they had them all piled up on palettes and there was no way they could find anything. People would come and look through piles. They had piles here and they had piles here, so it took me weeks to put the newspapers in order and separate them. Yeah, that was my first major job as a volunteer.

KB: Are these all the newspapers that have been printed and that you are keeping multiple copies of?

DC: Yes.

KB: Are those the papers that you store up here, or are there more papers in the basement?

DC: There are more on the lower level.

KB: What is the best part of your job?

DC: Buying books. I love to go out and look for books and buy books--buying things that we don't have.

KB: Is that a book-scouting job in a sense?

DC: Yes.

KB: So, in addition to ordering directly from the publishers you also do this book scouting kind of thing.

DC: Right.

KB: Which do you like best, the book scouting or the....

DC: Book Scouting.

KB: Do you do that on a state-wide basis?

DC: Actually, the last place that I went to was Duluth, and then the next stop is St. Cloud. I just take a day and do to all the bookstores. I have my little list.

CS: I think that the wonderful thing about it is that Deb knows the books in her head. She doesn't have to always consult a list and say, "Oh we need this or we need that." She

knows our Great Books, and just books--ones that we really enjoy and want other women to read. So she can pick them out without having to always look at lists and names.

KB: What is the least favorite part of your job?

DC: Phones.

KB: Phones? [laughs]

DC: Yeah, I don't like the phones. I'm honest. [laughs]

KB: Now, how often do you do that?

DC: I don't do it during the week unless Carol has to go to the bathroom. I work Saturdays alone and we don't get too many calls.

KB: Given the fact that you have sort of an odd assortment of tasks, how has your work changed. It seems to kind of accumulate, as you pick up new things.

DC: I think the biggest change is that I don't spend as many hours in the bookstore during the week. We don't really have a lot of selling happening during the week. That's because of the change in bookstores.

KB: Well, when you first started working, and both of you should respond to this, how many customers would come in on average in a day compared to now. Could you just draw some sort of comparison in bookstore traffic?

CS: Just customers, not other people?

KB: Yes, just customers.

DC: I think it was busier when I first started. I was here twenty hours a week four hours a day, and I always seemed to have something to do. Now on Saturdays, there are a lot of Saturdays I sit here and not one single person comes in.

KB: Really.

DC: Yeah, I know. And if you look through the book during the week, there are a lot of times during the week where nothing has been sold. Maybe some people come in and buy.

KB: Now, what about the library? I always wondered about that.How much the library gets used, if the bookstore is getting used less?

DC: I think we have under a hundred paying library members.

CS: It's real underused.

DC: Yeah, it's underused.

CS: And we have not marketed it, because it's a tremendous resource. And I think of all the people who would want to know. People are astonished. "You've got a library here?"

DC: A lot of people don't even realize we have the bookstore.

CS: Right, so when you think of it, what we have we aren't promoting a great deal.

DC: Another change is the bookstore itself has changed. We did have new and used books upstairs, and then a few years back we put all the used books downstairs, and just had new books upstairs. Now we've got all the used books back upstairs and it's mostly used books.

KB: Now, that's a fairly recent change within the last year isn't it?

DC: Yes.

KB: Well, Jane I wonder if you could do the same. Talk a little bit about your involvement here at the Minnesota Women's Press.

JH: My involvement I would say is directly hinged to the fact that I moved to the metro area. I'd lived in Minnesota, but I moved to the metro area in 1996, and began volunteering at that point. An afternoon a week I would drop by. I worked and still work with Norma [Olson; Systems and Production Coordinator] on the "Directory" [The Minnesota Women's Directory: A Business and Resource Guide]. Over the years then I've sort of learned what it is that needs to be done--what she wants, what she wants me to take responsibility for, and when it needs to be done. I still work on the "Directory" with Norma.

More recently, in the last year or so perhaps, I was asked if I would do some proofing work on employment ads. I love that; it's what I do as a freelancer. So I began doing that, and it has sort of expanded so that now I proof all of the employment ads. Well, not exactly, but the way it works, I do it twice every time the paper comes out, and then over time too. I have taken on some projects that Kathy Magnuson [General Manager] had lined up. For instance, the Reader's Survey that the newspaper does every other year. I've been involved with that, and that is a great lot of fun.

KB: What do you do with the survey

JH: The survey is printed in the paper that the "Directory" comes in, and so it's going to the issue of September 29th this year. It's a Reader's Survey with, I don't know how many questions--I'm guessing in the neighborhood of fifty. And so they go out to all the readers, and the readers fill them out and send them in. The survey is designed to find out about the readers.

KB: To profile the readers?

JH: Yes, profile the readers about their interests, what they like, what they're not so crazy about. And they come in and the results need to be tabulated. The ad reps use that information a lot for statistical purposes--sort of like the demographics of the readership. So that's basically what the Reader's Survey is, and they do that every other year.

Then, the other one that is really fun to work on is the Feminist Finds. That has happened every year. I don't know if that will continue. The questions are more open-ended and it's of course in the paper. The readers are invited to submit their answers to this survey--for instance, My Favorite Coffeehouse, or My Favorite Place to Go for a Night Out on the Town, that sort of thing. At the end of this Feminist Finds survey, when everything is tallied, the "Press" awards prizes to the winners of this survey. They are wonderful little plaques with some graphics on them. They are very, very nice. So that is the other thing that I have done.

KB: So you are involved on the tabulating on that?

JH: Yes, right....putting it together. Every now and then I have filled in on the phones when there has been a need for that. So I'm sort of doing any number of things.

KB: What do you like to do best?

JH: I really, really like proofing. I really do like that, and so I enjoy that probably the most. The surveys also can be very interesting projects so I like that. I guess I basically like most all of it.

KB: Are you working full time for the Minnesota Women's Press?How many hours a week?

JH: No, I'm not. It's very flexible because I do have this freelance business. Sometimes I can be quite busy with it, and I then I don't have the time. The wonderful thing is that they have said to me, "You let us know what kind of time you have, and we will work around that."Which is the absolutely perfect working arrangement for me. So, it's very flexible. I still try to come in one afternoon a week to do my things with Norma, and then the other jobs are probably in a month's time, perhaps twelve to fifteen hours, fifteen to twenty hours, something like that in a month's time. When the survey starts--

and that will be happening in October--then it will be full-time until I get done. So it ranges.

KB: I'd be interested in hearing about what prompted you to volunteer to work at the Minnesota Women's Press. I'd be interested in hearing from you [Deb] as well, since that was the origin of both of your involvement.

JH: It's the place itself. It's what they produce, and I just wanted to be connected to it in some way.

KB: Did you respond to an ad? How did you connect?

JH: I called and said, "Do you have volunteers?" "Do you use volunteers?" And yes, they did, and they would talk it over and get back to me, and they did. It was Norma who I started with, and all of this work on the "Directory". So it was for me, wanting to contribute something to an organization that had really been very meaningful to me as an outsider, not living in the Metro area. I had just read the newspaper and knew how much I appreciated that newspaper, and I just wanted to be involved with it in some way.

KB: How long had you read the paper before?

JH: I think I may have been subscribing since 1987 or 1988, something like that. And then we moved out of state and I took it with me and showed everybody, and said, "Look, there's actually a paper that is a women's press. Look at this!" They were astounded. They had never seen such a thing. So then when I came back and moved to the metro area, I wanted to connect somehow.

KB: How about you [Deb]?

DC: I'm not sure. I don't remember. I know I was out of work because of a worker's comp injury. I knew about the "Women's Press" before that, because I had lived in Anoka when I was younger. I would drive down to the Cities to pick up the "Women's Press" and the "Equal Time" newspaper [gay lesbian newspaper]--both those two, because they weren't out in the suburbs. When I lived in St. Paul I had started coming over to the salons for some reason. I don't know if I just read it in the paper. So I was coming to the salons on Friday night--I'm not really sure how I got roped into volunteering for the newspaper. [laughs]. It was like, "Here, we have this project. Could you do it?" I know I was at home reading, doing basically nothing. Volunteering saved my life at that time. That's what I remember--connecting in that way. I had been through a lot, and it was like a haven in the storm.

KB: Can you expand on that just a little?

DC: It was just fun to be involved in an organization that was all women. There was always something going on. I usually just came in and didn't say a whole lot, and went down to the basement and sorted newspapers [laughs]. It was just the overall, general feel of the place.

CS: I think it's important too that all three of us are very involved in the programs--I mean the bookgroups, and if we have a workshop--any activity.Not so much lately, but we've had authors in, and booksignings, etc. We happily attend, and it isn't work.

DC: One time I was in nine book groups. [laughter]

KB: All at once?

DC: Yes.

KB: Really?

DC: I just grabbed a hold and ate it up.

KB: Now was that before you started working?

DC: Yes.

KB: Carol, talk more about those activities that you just made reference to. This is an internal book group?

CS: Yes, we have an internal staff book group that all three of us have attended. But we also have listed book groups that we attend and pay for--retreats.

DC: And we each have facilitated book groups.

CS: Yes, we've facilitated book groups.Retreats, events and workshops, anything connected with the work of the "Women's Press". We usually are happily there, not so much as workers but as attendees.

JH: I also take part on the staff book group. For me, it's not only discussing a book that you've read and finding out what other people think about it, but you definitely get to know people on a whole different level. You don't get to know them when you are just here working. You are working and you're focused on what needs to be done. You walk in this room and people start talking about a book, and they relate it to themselves--personally or to their life--and you understand them in a whole different way. So I just think that is to me perhaps as important as discussing the book. ...Getting to know people.

KB: You [Deb] shook you head, and were nodding and saying, "Yes"

DC: Yes, because I don't have a whole lot of contact with the other staff. I'm mostly bookstore, and I do a lot of stuff outside of here, and I'm in the pit. So the bookgroups, or the retreats, and the feminist forum meetings are where I connect to the staff and find out what's going on at the "Press", because I'm part-time and sometimes feel like I'm out of the loop. It keeps me up. ...And [so does] "OfficeTalk".

JH: "OfficeTalk". Carol does "OfficeTalk".

KB: Are you responsible for putting it together, Carol? I didn't know that.

CS: Yes, I enjoy that very much. I feel like Harriet the Spy [character from a child's book]. [laughter] I'm listening and hearing what's going on, and then I like to put it in, in some manner. I like to do little vignettes about the customers that come in, and people we deal with, or phone conversations we have. I think they are important. It might be just little every day stories, but they tell it like the bookgroup. It gives us a sense of someone else, and our connections.

JH: Carol's contributions to "OfficeTalk" are wonderful. I love finding it in my mailbox! I quickly go to the last page because that is where, if Carol's was going to have written something, that's where it's going to be. I have laughed and have thought very seriously about what she has written. So that's a wonderful contribution that is just another plus. Knowing it comes from her is very special.

KB: What do you write about on the back page? [laughter, talking]

CS: Well, vignettes about our staff, ourselves, and customers that come in. Things that happen in outreach that are important to all of us. ...Sort of stories of our women.

KB: I seem to remember reading not that long ago something that you'd written about your illness. Did you put together a little poem, as I recall?

JH: It was wonderful. [laughter]

CS: Yes, that was when I was in the hospital with my hip replacement. I knew I was ready to leave because I was examining the pencil, reading the pencil, proofreading the toilet paper roll. (laughter) So, yeah personal things I have put in there that I think sometimes might add a little smile now and then.

KB: Well, talk a little bit about Feminist Forum. I don't think that anyone in the interviews has talked much about Feminist Forum, and I think it would be interesting to have you all spend a little time about what that is, and what that means to all of you.

JH: Shall I start? I don't get a chance to go very often. That's just because it always happens on a particular day, and for the most part it is not a day that I am not here. But, when I have been there I have enjoyed it very much, To me, the very fact that it exists is like unbelievable! It's like, "OK this is what we believe. This is what we say that we believe. How is it working here? How does it work in this building, in the jobs that we do?" ...All that sort of thing. I have told so many people about Feminist Forum at the Minnesota Women's Press, and I applaud it.

KB: So, the actual process is that Mollie [Hoben; Co-founder and co-publisher], or Glenda [Martin; Co-founder and co-publisher], or someone gets up and talks about....? Can you describe it?

CS: Well, we begin with 'epiphanies' so no one person starts up facilitating the group. It is a time for all of us to bring whatever we have experienced, or little nuggets of wisdom that we've encountered. We start out that way so we are all part of it. Quite often there will be a focus on sort of a philosophical topic, and then that is when I feel we really bond. Each of us can say, "This touches me", or how I feel about this value, and so that is neat when we have those kinds of discussions. I like those. Periodically, usually Mollie will do a budget and finance report. It is really nice to feel that we hear all about how things are going, any problems, things of that sort, and we are a part of the financial information of the place. So, I feel really a part of what we are all involved in.

DC: I live an hour and a half away, so to come down here for Feminist Forum every Monday, I do a lot of grouching and complaining. But, once I get here I'm really glad that I'm here. I think that overall, as far as the staff goes, Feminist Forum has unified the staff as compared to when we didn't have it--or when it was just a staff meeting when people sometimes came to it. It unifies, and we spend a lot of time in the beginnings concentrating on the mission statement and what that means, and come in each time to discuss those things. In my daily life I know that I'm a feminist, but I don't discuss that with too many people. So it's kind of nice to be able to come and hear what other people think and develop those definitions for myself. I think of it in different ways.

KB: Is there a unified view of what feminism is here?

JH: No, probably one of the most fascinating things about this place is that clearly we are not all in the same book, chapter, and page.

DC: ...Very diverse...

CS: Yes, think of all of our different lifestyles.

JH: But when you consider that in some way--and this is the elusive little piece that I still haven't figured out--it operates under a feminist banner and claims that identity, and yet embraces and acknowledges and respects all of those different viewpoints. I just

think it is an amazing thing, and a book needs to be written about it. I don't understand how exactly that has happened, but it has happened. I mean, that is the way it seems to me.

I really feel too, like I am sort of like an outsider looking in and examining and sort of looking over. It looks to me as though women are happy to work here. They are satisfied to work here; they bring all kinds of different viewpoints and all kinds of different lifestyles, and yet they come together and they do this work together. I believe it is meaningful to them to do that work! And there is harmony, or there seems to be harmony. How does that happen? We need to know that. We do need to know that.

CS: I think we are proud of our product, the newspaper, the shop, the bookshop, whatever we put out we are proud of it. We know that each one of us that has contributed to it has done a quality job. We count on it, and I know when you get through with that survey you'll have done a great job. When you and I did the 'employments' I knew that, "Well, they're all done. We did it right!" And Deb brings in great books. So you know that you can trust your co-workers and leaders that we are all doing as good a job as we can do, because we are proud of our product. It's almost like a mission; it's more than a product, I guess.

KB: And is the mission feminism or is the mission the Minnesota Women's Press, or is the mission 'women's words'? What is the mission?

DC: The mission statement.

CS: Well, I'm almost thinking it could almost be feminism, because feminism says that we believe all women have a story. Every one counts, and everybody has differences--like you said, differences and choices and we respect all of them. So, in a way that's what we are doing with our newspaper and all our work--our outreach. We're saying over and over again, "This is what we believe. This is why we do this." So, I don't know if it's logical to say feminism is our goal.

JH: I would agree with that. I think another thing is that it's an attempt, a very valid and very admirable and courageous attempt, to develop a community. A community that is so diverse, so broad, and yet is like a touch point for this community of women who are interested in women, what women are thinking, what women have to offer as far as service, products, what have you. So it's kind of like a community built, it feels to me, like a community building thing, in a very, very broad sort of abstract way. But it is founded on feminism and that is part of what it is. And that is just such a breath of fresh air.

CS: Profit isn't the bottom line necessarily. We have to be profitable to continue our task but...

JH: It's a means to a broader end I think, and that's what it means to me.

KB: How important do you think feminism is to your involvement at the Minnesota Women's Press? Could you work here without being a feminist for example? Could you not be a feminist and work here and be comfortable?

DC: That's a good question. I don't know how to answer that.

CS: You'll have to draw us a picture of what it would be like.

JH: Well, I can only imagine... I'm just going to do this thing in reverse, and say if I were the only employee of an organization, a company, an institution, that had clearly identified right wing issues--clearly identified, that was the basis--I could not be there. I could not be there. That's me; a lot of that is me, but I couldn't be that. So I'm thinking that if you were anti- what this place stands for or what this place proclaims to be, I think that might be kind of difficult. In the work-a-day, in the day-to-day, what needs to be done, I think you could certainly do that--if that's all you want is to do your work and go home, or whatever,

DC: Yeah, if it's just your job

CS: But it is important that you like your co-workers. We've heard stories of people coming to a place and they are faced with almost a dislike or hate or some bad words. Wouldn't that be difficult to keep coming?

DC: See, and I've worked in an all male factory. I supervised eighteen men and that was what it was like. I was this really feminist, bitch, woman, who was hired over their heads off the street and put into a position of power that they had to take orders from. It was absolutely horrible. I only lasted, actually a long time, like eight years until I got hurt.

So then, coming into this place, which is probably why it was like heaven to me... I didn't trust it at first. I came in here with a chip on my shoulder and very angry, but things just were totally different. I knew that this is the kind of place that I should have been working at all along. At that time I don't think I was calling myself a feminist. I was a woman. I was very liberated, very independent. I was labeled a feminist and all sorts of other stuff by other people. I would not have called myself a feminist, but as I grew into what that means to me, I realized I probably was a feminist from the time I was born.

KB: And you are all active participants in books groups. So you've done a lot of reading on topics that would help you kind of shape what feminism means to you. I expect your involvement with the Minnesota Women's Press in whatever form it's been, book groups, working here, I assume it has contributed to the way you define yourself as a feminist now.

CS: Oh, yes, I think it's become clearer to me. My values have become clearer to me, because you hear other people's insights and other women's experiences and then from that you take it, you say, " Oh, that's good. I like that; I'll go with that." Or, "I don't like that one." So that helps make you develop how you are. Then, in turn, in a small way I don't picket or have a banner on my house that says "I am a feminist"--and I would never put a bumper sticker on that says anything--but in my own way I think that I publicize feminist everywhere--in my church, in my neighborhood, every place I go. Although I am very traditional. I sing in the choir, I've got four children, I clean the house every so often, I make casseroles. (laughs)

DC: I bake (laughing)

CS: I think there is a way to demonstrate feminism and it isn't what you do. If you bake cookies, or if you work in a job, whatever. It's something about how you feel, live.

DC: How I live my life on a day to day basis

CS: Yes, with other people...

DC: It's a natural way of feminist being that make sense...

CS: Recycling is part of it.... Well, most feminists recycle. We care about our earth. You bring in your squash because you know you want to share your garden with the gang.

KB: It's interesting because you're talking about feminism as if it exists in an environment, and I'm interested in exploring that further as it relates to the environment of the Minnesota Women's Press. What is it about the Minnesota Women's Press that makes it different from other organizations? What actually happens here that is different from other places--that suggests that it is a feminist organization?

DC: Your work is valued--no matter, the differences. We are all different, but you're individual work is valued, equally valued.

JH: And another thing that I've noticed, it's kind of an interesting sort of philosophical... No not really that....more of a definition. In the world 'out there', workplaces are very hierarchical. It's as clear as the nose on everybody's face. One person is under or over someone else. I know that there are leaders here and yet, the interaction that I have with these leaders makes me know that this hierarchical stuff, whatever that is, it doesn't work here. It doesn't work that way here. So then you have to ask, "Well, what is a leader?"

We know 'out there' what a leader is supposed to mean. What does it mean here? I've thought about it, talked with friends about it, and I guess it's really more a definition of what is a feminist leader? Which I find a real interesting sort of discussion, just an

interesting thing to think about. What does that mean? How do you know it when you see one? How do you know one...because we all know them.

KB: You probably know them when you know what isn't a feminist leader; it's easier to describe what it isn't, than what it is.

JH: So, I find that very, very wonderful. The way it all ties into how your work is valued, every person's work is valued, you know it is. No matter how small your contribution is, they are glad you made it, and they acknowledge the group. It's not a person, it's a group acknowledgement. I find it fascinating.

KB: How are decisions made here at the Minnesota Women's Press? Is there something you can say about the way that decisions are made that perhaps make it different or maybe the same as other organizations?

CS: Well, recently, Mollie did a presentation at Feminist Forum and it's on tape which many of us are listening to now. Mollie's presentation was about the "Women's Press"--the business, the company--and she gave us some background, some history and where we'd come from. Then she also included the staff that had been involved through these almost fifteen years, and then talked about where are we right now presently. She had statistics and so forth, and then she presented to us where are we going.

What's next for the "Women's Press". What do you think? We were invited to respond, to think about it and to be now part of that future of what it is. What is the mission of the "Women's Press"? As Mollie said herself, maybe we won't do a [news]paper, maybe we'd do something else. We kind of laugh but we are open. If that'll accomplish something, fine. If we don't need it, we'll do something else. That's what makes me think it's not just the paper or not just any "thing" necessarily that is what we have in hand. So I thought that was wonderful to be asked and said, "Look. This is what we've got and we've all done this. Now where are we going next?" So, we're all thinking. There's going to be a forum for us to speak, I'm sure, for all of us.

KB: What about more ordinary decisions, like whether to stay open on Saturdays, or maybe that's not an ordinary decision. Maybe that's a strategic....more big time strategic decision.

JH: It's interesting, you are using the word decision, and I think that if I were to think about it in terms of who is organizing it so that it moves. Who is figuring out all the pieces so that it will go. I spend really very little time here but I've thought a lot about it. The decisions seem to me very often group made. The leaders are making them, the leaders are kind of making them.

DC: Mollie, Glenda, Kathy, Denise [Schiebe; Books staff], that's who. In my head I go, "Yeah"

JH: Norma.

DC: That's not the area that I work, it's always Mollie, Glenda are my two, and then Denise, and then Kathy Magnuson.

JH: Right.

DC: I don't even know where the rest of the people are.

CS: They ask for the employee input, which will be what we do. We are going to do the front office carpeting. "What color do you want, what color do you like?" We all are involved.

KB: A good example of a more ordinary decision. {laughs}

CS: We talk about what color to paint the walls and everybody gave their ideas. A few people had some expertise, brought in some real knowledge of what colors do to people. So that was factored in and then, thank goodness, someone else--I'm not quite sure who, maybe it was Mollie and Glenda--sat down finally and said, "Well, this is this. This is what we've been offered, now let's narrow it down." So we didn't all have to be there to pin down that last final decision that's it's going to be this creamy white color, but you have a hand in it.

You have a hand in saying, "It doesn't work to have [the store open on] Saturdays on a three day holiday". Or something of that sort.... That's given thought and maybe someone else will say, "Well, we won't be open that one, but we will be open this one." So, someone does have to make the ultimate [decision]. I can ask my family, "Well, do you want macaroni and cheese or mashed potatoes?" They'll all say their thing, and then I have to be the one to say, "I think I'll have mashed potatoes because I don't want to have to fool around with cheese." You know, you kind of make that final decision based on everything.

KB: How about interacting with one another? Is there anything about this organization that makes it different from other organizations or jobs that you've had, in terms of just interactions with one another?

DC: Well, we are allowed to talk. Where I worked we were not allowed to speak to each other. So when I came I saw people just standing around talking about personal stuff. We were not allowed to do anything outside of the company with each other either. So, I walked into here, and people were talking to each other, and doing things socially outside of work, and that was so cool to me. I just thought "Wow" {laughs} I had been working in hell!" Eeeww. [laughter]

CS: That is true, it's almost like you are always on a coffee break here, isn't it? Because you can always go visit with someone. You'll come in, and we'll chat, and it's not like, "Oh, my fifteen minutes are up. I'd better get back"--nose to the grindstone.

DC: There is no time clock....no loud buzzers.

CS: Yes, right. Sometimes I'll be sitting at the desk at the front or in the bookshop and I hear laughter in the back. So I go back and find out what was going on. I hear what we're talking about, and so it's almost like a--it isn't a social hour--it's a family. It's a home kind of feeling of, you don't have to be watching if someone is going to check on you--what you're doing. That is unusual when you think about it.

JH: I recall an incident before I came here to do any sort of work, I had never worked on a Mac [macintosh computer] and felt relatively comfortable with the computer, but you know the Mac just has those things that are different. I recall one day sitting at a computer and not being able to figure out what to do. I went to get someone--and I don't recall who it was--and said, "I know this is simple, but I cannot figure it out." So she explained it to me and I said, "Oh my god. I am so stupid. Why didn't I think of that?" Her first response was, "Don't say that about yourself." It's like, "Oh my gosh." I do believe that person meant that. She was saying, "Don't put yourself down."

CS: Of course, you weren't stupid.

JH: No...that's pretty neat.

KB: How about differences and similarities in the way that people get jobs or tasks? Is there anything different? If you take a normal corporation, it's a fairly rigid process of job descriptions. Everybody knows what expectations are. Is this place different or similar to the way another kind of organization would work in regard to allocating out tasks and jobs?

JH: I would say so. Everybody kind of has an area

CS: Yes,that they know best and do well. Right. But it's not a sense of, "Well this is my bailiwick, don't come into it." Or, "I'm not going to reveal anything about it." So you teach, you show, you educate people and share what you know. There is not a sense of 'only I can do this'.

KB: How about the physical space, anything different about the physical space here at the Minnesota Women's Press that you think perhaps is particularly feminist or not?The way the offices are arranged, the way the bookstore is arranged, the way the expansion was done, anything?

CS: Well, Deb's got the biggest area.

DC: What?

CS: The whole pit is yours! {laughing}

CS: All the toilet paper..... No I think that our surroundings are very comfortable. I have been thinking even this summer--when we got the air cleaners or whatever, that equipment--we used to smell paint that wasn't allergenic. When they did the carpeting we had them come in off hours and had them use some kind of a glue that wasn't sensitive for people.

DC: The remodeling was done with the specific person's needs in mind. They really worked to make sure that Norma got a little space.

KB: People with different needs...

JH: I would imagine somewhere in the design....I mean the whole production area is open. I would imagine that was an obvious decision that the work that needed to be done in this room was going to be sort of an open room. I don't know that, but I'm guessing that was designed that way rather than for everyone to be sitting at their computer doing their graphics in an enclosed room. They are all out there talking and interacting with what it is they are doing.

CS: And chairs.....if you need a certain kind of chair for your back or something. Really they are very conscious of the fact that for our health and comfort, anything reasonable can certainly be looked for and is given consideration.

KB: One more question along the same line that probably less relevant to you [Deb] and more relevant to the two of you [Carol and Jane], although you're out there interacting with the books circuit as well--interacting with outside people. Are there any differences in the way the Minnesota Women's Press interacts differently with customers, with suppliers, with people that walk in....any differences?

DC: When people come into the book store, we try to talk to people about the different kinds of books we are carrying, and why it's important we are only carrying women authors. We try to find out what they like to read and sell them that. I think that if you go into like a Barnes and Noble or Borders most of the time the worker doesn't even know you are in there. You don't have anybody coming up to you saying, "How are you today?" In that sense it is more personal with the public.

CS: There is a term called "hand sell" where one does indeed talk to an individual, talk about what they are looking for, what kind of things they enjoy reading and so forth. It's more of a personal thing, and I think that works very well. It takes time, and sometimes they aren't going to buy a book, but it's an interaction. My feeling is that whoever comes

in, sometimes it's delivery people, or the customers, or clients for the ad people, I want them to leave maybe smiling a little. You say, "Have a swell day" or something.

We all experience going in and out of shops and stores where you feel like they didn't even care if you were there or not, or they don't remember you. When you take people back, or call up somebody [to see a customer], "Someone's here to see you," they come up [to the front of the store] bubbly. So I don't think anyone ever comes in and is not treated as though we're really glad for them to be here. That's important. I think in our world today we all need those kinds of things.

JH: I think, going along with that, it's very important on a day to day basis. It also seems to me that I know as a consumer you are aware when you think someone actually has interacted with you as another person on the planet, rather than as (a) somebody that I'm going to sell something to, (b) somebody that I don't really want to have in here...I'm sick to death of people. And you are going to remember that, whether you go in there again or not. You might mention it to somebody else. Who knows the kind of ripple effect that sort of friendly, welcoming sort of persona has.

CS: I'm sure, and the same thing with the telephone. We literally can make people feel good about the day, or feel rotten. ...How they are treated even on the telephone.

KB: Is that feminist? Is it feminist to do it the way it's done here, consciously supportive, friendly.

CS: Well, I'd call it feminist, yes. It's not a "what's in it for me?" which is not so feminist. Not that I don't want us to profit by it, it's not just that "what's in it for me?"

KB: I'd like to turn now to values and get a sense from you... We've talked around this a lot actually, but what are do you think the most important values of the Minnesota Women's Press?Three or four.

JH: Cooperation, validation....

CS: Fun. Would fun be one?Pleasure.

DC: Uniqueness, is that a word? Can that be a value?

DC: Respect, most definitely

JH: It reeks with it.

KB: Interesting way of describing it. [laughter] Well, I'd like to move now to the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press and if you would be willing to share how the Minnesota Women's Press has affected your own personal life that would be wonderful. I'd also be

interested if you could talk about the larger impact of the Minnesota Women's Press. Perhaps we could start on a personal basis first, if you're not comfortable doing it fine, but if you are it would be wonderful.

JH: I think for me it's all about women's words. It's about women's ideas, and seeing them in print, and sharing them in print, and laughing about the funny stuff in the paper, and sympathizing with someone else. It is about women's words and they touch me, and that's important to me. Well, I guess that's the personal impact.

KB: So, you spend your days when you are here then with women's words in a variety of ways.

JH: Ultimately that is the goal....to collect, and distribute women's words. So whatever I can do to help that process is A-OK with me.

KB: So, your contribution to all of that is very important to you.

JH: Sure.

KB: How about the other two of you?

CS: Well, that word you used, validation... Here I feel I'm validated in all the things that I've thought and believed are 'out there', real. So it's sort of affirming, over and over again. I'm okay and this is a good way to be and so forth. So that's a good word, validation and affirmation. And respect, to feel important, what I contribute is important and making a difference. Then beyond what it does for me, I can feel that what I do on my job is happening... I can spread that out in my personal life and other parts of my life. I can act it out, bring action.

DC: Impacted my life...it has most definitely. I would have to say the validation and who I always was, was ok. It gave me kind of like a springboard to go out and be even stronger and more courageous into being who I am. If that makes sense. Because I think on a certain level I always knew my values were OK, but never had a home or a place for them to be, and they were never validated. So coming here it was like "Wow", and I became stronger.

KB: How about on a broader basis to the community, to women in general, women around the community, feminists? What has the Minnesota Women's Press meant to this area? What has been the impact of it beyond just the way it has affected you.

JH: Well, I would think information about what other women are doing, what other women are thinking of doing....it's information.

KB: There is no other place to get the information?

JH: There is no other place to get it on such a regular basis. It's such a quality piece of work. So if you decided to dip your fingers into this community or into this possibility or whatever, it is just there waiting for you to do that, if you chose. And I think that's wonderful.

CS: We think we know our distribution is 40,000--maybe more--so we could say 40,000 women who have read the profile and gained from that, and read another woman's experiences, and read the articles on health, on child care, on so many things, so that's pretty big when we touch [that many people.]

KB: Why do you think the "Women's Press" has succeeded? It's one of the few feminist presses in the country that has succeeded. Why is that the case?

JH: I'm guessing that there has been a whole lot of sacrifice here over the years. Now, I don't know, but I'm willing to bet that there have been women who have sacrificed financially, because they believed in this. That's a guess. I was thinking on the way in here, if you are of the mind that I am, that women can accomplish at least two times more than any man could in the same amount of time--and perhaps three. Then you consider that we've got here a huge organization for what they can accomplish. They are so busy, and so focused! They have given a great deal of labor to this thing, I think. I mean people work hard around here. And what was the question? [laughs].

KB: Well, you're answering it [laughing]. Why has this organization been successful when others like it have not?

DC: Well, I'm not sure. I don't know a whole lot about other women's organizations, but comparing the "Press" to other just general organization, it is set up differently, it's run differently, and I think that has a lot to do with its survival.

KB: In what ways?

DC: Well, what we've been talking about. You know, coming from the feminist [perspective], and the mission statement, and many women, and just all of what that encompasses....that has a lot to do with our success.

CS: I think our business procedures have been very wise, very smart. We move carefully, slowly--fifteen years and now we are making a profit. In the meantime though we have helped with the livelihood of all these people along the way. No big sudden business decisions, but careful, slow growth and wise growth. With much study--that of course goes to Glenda and Mollie and Kathy too.

JH: I recall one of the few Feminist Forums that I have been to with the question, somehow they got to talking about growth. There was this underlying, apprehension

about it. Maybe apprehension is too strong...questioning about the whole idea of growth. What does that mean? How is that gonna feel here? How is that gonna impact us? What does it mean and how is it gonna feel? And I thought, "Oh man! That is so awesome." To think that you'd actually consider and talk about... Growth is supposed to be everything, but in our crazy culture it's supposed to be the answer to everything. Here are these women saying, "But what does it mean for us?" I thought that was pretty awesome.

KB: Is there anything about the location that you think has contributed to it's success? Being here in the state of Minnesota, here in the Twin Cities?

CS: Rather than where?

KB: Rather than Wassau, WI or anyplace else [laughter]

CS: Well, I think Minnesota is very liberal. It's been referred to as the third coast--is that the term I've heard? ...Which is kind of intriguing because I think it means sort of on the edge you know, open to things, culturally on top of things. So we are not in any backwater, hick place. So I think we are very much on top of things, and in a state that is somewhat liberal.

KB: Well, what I'd like to do, actually, we are just about done. What I'd like to do is if possible, just get some anecdotes or stories that you think would be neat to have in the historical record of the Minnesota Women's Press. Can you think of anything that you've observed or participated in or have always thought of as a great story about the Minnesota Women's Press? ...That you think would be good to incorporate into this record?

JH: I remember when I just thought it was just so fun... I don't remember what we were doing around here, but there was some project that was nearing completion. The push was on and so in the morning, everybody found a power ring. It was this little plastic do-dad. Everybody--and there was a little note attached to it that said your power ring for today or this week or whatever--everybody had them on.

KB: They must have been effective. [laughter]

JH: I've seen that kind of thing happen. Some little do-dad.... When we were done with the "Directory" and the last ad was in, here were these little noise-makers about this big, you know with this little handle that you could whirl it around and it made this noise. It's certainly community building; it's certainly, we're all in this.

CS: ...Something fun and light

JH: And I think that is just fun. It's not a costly idea and in fact, the plastic-ness of it is part of what just makes it so much fun.Like cracker jack rings [laughing]

DC: I think the read-a-thon was pretty awesome and amazing. I'm not sure how long we ran it for where we just had non-stop readers come and read the newspapers. People from the community came, like Ann Bancroft [explorer to the South Pole]--that was just way cool.

KB: When was that? Do you remember approximately?

DC: One of our birthdays I think.

CS: Our tenth....

DC: I just think that was a really important thing to do, because it drew in outside people. They were orally reading the paper. People could come, and it was out in the shop and videotaped.And then we've won some different awards--the press has.

CS:Our editor and some of our writers and photographers. I think of the read-a-thon as a very moving event too, because women came and read something from the newspaper often something that was of particular interest or impacted them. Some of the profile women read a piece from their profile, and different ones read things... They were emotional, maybe with tears, as they were reading a piece that really touched them. Oh my goodness there was so much--it was endless. The pieces in there that different ones were affected by. So I think if we were able, we could have thousands of women reading pieces from the newspapers over the past fifteen years--things that meant something to them. So think of how it's touched [people] in very strong ways--that was a good one.

JH: They always talk about the "click" in feminism when it happens, when it happens, when it's like, "Oh my gosh. I get it." That is another piece. There is no way of knowing how many "clicks" the paper has caused. I'm sure there are many, many of them, but those are things you can't know, but wouldn't it be fun to know that.

KB: Well, anything else? Any other funny stories or sad stories about some of the people who have worked here or still work here?

JH: I just want to mention how glad I am that this whole thing is happening. How important I think it is, really vitally important. Particularly in a day when the culture would like to claim that either feminism is dead, or we are clearly post-feminism. We have been able to move beyond that, to stand up and claim--not exactly--that there is still a whole lot of work to be done. There is information about that work that has happened here, and to share that I just think is a wonderful thing. I'm so glad you're doing it.

CS: I thank you too

KB: Thank you. Well, I thank all of you for the interview.