

Interview with Mary Jo Dickinson

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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at the offices of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota**

KB: Mary, could you briefly describe your involvement with the Minnesota Women's Press?

MJD: It was about January 1989, when I started working for Minnesota Women's Press as their business manager. It was when we were still over in the Security Building, on the corner of Raymond and University [St. Paul, MN]. My sense of it was that it was kind of teetering on the edge. [laughter] Part of what I came to do, or attempted to do, was get things a little more business-like. That's the way it was described to me--what my job was.

Also at that time, Mollie [Hoben; publisher and co-founder of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] and Glenda [Martin; publisher and co-founder of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] realized that they had reached a certain point and they would need to do certain things to go to the next level. The question was: Could they go to the next level? They realized that they could not do things the way they had been doing them before. I was brought on to explore some of those questions.

KB: Was there anything in your background that suggested you would be a good person to do that?

MJD: I had worked with small businesses a lot, and I had just finished a graduate program in organizational leadership. I was looking myself to make a change from what I had been doing to something a little different. I had been a long-time reader of the "Women's Press", and a fan of what they were trying to do. I saw it as a little bit of a challenge as to whether it really could go. I came and talked to Glenda and Mollie and we kind of hit it off. So I agreed to try.

KB: How long were you here then?

MJD: I was only here a couple of years.

KB: From 1989 to 1991?

MJD: Yes, in 1991 I left. One of the things I did shortly after I started was to hire a sales manager--someone to recruit ad sales people, train them and do some corporate sales.

KB: There was a similar situation with the ads...as they were doing with the business piece... 'professionalizing' it?

MJD: Yes. That person came on. The space we had over in the Security Building was pretty grim, as was the whole building at that time. [laughter] It looks as if he might have spiffed it up a bit; I haven't been in the building lately. We basically had two big rooms and there was really no privacy. The phone system was real basic. We had one computer. We all sat in one big room, then across the hall was another room where the library was set up. In that room Mollie had an office and Glenda had a table and a chair. That was the way it was set up. It was really hard. There was no room for any salespeople to work out of that room because they basically all shared one desk. We had several salespeople that were [word missing] along with other things, so no one was really full time.

KB: What did you start on when you came in the door? You described things as being on edge, and your job was to fix things up.

MJD: I don't know whether it was to fix things up, or to keep it going for a while. One of the first things I started on was trying to get the billing for ads up to date. They had a system, but it was not very good. They did not have a system of knowing who hadn't paid... who still owed money...

KB: Seems important.... [laughter]

MJD: As far as doing the ads, they were sending those out to be done. There was a lot of cutting and pasting. I don't know anything about that part of the business, but I had to see it obviously because we were right there. The process was not very sophisticated at all.

The library system was an honor system. People would come in and take books and leave a note, so we didn't know exactly what was there at any given time. I don't believe we even had a good list of what was there. People would donate things and supposedly a list was kept but ...

So things were really running by the seat of your pants, if you will. I think Mollie and Glenda had been at it, and by sheer force of their will power they kept it going. I had the sense they were both at a crossroads, asking: "Do we keep going? If so, can we? Do we have the energy to do it? How can we make it better than it is?" It was pretty stressful.

KB: So you started working on accounts receivable processes essentially, developing some way of doing that? Are you the one that got the computer then?--the one computer? [laughter].

MJD: Well, they had a computer and I don't remember the time sequence of it all. I don't think we bought a computer to do the ads until we moved over here. At that time, they did some things on the one computer we had. We had a Mac; I don't know what kind it was. We used it to do the billing and to do ads, so everybody shared it. We didn't have even a great list of our customers with their addresses. [laughter] Also, every time it came to getting the paper out, we had to print the labels. We did have subscriptions on the computer too; we printed little labels off that. It kind of did everything for us.

After we moved over here, we got the first computer dedicated to doing the ads. Then the old computer became the business machine that we did all the billing off. We tried to get a little more sophisticated about tracking the past-dues.

KB: So moving here then was a big improvement?

MJD: Yes.

KB: Talk about that.

MJD: Well, Glenda was the real driving force behind it. She walked by this space every day. It was an old machine shop, of some sort, really grim looking. You could see in the front window, and there were all these workbenches, machines and everything. She knew that whoever had the space was leaving, and it was sitting there vacant, so she spoke to the guy that owned it. Really, she was the driving force behind it.

When she started talking about it, I kept thinking: "There's no way we're going to be able to do this. We can hardly pay our rent now. [laughter] How are we going to pay for the construction and all that?" It was a huge jump. We weren't in a position to do it at all. If you looked at the balance sheet, there wasn't any money there. The newspaper wasn't even close to breaking even, and that was the only source of income.

KB: What did the move accomplish? Why was it so important?

MJD: Number one was the visibility. I remember the first time I came over for my interview. I had the address, and I looked at the outside of the Security Building. All I could see was a liquor store. I thought: "They're not in the liquor store, I don't think!" I wandered around and found the door. It has a very strange elevator. I was so happy ultimately to find a light in the office. [laughter] There was light in the office. I thought: "Oh good. There are some real people here." The visibility alone was a big part of it.

Another part of it was saying to ourselves as much as anything: "We're really in this thing. This is not something that we're doing just to see how it works out, and if it doesn't work out well...we tried." We were really committed, because we had made a long-term commitment to the lease.

KB: Do you remember how long that lease commitment was?

MJD: Five years. We also had a long-term commitment to paying off some of the debt we incurred in renovating the area. We did buy more computer equipment, so there were some costs incurred that had to be paid off. No matter what happens, we have all these bills. We had better stay in business. I sometimes think of it as: "I think I can swim and I jump in. I'd better swim now because I don't have a choice." That was the point at which everyone agreed. This was it. Now it was here to stay. Up until that point, there was a question of: "Can it really go? Can a newspaper devoted to women's issues go?"

During that whole time, there was a constant struggle for distribution--finding places to distribute the newspaper free and working with a distribution company, which was kind of an on-again/off-again thing. We were always looking for more subscribers. We started setting some goals and to figure out: "Where is the break-even point?" I think the break-even was twenty-eight pages. I can't remember the percentage of ads, but we figured all that out--what percentage of ads we needed to carry that percentage of news, and how much income that was going to give us.

KB: Twenty-eight pages?

MJD: I think it was twenty-eight, either twenty-six or twenty-eight, however it works out.

KB: The current edition has twenty-four. [laughter]

MJD: This is a slow time of the year. I watch them very carefully, and I know that they usually don't go below twenty-eight. They've been up over thirty-two most of the time. [laughter] For the rest of my life, the first thing I do when I get my "Women's Press" is to check and see how many pages. That was the goal--that's what we had to do. We knew how many inches of ad space had to be sold, and we knew at what price those inches had to be sold. We were even getting to a point where we knew how many ad salespeople we would need to do that. We really, I think, started doing some goal setting. How do we stay in existence and pay the bills that we incurred? What do we need to do to do that?

KB: That was done in connection with the move, as a sort of symbolic gesture?

MJD: It's hard to say which came first.

KB: It was a period of transition.

MJD: A period of transition, but also in moving to this space there was a real commitment made to keep going. To me it said: "We're here to stay. We're part of the community. We need to be reckoned with, and we need to step out and be a leader on the issues affecting women in the metropolitan area." I really think the move and the resulting commitment really increased the visibility, if nothing else. They had always been committed to being a voice for women, but until that point the struggle to stay alive was so great. They couldn't do a lot of the things that needed to be done.

KB: When you think back to that 2-year period, what were some of the most important decisions you made, or accomplishments?

MJD: One of the big problems I came to understand shortly after I got here was that they were really undercapitalized for a business. They started with ten shareholders who all put in a certain amount of money. Beyond that, they went from day to day. Occasionally, one of the shareholders would put in a little more money. There was the issue of: "Should we be a nonprofit or a for-profit company? If we are a for-profit company, what does that say about our mission?"

There was no capital--no money--to support ourselves. I remember working with the bank on at least one loan, and working with the printing company--we had a rather large arrears on our payment. Mollie and I met with them. They loaned us some money, gave us a note to pay off. That gave us a little bit of freedom with the cash flow. They had always worked with an accountant, but I worked with her more closely on getting a current balance sheet, income and expense statement--so that we could know more than once a year where we were. We could look at the figures and say, "This is exactly what we have brought in ad sales, and this is what our costs were for the last month. This is our 'underage' [sic] or overage."

KB: That had not been done before?

MJD: Not in a formal way. They had worked out of their checkbook and they knew when there was money there and when there wasn't. [laughter] At the end of the year they would send the check ledger to the accountant, and she would give them a balance statement as of the end of the year. What I tried to do was get something every month, so we knew from month to month where we were, and then to get an idea of where we might be going. That was one of the things I tried to work on doing.

During the whole time, I was on a quest to find a computer program for the Mac that would do all of this for me, but at that time no one was writing financial programs for the Mac. They were writing them all for IBMs. We couldn't afford another computer just to do the financials. We still had to do it the old ledger book way. I read an awful lot about

computer programs, and never got to buy one.[laughter] After I left, I think they bought one.

KB: You talked about your relationship with the printer. How about other suppliers? What were those relationships like?

MJD: Let's see, what other suppliers did we have?

KB: Distributors?

MJD: All of these relationships were kind of...casual--primarily because we couldn't afford to work with the real big companies. They all wanted us to put in money up-front, and we didn't have any money to give them up-front.

One thing that happened while I was here was a big brouhaha in the distribution of all free newspapers. Everything at that time--City Pages and Twin Cities Reader, Equal Times was still publishing--all those free newspapers were all vying for the same street corners, the same coffee shops, and the same restaurants. I remember there was a national company that came in and tied up the spaces in all kinds of grocery stores, Snyder Drugs, Jerry's Foods, and all those places. They went in and built nice little racks. In order for us to have our newspapers there, we had to pay them so much a month. We didn't have the money to do that.

We wanted somebody who would just say, "Yeah, you can put a pile of your papers here." That's the relationship we had with our distributor. He was just a guy with a big truck. He had deals with some of the smaller, free neighborhood newspapers. He would go around and find places to drop off bundles of the paper. That was our distribution system. He charged us something...I don't know...really minimal for each place. He'd come in and say, "Well, I put your paper out at a hundred different places"

KB: Did he give you a list of the places he put them?

MJD: Sort of...[Laughter] I kept asking him for a list. He'd say, "My computer went down so this is only part of the list." I remember too, driving around and checking some of these places to see if the "Women's Press" was really there.

KB: Did you verify it? Was he being honest about it?

MJD: He was pretty honest. When the big company came in of course, that was the death of him and a couple of other small operators like him--they were a little more sophisticated than him. They all banded together to fight the company coming in. That all came to a head about the time I was leaving, so I don't know what happened.

KB: Interesting.

MJD: There again, we had a goal. We used to put it on the front--how many were distributed. That is one of the things you need to take to your advertisers, and say: "We distribute 50,000 every other week. These are our demographics." We would do surveys of our readers to find out where they lived, how much money they made, and all those questions we hate to answer. We had done one of the surveys to get the demographics of our readers, and as we were trying to sell ads, we'd say: "We distribute 50,000 of these [newspapers] and these are the people who pick them up." In order to say that, we had to verify pretty closely. We didn't just print 50,000 of them and throw them in a dumpster somewhere. People actually do pick them up. So that was another reason for driving around and making sure there was a bundle of our newspapers.

I don't know what came of it. Every once in a while when I'm in some place where I know we used to distribute, I will look and see if we're still there. At one time, we were in all the public libraries in Ramsey and Hennepin counties. Then, somehow, we got kicked out of the St. Paul Library, and one of the libraries in Minneapolis. It was a constant thing with these distribution sites. That's where all my gray hair [came from]. Distribution was the bane of my existence.

KB: Tell me what your job description was. [laughter] I know you didn't have a formal job description...

MJD: That is another thing I would have liked to work on, because I think that was part of what the struggle was. Everybody did everything. We all did a little bit of everything. The only thing I didn't do was sell and do layout; but I answered the phones, drove around looking for distributed bundles. Everybody basically did do everything. I think a lot of times nothing really got done the way it should have been or could have been, because no one could say: "This is my job and I'm going to devote the whole day to it." That's not the way it worked.

That was an evolving thing. I don't know if we ever got to the handwritten job descriptions, but I think now that people work in one area, and they hire people to answer the phones. At one time we had ad salespeople who wrote articles and did interviews and did layout. We had layout people who sold ads. Everybody did everything. We're not all good at everything, so I thought we should utilize our people in the most ideal way.

KB: What was the basis for that decision--to have people work that way? Why was it that way?

MJD: We just used the warm bodies that were there.

KB: My point is, do you think it was it reflected some feminist values, or do you think it just happened?

MJD: My observation was that it just happened. People would come and say, "I want to be involved with 'Women's Press' because I really like what you're doing." We'd say, "How would you like to sell ads?" [laughter] "Have you ever done that before? It's real easy." Or, "Gee, would you make some calls and collect some of these past due bills?"

People came and were associated more with the cause, than coming to actually have a job. We had a lot of people that weren't paid. That's how it happened. It's not that we put an ad in the paper and said, "We need an ad salesperson." We did some of that, but we had several people who just showed up and wanted to be involved, and that evolved into a job.

KB: Let's talk a little bit about values of the Minnesota Women's Press. What do you think they are? You're a long-time observer so maybe what you ought to do is talk about you felt the values were when you worked here, and then how you see the values as an outside observer. That would be an interesting contrast perhaps, but maybe they'll be the same.

MJD: My first reaction is that I'm not sure I'm able to speak to that. I was a nuts-and-bolts person--making certain the electric bill was paid, so we wouldn't have the lights off. On the other hand, I remember an on-going debate about: "Should we change the name from 'Women's Press' to Minnesota Feminist Press? What does the name really mean? What do we really mean calling ourselves 'Women's Press' instead of a feminist press? Is there a difference? If there is, what is that difference?" Those were the internal questions.

KB: Did you participate in those discussions?

MJD: Certainly. Particularly when we were over in the other building, all in the same room. It was about twice the size of this room, so we were all right there. There were a lot of those discussions. Also, a lot of the discussions of the shareholders were along those lines.

I know there was a big issue about being a non-profit versus a for-profit business. Can a feminist business be a for-profit business? I remember we did talk about it. I knew of a company on the East Coast--I can't remember the name. It was a gift company, and I remember calling them because they were trying to do business different than the normal business structure...they were trying to structure it differently, trying to treat employees differently. I remember talking and corresponding with them several times about what they were trying to do, and how they were trying to do it. We talked here amongst ourselves: "Is this something we could do?"

KB: Do you remember any of those specific recommendations, or things they were doing?

MJD: No, I can't remember at all. There were things like profit sharing, and how to do that in a meaningful way. How to respect people's family life and outside commitments. Identifying that you are not what you do--you are a whole person, and you don't leave all those issues at the door when you come in. How to work in a respectful way with vendors--being honest and above board.

KB: Just out of curiosity, was that a feminist business or was that a business that was interested in values?

MJD: More interested in values. That was the period of time when 'Ben and Jerry's' [ice cream manufacturer in Vermont, focused on social responsibility] was trying to develop their different model. This company that I knew about was also in Vermont, a small state. It had started small--two people got it going. Then it got big and they wanted to preserve that sense of everybody included, knowing each other.

KB: You have described a lot of discussions about values.

MJD: Yes, there was a lot of discussion...a lot of discussion. I don't ever recall us saying, "We're going to sit down and talk about our values today." There were just a lot of questions around those sorts of issues. What are we trying to do here?

KB: That perhaps itself is a value--the idea that you continued to explore, and ask questions, and debate.

MJD: That probably is true. We would have a retreat day, two or three times while I was here. We went to a cabin over in Wisconsin. Mollie had access through her brother. We took everybody, and would spend the day talking about different things at different times. I remember once we did what I call a "throw-things-at-the-wall and see-what-sticks process", where you generate ideas and then try to surface a focus or a goal out of that. It was a time to get to know each other. We were getting a little bigger. We had more people, who were not necessarily in the office. You might talk to them on the phone, but you would never see them. It was a day to do those things, to talk and say--in a little bit of a "state of the state" idea--"Well, we made it through another year."

We did spend a lot of time...Mollie, Glenda, myself...and Michele Holzworth... We called her [Michelle] ad manager. We had titles. She worked with the ad sales people--recruited ad sales people--and some larger account type things. We did a section with the University of Minnesota every year and I know she worked on that.

She was one person that took the Directory [[The Minnesota Women's Directory: A Business and Resources Guide](#); published annually by Minnesota Women's Press Inc.] to another level. They had put out at least one Directory, but it was a Xeroxed thing with a staple in it. She knew how to bring it all together, and solicit companies to be listed. She took it to the next step. It continues to get bigger and better every year. I think that was a

time when they really committed to it and saw it as a valuable and logical extension of what the "Women's Press" was trying to do.

That was another part of the debate: "What are we? We publish the newspaper, so then what else should we do?" We had the books, and when we moved into this space Glenda really got going on the bookshop [Minnesota Women's Press Bookstore]. We were the library [Minnesota Women's Press Library]. We were doing book groups [fee-based discussions of women authors]. So there was a lot of discussion: "Okay, so what is the Minnesota Women's Press? What really is it all about?" When something would come up, it was a question of: "Does this fit in? Does it really make sense for us to do this?"

KB: One of the things you mentioned on your background sheet is that you were employed by an organization whose focus was not necessarily profit. Could you talk a about that?

MJD: That was about that whole issue of whether we should be a nonprofit corporation or should we be a for-profit, and if you're a for-profit do you necessarily have to be driven by the bottom line? Is that all there is to a for-profit company? It was a real philosophical question about: Can you be a feminist for-profit organization or is profit and feminism diametrically opposed?

KB: Was there a conclusion drawn during your tenure?

MJD: No....not that I'm aware of. [laughter] We never had a profit, and we weren't even close. It wasn't really an issue. When you think about what's wrong in many businesses, what is identified is that they are driven by the bottom line. People get pushed aside, and ethics gets pushed aside, and everything gets pushed aside for the bottom line. That was the discussion. Can you be feminist and for-profit?

KB: We talked about the whole notion that everybody did everything. I raised a question then: "Do you think it was based on values?" Maybe I should ask the question: "Was the Minnesota Women's Press a feminist business, in your definition?" I guess that means you're going to have to define what a feminist business is...

MJD: I'm going to have to make a confession. I had lunch about a year ago, it may have been longer than that, with Mollie and Kathy Magnuson [Founder and current General Manager of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.]. They were talking about forming a Center for Feminist Business. They were talking about this during the lunch. When I left, I thought: "What do they mean?" I have no idea what they meant. Mollie and Kathy were really excited about this. They're still talking to people and trying to identify this. I don't know what Mollie and Kathy would say is a feminist business.

KB: Could you think about that from your own perspective?

MJD: Well, what I think they mean is a little bit of what I alluded to earlier. Being an organization that has a goal of making a profit, but also doing it in a humane way--treating employees justly, having the employees share in the good fortune, the profits if you will, in a just way. I don't know....

KB: If that is indeed the definition of a feminist business, do you think that it has, in fact, shaped Minnesota Women's Press--the way it interacts with its employees, etc.

MJD: Well, one thing was always kind of a conflict for me--and we would talk about it. [pause] You can get into destructive relationships with employees, when you try to change from being a traditional employer/employee relationship. I think you can get into a relationship that can be really abusive, if you don't have some clearly defined rules. There has to be rules, I think.

I think there is a danger of throwing the baby out with the bath water, by saying the way business does it now is all wrong. There is a reason that employer/employee rules have come to be, and it has a lot to do with what I call professionalism--a lot to do with setting boundaries around what you can bring to the work place and what you can't, or what you shouldn't. I think you can build false expectations. That is as unjust as some other employer/employee relationships. There's a danger of it becoming an abusive relationship. That's my opinion.

KB: And what does that say about the Minnesota Women's Press?

MJD: Well, I don't know. [laughter]

KB: Did they maintain appropriate boundaries, do you think?

MJD: I think we tried. I'm not sure we were always successful. That's part of the thing that I felt most regret....kind of a strong word...but when I left that was one of the things I felt I was really leaving undone.

We talked earlier about job descriptions. My training and experience says that job descriptions are good, because everybody knows what's expected. If you don't have a job description and you don't know what's expected, it is very possible for someone to say to you, "You're not doing what you're supposed to be doing, and so you need to leave." If I write it down, or you write it down, or we sit down and write this together, and you say: "I can do this for you". I say, "This is what needs to be done." If we all start from there; and come back in six months and say, "Okay. These were the things we said needed to be done. Did we get them done?" If we did, fine--let's go on. If we didn't, what do we need to do?

If you don't have those situations...if you try to leave it too unstructured.... I think that was a little bit of what was going on. If you're an ad salesperson, but we never really

said, "This is what we expect you to do." They could go out, come back, and say, "Well gee, I didn't sell any ads." "Well, how many people did you call on?" "Well, I only called on two people." "You should be [calling on more people]" "You didn't tell me you wanted me to call on that many people." I saw things like that happening . If we had been a little more structured, a little more professional, those things wouldn't happen. That created a...nobody was happy.

KB: Do you link that with the whole notion of feminism.

MJD: I don't know. No, I don't think that's what they're aiming towards. I sometimes had the sense that it was more of what we don't want to do, than what we are going to do. It was more about knowing what they didn't want to have happen. They didn't want the hierarchical, top down sort of structure in their group. What happened was just a big vacuum. When that wasn't there, they didn't have anything to replace it. It was hard. There were situations that did end up being abusive, and people were hurt unnecessarily. I don't think it is a feminist value to hurt each other. [laughter]

Its sort of like, "I can't say what it is, but I know it when I see it--and that isn't it." I would have liked to participate in doing something different, but I didn't stay.

KB: And why didn't you? Did you run out of time?

MJD: I had always had a goal of going into church business administration. It was something I was working toward for several years. The ideal job came along, and I thought: "Well, if I'm going to make the jump, this is it." Also they [Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] weren't able to pay me what I was worth. I went into it thinking I could give it a couple of years, and then things all came together at once. At that point, they really weren't teetering so much any more. They had, I felt, gotten a little more....

KB: Talk about that. By the time you left, you felt as though it wasn't quite as dicey?

MJD: Yes. I don't remember all the things. We had gotten the wolf away from the door as far the printing company was concerned, and that relationship was set up better. We had several good ad sales people, and we knew we had a base of advertising. It no longer was [the case] that with every issue we started over with nothing. In the beginning, that was the way it was. We'd get an issue out and then say, "Wow. We got that one out. Now we have to go out and gets ads so we can do another issue."

We had reached the point where we had some long-term ad contracts, so we knew there would be at least a certain number of pages of advertising. One of the things they really worked hard on was getting employment ads up and going, so that we would be a place where women could look for jobs. They really made great strides in that area. That was just being able to establish relationships with cities, the University of Minnesota, St. Thomas and some of those institutions that have good jobs that need to be advertised.

That really helped--to know you were going to have a base of ads every issue. You didn't have to start over from zero. You would know that they really were going to print the newspaper when you sent it down there [to the printer]. They weren't going to say, "No. You have to give us \$500 before we do this." We had gotten beyond that.

They were starting to see an expansion in the book groups. This sounds sort of crass, but we did talk about how to make money on the book groups--or at least not lose money on the book groups. This was a philosophical discussion with Glenda. "We don't want to make money on them, but then again we can't support them entirely. We have to charge something, so what can we charge that won't deter women from coming to the book groups."

KB: Were the first book groups free?

MJD: Some of them were, I think, or with a very, very minimal [charge]. I think members would get like a notebook and a book. They got something, and it wasn't covered. [laughter] Things were just getting going.

KB: The net result is that by the time you left, the wolf had been kept away from the door.

MJD: Yes...somewhat.... Also, we also sold more shares--brought in more shareholders. We had either done that or gotten it in place. I know there was a lot of legal stuff that had to be done, and I remember working on that with Mollie. She and a couple of women on the board talked to potential investors. That was another thing. We got some more investors and capital--money so that we weren't living from mail drop to mail drop. We didn't have to pounce on the mail to see if there were any checks today. I'd run down to the bank. I can't remember what the close-out time was... by which we would have to get money there to cover the checks that were clearing that day. I had to have the deposit down before that time or they would call them overdrawn.

KB: Did you always make the payroll?

MJD: Well, I remember Mollie, Glenda, I and Michelle holding our paychecks for a few extra days just in case. [laughter] That was another thing. We'd get bad checks from our advertisers, and if a check bounced that really threw everything off.

Another thing I did, and we had a big discussion about this too. I got a collection agency for our past-due advertisers. We talked a lot about whether this was the thing to do. Is this a just thing to do? My little businessperson's heart kept saying, "Yesss! Yesss!" [whispered] Someone would say, "Well gee. They're struggling too." I did send some of them to collection agencies, got a little more money, and finally started getting caught up on our payroll.

KB: One more question: "When you all had these debates, did they say things like: "Is this a just thing to do?" Or, "Is this the feminist thing to do?" Do you remember?"

MJD: I don't remember saying it in those words. It was more that someone would say, "That doesn't really feel right." Or, "I don't want to do that."

KB: Interesting.

MJD: As I was reading Mollie's article in the paper last night, I was thinking about those discussions, and thinking: "Well, gee. We never talked about this being a feminist value or not." I kept racking my brain, because I was afraid you were going to ask me that question, "What is a feminist value?" [laughter]

KB: No. What you're doing is great. It's wonderful. It's a very nice perspective.

MJD: I don't ever remember us using "feminist value". We did talk about issues such as taking people to collection agencies, identifying boundaries, and resolving relationship issues. That would come up, primarily because things weren't clearly enough defined. All those things had to be worked through. For those two years, it was Mollie, Glenda, Michelle and I who did the working through, and tried to get some direction.

I remember thinking it was often one step forward and ten steps back . We'd just start getting along, and something would happen. I would think, "Oh my gosh. We don't have the money for this, so what are going to do?" Our distribution sites would all dry up on us, and we'd feel we couldn't really say that we distribute 36,000 of these [newspapers] every time. Can we really say that to our advertisers? Is that an ethical thing to do? There were a lot of discussions. I wish I would have written things down at that time.

KB: What do you think has been the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press? Talk about that in whatever way feels best to you--personal, community wise, women...

MJD: It's kind of like Ms magazine [a nationally based feminist magazine]. It needs to be in the community. Another thing Mollie did, was go through the Minneapolis and St. Paul newspapers every year and see how many women's bylines were there--how many inches were devoted to women's issues and how many to other issues in the world. She generally would do an article once a year on what she found. I really had the sense in answering the phones...many times I would hear, "I get news from the "Women's Press" that I don't get from any other place." That's what the "Women's Press" does. It talks about things no one else does. For that reason, it has to be here.

I have been in the past active in the American Association of University Women [AAUW] and as an extension of that, in the Women's Consortium [Minnesota Women's Consortium, a coalition of organizations supporting women's rights]. It may be more of a function of my own personal place that I'm not quite as involved in those two things as I

was at one time. I think a little bit of the spark has gone out of the feminist community in the metropolitan area. That's just an observation from being involved in those two groups and the "Women's Press". I'm not sure there's the hunger out there that there was fifteen to twenty years ago for this perspective. Obviously they're doing better than ever, so there's still a need for it. It's still viable.

KB: Anything else that we haven't talked about that you think should be included?

MJD: I think I've talked about everything imaginable and nothing in particular.
[laughter]

KB: Wonderful interview. Thank you.

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