

## **Interview with Terry Foley**

**Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer**

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**KB:** I'd like to start by asking you if you could briefly describe how you've been involved with the Minnesota Women's Press, and how long.

**TF:** I came to the "Women's Press" in 1989 when its first office was over the liquor store on University and Raymond. I wandered up the steps, and there were two or three little rooms. One room was packed full of books, and Glenda Martin [Co-founder and Co-publisher] was sitting at the table. I asked a few questions about the book group--I had seen a biography book group advertised in the "Women's Press" newspaper. Actually the person I was living with at the time saw it and said, "Oh, you should check into this." So I did.

I was in my mid-twenties at the time, and still fairly shy and not very outspoken. I had been an athlete and so had been on the boundaries of feminism because of that. This was in the late 1970s, early 1980s, so girls' athletics in schools was just starting to get popular. I met Glenda and started in a biography group. I just fell in love with the whole idea of sitting around with eight to ten women who loved books as much as I did and shared the same values: that women's lives were important, that they had important stories to tell, that there was more to reading than dead white men. It was just .... exciting. .... Very exciting.

And so over the years, I've told people I've grown up at the "Women's Press". It's been a huge part of learning about myself and solidifying my values. The first book groups were the six-week book groups, so every other week we would read a new book and we would discuss the book. The books were generally chosen by the facilitator, so it was a bit more structured, and I kind of felt I was getting my foundational education.

And then, a turning point was the spirituality book group that I got involved with probably a couple years after my first book group--that was a huge experience for me. I was raised Catholic in a very traditional home. To be exposed to some of the ideas that touched my soul in a very deep way, that had nothing to do with religion and all to do with spirituality and connection to nature--and some of the more fundamental beliefs that have been in the world for more years than structured religion has been even thought about--that was really, in terms of consciousness-raising, that was powerful. .... Very powerful.

People like Sue Dahlen [Accounting and Subscriptions], who now works in the "Women's Press" office, was one of the first facilitators of the spirituality book group. To see someone who came from... I don't know that our backgrounds are *entirely* similar, but someone who was really exploring some new ideas, it gave me courage to step outside who I *had* been, and back to really who I am at my core.

From that I evolved to a year-long book group; I've been with this year-long book group for seven or eight years now. I see them once a month, and our book group is called the Rock group: R-O-C-K. We have a reputation in the Sunday Together book group. There are three groups that get together. We *laugh*. We started out as a spirituality group, and laughter was our connection. It was the way we were able to discuss some pretty serious topics. We got into some interesting discussions, but the main theme is just an .... enjoyment of other people, an enjoyment of sharing ideas and exploring new books.

And we've developed some rituals of our own: once a year we go up to Lutsen [Resort]. We stay on Lake Superior. All of us have very deep connections to the north country and Lake Superior and the rocks, obviously--given the name of the book group. And we've had members come and go, but it's like a family, an extended family. You know, you can get an excused absence, you can take a sabbatical, you can come back, you'll be welcomed.

**KB:** How many people are in that book group?

**TF:** There are twelve of us now, and there are probably four or five of us who have been around for seven, eight, nine years. I think the group itself has been nine or ten years in existence. So I used to be one of the new people; now I'm kind of one of the veterans. New people from the group have told me that although there's a deep history and there are some things that the core members share, it's a very welcoming group. I think the laughter is really what attracts people--and the irreverence. There are very few things we won't talk about, and very few people that don't get kidded in the group. What's been important for me there...it's an intellectual community as well as a spiritual community in a sense, but not in the traditional sense.

When we sit in that group--in the large group, there are anywhere from twenty-five to thirty women--we sit in a circle. Glenda Martin and Mollie Hoben [Co-founder and Co-publisher] generally lead the discussion, and there will be a question of the day.

**KB:** Wait, I have to clarify something, because I'm a little confused about that. You talk about a larger group of twenty-five, so maybe you need to describe to me how Sunday Together works.

**TF:** Sunday Together started as three independent book groups, all looking at a different aspect of spirituality, which is why it was on Sunday. And we had rituals, and the larger

group would come together and do rituals on a quarterly basis. So we would celebrate the solstice and equinox together. We got together as a large group at the beginning, then we would break off into our small groups, where we would discuss the book. So the large group would share the ritual, what was happening in that time of year. It would be a way to connect with a larger community, and then we would go off into our own individual groups to discuss the books.

**KB:** Talk about the rituals. What are the rituals, in general, if you can describe them?

**TF:** Well, the ones that I remember the most were around the solstices. In the winter we would have something celebrating the darkness, welcoming the darkness, and the importance of light. It was a way to reflect personally as well as with the group--and also learn from all the people in the group. This has been a tremendous education for me, a personal education. Because there are people who are younger than I am, older than I am, different than I am, the same-- it's just this whole spectrum of interesting people and experiences to learn from.

One of my favorite memories of our rituals is the summer solstice ritual. We're kind of a rowdy, playful group, and we decided that what we wanted people to do was to tap into what it was like to be a kid during the summer. So we brought in sand, and we brought in pails, and had lemonade, and just helped people get in touch with what it was like to celebrate summer as a kid. So that was fun. And one of the times we went out to a little park about a block away from the Press, and had the ritual outside. And everyone shared a thought or a wish--planting the seeds of hope during the year.

**KB:** Again, this is the combined three groups.

**TF:** All three groups. There are people in those three groups who have been there from the very beginning--ten years ago when that Sunday Together group started. There are new people all the time, who come in and out. I come away with a list of books to read almost every time.

**KB:** You said earlier that the book groups were more structured in the beginning, with a facilitator selecting the books. Why don't you talk a little about that process, both beginning and now?

**TF:** Well, when the six-week book groups got started--actually, there were twelve weeks, but there were six sessions--they were around a particular topic. It was a facilitated discussion. I think it was a way of getting people to know each other as well. There are still some groups that are run that way--in fact, I think a majority of the book groups still have facilitators. But my Rock group, which is part of the Sunday Together group, decided that we didn't really want a facilitator because we had been together long enough, and it's a free-flowing group. The people who are in the group are pretty independent souls, and we're able to make our own path. I'm not sure that's the typical example, but

we had the choice of whether we wanted a facilitator or not, and we said "Nah, we don't think so."

One of the things in that group which has become a ritual is we have all taken various versions of the Myers-Briggs test [personality profile], and so we have a roster. We have our name, our address, our phone number, and our Myers-Briggs type. We're mostly introverts, although there are the token extroverts. The key difference is the last letter, the "J" and the "P," the judging versus the perceiving [personality characteristic]. You always want the judging people, the "J" people, to have the folder, because they take care of things. They get things done; they're very organized, they're logical, they're left-brained, they're structured. Those of us on the "P" side are more like, "Well, yeah, whatever." We're more spontaneous people. So it's a constant battle, of sorts--a teasing battle between the "J's" and the "P's." When someone comes in, it's like, "Okay, what's your Myers-Briggs type?", and we put it down.

**KB:** What about "S" and "N"? That's another huge.... Are they all "N's"?

**TF:** I don't think so. I think there are some "S's." But that seems to be less of an important characteristic. And the "T" and the "F", thinking/feeling ....it's interesting to have a mix. I think it would be boring if we were all the same. You can kind of tell who pushes whose buttons around those sorts of issues, but the environment and the atmosphere is so light and playful and ..... warm, that it never gets to be a point of contention.

**KB:** Does any staff member from the Minnesota Women's Press attend your sessions?

**TF:** No. Not the small group, not the Rock Group.

**KB:** But the larger group... still Mollie or Glenda or both?

**TF:** Right.

**KB:** And how do you select your books? Now?

**TF:** Well, we have this massive list that we've created over the years. But we rarely choose from the list, which is a point of contention for the "J's" in the group who like to be logical.

**KB:** I have to tell you, I recognize this! I recognize all of it from my own book group.

**TF:** Yes, it's a fairly typical thing. What ends up happening is, we try to alternate between fiction and nonfiction, to just keep things interesting. We have three basic rules, and they've come into play because we've gotten into trouble when we didn't have them: you have to know the title, it has to be in print, and it has to be written by a woman.

We have this great story of a woman who suggested a book. She thought the title was Jewish Women on the Prairie. The actual title was Prairie Dogs Aren't Kosher. So we had people running around trying to find this book, and finally we figured out which book it was .... So we don't necessarily have any rules.

Originally we started with the spiritual theme, and we had one member of the group whose role it ended up being to ask, "So what was spiritual about this book?" We called that "the Kate question." She's no longer in the group anymore, but once in a while the Kate question comes up: what was spiritual about this book? So generally it [book choice] becomes a part of each session where we're planning ahead a month or two. It may have to do with the season, for example.

This last time we read Summer by Edith Wharton, because it was summer, and it was a short book--although it was deceptively short in number of pages because it was written in the early 1900s, and the language makes it a more intense read than you'd expect by the page number. We will explore different themes. We've done We Are Our Mothers Daughters by Cokie Roberts--I think we did it in that group--I'm also involved with a biography group, so I get my titles mixed up. So there's really not a rhyme or reason to it. We generally try to do a paperback because it's much more affordable.

**KB:** And the recommender....there's no necessity for this book having been read by anyone in the group prior to ....

**TF:** Nope. Usually it'll be someone in the group saying, "Oh, I bought that book and I want to read it! So if we read it for the group, then I'll get a chance to discuss it." Or someone will say, "I've read it, and I really want to discuss it with the group because I think it would be important." Or there's an author that a few of us have been interested in, and we convince the rest of the group that it would be fun to read.

Some of the best discussions are [about] books where some people loved it and some people hated it. The one that is kind of tattooed on my forehead--because I suggested it--was Always, Rachel, which is a collection of letters between Rachel Carson and Dorothy Freeman.

I got interested in that because I went on the Maine trip, one of the first book trips for the "Women's Press". Glenda Martin had brought that book along, and we were standing in a wildlife refuge that was named for Rachel Carson. Glenda was reading this passage from this book, and there was--I believe it was a red tanager--this bird flew by as she was reading this passage. It was almost as if Rachel Carson visited us during this reading. It was a very spiritual, moving moment for all of us. It was a passage about the relationship between Dorothy and Rachel. They both had very different lives, but very difficult in terms of taking care of their families. They had deaths in their families, and illnesses, and all that. I was very taken with hearing about their lives. A woman I met on the trip had the book, and so I bought the book on the trip. And actually I had her-- the woman who

was on the trip with me-- autograph my book, because she's a very important friendship. She's in her seventies, and I'm in my late thirties, and we really connected around Rachel Carson's book.

So I suggested that my book group read it. I thought they would love it. I thought, "Here's this very rich, personal account between these two women..." There's a mix of straight people and lesbians in the group, and people that have been married, people that have kids, people that are now divorced--a whole mix and jumble of people. I came to the group and I could tell at the large group meeting, because I got some looks from my fellow book members, that this was going to be an *interesting* discussion. You know: "How dare you make me read this book?" and so on.

So we got in the room for our small group discussion, and the more vocal people who didn't like the book were like, "I can't believe that we read this book! How many times can you say, 'I adore this person,' or 'I miss you,' or whatever." And I was deflated. I was like, "Oh, my God, I *loved* this book!" And then it ended up that the group was divided half-and-half, but the people that didn't like it were much more vocal than the people that did like it. And so towards the end of the group, there were a couple people that said, "Well, I was really touched by it, " and "I liked that book, too," and then I felt a little more secure about it. But it's kind of like a family joke. This was six months ago, and it comes up in almost every book group: "This isn't another Always, Rachel, is it?"

So, you end up having things that you continue to go back to. There were people that liked that book that I wouldn't have expected to, and I'm connected with those people now in a different way than I would have been had we not had that experience. And there's one woman in the group who .... we decided we were sisters in another life because we just are at opposite ends of the spectrum but we love teasing each other. We'd never want the other person to leave the group, because it's kind of our anchor. I love May Sarton; she hates May Sarton. I loved Rachel Carson; she hated Rachel Carson. She loves science fiction; I hate science fiction. It's like we're alter egos.

**KB:** It's so interesting that you can agree on a book, given the differences.

**TF:** Well, everybody's open to the experience. It's all about an adventure. There are times when my life is busy and I won't get to read the book, but I'll come to the group because I will not miss the discussion and the laughter. We talk about the book for maybe twenty minutes of an hour and a half. We come in and out of the discussion, because what you end up doing is...some books really tap your own personal experience, and some books tap other books that you've read, or other authors that you've read. So it's nice not to have a structured format, because it's a real free-flowing discussion. You take it where it goes. Someday I think it would be interesting to do a virtual mapping of a book group discussion because the twists and turns, the ups and downs, and, "How did we get to this topic?" kinds of questions are fascinating.

**KB:** Yes, it is so interesting.

**TF:** But it is one of my most favorite activities. I will re-arrange [my schedule] in order to not miss the book group.

**KB:** Do you see any book group members outside of book group?

**TF:** You know, I didn't for quite a while, but just this past year, I went on the England and Scotland trip, and made friends with one of the people I met on the Maine trip. She's also in her early seventies. I think you're going to be interviewing her: Barb Clarke [Library coordinator].

**KB:** I may; I don't know.

**TF:** She's been around forever at the "Women's Press". The "Press" has really changed her life, as well. She and I connected on the Maine trip, and then she went on the Scotland-England trip, and she and I and another woman, Charlene, ended up going around together. We called ourselves the Bronte sisters, because we ended up seeing where the Brontes lived. So the three of us wandered all around York and Whitby and Edinboro and Glasgow together. As a result of that experience we have gotten together--the three of us--to go out to dinner and to reminisce.

Now I'm going back to the Highlands and Charlene is going as well. It was my idea to do the Highlands trip, because when we went to Scotland, we had three days in the Highlands at the end of the trip. It is the most gorgeous country--it captured my soul. The rolling hills and river valleys, and mountains, and the lochs--we were at Loch Lomond. We stayed three nights at this mansion called Ross Priori on Loch Lomond, and then spent a day driving into the Highlands. I had my face *glued* to the window of the van, because I was enchanted by the scenery.

So we came back, and Mollie said they were going to do the England-Scotland trip again. I said, "Would you consider adding a week either on the beginning or the end and taking us to hike in the Highlands?" She said, "We'll put it on the brochure, and see what happens." It was filled before the other trip was. There are ten of us. Charlene and I are going back. There's another woman, Barbara Blackstone, who's also going back. Charlene and I decided we were going to add some days onto the beginning and the end,

I've always wanted to see the Hebrides--I'm drawn to them. We read a book called The Fires of Bride before the trip last year. It's a fictional account of a community on one of the Hebrides--it's fiction, so it's not *really* where we're going to be--but it talks about the stone circles there, and the power of St. Bridget, who was actually a pagan goddess before they made her into a saint to sanitize her, Christianize her. So I was very attracted to the islands, and Charlene and I decided we would do this. There are two other people in the Rock group who were also going on the trip, who are going to join us, so the four

of us are going to fly to Glasgow, drive a car across Scotland, take a ferry onto the Hebrides.....

**KB:** Sounds wonderful!

**TF:** Yeah! It's going to be a great adventure. It's really going to be fun. Then we're going to join the group for a week of hiking and exploring the Highlands. Then we're going to take a couple extra days at the end of the trip to go into Edinburg and explore the museums--and the Edinburg International Arts Festival will be on at the time we'll be there. The last thing we're doing as a group for the Highlands trip is, we're going to a military tattoo in Edinburg--it's the last day of the tattoo: it's an internationally known drum and bugle corps, on the Edinburg Castle grounds. We got to spend a little time there last year, and we got to spend one afternoon in Edinburg, and none of us got enough of it. It was one of those places where, it's like going into a library, and you can only look at one row of books. There just wasn't enough time.

**KB:** You're describing a community that goes so far beyond books ....

**TF:** Oh, yes.

**KB:** .... that is really facilitated by the Minnesota Women's Press, or at least originally was, but perhaps has in some ways moved beyond that. Fascinating.

**TF:** Glenda and Mollie are tremendous role models. They're Johnny Appleseeds of women's thoughts, ideas, and values. They are the core, they are the fire, that started all of us on this path. We've taken their strength, and then created different pockets....but it wouldn't be the same without those two. Glenda is watching me grow up. She's not a mother figure--that's not the right analogy--but she's a primary teacher for me, in terms of books, and in terms of life.

When I was down visiting my mom in Arizona last winter--Glenda's down in Arizona during winter--my mom and I drove down to Tucson to visit her in her home. She was so welcoming, of me and my mother. It was really helpful, because my mom and I don't have a lot to talk about; we're very different people. Glenda knows who I am better than my mother does. So here I had two very important people in my life. Glenda now knows my mom, and it's really .... fun. It's been very important to me. And to be able to go on trips with Glenda is just..... indescribable. The first trip to Maine ....

**KB:** Why don't you say what trips you've been on.

**TF:** I went on the first book trip to Maine in 1997, in May. I had just ended a significant relationship. I was graduating from graduate school, and had just started a new part of my job, so I gave myself the trip to Maine as a graduation present.

It was a tremendous experience, because Glenda and Mollie and Denise [Schiebe; books staff] had arranged for us to meet several authors whose books we had read. One of them was the author of the book which was made into a movie, which was made into the [television] series "As the World Turns". My mother watched that as I was a child, and so, "Wow, I'm meeting the woman who created this!" She was an elegant woman in her late eighties, and she lived on a farm where she grew up and had lived almost all of her life--she lived in Minnesota for a short time. This was her one successful book. I was able to find a used copy in a bookstore in Maine, and it was a 1948 copyright--not an original edition, but a very old edition, and I have her autograph on it. I think she passed on last year, or this year, so now I have it. It's priceless.

Another woman we met was Elizabeth Ogilvy, who I know they visited the last two times they've been to Maine on their trips. I'm addicted to her Bennett's Island characters that she's written. I think there are ten books in that series, and I have eight of them. I just was recently out in Maine with another group of friends, and picked up a trilogy in that series that had just been released by Downeast Press. I saw it; I didn't even blink an eye, I bought all three. Immediately. I need to know what's happening to these people. She wrote about them in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. So, that was my first trip. Shortly after that, they said they were going to England and Scotland. I've wanted to go to England since I can remember.

**KB:** Let me understand the trips a little bit better. How large a group is it, generally?

**TF:** Generally eighteen people, because you can fit six people in a van. In Maine we had three vans, and a driver for each van--which in that case was Mollie, Glenda, and Denise. One of the rules was that you can't sit with the same people or go in the same van the next day. So if I rode with Glenda and sat with some friends, the next day I'd ride with Mollie and sit with some different people, in order to mix up the group. Before we went on the trip, we met, and they told us what books-- I think we read six or seven books about the area.

**KB:** Did you have an opportunity to discuss them before the trip?

**TF:** We discussed one of the books before. The way the trip was structured was that each day we'd go to a particular place either to meet with an author or--this was great--they arranged for us to see a women's library collection at a small university in Maine. They had this room full of books published by women, mostly Maine authors, I believe. Mollie and Glenda know the details. May Sarton had willed a number of her personal effects to this collection. The genesis of the Maine trip was actually a May Sarton group, which I wasn't involved in, but I'm a real May Sarton fan. These people wanted to go to Maine to pay homage to where May Sarton lived and wrote.

**KB:** I can picture in my mind from reading-- is it Solitude?

**TF:** Journal of a Solitude, right. I think she wrote that one there. I actually got to see her leather-bound copies of the books she got from her publishers when they were published, because she had willed them to this group. This woman was in the process of cataloging them and entering them, and here we were in the presence of these things she had lived with, and touched, and had as part of her life. There were various people in that group who had read....I know Barb had read all of May Sarton, chronologically, twice. I'm not quite that addicted! So we would go do those things, then have book group in the evening. We'd split into two or three different groups, and discuss the different books.

**KB:** Did you do that in a hotel?

**TF:** It was interesting: we stayed in two different places. One was a convent that was turned into a conference center. The order ran it, and they had some strict rules. We had to be a breakfast at a certain time, and do certain things with our dishes, and I was a little scared about getting yelled at, you know. We stayed in these little rooms--the little cellblocks, or whatever they're called--and they had some great community rooms.

One of my favorite memories about that is, they had a big picnic table-like thing with a circle of rocking chairs, so we all got to sit in a rocking chair. We had a puzzle going on the picnic table. Mollie or Glenda or somebody had taken this puzzle and they didn't want to bring the box, because they didn't want to pack the box. They took all the pieces and put them in a plastic bag. They brought the bag--so we didn't have a picture to go by. I don't do puzzles, as a rule, but I was drawn to it. So I interacted doing the puzzle with different people than I would have normally. We were staying up until eleven, midnight, because "I've got to get this last piece in!" It ended up being a lighthouse, and I love lighthouses-- it's one of my personal symbols. So that was fun.

So it's usually a combination of meeting authors, going to the places that we read about in the books, or going to places like Sarah Orne Jewett's--we read Country of the Pointed Firs. We got to go to her house, and got to see the countryside she wrote about; we got to understand more about her family. When I was a kid I was really into historical places, and this was just a fantastic constellation of traveling and reading and history and biography--and all about women--which is a very powerful experience.

The great thing about the trips is.... All I had to do was say I wanted to go, pay my money, and get my airline ticket. Everything else was taken care of. So as a single, professional woman, I don't have a lot of time to do the planning and the research that's involved. The first time it was like, "Well, okay, I don't know what's going to happen, but I'm willing--it's an adventure." I knew Mollie and Glenda and Denise, and thought, "If nothing else, it'll be fun." Another place we stayed there was a little inn called East Wind at Tenant's Harbor. In Maine, on the southern coast, there are all these little fingers that go out into the ocean, into the bay, and it's at the end of one of those little fingers. It's your quintessential New England house, or inn. They've got the wraparound porch, and a beautiful dining room that looks over the bay. The island that's closest to it is owned by

the Wyeth family. There's a little lighthouse out there. I was so enchanted by that that the person who I connected with there--her name is Pat--Pat and I ended up going back out there in October and staying in Tenant's Harbor, and re-living the book experience, in a sense.

When I tell people about those trips... In fact I just had a conversation this morning at a meeting I was at; I was telling a woman about the Scotland trip. I was telling her I was going back and describing the experience, and I could just see her saying, "Oh, I want to go!" For people that read, and people that like to travel, it's just an amazing experience. It's not about the money you spend--I would gladly sacrifice whatever I need to do to go on these trips; I'm already signed up next year to go to Colorado. I have to have my next one planned before I go on my trip, because otherwise it's a letdown. It was two weeks after I got back from the England-Scotland trip that I asked them if they'd do the Highlands trip, so we've been planning that for a year--really something to look forward to.

**KB:** I can imagine! Let's go back to the very beginning. You were involved in some of the early book groups then, and you actually met in the famous Security Building, which I've never seen--although I suppose I've driven by it. I've heard so much about the Security Building. What was book club like, meeting in that?

**TF:** It was always interesting walking up the stairs to that building, because the liquor store is on the bottom of the building, and you never knew who you'd run into, going on the sidewalk. My most vivid memory is, it was like going into someone's living room--a small room surrounded by books, which was just a *joy*. I have books in almost every room of my house; I would be lost if I didn't have them. So it was like finding my home. I remember sitting on this interesting collection of chairs and couches, and it was hot--it was during the summer, there wasn't much ventilation, maybe two windows. Glenda or somebody had a desk by the window, but every other space was taken up by books, and it was like "I recognize this ....this is good!"

That's where I was first introduced to May Sarton, in that group--which has been a powerful influence in my life. Journal of a Solitude is....if every woman hasn't read it, they should, and even if they don't like it, I think it will be impactful for them to read it. One book that I read in that group and have re-read at least every other year is Gift from the Sea, Anne Morrow Lindbergh. That book was written in the late 1940s or early 1950s, I think. It's an essential feminist text, to me, written by a very traditional woman. She had five kids, she was wealthy, she was married to a very famous person, but she had the ability to capture, in words, thoughts and feelings I think every woman has had. Even though I don't have children and a family, I feel this caretaking, this nurturing responsibility for people, and how women have a tendency not to take care of themselves. She was able to get away for two weeks or a month every year to go to this island and to get back to her essence-- and then to be able to write about it! I've actually started a collection of her books; I've tried to get as many as I could in hardcover. I haven't read

them all, but it's a part of my life to have my chunk of Anne Morrow Lindbergh books. And I have my collection of May Sarton books, and I have my Willa Cather books, and then Eleanor Roosevelt, who has come in and out of a number of our groups: biography, my Rock Group has read some of her....

**KB:** Were you an insatiable reader *before* book club, or did book club beget that?

**TF:** I've become more of a reader. I was encouraged by my grandmother on my dad's side to enjoy stories; she would read to me. I have an older sister who loves books as much as I do, and we've fed each other in that respect. But as an adolescent I didn't read very much. In college, of course, you're reading textbooks. I spent a semester at Princeton University doing an internship in sports information-- my sister was a women's basketball coach out there-- and my sister had lots of books: Sherlock Holmes, some of the classics. I had enough time to read out there, and she took me around to used bookstores. I started to realize that I had a passion for this.

It wasn't a full-blown passion until I met the "Women's Press". I had read mostly men, and it didn't occur to me to seek out reading women. Now I read almost exclusively women. The only exception I generally make is business books-- it's difficult to find business books written by women, although there are more. So now it's a significantly bigger part of my life than it was. And now I can't imagine life without books. Some people collect artwork, or other kinds of things, and I collect old books. I have this reputation with the traveling book groups as being quite the book buyer. I'm not a shopper, but when it comes to books, I'm a kamikaze shopper-- I can go in, and the titles .... I'm led to them.

**KB:** Do you find that you actually read them after you buy them?

**TF:** Sometimes I don't.

**KB:** But just having them is okay as well, speaking for myself.

**TF:** It is. It's kind of an instinctual thing. If I'm attracted to a book, there's a reason. It may be that I need to read it now; it may be that it's a piece of history that I want to have in my collection. It may be that ten years from now I'll go back and that'll be exactly the right book I need to read. One of the exercises we did for one of the book groups-- I think it was the more recent biography book group-- we had to count the number of books we had, and describe them. I thought, "This will be interesting."

So I have about twelve hundred books, which I move every time I move, of course, and it's kind of a chronology of my life. I have the old books that my sister and I collect together. I got a set of Dickens books-- kind of by accident-- and there are twenty-four in the set, published in the early 1900s. I have twelve, and my sister has twelve, and that way I can always keep track of my sister. We have, over the years, gotten books for each

other for every occasion, and if we find one that we think the other person will like, we get it. So I've got that section, I've got my self-help section, I've got my "Women's Press" section, which is now two bookshelves full. I've got several shelves...each time I go on a trip... I've got a Maine shelf, I've got a Scotland-England shelf, I'll have a Colorado shelf ..... I have my business books, which are actually in a different room.

So it's interesting to see how books have weaved throughout my life, and I know if I hadn't run into the "Women's Press", it wouldn't have happened as soon, and it might not have happened with this intensity. It's allowed me to be who I am, with books, because there are other people who are just as crazy about it as I am. I talk about it with people I work with: they think I read constantly. It's like, "No, you should meet some people who read constantly: they're people that are in *five* book groups." I couldn't keep up with that! I have trouble sometimes keeping up with one.

**KB:** So wonderful. Thank you for describing that; that's exciting and interesting stuff; I really appreciate this .... I think you've answered many of the questions I thought about asking. Based on your observations, your participation in the book clubs, your participation in the traveling book groups, describe what you think are the values of the Minnesota Women's Press as an organization. That's a hard question, so think about it for a second if you want.

**TF:** It's a hard question, but I have an answer on the tip of my tongue. When they say every woman has a story, with the newspaper there's always a profile on the front page. When it comes to books, the fact is that not too long ago women weren't able to publish under their own names. They had to have pseudonyms or their initials or under their husband's name and it wasn't that long ago.

So from a historical standpoint it's so very important to me as a young, young-ish woman that I can recognize that I'm very lucky to be living in the time that I'm living in. I have benefited from the whole "women's lib". There was no way I would have been an athlete. I wouldn't have been able to have the athletic experience that I had, had other women not gone before me. As part of my profession I'm a writer; I'm director of communications at a health care company. The written word is a very important part of my life--to recognize that there are women who've been able to express very powerful and important ideas and be recognized as intellectual equals or superiors to men. That's the whole idea of fighting the Patriarchy was very important early on in my experience with the book groups.

I think that's one of the ideas that Mollie and Glenda allow people to get comfortable with--that whole idea about the feminist business and feminist reading and even the word feminist can scare people off. But I understand the depth of that word, and I've seen struggles. I've seen individual struggles and group struggles with that concept and with, "Why do you have to only read women's words?" And, "Why do you have to be angry about this?" I'm far less angry than I was ten years ago. I think it was a process that I had

to get angry so that I could establish who I was as a woman and be strong about that and be strong in my own person. I think Mollie and Glenda have done that and the rest of the people at the "Women's Press" have provided the vehicles for women to do that individually and collectively in the community with the "Press", with the book groups, with BookWomen, which I love.

BookWomen: I think I started as one of the original subscribers. One of the first issues, I think I might have. If I don't have all of them, I will. I read it cover to cover as soon as I get it. They've create these vehicles for people, and they're not in your face about it. It's like, "These are here. They're available. We'll create the environment and provide the opportunity," but there's no pushing or anything.

It's fun to watch people come in to book groups who--they could be twenty, they could be seventy, they could be fifty-five and just discovering that, "You know, I'm important." It's really fun to see. I've learned so much about history that predates the Patriarchy and what's really grounded me as a person and spiritually is to know that there were women at the center of a lot of religions a long time ago. Millions of years ago, there were cultures that were Matriarchies. I'm not really for one or the other. I'm kind of the Chalise and Blade kind of equality--balance of power kind of thing would be more of a way I would describe my philosophy. ....Being able to read books that reinforce the fact that the world didn't begin with men. ....And knowing that the Native American spirituality is really tied to nature and *Mother Earth* and some of the more organic things. ....Really being able to step outside of the culture that's been created by men, primarily.

I think that's one of the exciting things about seeing the "Women's Press" succeed as a business. Here are these two women and this group of women who said, "You know, we're not gonna do it your way. We're not gonna create the male hierarchy and bureaucracy of the corporate system." I know that it hasn't been easy, and I'm sure it's not as profitable as it could be if they were only bottom line driven. But their bottom line is about women's lives, it seems to me, which is--how do you measure that return on investment?

People like me, they helped me change my life. There's no way I could give that back. The only way I can give that back is to tell people about what I'm doing and what they offer and get them into book groups and get them copies of BookWomen. I keep telling those guys, "Give me a bunch of brochures and business cards and I'll just be part of your publicity machine." It's been so important to me and I know of other people that it's had that same effect on...

One of the people in the Rock Group was getting her Master's degree and had to drop out for a year, because she couldn't juggle everything. She said she had to come back--while she was still going to school--because she couldn't find anybody else where she could share her ideas...that had the same values, that she felt comfortable. She said, "I didn't fit anywhere else." I feel...I always know that if I have a wild idea or some weird book I

want to read, I can come here. If my book group doesn't discuss it, Glenda will have read it for sure or will know about it or will be willing to discuss it with me.

Denise has been really fun to get to know. She's really shared a lot of what she knows about Scotland with us. I'm really excited about going back with her. We met some of her family, and her niece is gonna be one of the guides on our Highlands trip. All of the people here just seem so willing to share what they know and have a sense of adventure about what they don't, which is not common I think. People tend to...especially in Minnesota...the reserve.... It's ironic.

**KB:** Yes, that's another question actually, why Minnesota? Because the Minnesota Women's Press has succeeded here, where similar presses have not.

**TF:** I think even though we are somewhat reserved and can be--you know, the whole Minnesota Nice image-- you can only get so far with people. I think the Liberalism that this community, the Twin Cities community and even outstate Minnesota provides...the texture, the cultural environment where it's okay to do different things. We have a wide berth here to do things.

I think it has to do with the state, but it also has to do with personalities and the women that are behind it, and the driving forces. Without the passion of the people who make this organization happen, it wouldn't happen anywhere. It wouldn't matter where it was. When I step inside this building, or if I'm out with a group from the "Women's Press", it's like you're creating its own culture. And not in an insulating way, because I think it's very permeable. I think there's a lot of interaction with the community.

But I feel a certain sense of security and protectedness when I come within these walls, or within the virtual walls of the ideas of this group. I think the strong women's community, and the way they've been able to tap people who have a very personal but introverted passion about words. It's an interesting collection of people, because I've never heard so many noisy introverts. It's pretty amusing when you get a lot of people who would normally be at home reading by themselves--and be quite happy, thank you--be animated and really engaged in the discussion with people that they may not know.

I came once or twice to...what they used to have is salons here, which were kind of free-flowing discussions not about books, but about various topics. The topic happened to be "Thelma and Louise", the movie. So I'm sitting in this packed room of like, it must have been like fifty people--and mostly women that I didn't know. I came with a friend and it was an interesting experience, because I didn't like the movie and ninety-eight per cent of the people in the room loved the movie. They thought it was the *best* thing in the world. Finally, there were two women who got to be bold. I'm thought, "Well, they just got to be like the *guys*, and why is that so good? I don't really think that women being able to shoot people is such a big step up in the world." It was okay to say that in that group. The energy was tremendous.

**KB:** That many women.... How on earth did people have voice in that kind of an environment?

**TF:** It was just a 'speak up if you have an idea' kind of thing. If you would have traced the conversation, a little ping pong ball would have been going back and forth just at the speed of light almost. So the exchange of ideas.... The thing is, I don't feel judged necessarily. I had a very different opinion than most of the people in the group and yet, they wanted to hear what I had to say. I think that's another value--the respectfulness. I think there are very strong ideas and ideals that the "Women's Press" has, but they respect other opinions. So if you can express yourself and bring in a different point of view, they may not agree with it but that's okay. That's part of the debate, that's part of learning.

**KB:** Did you attend any other salons?

**TF:** I'm trying to think. I think it was just the one. I don't remember any others...

**KB:** Another thing on your form, you say that you're an occasional reader of the Minnesota Women's Press. Well, that's kind of an interesting comment that you're not a voracious reader of the Minnesota Women's Press.

**TF:** No, I get most of my news through public radio, and I don't read very many magazines except the BookWomen. I was a subscriber of the "Women's Press" for a number of years, and found that I could never get around to read the whole thing. So it became more of a guilt complex than... Every now and again I will pick it up when I'm here. I enjoy the stories and I'm very glad that they do the coverage that they do. I think it was a very important part of my being exposed to the women's community and what was happening. I use it as a touchstone. I like to go back to it, but I kind of have my living connection to what's happening is the book groups and the people. The newspaper isn't what's important to me.

**KB:** Isn't that interesting?

**TF:** But, I'm really glad it's there because for women that don't read like I do, it's their connection to women's words. So I know most of the women that I've bumped into, they either know of it or they've used the directory to find names of women-owned businesses. I know, it's almost like a... I feel embarrassed to say that I'm not [unclear] to the "Women's Press" or anything, but it's not as important to me as the books are.

**KB:** What haven't I asked you? I mean, I haven't asked you very much. [laughter]

**TF:** You know I keep saying I'm a socialized introvert, but I'm passionate about this place, and the experience and the role it's played in my life. It's very easy for me to tell these stories.

**KB:** Anything that you think should be said about the Minnesota Women's Press?  
Something that you've not had an opportunity to say...?

**TF:** I think it's an invisible institution in Minnesota. I think it's one of the most valuable assets that we have as a community. Part of me wants to have everybody know about it and part of me wants to protect it. Sometimes the higher visibility you have, the more risk you're exposed to. I feel very protective of the organization. I kind of worry and wonder...Glenda and Mollie aren't going to be here forever. Someday they're going to decide, "Oh, I think I want to do something else." That's why I keep going on every trip that they plan. I'm like, "Oh, I'll go," because I don't know how long it's gonna last.

So I have concerns about the legacy. I know that there are people that are doing the newspaper and that will continue that tradition. I really hope that other women and younger generations are able to have the kind of experience that I've had, and that the organization will continue to live on if the principles decide to do other things in their life. Although I think Glenda will probably be here when she's ninety-five years old, reading. "Oh, I read this book recently..." [laughter]

One of the things that I've heard Mollie and Glenda worry about is that the people that are attracted to the book groups specifically are generally white, middle-class women. They worry about the diversity issue. What's interesting is there's such a diversity within that small group of people. I hope that it's not perceived externally as just this white women's organization, because I think it's so much more than that. It's such a deeper type of diversity.

It's not that people from other cultures aren't welcome, it's just difficult, I think, to create... It's like we're learning about our own culture as much as we would be learning about other people's cultures. I think it would be interesting if it could develop into something like that or if other--the Hispanic community or African American community--had their own type of women's press to nurture their own environment and culture. I don't think all women are the same just because we're the same gender. So, I don't know...

The fact that you're recording it for the Minnesota History Center is perfect. The story has to be told. It *has* to be preserved. Because we don't know. Twenty years from now it could be bigger, better and wonderful, or it could be, "Oh, yeah, remember that?" Who knows? I'll never forget it. And I know the people who's lives it's touched, even if they aren't associated with it anymore, I'm sure it brings back great memories. That's about all I can think of.

**KB:** Well thank you very much.