

Interview with Glenda Martin

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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KB: Glenda, because you're one of the founders of the Minnesota Women's Press, I'd like to start at the very beginning, and I'd like to have you describe how you first thought about or became aware of the idea of establishing a women's press.

GM: Things occur in such ways that sometimes you're not even aware that that's what you're moving towards. I can remember the actual point when it was decided that we would do this. Then I'll go back and sort of say what I think led to it.

One afternoon, Mollie Hoben [Co-founder and co-publisher] and I were sitting in my front room. I even have the image of that day, because she was sitting in one of the over-stuffed chairs in the living room, and the sun was shining through the window. Who knows exactly what we were talking about, but I can remember she posed the question of what news would look like through women's eyes. I can remember there was kind of a silence then, and my response to her was, "Well, let's find out." It was as if, for me anyway, that was the beginning moment.

What led to it was I think the fact that each of us had come from backgrounds where women...no matter how hard we tried, it always felt like we were at a lesser level. ...And the importance of women's words in the arenas in which we were working at the time, which was education. ...And the fact that I had been at the university teaching for six years, and then in public schools for I don't know how many years--twenty. It became very clear that no matter how hard you worked as a woman, no matter what your background was, no matter how much you knew, that you never quite measured up. Of course I taught at the university in the 1960s, one of four women in a department teaching graduate courses. We had a faculty of about twenty-five, and in faculty meetings one of the four women were assumed would make the coffee, until the four of us decided none of us were going to make the coffee. And in the 1960s, that was sort of far out.

Then of course when I went into public schools, where I moved into administration and I became the only school administrator in a thousand-member school district. There were ten top administrators and I was the only female. I was particularly passionate about the work I was doing--not administration, but programming for kids. Of course I had supervised a huge staff before I went into upper administration, and I went into upper

administration with the belief that I could really make change in a large system. I tried that for three years, and at the end of three years, it was enough--enough already. I wasn't going to do that anymore.

KB: You weren't going to attempt to make changes?

GM: Not anymore, it would just seem so hopeless. There were very specific instances where it became quite clear to me that no matter how you would try to explain, or how you would put forth criteria, or how you would put forth a plan, the guys would kind of say, "Okay, if you want to do that, Glenda." But there wasn't any real support to move ahead. So once you moved ahead with staff, then if you came in to take the next steps, it was, "Well, why would we want to do that?"

It seemed to me that basically what I was doing was going on and setting up staff expectations, which in fact administration was not going to honor. I just felt that this was hypocritical to the staff; I just couldn't tolerate it. Ultimately I was asked by the superintendent to do something I felt was extremely unethical, and I resigned. I went into him and I said, "I'm leaving in two weeks." In education you don't usually do that--you usually are in at the end of the school year, or at a certain marker.

This was actually after the time we had started the paper. When we originally sat in that living room and decided we were going to do this, I did not see having any active role with the paper. Now I was willing to put forth the money to help this endeavor go, and to help along with Mol [Mollie Hoben], try to talk with different people to raise [money] with the stock offerings. But I was not going to have an active role--partly because I made a lot of money at my job. What I thought was, "Well, then I can continue to feed money into the company for something I value a lot."

But within a year then, I had left my position at the school district. Then it became interesting, because what kind of a role was I going to play? I think it's really important when we look at these kinds of efforts, Mol and I come at tasks very differently. I have managed people for a long time, and also I'm fairly gutsy about the stance I take. Mol is much gentler, and much more specific-task oriented, where I would be much more global, much more "Rah, Rah, Rah!" Sometimes that's been a problem, but overall I think it's been a tremendous strength because we each bring some very different skills and perceptions about how things should work.

So anyway, I left the [school] district. I then sort of played a number of different roles with the paper, especially those first two or three years, partly because I was not a journalist. Even though her degrees aren't in journalism, she did the high school newspaper, and then of course she did the Bugle [Park Bugle]--which is a community newspaper--for a number of years. Plus, I think she has a journalist mind. She questions; she really looks at news, interprets, thinks about, and is interested in other people's view and reaction to events.

KB: Let's get back to just the whole notion of starting, and the inception of the Minnesota Women's Press. Can you talk about what the external environment was like, that would make this, the notion of the Minnesota Women's Press, a reasonable idea?

GM: It became really clear to me, in those latter years in the school district--because most of our staff were women--that there were the voices of the women, and they were just clearly different than the voices of the men. I had never actively thought about that. So when Mol proposed this, it was like, "Ah! But of course! What needs to happen is women's voices need to be out there more publicly than they have been."

Of course, you know now, we were in the 1980s, so already we were kind of passed the big push of the 1970s for feminism. Even though there were words out there, a lot of writings out there in the 1970s, already you could begin to see things, sort of that get to be in the background.

Of course when we first started, I can remember, when we talked with people who might be potential stockholders, some of the reactions were, "You can't call it the 'Women's Press' because if you do that, people will see it as a lesbian paper," which stunned me. I couldn't think that if you claim the word "woman", that then automatically that meant lesbian. Of course we were also very concerned about using the 'feminist' word because, again, in that environment, in the 1980s, there'd begun to be stereotypes about the kind of women that feminists might be. If you can't claim feminists, or if you can't claim woman... By golly, how could you ever claim feminist? That was like way too far out.

I do know that when we first began, we were very careful about using either the--as we said--the 'L' word or the 'F' word--that's the feminist word, and not the other one. Because we were trying to make it clear that we were speaking to a larger audience, that we were really speaking to the female gender. In some ways I think we were maybe a bit too careful. Who knows in retrospect? But we were [careful], especially those first three years.

We got a lot of heat when we first began. It was like, "Why do we need this? What difference is it going to make? Women aren't any different from men, what you're really talking about are humanitarian things."

KB: Who did you get that heat from?

GM: Well, even from some of the people we [were soliciting money from]. We were bringing groups together to raise money. Of course the trick was how do you find women who have money? Or, who at that point would be willing? I think the climate's very different now, in the number of women who have enough money, and are willing to spend it in broader ways. So the women that we were talking to, many of them... It's not that they weren't interested in the idea, but to put money to that....!

Of course a lot of those were women who were in corporate environments at that point, which was kind of the beginning of the big move of people into corporations. I can remember one of the women who was a big time corporate woman who invested heavily with us. She kept rising in her corporation, and she said that over the years, she felt she could not bring the "Women's Press" into her corporate environment--just have it out on a table for people to read. She was very selective about who she might hand it to, because she was well aware that within that environment this was not a wise thing. Not just for herself, but even what it said about whatever woman picked it up, or, what it would say to the other people in the corporation. It was just part of the time.

Of course, almost no men--even my own husband thought this was one of the typical silly things I would do... [laughter] I'm not sure he's ever changed his mind. Except that it's fascinating to me, especially in these last years when the company has done well--he comes out of an economic background--he says, "My golly, you guys did this, and actually made money." Somehow it began to have a different, very different value.

KB: Well, talk a little bit about what your initial vision was.

GM: Well, do you know...

KB: I mean when you thought about this organization...

GM: You've probably heard me say this many a time. I do know that when we started what I said to Mollie. You never know what becomes fact and what becomes your imagined belief of what happened. I do know--and that had to do with my previous work--that when you're putting forth a new idea, that if you can't stay with it for a period of time, then there's no reason to start. Otherwise you can sort of diddle away for a year, and then what you've done is, well you've sort of had this little event, and there's nothing will come of that.

So I can remember very clearly saying to her, "If we start, we must last ten years." Well, she was appalled. "Oh my gosh, I can't even think of one year," plus the fact that she had to put that paper out every other week. It was all she could do, to gather the forces to get that paper out every two weeks. But it was really clear to me that had to happen, because I just felt that otherwise we might as well not start. Of course there were many times along the path where we weren't sure.

However, I do know that within the second year, when we started all the book stuff--which was to begin to bring in cash flow--that was part of moving toward being sure we were there ten years. Not that we were necessarily saying "We must do 'books'." It turned out to be books, because that was my own love. By that time, I had left the school district. This began to be something I could develop, and it also honored our mission, which was the celebration of women's words.

I'm not so sure in the very beginning whether or not we actually used that phrase, "The celebration of women's words." Honestly I can't remember--we'd have to go back and do some research on that. But it has certainly held for us well over the long-term, whenever we did coin it. I know Kathy Magnuson [Co-founder and General Manager] always is saying to us anytime something new comes up, "How does this fit with the celebration of women's words?" That's been a good steadier, you know, and kind of beacon up there to go for.

KB: Well, let's talk a little bit about how the "Press" was organized. I understand that in 1984, you started to hold weekly meetings to plan for the "Press". Can you talk about those meetings? Who was there, as you remember? [laughter]

GM: The planning part of course was held at Mollie's house, because of course at that point we didn't have any office space. In fact, the office was Mollie's house for I don't even know how long--a long time. Faye Kommedahl [early copy editor, present volunteer] will talk about it; she began to work with us immediately, because she was so committed to the concept. She would come over to Mollie's house and she'd spend--however long she'd spend there--hours. She'll say now, "I can't believe that clock chimed every hour. I got so tired of listening..."[laughs] Because Mol had a clock that would chime; it's funny what people remember.

I can also remember Kathy Magnuson was doing some things with us as well. When we began--coming out of big institutional America--we were really committed to the idea that everyone had equal value who was going to work on it. If people had children that they needed to care for, they could bring their children. People could work whatever hours they wanted. It was all extremely flexible. Mol's house was just kind of a revolving door.

I remember Kathy Magnuson had little kids at that time, and would bring them over. It's so interesting how it changes an environment when you have children around. [laughter] Even when we finally ended up with our office, here, our first office...for two years people brought kids.

If the phone needed answering, anybody who was closest to the phone answered it. There was never a designated person, until after about two years. I said to Mollie, "This has got to change." That began to be our realization: that no matter how much your feminist sensibilities might want to be open and flexible to everything, that if you're going to run an organization there are certain things that you just simply have to put in place in order to keep your sanity. In some ways that was hard--that was really hard.

Anyway, for a long time, we just worked out of Mollie's house. It was very exciting. I don't even remember the other people that were there. I remember Kathy, I remember Faye, and certainly Mollie was working all the time.

KB: Well, what was your perception of the organization right before you started publishing?

GM: You mean, what was it like?

KB: You talked about the fact that it was going to be around for while; you talked about the notion of women's words. You envisioned a newspaper...are there other pieces of how you envisioned this 'animal' to be before you started?

GM: I don't think so. I think basically our whole idea was that we would publish a newspaper, and then it wasn't any more. I mean, that was a lot, but it wasn't any more than that. There were no other activities or things that we thought would be part of that.

Of course, the whole big discussion [ensued] of whether it should be a weekly, or every other week, or even a monthly. Eventually, we have gone two weeks, and that's what we've done ever since we began. [There was a] big discussion of course of what the prototype should look like.

KB: Well, talk about the prototype. First of all, who was the prototype intended to reach?

GM: Well, we used that in trying to help continue to raise money from the stockholders. Because you know if you're a Sub-chapter S corporation [Sub Chapter S corporate status passes liability for federal income taxes directly to shareholders], you can't advertise publicly. What you have to do is word of mouth, and you have to meet privately with people, and you have to give all kinds of explanations. So it wasn't like you could put an ad in the newspaper and say, "Oh you lucky people, here's an opportunity."

So we were ongoingly [sic] meeting with all kinds of groups, and that became hard work because you'd go over it and over it and over it. You might meet with ten people, and maybe one person would be interested enough that they would want to pursue it. Part of that could be really discouraging, except, on the other hand, we were so committed to making it happen.

Both Mollie and I own more than 50% of the corporation.

KB: To this day?

GM: To this day, oh yes, and planfully so. I think we own together, fifty-two or fifty-three percent. This causes us to be the directors of the company, which is how we want it, because there's also legal obligation with that.

It's so interesting. Once we began to have enough to start with--and I'll get back to the prototype--it was so interesting to try to find a lawyer who would draw the papers in a way that we needed to have the papers drawn. That was really fascinating. We did find a lawyer.

KB: What was special about it?

GM: I don't know if I could even tell you, but there were some very specific things. Mollie may be able to tell you. I can remember meeting with her in the office, where we met with her two or three times. She would say, "Here's what the legal language says, but we'll just change this a little bit. It'll still have the same meaning, but it gives just a little different emphasis." You know, it was such a wonderful message because it was exactly what we were about to do. It was that whole thing of taking institutional language--legal, lawyer language--and moving that into [something] just a little bit different, but in fact meeting the needs of what we wanted to do. Ultimately, down the road, the same thing [happened] with banking. I mean it was real intriguing.

So it says a lot about who you find; who can embrace the idea, and understand that it's not just a word game, but it's a deep philosophical understanding of a different way of being. When you can find those people, in whatever profession, then in fact, you can make that click. The trick is finding those people, because you have to sometimes go through a lot of folk before you get to the ones that say, "Aha! This is what you want to do. This is how we can make it work." That's been a real pattern over the years--and fascinating--and it gets easier as the years have gone on. Maybe because we've been around longer, but I think it's because we have a lot more women in those fields who understand, and can say, "Well, this is really what we're talking about."

One of the big issues of the prototype was that--and we've never deviated from this with the paper...maybe we've done a couple of issues that we haven't done this, but consistently... It was really important to us that... Because our tag line for a long time for Minnesota Women's Press was that every woman has a story, on the front page of every newspaper we have whatever stories we have on the top-fold, but we always on the bottom-fold have an individual woman's story. This is to honor the fact that any woman we would go up to--someone walking by--we could say, "We'd like to interview you for our profile," and that woman would have a story.

Now we had a lot of people scoff at that; they'd say "Oh, well, you wouldn't do a homeless woman." Well, of course we have. "You wouldn't do a prostitute." Well, of course we have. Because what we wanted to [do was] make a baseline statement to the greater public: you can't lump women's stories in one lump. It isn't like you've got this group of women, and then you've got this lump over here, and then you've got this lump over here. If you were to talk to the individual women in any of those places, each of them has a story that is important to hear. It doesn't necessarily mean you always agree with the story, or that you would follow that path for yourself, but in reality, those

individual women's stories are what make up the larger female being. It's really important to recognize the tremendous diversity of these women's stories. So that if you get hung up on being woman, or being feminist, or being lesbian, whatever word you want to put, that each of those stories in the larger whole, are what's important. We've never moved away from that.

KB: So who did you profile in the prototype?

GM: The very first woman who we put in the prototype was a woman whose name is Grace Warfield. She died three or four years ago, but I had known Grace a long time. I had worked with her in the Minneapolis Public Schools; she was a psychologist. She was quite a heavy woman, and what should I say...I think in our culture would probably have been termed not attractive, physically. But she was a woman who not only was wonderfully bright, but she looked at the world...

I don't know if she'd ever have used the word 'feminist' for herself; I don't know. But I also do know that she had been married to an African American man that she loved dearly, and had three children by him. He ultimately left her, and eventually married an African American woman, and moved away from here. This was very sad for her, even though that was not something we were putting 'big-time' in the story. On the other hand, it was always intriguing to me how she created her own life; her own life was not only tied to the husband, to the man that she loved, but to much larger issues. I was really glad that we did it with her, and we had a wonderful story. I don't remember what the headline was.

I do think though in the prototype we also did...didn't we do that whole photo of all the people who were working with the "Women's Press" at that time? There were maybe thirty women that we gathered over on a lawn close to Mollie's house, and we were very specific about how we gathered those women. What we were saying is, "These are the kinds of women we're going to be writing about."

Kathy Magnuson was there with her two little kids at that point. We had Mabel, who was a long-time librarian, who was a friend of Mollie's, who was like at that point eighty to eighty-five. Then we had the career woman, Terry. My daughter was in it, and I was in it. There was a whole big group, and people were all dressed real differently--to their lives. This was not a fake picture in any way; it's just that we had drawn people from all different kinds of backgrounds. It's a wonderful picture, in fact it is out here. It's a wonderful picture, and it really made the statement for what we were planning to do--which was [to present] all kinds of women's voices. I still really like that wonderful tree in the background [laughter].

Another thing with the prototype--big issue--was we used color on it, which was called 'rubine red'. It was so interesting because the whole thing was, "Are you going pink

here?" [laughter] "It's a shade of pink," I said, "but it's more like a fuschia or something." We used that color for at least two years or three years.

KB: As the base color of the paper?

GM: ...As the base color. We never used any other, and we did it on purpose. Because what we wanted was to begin to have some identity as it was out there on the stands--that this was the color that you looked for. So I'm sure it was two or three years that we used just that color, which I think probably was fairly unheard of at the time. It was just interesting what little decisions and big decisions had to be made, and then why you made them at a specific point in time.

KB: One of the purposes of the prototype, then, was a fundraising effort?

GM: It was to be able to show people this is the kind of thing we're going to be about, and I think was very helpful.

KB: So you could use it in your meetings then as you made presentations?

GM: Yes, absolutely. We'd pass them around and say, "Here's what the front page is going to look like," because by then we had the design for the ad, and the design for the front page. Of course, we printed it on a little nicer paper than the usual newsprint, with a little more quality paper.

KB: Did you distribute it around to others than investors?

GM: I don't know. I don't know what we did, and I can't remember how many copies we made either, but...

KB: Advertisers or...

GM: I assume somebody was following the advertisers at that point, because of course it gets really interesting in a feminist business--the reality of having to raise money ongoingly--which of course were going to be the ads.

That's a whole story into itself--the complications, the challenges--from the beginning of who would be the advertisers, how you would go after them, how you would talk with them. People had a belief that if only Dayton's [large department store chain] would advertise, you'd be successful. I am sure that in fifteen years, Dayton's has never advertised. I think that's true [laughs]. And then whole question is whether Dayton's is even the appropriate place you need to be. So even philosophically, right from the beginning, it was fascinating to begin to struggle with. There were some real ups and downs on that, because of course that was the lifeblood for ongoing [operations].

Now it is true, we knew right from the beginning that people would lose money for quite a while. We knew that. In fact, the amount of money that we set out to raise was to cover it for, I think, 3 years.

KB: How much was that?

GM: I don't know those things...whatever it was. [laughter]

KB: Whatever, whatever... It's not that important.

GM: Well, except it is. Mol would be able to tell you. She knows those things. I can remember that for the first two years, it wasn't terrible for us to realize that there was no profit. Of course you also have to know that people were being paid not a lot--they just weren't. That was expected. We certainly didn't say to anybody, "You know, there's big money to be gained here." So [there was] a lot of commitment on individual people's part, for those early years.

KB: Let's go back to the fundraising then, and talk a little bit about how you put together those groups of women that would meet, and how you ultimately held your first offering of stock.

GM: Oooh...can I even talk about that very well? [pause] I don't know if I can. I do know that most of the groups... Well I think probably all of the groups that were brought together were because there would be one interested person who would say, "I'll bring my six colleagues, or my eight friends, or whatever, together, and we'll come and present." [laughs]

I can remember being in some pretty 'poshy' houses down toward Grand Avenue, and in some ways--it's interesting--feeling somewhat intimidated. The women that would be gathered would have been through someone who valued what we were about, but it was because these were women who had some money. I don't mean huge, big money, necessarily, but money that they would perhaps be interested in investing. Of course, most of those women would basically say they saw it as a poor risk, and were not willing to [invest]. Not that they maybe didn't like the idea, but they really didn't believe that it would be something that could be a worthwhile financial investment.

KB: So as a contribution it might have been okay, but as an investment...

GM: That's right. That's right. And I think that's really an important point, because you have to remember one of the very first things that we decided was that we would set this up as a for-profit company, and not as a non-profit. That in itself became a real ongoing thing that we would have to explain to people. It was like, "If it's women doing this...obviously, women only do non-profit things." We would always have to really

make the point that we felt it was important--that a woman-owned company could be a for-profit company, and would make profit.

KB: Did you start there?

GM: We did. We did. We never deviated from it. It was so fascinating because even now, sometimes--not so much now, but many of those first years of the "Women's Press"--people would say, "Well, of course you're a non-profit; why aren't you writing grants?" When people would bring their books to donate to our library, and they'd say they want the sheet that says they can take it off their taxes, and I'd say, "Well we're not non-profit." People were stunned. Or, people would come and say, "Well as a women's organization, you know what it means. Women need to be supporting all these other kinds of things, because non-profits help non-profits."

That's why when Judy Remington did her book, Need to Thrive, it got really interesting. What Judy found was, most of the non-profits that had been around for ten years, were gone. I'm not saying there's a direct relationship between being non-profit and only lasting ten years. But I do know that it's coming from that real philosophical foundation of the importance of women's words, which doesn't have anything to do with money--that's a basic thing. On the other hand, it is also basic to come as a for-profit, because it puts forth a very different statement of what, in fact, women can do. It just puts you in a whole different kind of arena.

I don't think of myself as a capitalist, but on the other hand, it's the challenge of saying, "Alright. If this is the system within which we live...we can make it in that system, even though we plan to do it in some different ways. Some of the ways that we're going to go at what our business is about... Which of course brings us to what we're doing now, which is Center for Feminist Business. Is there a difference?The very thing that you and Kathy [Magnuson] are exploring. I really do think there was a greater challenge right from the beginning about being a for-profit, than there was about holding true to our philosophical underpinnings of the value of women's words. Maybe it's because it was so clear to us...

KB: Did you just say it was more difficult to be a for-profit than it was to...

GM: To hold true to what that meant to be a for-profit than it was to our goal of valuing women's words. Partly I think because for us, again, the idea of capitalism is not big in our hearts, whereas the other was in our hearts. [laughter] It was really clear to us how important that was. So the challenge of being strong, about what it meant to be for-profit --we had to not work harder, but we had to pay attention in some different ways, I think, that we hadn't anticipated.

That's been a wonderful lesson, and that's why what you and Kathy are doing gets so important now. It's like this is now, for me anyway, the fruition of our being able to hold

true to that from the very beginning. I think that's one thing, when we were going out to get money, that was really hard for a lot of those women to understand. "Look, this is going to be a for-profit." It was kind of puzzling--it was almost like they would be willing to give us some money if we'd been non-profit more easily than if [we were for-profit]. I think that's because that was the mental set at the time--women were going to do good. What you do is raise that money, and you go out and do good, and supposedly we were going out to do good. So I really at this point love the connection of that deep heart-felt [emotion] as well as a real 'head' understanding of what it meant to set it up as a for-profit.

KB: So ultimately you gathered a number of stockholders.

GM: Yes, we did.

KB: Were they all women?

GM: No, they weren't all women--and they still aren't--but the majority was women.

KB: It sounds like you approached women.

GM: We did. I can't remember whether we approached any men directly or not, who then set up the individual meetings with eight to ten people. I honestly don't remember that. Of course, we have roughly thirty-one stockholders now. We only have so many because it's a Sub-Chapter S, and some of those have changed over the years. I think maybe two or three people have asked to have their stock returned--paid for. Then other people have bought it.

Of course, we did a second stock offering somewhere in our time here, which has made a difference for us too. But we still can have only 'x' number of stockholders, and as I say, I think there are thirty or thirty-one right now.

I think at least three are men--often times in combination though, husband and wife. In fact, a couple of those men especially have been not only financially willing, but also humanly willing. For example, one of our stockholders, the husband, has helped us build a film library here of films from books written by women. It's been wonderfully helpful to us as we do different things around here. He just has done that on his own--partly because he's a film buff, and it's been interesting to him to do that. So it's kind of a human connection beyond the money connection, which has been really good.

Of course, that's happened with other stockholders too, who were willing to put money into something that their hearts cared about. I don't know if any of them ever thought they would make money--it would be interesting to poll them and see whether or not. When the stockholders meet now, their biggest concern is not for themselves, but to be sure that our staff is paid competitive wages, which we've been able to increase.

KB: Isn't that interesting?

GM: It is. I think if we go back and read the stock-holders [minutes]--in fact, I just read the ones from the last stock-holders' meeting because I wasn't here, and they reiterated it again--over the years I think it would be almost in every stock-holder meeting minutes. They have said ongoingly, the most important thing is that you continue to move toward competitive wages for your staff. It would be fascinating to research in how many organizations that that would be the center.

KB: Interesting. Let's go back to the beginning and think a little bit about the very first newspaper. So you've raised the money; you've had your prototype; you're still in Mollie's house, presumably...

GM: Well, yeah, see I don't know. When did we actually move to...?

KB: I think that you were still in Mollie's house...

GM: Were we really?

KB: According to this little chart I have. Talk a little bit about that very first newspaper--the first or second newspaper--and what that process was like, how you all interacted, developing strategies....

GM: Obviously it was pretty exciting, for one thing, just to think that we could even do it. One of the fascinating things--oh god, I remember when those first papers came out--was where they were going to be put so people could pick them up. I can still remember, because we distributed them ourselves. So we had this whole crew of volunteer people who went out. How we put the list together, where we were going to distribute--I don't even know that. Typically you don't just go and drop them somewhere; you've got to confirm with somebody that it's okay to leave them at certain kinds of places. It would be fascinating to see that early list.

Over here there's a huge parking lot. We got permission from the people over there, and the truck would come and drop the papers, and then all these volunteers would gather--about fifteen of them. I remember Denise Schiebe [early distribution coordinator, present book staff] was the one who was coordinating these volunteers. Oh, jeez... [laughter] Only part of them would show up. They could only deliver it this day, but maybe they'd get it delivered tomorrow. [laughter]. The whole thing was just really 'zoo-ey'. So it was really clear when we finally got our own paid distributors--it really made a big difference.

When it first came out, it was interesting that always you'd get some negative reaction--I think it had to do with calling it the "Women's Press". What does this mean by having that name?

KB: You got that kind of feedback from the people who agreed to let you have your newspapers there, or from readers?

GM: Well, I don't even know. Individual people would say that. I've always maintained that people are kind of afraid--both men and women--of the word 'woman.' One of the things that has been very clear to me from the beginning... Mollie and I were really clear that that's what we wanted to name it, but when we brought it up to people that we were trying to get to help sponsor and buy stock, a lot of them were very uncomfortable with that. Yet we never deviated from that, and I don't mean that in an ornery way, but in a grounded way.

It really needed to be the "Women's Press". That so clearly was the right thing to do. Ongoingly, when we would go out and talk, someone would say, "Well it's a lesbian paper." We would say, "It's true that we certainly are going to include lesbians. You can't do the women's community--a large community, I'll say it's the fifty-two percent--I'm not interested in thinking it's only for a slice.

It gets interesting now as we become more feminist-identified, whether or not we're really narrowing our community. On the other hand, do we honor the word feminist, and really own it and celebrate it? I think that is part of our challenge now.

To go back to that very beginning, I'm not so sure that when we first called it the "Women's Press", that we didn't have some of this same reaction that we'll have now if we really begin to more openly [be a feminist paper]. Because Cynthia [Scott; editor] is now thinking about actually having a tag line now on the paper with 'feminist' in it.

KB: Ahh...how interesting...

GM: That's pretty powerful. That's not totally decided, but it's certainly being talked about. It sort of intrigues me to think whether fifteen years later, we have this same reaction to the fact that we call it 'feminist' that we had when we started out [calling it] 'women's'. We clearly knew when we started that we came from a feminist base, but again, we were careful about using that word.

When those first papers came out, one of the things that was so wonderful was the sense of having set a goal, and worked--by then it would have been a year, year-and-a-half at that point--and here was the actual product you can hold in hand. Of course Mol had great fun, because she calls it doing a puzzle. She loves putting together just the 'physical-ness' of the paper: how you have to lay the ads, etc.

Of course, when we first began the paper, we did it all by hand. We didn't have computers; everything was done...the cut and paste approach to lay on the ads and so forth.

KB: Did you have ads in your first paper then?

GM: Oh gosh, I think so.

KB: Can you tell me, in summary, what were some of the biggest problems that you had in that very early stage?

GM: I think our biggest problem was certainly not editorial; in fact, we had all kinds of people who really wanted to write for us. If you look at the first year's newspapers, you can see that we had a wide range of people writing for us, and some very fine work. We always had people in line to write for us. Over the years you have trouble having people being consistent enough, people staying with you over a long time, but we certainly didn't have any trouble finding writers.

However, the reality of finding enough advertisers to bring enough money to support the paper was a major issue. As we look at the first year's publications, our goal had always been to run at least sixteen pages, and we certainly started out doing that. It was also true that the advertising base would not support that, and so many of the issues of the first year were only twelve pages. This of course was really disheartening in some ways to Mollie, because she had so many ideas of the kinds of stories that we hoped to be able to produce. The reality was, that was all we could create.

KB: What were some of the issues in getting advertisers? Was it level of readership, or was it content?

GM: Probably both, and also just not being well enough known. Of course we had no data to be able to show them of the number of people that were picking up the paper. Of course we do now, but we didn't then. It was a matter of just having enough presence to even be able to reach a broad base of advertisers. Now clearly, there were some who were with us right from the beginning--very supportive of the idea, really wanting to be identified with a women's newspaper. In fact, if you were to go back and look at some of what we call our 'directory' ads--the small ads at the back of the paper--there are some people who were advertising with us in the first issues, and are still advertising with us. I think that is a strong statement from them about what we are about.

In the early years it was so interesting that we didn't do employment ads. Of course, it's partly because of the market now, we have a huge employment section. As the employment section developed, one of the things that we have found--and as we became seen as a valuable institution ourselves--people often tell us that the employment ads in our paper bring the best job seekers to a company.

I believe that's because of the level of the readership that we have. Of course, over the years we've done many surveys of our readers. We have extremely educated--of course,

in Minnesota, you generally do--but we also have an extremely educated audience, as well as women who are making good incomes. In the early years we had none of that data, and so of course, you just go with the best you can to have presence out there.

KB: Just as you did with some of your biggest problems, what were your greatest successes during that very early first year period?

GM: One of the things that I would call a real success is the variety of stories that we were covering--covering is not the right word--choosing to put in the paper. We had a couple women out there who were sitting in on some major kinds of activities that were going on in the Twin Cities at the time. But it wasn't like we had journalists all around--being able to cover everything that was going on. It was choosing from a long list of stories that we would want to be sure to make some comment on, and being able to do that.

The most exciting part of that was when we would come upon stories that we didn't find in any other news media in the metropolitan area. Probably one of the most satisfying things to me--I don't know what other staff would say--is when we know that we had covered a story. Within a week or two, we would see, not the same story, but we would believe that they learned from us that this was something worth covering. It would be in some of the other print media here in the metropolitan area, and we always said "Aha...they found it from us." That's certainly been true over the years. I just know darn well. Certainly Mollie has spoken to most of the editorial staff at the big newspapers here, and she's belonged to the Woman Journalist Association--I know those women read the "Women's Press", because they are using it.

KB: Can you think of any examples of stories like that?

GM: In that first year, yes I certainly can. The one that was the most fascinating for us, and one we put extensive coverage into actually, was when the U.N. Dictate for Women Conference was held in Nairobi in July of 1986. Actually we did two issues on the Nairobi Conference. There were women from here who had actually gone to Nairobi, not for us, but were going anyway. They said they would like to write for us, so of course that became really important to us to have them do. And they did it. And more than that, we also had a wonderful art piece done of many women's faces who would be attending the conference.

To the best of my knowledge, no other newspaper covered that conference at all here in the metropolitan area--maybe in the New York Times or something--but no one in this metropolitan area. We were the only ones that covered the conference. It was interesting when the second one was held, which would have been in 1996... It was in China, I think. We certainly wrote about it, but I also know that every other newspaper in this metropolitan area [did as well]. So that ten years--which I don't think has to do with us directly, it's a difference of time, but certainly at the Nairobi conference--there was

nobody else writing about it, except us. I think it's really important to know that. To me that was a big occurrence. Even the small occurrences of individual stories that go on in this metropolitan area...I just know that we've had impact on what's happening in the larger media. This in itself has been, if for no other, a reason to exist. We should have existed for that reason.

KB: During that first year, did you think you were going to make it? I suppose you had varying feelings, but were there any points you thought, "Hey this is going to work?"

GM: During the first year, I remember when we had our birthday party. One of our stock-holder's name is Margaret Shryer--we call her one of our angels, and you really need angels when you're doing this kind of thing. Margaret consistently over all the years on our birthday, which is in April, brings a meal here for our staff. Margaret is a gourmet cook, so you can imagine our staff is pretty ecstatic when that happens [laughs].

At the end of the first year, Margaret said we must have major celebration. She was the one that became the driving force behind a celebration that was at the Theatre in the Round. It was open, of course, to everyone. It cost \$5, but that's because we had terrific food, which Margaret had gotten and had for us there.

But the important thing that happened was that Marilyn Belgrum, who is also one of our stock-holders... Marilyn didn't become a stand-up comic until she was sixty-five; she was a social worker at the University of Minnesota--in the social work department. When she was 65, she began to be a stand-up comic. She is a very funny lady, and in fact, has traveled all over this country. I don't know, maybe more than that. Marilyn did a stand-up piece for us that night, which was wonderfully great. But more than that, we also invited the twenty-four profile women that had been featured in our first year. It was a really emotional event.

I really almost wish we had it on film, because the majority of these women did not know each other. Yet, they clearly felt the honor and respect from having been a profile woman in the Minnesota Women's Press. And then to meet other women to whom that the same thing had happened--and these were women from all walks of life, different ethnic backgrounds and economic backgrounds, which is exactly what we're about. The electricity between the women was just wonderful. I can remember one of the women said, "Oh, do you think we could meet every year?" I thought, "Oh my gosh, this could get to be a really big thing...to try to have all these profile women..." [laughter]

KB: Have you done this, by the way...?

GM: Well, we did it the second year. We invited those twenty-four women of the second year. It was fine, but it certainly didn't have the kind of high as the end of the first year. Maybe it's because we were getting tired. [laughter] I don't know. Of course, one of the things we've often talked about over the years is that it's too bad that we didn't also

keep these women's stories. We talk ongoingly now about whether we should produce a book or produce a something, where now we'd go back and interview some of those women again to see whether there's fifteen years later for them, and actually have a picture that was in the paper in the first year, and then maybe a picture now. All that costs money, and we haven't set out to do that. I do think it would be such a wonderful example of the cross-section of women who live in the state of Minnesota.

If we were just to sit here now, and read this first year's volume--just the profiled stories--we would see such a mix of stories that it really tells me that the underlying purpose of what we set out to do is there. Those stories are so powerful, and yet, some so simple. I don't mean to say that they've gone out and totally conquered the world...but their own stories. Then the collection of those stories is just such honoring of being female in this culture, which is what we're about.

KB: Well, I'd like to move on from year one and two to the next five year period, because I suspect that there were a number of changes that were made. We don't have to be completely specific as to the time period, but in the early history of the Minnesota Women's Press. What were some of the most significant changes that were made in the newspaper, or in the business? We can broaden it to the Minnesota Women' Press, Inc.?

GM: Let me just finish the end of the first year. At the end of the first year, we were so 'high' about what was happening: we had carried out the mission that we had set forth. At that point, we were not making money, but we were also not losing a lot of money. It was clear to us that we could go forth; we made it that first year, we could go forth.

But as we went forth, we had so much to learn about the business. Remember we had said early on that we were going to be this wonderful feminist business, where we would be just open to anything that happened, and everybody would do all the tasks, and everybody would just pitch in wherever you needed to pitch in. Certainly some of that worked. On the other hand, I can still remember we had an all-staff meeting in our first one-room office. There were probably twenty women, all of who did different things for us--some of them might have written something, some of them may have gotten an ad. Of course, the phones were ringing, and 'whoever' was presenting was talking to the staff, there were little kids running around [laughter], and whoever was close to the phone would answer the phone--trying to carry on 'whatever' business while the meeting was going on, while the kids were running around....

That's when I can remember saying to Mollie, "We have got to do something about structure; we cannot just let it be so totally open." That was a hard step for us, because it was like, "Oh my gosh, are we going against our principles here?" On the other hand, I knew that if we didn't begin to delineate some particular tasks for particular people that I would eventually go crazy--I don't know about the rest of the staff, but I would have gone crazy.

One of the things that was challenging to do was to then begin to--because we haven't until recently done job descriptions--talk to each staff member about specific things that they wanted to do, and then give them responsibilities for certain areas. Everyone else knew what responsibility each person had. So then you can not only respect those responsibilities, but also know that [each person] had some area that was her own.

KB: Could you just define, if you can, those principles that would've suggested that was a difficult step for you to take? What is it that said that structure was not easy for you? What principles?

GM: I came out of an organization that was at that point maybe twelve years old, where I ended up being one of the top administrators. I had watched that organization start with such potential and lots of money from the legislature, with lots of dreams, and watched it become more and more and more bureaucratic, with more and more rules, more and more regulations, a book that got thicker and thicker. To the point that pretty soon, it was as if the book was running the organization, rather than holding true to the mission. So, having left that, it was really clear to me I wanted something very different. I personally was really [unclear] to think that we might develop into what had happened with the other organization.

KB: Did it fit in with feminist values in any way?

GM: The other organization?

KB: This issue of organization, ...

GM: It seemed to me at the time that it was going against feminist values. Now, thinking back however, in some ways it seems very naive to think that [task specificity] could have been a principle of a feminist organization--that you could just be totally open to everybody doing whatever, and that everybody could be capable of doing whatever, whether it was selling an ad, writing a story, taking a picture.... It didn't ever go quite that far. But it was open. If somebody wanted to go take their camera and take a picture of something, I'd say "Oh, sure, that's fine. We'll see if we can use it."

I think it was kind of over-reaction to total structure; I don't even know that I thought about it. That became a very personal thing for me. So if it was even a feminist kind of thing, I don't know. I do know though, that what we were most concerned about was that everyone was treated equally, and held with value. So we were really working hard to be sure that everyone was. What that did, of course, was cause all kinds of 'double doing' something, or not getting something done, or whatever. How that fits with feminist stuff, I don't know. It was the equal stuff more than anything else, I think, and wanting to hold to that.

Of the course the question is then, what is equal? Over the years, it's been really clear that ultimately what it's come down to is, who has responsibility for what. Once you agree together what your own responsibility is, and the other person understands it...that's basically how we operate now . People have different responsibilities, and different skills. Everybody can't do everything. Who are we kidding? [laughter]

One of the things that was really clear with Mol and myself, and I think she would say, she's not a manager. She doesn't care to manage; she doesn't want to manage. She can do it, but it isn't part of who she is. For me, it's pretty easy. One of the things it means is some hard decisions sometimes. It means, by golly, we either have to change some ways you're working with a particular individual, or perhaps that individual needs to leave. That's hard stuff, and yet sometimes it has to be done. I just think that 's honest. I don't think that's how it fits with feminist or not feminist, because it can become dishonest when you really are carrying people who are not doing their full effort. I don't know...that doesn't answer it. It's an interesting thing to explore, it just is.

All right, I was going somewhere...

KB: We were talking about the important changes...

GM: Then what happened was that as it went on, after the first year, and after the second year, it was really clear that the amount of money we were losing was going to be a big factor. It was going faster than we thought. So the question was--and it wasn't so much that we didn't think long-term it would pull out--but the whole question was cash flow. How in the heck were we going to have enough money to be able to just monthly pay the bills we needed to pay?

At that time--again, it's what happens in our lives--my house burned. My husband lost all of his professionally library, and we lost a good deal of the house. My library, which happened to be in the farthest corner of the house, with the door closed from where the fire was, became very smoke-damaged, but it never burned. We had a big house, and I loved that house. My husband did not want to rebuild it, which was very difficult for me, because I wanted to. We spent a year, he and I, fussing about that. Of course I spent much of that year trying to salvage things from the house. I loved this house--it's kind of emotional stuff.

I had this huge library, which was now smoke-damaged. When we finally decided we would not rebuild the house, we just looked in little tiny places. There wasn't room to move my library. So I said to Mollie, I think it 's a crime to just throw my library away because this was all women's books, even at that time--especially a lot of the classic women's stuff, from early time, and certainly from the 1970s.

So I said I think that this should become part of the "Women's Press". We should begin to create a library, because things were going out of print so fast, and a lot of the things

were not easily available. So we then rented another small room, even though financially things were not very comfortable. We rented another small room up next to our office, and we set up the library in there--which at that point was maybe 500 books, something like that. Volunteers began to track it for us--put it on cards, because we didn't have computers.

Then it became clear to me because now I had left the district, was that I needed to be doing something that I cared to do. I wrote for the paper, but the paper wasn't really my passion--women's words were, but the paper itself was not my passion. So the second year we were in business, I called together--and I don't remember how I got these women-- but eight women, wonderful women. In fact I just wrote about it in the last BookWomen. Eight women agreed to do a book group with me for a year, experimentally. One of the things I learned in my previous work was that when you want to start something new, what you do is research. You say, "Okay, we have a research project we're going to do" [laughs] It goes for a year, and you keep your data, and then you go and say, "Look what my data shows," and then you go ahead and do it, and it's now part of the system.

So I had a book group going of these eight women, and we met ongoingly for a year. I was experimenting with several things. Number one, whether or not we could even hold them that long...did it make sense? Did I want to do this? Would it work? At the end of the year, it was really clear it was going to work. Then we began offering book groups here at the "Women's Press", which people paid for--which [even with] the upsurge in book groups now, there are almost none that people paid for.

There will be even people who come here and say, "Why should I pay? I can go do thus and so." But in the beginning, the reason that we put money to it was to bring cashflow to the "Women's Press". So we began book groups, and we have done them ever since. We've been doing them for fourteen years, and people pay for them. Over the years, it has made a big difference. It's not that we're talking huge amounts of money, but what we're talking about is an ongoing flow of money.

Of course we met in this room where the 500 books were--the library. In time, people were donating books to us to add to our library. So then we'd have duplicate copies, so we thought, "We might as well sell these; we've got more than we need." We began to sell used books, and then before long because of the book groups, began to buy new books for the book groups. Ultimately, of course, that led us eventually down here, five years later, into our bookshop. If we were to look at the income from the books' effort--the book groups and the bookshop--there's a real pattern where it started just bringing in a little money, and then there was a point where it brought in a lot of money. It doesn't now, and that has a lot to do with how much effort, one individual has been able to give to that. But what it did do...

KB: Do you mean the book groups or the book sales?

GM: The book sales...and even the book groups, because at one point we offered many more than we offer now. Right now we have ten - we have about 100 or so women in book groups right now.

KB: What was it at the peak?

GM: At the peak, maybe three or four years ago now, probably twice that. I wasn't doing all of them--I'm still not doing all the book groups--but we had a lot of people doing book groups. We had a big, diverse group of people coming to these book groups. The ones we have now are a pretty steady number, and they're ones that have gone on for a long time. But they all built out of an early time--almost all. Some of the ones we're doing now are new, like the Margaret Atwood. Overall, I think the newest group we have besides that is probably five years old now. We have some that are ten years old. Some of the women have always been with us; there are some who come and go.

But the point is that what it did stayed with our mission--the library stayed with our mission, the book groups stayed with our mission; the book store stayed with our mission. What it did was bring cash flow for a period of years, which is what we really needed to have happen. Even that high peak of book groups and books carried us over a time, where in fact then we became profitable.

If you were to look at the profit and loss statements across time, you wouldn't see that the books themselves--the books' effort--was making big profit. But what it did was held the company so that then as the overall company increased in what we were doing, then we would have been able to move toward profitability. Even if you'd look now, the books will basically, I think, lose some money right now--not big time, but a bit. But they held the company for a period of time where the overall company became strong enough to move toward profitability.

It gets real interesting because we're always saying, "Maybe we should drop the book stuff because it doesn't break even." It doesn't lose much money, but it doesn't break even. And again, going back to mission, that's really hard to think about doing, because in fact it fits so closely to what we're about.

I also really honor those women that have stayed with us in book groups--paid money for all these years--because what we told them in the beginning was it wasn't that they were paying just for the book group, they were paying so Minnesota Women's Press would continue to publish. So a lot of the women who came early on, they were willing to do that. It was like giving money to the "Women's Press", but to keep the "Women's Press" going--and was really clear that is what they were for.

It was also to meet my personal need, which was to be able to do books, to live with books, to talk books, and all that. So for me, it was wonderful. But we were also really clear with women that that's why there was money attached.

I still say to people when they say, "Oh, it costs"... I say it's part of what helps support the overall company. I don't usually say the newspaper, but the overall company. In the beginning, it was to help this newspaper keep coming out, and so that became integral to what we are, and has remained that all these years.

KB: Well, talk a little bit about BookWomen, then, as long as we're talking about...

GM: I don't remember when we did the first BookWomen here. Because women's words through reading and books became such part of who we are, there was a time where--and I don't remember what issue it would have been--where we quarterly did a four-page BookWomen that went in the newspaper. It was part of the newspaper, and we did that for three years.

KB: Why don't you just describe what that looked like.

GM: All right, well it was quite wonderful. It was a pullout piece, even though it was also integral to the paper. It had its own head, and it sat in the center of the paper. You had four pages, and you could just pull that out--just that piece, BookWomen. It was all about books, and we always would feature--like I can remember in one of them we featured Faith Sullivan--it was always a woman writer that would be featured as a profile on BookWomen. There would still be a profile on the front page of [the newspaper of] someone else, but on BookWomen there would also be a profile--because again that was to maintain the premise from which we come.

So we did that for three years, where we were actually doing quarterly those BookWomen. I don't even remember how we finally decided that we would do it as a separate stand-alone piece. In fact, we're just finishing our third year of now doing the stand-alone piece, which is thirty-two pages, I think, and we have 700 plus subscribers across the country, across the United States.

KB: What is the percentage of subscribers, Minnesota versus...?

GM: There are many more away from Minnesota now. I don't know....I would guess about twenty-five percent Minnesota, and the rest away. I haven't looked at that for a long time. We've made real effort to reach out to other states. In fact since BookWomen is a community of women who love women's words, anytime we travel for our special trips we always are in contact with whatever subscribers are in that state. When we go to Maine next week, we'll be meeting with subscribers. When we went to New Mexico, we met with subscribers. We just came back from Colorado; we met with subscribers. Right

away, even if you don't know these people at all, you can just talk books. [laughter]
They're usually wonderful women, which is fine.

So anyway, the movement into the book arena was certainly book groups, used and new bookstore, and the library. We have 8,000 volumes now in our library downstairs, all of which has been done by volunteers. It's the one effort in the company that has been created and supported by volunteers, because we were also really committed from the beginning to pay everybody who worked for us.

When I told you [about] out in the lot where they were distributing the newspaper, some people wanted to volunteer, but some people we actually paid. Of course anyone who worked for us, anybody who took photographs, all of these people were all paid--even though not at a great level. It was important to us that pay was involved, and that has been true ongoingly. Again, that whole thing of creating a for-profit... But that does get mixed [results], especially when women are choosing to do what they love to do--even people who are working with you--it makes a lot of difference.

KB: I'm interested in getting a sense of during that first five years, how you interacted with the rest of the community. Can you spend a little time talking about, for example, how you interacted with other feminist groups, either on a local or an international basis? ...Or key feminist individuals? ...The feminist community essentially, during that first five years.

GM: I didn't do it directly, but Mollie did. Diane DuBay [early editorial staff]--who was one of the early women working with us--did with the Women's Consortium [Minnesota Women's Consortium; a coalition of women's organizations] in St. Paul. We ongoingly covered and valued what they were doing, because first of all, it's unique and wonderfully well done.

It is interesting that there was a little worry in the early time about whether or not we were going to usurp the Consortium. That's not true now. It was started by a woman who...it was her great passion. She was tremendous, absolutely tremendous. It was kind of like, what was our role going to be in relationship to what the Consortium did? The Consortium had a wonderful newsletter--very pithy, and always 'out there', and really following the legislature, and so forth. Of course, we use it ongoingly to do what we do here. I don't think that [concern] would be the feeling now. In fact in the early years, the Consortium people were writing some things for us. That gets to be a question of how much you get involved.

Another organization that I was fairly involved with was AAUW [American Association of University Women], which is not necessarily seen as a feminist organization, but it's certainly a book organization. We've done a lot of outreach for AAUW; we've traveled all over the state, done presentations to AAUWs across the state--often about books, but

always with the newspaper. We take the newspaper, or anything we produce, we take [to the meetings].

Of course, they tend to be big readers, and I know a lot of them would say they're feminists. It isn't called a feminist organization, but a lot of them would say they are. You have to remember that for many women who belong to AAUW, these women were the teachers and the professional people. You have to have graduated from an accredited university or college, you can't belong otherwise. Especially the women who were sixty and older, these were the working women in the professions. So you have some very different sort of sense, I think, of foundation than some other organizations....

I can't even remember all of the organizations. We went out to talk to all kinds of groups--anyone who wanted us to come and talk about what we did, we went. So we would kind of say we were on the dog and pony show routine, but in fact it was important to do. We needed to be 'out there' for whatever organizations wanted us to come. We also paid attention to any kind of activity that was going on, especially in the metropolitan area, where it would make sense for us to have presence. Not the first year, but certainly after the first year, we would have tables where there might be a conference--either at the "U" [University of Minnesota] or at one of the colleges--where we would come and lay out our wares and say, "Here's what we're about."

Mollie met more often with feminist women. In those early years we didn't take that on as specifically as we did a little later on, where we really had what we called an outreach program. We had a whole packet of information that we would send out, and people would say, "Would you come and talk about 'whatever'." We would have this packet we would send, and say, "Here's what we can do, and things that we would be interested in." We did a lot of that, and of course also worked...

KB: So that was essentially public relations?

GM: Well, yeah, certainly public relations, but also in some ways almost a marketing program. I wouldn't call it quite that, but the whole building awareness, which can be PR, but I guess we almost saw it even more than PR. It's like encouraging people to either have newspapers where they were encouraging people to subscribe, or doing book groups...whatever we were trying to encourage people to do. So we spent a lot of time out.

It was interesting too, because for me it wasn't hard to do because I'd done so much of that in my previous life. For Mollie, in the beginning, that was hard. She didn't do that easily. It's been interesting to watch over the fifteen years, because she's extremely good at it now.

It was real clear to us that there would be all kinds of activities. We just needed to have presence. It could be a banquet where 'x' was going on...we would make effort to be

there. We would actually have a table and be seen--which is the old 'schmooz' stuff--and also to have our names on sponsoring programs. We still do some of that, but there was a period where we were extremely active--especially in those early years--to try to have people know what we were doing.

KB: The other thing that I'd interested in talking about is your relationship with your shareholders during this first five-year period, and how that developed - I think you went out with a secondary offering.

GM: We did. I guess the thing the thing I would say is we really have wonderful shareholders because they leave us alone. [laughter] I think that without any prodding from us, they have ongoingly supported what we've been about. That comes from the kind of shareholders we have. They did it because it was a mission that was important to them, and wasn't necessarily one they thought they were going to make a lot of money on.

The other thing is, besides the shareholders, the people that were more instrumental was our advisory board. We've had an advisory board, which is fairly inactive right now, even though we have a number of people who are on that board that we can call around 'whatever' issue. There was a period of time where the advisory board was instrumental in helping change attitudes.

Two key people were Carol Pine and Marcia Appel [early advisory board members]. Carol [was helpful] because she had done her own business very successfully, and Marcia was one of the key people with Victoria Sprague, who had started the first women's newspaper here in the cities. [Twin Cities Woman] It was a gorgeous newspaper. I was so excited when that paper came out--which would have been about 1980, or 1981 or 1982.

It was full spread, big newspaper...and wonderful paper. Of course, they had the Dayton's [Twin City department store chain] ads and everything else, I'll tell you. [laughter] It was smashing, and I loved it, though it was certainly much more related to fashion and career women. It also had feminist base--that was really clear. Of course, they lost a ton of money. I remember before we started the "Women's Press", we went to see Victoria in very lovely offices in Minneapolis. Victoria was very generous, but on the other hand she was sure we'd never make it--that you'd never succeed doing what you're setting out to do.

KB: That particular business had folded at that time...

GM: That's right; it had. She maintained that especially with the emphasis we were coming from... What they had done, which was smart on their part, was not only having that feminist base--whether they used the word or not--but they also had the fashion.

They also had the other kind of women's things, and wonderful photography. The whole thing was just a quality piece.

Victoria honestly, I believe, was saying you're never going to make it. She went down a lot of the issues that they had faced. Yet we went ahead. I don't think I've seen Victoria since; I would be fascinated to see what she would say now. No matter that she likes what we're doing, but just the longevity of what we've done... It would be interesting.

Out of that, Marcia Appel, was on our advisory board for a long period of time, as was Carol Pine. Marcia is a very savvy woman, and of course she's making 'beaucoup' bucks at this point. [laughter] She eventually went to work for, I think it's Musicland, as one of their top people. Of course that company has done a real turn-around, so I'm sure things are going very well. We haven't seen Marcia for a bit.

The reason I say these two women's names is because each of them first of all had great faith in what we're doing. At the same time simply would not let us wobble around in less than profitable thinking. Both of them maintained if what one does is worth doing, it's worth making money. They just never deviated from that. They were doing all kinds of things--all kinds of verbal support and actual support--like the time we went to Carol Pine's house and spent a day.

KB: Thank you.