

Interview with Denise Scheibe

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

Interviewed on July 28, 1999
at the offices of the Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.
St. Paul, Minnesota

KB: Denise, what I'd like to do is start with an overview of how you've been involved with Mollie [Hoben; founder and co-publisher of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] and Glenda [Martin; founder and co-publisher of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] and with the Minnesota Women's Press over time.

DS: Initially Glenda hired me in 1976 for School District 278: Special Education, where Mollie was a vision teacher and Glenda was the administrator. I was hired on as secretary at that point. We worked together on a number of projects over there, and then Mollie took a year's leave of absence to find out what she wanted to do with herself. We'd meet for breakfast during that year and nothing was coming. At the end of the year, it wasn't enough, so she took another year's leave of absence.

At the end of that time, one day we met and she said, "What do you think about a woman's newspaper?" Of course it was perfect...absolutely ideal for her. So Glenda continued working in the District. Mollie began in her house. We all sat around her dining room table with lists--yellow pages and all the rest of it. I thought: "If this is a newspaper, we're out of here." [It was] the drudgework, which Mollie did one hundred percent more than anybody else. Then she got investors and the thing took off--pleased to run down the road. I quit the District and came to work more or less full time for the paper. Six months later, Glenda quit the District and then she moved over and came to work for the paper too.

Initially I did the distribution. We hired women to distribute the paper to all the places. Many of them when they asked where St. Paul was, said, "I've never been across the bridge." They came from Minneapolis. [laughter] It was a very hard time getting women to deliver the paper. They also had children with them, which made it even more amusing and difficult. That went on for a number of years.

It tended to be a real negative job. Nobody ever said, "Thank you." In the beginning people were scared of the paper. So it was, "This paper's making a mess. Get this paper out of here! The strings are broken and somebody tripped on it", etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

KB: Do you think that was just hostility towards the notion of women's press?

DS: One [thing]; but it was also basic hostility to the mess those freebie newspapers make wherever they are, and the rivalry between where your paper is and somebody else's paper is. Your paper is always getting bumped so that their paper can be on top. People would call and say, "Why isn't your paper here?" That was not great, and in the end we hired somebody to deliver it.

Then Glenda and I would sit in the Accounting Department and bill people, and cut out ads. We would try and do that... Two people less suited for that job are hard to imagine! [laughter] So we did that and managed the ad reps--really did everything. The computer labels were the first that came out. The TRS computer that my son had been given a few years ago never worked the day we needed the labels to deliver the papers. So it was kind of nerve-wracking from the beginning.

Always the concern was money. We'd rush to the mail to see if anybody was going to pay their bills. It was just astonishing... the times Mollie would be wringing her hands because we weren't going to make it--up against the wall. We'd say: "Keep walking right through it. You'll do it." It always worked somehow, although you know large amounts of debts were incurred.

KB: And probably financial sacrifice on the part of Mollie and Glenda?

DS: Oh yes, definitely. Mollie's house has been mortgaged a hundred and fifty-three times or something like that to keep it going. [laughter] Glenda didn't have to because fortunately she had some financial stability, but money was a tremendous concern, absolutely tremendous.

KB: Do you think there would have been a way to get around that?

DS: No. That was the connection! Because of Mollie's sense that everybody should be treated equal and everybody should be paid the same--which even at the time I thought was ludicrous. You only had to watch what she did in comparison to what everybody else did for her wage to be ridiculous.

This was their sense of feminism. This was their sense of what it was all about--which obviously is not the way it is now, thank God. But at the beginning, they tried to make that work. It doesn't take long to realize that doesn't work.

KB: Why didn't it work?

DS: It doesn't work because new people get hired on... Because it's unfair! It's basically unfair! In my opinion, it's unfair that everybody be paid the same. You can ask Mollie, she might say, "No, it's fair." But it's not fair. The world isn't fair.

KB: What other things were done because of the fact that there was a vision of what a feminist organization would look like.

DS: There was a great deal of flexibility. If you needed time off, it was never questioned. [There was] always a struggle to try and return as much to the employees, which still continues today. It is a bit of a struggle between Glenda and Mollie--that debate over what to do with excess money.

KB: The idea is to return it to the business, or to the employees, or give it back to the shareholders, or build the business?

DS: Or whatever. That would definitely be one of the things.

Treat people with respect--which I'm sure you've sensed just being here--is how Mollie and Glenda go at things. Encouraging young women...[there's] a great deal of encouragement for young women. You just don't get criticism. There is criticism, but it is criticism in a very helpful way. You're never shamed.

KB: Do you think that's gone on from the beginning?

DS: Yes. Because that's who they are. You can say, "This is feminism." I would say, "Yes, this is feminism; but I think this Mollie Hoben and Glenda Martin." They do happen to be feminists, but you could have another feminist with a very different personality and a very different sense of the world, and it would be totally different.

KB: One of the difficulties of definition that we struggle with constantly as we think about this.

DS: Of course. Some people don't claim it; other people claim it. The things that went on were, "You're too radical." Then somebody would turn around and say, "You're not radical enough. I'm not reading you any more."

KB: I've heard stories about those early distributions and about the processes that you had to go through. [laughter] Can you think of any stories associated with those early times. Mollie described it as kind of a mess in the beginning. She said, "You'll have to talk to Denise about that because it was just too..."

DS: It was simply hard--hard to count on the women. You could always count on some who were wonderful, but it's the same thing that businesses struggle with. Women's children get sick. How do you get those papers out when that person who was delivering them doesn't come?

We worked in the open air, so in the middle of winter we'd be at the back of the building trying to load the papers into old rickety cars. [We were] hoping the cars would last until

they got to where they were going--hoping they could find where they were going. We had distribution routes and stops and we tried to make it easy. It was just sheer physical hard work.

KB: Ultimately it probably landed on your shoulders to get rid of them if people didn't show up.

DS: Well, I can't even remember that any more. All I remember is that it was not the most pleasant job.

KB: Talk a little bit about you and Glenda working on the ads. It is an interesting picture. [Laughter] I hadn't heard about this one.

DS: [Laughing]. Oh, she fusses so much about money. It drives me insane. Glenda's and my major argument is money. I maintain that she can't even talk about it, because she's got it. I don't think I do. [Laughing] This argument has been going on since 1976. There is a tendency on her part always to think the worst. And ohhhhh, that would just gripe me to pieces! It is amazing we still hang in together, which we do, simply because I think we value each other. I know her so well and she knows me so well.

That's what we used to do. We'd cut the ads out and we'd bill the people, and we'd wait for the bills to be paid, and then try and count the money. Ah, it was just a hoot. We were sitting in one little office. Not that we didn't have a few good laughs, but we were so ill suited to what we were doing. Who else would do it?

In the beginning, Mollie and Glenda kept a tremendous iron fist on everything, especially the money. If it didn't go through them, it absolutely didn't go. I think that was fear. They needed to make sure that what happened to the money was what they thought should happen to the money. They couldn't trust other people's judgment about the money--being afraid of where it would go.

KB: How about other decisions--outside of money decisions--[such as] decisions on accepting ads or editorial content?

DS: Ultimately always Glenda and Mollie [made the decisions]. I would say that is still true. I think Kathy Magnuson [Founder and general manager of Minnesota Women's Press] plays a large part, and Norma Olson [Systems and production coordination and editor of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc. Directory] and the other kind of major hitters; but in the end, it is going to be Glenda or Mollie.

There's that sense of knowing what you feel it should be. That's only my sense--I don't know for sure but that would be my bet.

KB: Can you talk about why it seemed like a good idea to start a woman's press at the time it was started.

DS: It didn't seem like a good idea at all to me. I came at it from what job would Mollie be happy in. When she said: "What about a women's newspaper?" I thought, "That is perfect for you. Do it. Let's do it." Did I personally feel a woman's newspaper [was the right thing to do]? No. If you were to ask me would I have done a woman's newspaper...oh never! Never.

KB: Is that personal taste or did you think it was not a particularly good idea?

DS: Oh I thought it was a great idea. I couldn't have suffered through the work if I didn't. [laughter]

KB: As you have observed the business here and in the organization, what have been the biggest changes that you've seen?

DS: Money. Money. It always gets back to that. The offices are now wonderful. We were all in one room initially--grabbing at phones, grabbing at the mail. It would be kind of "higgilty-piggilty" all over the place. Now ad reps have their own office.

The struggle to get computers was unbelievable because, of course, Glenda's absolutely against machines. Mollie's kind of more open-minded towards machines. That was a HUGE decision to bring in the first computer. Have you looked in the offices now? Every office has a computer--made possible by money.

KB: Is there a point that you thought: "This is going to work?"

DS: From the beginning.

KB: You did? You thought it was going to work from beginning? Why?

DS: Because of Mollie and Glenda.

KB: What did you think about the whole notion of spreading out into different businesses. Did you think that was a good strategy? I'm talking about the library ...

DS: Oh sure. You couldn't just stand doing a paper--how boring is that after a while? The people needed to do other things. Mollie has kind of gone around...she's kind of had her fill of this, her fill of that. What she did was excellent. Of course, [the work] Glenda [did] with the books was just astonishing, just astonishing. The library was a wonderful idea. People were so happy to help and bring the books. Look at the amount of books there are now. It isn't used, I don't feel, the way it could be--because there is such a variety--because we never advertise it terrifically much.

KB: Why is that, do you think?

DS: Don't know. Don't know. It is one of the things that I think would be beneficial to whoever: students, women who are interested...

KB: You've spent a fair amount of time working with the book piece, whether the book store, the library or the book groups. Can you describe some of the things that you've done in that area?

DS: Well, Glenda disappears--goes away for five months every year. [laughs] She has all these book groups that she does [leads] , and that she is very fussy about.... I shouldn't say fussy. She is concerned about who leads book groups. They have to come at it in a way that she feels is true to what she wants to have happen. A few people have done book groups, but they've kind of passed by. So when she is away for five months, I usually do all her book groups.

KB: If you were to describe what Glenda wants to come out of those book group discussions, how would you describe it? What is it that you do that makes Glenda satisfied with your role.

DS: I never know if it's actually what I do, or whether it's that she trusts me. That's hard to know. She will say, "It's not therapy and it's not school." I think I tend toward the therapy part, whereas Glenda is--no question--an educator. But I think too that I bring to it a sense of humor, which she values. So I do that and on a Saturday sometimes I do the bookstore. Then I'm involved with Mollie and Glenda in the book groups on the road.

KB: How many trips have you been on?

DS: Two. [I went] to Maine and Britain. I'm going to Britain in August, and then to the Colorado one next year.

KB: What do you do for the book groups on the road.

DS: OOOuuuuuuuuuu, this is my favorite work. [Laughs]. First of all I work at home. I get my cup 'o tea when I want it. Pat can come and sit and look at me. I have just bought a new computer, which I absolutely love--I'm quite fond of computers, especially the designing part. I do all the biographies, and I send out all the letters, and I do part of the research. I have the connections in Britain.

KB: Contact authors?

DS: Yes. That's what we had the Scottish (unclear) and all the rest of them. I do a lot of that stuff--basically most of the paper work.

KB: Do you find that the participants in these traveling book groups....that there's a lot of overlap between the trips, so that you see a lot of same people?

DS: I think that is more true in book groups than it is book groups on the road. Although we were just in Maine, and one of the women had been thinking maybe she should travel more. She came back from Maine and immediately signed up for Britain. You know that most of these women just love it. They love not having to worry. They love being with people they know, and they don't have to bother about. [Someone] will make sure things work well.

KB: Tell me some stories about those trips. For example, tell me a story about when you've been in a dreadful tourist environment that hasn't worked very well for the group. Do you have any stories about that? Tell me when you've had a very meaningful meeting with an author. I'm interested in hearing about those trips. Something that was very surprising that came up in a trip. Or disgusting. [laughs] You can go which ever direction you'd like. If you think about your memories of those trips, what are some of the memories that just come to mind?

DS: Relief at coming back.

KB: So it's a lot of work? They're not particularly enjoyable to you at the time?

DS: Parts of them definitely are [enjoyable]. When we came back from Colorado, we drove back and we got a list going: "What was it that we liked about doing the groups?" Of course, Mollie said what she liked about doing them. Glenda said what she liked, which was very different from what Mollie liked. I said what I liked, which was totally different from the two of them. Why do we do them?

My first thought was: as a job. Which doesn't mean to say that I don't love seeing places. I love driving. I usually am the one that jollies everybody along. I'm the light-hearted one. Glenda is totally intense and her real desire is to affect people's lives in a positive way. Mollie loves to travel and loves to share that experience with everybody. She gets all the information she can about everything; so she is just a wonderful resource person. She's very unflappable. She's totally great. Glenda is up and down, usually up most of the time.

KB: This must be very interesting, the three of you.... [laughter]

DS: Yes it really is.

KB: How are decisions made about these trips?

DS: Well, we've always been Anglophiles. I don't know how the decision initially was made about Maine. I don't think I ever got involved in Maine. It was almost just a 'done deal' that I would go Maine--I don't even remember actually being asked.

Then we did another list coming back from Colorado: "Where we would like to go?" I had previously pushed for New Zealand, because I just think it would be a wonderful place to go. Mollie was kind of excited. Glenda would say: "I'm not going to New Zealand." She doesn't like to fly, and it's a long time on the plane and all the rest of that. She has more hesitancy driving on a different side of the road than Mollie and I do. We have more guts.

KB: You each take a vehicle of some kind?

DS: That's correct. We rent three 6-passenger vans, and we have 5 people and the luggage in each of the vans.

KB: What's your job, in addition to driving, when you are in charge of the van?

DS: I would be in charge of all the Scottish part--making sure that the accommodations were there, that the people get settled in where they wanted to get settled in, that they had what they wanted. We have to buy groceries. Then all the appointments would have to be in place and the authors would have to be remembered [reminded] we were going to meet them, and the restaurants [would have to] know we were coming. That the book groups are led fairly well.

KB: Did you have to maintain an interesting conversation in the car?

DS: That very much depends on who's in the van. You often find, in groups, there's always one--that no one [else] need ever speak, just let them go. It really depends on how vested you are in shaping their behavior. You find that somebody in the back will take them on. They'll tolerate it for so long. But, do you lead conversations in the van? No. They won't let you. [Laughs]

Although one of the things we did in one of the vans I drove... We had a particular person who had mental illness on our last trip. It was very difficult, very difficult. We didn't know before we left, but it didn't take long. We found out there was a history of suicide of siblings, of deaths, other hospitalizations. Really it was absolutely amazing that she functioned as well as she did. When people saw her coming, they went in the other direction--because you didn't know how to talk to her. You knew it wasn't going to be terrifically pleasant to spend time with her. In groups, if the speakers didn't know what was going on, it was really hard.

However, one of the women in the van did get talking to her. She discovered about her history, and so in my van that day, she began to bring it out. We all decided that surely we could all take turns, so that no one person was burdened with that problem.

That was grand. We had done poetry that day on Edna St Vincent Millay. So we decided we would, in a good old-fashioned way, memorize a verse to say to the group that night. See what we've done!

KB: So you all repeated it?

DS: We all repeated it. We repeated it, we repeated it, until we could all know it by heart. We were soooo proud! It was just four lines but we were working so hard. [laughing] Then the other thing was, somebody had got hold of this Scottish song, "Ye canny shove ye grannie off a bus....". They wanted to know what was the rest of that song. So we sang it, and we sang it, and we sang it.

After I got back, I got a card from the woman who had shared [her story] about mental illness, saying that the most meaningful day she had had on the bus was talking about it, learning the poetry and singing the song. [Laughs] I think it was because everybody in the van was involved. You see, normally if you're sitting up front the people at the back have a hard time hearing. If you're talking at the back, up front you can't hear what they're saying. But this day everybody was involved in everything, and there was a real sense of it.

KB: Have you ever had problems with your reservations, where you don't have any place to stay or where you think you don't have any place to stay?

DS: I thought yesterday one of them [book group travelers] didn't have a place to stay in Britain, which is just nerve racking. I received a notice from Stratford University saying, "Sorry we're fully booked and Marthe Gager, who is one of them going, can't have a room". Of course I had dealt not this person but somebody else, and knew that money had been charged to our VISA. So of course I e-mailed them, "Sorry, but! I was told we did, and our account has been charged this much." If they really stick to it, it's awful--the concern and the worry that things will not go--and that will make the company look bad, as if we don't know what we're doing. We can't always fight this: Do we look professional? Do we act professional? Are we just hicks?

KB: It's interesting, interesting. Because you'd think your customers would be kind of forgiving...

DS: Some are. Some are not. I think when you pay money for something, you expect results. It's like everything else; it depends on your own personality.

KB: I'm also interested in the bookstore. Tell me what it's like to work in the bookstore and sell things.

DS: I hate it! I know you must be asking, "Why in the heck are you involved here at all?" I hate it because I don't feel competent. I don't feel competent because I compare myself to Glenda, who knows EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING. If I'm in the bookstore by myself I'm fine. If I'm conscious that Mollie or Glenda are around, it does not work well for me at all. Do you want to take care of this? Mollie? Glenda? I expect them to turn around and say: "What the heck, you're supposed to be working here."

KB: So you're suggesting people come in, and they're not just here to pick up a particular book like Spinster [1958, Sylvia Ashton-Warner].

DS: They might, but if Glenda catches them I can assure you they go out with far more knowledge than they ever came in with. She cares. She's an educator--from the word "go", she's an educator. She cares if you learn things. I don't care. So on my own, I might push a little, but.... it's that same issue: Do you want to change people's lives?

KB: It's interesting, given the way you've described Mollie and Glenda's reactions to the trips. On the one hand, [it is] a meaningful experience for Glenda and on the other hand [it's] the joy of traveling for Mollie--at least that's what I picked up from what you've said. Their differences are obviously an interesting way to think about the Minnesota Women's Press. How did those differences affect the beginning [of the company]?

DS: Major. Major, major, major. Not only that, but when we worked in the District, Glenda was Mollie's administrator, so that they came at it from a different angle.

When the paper started, Glenda wasn't involved in it as much. By the time Glenda became involved, Mollie had built her cadre of people. As with everything else, you have people who show allegiance to this one, or show allegiance to that one. Glenda felt as though she was just out there spinning somewhere--which was a shock from the way she left her profession, which she had been terribly invested in. Then to come and not really have anybody to shape. Nobody really knew her.

If you know Glenda....her ideas!... She is such a creative thinker. Even when we worked in the District, she would often appear and say, "Are you bored yet?" If you'd say, "Oh, my gawwd!", she'd say: "All right. Come on".

KB: I can hear her say that.

DS: She wouldn't allow you to be "bored yet." She'd put ideas in your head that were exciting and different, and you felt you could conquer the world--just absolutely wonderful. In an organization she's totally great for keeping interest high and excitement

high and all the rest. Some people don't value that. For the majority, when Glenda goes away everything lowers to a different level. That's just because of who she is. She has that terrific ability to stir people up.

KB: How did she go about building up that kind of ...

DS: She would say she's hasn't. She would say she still doesn't really know where she is. [pause] This seems to be kind of a theme that runs in her personal life as well as her professional life. How much the one plays off the other I don't know.

For instance, she didn't want to go on one of the trips. It was one to New Mexico. Mollie was going and she already had two people--an artist and an anthropologist. So there were the three, and that's really how many it takes to go. Glenda really wanted to go, but she didn't know what her role would be, because the roles were basically taken.

Her love is Georgia O'Keefe, the artist, and she wanted to go to that country. She struggled with it; she really wanted to go but, she didn't know if she could go in the way she wanted to. I said to her: "Are you saying, if you're not the star, you can't fit in anywhere?" Well, that crushed her. So off she went for a couple of days to think about this for a while. She hoped it wasn't. But the truth is, I think it is. She has to have a role to play. To go as an observer or participant--[it would be] impossible. [It is] not who she is...not who she is at all. In the end she decided to go, dammit, because she owns the company! [Laughs] Which I thought was a great reason to go in any case!

KB: Did she find a role for herself while she was there.

DS: She found the biggest role on that trip was that she was able to help Mollie in one of the [tricky situations]. I wasn't there, but there was a terrible situation when they arrived. There weren't enough beds, [although] they had been told there were. Some people had to be put in a bunkhouse that was freezing cold and sodden with mud out in the middle of New Mexico. I guess it was just awful.

Some of the women demanded their money back and they were leaving the next day. Mollie's never quite sure where to go with that, and Glenda sees clearly what should happen. She supported Mollie and what Mollie decided to do. That gave Mollie the added courage to go with her convictions. They are absolutely wonderful--the way they do that for each other.

KB: So that's something they have in common: this general sense of friendship and support.

DS: Oh yes.

KB: What other things do they have in common that have helped shape this effort of theirs?

DS: Value for women--both of them. That would be the biggest thing. Value for women. They have a long history. The other thing I've seen so much of [is that] they can get into the most terrible disagreements, but neither one will give up until they've worked it through.

KB: Wonderful. That's a wonderful relationship.

DS: It's what makes it go. It's what makes it keep going. If Glenda carried on, "I've got no role", and she does.... She continues that struggle with herself. "What do I want to do? What is my role? Where will I go?" Mollie is not as verbal in her feelings at all. She probably verbalizes them to Glenda, not to anybody else. Glenda is very open with her sense of what she's about. [pause]

To watch them work through those.... I could get in an argument and, boy, that would be the end of it for you! It has been marvelous to watch that, marvelous. It's given me a whole sense of how you can go with disagreements if you're both willing to be honest and say, "This is how I feel."

KB: They've existed in such different relationships with one another that, it's been interesting I suspect for them to try to work through...

DS: What has happened now, and we were talking about this on the road to Colorado... On our last trip, as we were preparing for the trip, Mollie and I did all the preparation. Glenda, in her typical fashion, didn't want to know about it. "Go ahead. I don't want to know about it." Well, this is true until you get to where you're going; and by god, does she want to know about it. So, we had the schedule--the schedule that she wouldn't look at before we went. Now all of a sudden, we're looking at the schedule. "Why is this? Where is this? Who is this? When is this?"

I was getting angrier by the minute, until it finally came to a head. We'd be trying to make a decision, and if Mollie makes a decision she'll kind of say: "What do you think? What do you think? What do you think?" She may decide on her own in the end but everybody has input. Glenda will go: "That's enough. This is what we're going to do." Well, it was just more than I could bear, so we got into a bit of a tussle. "You don't care. You don't care. If you care, then you get in on it at the beginning. Don't do it in the whole group."

Of course Glenda gets terribly upset, because she knows she's done it. It gets too much for her. On the road driving back from Colorado, Glenda said that she realizes now, whether it's being away the five months or not, that Mollie and I--who used to pay attention to and listen to what she said, which was our roles when we worked in the

District and to a large extent now--won't take it from her anymore. I said: "I think it's simply a case, Glenda, that Mollie and I have grown up. You won't let us go."

Then we all thought and thought, and she came back and said: "I think that's true." It's not a case that she'll go: "Oh that's nonsense". Or, "I won't listen." She listens and that's hard for her, but she'll work that one through too.

KB: As this transition in Glenda's life continues to take place, she may not come back this winter [to Minnesota Women's Press from her winter home in Arizona].

DS: No, she says she won't come back this winter. You see she's trying to decide what she'll do with the book groups. I don't know if she is going to cancel them or not. What Glenda does is really hard: She does five book groups. [It is hard] physically. I have a book group of my own. Reading for six book groups a month is physically unhealthy. She isn't in good health, and I think her reading will kill her at the end because all she does is read. You can say, all Mollie does is work, but then Mollie will go out and exercise. She'll go do this and go do that so she can do the rest. But Glenda just reads.

It just blows my mind. She knows that I don't want to sit and read all the time. So I don't know what she'll do with the book groups. I think that people come to the book groups not for the book groups, they come to the groups for Glenda. I know it. [Pause]

I don't know what will happen. I mean... When we talked about... Should we just close the bookstore? What about the library? Maybe we should give out the books that are here--it doesn't make a huge profit, at all. In fact, when Glenda goes, it goes right down...

KB: You mean during the winter?

DS: Yes, just over all. She can't maintain that level. Certainly some of the groups have built little communities for themselves, but when she's involved it's a whole different ball of wax. I've listened to her talk for years. I don't think I've ever been bored yet. Can't say that of too many people.

KB: How does Mollie feel about the book division.

DS: She has moved from the editorial and the paper into the book groups. The whole idea of starting the Women's Press was that they would both work together. What happened was that Mollie worked over here and Glenda worked over here. They weren't working together. They were working on two different things.

KB: That is such an interesting perspective.

DS: How do you work together? Does Glenda move over to the editorial side? No, there's no way. Of course Mollie begins being a great reader, an English teacher, with wonderful knowledge--a researcher. It was logical that she moved over here and then again together, they did BookWoman [national publication of Minnesota Women's Press, Inc. for readers of women's books]. They both worked on that--that is a Mollie and Glenda thing.

They finally tried to create what they thought they were doing when they started the paper--which turned out not to be true. They've done the book groups. Mollie's involved to a certain extent. Mollie moved over and we made the change, which I think has been much happier for them. I think that has been a much happier experience than the initial years of the paper, which was very difficult.

The future? Ooh, I don't know. It's hard. It's hard with Glenda, because of the age she's at--you've been there, done that. What [more] do you want? Whereas Mollie's clearly still got a lot of fire and drive.

KB: I know your interests don't maybe lend themselves to this question, but let me ask it anyway and see what you think. I'm interested in thinking about the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press organization...business...this project of Mollie and Glenda, whatever you want to call this thing that we're talking about. I think it would be interesting to hear your discussion of the impact on you personally. What has been the impact of hanging around these two great women, in their project, and helping them shape it and do it. I would also be interested in having you talk about "out there"; what it's meant "out there". Are you willing to talk about that from your own perspective?

DS: Sure. For me, I don't think you could work here and not take on a lot of the values--feminism. They were always there, but really have been driven home.

KB: Did you start there and grow, or was it a huge growth?

DS: No.

KB: Okay, so you started with a base [of feminism].

DS: Yes, and I've just had it confirmed over the years. Now I'm at the stage when... At first you're impassioned about something and you go at it all the time. Then all of a sudden it gets to that same point--you know you'll never convince everybody. Those that do become convinced, become convinced for whatever reasons. So you can just let it all go. It's for you and not for anybody else. It was a fast transition into that mode.
[laughter]

It has had a tremendous impact on employees. This experience, for many of the women who worked here, will never be repeated--no matter what jobs they find. That isn't to say

that they all leave sad. There are definitely employees who are not a good fit, but for those who are a good fit, it must be a great place to work.

When we talk about money... The discussions we have on money... "Denise, are we paying you enough?" "It's fine." "Well, do you think it's fair?" "Whatever. Whatever you want to pay me, that's cool." That's the way we now discuss money. I would not even get into it. Of course, where would you go--where WOULD you go and work--that that would be the way you would talk about how you get paid? Yet, I think they're so generous in so many ways--it's just unbelievable.

KB: So money is just one piece of that as far as you're concerned--and perhaps not the most important piece?

DS: I wouldn't be here if money were the most important piece.

KB: What are the other pieces?

DS: The very fact that you're allowed the freedom you're allowed. Nobody phones up and says, "How many hours did you work this week?"--whether that's just a trust that comes from working together for such a long time, [or not]. I do know that one of Glenda's feelings about me is: "We can depend on her. With whatever we ask her to do, we'll get it." So you never have to explain yourself. I don't have to come in [during] rush hour or drive home in rush hour. Those things are very important to me. And I maintain a contact with Mollie and Glenda, who have been great managers to me.

I know it's a terrifically well-respected newspaper. I know just from hearing the stories people send in, how much it means to their lives. Different stories. I know BookWoman is the same. People wonder how they never saw this publication before. They just love it--which is not true for the whole world, because I think only 20 percent of the people read. For the ones who read, I think it's very important.

KB: When you think about all the organizations that were founded based on values--this organization was founded in part based on values, not just interesting jobs, but an attempt to accomplish something--so many of them don't last this long. Why do you think this one has?

DS: Again, I would lay it squarely on the shoulders of Mollie and Glenda's own values and personalities.

KB: Do you think there is anything that is relevant to its location here in the Twin Cities area or in the state of Minnesota that might have..

DS: Certainly if you look at the surveys and the demographics, most of the people are around this neighborhood. They're the University women. We don't get a lot from the

“western suburbs.” So yes, I would say so. It would be interesting to put it out in the western suburbs and see how many St. Paul University people would appear over there. My guess is you’d get very different clientele. So, yes. I hadn’t thought about that before you mentioned it. I’m sure that that’s had an impact.

KB: We’re nearing the end of my imperfectly followed list. [laughter] Are there any other things you want to say here about the organization, the out-put of the organization-- I’m trying to use non-business terms--the newspaper, the book groups, the trips, that you haven’t talk about yet.

DS: The one thing I needed to say was that both Mollie and Glenda come from a social services background. It’s been the biggest deterrent, you could say, to getting over the hurdle of not believing “profit” is a dirty word. I certainly don’t think Mollie’s over it yet. But she’s come a ways from when we first started out. To try and make a profit from that background is a killer, a killer.

KB: Glenda is over it, you think?

DS: I’m not sure Glenda was ever there. She comes at money totally differently.

KB: Anything else? Thank you.

DS: A pleasure.

Minnesota Women's Press Inc. Oral History Project
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