

## Interview with Cynthia Scott

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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

**KB:** Cynthia could you start by giving me a quick overview of how you've been involved with the Minnesota Women's Press?

**CS:** Well, I've been editor here for little over three years. Prior to that, I was a freelance writer off and on--not a regular freelance writer, but I did some freelancing.

**KB:** Can you describe your professional background and how you came to work with Minnesota Women's Press?

**CS:** I have a Master's degree in Journalism, and I've been in journalism for 12 years now. I spent my journalism career in community/specialized press. I worked for the Southwest Journal, which is a newspaper covering seventeen neighborhoods in Minneapolis. I was a writer there. I was editor and publisher of Equal Time newspaper, which was a Gay/Lesbian publication. So that's my newspaper experience. I also taught Journalism and Mass Communications at Anoka/Ramsey Community College. It was a very unhappy year in my professional life. [laughter]

**KB:** Oh, really?

**CS:** Yes, it was. I think it was mainly because I was part-time. I'd go in for my class and then come out, and I felt like a teacher for rent. I didn't really get very involved in the school. It was during that job that I realized how much I missed being on a newspaper staff. When this job opened up, I jumped at it.

**KB:** Did you know Mollie [Hoben; co-founder and co-publisher] before? ...Mollie and/or Glenda [Martin; co-founder and co-publisher]?

**CS:** I knew Mollie. In fact, I remember calling her up when I was at Equal Time and seeing if she would have coffee with me to commiserate about writing--how difficult I found writing, and did she also find it difficult? [laughter] Well, it was a very affirming conversation, because we had similar feelings about how difficult it was to sit down--not just to sit down and write, which I think most writers find challenging--but really to put ourselves out there in the editorial posture. So we commiserated over coffee and that was very fun...very nice.

**KB:** 'Putting yourself out there' is an interesting question, because so much of journalism does not include 'putting yourselves out there'. Is it something unique to the kinds of work that you and Mollie do where that becomes an issue?

**CS:** I think it is. You know, of course there are newspapers that have signed editorials all the time in the mainstream press, and those folks 'put themselves out there'. But it's always been a real value for the "Women's Press" to do work that doesn't perpetuate the notion that news is an objective, scientific kind of phenomenon. And one of the ways to do that, of course, is to acknowledge that the person writing has a perspective, and that that's nothing to be ashamed of. It's nothing to be particularly proud of, but it's very important for the integrity of the product that it's something the reader's aware of.

So both in my editorial columns--which always has my face out there along with my name, which I find very stressful--and also in some of the stories we write we have what we call a writer's perspective. We encourage the reporter to say where she's coming from. Mollie started that with the newspaper umpteen years ago, and I just think that that is a brilliant innovation.

**KB:** Did you also have that kind of philosophy at Equal Time?

**CS:** Not anywhere near as self-consciously as it is here. I think that's one of the things that sets this paper apart--I mean that belief about the writer's perspective, and voice shaping stories. It seems to me that Mollie--and I'm speaking of her here in her editorial capacity in the early days--really tried to make that an intentional, deliberate part of the paper.

**KB:** Is 'putting yourself out there' more than the statement of a political perspective? So for the Minnesota Women's Press, that you are a feminist, for example...

**CS:** Yes. In fact, one of the things that has most surprised me about my being editor here--about the way I've done this job--is that I always thought my strength would be writing about issues. What I have found is that's true, but when I just write about issues without also writing about myself in the process, it's very dry. And I don't think readers respond to it as well. So I'm constantly finding that I need to reveal something of myself in everything I write. To me that's a very feminist approach to doing something.

**KB:** And that was not the case at Equal Time--as much or as significantly?

**CS:** I don't think it was. No. Or at least not as self-consciously, not as planful.

**KB:** For you as both a writer and an editor...

**CS:** Well, at Equal Time I didn't do nearly as much writing. I was really chief cook and bottle washer there--publisher and editor. I had responsibility for the entire staff, and setting ad rates, as well as copy editing and assigning stories, and working with the board

of directors. Equal Time was a non-profit, so I had a board of directors to work for. So my own editorial writing was put aside, and I didn't do nearly as much of it as I do now. Since I didn't do as much of it, I didn't have as much of a chance to reflect on the process and the philosophy underlying it. That's why I say I don't think it was as self-conscious.

**KB:** Tell me about how you starting working for the Minnesota Women's Press. What happened between that time that you met Mollie and talked about your issues with regard to writing, and the time that you started working here? ... Things that perhaps led to your work here at the Minnesota Women's Press?

**CS:** That's an interesting question. I spent, as I said, a couple of years as a writer for the Southwest Journal, went to a lot of neighborhood meetings, covered city hall, covered the county commission, learned a lot about being an editor by being a reporter. I had a great editor there, Mark Anderson, so I learned...

Equal Time was my first job outside of journalism school, so I never had the experience of working closely with an editor. I just kind of got thrown into it feet first. Mark was a good editor for me to learn from, but it was also very helpful for me to be a writer for a couple of years. I think I'm a better editor because of that. I have a lived experience of some of the stresses of writing, and how an editor can be helpful and how an editor can be harmful.

I left the Southwest Journal really because I got tired of going to those neighborhood meetings. [laughter] Some of them were just deadly boring...just deadly boring. That's when I decided I'd be a freelance writer, and teach at Anoka/Ramsey. What I found out is that I hated both of them. It was a very lonely way to pursue journalism. Freelancing is intensely lonely--at least it was for me the way I did it. And teaching was, too. Plus I missed being on a newspaper staff, but I knew I didn't want to go to a daily newspaper.

I was a little bit adrift. I got a call one day from David Anger, who worked with me at Equal Time. He also worked with Kathy Magnuson [general manager] at The Bugle and he had heard from Kathy that Andy Steiner [former editor] was leaving here [Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.] and they weren't going to advertise the position. They were going to try to find someone by word of mouth. Did I want to apply? So I called up Mollie and I said, "Is it true that your editor position is open? Would you encourage me to apply or not?" And she said yes.

So, I submitted my resume and, my god, it was the most grueling interview process I had ever been through. [laughter] It was! Yes, it was.

**KB:** Tell me about it...

**CS:** It was an initial interview with Mollie and Glenda that was very thorough, and then a written test--editing test--and then an interview with the entire staff. Then I think I had another interview with Mollie. I understand the need to be that thorough. I've been on the

other side of interviewing, and you really have to when it's your lead position like an editor. At the end of that process, of course, I was keenly aware of all my deficits. [laughter] I thought, "Why in the world would they ever hire me?" But Mollie called me and that was it.

**KB:** You get a sense during an interview of what 'hits the buttons' of the interviewers. What did you get the sense was important to Mollie and Glenda? What do you think they were most interested in exploring with you?

**CS:** I think they were most interested in making sure that I understood that this is a newspaper that really tries to speak to all sorts of women. It views feminism as very multi-faceted--I don't know how to say it--that feminism is not a rigid thing. I think they wanted to make sure that they weren't getting an ideologue, but someone who really would respect all kinds of women's lives and all kinds of women's choices, and would do her best to represent that in a professional manner.

One of the reasons I was interested in this job is that I really sensed it was a place I could grow professionally, because it is a professional organization and it has high standards. It was very clear to me during the interview that they wanted that to continue. But they also wanted someone who would be able to take the newspaper to the next step. Mollie was at a point where she really wanted to turn the newspaper over to someone who could take it and run with it, and she could step back a little bit.

It's just miraculous to me that she was editor for as long as she was, and through some very difficult times. Being an editor is stressful. So it was clear to me they wanted someone who could really look at this newspaper, kind of scan the landscape, say where should this newspaper be, and take it there.

**KB:** So the next step wasn't particularly well defined?

**CS:** No, I don't think so. And I'm not sure it still is...I'm not sure it still is.

**KB:** What was the interview with the staff like?

**CS:** [laughter] It was....terrifying is too strong of a word, but it was very nerve wracking. It was VERY nerve wracking.

**KB:** How many staff existed at that point?

**CS:** Well, I thought there was going to be three or four people, and I opened the door to the conference room and it was full. It looked like a sea of people to me. There must have been ten, at least. I look back on it now....

One of my clearest memories of the interview was how Kathy Malchow [copy editor] was scoping me out. [laughter] I tease her about that. Every time I looked at her it seemed

to me she was studying me very intently--everybody was, that's what you do during an interview. That's one of the reasons it was nerve wracking.

**KB:** Did you know any of these people? Did you know Kathy Malchow, for example?

**CS:** I did not know Kathy. I had met Kathy Magnuson. I had met Norma, because the year previous--or maybe two years previous--I had sat in on a focus group on the Directory [Minnesota Women's Press Directory; a resource and business guide for women]. She had asked me when I was at Equal Time to offer some observations about the Directory, so I had met Norma and Mollie of course I knew. I don't think I knew anyone else.

They each had one question. They went around and introduced themselves. I guess the staff interview was with the two finalists, another woman and me. So they each told what they did and what their jobs were, how long they'd been with the organization. I remember being impressed by some of the staff's longevity. At that point Carol [Schuldt; office manager], I think, had been here six years. Sue [Dahlen; accounting and subscriptions]...I don't know, [had been here] eight years maybe. That was a very positive thing to me.

**KB:** What kind of questions did they ask you?

**CS:** They asked me what my feminism meant to me. What it meant to be a feminist.

I remember Carol talking about how she answered the phones. Of course I had called here a lot over the years. I had always gotten Carol's voice, and had no idea what the face was that went with it. So when she opened her...

**KB:** And it's a very distinctive voice...

**CS:** It's a very distinctive voice. It's like the voice you'd expect to hear..."This is St. Peter. You've reached heaven." [laughter] So, I was amazed and happy to put a face to that voice. She talked about answering phones. I remember saying to her, "Oh, so you field a lot of the angry calls?" I have a great deal of respect for that position, because it really is the front line for anybody who has a complaint as well as praise. So, I remember Carol talking about that. I don't remember too many of the other specific questions. ...Don't know...don't remember.

I do remember that there was a range, and now that I know people a little better, I laugh at it. Because Kathy Malchow, I know, asked a very, almost technical kind of question about me as an editor; whereas then there was this other person who wanted to know what it meant for me to be a feminist. So, it was kind of everything. Which is fine, because an editor is part-artist/part-technician, I think, and so of course you want to get a sense...

**KB:** Did you have a sense of... and I'll use the word culture--I don't know if it's the right word--but did you have a sense of the culture of the Minnesota Women's Press at that time?

**CS:** During the interview?

**KB:** During the interviews... Or, was that an important part of the discussions with Mollie, Glenda and the staff?

**CS:** Very good question. Very good question. Yes, of course it was, because I knew that it was not going to be a very well paying job. So it was very important to me to have a good workplace. I was very concerned that there was clarity between what the role of the publisher and what the role of the editor was going to be. I knew that this was a transition phase.

Mollie was very up-front that what she believed needed to happen. The editor needed to be hired with assurance that the paper was her call and the decisions were hers. But that was also something new to her. So whether or not she could pull that off was a question. She never said it like that, but it was clear that she considered that to be a challenge. It was also clear to me during the interview that Mollie and Glenda are very different people. I knew Mollie better than I knew Glenda. I didn't know either one of them very well.

**KB:** Talk about that.

**CS:** I think it was as simple as... Mollie would come to the interviews with her little pad and pencil and questions outlined, and Glenda would just show up--and ask whatever questions came to her mind. Not that she wasn't prepared--I think she knew good and well what she wanted to know about someone--but she's not methodical like Mollie is. That became very clear during the interviews. Mollie pretty much stuck to the agenda and Glenda was kind of wherever her spirit took her.

**KB:** Do you see those different imprints on the way the paper and the way the organization has developed?

**CS:** Yes. The fact that the organization has lasted this long, I think, is due in large part because there's such a balance there. I think that if it were only someone with Mollie's methodical sense and cautious and thoughtful approach--and I mean those in an absolutely positive sense--if that were the only thing that ruled then there's no fire there. It's hard to imagine that the organization would have taken risks.

If it were only Glenda, with her intuitive, spontaneous, sometimes impulsive, "YES! Let's do this!" Then, my gosh, I don't know that it could have survived financially or otherwise. So the fact that growth has been intuitive as well as planned--and I don't know

how else to say that, because it sounds like a contradiction and yet, I don't think it is--I think that's very reflective of the team that they are.

**KB:** Interesting, interesting.

**CS:** They complement each other very, very well...very well. I've been in meetings as I've struggled to grow into this position as editor. One of the very difficult parts of the job is that there are so many details to get bogged down in. An endless number of details could consume my job--if I let it--and they're all important. But the problem then is, "Where is the time and the energy for big picture thinking...for writing?" I am a very slow writer. I need a lot of time to think and to ponder, and always tending to the details undermines that.

I've been in meetings with Glenda and Mollie discussing those tensions, and Glenda's response is--and this is overstated a little bit to make the point--"Leave the details alone. Just let 'em go. They'll get done or they won't get done, or somebody else will do 'em, but go do what you need to do. You need to have your time away. You need to think big picture stuff."

Mollie panics a little bit with that, because she's done the job. She knows that if the details--if the phone calls aren't returned, and the assignment made, and the t's crossed and the i's dotted--that affects the product. Again, it's a perfect...the two of them are a perfect balance in the way they've nurtured me along. You know...pay adequate attention to the details, but at a certain point, forget them.

**KB:** What happens to that balance as the organization continues its current trends into different roles? ...People taking on different roles, and perhaps Mollie and Glenda even taking further steps away from the day to day...

**CS:** I worry about that. I worry about that balance. As Mollie and Glenda step back and as we're experimenting--and it is an experiment with this new leadership structure--one of the things that it has meant for me thus far is the need to be more attentive to the infrastructure here. I'm not sure that benefits us, because... And I do say that I'm not sure... It's an open question for me. What's very apparent is that there needs to be somebody in this organization--and I think it needs to be the editor--who pays attention to what's going on out there--what issues need to be written about and explored, which people are important and need to be...

**KB:** This is out there in the world?

**CS:** Out there in the world. That's right. So things like vacation policies and annual calendars, they're all important, but I worry that they're going to swallow up too much of my time and energy.

**KB:** What about the special blend of impulse and planfulness [laughter] with the current management structure? Where do you see that blend..? It has been important in the history, but perhaps not to the future?

**CS:** That's interesting.

**KB:** Does that exist in the proposed management structure?

**CS:** Well that is a great question, Kathryn. I don't know! I don't know. I would hate to lose it. I would absolutely hate to lose it. I do think that we don't know yet, as we add staff... I don't think we've sat down and thought through enough what we're gaining and what we're losing in that growth. We have a retreat coming up in October and I hope and expect that we'll talk about that kind of thing then.

When I was at Equal Time, we grew exponentially during the four and one-half years I was there. Then, the organization basically imploded and went out of existence. That was nine months after I left. There were all kinds of things that contributed to that, but one of the things that contributed to it is applicable to the Minnesota Women's Press. I really think you have to be very conscious about change--not get into assuming that bigger is better, or assuming that the rules you made ten years ago absolutely are going to be adhered to. It's almost as though I think we're at a point where we have to put *everything* out on the table.

Let me give you an example of that. There was a decision made here many years ago about not accepting ads for liquor. Now, I don't want to be understood at all as saying we should have liquor ads in the newspaper, but to me that's the kind of decision we need to revisit and make sure we understand why we made that decision. [We need to] make sure it's something we want to continue.

It's also a very different landscape in terms of the media. Media has changed so much in the last five years. Do we understand how the internet is impacting papers such as ours? Do we understand what the opportunities are there? Are we prepared in our infrastructure to take advantage of the opportunities? So that's the kind of consciousness about change that I think we need to have.

In organizations it's so easy to get caught up in our own rhetoric. Yes, and say, "We've always said that we are x, y and z." Then we just keep repeating that to ourselves. Over time, things change--are we still x, y and z? I don't know? I don't know? I think what it takes is really strong leadership.

The single biggest threat we have right now is I think with Mollie and Glenda stepping back, what does that mean? ...Because they are the heart and soul of this organization. They are the absolute heart and soul. I told them last week, "The danger with you two is that you 'pooh-pooh' that a little bit." I think they are both so modest that they don't always understand what impact they have here.

**KB:** Well I agree with you. The interviews that I've been doing...it's amazing to hear how much they are the heart and soul.

**CS:** Oh, they are. They absolutely are, and again, in very different ways. Mollie is here all the time, and quiet, and in the background. Glenda blows in, visits everybody personally in our offices, "How are we doing?" She unloads fifteen ideas that we should think about, and they're always good and stimulating. She just gets everybody charged up. Mollie's the stalwart, the calm, you know, the thoughtful one that you know is thinking through everything that's coming in and going out.

**KB:** The other thing that is interesting about papers like this, and papers like Equal Time, is the market that you face out there. You've talked about the internal structure a little bit and you've talked about things that are impeding into the market like the internet, but how about the readership with regard to Equal Time and with regard to the "Women's Press"? Are there any issues there that you need to be sensitive to? Do you think that readership is changing?

**CS:** That is the big question. I really think that's the big question. Who reads us and why? I'm not sure we know that as well as we should. We do the readership survey...it's a very good survey. It's a good tool for us. But, every once in a while, I'll get a letter to the Editor or a call or a note from someone that makes me realize that there is a vaster audience out there than we think.

To me the question is--I remember talking about this in my interview with Mollie and Glenda--that I think the "Press" could be more influential than it is with decision-makers. Part of that is because of the way women's roles in politics and in the culture have changed. I think women as a group, women as an economic market, women as political forces, we're just stronger than we were when this paper started, and can wield more power. I would like us to do more of that.

I got very upset a couple weeks ago. I was reading an editorial in the Star Tribune [Minneapolis daily newspaper] about a think tank that some legislators may be starting. I got upset because I thought, "This should be in our paper, first." I would like us to be a newspaper that those legislators call first. I want them to look to us to communicate to the larger community, even before they think of the Star Tribune. Now that may be way too ambitious, because let's face it, the Star Tribune's circulation is half a million and ours is 40,000. But my point is that I would like us to have more influence.

The danger with that, of course, is that you then don't want to run the risk of not appealing to 'Josephine on the street', which is really one of our huge strengths right now. Every woman has a story, is what we have always said, and I think we do a pretty darn good job of adhering to that and really honoring stories of all kinds of women--great and small. So that's another tension. But I also think we can do both. I hope we can do both. There's got to be room for both. What did you ask me? Did I even answer it?

**KB:** Yes, you did.

**CS:** Oh, readership! Is the readership changing?

**KB:** It was a fascinating answer, but I moved away from the question as well.

**CS:** Sometimes I have to confess I just feel completely out of touch with our readers. I hear from younger readers that there's nothing in the "Press" for them. It doesn't seem to matter what I do to try to address that. There continues to be nothing there for them. I think part of that is because newspapers--every newspaper--competes with television and movies and internet right now. It used to be that newspapers competed with each other, but this is such a visually, graphically-oriented world that I'm not sure there is anything we could do to bring in a lot of young people. Newspapers are not a medium that a lot of young people are drawn to. Yet I'm also really very well aware that there's this next generation of feminists coming up, and we have an opportunity to speak to them.

**KB:** There has always been the issue of separatism within the feminist world. There might be some of that with regard to young feminists; if you have a press that appeals broadly, it simply by definition might not appeal to young feminists...

**CS:** Well, that's true, too. It is very interesting to me to think about the lesbian community, because I know one of the bad raps that "Women's Press" always got from the lesbian community was, "'Women's Press' is homophobic; they don't write enough about lesbian issues." Of course on the other side of that coin was very 'quote unquote' mainstream people who said, "That's nothing but a lesbian newspaper." They really degraded it because of that.

It's kind of like the criticism I'd get at Equal Time from the women, who said, "You always write about the men." The men said, "You always write about the women." I thought, "Well as long as the complaints are equal, we're probably doing fine."

When I came here, Mollie had a very heart to heart talk with me--and this is when I knew I could trust this woman with my career. She had a heart to heart talk with me to make sure that I understood that this was not a lesbian newspaper. She wanted to make sure that it wasn't my agenda to turn it into one. My answer to her, then and still is, lesbians are part of our readership, along with black women, disabled women, mothers, grandmothers, any population of women you could think of. It would really undermine the integrity of the newspaper to do too much of any one population of women, including lesbians.

**KB:** Why don't we talk about specific populations. We talked about young feminists, and now lesbians. What other populations do you get concerned about [within] the readership?

**CS:** Well, this isn't a population as much as... I worry that we don't have enough good political coverage, whatever that is. In my mind, good political coverage is not writing about what the DFL Feminist Caucus is doing vs. what the Republican Feminist Caucus is doing. It's really trying to make sense, for our readers, of women's place in the political power structures of Minnesota. It's frustrating to me that I don't have enough... I think ideally you need a full-time reporter to get to know the people, the issues, and I just don't have that. Having to rely on freelancers to do that is a frustration for me. So I worry about politics.

I worry about out-state Minnesota. I really wish we could have, for instance, a St. Cloud bureau, a Duluth bureau, because I think there's plenty of interesting stuff happening there. I would love for us to pay more attention to it and to become truly the Minnesota Women's Press.

I don't know if we're... It seems to me that the web is an area that we could really, gosh, mine a lot more than we do. I was saying to Glenda last week, "Maybe we ought to become a monthly glossy magazine. Maybe that's the way that I could have a writing staff. Or maybe we should just become an online publication." I'm not proposing that we do that, but I'm proposing that we talk about doing those kinds of things.

We're fifteen years old, and there's a very fine line between being a reliable, steady publication and being one that's just in a rut. If you don't do that kind of questioning about your very roots, you're likely to fall off into that area of being in a rut. I do think that the media environment in this world today is just exploding. It's just exploding. There's almost too much opportunity, and too many things to take a look at and to consider, I think.

**KB:** What are the constraints you face when you think about all of these things? When you think about a full-time political reporter. When you think about a St. Cloud Bureau. When you think about the web. What holds you back?

**CS:** And also international women's issues--it's another passion of mine.

Money... I think money is a big thing, because I really would like to have a writing staff. There are many benefits to having all freelancers. There are also many drawbacks. I'd like to have regular staff writers.

I also feel like there needs to be three of me. [laughter] Now I've just hired a half-time assistant editor and it's wonderful to have her on board. I'm still in the phase where the investment of time is immense in orienting her, so I don't think I've begun to see payback yet, but I will. So I'd like to see more staff.

I also think--I want to be careful about how I say this--but I'm beginning to think that there is... Part of the culture here is that we don't think big enough or powerfully enough about who we are or who we could be. It's a psychological or a cultural obstacle that is

probably in some ways more difficult to address than money and resources. I worry that we're not as much of a player as we could or should be in the world out there. I think some of that is because...maybe we don't see ourselves that way. That's a discussion I want to have.

I just have to qualify all of this by saying that I question it, and think that we should be a bigger player and more powerful and influential and all. But really, what makes it all worth it is when I get a call from... For example, this just blew me away. We ran a page one story about women who have overcome chronic illnesses. I had a message on my machine from a woman who said, "I was diagnosed with cancer today. I read your article on chronic illness, and I just want you to know it just meant so much to me. Thank you."

So what more do you want? What more influence do you want to have in this world than to be able to touch somebody at that level? I'm also very well aware that we do that and I think we do it with some frequency. We touch women's lives like that. There's no underestimating how important that is.

**KB:** Let's go back to a place we started awhile ago--talking about when you first became editor of Minnesota Women's Press, and Mollie's concerns about her ability to...

**CS:** Back off?

**KB:** ...back off a bit. Your words not mine. [laughter] How has that worked, as you look back on the last three years?

**CS:** I just have nothing but praise for her. I think it's been very hard for her to watch me make some of the decisions I've made. Obviously she has also been very happy with some of the things I've done with the paper. But, overall she has instilled a lot of confidence in me.

**KB:** What have been the hardest things, you think, for her do deal with?

**CS:** I wrote an editorial on... [laughter] There was a proposal at the State Capitol to allow concealed weapons. I wrote an editorial that didn't say, "This is a great thing", but it did say, "Is this a question of choice?" I think that was hard for her. Because I think her own personal philosophy is there's never a reason to carry a gun in a civilized society. But I needed to play with that idea. So I did.

That's on one end of things, and on the other end of things... [laughter] As a reader I had always thought the print in the newspaper was too small. I always felt like I needed a magnifying glass, even before I turned 45 and got bifocals I felt that way. So I made the decision fairly early on, without consulting Mollie, that we needed to make the print larger. I'd be interested to know if that was hard for her or not. I think it took her aback--that here was this huge change in the paper and she didn't know it was coming. I think

maybe it was a test for her about... was she really serious about letting this woman take over her paper?

**KB:** How did she react to those two things? What kinds of discussions did you have, if any?

**CS:** None on the gun... Part of the reason I remember the gun editorial was because I still wrangle with that, and wonder if I wrote the right thing. 'Right' meaning not the 'right position', but should I have taken it deeper? I may revisit that. So I don't think we had a discussion about that.

My experience with both Mollie and Glenda is that when they really like something I write, they mention it. When I don't hear anything...sometimes I'm not sure they were wild about it. [laughter] In terms of the type size, I think we had a discussion, but I honestly don't remember what it was.

What I have tried very hard to do is--because Mollie and Glenda are so identified with this paper and are the heart and soul of it--I knew that I needed to put my mark on it in a way that was very respectful of where this paper is coming from. I think they were worried that I was gonna come in and change everything all at once. First of all, that's not my personal style. I'm much more of a plodder than that. Secondly, it's not good for any newspaper, I don't think, to undergo radical change like that. But thirdly, I didn't want to change everything about the paper. Of course, when you come into a job like this, you do want to put your own stamp on it; but I also thought, for the most part, the paper is great!

**KB:** When you think back, what are the most important ways you have put your own stamp on the paper?

**CS:** I have tried to..... [pause] I remember saying to Terri Faust, one of our photographers, very early on--I had worked with Terri both at Southwest Journal and Equal Time."... I said to him, "I don't want you to take any pictures of smiling women! I'm sick of smiling women in this paper! [laughter] It's not real!" It's very hard when you have freelance photographers to not pose someone for a photo. Of course when you pose someone, they're gonna want to smile. I understand that there are structural impediments to having frowning women. [laughter]

This sounds like a little thing, but to me...I think my biggest criticism about the paper was I never saw myself in it, because I always saw these smiling, powerful, happy women. So I wanted to inject a little more realism into the portrayal. Once you get into the copy of the paper, of course, you see that there's all kinds of realism. But the images that met you were often of these cartoon character type women. [laughter] So I wanted to change that.

**KB:** And have you been successful with that, in your mind?

**CS:** Somewhat, yes. This last issue I looked at, and I said, "There's all these smiling white women on the front page." I don't like that, but that happens. Because...smiling women do exist... [laughter] I don't want to make too much of this.

I've tried to do a couple things. To both have more light stories like this article on football on the front page of the current issue. It's hardly hard-hitting in terms of a pressing social issue. It's also something that's very real in a lot of women's lives, including mine. I was delighted when a freelancer pitched that story to me. She's wild about football. "How about an article on women and football?" I said, "Great!"

I want the paper to be less predictable. Because I think one of the reasons people pick something up is if they really want to see what's in there. They don't know what's going to be in there. One of the things I really wanted to do was have more points of entry on the front page, so that if you didn't like the main story, you'd see that there was something else inside that you might find interesting and that might appeal to you. I hope I've made it more visually interesting.

**KB:** You started to say that you wanted to have both something a little lighthearted and you starting talking about the football...

**CS:** As well as more in-depth. Although I have to say I think that's always been the strength of the paper.

**KB:** Anything else that you think you've...?

**CS:** I have a goal of.... I've tried to bring in new writers. I have brought in new writers: Mary Hirsch, Judy Lutter, Deb Wilkins-Costello, Shannon Scott. People love or hate Shannon. I'm really pleased that we've brought along a young writer like Shannon. I think that's a great role for us to be playing.

My goal is to have a column every issue of my own. My goals for my columns are probably a little too ambitious. They probably are one of the things that keep me tongue-tied--maybe I have too high expectations. Glenda will say to me, "Write anything! Just write anything! I doesn't have to be earth-shaking every time." But I think it needs to be. I really want to write thoughtful pieces every time. But she's right...I can't....I can't. It's impossible to do. It's hard enough to do it period, much less expecting a blockbuster every time.

I think having an editorial column like mine...obviously that's my own mark on it. I try to not be predictable or ideological, and I try very hard to be just honest. This is one of the reasons it's so hard for me. I'm a private person. That's the biggest contradiction of my life. I'd in some ways rather be flipping burgers, because then you aren't putting yourself out there like that. You don't face that particular stress. Don't misunderstand...I don't want to go flip burgers, but you know what I mean. [laughter] The public part of this job is still hard for me, and I suspect it always will be.

**KB:** What about representation? Do you go out and represent the Minnesota Women's Press a bit? I know that Mollie and Glenda do some of that.

**CS:** I do. I spoke at the St. Paul Business and Professional Women's Club meeting last month. I've gone to Minneapolis Women's Club. During March we get a lot of those calls--Women's History Month. [laughter] "Come to our staff luncheon." I do a fair amount of that. It's always enjoyable. It's always also a very good reality check for me, because it's an opportunity for me. The way I always start a talk is, "How many people here are familiar with the 'Press'?" A lot of people usually are. So it's just a good way for me to interact face-to-face with readers, and to see who readers are...to hear from them directly.

**KB:** Talk about the letters you get. You've talked a little bit about that, but spend a little bit more time to continue this conversation about getting feedback?

**CS:** Well, I'm fairly schizophrenic about that. The reason is, I say I would love to get more letters, and I would, but letters can also be pretty tough. Andy, my predecessor, has a file that I kept, called "Crap." [laughter] In it, there are all sorts of really abusive letters that she got. Now I have to say I haven't gotten many abusive letters. Letters from people who really are very right wing, and picked up the paper once and decided that they're going to tell you exactly what's wrong with you and what's wrong with feminists--they just lay you wide open. Those aren't as frequent.

But it is pretty common, I think, to get... I know this from being a reader of any publication: people who are in print, people whose names are in print and whose photos are in print, lose their human qualities. You just don't regard them as a person with feelings. You somehow think that you can say whatever you want to say to them. In fact, I've spent a fair amount of time crying in response to the letters I get. I have to pull myself together and respond to them professionally, too. But, I feel like I'm being really vague....

I wrote an editorial on the need to patronize independent bookstores. Well, I got a scathing letter in return from the manager of a chain bookstore who advertises for us. I think he was very upset that I had not been more considerate of chain bookstores, because they're advertisers. As a matter of fact, I hadn't given it a second thought. Which is the way it should be. I shouldn't be giving consideration to what I think because someone is an advertiser. He really said some very unkind, unfair things, and took some deep personal shots at me. I was a mess. It just left me in tears. Then I get mad at myself, thinking I should have thicker skin than this.

As a matter of fact, if you have too thick a skin, you can't be a good editor either. In the best of worlds you have a dialogue with readers. I also get some really good letters. I've been corresponding with a guy who really disagrees with me about what I've written on Sarah Jane Olson [former Minnesota member of a 1960's radical group undergoing trial]. He does it in a really nice, congenial way.

**KB:** ...That promotes further discussion.

**CS:** That promotes further discussion and really makes me think about...take into consideration things I haven't thought about. So the letters are a mixed bag. I think I get nervous when we don't get very many, because I do want to be pressing buttons. I don't set out to offend anyone, but I do set out to make people think in this newspaper. When we don't get letters, it makes me think we're not doing that.

**KB:** Can you describe something usual, in terms of what the usual response might be? How many letters do you get--I know there's no such thing as an average--in a month, for example?

**CS:** Ten. Very often I'll get an e-mail...a quick e-mail note.

**KB:** Do you get letters that just don't really say anything other than, "Atta girl!" or "Great job!?"

**CS:** Or, "Idiot!" [laughter]

**KB:** Are most of the letters negative then? Do people write when they're negative or when they are upset about something? Do people ever write and just kind of be positive about the paper?

**CS:** Yes, and I'm glad you asked that question, because I don't want to just whine about the letters to the editor. As a matter of fact, I get a lot of positive feedback--sometimes very moving letters.

When my dad died, I wrote about that. In fact, that was a turning point for me as an editor I think. His death was extremely hard for me, and it came time for me to write my column and the only thing in my heart and on my mind was his death. It was around Mother's Day, and so I basically spilled my guts about my dad's death and... was terrified for having done it. It seemed like such an 'un-editor-like' thing to do. Would Ben Bradley [former editor of the Washington Post] write about his father dying? No. Well then why should I?

But the fact is, I won an award for that editorial--which I did not set out to do by any means. I got lots of phone calls. People picked up the phone and called me about it. I got a very wonderful letter from one woman. It was that editorial that made me think, "Well, you need to really reveal a little bit of yourself to touch the readers." People can go to other newspapers to get the 'head stuff', maybe they really look to us for some of the 'heart stuff'.

**KB:** Who does an editor turn to [in order] to get feedback?

**CS:** I worry about that, Kathryn, and I don't know that I do that enough. I used to go to Mollie more, but I came to the conclusion that I was giving her the opportunity to maybe step over that line that she didn't want to step over. I mean I was going to her because I wanted her, Mollie's, opinion about something I was writing. In fact that wasn't very wise, because her, Mollie, is also the publisher, and trying to let me do my thing. I talk to my partner. I'll talk with Kathy Malchow, Holly [Coughlin; production staff], staff people around here. I'll call up a friend. But mostly I stew to myself, frankly. [laughter] Because, for me writing is...a lot of times I know what I'm going to say only once I'm into it.

**KB:** The other thing that's come up in our conversation is ideology. I'd like to spend just a little bit of time talking about that--the feminist ideology and how you think it is manifested in the paper. I hope you're not offended by my calling it a feminist ideology. How is feminism reflected in the paper?

**CS:** We write stories about women. That is probably the most fundamental thing. This is a bit of an aside, but one of the questions that I want to talk about is whether or not we need to have a male columnist, a feminist male columnist. I'm leaning toward finding one. We have a male photographer. We've had male writers. I think it's appropriate to have a feminist male voice in the commentary pages, but I would never do a profile on a male. ...*Ever*.

That says something about what our feminism is. It goes back to that belief that every woman has a story and that our job is to tell those stories. We will *never* run out of women whose stories need to be told. So there's that. There's that consistent, reliable focus on women.

I think this goes back to your question about how I've put my mark on this paper. This is kind of a paradox to me, but I think the kind of feminism that is embodied in the paper means that you write about women who are not feminists, or about women who hold positions that may be antithetical to what people think feminism is--for example, pro-life women. We are a pro-choice newspaper. I'm pro-choice. But there are a lot of women who are not, and they have stories, too. Some of them consider themselves feminists, pro-life feminists. So, it's our obligation to put their lives into the mix.

I think also--keeping tabs on that old watchdog role of the "Press"--I think we have to be the ones who look at government, corporations and make sure that justice is being done. We don't do that as well as we should, but that's a goal. That's a driving force.

**KB:** If you would do the same analysis to the organization as a whole...not the newspaper, just the organization. Is it a feminist organization?

**CS:** I want to say yes. I want to just say, "Well of course it is." But I'm really in this phase where I don't want us to get caught up in our own rhetoric, and so I'm not letting myself answer that so easily. I've sort of been on the periphery of feminist business discussions. One of the questions that Kathy or Mollie or you--that's Kathy Magnuson--

asked early on about feminist business was: "Is there such a thing as feminist business, or is it just humane business?" This is certainly a humane workplace, and a humane organization. For that reason, I'd say it's feminist. Yes.

The danger I think in saying that it's a feminist business--a feminist organization--is that you then set yourself up to somehow say, "We're a perfect organization and we do everything in the most feminist, the most cooperative, the most rose-colored way you could imagine." Of course, we don't. It's still an organization where difficult decisions have to be made...where individual failings have to be pointed out and addressed. And they are. They could be more, I think.

So I don't know. I feel like I'm kind of riding the fence on that. I can say, "Yes, we're a feminist organization. Of course we're a feminist organization. Are we perfect? No."

**KB:** There's implicit theories of feminism under both of those responses that you've given me--in terms of the feminist newspaper, and the feminist organization. How are those varying definitions reconciled here within the Minnesota Women's Press? ...Because they exist all over the place. You've talked about what feminism is--to define the newspaper as a feminist paper. And then what feminism is--to define the organization as a feminist organization. They're different in a way. How does feminism in all its shapes and forms get reconciled?

**CS:** In the organization?

**KB:** In the organization...I think you've described it in the newspaper already.

**CS:** I think there is a--and I keep coming back to this--intentionality, consciousness... There is a conscious grappling in this organization with the tension between nurturing individuals and honoring and respecting individual paths on the one hand, and tending to the good of the organization on the other. Now in the best of worlds, they go hand in hand. What's good for the organization is good for me and vice versa. But that is not always true.

The place I'm most keenly aware of it is on the ad staff. Those folks have a lot of pressure on their shoulders, because they bring in the bucks for us to do what we do. There's all kinds of ways to do that. There's all kinds of individual styles, but at a certain point someone has to say, "This is what's good for the organization and it may not be good for your personal style." What I think sets us apart is that there is a consciousness about that tension, and there is a desire to respect the individual path. Again, I'll go back.

The first time I knew this deeply in my soul was when my dad was dying. I had been here only six months, which is not a lot of time. Mollie, Glenda, Kathy said, "Go. Go be with him." Well, I was gone here for a month, and they worked around that. Maybe I haven't been out in the world enough to know that any old organization would do that, but to me it was extraordinary. It was extraordinary! It was just an extraordinary thing to do for an

employee. Now if I had been here thirteen years, ten years, five years, then I maybe wouldn't have found it so breathtaking...but six months....

I've seen that with other employees who have gone through difficult personal circumstances. There really is an effort to accommodate that person, without jeopardizing the organization. It's a fine line to walk; I think we do it pretty well.

So your question about feminism is... To me the defining point about feminism is honoring women's choices, and not expecting women to make a certain choice because they're a woman--not boxing us into a certain way to live our lives. I think this organization does a good job of recognizing individual circumstances.

**KB:** Do you have the same definition then, do you think, that say, Mollie and Glenda do?

**CS:** About feminism?

**KB:** Yes.

**CS:** I don't know. A couple years ago, they laid out our mission statement again explicitly in feminist principles--you know, cooperation and not competition. Frankly I don't remember all of them. But I remember bristling at some of those. Thinking: "I'm not sure that this is realistic. I'm not sure that this is a prerequisite when you're talking about feminism." I think there's disagreement on the staff, and of course that makes sense that there would be. If we really believe that there are many different feminisms, why would we expect all of us to view it the same way?

Well, I'll say this. I think Mollie and Glenda have evolved. I think all of us constantly are evolving in what we think feminism is, and the role it plays in our lives and in the world. It's not as though we decided ten years ago what it was, and it has never changed.

I think one of the big questions on the staff is where men fit into it, and to what extent men should be involved in this organization. Would we ever hire a man? Should we have a male columnist? Should we write about men's issues? I think there's probably vast disagreement on the staff.

**KB:** How does that decision get made? [laughter]

**CS:** I think the decision about whether or not we write about men's issues is mine. Whether or not we have a male columnist is mine. Whether or not we'd ever hire a man is a little stickier. I don't know! I think there's certain positions where a man would not do well here--editor, for example. I could be wrong about that, but I just don't think a man could do this job adequately. Production staff, though--producing ads....why not? It would sure change the culture here--not the culture, the environment. I really think it would change the environment quite a bit to have a man working here.

**KB:** Could you expand on that?

**CS:** I think it's a little bit comical now when a man comes in--you know the Xerox guy or the people from the printer or whoever. Somebody's husband or boyfriend comes in. I think it's pretty comical to see people's reactions. It's not that everybody's jaw drops, but everybody's very aware that there's a man in the building--like we're in college, and a man came into the dorm. [laughter] ...Announcement goes out on the P.A. system, "Man on the floor."

Sometimes it's like that. We're aware that there's a man here. A man--we say this all the time and it's true--changes the mix. It changes the communication patterns. I think it's harder for women to talk and express themselves fully when men are in an environment. So it would just change things.

**KB:** I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the relationships between the different parts of the Minnesota Women's Press, in terms of goals, commonality, conflict--and the negotiation processes perhaps that are required as a result of some of those differences.

**CS:** I think there's a rule here, unspoken, that we should not have any conflict. That's unreal. I'd like us to talk about that. Not to say we should be down each other's throats all the time, but it's just not real for people to be in a close working environment like this and not have disagreements. I'm not sure we handle it well when we do have disagreements, and I think some of that is because we're all women.

I also have to say that the infrastructure here really lends itself well to communicating. For a long time when I first came here, I did not have a clue what Norma [Olson; systems and production coordinator] did. Systems Coordinator, what is that? Her job has been evolving for quite awhile. It's a very wise position to have. She's the one who makes sure that Peter knows what Paul's doing and she does that very well.

There's a wonderful structure in place for making sure that there's a good, healthy balance between editorial and advertising, so that I feel like our doors are open to one another, but I don't think that there's influence there. I think we collaborate where we need to collaborate, but Kathy Magnuson--and I think this started with Mollie way back--instilled in the sales force that you don't tie ad sales to editorial copy. You just don't do it. I've never had an ad rep toy with that--try to use it or stretch it. They're just very good about understanding that in the long run it's not in anybody's best interest to violate those boundaries.

I think right now with these new divisions growing--Center for Feminist Business, Center for Feminist Reading, and Mollie and Glenda move more into that...Center for Feminist Journalism, whatever that's going to mean--it leaves me with questions about how we all connect. Where does the newspaper fit into that? On the face of it, that seems like a silly question--well, we exist for the newspaper. But in fact, something has to change with the

addition of these new divisions and the new activities under these divisions. Not something has to change, but something has changed.

So what is the impact on the newspaper and the growth of the directory [Minnesota Women's Press Directory; resources and business for women]? I don't think we have answers to that right now. I don't think we have answers. I'm not sure that we've even arrived at a consensus that those are questions we need to be asking. Could be wrong about that.

It seems to me that the newspaper has always been the main activity here. If you drew a graph of it, piece of the pie, the newspaper would take a huge chunk of it. But [now], [Center for] Feminist Business is taking more now, [as is the Center for] Feminist Reading. And when I talk about more, I am speaking primarily of staff time as the main resource at this point.

What new demands does that make on us? I think we really need to be strategic about marketing the newspaper. So I have questions about who's responsible for heading that up? Do we have agreement that we need to do that? I guess I worry that we take the newspaper for granted. Part of the reason I worry about that is because I've gone through losing a newspaper. I was gone from Equal Time when it went under, but I was still very attached to that newspaper. I can look back and see decisions that I made that contributed to its demise. I never want us to take this newspaper for granted, and just assume it's chugging along fine, and now we can devote our attention elsewhere. That's dangerous.

**KB:** You've probably talked about this, but on your biographical sketch you said that your involvement with the Minnesota Women's Press was heart and soul. Could you expand on that? You've danced around that issue a lot, but why don't you just address it specifically?

**CS:** I think that's true on many levels, and several things come to mind. It's the struggle I've spoken about of really putting myself in my writing, in my columns. There's that. There's a huge respect that I feel for Mollie and Glenda, and I feel a tremendous amount of pride in being part of this newspaper. I'm very proud to be a part of this newspaper. It doesn't matter where I go in my career, I will always look at this time as a very...well, it's an honor to be part of this. Part of that is because I have such an appreciation for what it took to build it. I think a fair amount of self-sacrifice went into it on Mollie and Glenda's part, and all the early folk.

I think also just the choice of being at a small newspaper that's mission driven. I would say the Southwest Journal was a publication that wasn't mission driven, and I don't say that in a derogatory sense at all. Not to say they didn't have a mission, but it wasn't mission driven in the same way that "Women's Press" and Equal Time was.

I'm just more connected in my very being with what this newspaper is all about. Part of that is because I'm an evangelist at heart. I come out of working for the Catholic Church. [laughter] I'm kind of a do-gooder and a crusader in my very being, and this newspaper is a way for me to express that.

**KB:** I'm interested in exploring what you think the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press has been. You can think about that broadly--journalism, the community--or you can think about it narrowly--individual lives, that sort of thing.

**CS:** I can grumble till I'm blue in the face about how we need to have more influence, we need to have more impact, and yet I am continually amazed by and happy about the number of peers who think highly of the "Women's Press". I'm speaking of women journalists--Kim Jeffries, Robyn Robinson, Kathy Wurser [local women journalists]. They read the paper. They look to the paper, and to me that is a real measure of success. So there's that kind of peer professional impact.

I know that there's an impact on individual women's lives. I gave the example earlier of the woman who had been diagnosed with cancer. We've gotten flowers for the last couple months from people we've done stories about. Part of me gets uncomfortable with that, like, well, if they were that happy with it maybe we didn't do a good job. [laughter] But then again both of these were cases where our stories help a woman get her business off the ground. There's a lot of value to that. There is just a lot of value to that role. So there's that impact, I think.

I also think of our names in the news survey. Our annual survey where we measure the number of times men's names vs. women's names [appear in the local daily papers]. I think we've done that eight, nine years now, and I do think that professionals look for that and expect to hear from us every year. There is no one else who is measuring that. As flawed in some ways as I think that survey is, it's still a tool; it's still a reminder to the mainstream media that someone's watching them.

The other thing is, I really think that we have a great relationship with the women's business community. I'm thinking of our advertisers. It's a place where they can, I hope, help their businesses grow. I like to think that our readers will patronize our advertisers first, and really be conscious about going to women-owned businesses. So it's an avenue for them.

**KB:** Another somewhat related question perhaps is, given the fact that this is one of the few surviving feminist newspapers in the country, why do you think it's been so successful in general? Why do you think it's been successful here?

**CS:** Well, Jesse Ventura's [governor of Minnesota] election proves all things are possible in Minnesota. [laughter] I think there's a great business community here--even before women became a market. Women are a market now, and so businesses know that it's prudent to advertise with us. Even before that was the case--and I don't think it was the

case fifteen years ago--I think there were enough women entrepreneurs to give this paper a good start. I think that's one thing.

I think another thing was the willingness of Mollie and Glenda to sacrifice, and the early staff people to sacrifice. I know there were many points at which they would've been absolutely justified to say, "I just can't do this anymore. I'm not making enough money. I can't support myself." But they didn't do that. In simplest terms, starkest terms, that's why we're here. They were willing to go through some very tough times.

I also think that the paper has avoided being ideologically driven and has really attempted to write about women's lives--not some idea of women's lives. Not to say we haven't sometimes gotten too ideologically inclined, but overall... I think the original mission was to write about all kinds of women. I think that has resonated with readers and with advertisers. There's an integrity there that readers and advertisers recognize.

**KB:** That really covers my questions. Are there things that I haven't covered that you think would be important at this point to talk about--that you haven't had an opportunity to say yet?

**CS:** No. I do have one anecdote that I want to talk about...

**KB:** Oh, yes, please!

**CS:** ...and I don't know where this fits into anything. I have an intuition that it does. Couple years ago there was a young woman in the Twin Cities who went to the national finals of women's boxing. We did a page one story on her. Brenda was her first name. Now I am no fan of boxing at all, but the writer, who happened to be a man, was an excellent writer. He did a fabulous job on the story. I thought it was quite remarkable that this young woman would have a dream of becoming a boxer, and then actually go to the championships. So we ran the story. Dawn Valella did the photograph, and it was a stunningly wonderful photograph.

Well I got a note after we printed that from Rose Tillmans. Rose is a Sister of St. Joseph. I've known her for about twenty years--respect her very much. Love her. I think she's a saint...I really think she's a saint. "Dear Cindy," she said in the note. She calls me Cindy, which is something not a lot of people get away with. "Please do not ever do an article like that again, that promotes violence." She wrote it in a way that it was self-evident that we should not have done this story, because of who we are.

I think the reason this anecdote comes to mind is because it really is an example of the kind of story we need to do to have integrity. If we really believe that every woman has a story, this is a very interesting story. Whether it's a feminist thing or not to be a boxer is beside the point. Whether it's a feminist thing to do or not to promote 'quote/unquote' violence is beside the point, because it's really quite debatable whether or not that's violence. I think it is, but if you read the story and read what Brenda said about this sport,

it's not violence to her. It's helped her control anger and marshal her emotions, and stay in shape.

It was just a great example to me of staying true to who we say we are, and at the same time inviting readers to go outside their own boxes a little bit. Most of the time when people complain to me about stories, I'll say, "Did you read it?" "Well, no, and I'm not going to read it because I object to that kind of thing." Readers have a responsibility, too.

**KB:** That's a great anecdote. I'm glad you told it. Thank you very much.

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