

## **Interview with Margaret Shryer**

**Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer**

**Interviewed on June 15, 1999  
at the offices of the Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.  
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

**KB:** Well Margaret, I'd like to start out by asking you to describe your current and your past involvement with the Minnesota Women's Press. Give me an overview if you could.

**MS:** Let's start with current. Currently I have called myself the 'gad-fly' of the "Women's Press". I consider it my job to make sure that the women, who work very, very hard here, every once in a while have a little social. That is usually a luncheon that I bring in--very definitely on the anniversary of the Minnesota Women's Press, but sometimes during the year just when we, or I, get to thinking we need to celebrate. So that's kind of my job. I often just come in with something to eat--it is a big part of what I think is enjoyable--and so I bring in donuts or coffeecake or whatever. So that's my current involvement.

I also think of the "Women's Press" in connection with the book parties, and there have been several. Faith Sullivan is a good friend of mine; she's a writer. Minnesota Women's Press provided the books for that book signing. Pauline Boss is having a book signing at my house and Minnesota Women's Press is [unclear]. So in those kinds of ways, I feel that I'm currently connected with the "Women's Press". They very generously invite me to other events too, so I always feel like I'm a part of it even though I don't actively do any thing more than what I've just described. So that's my current situation.

I began, actually, planning the first anniversary party--the first birthday party--which we held at Theater In the Round of Minneapolis. It's a theater that I've been a member of for many, many, many years. We had a big birthday party. At that event, that first one, we gave certificates, plaques to the women who had been profiled on the first page of the paper, each issue. That was very memorable. We did that for a number of years--gave out those certificates. I don't think we do that anymore.

But what came back out of that was the sense that these women--who considered their lives very ordinary, nothing unusual--were being honored for simply being who they were. It was incredible! I wish I could remember some of those women's names from then. They had never, ever been named...given a piece of paper that said we recognize you for who you are and what you do. It was very touching. We all were so touched by

the appreciation and the gratitude that these women displayed at that very first birthday party.

I've been involved in the birthday parties ever since then. Some of them have been more grandiose. Lately they've been simply an in-house party with just the staff and a few invited people. For the year 2000 we were thinking that maybe we would be able to do something even grander. Initially that was when I first came with the "Women's Press". I even sold some ads in the beginning. I thought maybe I would be doing that--because at that time I had just retired from teaching and I thought maybe this would be something that I would do to fill that niche of having a sense of purpose, as I call it. You know as a teacher, I thought that was a way to leave the world a better place...

**KB:** Talk about how you first became aware of the *notion* of the "Women's Press". How did you first hear about it?

**MS:** Well, I heard about it through Glenda. Glenda Martin [Co-founder and Co-publisher] and I belonged to the same organization called Administrative Women in Education. Glenda announced at one of the meetings that she was leaving education, and that she was going to go with this newspaper that they were talking about founding. That intrigued me. I admired Glenda a lot. This is a very gutsy lady with a lot of compassion. And I loved the idea of the "Women's Press". So that's how I heard about it.

So when Glenda went with it I called her and I said, "I want to do something too." From time to time both Glenda and Mollie [Hoben; Co-founder and Co-publisher] tried to hire me. I said, "I'm not a good person to hire because I really don't *want* a job. I want to volunteer so that I don't have to have that sense of 9:00 to 5:00. Not that that's what it was, but they were *very* generous in asking me to participate more integrally, and I really didn't want to.

**KB:** So what was the first thing that you did then?

**MS:** That was the birthday party. That was the first birthday party was my first big involvement, as I recall it at this time.

**KB:** Can you talk a little bit more about what happened at that party? Some of the details that you, as the organizer of the party would remember that other people might not.

**MS:** There was food; I don't remember what we had to drink, but there were refreshments, I remember that. The main part of the program...we did have some songs which we sang as a group. But to tell you the truth I don't remember what those were.

Then we gave out the certificates. My memory of that evening is the certificate--the women receiving the certificates....what they said was *very* memorable, very memorable. It's too bad that we didn't write that down because I think what I heard that night was a real affirmation of what the "Women's Press" was about...that is women describing

women's experiences in women's words. That pervaded throughout the evening as I recall.

Getting everybody there was kind of a chore, because not all of those women had access to cars and transportation. That was kind of an interesting challenge to make sure everybody got there. Sister Giovanni, who has died since, was one of those first women. I remember her. My husband was the one who was careened into picking her up. I had everybody working.

**KB:** How many people were there?

**MS:** I would say there were about a hundred people.

**KB:** Oh, my word!

**MS:** Yeah, yeah. So we had the staff, and the families of the women who were receiving certificates were invited, and so it was quite an occasion really. And our birthday party was really more a celebration of those women rather than a celebration of us.

**KB:** That's exactly what I was just thinking--interesting, isn't it, to celebrate it like that. Consistent with what the Minnesota Women's Press was....

**MS:** Exactly. We did that for a couple more years and then the expense...we went through so many years we did not have the wherewithal to do a lot. So we decided that just doing something in-house, keeping it small would be appropriate.

**KB:** Well you said that you also sold ads for awhile. Can you talk about what that was like?

**MS:** That was not a good idea for me. I'm a terrible person on the telephone. I do not do well talking on the phone. I did that just I think maybe for a couple of issues. And so that was a job that I tried, and knew that that was not anything I was going to be good at doing...or wanted to do.

**KB:** [Laughing]. Ok, all right. Well you're also a shareholder.

**MS:** That's true.

**KB:** Talk about how that process worked, when you became a shareholder.

**MS:** All right. The second time around offering--buying some shares--my husband and I decided to do that. Our intention was to simply support something that we really believe in. This was not some kind of investment that we were going to make a lot of money on. It was giving some financial support to something that we really believe in.

It's been a good thing. We got dividends this year! [laughter] But that wasn't the point. The point was that we would be able to meet once a year with other who had--so to speak-- "put their money where their mouth was." ...And that we would enjoy that. Whenever we're in town, we do come to the shareholder meeting and like meeting the other folks and hearing from the staff.

**KB:** Can you describe those shareholder meetings?

**MS:** Sure. Well, we sit around the table. There is generally a little refreshment. We have usually a dispensing of the minutes from the last time because most of us were there and we had gotten a copy of them and that was fine. Then we proceed to hear a financial report, a report on what kind of new ventures the "Women's Press" is going into.... Cynthia, the last couple of years, has come in and given us a report on the editorial side of the paper.

We are always--I always feel, anyway--that whatever ideas we come up with that they are seriously considered and taken back to the staff any ideas we might have. I wish I could think of one or two things that have happened over the years that we actually saw, "Hey, we thought of that and suggested that." I think maybe some of the staff might remember that more because they'll say, "Oh that came from the shareholders meeting."

**KB:** Well, can you talk a little bit about where you were at the point in time that you're involvement in the Minnesota Women's Press began. Why the environment was such that it worked for you to become involved, or why your own personal circumstances?

**MS:** I have been retired from Minneapolis public schools for seventeen years. So it was a couple of years into retirement that the "Women's Press" started. I think I mentioned that sense of purpose. That was one of the things that I hadn't anticipated at retirement--that I would miss that feeling of contributing some of my time and energy to a cause that I thought was really worthy, that I believed in, that was consistent with what I thought needed to be done in the world to make it a better place. So the "Women's Press" really appealed to me a lot. I saw it filling that niche in my life. Since then, there have been other things in my life that have required a lot of time and attention, and so my commitment in terms of time has really diminished with the paper even though I still hang on.

**KB:** What was it? What was the cause that you found so attractive?

**MS:** Well, first of all that there was nothing anywhere that really described what I was interested in--in any area--that told it from the women's point of view. Some day we will get to a point in history when the point of view will not be that markedly divided. But the content in the daily newspaper focuses on a lot of stuff that has no relevance in our lives, unless you do consider what does it mean for the woman behind the man who was in the news. ...Not necessarily behind the man, but simply what was she doing on her own? That's what appealed to me about the paper.

I really liked that idea that these women were going to open up not only the perspective, but what qualifies as getting into the paper. You know, what is newsworthy. The notion that what women do is newsworthy...that it isn't just the next big corporate merger, whether Amoco and Exxon are going to get [together]. That was the big draw for me really. Their purpose, and what they believe in, is that female is important.

I liked what happened when we got the book groups. I participated in a couple of the [unclear] book groups, and I like the expansion into the whole bookshop area, because I thought that that was having an influence in quite another way from the paper.

One of the things I have to say about the paper... One year, at the anniversary time, when I thought, "Oh, it would be good to hawk the papers." We'd get young women with newspaper bags with emblems on it, and we'd stand downtown on Nicollet Mall [retail area in downtown Minneapolis] and we would just hand out the "Women's Press". That was very eye opening. Now that was not the second or third year...I mean we were like five or six years down the road here. And first of all, to hand out anything on Nicollet Mall...there's a reason downtown is dying because the downtown council was so adamant about not handing anything out. I talked to many, many people down there and said the same thing over and over again. I explained what we were about; I sent them a copy of the paper. We could not stand on the Nicollet Mall and hand it out. There was no way that we could do that. I pointed out other cities, other places, blah, blah, blah...it didn't make a difference. So I told everybody, you know you're going down the tubes downtown and this isn't helping you.

So we stood off Nicollet Mall but we did it. We had...I don't remember how many women, and we did pay them--I don't remember how much, not very much. I was down there handing out the paper and it was interesting to see. I don't think there were very many who knew the paper at that point, and the difference in the reception. Some of the men would not touch the paper. They drew back...

**KB:** They knew it was a women's paper.

**MS:** It was a women's paper and I think that they thought it was either gay or lesbian. It wasn't just, "Oh, no thanks." Some people don't want it another thing to carry. I understand that. But there was a real revulsion that I saw that was kind of scary. It confirmed in my mind that we had a lot of work to do! [laughter] I do remember that.

**KB:** That's a good story. I hadn't heard that one.

**MS:** Well, I remember that one.

**KB:** Well, you talked about some of the causes that the Minnesota Women's Press suggested to you. I'm assuming that out there in the world there were other women's presses that were trying to combat some of the same issues. Do you have any knowledge of that area?

**MS:** About ten years ago, on one of the trips that I took--driving trips with my husband--I was able to stop in a couple of places. In Denver, and in Salt Lake City and then again down in San Diego, I met with women who were working on women's newspapers. I understand that the one in Utah is still going, the one in Denver has folded. The emphasis in Denver was interesting. She shook her head at what I showed her our paper looked like...because theirs was much flashier. It focused on fashion; there were very posh ads. Their main event, when I talked about a celebration, was to have a benefit that city officials were invited to. It was a very pricey per person kind of thing.

...Very different from what we were doing. It confirmed in my mind that what we were doing in Minnesota was the important work. It wasn't just an adjunct...I felt their paper was sort of an adjunct to sort of a glorified "women's section." Their paper no longer exists. Maybe they were subsumed into the regular paper.

Then in Utah... When I met with the woman who was running that paper--small office, very thoughtful woman. I couldn't imagine in Utah with the climate about women that they had there, that there would be any market at all for the kind of issues that they raised. It was much more similar to our paper in terms of the content, what was appropriate, and again the women's point of view. She said, every time the legislature met and passed another law that was oppressive or was another way of keeping women "in their place", she said their subscription rate went up. She said there is a need. And she said, "We will not give up." They had been in business longer than we had at that time, so they were not giving up. I felt that their purpose and ours was much more simpatico.

The one in San Diego... I've been there recently and they still have this women's paper, but it is much more oriented towards ads and fashion. Yes, there are some articles written by women. I don't think it has the guts that our paper has. I never see anything about the abortion issue or sexual harassment that has quite the punch to it--the sort of no nonsense attitude that I think our paper has...Minnesota Women's Press has.

**KB:** I think that you mentioned before the interview that you attended a "Women's Press" conference at one point. Could you talk a little bit about that?

**MS:** Yes. That was an attempt to get together the women's presses across the country. It was attended by a lot of women who were involved in some kind of a women's newspaper. The thing I remember about that is there were discussion groups on how to balance advertising with editorial. That I think is always an issue--that the content of the paper was not there to support whatever ads were being run. I remember that very distinctly--that that was one of the discussion groups I was in. At that point the women shared how they set up their schedule for the year, naming their themes so that could gear their advertising focus and so on. So it was kind of a nuts and bolts sort of thing. They were all very hard working. None of them made very much money, I remember that.

**KB:** What was the year of this?

**MS:** That might have been about ten years ago. I did not come away with anything that I thought was a real “ah-ha” moment. I think it was a sharing of the kinds of issues and problems that a women’s newspaper is going to have.

**KB:** Do you know if that organization still exists?

**MS:** I don’t think they’ve ever had another one. I don’t think so. A lot of the problems with these conferences is the money to run that. You can have it in a certain part of the country. I used always my own money to go there. But how many newspapers could afford to send a couple of people to a conference like that, first of all. And then to charge the kind of money to attend the conference, that it would take to pay for the whole thing. I did a lot of conference work for the Minneapolis schools and so I know what’s involved. It’s a costly thing. So unless there was some way to underwrite it from a company or something like that... I don’t know.

**KB:** Did you get the sense that most of these newspapers were profit or non-profit organizations.

**MS:** I think they were profit, but they weren’t making any money.

**KB:** Do you think that’s a significant aspect of the Minnesota Women's Press, that it is for-profit?

**MS:** Yes, oh yes. Well, early on, whoever the women were who decided on the initial policy and decided that question, I buy into totally what they said. That is that they wanted to prove or establish that this kind of enterprise could make money. That to do it as a non-profit was to cop-out from the beginning--that women writing about women and women’s issues would not make it, that you’d have to do it non-profit. There are times when I wish it were non-profit because then we could go out and ask people to donate money. But that’s not what they wanted and I totally agree with that. I think that makes all the sense in the world to run it as a moneymaking enterprise, and to hang in there with that notion. So I think that’s the way to go.

**KB:** Okay. Are you...do you consider yourself a feminist?

**MS:** Yeah. I do. And it’s like...when you and I talked before we started the tape...this whole business of naming is so important. I often read a woman saying, "Well I didn’t know I was a feminist. It was before feminism, we didn’t call it that." So the condition existed. The feelings, the ideas, the notions about whatever they say feminism is now, that was out there. We just didn’t know what to call it. We had AIDS before we knew what to call it. So giving that a name now...yes! I’m a feminist. And I was feminist from the get go. When I was in school and was so dissatisfied with what we had to read--that there were no women writers. The one women writer that we included in any anthology was Willa Cather--Paul's Story. Wonderful piece and I love Willa Cather--read all her stuff--but she’s the only author that was ever included. Now I’m going back

fifty-five years, sixty, when I was in high school. I'm going back almost sixty years now. So yes, I consider myself a feminist.

**KB:** Do you think of the Minnesota Women's Press as a feminist business?

**MS:** I think of it as a business run by women....by my definition of feminist, yes. But I believe that sometimes when you use that term, people have a notion about what that is, and it's much more confining than I think it ought to be and that it is. So yes...I think they are a feminist newspaper. If you mean by that that it's written by women, women decide what's newsworthy, women write about it from their own viewpoint as they see the world, which is what all the men who are writing do. They write down how they see the world. So, yes, in that regard they're a feminist paper in my thinking.

**KB:** Well, I wonder if you could, as you look back on the time of your involvement with Minnesota Women's Press, if you could talk about what you think are some of the most important changes that have occurred from the first year up to the present.

**MS:** Well, lot more pages in the paper! [Both laugh]. Just in quantity it's grown. We are always over twenty pages, twenty-two pages, and that's just great.

**KB:** How big was it in the beginning?

**MS:** Eight? Ten? We are talking more than doubling in size. ...So just from that standpoint. What's happened is that being around as long as we have, it has received recognition from other establishment organizations, and so major newspapers quote us, which is interesting. That's really changed. Whereas before they wouldn't even know who we were. I think some of the women who have written and are writing now for the "Women's Press" are also writing for "major" publications--so called major. So there is much more recognition, credibility coming to the paper and I think that's increased even more recently from the beginning.

There are still people who haven't heard of the Minnesota Women's Press, which totally amazes me. Maybe from Mollie and Glenda you found out some of the names they considered early on for the paper, which is a fun list of names to go through. But the Minnesota Women's Press I thought--and I think they agree--it was a really good idea to include the whole state and to identify it with the state. It isn't just Minneapolis or St. Paul.

...And it isn't just women. One of the things that I think the world has to move toward is establishing those so-called "women's issues" as issues of being human on this earth. So we don't want to be just a women's paper because that immediately conjures... So it's for everybody. It is for every thinking, feeling person who cares about these issues that are across the board, regardless of what your background is economically, socially, gender wise, sexual preference--these are basic human issues. That's what I see the paper addressing and including when they called it Minnesota Women's Press.

One other event that we did was an oral history project.

**KB:** You did! [Laughing]

**MS:** I'll have to tell you about that one.

**KB:** Yes.

**MS:** It was my brainstorm that we would get ourselves in the--I think this was for our tenth anniversary--in the Guinness Book of Records. We would have a 'read-a-thon'. We would go for three days and three nights, and we would have different women coming in and reading from past issues of the paper to sort of record, from the beginning, what it was that we had put into the paper.

Well, Linda Grubish [sales staff], when you talk to her--you need to talk to her because she was in charge of it--this wonderful, wonderful young woman who we went through hell.... But it turned out that we couldn't go through the night...it couldn't be a real marathon. But we did have that tape recorder going for three days and had women lined up to come in and read...five minutes, ten minutes, or whatever from whatever issue from the paper.

**KB:** Did you start at the first page?

**MS:** At the beginning, we went all the way through. And do you know what was scary about that whole thing? That the issues that were in the first issue of the paper were still the issues of the latter.

**KB:** Oh....

**MS:** Now we could see that there had been some movement. But I will tell you it was a very sobering event. The women who came...we got such fabulous feedback from the women who participated. Linda was really good; she'll have the names of some of the prominent women broadcasters who came in. We had authors. My friend Faith Sullivan came in. I brought my whole book group in. It was very moving. It was very moving.

**KB:** So each person came in and read for five minutes.

**MS:** Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes...whatever they wanted to sign up for. So my book group, we signed up for an hour, there were six of us and we said we would take this hour and just read and fill it up. So that was another oral history project. It never made the Guinness Book of World Records, but I think everybody who was involved really enjoyed it a lot.

**KB:** So just to fill out my knowledge on it, you read how far into the history? How many issues did you read?

**MS:** Well, we covered right up to the present time at that time, which was like ten years. They had picked a certain sort of telling articles, I think, from different sections of the paper. Linda will be able to tell you how that was done.

**KB:** Okay. I hadn't heard about that one.

**MS:** Okay. Well, I don't know why they didn't remember that, but that was one of the things.

**KB:** Well, it sounds like you're almost the creative muse here. You come up with a lot of interesting ideas! [Both laughing]

**MS:** Well part of the problem is that these women are all working at the pace of three women, and then you come in and say, "Well why don't we do this!" And they all sort of shake their head, "Oh, here she comes again with another...how are we going to get this done?"... kind of thing. Which is one reason that I do the luncheons, because they don't take the time or the money--and they don't have the energy or the time. So it's just something that I can do. One of the few ideas I've come up with that I manage to be able to do by myself.

**KB:** Describe the last lunch. Talk about the last lunch. We're kind of jumping around here.

**MS:** It's always down in the library. For the last few years we'd go downstairs in the library and I bring in the food. We set up the tables. What did we have? We had lasagna with salad and bread and dessert, and whatever to drink. Then Mollie usually has us tell about what do we remember about being ten years old, or thirteen years old--last year it was fourteen years old. What do we remember about being fourteen?

These are these wonderful stories. We laugh and we cry. It's just absolutely the most wonderful thing. Running a tape recorder there of what these women remember at fourteen would have been a revelation. I mean, there's a very high trust level. People say really what they feel, and feel that they can say what they feel...really being trusted.

Then generally, Carol Schuldt [office manager], who's another person you'll be talking to, I know. She comes up with some tune, and has rewritten the words so that they correspond to something about the Minnesota Women's Press. It's always a lot of fun to sing that song. And that's about it. It's over the lunch hour and very quiet, not a lot of balloons or anything like that. We try to fit it in. So that was the last one.

**KB:** Interesting. Well, one of the things you were talking about is changes. You talked a little bit about changes to the paper. How about changes to the organization itself...Minnesota Women's Press, Inc.?

**MS:** Well, let's see. One is that I think they have... The ones who are here all the time know a little more about this... Sitting out on the outside kind of looking in as a person who isn't here everyday--as a shareholder--they get paid more. It is a viable job in terms of money and the kind of benefits that the women are given. I mean it. I think that's a really big thing, and that's something the paper's been committed to and the shareholders have been committed to. ...And saying the most important thing is that the women who work here are compensated competitively. They could make more money elsewhere I'm sure, but nevertheless it's very satisfying I know, for them to be here so that's a big part of it.

The other changes that I've seen are the branching out that they've done. Again there would be others who would know more specifically what that is.

**KB:** But just from your own perspective....

**MS:** I love the trips they're doing with the women with the book focus. They go to Maine to study the Maine authors, and they go down to Tucson, and they go to England, and I love that. I think that is just so exciting! I really like that a lot.

I had suggested once that we be the base for an Elderhostel, which is an organization that I don't know if you're familiar with. I thought that that would be fun for the "Women's Press" to offer an Elderhostel and maybe list it under in affiliation with the University of Minnesota in some way. But there are a lot of details to working that out and frankly I think that what they're doing with the book groups is just the same. That's a bigger change that's come about.

I know in terms of some of the management things...this is a big operation. They've expanded physically, where it's located--added rooms and space and equipment. So it's very impressive to walk in here. This is not a fly-by-night operation. So those are some of the things that I just look at and am aware of that has changed over the years.

It's hard, I think, to keep that commitment, to keep it in mind that whatever they're about is accessible to all women--regardless of what their background may be, what their socioeconomic level may be--but that it be there for everyone. So a lot of the things that we could be doing that would be more showy, more glamorous, more publicity oriented are shied away from simply because when you examine them in the light of what you really want to accomplish, it doesn't meet the criteria. So, that's something they stay true to and I appreciate that.

**KB:** Well, what are...what do you think are some of the biggest problems that the Minnesota Women's Press has encountered over the period of your involvement.

**MS:** Lack of money! [Laughter] I'm not really one of these people who believes that money solves all problems, but I think when you have a good cause, when you have

committed people, one of the ingredients that is necessary--but not sufficient--is money. I would say it would be wonderful if they had money to do all that they want to do.

I read this somewhere just recently and I wish I could remember... Oh, I know, it was Reinhold Neiburh [theologian], and this is only the first part of the quote. He said you cannot accomplish in your lifetime what you want to accomplish, so you need to hope that what comes after you will carry on what you're doing. Now I'm badly paraphrasing what he said, but I realize that now in a way that I didn't understand when I was teaching school. I thought, "It has to be done now. Why can't they see we have to do this and we have to do that." I was very impatient. Somehow when I read those words, that gave me a lot of hope, because I don't have to do it all.

And the Minnesota Women's Press doesn't have to do it all. So if they don't have the money, they have pointed a direction, and they are bringing up a generation of women, and talking to a generation of women that can come in and fill the shoes and carry on. Somehow I got a lot of encouragement out of that little saying.

**KB:** Yeah, very nice. What hasn't the Minnesota Women's Press been able to do? Can you think of any specific examples?

**MS:** Well, let's see. Just off the top of my head now--but I think about this every once in a while... Minnesota! I would love every single library, city office, in the state of Minnesota to have a stack of these. Now that takes some doing. Now they are in a lot of places and we do send the paper to some wonderful, exotic places in the world, as a matter of fact. But to really incorporate the state of Minnesota..... There are a lot of women in the rural areas who could relate to what is happening here in the Cities, which is the main focus of the paper. It draws on women in the immediate Twin City area. So that's one thing, if we had the money to hire a couple of people or whatever. I haven't thought through what kind of a business plan that would require, but I would love to see that--to get that word out there. So that's one thing. It takes money to do it--you have to hire the people and pay the freight and manage the project. So that would be one thing.

**KB:** Okay. Any other problems besides money that you see? ...That they've either faced or had to deal with.

**MS:** I don't know. Every time I turn around there's another intern--another person volunteering. So I can't really say that bringing others on board is a problem. I think there's an attraction for a lot of women to come work at the "Women's Press", or be volunteers. I don't really know because I'm not the one getting the volunteers so I'm not sure about that.

**KB:** How about their reputation in the community?

**MS:** I think their reputation has gone up--by that I mean being more widely recognized. It has resonated in a lot of places and I think there are a lot of women who like the paper now who hadn't heard of it...much, much, much more so than of course at the beginning.

There is a lull in the women's movement, there's no question about that. How that has affected the paper, I can't really say because the paper doesn't recognize it. [laughs] They simply do their thing and say what they have to say and get it out there.

I wish I could say that because of the "Women's Press" there wasn't a lull, but there is, there is. There is that notion that somehow that's been done and now we're going on to something else. I'm not sure what else, but you know... But it is, as I said, more than a lifetime project. I think that because I personally now can feel that--I mean intellectually I could say it and recognize that I understand the words--but to understand internally that I'm not going to see in my lifetime all that I want to see. As long as I am moving in that direction, and that's what I see the paper--I see the paper moving in that direction. Yes, there are those glitches when it looks like we're going backwards instead of forwards--but there is that buoyancy to the movement that I see here.

And I'll tell you one thing...when I need cheering up this is where I come.

**KB:** Oh, really.

**MS:** I come to the bookstore. I come and talk to a couple of people. Carol is usually here. I run into Linda...I love coming to a place where I don't have to start from ground zero with what I want to say. ...That's that trust level that I was talking about. Where I can come in and I'm immediately understood. I don't have to go back and explain or carefully word...I can simply say what I want to say and I know that these women understand. ...Because we've got that common base somehow. Even though we're all different in our...but there is that common ground, I guess is all I can call it. ...That understanding. It's like my book group. I don't know if you are in a book group....

**KB:** I'm a member of a book group.

**MS:** You understand then...

**KB:** Talk to me about it.

**MS:** I belong to two. The one I belong to that is all women, I can go and say what I want to say. It is wonderful because I don't have to back up, I don't have to worry about stepping on somebody's toes or saying something that's too far out, or too... Maybe it's the feeling part of the message that has more credibility with a group of women than with a group of men and women. That mixture there... Women validate feeling rather than diminish it. I realize that's a pretty blanket statement, but that's generally true, that's generally true. So, I love coming here.

**KB:** Well, talk more about how this place *as a business* differs from other businesses.

**MS:** Oh. Well, let's see. I'm trying to think of my involvement with any other businesses. I find that kind of a hard comparison to make. In terms of what I get here, I can never walk in without buying a book. I always find a book I want. I like picking up the Minnesota Women's Press wherever I am, so the product of the business is one of my favorite things. And the women... As I said, I love coming here because of the ambiance and the people here. But comparing it to any other kind of business, I guess I can't. I guess it's hard.

**KB:** Okay. Well you were talking a little bit about changes and problems. Now if you can convert that to a more positive [focus]...think about those things that have happened over the term of your involvement that have been wonderful successes. [Things] that you can look back and say, "That did it." Or, "That might do it." Or, "This is wonderful."

**MS:** This is not a good perspective for me because I tend to be very pessimistic, very cynical--and to view anything that might possibly have worked as being very suspect. [laughter]

**KB:** ....The greatest successes as you think about them.

**MS:** Again I sound like such a moneybags, but I think one of the things, one of the big things was the first year the paper made money and returned a dividend to the shareholders. I think that was real milestone. That was one of the things they set out to do. It was to create a business run by women, for women, about women that would meet that business world criteria, namely giving dividends to shareholders and at the same time giving more money to their personnel, staff. There were some benefit packages, health things kind of incorporated. So I think that was a milestone, and I think that's a success. I had no influence on that so I can't claim any credit. But I do think that it was a milestone for the paper to apply the traditional business world criteria, and not come up wanting. I think that was a really important part of it. So that's a milestone.

**KB:** Okay. Great!

**MS:** In terms of influencing the issues... I think there would be others in the paper who will have done some analysis of [that]. They report every once in a while how many times a female's name is mentioned on the front page of a paper and compare that... There might be more that we might take some credit for influencing that or not. But that kind of influence on other media... I'm not sure. I'm not sure. I think those are one of those things that have to go beyond my lifetime to be accomplished.

**KB:** Okay. Can you tell me what you think are three or four of the most important values of the Minnesota Women's Press.

**MS:** Okay. Let's see. Ai-yi-yi.... I think we should stop for a minute while I think.

**MS:** One of the values they hold is that ordinary women lead extraordinary lives and that that is what they want to tell about and write about. I value that. And I see them as an organization that values that.

I also think that what I see as an important value is their recognizing across the board women. Women. Not necessarily the most glamorous, or the most monied, or the most famous, [but] this sort of ordinary woman. ...But more than that, to represent a cross section of women. I know that some of the minority women have some issues with the paper from time to time about it not really including all the minorities. But I see that we have made a real effort to be inclusive. I think that's the operative word there, inclusive. And I value that. I value that.

They value the same issues in the world that I value. Young women and the kind of role model that young women need, and the kind of advice or stories about young women. I like that focus. There is a lot in there to appeal to the younger generation, I think. I don't know how they come by this--I don't know that they're all out picking up the "Women's Press"--but I know that the schools take the "Women's Press". There are those teachers that pick them up and use them as jumping off points for discussions and classroom debate.

**KB:** Really!

**MS:** Yes, yes. And so in that small way I value what you can learn from the paper. It is not to promote people that really don't need any promoting. It is to promote those who are doing what I call good works, and purposeful work, and to describe that and to tell about that in a way that has a lot of credibility. ....A lot of credibility. So I like that.

**KB:** Do you think that the values of the Minnesota Women's Press have changed over the period of your involvement, or have they been constant?

**MS:** In my opinion, the values have not changed. I think that they have been more and more affirmed. What they believed in the beginning, they have more and more affirmed as the years have gone on. That's my feeling. I really feel that. They have been creative and intelligent about the way they have gone about affirming those initial values. It relates back to what I said: it's very hard to stay committed to that, when that is not always the most popular, promotable idea. But I believe that I see them sticking right to what they said in the beginning.

**KB:** Do you think that those values are reflected in the way they interact with employees and staff and shareholders.

**MS:** Oh, yes.

**KB:** Can you talk a little bit about that?

**MS:** Well, I'm not on staff but I will judge from the ambience when you walk in here. When you walk into the bookstore, when you walk in to the rooms, there is a climate that is welcoming. It is free of oppression and it is free of 'should's' and 'should not's'. I think there's a lot of freedom in the way people do their jobs.

I judge also from when I am with them in a group. I see that there is...yes, Mollie and Glenda are in charge, we know that....but that is a position title, that is not a hierarchical kind of stance that they take. There's a lot of give and take among staff and between Glenda and the staff and Mollie and Cynthia [Scott; editor]. That I think is very healthy. So that I feel that the values--what they're trying to promote in the paper--they try to promote in their workplace. Absolutely. Yes.

**KB:** How about their values related to the way they handle earning of the revenue--that sort of thing? Have you noticed their values in that business piece?

**MS:** No, I haven't. I heard at the shareholder's meeting how the employees are compensated for their work. That's gone up, and there are some health benefits and all of that. But I really don't know. I suspect that it's good. You look at the people who have been here; they've been here a long time some of them. There must be something that they've done that they feel satisfied and rewarded.

You know there is a mentality out there now... I have four children who are in the work place and they are much more oriented to the work they like rather than how much they make. One daughter now just took a job for less money because it's going to be work that she wants to do. There is that out there. There's a generation that has seen the rest of us work away at these jobs we didn't like and are saying, "This is my life. I don't want to spend my life in something I don't..."

I suspect that that's part of the motivation here. That the reward these women get from what they're doing more than compensates for what they might make elsewhere. I think they feel adequately rewarded. If they got a pay raise they'd be happy, but I don't think it's an issue, really.

**KB:** Okay. Well I'd like to talk a little bit about now the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press and start out first with what impact you think your relationship with the Minnesota Women's Press has had on you personally.

**MS:** Well, I think I mentioned that I like coming here when I want to feel good....I come in here. So, one impact that the "Women's Press" has had is the individual women I have met here are positive in their thinking. They are similar to what my value system is. So, the individuals I have met are what has impacted me a lot.

The other impact has been--whatever little bit I do here--that when someone asks me--and I've been retired now seventeen years--and people ask me, "Well what are you

doing?" When I mention that I volunteer some time to the Minnesota Women's Press...that has a lot of cache. [laughter]

**KB:** It does!

**MS:** It does. It does. So my friends now and some of my good acquaintances as well and my family all know that that's what I do. There's something that I get out of that. I am validated because I do that. So that's an impact on me personally. And then I always have so much fun. I love it! This is such a good time! I'm always around for the parties, of course...and so that's part of it. But I like that...that fun part of celebrating. And I'm happy celebrating with these women because I'm very proud of what they do and I feel good about what they do. So, it's not just a birthday party that one does because one is obligated at this point. So and so is fifteen, we have to give him a party...you know. I look forward to these celebrations. So, anyway. So that is kind of the impact.

**KB:** How about on the community at large? What kind of an impact do you think Minnesota Women's Press has had? You've talked about this a bit throughout the interview, but if you could spend a little bit more time talking about what that impact meant.

**MS:** I think I mentioned that there are still people who have not heard of the "Women's Press". On the other hand, many, many more people have heard about the "Women's Press" and seek it out and want to read it. So I see that is definitely an impact on the community. It is not a paper that is ignored. It is one that is sought out and read. I think it's read in a lot more places than... Well I know it's distributed more widely, so it's not just in-depth, but it's across a wider group of people. So I think it's had that impact.

There might be some who would be able to talk more about when we...when the paper has raised an issue that then somebody else in another media thinks, "Oh, well maybe we should write about that." I don't remember what those instances were, but I do believe that the media now--the so-called "established media"--pays attention to it, whereas initially I don't think that happened at all. So I think there's been that impact. If it is in Minnesota Women's Press you can quote it and use it in almost any context, whether you're talking to educators or business people.

I think the business directory--I know you'll be talking to somebody about that--has grown by leaps and bounds. ...And the employment section of the paper. I mean those are the kinds of very practical, legitimizing aspects of the paper, that tell me we've had an impact. Because the organizations *look* to us for employment. They want to be in our directory. So, that's a very tangible kind of impact.

**KB:** How about that old phrase "the women's movement." What do you think Minnesota Women's Press has done for that?

**MS:** Boy. Well the "Women's Press" hasn't given up on the Women's Movement...that's what I'd say. [laughter] A lot of people have but we haven't! And that's something to say. Because when it is a popular thing to be "x", it's easy to be "x." It's when the going gets tough, it's when the chips are down that you really know who the dyed in the wool, sincere committed people are--and that's the Minnesota Women's Press. So what they've done is--I say this somewhat facetiously--but honestly they haven't let go. They haven't let go. And I think that's important.

**KB:** Are the chips down now, by the way?

**MS:** Well, in the sense that I think the Women's Movement has... We're struggling to be more than just something that happened and is somehow over. I think we're struggling with that. I think it's up to my generation and others, and the people working for the "Press"--the women there--to keep reminding folks out there that it wasn't always that easy. You couldn't just walk in one woman, and present yourself. There'd been a few people who came ahead of you who maybe didn't get the job but who somehow created the footpath that you can now walk in because it's a little easier.

I mentioned the Holocaust. Now I'm not going to compare the Women's Movement to the Holocaust, but I am using it only in this sense. The Jewish community--those who experienced it, those who are descendants of it--are not going to let that episode in history be forgotten. ...To be reminded of that is a helpful thing to do. In that sense what we are doing at the "Women's Press" is a helpful thing to do: to remind people that these are still issues, they are unresolved, we've got work to do on this. It would be nice if we could be more tenacious about it, but I think in our own way, we have been. I really do. We have never missed an issue. It's always been there. And I think that's something to say. We never had to take a hiatus because we didn't have the wherewithal... It's always been there so that's good.

**KB:** Well, we're actually just about done. What I'd like to ask now is, are there any stories or any other things that you think would be important to talk about before we end the interview? ...That we haven't had the chance to [talk about].

**MS:** You've been very thorough, Kathryn. [laughter] You have reached into all the nooks and crannies. The Guinness Book of Record marathon you will hear more about from Linda. She can tell you all the fiasco's involved with that. You know I really don't have any particular stories to tell. I can't think of any right off hand. If I should think of something later on I will definitely drop you a note.

**KB:** Oh, great! Okay. That would be fine. Well, thank you very much.