

Interview with Mary Ziegenhagen

Interviewed by Kathryn Brewer

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KB: Mary, I wonder if you can start by giving me an overview of how you've been involved with the Minnesota Women's Press over time.

MZ: It's been a fairly brief and sporadic involvement, but I think probably significant. I met with Mollie [Hoben; Co-founder and co-publisher] and Glenda [Martin; Co-founder and co-publisher]--whom I had not met before--the year before they started the newspaper, just to talk about the whole idea about whether the idea was supportable.

I guess Twin Cities Woman [weekly woman's magazine from the 1970s] had shut down and they were going to take a different approach to a women's newspaper. I was newspaper publisher at the time, having started a newspaper for our community in Burnsville. So I met with them then.

Then when the Minnesota Women's Press was three years old I stopped in to see Mollie and Glenda. They asked me to do a business or management consultation, just to look at their operations and give them some feed back on how it looked and what they might do to make it a stronger business. I gave them a written report. I don't happen to have that, but perhaps it is somewhere around. I do remember two or three of the salient facts about that.

Then my other involvement was as a...I was in a book group for a while. That's really about all. I'd stop in and see Mollie every once in a while. When I go to news council meetings, I see Mollie there. I see Glenda here when I stop in. But I live quite a distance from this place. If it were closer to home I'd come more often. I subscribe to the paper from time to time--otherwise I try to pick it up--but I've certainly not seen every edition.

KB: Why don't you tell me a little bit about your background--why Glenda and Mollie wanted to talk to you in the first place back in 1984.

MZ: I had moved to Burnsville in 1970, when David Ziegenhagen and I were returning from the Peace Corp. We had spent much of the 1960s in the Peace Corp--in the Philippines and in Polynesia. While I was in Western Somoa, I remember having some visitors--Peace Corp [volunteers] from Micronesia who were just island hopping. And they were establishing a radio station in Micronesia, and I thought, "What a cushy project!" We were out there building water field toilets. [laughter] And they explained to

me that Micronesia was being prepared for independence--it was a United States territory--and that for democracy to function, you had to have a common information base and a communication system.

Well, when I moved to Burnsville then in 1970, with one small baby and another one about to be born, we looked around. There was no common base of information in this new suburb of Minneapolis/St. Paul. We got involved in some local political stuff and referenda. In utter frustration I remember saying, "I could open the StarTribune [Minneapolis daily newspaper] and find out what went on in Afghanistan yesterday, but I couldn't figure out what happened down there on the corner of Highway 13 and Cliff Road."

People or organizations would have a waste paper drive or a bake sale for some good cause, and we'd hear about when it was over. I learned about a bookstore closing before I even knew it was open. I felt like I was living out in the prairies of North Dakota, you know? This was pioneering all over again.

Then on election night in 1974 I said, "By damn! This town needs a newspaper!" [laughter] That's another whole story. But nevertheless, it was a wonderful time. The national economy was coming out of a recession, and we, as a small business--newspaper business--rode a wave of growth. Both the town we were living in, and the national economy later got into trouble with super inflation. But it was the time to go into business and let it rip!

KB: There were some chains at that point, weren't there? ...Like the Sun Newspaper? Or is that a different era completely.

MZ: No, no. The "Sun" is still published--I mean the "Sun" is still coming out. There was a Sun Newspaper that came to Burnsville but it didn't have much in it. The Dakota County Tribune was a grand old--century old--county newspaper that had the lactation rates of the cows in entire townships. They simply weren't aware of how fast the western part of the county was growing. I just saw new housing developments going up all the time, and it seemed like... I guess I didn't want to live in a town that didn't have a newspaper.

I had no background for this work but it didn't seem all that difficult to me. I'd gone up to the Ely Echo where we went on a canoe trip in the Boundary Waters [northern Minnesota]. I'd stopped in at the Ely Echo in Ely, Minnesota, where they had a new newspaper. It was three or four years old. I just went in and said, "How do you do it? How do you do this?" He said, "Well, you need a camera, and you don't need hot lead and linotype" [used for printing], which was *just* changing. The advantage of being a new business was being able to invest or lease--which is what we did--electronic typesetting equipment. It was small, it was clean, and it was cheap. You could type up stuff, and drive it to a printer, and create a newspaper. That gave you cost advantage over any of your competitors, because you could produce it fairly cheaply.

So we went into business. Then after the paper was just a year or two old--I got a call from the "Minneapolis Star" [daily, morning predecessor to StarTribune] saying they were recruiting. They'd created a new position for a woman: an editorial writer, and she needed to be a feminist, but that couldn't be all she was. She needed to know about other things.

KB: She needed to be a feminist...

MZ: Yes, because they had been...

KB: Fascinating.

MZ: Steve Halmas, God love him--no longer living--was the editor and he had gone to John Cowles for an annual meeting with his publisher. John Cowles said, "If you had three wishes what would they be?" Steve responded that one of his wishes would be to have a woman on the editorial page--because the most important thing going on in America today was the change in the role of women, and that was affecting everything. He said, "We don't have anyone who's able to look at that, and report it, and write columns analyzing and interpreting it."

KB: Exciting opportunity...

MZ: Yes. So he called me. Paul Gelge at the Citizen's League was a pal of his, and Paul lived in Burnsville. When Steve called me, he said, "Paul Gelge says you're the smartest woman in Minnesota." I said, "I've always respected his judgement!" So I went down for an interview, because I'd never been in the building before. I knew nothing about it. And I was offered the job.

Interesting from the feminist point of view is that the woman who was next in line had a Ph.D. in journalism, and had been working nights on the copy desk for ten years. She didn't get it. Little, old inexperienced me created the comfort level that the guys needed. That's all I can say. That was still the old system operating that got me in there.

Following that, there were... I was the first woman in several situations in the Twin Cities. First woman on several boards...Inner Study, which was a health economics policy center, and the start of the Minnesota Newspaper Foundation... They made sure there were women on the board of that. I never lasted very long on any of these. But I sort got the door open, and then made sure there was going to be more than one after me. That has happened and it's been something of a satisfaction to me.

KB: So you continue to operate the newspapers and also the [work] StarTribune then at this point.

MZ: Well let me tell you. I had a real advantage. I did not continue to operate my own newspapers. My husband left his job--David was Director of the Minnesota Mental

Health Association. He left that job and went to run the newspapers. David had a degree in journalism, which was very useful--and had some management experience. [laughter] I went down to StarTribune for two years. That gave our family health insurance benefits--which we badly needed and our own business couldn't provide.

It was a wonderful time at the "Star" [StarTribune]. Everything I wrote was fresh and new at the time. It certainly wouldn't be now. The first column I wrote was about women's basketball. There was a national and a state tournament going on at the University [of Minnesota] at the same time--the first time we'd had such a thing. Title IX [1972 legislation prohibiting sex discrimination in federally assisted educational programs, including sports] had been in the schools not very long at all. Then I wrote about the condition of divorced women, and the statistics and stories of women who had dropped from a middle class or upper-middle class lifestyle to poverty, and whose husbands had gone on to be wealthy and secure.

I wrote about the ERA; the Equal Rights Amendment at that time had run out its first allotment of time to be confirmed across the nation. We were down to the states that had never ratified women's suffrage--somehow needed more time to work there to get the ERA ratified. [laughter] I took an editorial position for the paper that the time needed to be extended. If the ERA was a good idea five years ago, it's still a good idea and we ought to give it whatever time it needs.

What was interesting about that, was I was then sent off to Washington to cover a Congressional Hearing on maternity benefits for working women. While I was gone, the news room erupted and 'marched' on--that's too strong a word--but a number of the members of news team came in to complain to the editorial department about that editorial. They said to extend the time to ratify the ERA is changing the rules in the middle of the game. It's a crazy position; how did we ever take that?

And the men backed it up. They told me about it when I got back. You know it was the "team"--the team supported me and they didn't have to. They could've said, "Well, you know, she's new...and we wanted her to...and that's her department." They didn't. They embraced the position of the paper. I thought that taught me something about loyalty that I really appreciated and understood--and I think it's more common among men than among women. You know, it's a team thing. It's the editorial page and newsroom. If we're a separate team, we'll back up whoever is doing our work. So that was a good experience.

Then I went back to the Current; by then it was no longer the Burnsville Current.

KB: So this was between 1978 and 1980 then?

MZ: I went to work from March 1, 1977 to March 1, 1979--I was at the StarTribune. I also was the first woman to serve on the negotiating team for the Newspaper Guild, and in Union contract. It was six months negotiation, and we did get maternity benefits on

that one. It helped that there had been a recent court decision against 3M about providing parental benefits; that is the way we negotiated that one. It was great experience.

And then I went back to Burnsville. I had kept the title of publisher, but didn't want to get myself in a conflict of interest. By 1979 our paper was doing about a million dollars worth of advertising out of that retail market. A large new shopping mall had opened, and I was in a position of conflict of interest. We were getting advertising in the Burnsville Current from Dayton's and Sears and JC Penny's, and those are customers of the StarTribune. We were in a financial [position], and also had a new editor who made that point. So I left and went back to Burnsville.

At that point we developed more newspapers for the neighboring communities--The Eagan Chronicle, The Apple Valley/Lakeville Countryside, The Prior Lake Clipper and the Bloomington Current. Those newspapers were sold in 1984 when they were nine years old. They were sold to an outside buyer who merged them with some other chains in the area of suburban newspapers. So when Mollie and Glenda called me I was a pretty well known newspaper publisher. It was at a time when few women were visible in certain positions. It wouldn't be outstanding now, but at the time it was. So that's what we came to talk about.

KB: Okay. Well, talk about that meeting a little bit.

MZ: I don't remember a lot about it. I remember encouraging them. I remember thinking the Twin Cities Woman was just a disgrace for being so wasteful. I knew that they had \$250,000 to start with. I knew that Jim Binger was one of their backers. I saw then at the Press Club every time I was there--the center table would be full of the Twin Cities Woman dressed in the latest styles, with perfect hairdo's and fingernails. They were just being visible; they were just being smart and having a grand time playing celebrity journalism, I thought.

We started the Burnsville Current newspapers with six thousand dollars borrowed from family members and one bank. So the prospect of starting business with \$250,000 just seemed to be more lavish than I could imagine. Their story was that they just...they were under capitalized.

KB: There were totally different philosophies of operation as well.

MZ: Of course. Well, they were a fashion magazine, although there was some good stuff in...

KB: Talk a little bit about that though--in terms of your discussion with Glenda and Mollie. Because there was a different philosophy that they were talking about, and perhaps you were able to..

MZ: Yes. We did talk about the extent... I'm sure I told them that the First Amendment guarantees freedom of the press, but it doesn't guarantee that newspapers survive. You need a retail market to do that. Normally you need people of established businesses that will reach an audience through your newspaper. Your newspaper has to be useful to your readers. That to go the fashion route might get you some advertising from Dayton's... It might--or hairdressers or that kind of... You had to decide sort of what the product was going to be.

KB: Did they have a pretty clear idea at that point?

MZ: I don't remember it. They may have had, but I did get the feeling that it was going to be a more sensible operation in terms of controlling costs from the beginning--that they didn't have a lot of money to work with. Mostly what they wanted to do was recognize women who otherwise would never be know--whose stories would never be known. They did want to be useful to women, and I wasn't at all sure beyond that. But I encouraged them to try it.

Also because they had this advantage of starting fresh in the era of electronic typesetting--which made publishing much more possible for people, who twenty years ago wouldn't have had a chance of doing it. So I remember that--just being encouraging. And then sharing whatever information and experience I could.

KB: Do you remember them as being particularly astute from a business stand point or were they approaching it somewhat naively. Do you have any recollection of that?

MZ: I have a much strong recollection three years later--about the time of their third anniversary. I visited them, and as we talked Mollie and Glenda asked if I would do a kind of consultation review of the business--just look at the aspects of it and give them some business advice.

KB: Now, the industry... when you say business do you mean the broader--

MZ: I mean the Minnesota Women's Press.

KB: The Minnesota Women's Press. Okay. Could you describe what the company was like then at that point?

MZ: It was upstairs in the Security Building. It was all in one room. It was pretty dark and grungy. I have to say I was totally confused. They had a strong belief in being a business, but all the behavior was that of a social service agency. Anybody who wondered in and said, "Oh, gee. I'd like to work here", seemed to get on a payroll. [laughter] People who sort of thought they might want to sell ads were employed as ad sales people.

So I mean I recall two recommendations from the consultation at that time. One was to give them some industry norms: financial, dedication, categories--that the newspaper business at that time was real simple. We called it the three P's. You spent about a third of your budget on personnel, about a third on printing, and about a third on postage--because we mailed ours--but it was delivery. However you wanted to work within those categories, that would get you to ninety percent. Then you ought to have a ten- percent profit.

As I recall, the personnel costs were the considerably higher proportion of this operation...

KB: But not because they were getting paid well though, necessarily.

MZ: No, there were so many of them. There were too many, and there wasn't any discipline. There wasn't any sense that anybody had to produce money. So a recommendation was, that you cut down on the sales staff and get somebody who is really serious: who understands marketing, who knows how to sell, who knows how to sell long term packages and contracts. We were also talking about getting a contract with a printer--that you can negotiate a deal that gives you sort of better rates over time with a printer.

But I think my biggest contribution was not even my own idea. It belongs to a dear woman named Millie Potter--no longer living. She was head of the classified ads at the Sun Newspapers. I'd brought her out to Burnsville to do a workshop for our classified ads department. By the way, her son is Leonard Inskip of the "Tribune"--the "Minneapolis Tribune" [StarTribune]. Millie Potter said, "What you do is get the Sunday paper. You read the want ads--you go through them and you circle any of these ads that you want to see in your own newspaper. Then your staff calls those people and says, 'What has been the response from your ad? Look we'd like to tell you about our newspaper. Perhaps you'd like to run it with us.'" We mined those newspaper ads every Sunday.

It seemed to me that Minnesota Women's Press was such a natural--especially for employment ads--for agencies and business that wanted to demonstrate that indeed they were doing affirmative recruiting for women. That would really chunk up the money. And it is the kind of work you could do sitting at your desk. It's not as hard as going and doing outside selling.

KB: Do you remember what their ads looked like at that point--their employment ads? Did they have much?

MZ: Well I thought the whole section was pretty underdeveloped. I think it then did change.

KB: It's such a healthy piece of the business now.

MZ: Yes, I know. It was such a natural. What you're doing when you're selling newspaper advertising is going to advertisers and saying, "We have this audience, if you're putting something on newsprint." Classified ads can be charged at a higher rate than display ads too. There were all kinds of advantages in developing that section.

I also was keenly aware that we--at my own newspapers, at the Burnsville Current--we didn't develop our classified ads until we were a couple of years old. We were more interested in getting the news in and in being an important news product, but the community wanted classified ads. I don't know if we know how to do this. So that's when I brought Millie Potter over to tell us. So that's her idea and I think it's working here. Of course many of those employment ads now are contracts--like the Metro Transit Commission, and a lot of those agencies that really do affirmative recruiting. University of Minnesota is in there often.

So, those are the things I remember: to get control of your costs in terms of personnel, to concentrate on ad sales, and get an outside ad sales person who is experienced and then pay her really well. I said, there were times in our business where the top sales person earned more than the publisher--but we thought it was well worth it--and certainly more than the editor. That's what it took to have a business. And it was hard work.

I would say to people, "Be nice to the sales rep when they come in at the end of the day. That's hard work out there. Everybody's complaining about the paper, and they've got to sell them, and our rates are pretty high. Let's respect them." Then that frees the news staff to do their work. I always kept my office on the newsroom side of the building, and I had a really good partner--business partner in terms of marketing--so we operated in that traditional way of separating news and advertising, but with enormous respect for the advertising work.

KB: You bring such a wonderful perspective on the industry at that point in time. Were most of the community-based newspapers for profit entities? Or were there some non-profits that existed at that time.

MZ: Oh. Let me tell you the ones that I met through the Suburban Newspapers of America and other industry organizations were for-profit papers. I was called upon--as were Mollie and Glenda--I was visited by a number of people who wanted to start a neighborhood newspaper in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Margo Ashmore from West St. Paul--where was it, the Seventh Street--West St. Paul Voice, I think, or the West Side Voice--asked me to come speak to her staff one evening.

KB: She has the Northeaster [community newspaper in Northeast Minneapolis] now.

MZ: Yes, she and Carrie are with the Northeaster.

KB: I know them actually.

MZ: They're wonderful people. Then Janet--the Southside Voice, the airplane noise--Jan Delcaso, wanted to put out Southside Voice in Minneapolis, and actually they put out their first edition in our office. But I'll tell you I couldn't understand how that worked. Non-profit organizations seemed to me to be absolutely nuts in terms of newspaper work. I thought if I had to discuss what we were doing with a board, and get approval, we could never have succeeded. There wasn't *time*, especially wasn't time for people who weren't suffering day to day; there was too much work to be done. We were entering a lively market, and it was tough. Our advantage was we could turn on a dime...

KB: So you couldn't work with a board to establish an overall tone and then just kind of charge forward?

MZ: I knew what my tone was going to be. I'm sorry, but I knew what we were going to do. We were going to deliver. So it was just that difference in ego and personality. I wanted to say...something else came to mind about that...well, it will come back.

KB: So it was... Although there were some non-profits being started, it was primarily a for-profit business then--the community newspapers at that point.

MZ: Yes. I'll tell you what was really innovative was that we were free newspapers. I got a lot of help from the Minnesota Newspapers Association. Bob Shaw was the executive there, and he was very helpful in introducing me to other new publishers--Mike O'Conner at Hastings, and Don Smith at Monticello. They were just wonderful friends. ...And Dave Simpson from up at Elbow Lake. He would get us together just to talk about our business, and then he'd put on a workshop. He was very helpful.

He couldn't quite figure out why we should give it away. We said, "Well, it has to be a free newspaper in order to get the numbers you need for advertising. I do remember talking to Glenda and Mollie about that...that you really need ten to twenty thousand circulation to sell advertising to anyone. If you wait for people to buy subscriptions, you'll have a hundred. Why should anybody advertise in that? So the economics of a new rapidly growing suburb were that we had to be free newspapers.

KB: Do you recall whether the Twin Cities Woman was a free newspaper or not? I don't remember.

MZ: It may have been. It may have been; you picked up in certain locations downtown. We were experimenting with that. In fact, we went to the Legislature and got a law passed that allowed units of government to designate free newspapers in which to publish their legal ads, if the newspaper were otherwise delivering news to the community. Our news hole in the "Current" papers was 50 percent. We were 50 percent advertising and 50 percent news. Most newspapers run something like 27 percent news. But we were really committed to the information function of the paper. So that made the advertising a little expensive.

KB: Well, let's talk a little bit about specialty newspapers then. Because clearly the Minnesota Women's Press approached...was not competitive with any of the other community newspapers, but rather approached a specific segment of the market. Was there much of that going on in the environment of that time as well?

MZ: I don't think so. Since then we've had the Asian Press, and I think there's a Spanish speaking press, and of course fifteen hundred years ago there was a Swedish and Norwegian and German presses... It's sort of deja vu all over again. But in the 1970s, I'm not aware that there were many free papers. There were sporadic efforts to form Minnesota wide publications--either magazines or newspapers. Then there were a couple of newspapers in Minneapolis--one was called the Metropolitan--and they'd last about six editions and shut down. I'm not aware of any special populations...

KB: There was the "Spokesman". I remember that from a long time ago. But frankly I can't tell you whether it's five years...or ten years ago or longer...

MZ: There was the St. Paul Recorder and Minneapolis Spokesman, and they have now merged. The Spokesman Recorder--for the Black community... It's well-respected publisher was Mary Kyle--a wonderful woman no longer living. Yes, those newspapers were around, but I don't think the Minnesota Women's Press had a model. It did seem like a really tough challenge to think about how you were going to package... to create an audience that was cohesive enough.

KB: Try to position the Minnesota Women's Press in the Women's Movement a little bit. I think that would be also interesting to do. It was 1984 so the Women's Movement had been active for quite some time. So was it the right time, do you think?

MZ: I don't know. I think it ran into some of the same problems--which is the Women's Movement is much too varied to have one [voice]. It's just a multi faceted organization, and every new woman's organization that was forming in the 1970s said, "Well, we'll be the umbrella for the state." Well, finally the Women's Consortium [Minnesota Women's Consortium; a coalition of organizations supporting women's rights formed in 1980] sort of did that.

I remember the early consciousness raising groups in my living room in the early 1970s, and women would figure out what they wanted to do. They either wanted to get divorced and move away, wanted to go back to college, they wanted to have a baby...they wanted to stop having babies. Women would get together, tell stories, talk to each other, empathize, and then they'd go take action. I often thought the Minnesota Women's Political Caucus [a branch of the National Women's Political Caucus] was that kind of an organization. I thought sometimes we ought to hire a social worker. [laughter]

The big change that was taking place in the Women's Movement was that--it seems to me culturally in America--women were beginning to feel free to spend their own money. In the early 1970s, we would have women's meetings, and we would argue over whether

to charge a dime for a cup of coffee, because after all women didn't have money. Women could spend money for groceries for the family, or clothing for the kids, but not for themselves.

By 1984, I think some of those good republican women had taken leadership of the Women's Political Caucus and started having fundraisers--you know, \$125.00 for lunch--which would blow us away and they could do it. [laughter] Of course a lot of women were coming out of law school, a lot were coming from medical school...a lot of the well-paid professions. I think there was a big change in money.

The "Women's Press" has been a pretty modest effort it seems to me--and of necessity. ...Because trying to appeal to across the board to women is just extremely difficult.

KB: Well let's talk a little bit about that. Do you have a recollection of how they described the market they wanted to appeal to back in 1984.

MZ: No, I just thought it was everybody.

KB: It was everybody. Just all women....

MZ: I think they were pretty clear about not wanting to appeal only to upper class women--that they did want... In fact it seems to me that there was an emphasis on wanting to find women who were not being recognized.

KB: You were a very sophisticated observer of that paper when it first came out. How well do you think they did that first three years? I'm dividing the world into two segments...the first three years and after.... [laughter]

MZ: I moved away for two of those years. I saw the first year and I thought, "Well this looks good. This is very interesting." I read every word of it. At the third year I had been gone for two years, and I don't think I subscribed while I was living in Maryland. So I came back and looked fresh at it. I can't comment on the content all that much. I remember asking them what was best read, and they said the movie reviews--and I said put them up a little further up front then, so people get satisfaction.

I remember Mollie wanted to mix in--they still do it, this is nontraditional--in their calendar page they mix in what are paid announcements for useful conferences and workshops, along with free ones and unpaid announcements. They wanted them together because it made a cohesive piece of what was going on. In the newspaper business there is usually such a religious attention to the difference between news and advertising, that that was a kind of violation of that rule. I think it worked perfect for this paper and it made a lot of sense. So it's wonderful when you are free enough to make your own decisions, and actually follow your own market and your own readers.

KB: Yes. Well, can you tell me--and perhaps you've addressed this a little bit--but why did Mollie and Glenda call you three years after they'd been in existence? What did they tell you they needed?

MZ: I think I had dropped in to see them. I think I said, "How's business?" [laughter] I usually do. I usually say that when I know there's a woman owning a business, and I'm really interested. They looked tired. And they felt that it just wasn't coming together in the way that they would like it to. They had plenty of people selling ads, but the ads weren't coming in. They were real pleased to have the library, but they just thought it was time for a business evaluation, I guess. I was quite eager to use what I had learned on my Bush Fellowship out at Stanford University's Business School--which was a class in the stages of a business growth and development.

It was just real clear where they were. They had put in all the sweat equity. They had done everything they could in the first stage of business, where everybody's doing everything. It had all the flexibility you could imagine. What they needed was to start acting like they're going to be here ten years from now. Just begin taking...not the hysteria of how do we get out the next edition, but where are we going to be ten years from now and how do we get there?

That just got down to those very simple principles of the norms of the newspaper industry, at that time, were that your budget was divided in three. Thirty percent for personnel, thirty percent for printing, thirty percent for distribution and ten percent profit. I think that helped Mollie enormously. I think that really gave them some numbers to aim at.

KB: Well the other thing that made the "Women's Press" slightly different from any other organizations is the fact that they were trying to do it as a feminist organization. So why don't we talk a little bit about the "Women's Press" as a feminist organization--and we can talk about based on your experiences with other newspapers as well.

MZ: Yes, I have a different definition of feminism. I haven't checked the dictionary, but the definition for me is that men and women are treated equally. I look at the "Women's Press" as a pro-women's organization.

KB: ...As opposed to a feminist organization then.

MZ: Yes. I don't see any men around here. And my definition of a feminist organization--because I think men can be feminists, I think men are feminists, one hired me for an editorial writing job and I was married to another one--was that men and women are treated equally. I've always myself preferred to work in a mixed group. I think it's healthy. In our business we strive to have every job category open to both men and women, and I was constantly attentive that if we were all women in classifieds the next hire would be a man, however we could recruit for that. So we worked it out that

way. So that's my definition of feminism. I think of this as much more a woman's advocate organization.

KB: Do you think that some of the things that they were doing back in...when you gave them some consulting services three years after the company started... Do you think some of those actions, processes they were using, were because of their feminist beliefs? So do you think it then became kind of a clash between business and feminism?

MZ: Well, it was a whirling vortex of co-dependency. [laughter] It really was 'everybody taking care of everybody'. I don't know whether that's feminism or not. I think you could put whatever label...you could put Christianity on it if you want. You can put the label on it.

It was an orientation that was just very well intentioned, and very sensitive, and very careful in terms of wanting to accept everybody who was a woman--and be useful to them. Which I think the paper was and is, but you have to look at your organization... The money isn't limitless. In deciding how you're going to spend your money, and how you're going to get it, you define what you're going to be able to do. Otherwise you can just work yourself to death. And I think they were there.

Every business gets to that point where the owners or the start-ups are exhausted. In my own newspaper that was exactly when I went down to work at the StarTribune. My husband came in and took that business into the next stage. He said, "Oh well. We've got to hire an accountant here. Yes, we've got to lease a van." He made those big tough decisions about money that I was scared of.

So when I think of how they were handling money at the time, I think that was where women were. I think money was scary. Money...you just didn't want to have to think about it. You wanted to believe that good work would be rewarded. Talk to any writer you know--good work may be rewarded, but it can be ignored for most people. [laughter] So I think it was just a view, that if it ever was true, it certainly wasn't....

KB: Contrast that with where people are today... [Where] women are today with regard to issues of money and power and business...

MZ: The whole trend in college education has been a huge sweep to the business schools. Twenty years ago nobody was studying business--we were all in social service, or any useful occupations. It was a much more altruistic, adventuresome society in terms of social needs. So we just have a huge number of educated women accountants, lawyers, financial analysts. So it's very different now.

The work force seems to be much more attuned to credentials overall, so that people in those positions are much more likely to have had some education in it. In the early days, the Minnesota Women's Press was both a product of a new business and a product of the status of women at that time. But it was a transition.

Then I think it was the values of Mollie and Glenda themselves--that they are oriented to service. It confused me; I didn't know why they didn't want to be a non-profit organization. I just didn't understand...if this is how you want to do it, you can get grants.

KB: Did they ever explain that to you?

MZ: No. I remember they had gotten investors in the beginning. They had a group of investors who had pledged certificates of deposit as security against a line of credit at the bank. I remember lecturing them that you've got to pay those women back--you've got to. This business has to reach the point where it's no longer dependent on... Those are investors and they deserve a return on their money. Don't tell me they don't need it. It seemed to me the honest...

KB: Mary, why don't we move forward in time a little bit and talk about your current involvement with Minnesota Women's Press--which I understand is primarily as an occasional reader, and you have been a member of book group as well. Let's start with book group. When did that happen?

MZ: I think it was shortly after the consultation, when the company was about...well they had moved over to this building. So it must have been when the business was about four or five years old. It was not a long involvement, but I was introduced to some books that I would never have otherwise have seen. One was on menstruation--the cultural history of menstrual rituals--and I'm not sure I even completed it. [laughter]

What I remember was that it seemed like a therapy group for Glenda--that she laid out on the table a lot of personal conflicts that I just wasn't all that interested in because I was having my own. I wasn't at a very good place at that time either. It just wasn't very satisfying. I understand that the book groups are highly successful with other people, and that they really appreciated them, but mine was just kind of a... I guess I came to about six or eight sessions and that was the end of it. I didn't sign up for another one.

KB: Okay. Well you've been a reader as well. Why don't we talk a little bit about... Perhaps the best way to do this is to talk about what changes you've observed in the paper, if any. How has the paper developed?

MZ: Well, first of all the graphic design has always, always been good. I think they've updated it probably four or five times, but it's always a good looking paper, as it needs to be if you are going to have serious advertising in it. You can get ads that are produced by the best ad agencies in town and they have to have an environment in which they look good. I've really appreciated how the design has always seemed fresh and alert.

I find the calendar the most interesting of any I read. I find the classified ads, which I read every Sunday in the StarTribune and every time I read the "Women's Press". I find that a very interesting section. In fact, it's kind of a 'cream of the crop' section in

Minnesota Women's Press. You really see some of the best jobs advertised in there, and I like that a lot. I often thought it would be fun to get together a group of women who found jobs through the Minnesota Women's Press.

KB: What a neat idea!

MZ: I suggested it once when they were saying, "How can we form community?"

KB: I should be interviewing someone who's found a job. I hadn't even thought of that.

MZ: I don't know how we'd find them. I suppose you could advertise. Then I like...well, I do like reading about women that I haven't heard of anywhere else, but have interesting stories.

KB: The profiles on the front page?

MZ: Yeah.

KB: Fascinating women in that section, I agree.

MZ: I think it's a really good product. My wish, if I were God, is that it would have more news in it. ...That when things are happening to individual women who are legislators or...a little more on Sharon Sayles Belton [mayor of Minneapolis]. When Marlene Johnson was Lieutenant Governor [of Minnesota] was the time when I did the consultation with the paper... When the paper was three years old.... I remember saying she should have announced her engagement through the Minnesota Women's Press. [laughter]

When I worked at the Minneapolis Star the newsroom was very well integrated, and the Minnesota Supreme Court would release on the "Star's" schedule because Gwen Jones was there to sort of negotiate all that. So instead of the morning paper getting the news, the afternoon paper did. That's my own personal preference for a newspaper, but then I had my own, so... This one...it's not quite so timely. Maybe it can't be if it comes out every two weeks.

KB: Yeah that may be one of the things you have to sacrifice. Do you read the Minnesota Women's Press and other newspapers as a professional newspaper person or as a general reader? Is it possible for you to detach your history of newspaper work from your review of a newspaper?

MZ: Hard to say, because I have read newspapers all my life. I've really been avid and interested in news and public affairs. But I do bring...

KB: You bring your history...

MZ: I do bring that experience. I also recognize we're in a new day--that in many ways I'm obsolete, my experience is obsolete. It may be interesting to a historian but that the world out there is really changing rapidly.

KB: Where is it going?

MZ: Oh, I don't know. I mean it looks like chaos--it looks like it's going in all the wrong directions sometimes. I could get into a snit about everything I worked for all my whole life that didn't happen. [laughter] I don't know but I think that the Internet is just a huge impact on this society. The whole visual communication and electronic communication--it seems to me that radio is getting stronger.

The whole question of the printed word just deserves a lot of meditation, I think. I think we're not sure. We are now in an age that is comparable to the invention of the printing press. The Internet is like the printing press, in its impact, and we don't know how to use it yet. It's just changing everything. Especially information--access to information.... ...The way people interact with their doctors because they can get more information. ...The way they shop. ...The implications for all those trucks running around our neighborhood delivering stuff to us instead of our trooping off to shop in a store. It's just huge. And I'm sure there will be women sites on the Internet. I'm sure they are there now. I think there will be more television--women's focused channels. I'm pretty sure there will always be the printed word, because reading is a pleasure.

KB: Printed word on a sheet of paper as opposed to on a screen.

MZ: Yes, oh yes. ...Entirely different experience. Printed word on something you can hold in your hand, and go back and read again.

KB: Well it is interesting to think of what it does to regionalism as well. Because the world becomes so much smaller, and regional newspapers... Do you see where I'm heading with this? I'm struggling a little bit in saying it...but it's a huge impact there.

MZ: Newspapers do seem to legitimate events--to confirm that something happened, to show that this was true in ways that the ephemeral media do not. Radio and television are just gone--even if you got them on videotape. Maybe when that technology gets a little bit better and gotten really three-dimensional pictures there's something there.

At the present moment, the power of a newspaper clipping for someone who's on a campaign of any kind is really valuable. It impresses people. It gets you grants. It's really important. So I think that's what newspapers can be used for--put a spot-light on something you want to see more of. That's behind the philosophy of this newspaper, I'm sure. Put a spotlight on the extraordinary variety of women that exist--that are just there, and how they talk, and what they do, and how they look.

KB: What do you think the impact of the Minnesota Women's Press has been when everything is said and done...fifteen years later?

MZ: I connected with Mollie more than the publication itself--Mollie as the embodiment of it. I loved her editorial about high-heeled shoes--I've never read another one like it. It was just wonderful saying, "Anytime women get together around a table, the first thing they do it kick their shoes off." Then she wrote about the pain women endure--just automatically almost. I just love the whole shoe revolution. I think that's a great thing! Thank the baby boomers for that.

I think Mollie's willingness to go to public events and represent the "Women's Press" has been hugely important. She asked me about that in the early years--about whether that was a waste of her time--and I thought not. I thought any time you can get on television or radio or in the newspaper in front of an audience--that's good for your business. I know she serves on the Minnesota News Council, and that's not only a prestigious position but the Minnesota News Council does important work when it hears complaints against the media and renders decisions on them. I'm real glad she's there and I'm glad there's a women's presence in a formal way--there are other women on the council, but I like that the "Women's Press" is there.

So I think within the newspaper industry the impact is... The Minnesota Women's Press is present in a serious way. It's not trivial; it's not commercial--overly commercial. It's a serious journalistic effort. I think it's respected for that. So I see that as an impact. I don't see an impact on the politics of the state. I don't see an impact on the economy especially. I think that the largest impacts are within the industry, and then on individual women who find support and encouragement to follow their own inner voices.

KB: Nicely put. Anything else?

MZ: [laughter] I'm remembering now that early in this tape I said I think the Minnesota Women's Press is a fairly modest effort. It's not a modest effort. It's a *heroic* effort.

I would like to see a greater frequency and a greater size. But I think that the slow approach, and the patient approach to this effort has really been remarkable. And that this participation of so many people in it, is just remarkable. And that they're building such a solid foundation, and it's selfless in that approach.

So it's a kind of miracle--but very hard work. I really do appreciate the...what that puts on people. Even the decision of Mollie to step aside, and look at the broader business and extensions--to step aside from the news product--that is really selfless, because that's an ego-satisfying position. Let me tell you, that's an ego satisfying position. It gets you out of shape, but... [laughter]

So I appreciate that, and I just love it that they're fifteen years old. I just love it. So I think that their values are really good ones and it's fascinating that they held it together

long enough for the business to come through. It's because they didn't need a lot of extras. They didn't need status symbols...you know, as owners they didn't need cars to be provided by the company, they didn't need fancy offices. I do see that they've moved from all in one room to individual offices. We did that too. We liked being open at first in our newspaper business, and everybody sat around a table, and then as we got more space it made a lot more sense to...

So it feels like this has been a really good and healthy business that does continue to expand and grow in interesting ways and touches a lot of people. That's what I think.

KB: Great. Thank you very much.

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