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Judy Smith: Okay, so my name is Judy Smith I was born July 4, 1944, in Durant, Oklahoma. It’s been quite a birthday. That’s one of the really positive of having a birthday holiday is that everybody gets off for your party. But sometimes if you don’t particularly appreciate the dynamics of the party, then that can be a little more troubling.

Jack Rowan: My first question to you is to ask, what is it that you see that brought the New Party together? What were the forces at work?

JS: I think at least in Missoula, and I actually think around the country, the same thing was going on. I think the phenomenon in Missoula wasn’t unique. I think there were a number of places where this happened in pretty much the same way. A number of people who’d been working on what we call progressive issues or identity campaign—or whatever phrases we want to use—have been working very hard, but felt like they hadn’t perhaps gained some of the things they were hoping they could gain.

They really were looking at the structures that seemed to stay the same. The people that got elected, the decisions they were making, were not the best they could be. So although you were getting some things done in your own aspect of the movement, whether—I’m a feminist so I was working along on women’s issues and building institutions and doing all these things—still, it was like this other power thing out there; the government and both the local, state, and national still was doing some of the same old bad things. So I’d created my own somewhat alternative universe and did good things in it.

This other thing was still out there in a way that I was concerned about. I think that perception, interestingly, was something that I talked about with some other friends of mine. Should we ever really try to have a bigger conversation with people that are working on their issues? Should environmentalists and feminists and Montana’s people and other people get together and have a conversation? We hadn’t done it. It was something that was just stirring around that you sort of thought about on occasion.

Also watching the city council; it was totally lame. The people that were on there were the lowest common denominator. They really just—the conversations or anything were very poor. Some of the things that they did, they still were at that time talking a little bit about the family definition. Who got to live with each other; it just seemed so retrograde. It was kind of like: Good heavens! This is a progressive community, why do we have such retrograde stuff go on at the city council and the county commission and all of those?
So that was another conversation that was kind of going on among people that I know, which is sort of like the election process or else the people who are actually elected don’t represent us. What do we do about that? So all of that was sitting. I had been reading in The Nation, I can’t even remember some of the things I was reading. These questions are around in the country and people are wondering what to do.

I got a call about coming to someone’s house. There was this conversation that was going to be had about this exact thing. How interesting. “Let’s do it.” And I told a few of my other friends. I said, “Well, I got this call and this person is coming from New York City to talk about this thing, the New Party or whatever it is.” The idea is that it would be a place where all these different progressives would come together and try to link issues and talk about things, but more in this sort of small democracy moving forward; the electoral decision-making side of things instead of the issue, policy side of things that we were used to working on.

“Let’s go and find out about it.” So we all crammed into Jim Fleischman’s and Seki Fatsioni’s (?) house one evening. This happened to be a college buddy of Jim’s who was doing this work in New York. His name was Dan Cantor. (?) He just came and talked about his experience with this idea that perhaps there could be a coming together of different constituencies and it would be a non-spoiler approach to elections. That had always been the old problem, which is to start a third party. What happens? The most retrograde person wins because you pull votes from the better person.

So there’d been sort of an unease about doing a separate party. So people weren’t quite sure what that option looked like. This person said, “You can do it the way we’ve done it in New York, which is fusion politics.” You can actually have your own ballot line and put the same person on, so you don’t take votes away from them. They’re aware that a certain segment of the votes came from a more progressive side, so it pushes them. If nothing else, you just push the whole debate to the left by being around and agitating and seeing what you can do to get people elected. At that time, anyway, very few of us were saying, “Oh, we’ll have our own ballot line and we’ll do our own electing of people.” It was more like, here’s a way to perhaps have some impact and influence by coming together and targeting, in this case, the city council is the thing we started talking about right away because everybody agreed it was incredibly stupid to have that set of people at the city council at that time in Missoula.

So here’s where I’m not going to remember the exact timeframe, but that was a gathering of people. I do remember several of the people that were there, like Craig Sweet. A couple of us ended up as running as New Party candidates and being on the city council. So it was a pretty quick time turnaround there I think where we said, “Okay, if we’re going to do this, let’s jump on it.” We started having pretty regular meetings and recruited some people to run for city council. I remember one of the concepts that really attracted me—and actually Craig talked about this too—is that you’d had a real relationship with the person who was running. So it wasn’t like they were just out there running and you would give them a little money, or do a little door-to-door. You actually met with them and talked issues with them, and then when

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they got elected, you held them accountable by having ongoing discussions with them and giving them ideas.

I remember Craig Sweet at that very first meeting because he had been working with the Democratic Party. He said that he had once thought he’d run. I think this was the election before this one. When he went to the Democratic party they said: “Sure you can run. No one really cares. There’s no platform or anything that you have to deal with.” He got nothing from them. There were no bodies to go help doing the organizing. It was just sort of, “Sure, good luck”—out the door. As opposed to the New Party concept, which is: if you were endorsed by the New Party you got money because we bundled checks. You got bodies because we went out and did doors. You got (?) because various people who knew how to do campaigns all met with each other and talked about it.

So you actually got a rather large package with your endorsement, which is why I think we were so successful off the bat. The folks we endorsed were all folks that had prior interest and experience. All of a sudden we were all right there saying, “Okay, we’ll work for you. We’ll give you money. We’ll make it happen.” Bang, we could get several people in at a time. It wasn’t like a long time, getting one in and then the next one. We got a whole bunch in fairly quickly. That was sort of like, “Oh, wow. Look, it can happen. Look at this.” I think that was, in some ways, such a reinforcing thing that that’s why the New Party kind of had—grew very quickly because all of a sudden we were in these races and were recruiting people to help on races.

We recruited significantly on the campus, but it really wasn’t a campus group. I think that was also an interesting dynamic. Because we had faculty in the New Party from the beginning, I think they helped bring students. So it was actually faculty bringing in some students. A lot of times the students were more graduate students, not so much really young students. Then we had a whole bunch of us that were out in the community that had been doing issue work, coming in with the people that we had.

You immediately had a whole set of people who could meet regularly and fill a room and raise money and have events. So it didn’t take a long time to actually build something that could then be effective and get people elected. That was kind of the first phase. One of the things that I was particularly interested in and thought a lot about—and maybe we’ll swing back around, as I always wanted to see the linkage of the issues. One of the things that we did, I believe it was in that very first round of campaigns, we held a big community meeting on the linking of open space and affordable housing.

Just to say that you don’t have to have one or the other, but you have to have both. Even though they have different constituencies, how do you have both? Poor people deserve open space too. That shouldn’t just be about upper class people keeping their nice little wilderness walk. Affordable housing is very important. It’s in the community’s interest, not just poor people’s interest to have affordable housing. How do you do all of that with limited resources and limited land? So we had things like that where we always tried to be a bridge in some ways.

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between what seemed—in some cases at least—not polar opposite, but issues that weren’t often talked about with each other.

Another one I got really involved in was that whole family definition thing, which I thought was a violation of human rights, and organized around that and brought a different kind of voice than the students. To me, it got too narrow to say it was the students versus the University homeowners, though it was to some degree what it was. Also there were other interests in it, like single moms needed to be able to live with each other and have cheaper rent. There were other issues that needed to be brought up. So we immediately did some work on that.

We were aware that we wanted to link in to different issues that were in the community by showing some of these different constituency ways of going at things. As we went on, we got really involved with the Living Wage. As we got involved with the Living Wage, that brought in larger numbers of players and a great deal of outreach so that, I would guess that’s the time when we were the largest, is when we had an organized ballot campaign and hired people to work on that; did the phone calls, all those kinds of things. So that was a pretty intense time.

Then Montana People’s Action at that time was also much more active and engaged. They were really working that as well. We had had several of our people elected at that time. We have the inside and the outside pressure game—like you had some of your people inside who kept bringing up the issues—and then we had us on the outside, pushing as much as we could to get the issue heard. Then you had, unfortunately, the mayor and some of the other council not being interested in doing it.

It was kind of like, how do you bring the pressure on to at least get done something? That was one of the things that I thought was quite interesting. One side of going and doing party politics for a lot of us was we weren’t used to having to be very pragmatic. We didn’t want to compromise. We didn’t want to make it work for the system. That wasn’t our goal. So all of a sudden you’ve entered into a new arena. So for example with the Living Wage campaign, I remember having a conversation right in this office about what would be acceptable as a living wage? Why would we say eight dollars is a living wage? That’s nothing. So, just having these conversations about—well, that’s what you can win. Anyway, back and forth about what you could do. Well, how do you bring this pressure? If we can compromise on this, is it enough? Have we said that we want to be this whole other thing and now we’re just being the same old thing? Those are I think are some of the tensions in the New Party for most people I know. There were a lot of other people that I don’t know.

You had done a lot of issue organizing and then you came into this arena, which almost by definition means that you have to compromise, because you have to do something that’s winnable (sic). What does that mean? So you have to look for candidates that are electable. That was one of the interesting experiences that we had in the New Party was, who’s electable?
Depending on what ward they’re from, it’s different. So somebody might be very electable, like Jim McGrath might be very electable at that time, although he couldn’t be elected now.

Someone else like Jim could never have been elected from Ward 4 or 5. You read those things and you figure out who’s possible and where your strengths are and how you work those. Then, what kind of policies you can do. So Jim McGrath could do the Affordable Housing policy. He set up an Affordable Housing subcommittee. He did a lot of hearings, brought a lot of policy, but he couldn’t do the Living Wage policy. He couldn’t get that done. Trying to understand and think through some of that, for a lot of it was kind of like, is this really it? Is this how you do electoral politics? What does it mean?

I think that’s where it kind of—the New Party built up, got people elected, did some good issue work, did the Living Wage campaign. Didn’t win it as a ballot initiative, but “won it” in the conversation with this council so that something got passed that had some impact. That was probably the largest time, and went on to some degree. Well, two things happened; one is the other side organized very heavily against us. I’ll talk about more of that in a minute.

The second thing was that I also think there was some—there’s a life cycle to certain things. There was a certain amount of life cycle to some of us going, “Okay we see this. We understand what it is, but what do you really do after this?” You can probably get people elected to the city council. You might even get a few people elected to the state legislature. So what? What does that mean? How do you really change policy?

So these are questions that people continually ask. In my opinion, a lot of the initial exuberance, exhilaration around, “Oh wow, we can do this!”—and I learned how to do campaigns. I never thought I wanted do, but I certainly know how to do them. Then you’re at this place: “Well, okay, here we are.” So I think partially the momentum started to wear out of the set of people.

I think I talked to Wren, who sometimes sits at that desk, and she was a young woman who came to the party and she was actually one of the co-coordinators for a while. I think that was one of the problems, is we didn’t do enough leadership development to bring in the next set of folks and another generation. We didn’t do enough media work to claim our own message in the community. Between all that, it just became harder and harder to keep the energy.

So I think by the end, we had meetings and people would come. But it would be the same people. We might be able to elect somebody, but the other side had so mobilized. And interestingly, who had mobilized and the level of hostility that there was to us, that it was almost like, why is this worth continuing to do? I think what happened was a bell curve. We hit that high point and then there was a sliding off from “a.” Just people getting tired and having done a lot of that. Maybe not seeing maybe if it was the political answer they had originally thought it was.

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Then the hostility that just came from certain people. People started going, “Is this really the best thing, then? Maybe we need to move on to something else?” I very much remember that meeting, which was over at the Children’s Theater. We had this big debate about, “Okay, what do we do? Do we say that the New Party is going to be done for now? It can go in hiatus for a while and then we can come back if we want to. But at least for a while, we can take a break. Do people want to become a caucus inside the Democratic Party and be a progressive this or that? What do people want to do?”

That was a very long conversation. In my memory of this, we said overall if there are people who still want to make this happen, they need to stand up here in the front and say what their energy is and say how it can happen. Really there wasn’t—that didn’t happen. In some ways it was an understanding that the energy to just pull that and keep it going didn’t sit there. The people who were there, all were ready to think about something else, and there wasn’t a new core of people that said, “No. We like this. This is the answer.”

The other thing about the New Party is that we all liked the idea of parties. That was part of the game. A party that likes to party. That was one of the lines people used. So we used to have pretty good parties. We said that we had to have a closing party, if nothing else; this bash. So we did that. That was another thing that we planned. We had this big party. We were going to say all of these wonderful things that we did, which we did. We were going to say that we all still really like each other, which we do. Then we were going to say that we’re just taking a break and we don’t know.

If there’s another set of people coming in and saying they want to resurrect the Missoula New Party—more power to them, and take it away. It was in my basement for a while. All of this stuff just sat in my basement. It was like, you can have it. It’s fine with us. I think that—in my mind—is kind of what happened with the New Party.

There’s I’m sure other little things we could talk about there. But I think it ran a course, and if you don’t learn how to bring in new people in a really organized and systematic way, and you don’t learn how to counter the hostility that comes out in response to you, again in an organized and systematic way, I think the push back of energy is so much that people begin to lose the sense that this is the best way to go. So everybody starts looking for new ideas. It sort of dissipates. And that’s what happened.

We hit a time when we could do quite a bit, and we were all very jazzed about that. Then as it became harder to do the thing, it became: “Oh, is this really how we’re going to spend our energy? Do we really want to sit and talk about running electoral campaigns?” I guess the other thing that I’ll elaborate slightly is, I have to say, I don’t know why, but I was a little surprised at the hostility toward the New Party.

The goals of it were so, in my opinion, just old America flag-waving stuff: equality, freedom, democracy—all those words. Now tucked around the side of it occasionally in somebody’s
mouth would be something that somebody could think was socialist. That really wasn’t what the discussion was. Stuff like now, it’s like; of course, that’s what everybody talks about. So that’s one of those things that you laugh about is the stuff that someone was saying, “You’re so radical.” Then you’re like, “No, that’s what everybody is saying.” Who knows?

Some of what happened was red baiting. Some of it was absolutely just pulling old, “Oh, they’re socialists. They’re communists. We hate them,” stuff. One of the things that surprised me a little more—but now that I think about it, I understand it—is the Democratic Party people—especially the more, I would say closer to us—got really mad at us. I was in some meetings with the so-called progressive side of the Democratic Party, which is sort of like—I’m going, “If you’re going to be like this, why would I ever want to be in your party? You are being so horrid.”

It was interesting that the sense that the Democratic Party was saying to us, “It’s your fault that we’re losing. You’re bad. You’re taking energy from us. You don’t have any right to do this.” We’re like, “No, we’re not even forming a third party that takes votes from you. That’s not the model at all. What’s the deal?” Because I hadn’t done a lot of political work with parties, I didn’t understand the nature of the political class in this country.

This is sort of a theoretical conversation. I don’t know if this is what you want. My experience now, is that there is a set of people who just sort of join the political class, starting with ASUM equivalent and move right into the parties. They think that’s their little turf. It’s almost like they own the arena and they can give their friends the jobs. If you’re out here doing this thing, it’s sort of like you’re getting in their way and they don’t want you to do it. I wasn’t quite as aware of that when I was out here agitating, doing other things. Once we got closer to it, I did see it. You can see it in Missoula to this day where some people think they own those seats.

If you would propose someone else in the primary, which is something that the New Party does—and I still do—they’re mad at you. You’re like, “It’s a primary. Isn’t that the idea; to have two people with different views in the primary?”

“No, that’s not the idea. The idea is this is who the Democratic Party is going to choose.”

Oh, look at Tester and Morrison. That’s a very good example, we won’t go there. The party people think they own the territory and when something else comes into it, they get very upset. There was a lot of hostility to us from people that I thought would be happy we were there; that something different was happening from the progressive side and they weren’t. After you get a whole lot of negativity around and around, and the thing that you accomplish, you wonder if you really accomplished a whole lot—like getting half of the council—but you can’t really get much more because of the way the city is laid out. Then there’s polarization. Then it’s back and forth, back and forth with not much happening. It’s kind of like, “Maybe this isn’t the way to get what you want done.” I think that’s my close on that.
JR: When you talked about part of what fed to the growth of the organization—and you talked a little bit about this—but I was wondering if you’d expand a little bit more on how the definition of winning changed over time? From what I understand, there was like the Campbells, which are like the old school Democrats, as well as people like yourself who hadn’t been active in the political class before. How did those discussions and definitions develop over time in terms of; how do we know what we’ve accomplished? Is this a compromise, or is this winning?

JS: I should drop back and say, the Campbells are an interesting example. Doug Campbell really is an amazing person. He is not at all typical of his own group, like the “beak cutters” of America, or whatever he is. He was always interested in something new or whatever else was happening. So he was a very unusual player. It’s not surprising to me that he was very proud that he was a New Party member. This old guy would get up somewhere after we’d been called all these horrible names and say, “I’m a New Party member.” The rest of us were like, “Oh Doug.”

Back to that point, one of the great things in my mind—but was also one of the trials and tribulations—was that we consciously brought together groups of people that didn’t in the past work with each other. I’ll just use myself as an example. Other people will tell you this too. I’m from a background that unions never were a part of. I have very little understanding and respect for just supporting something because the union supports it. Well there were some people in the room that that was their religion. The union says it’s good.

We would have very interesting little discussions around how to put that together because there were times when there was disagreement on that. People in the room couldn’t believe that we’d say, “We don’t care the union’s position on this. We’re not doing it. Or we’re doing it anyway.” That made for long term—some issues we just couldn’t take up because you just couldn’t get it done. Those of us that are feminist came in saying, “We want consensus to be how we work in here. We’re not willing to have votes or supermajorities. We want consensus to be the way we work.”

We had to have that as a big conversation for a very long time because a lot of people weren’t that used to working with it. So since we were working with consensus, you can see that on some issues, if we absolutely didn’t have anyway of getting together, we were going to have to drop those out. So that’s one answer about success. We had to have a way that all the interest groups that were there could figure out how that makes sense. So a lot of the issues were, again, pretty big—Living Wage—things that everybody could agree that’s important, and if we’re going to do it on a local level, what could we really do here? This is another good thing I think about working in—people would take lead from each other. So I would say to some person, “Well you have experience in that. You tell me what a win could look like in that because I don’t know.” So we could actually learn over time to trust each other, which I think is very significant in that experience.
At the beginning, at those first few meetings, we had no basis for really, trust, and trying to talk about consensus and what issues; those were all pretty rocky. But we were saying that we’re doing this because we want this larger thing to happen. We want all together to have some influence. We know separately what we can do already. It’s what can we do together. So I think we had that understanding. Some of us had enough experience to come out and say, “Remember why we’re here? We’re here for this and not for that.”

I think that’s partially what worked, is saying, “What can you get done on some of these bigger issues that we can agree on?” That’s a success. We can get it done. Getting the Living Wage adopted by the city at eight dollars an hour affected maybe 20 people. The only bottom line affect was maybe 20 people. There’s always a spin-off and it becomes a part of the conversation and people care. Sometimes when people say, “Well, what did you accomplish with that?” It’s funny.

It’s very limited if you look at it very technically. If you look at it from changing the debate, helping people understand things, exercising power—that freaked people out—then there’s a huge difference. So it’s all of those things, was the success that you had to talk about. Getting three or four people elected to council. What did that mean? Well again, small if you look at each individual thing, but very large if you look at what seemed to be this sweeping in of this new voice and setting of the agenda.

All of a sudden affordable housing comes in a very different way and the family definition. The status quo people at the chamber, people who were used to coming in and being the people who were listened to weren’t the people who were listened to anymore. That kind of change. That’s an interesting experience to say that Democracy is supposed to be about this. Here’s an experience of Democracy that’s different than it’s been. It can be a very pleasurable thing to have that kind of sense that people who before have never had a voice, you can create a situation where they can stand up and have a voice.

I think all of those are definitions of success. The actual accomplishment was the changing of the debate, and also that sense of empowering of voices that haven’t gotten heard and things that haven’t happened in the past. A lot of things we had to drop away too because we couldn’t come to agreement on them. There wouldn’t have been a way to get them done. Which is one of the realizations that you have about a party is: how do you have a platform? I don’t know if you’ve ever looked at the platform. We came up with a little statement of some kind, very general. They have to be. That’s the level of agreement that people could get to. If we’d ever had a chance to have enough of a state representation or whether we just sat there and debated how to put that into effect in the state of Montana, I don’t know where we would’ve gotten. It was a little easier to think about Missoula.

I think for me, one of the successes personally, is just the learning. I had a very interesting learning from it all about why people believe what they believe, what’s important to them, and how that can be brought into a conversation or not. This sort of thing about electoral politics,
which is something that I hadn’t spent a lot of time on—coming to a better understanding of that, and why it works the way it does. The sense of when you’re governing, what does that mean to govern? We talked a little bit about that too. We wanted these people who were in there to be accountable to us. They can’t just govern in the sense of just for us.

You get this sense of, “Well, the New Party isn’t all of the community.” Do we want our people just to represent our view or do they have to represent the community? So you just get these different kinds of understandings and learnings about what it would actually mean if people that you agreed with had power in the country, and how things would be different. Those are all exciting in their own way and revealing.

Then you realize how difficult it would be too. Most revolutions that have happened in my lifetime, the people get in and they don’t live up to the expectations of the people who put them there. Sometimes there’s another revolution. Sometimes it’s just disappointment. Sometimes no, it’s not going to be so straightforward. Just at the city level we found that out.

JR: We’re pretty close to—so we’re going to go ahead—

[End of Side A]
JR: There are several questions that are going to (unintelligible), but one that I think is coming up right now is that—you’ve eluded to this a few times and you’ve talked a little bit about the opposition—even the progressive Democratic Party—and some of these groups that began to organize in opposition to the New Party. From your experience obviously you (unintelligible) perspective and experience, what do you think brought about that the (unintelligible) response to the New Party, and how did it impact the party? Even just the weekly interaction?

JS: I think for some people that were used to running things, they felt that was slipping away from them. They couldn’t do that anymore. This is old analysis of when the ruling class wakes up and realizes, “Oh, by definition we don’t get to rule.” In some cases they don’t quite know what to do. I think at first, this whole thing of laughing, or thinking it’s irrelevant or silly, who are these people?

Then, after a while, once the power does shift a little bit, like some things are brought up and they don’t win their point of views on it—I’m thinking of the chamber right now. At first I don’t think they paid a lot of attention to us. Then it goes back to that thing of—I don’t know if hippie went out, but, “These are these alternative ‘granolas.’ Those people.” For sure the Living Wage campaign and some of these other things that they were just totally opposed to started gaining momentum and they realized, “Oh my God, this might actually happen.”

Then they were like, “Okay, we’re going to have to organize ourselves and do something about it.” Then they started just coming a lot to the meetings more, and trying to run candidates against the New Party candidates, and bankrolling candidates. So that became more of the issue that you have this...I’m not going to remember the group they formed, but they formed a group to bankroll candidates to run against the New Party people. A lot of it was bigger pieces of money from somewhere else.

They obviously saw that something important to them was shifting away from them. They wanted to buy it back. That was their idea. That was the chamber. The more progressive Democrats, I can have some compassion for them actually, in that I think they had felt that they had put their time in. They had struggled so hard and here we were; we were basically saying that it wasn’t good enough. We were saying that we weren’t willing to jump into that morass with you and be Democrats. We don’t want that. We want to have our other thing over here because we don’t think that is something that’s truthfully good enough. That’s not where we want to put our energy. We want to do more. We don’t think the Democratic Party can accomplish what we want to accomplish. So in some ways it called into question a lot of commitment and energy and whatever they put in there. I sort of understand that.

It’s just an old question about, are you skillful enough to understand that you can integrate with people who are a little to the outside of you, and that you can be stronger with all of you working together, instead of seeing it as a threat to you? Unfortunately, they did see it as a
threat. It happened in other places, it wasn’t just in Missoula where the Democratic Party got very upset with whatever third, more progressive party was coming along. We felt we could get out of it with the fusion thing. It wasn’t just that.

Obviously it wasn’t just the mechanics. It was this identity and psychology of...whatever word you want to use for more progressive than you are. That whole thing was obviously at play there. I can remember a meeting with Dan Kemmis and John Ellingson; all these people that you would think that they were pretty reasonable people. It wasn’t a very pleasant meeting. Obviously we were doing something that they were unhappy with us about. They didn’t want us to do it.

Often enough, the way people treat people that are trying to be more progressive or a third party; they make fun of you. That you’re “pie in the sky,” “silly,” all that stuff. So that’s kind of the dismissive part of this. The other part was that we were scared that we were actually going to accomplish something like the chamber. Or like Warren Little—being Mr. FBI Secret Service, whatever he is—literally running around talking about Communists and being sneaky. All of that was at work. I think it was a mistake on our part that we didn’t seriously confront it.

I think partially it was because we weren’t sure we were going to be long term. We weren’t sure we were going to be a party. We didn’t put money into having paid staff. The staff we had—most volunteered and maybe got paid for 10 hours, and rarely. It just wasn’t a vision of creating an institution like that. It wasn’t something that we thought about like that. Or at least I didn’t. So we’d always say, “Would anybody volunteer to be the media spokesperson, and go write some op-eds, and do this stuff, and push back on this McCarthy stuff, and don’t do this.” We’d be like, “Oh, yeah, that needs to happen, but who’s going to do it?”

So it didn’t happen. That was one of the things I would definitely fault us on if we were looking at the pluses and the minuses; that we really let that build, and didn’t just right up front and calling out and going to the paper and saying, “You can’t discriminate against us on the basis of party. It’s in the Montana constitution.” I mean just go back into that whole frame. But we really didn’t do it. Then you say how it affected our meetings. It’s an interesting thing.

A lot of people didn’t experience it on a day-to-day basis so when they came into the meetings it was kind of a joke for them. For those of us who actually did experience it on a day-to-day basis, it wasn’t funny. My sister Lynn and I had contracted to organize the neighborhood councils for the city. We had all of these people attack us for being New Party members in that experience. I know how to handle it. Obviously I have done political work all my life. It’s just not pleasant. It’s just this negative energy that you have to constantly be pushing back against and saying, “Let’s talk about that. What is the problem with being a New Party member? Do you know what the New Party stands for?”

All of the time I’d be neutralizing something instead of just being able to come in and do my, “Hey, I’m your neighbor, and let’s talk.” I had to go neutralize this before I could do that. Some
people were very consciously doing that because they hated the New Party or at least that’s their line. They would go say that stuff and I’d have to come along and try to neutralize it. So it just made my work a lot harder. I just thought people should take it more seriously.

Unfortunately, I don’t know why, a lot of the people, especially the ones on campus, didn’t affect them the same way. They didn’t have that same price they paid—if you want to say—for the negativity. So for them it was kind of a joke. The people that were calling us names were kind of silly about it. You could make jokes about it and we did. I don’t know that too many people really understood what the day-to-day experience was doing; whittling away, or wearing away, the traction we really had in the community. We could still draw people who would consider themselves progressive, but we wanted to do more than that. We wanted to be actually engaged in the community in a different kind of way. This negativity that we’d encountered kind of drew a circle around us instead of letting us mold in more.

You’ll find that in any kind of progressive activity. There are some people who want to circle around them. They want to be better. They want to be the progressives. There are some people, like myself, as one, who’s always like, “That’s not an answer, to create a circle that we’re in, and showing that we’re the progressives. The answer is that the circle is really big. People will fuse the whole circle with their values and we want to do that.” That got harder to do as a result of the negativity. It still will come up. This New Party stuff will still come up. I’m just totally like, “Oh my God this local government study commission?” It still came up. This woman is actually talking about the New Party.

JR: You talked some about your personal moment and what you gained and what you saw in that experience. What have you drawn from that experience that you would say...there’s a question that I’m having a hard time putting my finger on, but, when you decided that this was something that you wanted to be a part of, what did you see as your role that you could bring to...?

JS: Okay. Well, a couple of things. One is that a lot of my work has been in group process and helping groups work and make decisions. I figured that would be something that I would have to offer because I had done a lot of that professionally, as well as in my political work. I could help facilitate and do thought process. I wanted to do that. I also wanted to represent, as much as possible, the feminist perspective, but bring it into this other conversation that I thought I could do.

While I have had—most of my political experience is working on women’s issues. I started out on the movement in the sixties. I’m very aware of the other stuff that goes on. I just kept myself in that particular branch. I was very aware of a lot of the other stuff. I think here in Missoula, frankly, I haven’t met a lot of people that necessarily have done that. To me, one of the things I brought, I thought, was some awareness of all of that: the history of the sixties and seventies of how people tried to work together, how it didn’t work very well, how we should probably think about how it could work again, and what other efforts had been made.

Judy Smith Interview, OH 400-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
So, some ideas around how some of that could happen. I wanted to bring some of that picture in with it as well. Probably those things. This is a truthful one, although I feel odd about it, I thought—and I still think—if there’s a few of us that are seen as leaders of a particular part of the movement that come into this, then that’s good. So there’s recognition, like, for me, there’s recognition. Here’s a major player in the women’s community that does this. It brings a certain amount of, “Yeah, women are committing to this. Let’s look at that a little differently. It’s not the same old thing that women are not included in, or avoiding, or whatever.” So it was sort of pushing it forward from the women’s constituency side. I think there was some of that that happened in other constituencies too, where the commitment was from people who had some leadership roles and had some experience, and wanted to bring that into the mix as well. That’s kind of what I saw.

JR: (Unintelligible) different issues representing as well as the individual people, this could work (unintelligible) do something. You were one of the people that he mentioned. (Unintelligible) question that I was trying to get at before: in light of what you saw, what you could bring to the organization as you came into it and as it went along, what are some of the things, for you personally, that were most rewarding and most of a struggle to the process of being involved, and helping decide which way to go?

JS: For me, some of the best things were just getting the time to listen to other people talk about what they believed and why. One of the things about being in a movement that’s fragmented is that I could tell you incredibly a lot about the various aspects of the women’s movement. I knew why people believed what they believed, even if I didn’t agree with them. I still knew why.

So I had this whole conversation I understood. A lot of the other conversations I didn’t understand. It was very interesting to me to hear why you said—and because we were coming together, we could ask those kinds of questions, which wouldn’t have happened inside each movement. Because by that time, they’d already had their own language and they didn’t have to tell each other why. Now, I’d be like, “well, why?” to the union people. They’d be, “Don’t tell me just because the union says so. I won’t accept that. Tell me why.”

So you could have these different levels of conversation. That was something that I learned a lot from. From just that kind of—people have their own experience that they bring here. They’re having their own ability to understand things. That expands me and who I am and what I can do. That was good. Also the solidarity that came out of that experience was very good. Again, we all didn’t know the same things. We all didn’t have the same inclination. Solidarity, in a way, was saying, “Okay, if you say that’s what’s acceptable, I’ll join you. I’ll go there. I’ll work on it.”

That’s the kind of solidarity that you rarely find anymore—if ever—in some of the political endeavors, because people have their own little deals that they want to do and they think it’s
more important than anybody else’s little deal. Well this was like, “No we’re all learning together. We don’t know this stuff. This is something that’s kind of a new deal. Let’s just try it out.” So that sense of being this group in it together, trying to get something done and having it work.

I always tell my younger colleagues here, “You know, one of the great things about being my age is that so many things worked for my generation. The Vietnam War, I really believe we stopped that war. We did so many things with the Civil Rights.” All those things we tried and they worked. There’s been complications. It hasn’t turned out exactly like we thought, but we still had those rewards for our work.

The New Party as well. It was a pretty immediate tangible reward for the work. That always is great. It gives you energy. That’s where I think the energy started to lose, is when we didn’t see that before. Where it was becoming a lot of work, and what was the reward for the work? Well, maybe we got someone elected, and maybe someone lost by 14 votes. The negativity and the sort of closing down of conversation that seemed possible: “Where is that reward? Is it worth the energy? Are we really getting something done that we wanted to? Can we get the policies through that we thought we might be able to? Because if we bring it up, it’s the New Party and no one else will think about. Can you really get something done?” So all of that really shut down those sort of positive reasons to keep going. It looked like it was harder and harder to get done the things that we wanted to get done.

The thing about the individual people, for me; I think we kept some of those friendships so that, who I spend my time with in the community, a lot of those people are New Party people. So it’s sort of a funny joke we tell each other. We’re sitting there and there’s like eight of us. We said that, “If they only knew that we were all New Party people sitting here.” While the New Party has gone away, obviously it hasn’t gone away because it was something other than an organization. So, those people are still out here in this community, and they’re still working and making this happen. So, I’ve still carried with me those contacts and the connections, and I have a different understanding of things as a result of that. So that part—whether the New Party itself went on as an organization—didn’t have to go away for me. It was an ongoing positive thing. So those are kind of the positives.

I think one of the disappointments I had—and the way I handled it maybe wasn’t the best—is I was not willing to become the leader or the organizer or the name with the party. I had done that too much already in my life. I didn’t want it. I wanted someone else to do it. And no one ever was going to do it. I don’t know why. There are maybe lots of reasons, but we never had even a set of people that were willing to take on that leadership push roll. A lot of people were coordinating, but then they almost didn’t want to do that.

So if something would happen or someone would call, they’d have to say—there’s a certain amount of leadership energy in something where there’s that forward push from the leaders. I don’t know why. Maybe all of us were too busy and had decided that it wasn’t going to be us.
So it wasn’t anybody. And it wasn’t anybody. It kind of fell on very young part-time coordinators and I really liked some of them too. I felt sorry for them because they were brought in and they didn’t even have one person as a supervisor. It was a group of people that would supervise them. That’s not a good idea. We couldn’t just provide the nuts and bolts structure sometimes that would have made that different. That’s a disappointment. I don’t quite know why. I can say for myself why.

Part of what happened is if you don’t do the organizational building structural stuff, you don’t stay around. It’s different. Since you talked to Fletcher, maybe that’ll help—people like Fletcher sometimes would go nuts. He sort of oriented and took over the books because it’s like, “Oh my God. You have to have something so that you can do the numbers.” So every meeting he would bring the numbers and for a lot of is it’d be like, “Oh, that’s nice John.” You need the “Johns.” For it to have actually become a structure, there had to be more “Johns.” There weren’t. I think that’s why it went away was that people like me were saying, “I don’t want to just have a structure to have a structure. I’m not taken by that. I run these institutions. I have plenty of these structures around me. This needs to be more than that for me. If we can’t get done what we want to get done, I don’t want to just hold on to a structure.” That was kind of my deal.

For whatever reason, no set of people really emerged to push the structure itself. That’s a disappointment. I don’t know if I have too many other disappointments. Obviously I was disappointed that the negativity was as strong as it was because it just tells you something about the fear of change and human beings. It’s something I would prefer not to totally understand because it tells us a lot about what’s going to be possible just in general about change. I had thought Missoula was a little bit more progressive than it turned out to be from my experience with the New Party.

People were more scared than I really thought they would be about it. So that’s disappointing too. There’s a lot of people in Missoula in my experience now that are pretty progressive, but they don’t want to be out here with it. They want to be at home with it. They’ll always be like stealth progressives. It’s kind of like, I don’t like that. The point of being progressive is to be able to be out in public so that you’re moving forward a conversation, and trying to make something happen so that you feel good where you live. So just doing it in your home, and then maybe you’re voting it. I think that’s how Missoula would be described to me. It’s a stealth progressive community. Those are things that come to my mind anyway.

JR: One of the things that Jim had mentioned about you is that, at least the way he saw you, was you were one of the people that was hoping to identify candidates, encouraging people: “No, you can do this. Are you willing to give it a shot?” Do you think that’s an accurate representation? Who else was part of that, and how did that come about? How did the group decide and help to mature people to actually run?

JS: Somewhat organic actually. I do remember this. A group of us still does this. This is where I could still say that there are eight of us still sitting around saying, “You know, we’re all New
Party people.” Basically from the very beginning, what we were doing is saying, “Okay, we have to find people who aren’t the usual candidates, that aren’t part of that political class; that are either part of people’s political movements, or are community members that just haven’t thought about it.”

The only way we knew how to do it was to just start asking people. I can remember the first few meetings; we just made lists of people’s names. We would go talk to them. We put together—one time I know we put together a room of people that we thought represented a different movement, and even some regular Democrats. We said, “Everybody write down names. We’ll just go talk to them and see if they’d be willing to run.” That was part of the problem. We were having such low quality candidates that were for the city and the county that we were getting very retrograde people. So you had to improve the whole candidate pool. That’s kind of what we did. By doing that that way, we sometimes got ourselves in trouble. You’d have several people in that would say, “Okay.” Then you’d have to talk some of them out of it. You had that kind of awkwardness at times.

That was something that I probably took on because to me, that was the key. If you couldn’t get good people to run—and I always tried to find people in those unlikely wards too. We had such trouble doing that. So I would always be willing to spend some time talking to people in Ward 4 or 5 and 6. Six was actually okay for a fair amount of time. It’s getting okay again. Unfortunately [Ward] 2 is another thing.

I think I took that as one of the jobs I felt that I could do, is to try to help find people and bring them in and get them to run, hopefully get them to be people who, for whatever reason, hadn’t thought about it before, and see themselves as people who had something to offer that would be better than what was there. McGrath was very funny. I really appreciated what he did. For the longest time we were having to make up—recruit people and do all this. One time, Jim just walks in and says, “I’m going to be the candidate for [Ward] 2.” We’re all like, “What?” It was almost like he took it upon himself. He didn’t even get recruited. He decided that he was going to do it. So that brought an interesting little fission into the thing. Because it was sort of like, “Well, nobody asked you.” There was that conversation. Was he even electable? That was interesting. So you just sort of watch some of that happen.

I had been talking to John Torma forever about running. Finally he said yes. There was this whole dynamic between him and LuAnne Crowley because LuAnne Crowley then was maybe going to be a New Party member too. Then we had LuAnne and John maybe [for the] New Party and they had this huge fight. All this stuff that happens. So she refused to be in the New Party, that level of thing. Starting out and saying, “We’re not a Democrat. We’re not a Republican. Who runs as a candidate in this party?” It was just totally open. There was so much to learn. There was an open question. Who should be a candidate?

You don’t want the same old people be the candidates. So who would it be? Would it be a really good organizer? No, organizers aren’t going to be the decision makers. You’ve got to have

Judy Smith Interview, OH 400-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
somebody that plays in a group. So you go through this whole thing: Who plays in a group? Who has skills? Who can stand to sit there every Monday night for blank hours? Who doesn’t need childcare? That was one of the big ones too for women who had little kids. They were the ones who were responsible for the little kids. How do you get them the time to be in there?

There were a lot of things that you had to think about for the first time, and kind of come up with names, and kind of recruit people. I think partially one of my favorite things actually that I did, at the very beginning, I said, “If we’re going to do this, here’s what I want to do: I want to get up at the next three city council meetings and I want to say on TV to the public comment period, ‘We’re looking for a few good council candidates. If you’re interested in running, here’s our phone number.’” That’s how we started the New Party’s recruiting campaign. We did it.

Now I realize that it was a little confrontational. I was so tired of the city council at that time. It was made up of very dysfunctional people who fell asleep during the meeting, who just never got anything done; tired, old guys. So we were just needing a little kick. That did get some response. People saw that and thought, “Oh, well, I like that.” Then they might come in. I was always recruiting.

JR: When you look at the makeup of the current council today in 2006, do you see, in the county as well, do you see a difference in the fact that the people who are serving today from the one that was then? Do you think the New Party had a part in it?

JS: I actually think they’ve almost gone through more than a cycle. Like on the city council, I think we did get some folks elected that did things different. We did get some policy changes, but we got a reaction. While we kept some people on, we couldn’t keep enough people on. It became very frustrating for people because it was so polarized and it was polarized four to eight. It was just very hard. My opinion of [Mike] Kadas is not very high. So having him as the mayor didn’t help us out on a lot of things either.

I think what happened was people got less interested in saying, “Okay, let’s get a progressive-by-definition candidate,” but more like, “Let’s get a good candidate that we can agree with on most issues in.” That’s where the shift has come now. You don’t have people that would probably pass muster for a New Party person now, but we just worked hard on four races. None of them might have ever been New Party members in the past, but all four of them probably agree pretty much on the issues with what that little sheet was. I’ve always thought those were pretty middle road issues. They all pretty much agree with those.

I think we’re—in some cases—almost back to having at least a six-vote on things that are what the New Party might have agreed with, but we’re not the most leading edge of the issues. The difference is that we also have the side more mobilized now. In the original old days when everybody was asleep, we could kind of come in there and wham them and have our side organized, and the other side kind of sat there. Now what we’ve got is they’re mobilized into their polarized positions of things, and we have got some people in that will be more in
agreement with us, but they won’t be quite as committed and perhaps to the edge of progressive things. They are more of the moderate side. What I feel a little sorry for them is that they would rather think that they could work with this other side of people, like conservatives. They’re going to be disappointed when they find out that they probably can’t. They need to try if that’s what they’re going to do. I sort of watch them a little bit and I’m like, “You know, I’m kind of wondering if you’re going to do that, but if you want to spend your time building those bridges, okay go for it.” So we’ll see.

I think the New Party definitely has had an influence. It’s one of those things in a city particularly where a lot of those issues we would take as our leading edge issues are just middle of the road issues; affordable housing, open space, the family definition. A lot of people are like, “Get that out of here. That’s not going to happen again.” But what is happening that’s troubling to me, is a lot of class issues and race issues in Missoula that aren’t addressed. They aren’t. We don’t have them on the agenda right now. We put it on the agenda occasionally around [Not in My Back Yard] “NIMBY-ism.” You’ll hear us talk about it over there. About how these people want to live in their little gated communities and their little upper end. Single home buyers and not wanting “those” people living near them. So we talk a little bit about that.

There are some real questions that I think should get asked. I don’t know who’s going to be asking them. I think we’re going to have moderates in there for a while. Then maybe we can bring up some of the issues a little bit more once people say, “Oh yeah, we can have a reasonable conversation. We don’t have to be totally polarized.”

The county side; I think it’s sort of funny. The New Party has sort of skated the edge of the county stuff. Several of us worked for both Bill Carey and Jean Curtis, just because they were the better choices. We were never able to recruit somebody much on the county side. We spend a fair amount of time trying to recruit County Commissioner candidates. There’s good money in that job. It must just be so boring. That’s the other side of it. I’ve talked so many people about it. Wouldn’t you like to think about that job? People just don’t want to do it.

[End of Interview]