Dawn Walsh: Hello this is Dawn Walsh with the Montana Feminist History Project. I’m about to interview Caryl Wickes-Connick. Today is May 11, 2001. We are at Caryl’s home which is 604 Gerald, Missoula, Montana 59801.

Hello Caryl, thanks for being here today.

Caryl Wickes-Connick: Hi.

DW: So I’d like to start out by asking you some personal background information if you could just say where you were born, where you grew up, your education, when you came to Montana, a little bit about your growing up.

CWC: Ok, well I’m a fifth generation Montanan. I came...I probably have a lot of the pioneer spirit because one grandmother came by covered wagon to Montana and they homesteaded, and another one came up the Missouri to Fort Benton and over that way, so my parents were all born here through homesteads and different things. So I was born in Missoula, because my dad’s parents moved over here and my mother came to the university here, and so I was born in fact a half a block away from where we’re sitting right now, which is now an apartment house but it used to be the old hospital. I grew up here, went all the way through grade school, high school, and college here. I’ve lived in Montana, other than when I was first married we did have a stint—he was in the ROTC program in Germany, and we were at Fort Benton before that. But basically I’ve lived in Montana and other parts of Montana. Through high school I’ve always been a leader and involved in class offices and the student government and my junior year I went to the first Girl’s State in Montana, which was in Billings at the time. I think that gave me a good foundation in knowing that people can make change through legislative efforts and not realizing how it was going to take me on down the road as much...and I’ve always had family that have been very involved in their communities.

My grandmother on my mother’s side started the library at Libby, Montana; my grandmother here, on the other side played the pipe organ at the church. So you have people who have been very actively involved including my mother, who went to the university and my dad too. He later in his life—he and his father were in business in Missoula—and then later in his life he worked to help people who had addictions to alcohol. I think working with people, which we always had people at our house; he did what Claudia Black 40 years in her book did, with interventions. My dad used to do that, and that was before there were any treatment centers in Montana. So I think a lot of my being part of—was the wonderful women I had in my life, and I always thought we already had equality and rights under the law because I never felt...
discriminated against. I can remember when the feminist movement first came on you were all being called bra burners and some of those things and I looked up the word and it says “anyone who works with women’s issues”. I thought well, that’s one thing we can also say, we’re humanists but we’re also feminists because we’re definitely working for the betterment of women and I’ve been doing that for many years now. I feel that I had very strong role models and mentors in the women in my family, to do that. I think that’s how I really came to—I think the combination of the leadership and I’d always be willing to do that and I was on the Equal Rights Education Council in Great Falls that was formed.

Then we were trying—the state of Montana had passed, and in fact I’d testified on that, this was before 1977. I had gone to...I was president of the YWCA board, I was on the board for 6 years in Great Falls and about 1974 I went to a national convention down in...of course the YWCA tries to do things for all women so you get that reinforced also, to eliminate racism wherever you can. We used to have racism audits and things like that. So I went to the national convention down in San Diego where 3,000 women voted to say yes, we want equality of rights under the law, on the ERA. So when we had passed it in the state of Montana under article 2, section 4 of our state constitution, at the constitutional convention, where we got it that we would have it in Montana. But when we went to pass the national one, all these people would come in with their babies on their lap as if you couldn’t have children. So I got up and testified, that was the first time I testified in legislature, and that would’ve been around 1975, and I testified that I had been to this national convention where I voted with 3,000 others that we wanted the equal rights amendment. Well that same year was the International Year of the Woman and I went to all the regional meetings like we were supposed to and we were supposed to plan—what did we have, what could we do, and I called as public affairs chair of the YWCA during those 6 years except the year I was president, and I would call community wide meetings to address problems, whether it was racism or whatever with Malstrom Air Force Base there and so the International Year of the Woman in 1975, I had called a meeting and we got everybody involved in going to the International Year of the Woman in Helena when we were overtaken by the beehive symbol with their ballots that were men that bust in from Utah and other places and were telling the women how to vote at this convention that had never gone to any of the regional meetings, and even a nun from Butte Montana got up and said...because they commandeered the microphones and wouldn’t let anyone even give a minority report and there was a national woman that was republican who came to talk about the equal rights amendment and so...but they outvoted all of the delegates from all these regional meetings all over the state of Montana that we had, they commandeered the microphones and wouldn’t let us get anything in and they could outvote us because they brought in that many people. They allowed men to come in, I asked one county extension agent from up around Chouteau where his wife was and he said, “Well she’s pregnant, she’s at home, I’m here...”, he was voting on an International Year of the Woman. They got their own list of people voted in from Ann Allen from Great Falls down to Joan Sorgmeyer (?) from another part of the state.

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So they all went to the national conference, none of the ones that had worked to get there. That kind of fires you up a little bit to work a little harder. We had a protest march, we did it with some of the representatives that were there from the Montana Legislature that happened to attend the International Year of the Woman, trying to address issues we cared about, whether it was health or whatever. Then in ’76 as the outcome of the International...well also, I was going to say the Equal Rights Amendment also I think helped us all over the state of Montana to get a real networking cohesive group, because I got to know women from all over the state just when we would have get togethers about that. But in ’75, so I had Pat Reuss who’s now with...she’s with the Now Legal Defense Fund, I think she still is...she was when we had the carrying the torch award in ’95 and she started the rape crisis line in Helena and Sue Bartlett who’s been subsequent...and all these women that I worked with at the Montana Women’s Lobby then down the road...but that wasn’t until ’82, I’m getting ahead of myself a little bit. But anyway, so we ended up...I called this community wide meeting and had Pat Reuss and Sue Bartlett from Helena come over and we formed a women’s center—resource center, which we’re just starting in different towns, of course the university here had one. So we formed that and we were getting that off the ground and the next year I called a community wide meeting, which was January 20th, 1977, and I had called 150 agencies that dealt with abuse, because Dorothy Egge who was the director of the YWCA and she was a wonderful mentor also, and she said, “I’m seeing an increasing need for transient woman, Caryl,” and so we put that on too, because Salvation Army was doing some of the work with women that were transient and so was the rescue mission, but then later I got the rescue mission 10 years later to open up a place for women that are transient because they don’t need the secrecy as much...they need confidentiality but they don’t need the secrecy that you do with a battered women’s shelter.

But at first when we opened it up we were doing both. So I called this community wide meeting of 150 agencies and we did a verbal and a written needs assessment at the YWCA where I called the meeting. We served lunch so we’d get as many as we could there. So anyway we ended up forming this task force, and we were looking all around in every closet we could think of, how are we going to find a place for this shelter? I got wind of the fact that Steve Waldron on House Bill 780 was about battered women, and his wife by a former marriage was in an abusive relationship. So I called him up and he had no idea anyone was trying to start a shelter and so I said we would come over and testify, and so we did, and the joint legislature had a joint resolution that said there should be a study on spouse battering. So Governor Judd, at that time, set up an organization...actually the study was given to crime control then to do, who in turn gave it to a Missoula attorney, Carol Mitchell and Marty Adrienne was a social worker and they did the study over here in Missoula. Then from that the state task force was set up. And it was set up from a systemic point of view where you had law enforcement, judges, and clerks and mental health and public health and people that were...they invited me to be on it because I was just starting this shelter.

The first meeting we all had the study...and I have a copy of it here I believe, this is the study that was done and we put it in all the 40 public libraries in Montana, so that was in April of

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1978, and from that study this task force...we got the study the first meeting, the second meeting one of the directors of Social and Rehabilitation Services said, “Caryl we think you ought to chair the state task force.”

And I said, “Well I’m already a volunteer executive director for mercy home and president of the board at the same time...” because we had no funding but we did have a spot that these...we were in this former orphanage, these 5 nuns had this big building that they had all kinds of programs in it and they weren’t using the upper floor at that time, so for 50 dollars a month, with lots of faith, they let us go in there. It was perfect, it had lots of closet room...we could bring in used clothing and it had partitioned rooms and so I have some pictures I could show you of that.

Anyway he said, “Well we need a civilian, not someone that’s working for the state of Montana, to chair this task force.”

I said, “Well, I have to have a support staff like a secretary that could send out the minutes” I said, “I’m doing a lot right now.”

And of course I had three kids and whatnot and a husband, so anyway they gave me one of the top people in SRS (Social and Rehabilitation Services) to be able to do that because they can’t go for legislation and so, from that study we were to report back to legislature so in the fall of that year in ’78, before the ’79 legislature, and we testified in ’77 and this is what happened. In ’79 we were to report back. In the fall of that year we had a meeting and we sent out a questionnaire to all the legislators and we asked: would you support, oppose, sponsor, co-sponsor these laws. The laws were, in ’79, to summarize them...because nobody was gaining any statistics on things, and it wasn’t mandatory, but we asked the department of Social and Rehabilitation Services in cooperation with other agencies and officials like the county attorneys and people like that to gather, maintain, and analyze statistics of spouse abuse for 4 years. That was one of them. The other was to raise the marriage license fee, which appropriated 72,000 per year for two years, that was the first money we did have, and then we had to...even though we testified on it and I testified on these 17 laws and had 35 victim survivors through those 7 legislatures testify with me from the programs all over the state by that time that we were doing, and so we would write a grant to get some of the money but that’s how we first got it.

And by the way, the other part of the marriage license fee, part of it goes to the judge’s retirement fund just for clarification. Senate Bill 409 was a revised law relating to assault between spouses that abolished the common law doctoring of inter-spousal tort immunity for assaults and an additional tort said an abused spouse could sue a spouse for damages accrued as a result of abuse. It also eliminated the exclusion regarding rape between spouses if they were living apart whether under a decree of judicial separation or otherwise, because you know, you couldn’t do that. And of course that came out of that study, that’s why we went for these particular laws. The other one, Senate Bill 243, changed the procedures for granting a temporary restraining order without notice to the accused party if the delay would cause immediate or irreparable damage to the applicant. Well in abuse cases you can’t notify them that they’re going to be getting a restraining order or you don’t get them served. So that’s what happened in ’77, and then in ’81 we were—of course in the mean time we were working with
having people like Dr. Lenore Walker who has done some of the most research on battered women in her book I have here for you to look at...you know we would have work shops in Montana and then we, as volunteers from all of the programs, because I gave 60 talks and workshops every year, and I kept thinking I won’t have to do this next year but every year, but I would do it out to Kremlin and Havre and different places and the law enforcement academy and we had a mercy home workshop team, by that time I was called creative staffing...I had Jesuit volunteers who didn’t have to be a college graduates but most all of them were.

So you would give a year of service for oppressed or people in abusive situations or whatever, some of them worked for food banks, etc. So we got them involved too, so a lot of the people in here are some my Jesuit volunteers who would testify and write testimony and we had all the women empower themselves by writing testimony and testifying, and some of them went on to do all kinds of things. When you empower somebody else...and even some of the children wrote letters, “I don’t want to see my mom and dad going through this and please pass this law.” What we told them it was important if they couldn’t testify that they would let them know why we needed to change that law. Then of course Lenore Walker when she gives talks would go into the patriarchy of domestic abuse and develop it and that is why we’ve had some of the things we’ve had, but I’m not going into that totally. But anyway we changed the procedure in ’81 for granting a temporary restraining order whereby the applicant does not have to file for separation or divorce. They’re not ready to do that when they first come into a shelter and they may not be able to do that for a long time...but we have to change the law to allow people that that’s a possibility that they don’t have to file a divorce action to get a restraining order. In House Bill 800 we raised the fee again a little bit more for, to get a little more for shelters and safe homes, programs for victims of spouse abuse.

DW: Before we go too much ahead I want to come back and stay around 1977.

CWC: OK.

DW: Can you comment...of course we know spousal abuse, domestic violence has happened for a long time, if not forever...

CWC: Yes for centuries.

DW: Right, but there was a new level of discourse that began to happen at this time period...

CWC: Well when we did it we had no idea anyone else in the United States was doing it and when I went to the first national Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and that would’ve been in 1981, they had you stand up when you started your shelter and we were one of 30 shelters in the whole United States at that time. We were in on the ground floor of the shelter movement and Grace Sicott(?) in Butte, Montana had also opened up what they called a safe home, but they couldn’t take in children so then a couple years later she and one of the sisters over there came over, I’d just had been to a Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference,
where I learned how you could get a HUD house, we had a shelter but they didn’t in Butte, so they were able to...I was able to give them the book and the grant and to tell them how to go about it and so they got a shelter started in Butte then. But I would go to Billings and help...I did technical assistance too, Missoula was the second one, Billings was the third, Butte was about the fourth, later Havre was able to start because they started the Highline Help for Abuse Sufferers. So it was all this education we were doing through churches anywhere we could, all these 60 workshops and talks to different groups...and people would say to me, “Oh I wish we’d had this before, my cousin would still be alive,” or whatever. Lenore Walker about that same time was starting to do a study and that’s how it was starting to go that people were—you know since then, when she did it, there were Del Martin also had written the battered wives book. It was just barely starting so it was really a grass roots movement.

DW: Could you clarify how you got into the domestic violence movement, you were already active in many ways as a community member but then how did you get into this specific issue?

CWC: Well because I —how I got into it was because I called a community wide meeting—my background is in social work and psychology and so I always knew I would be working in a social service type field even though I was in this other business of developing a resort at Flathead Lake earlier on...so I always knew that I would be because that was my field of study. At that time we had no mention of battering or anything. A lot of the laws that we were ending up passing also helped people in...abuse in families, child, or other people, elder abuse—started to come out more and more after we did the battered women’s movement.

DW: I was just going to ask you on your take on sort of a larger community response of this issue being brought to the table if you will.

CWC: Well I think having started with a 150 agencies because the Mercy Home task force, I said anybody who wants to be on the board can be on it and it was comprised of people from the Native American Center, from HUD, from SRS, Mental Health, because these were people that I originally called and they wanted to see something happen with it too and none of us realizing the enormity of the problem. I think all of the work that I had done up to that time with being involved with the YWCA and everything, put me in the right place at the right spot to do it. Because I did include—she told me emergency shelter for women and children, but that’s not the same thing as abused women and children so I had put in that and that’s how it started. When I said to the YWCA board, I said “Don’t you want this as your program” and they said “Caryl you have such good community support,” and I did, so I think by that it helped to really get it started, when I’d get a little money here, I’d think well that’ll pay for electricity this month-sort of thing until I could start writing grants. The first grant I did through the Presbyterian Church Women’s Opportunity Giving Fund, a 30,000-dollar grant. Then that first year after we—’79, then that fall I could write a grant to help fund the director’s salary so that’s when I was able to become salaried to continue on. I thought, I’ve done all this work to this point I can’t see it...I’m learning and we’re studying and I had through the years master’s level women doing internships, I had over 100 nursing interns from MSU, college interns from the

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College of Great Falls at that time, it’s now the University of Great Falls, so I had wonderful staffing, I had professional mental health workers doing the support group for the women, volunteering that time. Plus some of them went into counseling over and above that; a lot of them did that with all different agencies.

If you worked through United Way maybe you became a United Way Agency, and I was able to at the second shelter, when they ended up tearing down the building we were in we had to move and I was able to help get some funding to help their building because of the client load we were doing through community development block grants and things. I was really working for a lot of other agencies and working together—we couldn’t have done what we did without the crisis line that was already formulated and they just started receiving all kinds of calls of course when we started that. I think the systemic approach with you get everyone you can and we work real closely with law enforcement to help the women and we go into their homes to get any clothing or whatever. We kept growing and doing that and working with them, and that’s why I got involved because that’s...starting the shelter and then I just thought ‘I need to continue on and do this.’ So every aspect we could do...and we didn’t provide just a shelter, we did everything we could in helping them decide what was the best course for them, letting them understand the problem, we had them all read the books, we had support groups, we’d help them with housing or work or schooling, we’d have children who were even home schooled in the shelter that maybe just moved from Billings...I’m thinking of a family, we networked with all the other shelters that eventually started in the state, and we worked with all the Indian tribes. I can remember I had a grant for out of Washington D.C. once, and he came to review the shelter after a year or so and I had five different women from different Indian tribes around Montana there at the same time he was there, and to me working closely with them—it was wonderful because some of them were able to get some of the laws we passed in the state of Montana into their tribal laws. That’s what I mean how you can—

[End of Side A]
DW: Oh, I’ll ask a question then. So can you talk specifically about what it was like when the shelter opened?

CWC: Yeah. Well we even had an open house actually, would you believe, when we did it and then we said it was secret, nobody could know where it was. But we were up on the third floor of this building that the nuns were in charge of and we had these five little angels guarding over us. It used to spook me when the kids would go down the fire escape; it was one way we’d sometimes have to use when these little babies...you know. You felt safe I guess because they were there and occasionally...I’ll never forget Sister Grace talking to this one man that wanted to find his wife and she said “I think you need to quit drinking and go get some help,” only she was really nice to him. But anyway, because many women have been threatened to be killed, so you do really need to know...I noticed now in today’s society some of the shelters are saying where they are, but there’s still some threats, you have to be very careful about it. So we were very careful, we’d hide cars, we would get the dogs and cats to the Humane Society or to somebody that would take them in. We did everything we could to give that person time to do some healing and learn some different ways to work.

We did, like I said the support groups for the children and support groups for the women, later on I had foster grandmothers to work with the children, I did everything I could to have them learn what other ways...One of my staff developed a non-violent coloring book right away. We didn’t allow any spanking, we did time outs, we told them that that’s not allowed here and the kids thought oh great I can’t be spanked but we taught them that there’s other ways to solve conflict than hitting. That’s what spanking is, is hitting. Though that was the traditional way many of us were raised, but the rod was to lead the sheep with not to hit with...people used to say “Spare the rod you’ll spoil the child,” but that’s not true. Time outs really do work. Even with my own grandchildren, I’d say, when they were little, “Do you want a time out?” “No, Grandma, no!” Anyway, what I think is that the courage of the women, the nuns and the fact that they’ve been pioneers of their way and I even had some nuns that went on with me on the Equal Rights Education Council on the television so I’ve had a lot of association with other women wanting equality of rights under the law and working for women’s issues. And I definitely feel the Battered Women’s Movement is working for women’s issues and I guess that’s why I got the Women Helping Women awards from the Soroptimist and different ones and I got a Jefferson award also for outstanding public service.

To me it’s the women themselves that you gain from and the courage that they have to testify in the legislature and we had them do it right away at the very beginning because they needed to see why we needed to change those laws. I have some wonderful legislative stories about the humor that the women legislators that I have in here that I have pictures of that I worked with. Senator Pat Regan (467), the different ones, Nancy Keenan...I’m just naming names you might’ve heard.
DW: Do you want to tell one of those stories?

CWC: Well sure. We were on the marital—was it the...Making Domestic Abuse a Criminal Offense I think, when this woman came over...married a fellow from the Air Force and came over from England, had sold her house in England and put it into a new home that they had but of course he locked her out of it and she ended up being in public housing on the floor with her kids on a mattress. She came in because she had a job, so right away I asked her...down the road, I would always each year think now this would be a good law to go for, and this person would be a good person if she’d be willing to go over and testify. We had to be very careful because many of them were still in very abusive situations so that we would sometimes ask someone like Nancy Keenan or Senator Pat Regan when they were carrying a law, would you use just...well we would have them—they could use their—maybe a name that wasn’t theirs or just a first name or whatever, just so it wouldn’t be published in the paper, to protect them. Well anyway we had gone...she had taken her daughter’s picture, who was then 3 year’s old, and put it in front of the senate judiciary committee and said “This is who we’re talking about.” And I had gone with her when she had to exchange and let this man who had an alcohol and abuse problem take this child on a visitation and it just scared her to death, because of drinking and driving and the whole bit and let alone what else. I told her, I said “Rosemary we’re going to go down now before the senate convenes and I want you to get a hold of senator so-and-so from Wibaux County.” I never did tell her well he’s never passed anything on women’s rights in fact Senator Pat Regan would give him the pink...what do you call it...that little pink pig, what’s the word I want...chauvinistic pig. Anyway I didn’t tell her that he’d never voted for anything, anyway she went up to him and asked him, “you know I’d say go ask him why he would or would not support this and find out.” And he said, “Oh, I know all about violence, I was in World War 2.” To which she replied with a beautiful English accent, “Well my father fought in the trenches in France for six years to make me free, not so some man would batter me!” When she told me that I said “Rosemary, that is absolutely wonderful, you couldn’t have said anything better.”

He went back, got everybody on the senate judiciary to vote for it, this is this person that...you know. This is the kind of thing they did, so I thought it was fabulous and so I’m happy to say she is remarried to the most wonderful man and her little 3 year old daughter was at the twentieth anniversary of Mercy Home when I gave a talk back in Great Falls a couple years ago, and they were there...I had called them up and said I’d sure like to have you guys there.

DW: That’s a great story.

CWC: But that was just one of the many because like I say, they bared their soles, told about threatening to be killed and their testimony, I’ve got all of it because I made up packets and I would hand it to all the legislators on the committee, just to have that impact. Then I would take those same packets and send them to all of our congressmen and senators in the congress.
It took ten years to pass the Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Act but that’s how these people impacted the Montana law and eventually helped impact the laws.

DW: Good work. I want to jump ahead quite a bit now because we have only a certain amount of time and I do want to have you tell us about the Silhouette project because I know you were involved in and which was a very significant project, so do you want to talk about how that got started?

CWC: Yeah. The national initiative, it was a national initiative and the vision is to have no more homicides and domestic violence and to promote peace, healing, and responsibility in adult relationships in order to eliminate domestic murders in the United States by the year 2010. And so when this vision started with some women that were art majors in Minnesota, the Silent Witness Silhouettes did, and so Gerry Miller was the president of the state business and professional women that year and she and Vickie Amundson, who was the incoming president that year, was from Clark Fork Realty. She’s been on the lobby fund board and been in business professionally for many years. They had gone back to the national, when many of the national BPW states were deciding to be part of it and so Gerry asked Vickie if she wanted to do it and she said let’s go for it and so Vickie had the first 3 figures made, she had her son over at the Sigma Nu house help with them and she had some other friends that have built a lot of them. I couldn’t believe that they were...and she took them back October 18th of ’97 I think, because this was our state convention when we had them here. And these are just the women in Montana that have been killed since 1990; we now have 40 I’m sad to say. In ’93 I retired from Southgate Mall, I moved back to Missoula in ’90 and I tried to get into my field but I wasn’t planning to, but unbeknownst to me I didn’t know I was going to get remarried either. So we were snowbirds so I was going down when Vicki took them to nationals or I probably would’ve gone with her. Because I marched down the streets of Denver way back when Andrew Dworkin gave a talk on the violence against rape, and we marched 3,000 of us down the streets of Denver yelling “2, 4, 6, 8, no more violence no more rape.”

DW: And when was that?

CWC: That was back in 1978, right after I started Mercy Home I went to a national conference down in Denver, on violence and rape. So it was very natural for me to end up just this last year when I was back here in Missoula in the wintertime, because I was still involved in BPW all this time here and that’s our local state national project so we’re the ones that started Silent Witness in Montana and she gets them around to everybody. We were just at a crime victim’s fair with all the providers from all over the state in Helena at the law enforcement academy. The Silent Witness Initiative Board that I’m on now is also doing workshops with psychologists and social services to some of the more recent things, to how do we re-educate and help the abusers to have self-mastery or the STOSNI model or the different models that they’re presenting in workshops too and the Montana Coalition is in Helena with an office which was our dream for years when we’d had a coalition person there, you know we did state education
and training, we’ve constantly done it for years. So all of these things contribute to everything that we’ve done before and it’s pretty impressive when you see those figures. It was interesting at the Crime Victims Fair in Helena one of the law enforcement went up and he saw this figure and he said “Oh my gosh, that’s my wife’s aunt.” It really took him back to see her there. The pay equity day we had at the mall this year we had one of the figures that represented 39 figures at that time. But they have to be proven, it has to have been a proven case, it doesn’t just...but there again, and we talked with our new attorney general Mike McGrath and we’re saying we need to be able to have some cohesive statistics because we read it in the paper that it happened in Billings, Montana or Livingston or somewhere. And this was at our state convention the first year after she went there that we had the figures.

And it’s interesting, I went out into the other room where they were putting—they had the women’s name on, how old she was, who she was killed by, and we wanted to do healing for the families too to feel like their figures going around and seeing that. We just took them up to the justices of peace because some of them say “Well she doesn’t need any restraining order”, and that’s one of the...we did the self-help restraining order back in 1985, the same time we made it a criminal offense in the state of Montana and the same time we did the married-rape law in the state of Montana, worked with the women from the Women’s Law Caucus. I’ve always worked with legal services because they were on the initial spouse battering task force that the governor appointed and they helped me, they would do research whenever the women from the Women’s Law Caucus came in and we’d have somebody from Billings carry that law and we’d all walk in with our briefcases and stuff and you could see them visibly step back. Just people going in and saying you know, this is why we need to change, and I used to take the women that testified into one of the senators or representative’s office and say we just wanted to come in and see if you have any problems with this particular legislation, or here’s a packet of the testimony we just gave to the senate judiciary or the house judiciary committee or whatever, and sit there and talk with them and so its what you call trying to educate the legislation as to why we need to have women helping women and being able to go ahead in their lives.

DW: Can you...You mentioned an encounter with the law enforcement who saw his wife’s aunt, can you share a story or two about encounters that you’ve seen happen with the silhouettes? Or some more personal interactions with the silhouettes.

CWC: Well I had a women that I had...someone had said that she should come and meet me and so she—I said that we were going to have this down at the court house in October, we always have it down there, in fact Judy Wang has done so much here locally with the family violence council, had given us—she’s helped with a lot of the current laws that were just in this last legislature. So anyway she gave us the plaque that Vickie Amundson had gotten for the state business professional women because of the project, but anyway of course she knew this one figure from her home town and of course she wanted-I said do you want me to take a picture with you and she cried and I cried. Sorry...

DW: That’s ok.

Caryl Wickes-Connick Interview, OH 378-025, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
CWC: Crying is an emotion, you cry when you’re happy, you cry when you’re sad. And so when they’d cry I’d cry. Anyway it’s a lot of release, you know but she has blossomed forth already because she has met people that care about the problem—other feminists you might say, and get them in BPW. More than that it feels like a support system too without it being a group therapy type thing. This is what we all need one way or another, you want to have friends that help you with whatever situation you’re in. It’s very emotional, and I’ve heard remarks of people, young men going through out the door “Well what are they trying to prove about guns” you know, this kind of thing, which they’re not getting the message at all. Most of them are very good, are very compassionate, because it happens in all economic, all income levels, all socioeconomic levels and so we learned all those things and the women are most in danger when they do leave. I had a detective break into my house from another town that was looking for his wife and he called me about it and I said, “I can’t tell you whether she’s here or whether she’s not here.” So you had all kinds of things happen. That’s the only incident I ever had of anything like that but…what he did to his little daughter was—that’s how they track them, they use the children to try to get them back. I think there’s a great response to it; I think it raises the conscious level of the people that want to think that’s really true. I think that the more we do that kind of thing, and doing it at a law enforcement academy was great because all those trainees were there so then—and I always protected them, I always said this guy has a gun dealership, he gets it through the mail, he carries a pistol on his leg, you know, so I was always warning them to protect the law enforcement that were going out and risking their lives...because the modern thing when I first started the shelter was that law enforcement was trained to tell them to take a walk around the block and they’d come back and really give it to them you know. I feel that the women have really made the difference in helping to change the laws and to change their own lives, these two did a remarkable thing, and everybody in this picture—this is Steve Waldron, this is Governor Schwinden signing the marital rape law into law...

DW: And again that was 19...?

CWC: Gee I don’t have the date on this do I...yeah ’85 was when we did those laws and then we’d get into all kinds of...I did a lot of legal advocacy and testified in 10 different district courts on spouse battering, with the clients I worked for. So you can see that you have to do the education and tell people why we need the laws and the quality of those laws and it was quite an experience to have done the legislation and what has been pleasing to me and some of the women like Vivian Brooke that have continued on when she was in the legislature with laws and all of them here in Missoula that we know, and so I’ve always been very politically involved too since then because you know the people that are in these offices when you go over and testify you get to know a lot of these people. Its real interesting putting a law through, it’s real interesting for those women and there’s a lot of other stories I could tell you about them and how we kept the supreme court from changing something that we had passed into law...but anyway...(tape stops, starts again). I feel that you just keep telling people that we have to work with women helping women and umm and do it through just saying it like it is and why we have

Caryl Wickes-Connick Interview, OH 378-025, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
to change that and one person can make that difference. This young women I was telling you about that recently went and saw the figures and then revealed that she herself had been in a very abusive situation and she was even talking to me about testifying so just to let people know we’re writing a book about it and what she went through and that’s what its going to take to change that. But doing projects like you are lets us know how we can work together and get the word out.

DW: So you’ve seen a lot of change occur in the last 30 years on this issue and as we know, it’s not over and there’s still a lot more work to be done, but to me talking a little philosophically you seemed to have a great deal of hope still and a great deal of energy and faith that yourself as well as other women will continue this issue and it will continue to get better. So could you just reflect on the process of change in this arena and where you think we’re going, and about the hope that you have in this area?

CWC: Well, we always did education not only to the adults in the workshops I gave but I had my staff all do it in the high schools and junior highs, I had VISTA volunteers too for several years, and they would go into the junior high level. Here in Missoula they’re doing it through puppetry and so to me that’s where...with kids, you teach kids not to do...because all they see on TV is bang-bang kill-kill, I think the violence on television and things, I can see why they are asking them can’t we have a few more Fonzie and Harry type shows...I know that isn’t nearly as exciting as shoot em’ up and crush em’ around and what-not but we need to do that. I’m a little amazed the number of homicides because we were trying to work ourselves out of our shelter; we hoped to improve that. I have no recollection—of course we weren’t reporting the homicides as domestic abuse like we are now but I just feel that this will eventually be the thing that will change that, I think it already has. I don’t think women today, I mean we try to like in the high school level I can remember one of my Jesuit volunteers went out to this small high school outside of Great Falls and gave a talk right before graduation and several of the senior girls, one of the teachers told me after the fact, broke off their wedding plans because she had told them about the red flags, and this is a very loving young woman—this Jesuit volunteer, but she went out and...having worked in the shelter—these women would never work in the shelter probably you know, and I thought that was wonderful that they saw, right then...and that’s what we try to tell people. It’s kind of like the date rape thing; you try to educate the women. So I think we’re educating the women that this is not ok behavior and if you see some red flags, like total possessiveness, power and control over you, you better start looking at a different angle of it. So I do feel the education we’re doing is going to eventually bring it to a much better conclusion.

DW: So we just have a couple minutes left if there’s anything you want to say before the tape is over, some closing...other closing remarks.

CWC: Well I really feel...I’m really proud of that fact that you all are doing a project, a feminist history project. I think it’s wonderful that we can do an oral history, we used to do that, and Native Americans still do it right—a lot, although they’re probably writing down theirs more
too. To do it now, and so that we can give our thoughts on it...and I really do feel that we can do a lot of changes and women have always been pretty involved in their communities and help start the water quality things and other assets or other parts of the community for themselves and since where we really had the women’s movement we deal with issues like pay equity and everything else like business and professional women, that’s one of our big things we just—in the mall sell cookies for a dollar to men and seventy-five cents for women. A lot of young women came and said that is so wonderful that you’re doing that. Anyway this one gentleman had three daughters there and he said, “I’ve been trying to tell them that’s the way it is.” And one of his daughters told me, she said, “Well I have been washing dishes (she was in high school) and there’s a guy that washes dishes too and he does get paid more than I do,” and he said, “See I told you.” Anyway I think that we are going to be able to have a little more equality of rights under the law and I would to see that passed in the congress totally, I mean we had 37 and we needed 38 states to do it—

[End of Interview]