Diane Sands: Okay, this is Diane Sands interviewing Barbara Koser and it’s September 12, 13, 14, somewhere in there, 2001. We’re going to talk about the early days of the Missoula women’s movement.

Barbara Koser Konigsberg: The women’s liberation movement.

DS: The women’s liberation movement, as we called it back then, not women’s lib.

BKK: No.

DS: Not bra burners and those various other things. So Barbara, why don’t you tell me how you came to be in Montana?

BKK: I graduated from the University of Colorado and joined VISTA with my husband, Jan Konigsberg. So I was Barbara Konigsberg when you first met me. And we ended up being assigned to LIGHT, the Low-Income Group for Human Treatment. Isn’t that great? With Paul Carpino (?), who was trained in [inaudible] Linsky (?) techniques. So I was in Missoula for a couple of years and that’s what brought me here.

DS: So what was VISTA? I mean, in this interview you should assume that you’re talking to generations that are, say, two generations out. What would your great-grandchildren...So you need to explain some things like what was VISTA?

BKK: VISTA was Volunteers In Service To America. And the interesting thing that I remember about VISTA in those days—it’s no longer true, although it’s still an existing program—in those days people would go in self-identifying themselves as being moderate, you know, to maybe liberal. And they would come after a year’s experience self-defining themselves as radicals. And that was what VISTA did to all these innocent white Americans who had never seen poverty. Suddenly you saw poverty in the face that made you very angry and at the same time the war was going on and the Civil Rights Movement, so it was a wonderful time to be alive and to be young and to be dreaming and to be wanting to change everything—everywhere you looked, it needed to be changed.

DS: And VISTA was one of those great society programs of the Johnson Administration, so the late 60s and early 70s were really kind of its early heyday.
BKK: I think maybe it was corrupt in some of the large cities, but in many places it was the first time that low-income people had resources. So in this community, it was all low-income whites. I remember Paul was so brilliant. At our front desk we needed a receptionist and he hired one. Louise Culpa, that was her name. She had cigarettes rolled up in her t-shirt. She had no teeth and she talked in double negatives and I was horrified. How can we have someone like Louise...? You know, she’d answer the phone: “Yeah, what do you want?” And Paul sat me down. Boy, did I get a talking to. He trusted that she would be the right person for that position, and she was. She knew how to handle people, she was really bright, she could...I came to love Louise.

DS: You should go see her. She still works for the Human Resource Council, the old [inaudible] Pages in Missoula.

BKK: Oh my gosh, I will. I will try.

DS: And she runs their housing program.

BKK: See, Paul was right. She had it, yep.

DS: She’s still the person if you want to make something happen over in that world. Knows how to do it. So what drew you and why did you choose VISTA versus some other...I mean there were many avenues for being an activist in those days, or changing the world. Why did you choose VISTA versus the Peace Corps or joining some other group?

BKK: I’m not sure. I don’t know. I had a teaching certificate, like most women. Teaching or nursing, right? I had a teaching certificate but I wanted to be doing something important, and VISTA seemed like the place to be.

DS: And Missoula. Why did you guys choose to come to Missoula?

BKK: No, it was chosen for us.

DS: So you didn’t have a choice?

BKK: No. That was fine. I came with Jan Konigsberg and Chris Wood and David Pollack. We were very...It was a wonderful foursome.

DS: And you all came to Missoula and what were you supposed to be doing?

BKK: What we ended up doing was a lot of community organizing. I was involved with organizing a daycare center. Paul had techniques for getting funds. Oh, we would call with speaker phones and he would say, “I have around this table...” and he’d have, like, the head of the Indian reservation and this person and that person. “We’re entitled to funds for X, Y, and...”
Z,” and, boy, you could just hear them hopping to in Washington, D.C. I didn’t know how he did it, but we always got...We applied for programs and always got the funding. I think it was the first time we had legal services, housing authority—Virginia Gillecin, what a wonderful woman she was. And that was all in the beginning. And so I was involved with a variety of different programs, but I remember the child care. Food—we had a welfare. We had conflicts with the welfare department. Helped set up legal services and the housing authority, Missoula [inaudible] Housing Authority. And just getting low-income people to be represented on boards. That was a big thrust too.

And as a VISTA volunteer, we had...The Forest Service hired Indians to fight in the forest fires. I think they still do that. They are really well known for their bravery. Being who I was, this developing feminist that could see sexism everywhere I looked, I figured a lot of these low-income women are strong, they have the skills, they have the know-how, and they need the money—why can’t they be fighting forest fires? And there no women forest fires in those days. Because of Paul Carpino and my own political chutzpah, we called the EEOC in Washington, D.C. and talked to Marilyn Max...Mixer, something like that. She said she would like us to be kind of her guinea pigs. She said, “Of course you should be able to fight forest fires if you want to, but the problem is we have to prove that there’s sex discrimination.”

So I had some Indian women, low-income women, and then eventually the women that I was getting to know through my involvement with the Women’s Liberation Movement. We had over 300 people go and apply. Maxine sent us this special form. We’d fill out our names, our social security numbers, our address, the day, the time, the person we talked to, and what they said. And you wouldn’t believe what they said. I was told...I mean this guy was coming on to me, right? And he’d say, “You know, honey, if you were fighting forest fires when I was, I wouldn’t get any of the forest fighting done.”

I’d go, “What are you talking about?” you know? That was their excuse. They felt the men would be fondling the girls while the fires were burning and therefore, no women. And then they got a little tiny bit more sophisticated and said wherever will you take care of bodily functions?

I said, “Wherever do the men take care of their bodily functions?” To make a long story short, we organized the first all-women’s firefighting crew. Do you remember that?

DS: And what year was that?

BKK: That was in 70.

DS: One or two?

BKK: Yeah, ’71. So that we were trained, they came to get us at three in the morning. And I’m sure that they had hoped we couldn’t get the crew together that early in the morning. I had to
drive way out in the country where—oh, what was that woman’s name? She didn’t have a phone, but she was the person that would make our team complete. I remember driving out there at 3:30 in the morning. I’m getting [inaudible]. But anyway, we did it, we did it. And they helicoptered in an avocado-colored toilet and dropped it. I don’t know, it was just the funniest thing. Boy, we’d really made it and seeing that helicopter was proof.

DS: So what was the role of the EEOC then and actually did you file a complaint with them and they intervened and talked to the Forest Service? How did that happen?

BKK: Well, we worked our way up the ladder, shall we say. I was very good at knowing, you know, figuring out just who’s the assistant, who’s the assistant assistant. So we wanted to get to the regional director of the U.S. Forest Service, so we had to go up the ranks. I was talking to Madeline every day, so I’m sure she was helping and giving names and advice. By the time we got to the regional director, he knew exactly what was happening. At that point, a decision had been made to accommodate us, or else. They knew there was an ‘or else,’ and I’m not sure if it came from us or from the EEOC. I believe that we did file a formal complaint.

DS: And it was a time in which there were a lot of these kinds of complaints being filed all over the country around sex discrimination, so he was probably made well aware by his....

BKK: Supervisor. Yeah, I think a decision was made in Washington. They really tried to sabotage us.

DS: How did they do that?

BKK: See, they called me at three in the morning and we had to be there at seven or that was it. That was our only chance. So, and we didn’t have...I said, “Do we need 15 or 20?” We needed 20, and only 25 were trained. So it was hard getting people together.

DS: So did you go out and fight fire?

BKK: Yes, we did. What are those things called? I don’t know.

DS: Pulaski?

BKK: Yes, Pulaski here we come. It was fun.

DS: So how was that experience for women? Did many of them stay on that kind of work? Was it a successful...?

BKK: We weren’t called back, but we weren’t trained until mainly the fire season was through. So that was the one and only time we were called out. Then the following summer, some women in the same crew organized more women and I think that happened for three years.

Barbara Koser Konigsberg Interview, OH 378-042, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
Then after that they were integrated as they are now, as they are today. I don’t think they have separate fire-fighting crews. But it was in *Ms. Magazine* and it was all over the place, front page news.

**DS:** What was the name of that crew?

**BKK:** We didn’t have a name that I recall. The first women’s all firefighting crew.

**DS:** In ’74, ’75, there was another all-women’s firefighting crew in Missoula that I think called itself the Red Star Brigade. Some of the same people in it.

**BKK:** Oh, uh oh. So that was a nice combination of my work in the women’s movement and my work in the Community Action Agency, and Paul was very supportive. Everyone in the agency was very supportive. Louise was very supportive.

**DS:** So how did you come to identify yourself with the early women’s liberation movement?

**BKK:** When I was at the University of Colorado, I heard about the first conference where allegedly the bras were burnt. And I guess they were.

**DS:** That was the Miss America Pageant in 1968 and they didn’t burn them but they threw them in a trash can.

**BKK:** That’s correct. But it was...Well [inaudible] Miss America Pageant. You know, we did that in Missoula. Do you remember that?

**DS:** I’ve got those records.

**BKK:** Yeah, we did that for two years in Missoula.

**DS:** Protested the Miss America...Miss Montana...

**BKK:** Miss Montana Pageant. And I met with the woman and brought her to tears and I felt so bad. She just said...We were a little strident, weren’t we? I don’t think I was, though. I think I was very sweet. But yes, we protested the Miss Montana Pageant and it was very difficult for the woman that ran it to have us protesting.

**DS:** Do you remember, what did we do?

**BKK:** We had handouts, we had leaflets that we handed out as people were coming in. And the leaflets were pointing out this exaggerated importance that these kinds of pageants put on young women.
DS: And physical beauty.

BKK: And physical beauty and not scholarship.

DS: As we like to say, The Scholarship Pageant.

BKK: So now, you know, that’s changed. Now it’s like, “Oh wait, this is a scholarship pageant.” Yeah, sure, right, anyway. So but I originally met a woman at CU, a professor who had been at that Miss America pageant. I think I was writing a paper in some honors class and I interviewed her and I remember going into her house and she made me a cup of coffee and she said, “Today I’m serving you. The next time you come, you’re on your own. We don’t have servants around this house.” I was so impressed with that. Boy did she light the fire under me about the Miss America Pageant and all the other things. Betty Friedan was so important in that and Gloria Steinem. You know, Gloria Steinem wrote her doctoral or master’s dissertation on Marilyn Monroe. Did you know that?

DS: [inaudible]

BKK: So part of her consciousness was what the media does to women and, in the case of Marilyn Monroe, what all those doctors did. Uppers and downers and, she was really destroyed by the drugs that were given to her. She was a very talented actress that was forced into these blonde roots roles. So anyway, I, like a lot of people, was reading Betty Friedan’s book and...what was it called, the first one?

DS: Did you also read some of the other more radial things that were coming out and distributed in the late 60s that came out partly...Were you involved in the anti-war movement or the Civil Rights Movement?

BKK: Yeah, it was part and parcel of the same thing. I remember Stephanie and I...I’m not exactly sure how Stephanie Henken and I met, but we became fast friends and our husbands became the resident Marxists in the neighborhood. They became also very good friends. But I remember Stephanie and I were...we must have spoken to, I don’t know, two or three dozen classes at the University of Montana campus. I remember responding to a question from one of the students by saying, “If you want to learn about feminism, read about racism because there were so many parallels.” So I was very involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Yes, very much, reading and going to women’s conferences. There was a group in New York, SCUM.

DS: Society for Cutting Out Men.

BKK: Yes, and their manifestos and...to me looking back at it, a lot of it seems like it was very connected to the Civil Rights Movement. Anyway, when Stephanie and I first got together, we decided someone needed to do something so it might as well be us. We called ourselves Mrs.
Konigsberg and Mrs. Henken because we thought that people could relate to that, these two married women.

DS: It wouldn’t be too threatening.

BKK: It wouldn’t be too threatening. There were many things that we did, but I remember having a table in the student center and we passed out information. One of the first projects, well, to make a long story short, eventually there were seventeen consciousness-raising groups. I remember weeks where I just feel like I went from one to another to another. Either Stephanie or I would be there the first, we had decided, for the first three meetings, just to provide consistency and make sure that the principles of the consciousness-raising groups were at least understood. That meant there was a very strong attempt to allow everyone to speak. No one was to dominate. We had a bunch of topics that we suggested and people chose from the topics.

DS: Let’s go back and say, I mean, one of the first organizing tools of the Women’s Liberation Movement was something called CR groups or consciousness-raising groups, which were small groups of women, ten people maybe, who met on a weekly basis around an organized set of discussion topics related. Sometimes they would have reading material as well, like “This is a Vaginal Orgasm,” or whatever, like “Everyone Wants a Wife,” or one of those articles, or the SCUM manifesto or something. We’d discuss it both in a theoretical point of view but also from how it affected their personal life. So you gave me, the first thing that you gave me that you said...It’s a blue mimeographed hand-drawn sheet calling for a meeting of Women’s Liberation and you have a note on it that says nobody came.

BKK: I think that was true. We were expecting hundreds and I don’t think anyone came. But we kept trying.

DS: So then you set up these tables at the University, which I was one of the people who marched up to it and put my name on one of those sign-up sheets to join a CR group.

BKK: We had three different CR groups at three different times we thought could accommodate people’s schedules. So that started...I think there was...I know that one of the major things we did was distribute the Birth Control Handbook. And I remember...boy, in VISTA, you didn’t get much. You got maybe $90 a month.

DS: Let’s save the discussion of birth control. Let’s go through this consciousness-raising group.

BKK: I think it was...

DS: Think of your target as someone 50 years from now and they go, “What is this? Is this a therapy group? Is this a class?” What is this and why was it such a powerful organizing tool for the early days of the women’s movement?
BKK: I think part of it was the times and the timing. I think a lot of women were having a look at their mothers and their mothers’ lives and how they had been cut off from being able to do many of the things that otherwise they would have been able to do. And these consciousness-raising groups provided a very safe place where women could talk heart to heart. I don’t think there was very much theoretical discussion of issues, as much as sharing our experiences and talking about sex openly, which I think may have been the first time that had happened. The groups were fairly diverse and they met so often. But what happened was huge changes and validations of who you were and consciousness-raising groups were very much a part of my life for probably ten or fifteen years. It wasn’t a fad, it was a place where people could process, where people learned to trust one another.

DS: Learned to trust other women.

BKK: Learned to trust other women. We became what I had called women-identified women. It was this whole shift from “Who cares what your father and your husband think? These are the women...what they think really matters to me.” And I remember this transformation of spending time with women. We would go camping. My husband almost divorced me because of that. From the time that we met, we both got the VISTA job, we were together day and night, day and night. When I was going camping with a group of women, he...

DS: The radical Marxist...

BKK: The radical Marxist...

DS: Who thought it was just such a great idea theoretically, as I recall.

BKK: Yes. He hated it. It was like it was this betrayal. It was this horrible betrayal. So, you know, did that stop me from going? No. It wasn’t a betrayal.

DS: But it does cause that realignment in personal relationships and one of the more powerful little pieces out there. These are not highly theoretical. Our little mimeographed pamphlets were ones that were sold for ten cents a piece. That concept of the personal as political is really the core concept within those consciousness-raising groups. That there are power relationships between men and women in their personal relationships. Those were able to be discussed in those consciousness-raising groups in a place where before there was no recognition of that dynamic being a power relationship or being one in which equity was not there.

BKK: And I was in a consciousness-raising group. Well, I got rid of the Marxist and then married another man. But in the consciousness-raising group I presented them with this idea of how I thought an ideal relationship should be economically. Part of this was women...Can you turn it off for just a minute?
(Recorder is switched off, then on again.)

DS: So we were explaining about consciousness-raising groups.

BKK: Right. So it served such an important function as a support group for women and decisions and choices they were making, we were making. These were decisions of huge proportions. I remember Cynthia, being a house wife, decided to go to law school, so we supported...

DS: Cynthia Wesby?

BKK: Yeah, that was her name. Not that many women were in law schools those days, but boy were we happy to see that. And was Carolyn Willard getting her Ph.D. then? A lot of this was directed at getting access to places where women had not had access before. So it was very exciting. This whole redefinition of who we were. I had been a model when I was in high school and was Denver’s representative to Seventeen Magazine and I was giving up makeup and all that emphasis on how you looked. That was a big deal for me and very supported within that group.

I think a lot of it was defining...I remember Stephanie in the group one time was complaining. Her husband had lost his job and they didn’t have money and she was getting toilet paper from the dorms at University of Montana and I said, “Why are you depending on someone else to be providing your basic needs? I think we should all...” So much of it was being able to make a living for ourselves and not having the financial dependence, which I think was what had limited our mothers, being financially dependent on their husbands.

A lot of it really was a liberation from ideas of how women should be, from expanding...You could be something besides a nurse or a teacher. Oh, yeah? Well, what was it? Well, I mean it was so exciting because you could see, even in the process of a month or two, enormous changes in people’s demeanor, in their excitement level in defining who they were and what they wanted to be. And it really didn’t have...it wasn’t anti-male, it wasn’t...it was just a very exciting and supportive time. And many of these groups lasted for...I was in one group after I left Missoula that lasted for seven years.

DS: Wow. [inaudible] was in one that was like seven years too, although many of them were much more short-term than that. They were...

BKK: For a school year or...

DS: Yeah, ten meetings or something like that. But those people became very close friends because of connection. Now one of the things that I thought was quite unique about the several hundred women that were signed up for these consciousness-raising groups in Missoula was how you all structured those groups, that there was, as I recall, community women as well as university women. I’d like you to talk about that and how they were governed. Wasn’t there...
a Missoula council and different representatives from these groups came to these meetings on occasion? I don’t know what that was all about. I think I went to one of them. But why don’t you talk about that structure?

BKK: The structure was really based on, well...what was her name? Joanne something. There was a list of guidelines about how to organize the consciousness-raising groups. Sometimes there could be very strict rules about one person spoke and no one spoke twice until everyone had spoken. It’s interesting. I’m a Quaker now, and that’s been a long-standing tradition in our...we have groups like that that are very common. That’s the understood, the explicitly understood rule, that no one speaks twice until everyone has had a chance. Just because what every woman has to say can be so valuable.

Anyway, so Stephanie and I...I’m sure that we went at least three times. I think I was an active member of as many as four or five groups at a time because I loved it so much and I loved the women so much. And then we had...But out of that group, a group that would meet to plan ways of establishing more groups or, you know, what could we do? And that’s where the birth control pamphlet, the Birth Control Handbook, from McGill University. I think we ordered 4,000 copies. It would be hard to explain to people in those days bodies had really been a mystery to our mothers. You never talked about it and you didn’t know how it functioned. Birth control was next to...I don’t know if it was considered immoral.

DS: Immoral and in some cases illegal because of the blue stocking laws of New England, particularly Massachusetts. It was illegal to send much of this information through the mail. It was considered pornographic. So in some cases, there were legal restrictions on it. But it was certainly not something women were expected to know anything about and positions women as though they had no brain. “Don’t you worry your pretty little head about this.” I think that is one of the most radical changes, the reclaiming of the whole women’s health movement and women claiming their bodies and a right to know about what they do and how they function and we taught ourselves that and insisted on we change that power relationship with the medical industry in a way.

Concepts of informed consent came about because we demanded it. It’s hard to remember how patronizing that world was. I remember because I was attending the university then. For women to go in to the university student health service and ask for birth control, you could be reamed out and yelled at out in the waiting room if you got the right person about immorality. You would be asked...some women put on a wedding ring or an engagement ring and said they were getting married or they were married in order to convince the physician to give them birth control. They would go to these elaborate ruses to get birth control. I don’t remember. It must have been through that consciousness-raising council. That first thing we had before we ordered the McGill handbook was a single page sheet on birth control methods that we went through the dorms and put under the doors of the dorms and the housekeepers came right behind us and picked them up. Do you remember that? That was before the McGill handbook.
It came out of one of those self-help studies on women’s bodies group within that consciousness-raising community.

BKK: But you know, I don’t think that...did they try and stop the distribution of that handbook?

DS: Yes, and that’s all well documented because we ordered the first McGill handbook and it was when we were already where the Women’s Action Center had formalized women’s liberation to some degree. We’d actually gotten the student government to agree to pay for this first volume. The first one that they saw was more of a...wasn’t as fancily printed as the second edition which came out, which had, because it was out of Canada, a lot of nudity in it, a lot of discussion about abortion, and that first inside whole page talked about the Vietnam War and imperialism and the United States’ role. And those two issues—between the abortion issue in there and the discussion of the war—was why the university officially said...it confiscated those [inaudible] locked them up until they finally came to the position of putting a little disclaimer sheet in there just saying it wasn’t the opinion of the university we got them back. I was some involved in that and you were probably more involved in that.

BKK: I don’t. What I remember is being at the tables and distributing the handbook to anyone who wanted it and it was not looked with favor by the administration, I know that. But we felt like we had a right to get that information out. And I think that was before the woman’s referral. That was the year before the woman’s...

DS: No, they both existed already.

BKK: At the same time?

DS: But it was really a radical thing to give women information about that because in the abortion stuff that we were doing with pregnancy referral service—that was 1970, 1971—it was a felony in the state to tell a woman where to get a legal abortion out of state. There was legal as well as social and political censorship of women getting this information about their bodies. So we thought it was a very radical thing to do and I still believe it was a radical thing to do was to give women that information.

BKK: Because that was such an incredibly important part of...If you have a right to decide to have children and when to have children, that radically alters your life, because a lot of women would prefer to postpone child rearing until later.

DS: Well, and those were the first discussions about it even being okay to talk about abortion and also because Roe vs. Wade in ’73 became legal. But prior to that, the American Association of University Women and some of those older women—although some of them were in those consciousness-raising groups, Maxine Johnson—they went to the legislature as MORAL, Montana Organization for Repeal of Abortion Laws and testified and argued for the legalization of abortion before Roe vs. Wade. And they’re a generation older than us and were involved in
and acted out these social issues around women’s liberation in a more traditional political arena than we did.

BKK: I was very friendly toward MORAL. And Maxine...I later left Eugene, but when I came back I would stay at her house. There were a lot of neat women. Was it Hazel Barnes?...let’s see...there was a philosophy professor, older—she was probably in her sixties. She was very sympathetic.

DS: So how did you—to go back this organizing CR groups—they were in the community women as well as the campus and I think one thing that’s so striking these days is that things that are on campus are on campus, things in the community in the community. They don’t even know what’s going on across those. And at those early years, partly because of the openness of the university system as a whole and anti-war activity, et cetera, that there was a permeability between the community and the campus that created these environments in which community and university people flowed back and forth or were all part of one common organization.

BKK: Neither Stephanie nor I were students and yet a lot of our work was done on campus. I think there were a lot of community women involved partly because of my role in VISTA and Louise. I think I got Louise to come once. I don’t think she ever came back, but I tried. Wasn’t there a YWCA, and they seemed very...I spent a lot of time just contacting community groups that I thought might have an interest in some of these issues. So that led to...and also it was the times. I remember in those times I knew a lot of minority people. I knew a lot of Indian women. There were many black women on campus that I could say were my friends. I mean, we had daily contact, we did projects together, and it was a time when I think there was a lot of contact between minority people and white people in Montana, but especially in cities all over the country. We’ve lost that. I think there’s this bifurcation of society now. Everyone is separate. There has been a re-segregation of America. But in those times there may have been an economic segregation, but there was an interest and an attempt of many different groups to take an interest in and expand your horizons. So part of it wasn’t just around women’s issues, but getting to know people that were different than us, being more tolerant.

DS: Well, and that broader political...Again, the times, as you say. The broader political environment that in the late 60s, because of the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-war movement, that there was a lot of activity with 1968. The poor people’s campaigns were talking about coming through Missoula and setting up encampments on the campus lawn.

Certainly after 1968 and the assassination of King into Missoula, for example, here comes Ulysses Doss out of Chicago where I had worked and because of his ties to the campus ministry. With him then comes several hundred black students. There’s a very politically active black student union and a number of those women were active in some of these early feminist activities. And those are very active then with the Wounded Knee effort and AIM. There’s that political movement coming in and the establishment in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s of the first Indian Center on the campus, Indian activities. So those political movements really all exist in
that same [inaudible] come to development at the same time under much of the same kind of political philosophy.

BKK: Dawes was an important figure in my own life when I was in high school, which was only three or four years before I came to Montana. I went with...I had a boyfriend at Notre Dame and they had a program then that they gave free scholarships to any Black Stone Ranger, which was a gang in Chicago, that wanted to go to Notre Dame could. Well, they would go there every summer and every spring break and I went. I think I was the only woman with 75 Notre Dame guys. But there we were in the middle of Chicago with these gangs and I worked with the Rangerettes, a group of black...They were the black women affiliates. Believe me, they didn’t choose to be in. They were chosen by these gang members and they were gang raped. That was part of the initiation. There I was. I don’t think I would allow my daughter to go to Chicago and work with gangs, you know what I mean? But my mother let me go and part of it was the culture was so different then because there really was much simpatico, kind of earnest wanting to know how it could have come to this. Just seeing the face of poverty and wanting to be in the thick of it and change. Seeing the injustice and being outraged by it. I had a lot of contact with minorities in those days, which I sorely miss. I have it to some very limited extent in Denver, but it just isn’t the same. I’m not working on projects with minority people. I don’t know. I’m sure some are but I think there’s this great division, and it wasn’t that way in these days.

DS: So what’s your recollection? Any specific instances or, say in the Missoula community in that late 60s, early 70s period about the involvement or cross-activism that you recall?

BKK: Well, there was the anti-war movement. I don’t...let’s see. With minorities, I think Doss, you know, he had conferences, he had retreats in the mountains and those were definitely mixed and very powerful. This woman’s name was Esther. I can’t remember her last name.

DS: She married Ulysses’ brother, Farin(?) Doss and she led the black student union and the take-over of the ROTC building. Were you there when we did that?

BKK: When was that, what year?

DS: The Kent State event in ’71.

BKK: Well, as you know, my then-husband, I think it was Harmon, they pretended to put a bomb in the ROTC building. Do you remember that?

DS: Ah yes, and it was in a shoe box with...

BKK: In a shoe box with a wind-up alarm and a battery and a string. I mean it was a joke. Boy, let me tell you, it was no joke. They were arrested immediately. I remember I spent the whole night getting bail money to get him out of jail. It was a federal charge. It was just a horrible...What a juvenile thing to do, Harmon and Jan, when you think about it. The funniest

Barbara Koser Konigsberg Interview, OH 378-042, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
thing was that the guard at the ROTC building saw it, thought it was bomb, and he got a bat and
he started beating it. And that’s when he found out it was a wind-up alarm clock. Oh boy. What
if it would have been a bomb? Anyway.

DS: There were a lot of bombs in those days.

BKK: Yes. Now Tom Power, who is now head of the Economics Department, and I, we tried to
take on the, well, the FBI. There were student demonstrations and we looked up at one of the
tall buildings in downtown Missoula and there were FBI agents taking pictures. Well Tom and I
weren’t going to allow that to happen. We went up on the roof of whatever hotel building that
was. I had so much nerve. I went up to this guy and I said, “I’ll take your camera.” Do you know
what he did? He took the film out of it and gave it to me and walked away. I’m sure that was
what they had been told to do if they were ever confronted. But there we were on the top of
this building, and boy there was no way they were going to get away with taking pictures of my
friends.

DS: When did you come to Missoula?

BKK: [Nineteen] sixty-nine. So it was ’69, ’70, ’71.

DS: There were two takeovers of the ROTC building in conjunction with Kent State and I think
the bombing of Hanoi. But the first of those was led by the black student union. And then the
second one was the one when we already had the Women’s Action Center, so it’s going to be
’71. And at that one, because the Women’s Action Center was in the Venture Center, which is
right next door to the ROTC building, that was one of our little staging areas. And already,
Freddy’s Feed and Read existed, which you all, many of the VISTA people basically funded and
ran that original store right off campus, which was kind of a campus organizing place. And
Freddy’s provided much of the food for that two day takeover of the ROTC building. And out of
the Women’s Action Center, we staged different kinds of supply runs and things to the ROTC
building. And because so many women were involved in it, there were all of the girlie
magazines, the porno magazines in the desks of ROTC guys. Angel Flight and all that sorts of,

wedding rings [inaudible].

BKK: See I think I was gone by then. I was working on the Indian reservation starting in ’71, so...

DS: So do you recall the formation of the early Women’s Action Center, because in it was where
some of those consciousness-raising met, and they often met in homes. But also then the
development of the Women’s Free School, which was eventually a building that LIGHT had
owned and [inaudible] burnt down. Were you around when that happened?

BKK: No, no. You mean down near the train station?

DS: Yes.
BKK: No, I think I was gone by that time.

DS: Well there was one very exciting event that I do recall that you were quite a [inaudible] Let’s say there’s two. Let’s take one at a time. Let’s take your arrest with two of our friends, Nancy Daniels and others, relative to...On August 26—

[End of Side A]
DS: So we’re going to talk about the August 26, 1970 arrest. So tell me about it.

BKK: Well, it was the 50th Anniversary of the women’s vote and, by god, we weren’t going to let that go by without something happening. Well, my idea was to take the whole hill, you know, the hill where they have the “M”? And to get fertilizer and make the women’s sign on that whole hill, put fertilizer on it, and when spring came you’d see this huge women’s sign. But that would have cost a lot of money, and to make it big enough we would have had to buy a lot of fertilizer. So we decided why not paint women’s signs, you know, easy. Nancy and Gleesa (?).

DS: And because it was a big tradition already for the Forester’s Ball. They would go through town and stencil these footprints of Babe the Blue Ox and Paul Bunyan all over town, so...

BKK: So, why couldn’t we? So we had a can of paint and oh, we had fun. You know, I bet for years you could still see those women’s signs on the corner. We’d pop out, paint, pop back in. I think Nancy was driving, I had the paint. I don’t know. We must have done a hundred of them and then I got the very smart but, as it turned out, stupid idea of, “Let’s paint a women’s sign right at the police station corner.”

DS: Oh God.

BKK: And I thought it was a great idea and so did they, until we did it and then there was the light, the police light, because they’d seen us do it and they followed us up to, oh who’s that wonderful woman that was, I think, married to Tom? Oh, what was her name? She went to Seattle and she got brutally attacked. Yeah, Tom Bollinger and what’s her name. Anyway, they were kind of tucked away in the middle of nowhere, so we figured well that would be a good place to go and hide and we kind of tried to...We didn’t exactly try to outrun the police, but we went in the driveway and felt like if we turned the car off and ducked down we...

DS: Laughing the whole time probably, right?

BKK: Probably. They came with their little flashlights and I’m trying to cover the paint can. So we got taken in. We were arrested. I think we were kept overnight. Nancy and Gleesa got their own cell and I had a private cell. And now, if I tell you if I got enough money to get those guys out of jail, and I had to raise like four or five thousand dollars, why couldn’t they have gotten money to get us out of jail? But anyway.

DS: They didn’t, huh?

BKK: No, we sat in jail. We were arraigned. So we made it a political issue. Why should we get arrested when this other group can do it every year and never face any problem?
DS: Was it defacing public property, or?

BKK: It ended up being a disturbing the peace charge, but we had to go before the judge and we read a statement, you know, which...

DS: We were famous for writing statements, weren’t we? Manifestos and statements.

BKK: I wish I had a copy of that because I recall it being pretty good, you know?

DS: I’m sure you do.

BKK: Because I wrote, I’m sure. But anyway, we had several people with cameras and none of them even had film in the cameras but it was to impress the judge that this wasn’t just a disturbing the peace charge, but...

DS: A political action, uh huh.

BKK: But this was going to be reported, you know? And Harmon, do you remember Harmon Henkin? I mean he’d take pictures of us. I know that he didn’t have any film but he had his flash and would take pictures of the judge, you know, from all different angles.

BKK: Oh was it? I want a copy of that. I’ve never...

DS: [inaudible] picture as we have was in the Missoulian [inaudible].

BKK: You sent it to me. It’s a picture of you in the newspaper in your miniskirt kneeling and looking very ladylike with your can of paint.

BKK: Well I didn’t mean to send you that. I want it back. But that was just trying to bring attention to the fact that women had gotten the vote in 50 years. And it actually turned out to be very scary because Gleesa, she was not an American citizen, so we hired an attorney. I remember that. That was like the main thing was that she wouldn’t have to suffer because of our juvenile acts.

DS: Didn’t you tell her first not to say anything and reveal the fact that she speaks with a heavy Danish accent?

BKK: Yeah, we got her a lawyer. I don’t believe that she was charged, so whatever happened, she got off the hook, as well she should have. I think we got a twenty-five dollar fine each.

DS: A day’s work.

BKK: Yeah, so that was one thing.
DS: We were always—I don’t know what these meetings were—but it seemed like we were often hanging out over at your house over bottles of wine and various other substances. And just cooking up interesting things to do. And one of them was that invitation that we received, as Women’s Liberation, to go speak to the faculty senate, I think, to give a presentation about what the Women’s Liberation Movement was about. Do you recall that?

BKK: Oh, we had so many speaking gigs. What happened? You must have spoken.

DS: Well, I recall the hilarious time we had at your house planning this event, because we were supposed to go speak to these faculty members and give this presentation and the next thing you knew we had this agenda that ranged from coming in dressed as all these various stereotypes of women, singing “Ain’t She Sweet, Making Profit Off Her Meat.” In reading all of these, you were the ringleader and M.C., reading these cards with all these sayings from all of these cultures, which was a very popular consciousness-raising thing at that—“You should never beat a woman with a stick bigger than your thumb,” or, you know, all of those kinds of things. And there were various readings of different kinds. We had actually practiced, hilariously, going out and pinching women’s arms and making comments about their bodies. There were other little acting up things, and it ended with Judy McBay, this beautiful woman with this long, dark hair coming in dressed in kind of a Superman, Superwoman costume with a “W,” wearing a gun, as I recall, reading this poem of Marge Piercy’s about how we weren’t going to take this anymore and ending with, you know, “Power to all women.” We, at that time, of course, had all left the room and were rolling in the bathroom floor, laughing hysterically. The men, mostly, of the faculty senate were sitting there, I think, in just total stunned amazement. One came down and knocked on the bathroom door—do you remember?—and saying, “Couldn’t we talk? Would you like to come in an actually discuss this?” We thought we were all so very clever here...

BKK: And very finished...

DS: And very finished.

BKK: Oh, I think it was Judy McBay. Oh, how striking.

DS: So we were pretty full of ourselves. Guerilla theater. And there was a little article in one of the Kaimin pieces about that. But I think it was a good example of how much fun we had, however much the rest of the world may have perceived us as being fairly obnoxious, but we dared to do most anything.

BKK: Yes, the world was ours for the taking, it really was. And part of it was, again, it was the times, but I remember Leah Cooney. Oh, boy, was she a beauty. But we would go to bars. Oh yes, going to bars. You know, Jane Mackey and I swore as friends—we even cut our fingers and

Barbara Koser Konigsberg Interview, OH 378-042, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
made a blood pact—that for this six month period we would meet every night, come hell or high water, at Eddie’s Club with all of the...well, you know Eddie’s Club.

DS: All the politicos and...it was the social place of that world.

BKK: No, well, not when we went.

DS: It was a dive.

BKK: It was a dive and it was a dive with all these old guys. We also made a pledge that we wouldn’t date or have any sex with anyone that we met at...we wouldn’t allow ourselves to be picked up. But, no, we talked to all the forest guys, all those really rough...So interesting to talk to.

DS: And why did you and Jane decide to do this?

BKK: Well, it was a commitment to our friendship. She was in psychology and we just...It just seemed like...There weren’t women so much in Eddie’s Club. I don’t know if they were forbidden or...But boy, let me tell you, we were there. There wasn’t anyone stopping us from going in, just getting to know all these old guys from Missoula, mainly that’s what I remember. Later it became the Railroad...and it was a lot of railroad guys, too. It was not a college thing. What we had heard was previously it had been a place where people read poetry and did readings. It had been a bohemian hang-out, but then it became taken over by railroad, all these men. I think we really did change the face of Eddie’s Club. We did it for six months. Jane and I met every night there at some point. It was just such a time of freedom and being able to move and go where you wanted and not having any restrictions.

But back to Leah, who would go to, I don’t know, some kind of cowboy bar. I remember these cowboys coming up and asking Leah to dance and she said, “Oh, no thank you.”

Then they started to walk away and she turned to me and said, “Would you like to dance?”

I said, “You bet!” These cowboys, I mean they turned around and they couldn’t believe it. Leah and I had the whole place dancing.

Eventually we went up to the same two cowboys and said, “Won’t you join us?” They even got in. You know how it was then—you could do that. You could go to bars and everyone would dance with everyone. But as far as I knew, Leah and I were the first ones that ever did that in the history of mankind. But it was fun, because then you could go and you could dance and we often went in groups of men, women, you know. But it wasn’t this coupling up, this restrictive part being just a partner of one person, or sitting there and wanting to dance and not being able to because no one would ask you. So, you know, I’ll never forget that, Leah turning to me

Barbara Koser Konigsberg Interview, OH 378-042, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
and, boy, I was up on my feet in a minute, and those poor cowboys. But that was something that happened in those times, just a lot of, I don’t know, freedom and spontaneity.

DS: Yeah, and we were all younger then, too, so we could do that. We talked some about organizing across the different boundaries of campus community and low-income students, blah blah blah. One of the other issues I’d like to explore in these is the sense we had of being part of a national or an international movement and the degree to which you recall or remember going or attending national and international conferences, reading material from other places, that sense of being involved in something much bigger than what we had just made up on our own. We made up a lot of things on our own. So some comment on that general sense and remembrance. And then let’s talk about the international Indo-Chinese Women’s Conference in Vancouver in 1971.

BKK: I remember while I was in Missoula I made two trips and it was all to women’s groups. I went to New York and I remember I went to...well, I think there were some publications that—I can’t even recall now where. But people put me up and had very easy access to a lot of very radical organizations in New York and then in Maryland. I mean I just took off and made a trip. I think I had copies of the Birth Control Handbook and we had some little mimeographed sheets that I took and shared with them and I then, in return, got things from them. So I was keenly aware that we were part of a much larger movement.

DS: And of course we got all those newspapers, everything from Berkeley and California and everywhere else that were so commonly published, and actually were also being published in Missoula, beginning with some of the Missoula Chief Joseph, “Borrowed Times.”


DS: So one trip you made was to the New York, East Coast circuit just visiting around to different...

BKK: Women’s groups, and attended some consciousness-raising groups, you know, as a visitor. I remember that. And then also...

DS: And what impact did that trip have on you? What difference did it make for Missoula?

BKK: I’m not sure. I think I brought back a lot of materials. I think a lot of it was just materials. I’ve always in my life felt like I’ve been a bridge person. In high school, as I mentioned, I was a model and a representative to Seventeen Magazine for Denver. But at the same time, I was a writer for this teenage magazine that was writing Sex in Denver. But this was like in ’67. I got expelled from school for writing that article. So, I don’t know, I always felt like I was part of a lot of different worlds. I felt very comfortable and easy with a lot of the low-income people that I was working with, although I’ve come from a very middle to upper-class background. And the
Black Student Union and the blacks both at the University of Colorado and then at The University of Montana. I felt like I was...I still have this letter—you know, looking back on it, it’s a much different take—but it was written by this black guy and he was writing to his mother saying how he’d met this wonderful girl who saw him as a person, and it was the first time he felt like he’d been treated like a person rather than a black. Now it’s different. But at the time, that’s how I felt about it. He was just a guy, you know? So I’ve always felt somewhat on the fringe, but as a bridge person. I think it’s really important that we be tolerant and make attempts to get over the discomforts we may feel around people that are different than we are.

DS: So in 1971, the second trip out of the country—and I don’t recall how this happened—but because the United States was at war with Vietnam, there was an organization, an international conference that was held in Toronto and in Vancouver, one the other—1971—co-sponsored by the Women of the Black Panthers, Women’s Liberation, and International Women’s [inaudible] and Freedom. Those three organizations sponsored these conferences and brought in four Vietcong women who spoke and lots of organizing. And from Missoula, I don’t remember how we ended up going, but you and I went for Women’s Liberation. Pam Farley drove a mini-van up there with little peace symbols all over it. Sandra Perrin was the other woman that we met.

BKK: And did Dolores McLean go?

DS: Yes. So do you recall that conference and how did we end up being invited to that?

BKK: I don’t know, do you remember the details?

DS: I remember going, driving to it, and I remember the huge impacts of being at...it was the first major conference like that I had ever been at and it was so international. I mean, there were women from all over the United States and Canada and Asia at this conference. It was declared something by the United States State Department...I mean, it was a very big deal because we were meeting with the enemy, women of the enemy.

BKK: They weren’t the enemy, were they?

DS: And getting back into the United States was a very difficult...You know, they strip searched all the black women coming back and we all...I remember, Pam freaked out the most and put mud all over the hubcaps and everything. And we came over and came in through maybe north Idaho or something, instead of going through the Seattle border crossing. And they confiscated our material and they took...Everyone had been warned that they would have a hard time getting back into the United States from having attended that conference. I remember it had a huge impact on my life because, I mean, I was such a well-organized conference. It really connected up the issues around race, the war, the women’s movement, poverty. It was the first time I ever saw large groups of lesbians. There must have been a thousand women at this conference for two or three days. And the power of those women’s testimony from the Vietcong talking about what the United States and this war had done to their country and their
lives was such a powerful motivator. This was a men’s war, but how it affected families and women and how inspiring that was, but how determined it made all of us to bring that war to a halt with whatever we had to do, which was such a shift because so much of the anti-war movement was such a male-focused activity.

The women were seen as auxiliary, even within the radical movement, which is where we get, of course, all of the: only position for women in the movement was pro. But even in Missoula, you know, seeing women as someone to have sex with versus a political entity in our own rite. And how difficult it was, often within SDS or the other anti-war groups.

BKK: But we always managed to get some women speakers. Who was that one woman? She ended up going to...I can’t remember her name. Not Pauley. I don’t know. But anyway, that conference for me, too, it was such a shift. And it made me so ashamed to be an American. I remember going to a football game—the Grizzlies, is that what they are there? I couldn’t stand up for the national anthem. I was too ashamed. I took a lot of heat from people around me and I remember turning to the guy and saying, “I can’t support what our government is doing in Vietnam and I can’t honor the flag.” Some other guy came and put his hand on my shoulder, sort of in sympathy. But those women, what a story they had to tell. Why were we there? It was such a senseless...Just destroying their country, all those mines, all the...Remember the monk that burned himself? Oh, what a shameful part of our history.

DS: And destroying our culture, too, in our country. It was a time that required everyone to make a decision. As George Bush said today, “You have to choose sides.” In an odd way to have this conversation in light of the bombing of the World Trade Center. So many of those issues come back. He’s saying you have to choose sides. Well in that time we all felt we had to choose sides. And if you were a young person, particularly if you were male, you had to choose sides because you were going to be drafted, you were going to be this or that. I did a lot of draft counseling and ran some people to Canada and did various things. But it really was life and death situations for people and you had to choose sides about where you stood. That war, in my view, not only did we end that war in the streets, but it taught us all of these organizing skills and, in many ways, empowered us to learn how to speak and to organize and to feel morally responsible for what our government does, in a way that many of us have carried out in the remainder of our life. And here we are again being faced with those fundamental moral questions of responsibility for what our government decides to do.

BKK: But I have a different take this time around with Bush. Boy, he wants to vanquish the enemy. Who is he talking about? What is going on? I think we have to look at the root causes. It’s the same now as it was then, and it has to do with poverty and with access to resources and it doesn’t have anything to do with vanquishing the enemy. But see, even then, I was a part of the movement and yet I wasn’t, because I never felt like the people who were drafted should be attacked. There were many people attacked. I never felt that.

DS: But so much of what that...
BKK: Applegate. Donna...Was it Applegate?

DS: Donna Davis, yes.

BKK: Yeah, Donna Applegate spoke...You know, they were going to have an anti-war rally and I found out who was organizing it and I said, “Donna Applegate is going to speak. I want to see her name.” She was great.

DS: [inaudible] an attorney and she’s now a poet. But her husband, Rick Applegate, was kind of the head of the—not SDS—but when Benjamin Spock, Dr. Spock, came and we had the draft card burning, he was kind of the key spokesperson for that again. Even though she was as capable as he was, she, as most of us, it was a struggle to get to be heard in that environment.

BKK: Just being able to see how women could shine. Donna Applegate had the capacity to give a really good anti-war speech. I wasn’t particularly a good speaker but she was.

DS: You were a great organizer.

BKK: I was a great organizer. Because I could also see potential. I could see the Louise Culpas of the women’s movement, you know? Oh what an exciting time that was. I’m really sorry that kids nowadays don’t have...

DS: Well, the potential and the necessity to change the world and, I think the discussion I was sharing with you earlier about the interview with Stephanie...You know that there were different kind of brands of...People came at feminism from a lot of different places: some from a cultural place, some from kind of a civil rights—particularly a person of color—a different slant on this than people who were for more of a Marxist economic analysis. And all those debates we had about which was the core oppression. Was it race, gender, or class? We got into all of those things and people would break out along different lines. But that growing...because of all the study groups and discussions, too, some sense that we played in the world and no one was totally innocent on all of this, that we had responsibilities worldwide. And I think one of the things that I find so horrifying in this current discussion is that we are all innocent parties in America, that we don’t take any acknowledgment for the impacts of what we would then have called capitalist imperialism around the world and what it’s done to many of these third-world countries and why people might hate Americans because of that and how that would feel, that kind of fanaticism. I think back in the 60s, many of us had to make a judgment—particularly when the SDS became the Weatherman—had to come to grips personally with what we personally felt about violence and would we ourselves pick up a gun and what we would do with it. And so that debate needs to go on again in relationship to what is the end of escalating violence and revenge.
BKK: Well, after I left Missoula, maybe ten years, I became very drawn to the Quakers, which of course is a pacifist organization. I could never buy into...Well, I think I did buy into the violence in some ways, because I saw it as the only way to stop the war. But later I really regretted that shrillness and that making an enemy just ends up in a really bad place. And the point was we had a lot of allies in government. We had a lot of allies in the State Department and were just too stupid to know it.

I remember Stephanie and I protesting the war, and then we took over the President’s office. I don’t know if you were part of that group. I don’t know, it just seemed so foolish, and making all these threats that we would never carry through with. It was many moments of disaffection for me, because I think I didn’t realize at the time that I really was a pacifist. You have to have your means and your goal both be justified. I think a lot of times in the anti-war movement, maybe in the women’s movement, it was like the end justified the means, and I don’t believe that anymore.

DS: Well, and given that at that time there were so many political assassinations, whether it’s the government assassinating the Panthers or the massacres at Wounded Knee or the Kent State and Jackson State. And really that sense that we were at war in this country with each other. And we would bring up Donna Davis. One of the stories that we would relate was that second take-over of the ROTC building. We went in and negotiated with the president because we thought they would kill us, because they were killing us. That’s what Kent State and Jackson State and other places were about. So we negotiated with Panzer at the time about we would only stay two days. We would not burn down the building because we didn’t have that kind of massive destruction and we would leave at the end of that two days. It was two days because it was an overnight thing. In exchange for that, he would not bring in the National Guard or would not shoot us. So we took it over and, you know, yeah there was minor damage but we didn’t burn the place down. We left when we said we would leave. We always thought he was an honorable man. Well, Donna Davis went on to become an attorney and then sat on the alumni board for the University of Montana. She’s very beautiful and very straight and traditional looking. Less than ten years ago, Panzer was in a meeting and they were talking about the ‘60s and ’70s. He didn’t know of her involvement in this and he went on to talk about that event and said, “They didn’t know it, but I had the police and a machine gun up in the tower of the Union. She still talks about it. She’s still horrified.”

BKK: At what could have happened.

DS: Yeah. And that at some of those rallies, there were men with guns up in there to shoot us. So we weren’t far off in that. But the sense that in the end we could not have won in an armed struggle, so you had to come to grips with the fact that you were never going to have enough guns to win that awareness of where does it take you. And I think in that context, when you think about that older group of women, when I think of the other mentors and allies that were in the community that we didn’t really...You know, our youthful arrogance. None of them were there, such as the Women for Peace, who were affiliated with the International...
BKK: League of Peace and Freedom.

DS: ...who were there, who was that older generation above us of faculty wives who formed GASP, that went out against [inaudible] and air pollution in the ’60s and were activists on the war front. The first time I walked on campus in 1965, those were some of the people who were holding silent vigils against the war even back then. So our arrogant little enchantment with violence was not the way they would have gone, and yet I don’t know what we were in much of a dialogue about that.

I remember staying up all one night, with people who had turned in their draft cards or burned them—one of them went to jail for that—staying up all night and thinking that revolution was going to come. I mean I remember that, with Harmon and all those guys. There were guns around and people really had a sense that at any moment tonight this will happen, the police will show up and haul you all off or shoot you. We lived with that kind of...I’m sure part of that is a romantic fantasy, but the other thing is there were people being killed all over the country and being hauled off, so it was a time when you had to make those decisions about where you were going to stand on that.

BKK: So I think people have maybe altered their political views. Is it true, ‘Once a feminist, always a feminist’? Because I find a lot of women in those consciousness-raising groups, a lot of women who went through that, have really maintained some kind of affiliation on some level, whether it’s joining NOW or Women’s Political Caucus, or...

DS: Send a check to the Montana Women’s Lobby or can still be counted on for [inaudible]. You would be amazed because there are women who became attorneys or vice-presidents of a university, very traditional older women, and they’d say, “You know, she was in a consciousness-raising group,” or a judge, and they turned out to be women who were involved in these consciousness-raising groups. And in many cases changed husbands or dramatically changed their lives.

BKK: Well, in my second marriage, we had a very egalitarian relationship. I’m laughing because we figured out what rent, food, utilities were and we paid based on our income. It was great, because he was in school getting his Ph.D. and I was working, so I was paying like 75%. Then we divorce, so I never got my fair shake. But it felt really good at the time, to share expenses based on our income. I definitely supported him having women friends. He had several women friends that he would go camping with and they were really neat women. I had some really neat men friends. It was not a sexual relationship, but friendships filled with a lot of affection. He was free to be with them and I was free. There was a guy that I bought tickets to the symphony with because Bob didn’t really like the symphony. So every whatever-it-was he’d dress up and I’d dress up and we’d go out for dinner and to the symphony. It was a wonderful relationship on that level of really being able to support, to be able to lean on one another but not totally...
depend on one another. And not to be fearful if they were out in the world without you and with someone of the opposite sex. I don’t know.

DS: How did your emerging feminism affect your first marriage with Jan?

BKK: I have a letter. We were together... We met in the honors program at the University of Colorado and then he went back to Reed. Oh, we had these letters. So I have this one letter from him saying, “Oh, this women’s liberation movement. We’re not going to let that interfere with our relationship, are we?” I don’t know what I wrote back. That was before we were married. I think, like a lot of men, I think he really fought it while we were in a relationship. But then once he was out of the relationship, I think he went for feminist women. That was my impression. He resisted it with me, but it was very easy to be drawn to feminist women once he was out of the relationship, or that’s the feeling I got.

DS: Why is it so much of a difficulty for many of those political men [inaudible] who at least at the time philosophically and intellectually supported it, and when it came down to who was going to cook the meals and do the laundry and do that at home, in fact, we were off all the time at meetings with the other women. It was really a bit of a... I mean, it was hard for them. It was hard for women to change their roles, but it was very hard for men to have to live with those changing roles too.

I remember one whole period when Paul and Michael and I were living together in this tiny little house and they wouldn’t do any of the dishes. They just piled them all up in the bathtub. My sister, Susan, was just reminding me this weekend about her and this friend coming over, and I washed three bowls so that we could each have a bowl of soup. We sat in the bathroom and ate the soup. She said it was so weird because here’s the bathtub filled with all these dirty, moldy dishes. We’re sitting in the bathtub—why? Because you don’t want to wake up Michael because he’s sleeping in the other room. I wouldn’t do it. Those dishes just sat there till hell froze over.

BKK: For nine months.

DS: Yeah, till we moved, actually. She recalled going through a phase with that with her husband where she literally took every dish and threw it against the wall. One afternoon she said she went through almost the entire stack before he agreed he would start doing the dishes, and he did. Cost him every one of this set of pretty good china. I know several women who went through their china that way. So I mean, it was pretty heated at the time.

BKK: I remember with Jan, I really think he tried. He really tried to understand. I have a lot of affection—even for Jan, in a way—for his family. His father graduated from Princeton, taught at Air Force Academy. I remember him having this sort of heart-to-heart talk with his daughter-in-law and he was saying, in all seriousness, “Well, is this a phase you’re going through?” He was trying to get a sense, was I attracted to fads and it lasted for six months and it was over, this

Barbara Koser Konigsberg Interview, OH 378-042, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
was the new fad. I remember it was very interesting because I was not at all defensive about it, you know, “How could you say such a thing?” But I very calmly explained everything from A to Z. I think after a while he knew it wasn’t a phase, it wasn’t a fad for me. It was a way of life, and it was not going to change.

DS: So you left Missoula and went to Wolf Point, Montana.

BKK: Wolf Point, near Frasier.

DS: Near Frasier up there in northeast Montana on the reservation. What were you doing and how did you take and how did you express your feminism in that environment?

BKK: Well, I was the only woman employee for...It was a National Institute of Mental Health grant and they were looking at juvenile delinquency in urban areas, suburban, and rural. We were the rural project. I was one of the highest paid federal employees. I was in the top five percent of women federal employees. I never touched my salary. I only lived off my per diem for three years. And so part of it was being around men, obviously, just endless meetings where I would be the only woman there. I don’t think I was very shrill, but I think I was very competent and wrote grants like crazy.

Grant writing I viewed as making people’s dreams come true. This was just the perfect project because what came with it was money. We would match dollar for dollar money that they would put into our program. So it was very exciting. Jonny Lee Bear Cub Stiffarm and I started what I think may be the first all Native American school with all Native American certified teachers. When we started out, the school superintendent said, “You know, it’s a good idea, but you’re not going to find any Indians with a degree.” That long ago, he may have had a point, but boy we weren’t going to be stopped. Oh, we had this woman, Roberta Hill was the English teacher. She had her Master’s. She became a Yale Younger Poet winner. She taught English. Charles Coucheine (?) taught Social Studies. We found a guy that taught math. It was the first all Native American school and they did really neat oral history projects. It was a summer school and the kids got paid for going to summer school. Johnny Lee later got her law degree at Minnesota and felt like that school had been some part of that. I don’t know if that school still exists. It did for three years, and then Charles Coucheine, I don’t know, he was a pretty good director and I think he left and I don’t know if they...

DS: What was the school called? It was a summer school?

BKK: Yeah, it was a summer program. But they did, the next year they integrated it into the regular school system. There was a woman, Carol. It was just wonderful, fun way to organize because Jonny Lee and I, we did the strategy meetings. And we agreed, she would go to the Johnson-O’Malley and she would present and I would be the back-up person. And for the school board, I would present, she would be the back-up person. But you know, there were many Indians who’d said they’d never even spoken to white people, I mean in a project...
DS: This was 1974, '75, '76.

BKK: '72. But I don't know, it was just so exciting. I think both Jonny Lee and I it was, you know, we were so young and we had so much money, or it seemed that way at the time. Because we had a combination of Johnson-O'Malley money, the money from my agency, and then I wrote grants and we got several, National Endowment for the Arts. I mean it was a combination of funds and that was real cooperation. This white girl and this young Indian. That was exciting.

DS: Do you think that was kind of historic in the sense around empowerment?

BKK: Well, in a way, I've since then integrated that into what I've done. The teachers, there were half women teachers, half men. Working with Jonny Lee and, like I said, she ended up going to law school. I don't know, it wasn't feminist as much as it was creating an all-Indian school. But that seemed very consistent with my belief in equality and that people should be able to do what they want to do and that people should be able to explore their own talents and their own capacity. And so many Indians had dropped out. I think the school really helped. That's why they later tried to integrate it into the year-round school. I've just lost track. I don't know what has happped.

DS: So in the last part of this, is there anything you'd say to women of fifty years in the future about what it meant to be a feminist in this time and to continue to grow in that? What do they need to know?

BKK: Of what we learned? I think it's important to find a support group. I really believe in this 'United we stand, divided we fall.' And I think, more than anything, if you can make strong connections with other women and I really believe in women-identified women. Women's energy can be so positive. That was certainly true in the consciousness-raising groups.

I just think it's important to know who you are and what contributions you can make and be able to look outside of the box. To me, feminism is so connected to my being a Quaker and putting a lot of emphasis on, rather than judging, being able to try to understand and accept differences. So I think that's a theme and it's such a pleasant life to be able to not judge but to embrace. And I think that's what a lot of the feminist movement was for me, just embracing other women and pushing them a little bit in the direction that they probably want to go anyway.

DS: Embracing yourself as a moral entity and as a person, and pushing yourself a little bit, too, to say, "Why do these things make me uncomfortable, and how do I grow and take responsibility of my life instead of just giving up my moral agency and identity to other forces and other people?"

BKK: Good place to end.
DS: Good place to end. Thank you very much, Barbara Koser. We’ll just sign off on that.

[End of Interview]