Diane Sands: Montana Feminist History project and it is August 7 of 2004 in the continuing series of interviews with women about early activity, feminist activity in Bozeman particularly, around Montana State University etc. So Donna you have some introductory activity on the other state but do you want to share your name?

Donna Stringer: I’m Donna Stringer I moved to Bozeman in 1978 to be the first affirmative action human resources officer as a result of a class action lawsuit by five female faculty members. I was there until March of 1981.

DSt: Yes and during that time worked on developing the battered women’s network, a community women’s center which I think was very short-lived and yes.

DSt: And the women’s political caucus.

DSt: Yes.

DSa: And in the same position that entire time?

DSt: Yes and during that time worked on developing the battered women’s network, a community women’s center which I think was very short-lived and yes.

DSt: And the women’s political caucus.

DSt: Yes.

DSa: So let’s take these in some sort of an order because we’re talking about the domestic violence and the network on the other day so why don’t we...We can take up the law suit and the ramifications of that. We’ll talk about the lawsuit itself tomorrow. But you came in to do what specifically?

DSt: Well I was charged as affirmative action human resources officer to basically see that we had, that equity was achieved for women and that faculty and other staff positions, not just faculty, and so I needed to do all the federal kind of reporting, etc. Pretty early on I think because I had come from California where I was working with women’s groups and women’s resource center at the University of California Davis, I really wanted to be very cautious about not creating an environment of polarization. I think I said earlier that one of the things I discovered early on about Montana is that if you talked about the law, people got annoyed. If you talked about fairness, people really could like listen to you a little bit. So, working with Nancy Pope now Nancy Howard, one of the things we really tried to do was establish an environment where we’d get the different colleges to work with us on how we might employ women and keep them there in faculty roles.

DSa: You said one of your goals is to reduce polarization but since your position is created as a result of a lawsuit, a lawsuit almost by definition requires, or there’s some polarization going on
in the situation. So what was the environment like that you entered into? Was there residual animosity? Were people on the defensive? Was it an open and affirming and inviting environment when you first arrived? From your perspective.

DSt: I think from my perspective there was some tension. My process was really to try and meet and develop a relationship with each of the deans and from there work to the faculty members. Kind of doing that on a parallel with meeting as many women on campus as I could because I was also aware that there were women there that had really kind of laid the foundation for this, and I wanted to know who they were. I wanted them to see me as an ally, not somebody that was taking over from something that they’d done obviously. I had an enormous amount of value for the fact they had laid this foundation and so I spent just an awful amount of time talking to people. Trying to develop relationships. My own experience and history basically says that if people have relationships, you can talk about a lot of things. So my goal was to create as many relationships with people as I possible could so that was kind of the strategy I used. In working with Nancy, who had been in town for a long period of time so she knew people. She kind of could give me the kind of cultural insight about who had the power, who might be angry, who were the problem people potentially. We had a list in our office of the trickies of the week. You never knew that did you. (laughs) I had a blackboard on the wall behind my desk and I had T-O-T-W and nobody ever knew what that was, and we’d just put little initials there about who that week was our least favorite people.

But I really found most people willing to work with us as long as there was a relationship, and they really felt like what we were trying to do was establish a community, or a campus where people were treated fairly. Now, I had some successes and some failures. I can remember one woman who did not receive tenure and I felt that was wrong, and I lost that battle. I had one woman who came to me with a sexual harassment case that I didn’t feel we had enough cause for. I didn’t not believe her. I did believe her. It was something that I basically had to tell her I couldn’t do anything about which was distressing for me. But by in large when I would go to the president, who was then Bill Tietz, and engage him in a conversation about something that I thought wasn’t right. Typically he would support the office, telling somebody that they could or could not hire someone. It was pretty good to work with, I felt.

DSt: Correct.

Dsa: So the position you have, as I understand the way it’s organized at MSU, you really work at the pleasure of the president.

DSt: Correct.

Dsa: So that has to be a really close working relationship.

DSt: Correct.

Dsa: And yet the president as a figurehead and chief administer of the university is the one who must have been the named party in the lawsuit.
Dst: I think it was the previous president named in the lawsuit, is that correct? So he came in after the lawsuit and was the person to whom I reported. So he didn’t have a history of being the person who’d been named in the lawsuit which helped a lot. There’s no question about that. I think for the most part, supported women’s issues. I’m not sure he understood them but I think by in large supported them.

Unknown: My favorite comment of Bill Tietz’s was when Dorothy Bradley was running for governor and told him she was going to run for governor. He said if he thought it was important to be governor, he would have run himself. (laughs)

DSt: Really? Interesting. Well, like I said, I didn’t think he understood, I only thought I had his support.

DSa: It was actually under Tietz’s administration that most of the program that had to do with women’s issue on campus were accomplished. So how and where was he involved in any of that? And what kind of a response did he have of setting up women’s centers and sexual harassment and all those issues? And did he educate himself on all of that?

DSt: Well I think Bill was educated by a number of people. Certainly I think he worked well with me. His first wife, I think was, I wouldn’t call her a strong feminist, but I would call her somebody that cared about, she was fairly independent in her own right. So I have to believe she had an impact on him. His second wife was a strong feminist so I think that clearly he had, am I wrong?

Nancy Howard: I don’t know, I didn’t know he was married twice.

DSt: Oh, okay.

DSa: Because I think that the impact that we look at on feminism is how it impacted our own lives and how it impacted the people we work with, but also how it impacts the institutions themselves, the culture in general. So I think that questions of how and what factors go to move the people who are really the decision makers on campus is a really important one.

DSt: No, I agree with you. Well, and it think that as I work at MSU is probably the first time that I kind of resonated with the fact that if you’re working with a male decision maker, then you want to know what his personal relationships are. I certainly carried that to Seattle where I went after leaving Montana. Observed that the men in—because I moved to Seattle for a political appointment and observing the mayor to whom I reported and council members whom I had to get votes from, knowing what their personal relationships were, told me a lot. Men that are engaged with strong women typically are easier to move than men who are engaged with weak women or have hostile relationships with women. I think Bill Tietz generally, I think he liked women so I think he could at least hear even if he didn’t
necessarily...And I could disagree with Bill Tietz and we could have conversations that were pretty active. I could walk away understanding whether he agreed with me or disagreed with me. I don’t think he tried to be nice to humor me. So while we didn’t always agree, I didn’t feel like he was somebody that wasn’t just trying to humor me because I was there and that was important for me in being able to have any impact on campus.

DSa: As part of the, your position was created as part of a lawsuit correct?

DSt: Yes.

Dsa: So, what legal responsibilities did you have for reporting and to whom? Did you report to the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) as well as the president?

DSt: We were not under a compliance order at the time. Certainly we had to submit EEOC reports, but they weren’t there on campus and they weren’t monitoring in the way that sometimes you see that happening now or with other organizations. So we had to submit affirmative action reports on an annual basis and we kept that data. My position from the very beginning was that I wanted the data collection to be secondary to the relationship development. I felt like you can have all the best data in the world and not be successful. So I was more concerned with helping people, understand how the environment was affecting women than I was with the numbers. We kept the numbers but I spent an awful lot of time trying to establish things, like let’s do good interview committees or selection committees so that people really could ask the right questions and look at the right things, rather than just collect the numbers for the numbers sake. The numbers for me were always secondary to establishing an environment where a woman could be treated appropriately.

DSa: So what were the challenges specific that you were trying to address in terms of moving more women into certain staff and faculty positions?

DSt: I think probably the largest challenge was the notion that the perception that, if I understand the lawsuit, and I wasn’t there during the law suit, there were perceptions that women weren’t doing things that in fact the data show that they were doing. So for people to even see women do things that they didn’t expect them to see, was a challenge. For example, if a woman is published in juried journals, and you don’t expect them to be published in juried journals, then somebody has to bring the juried journal and say, “Look at this.” So, having people perceive women’s successes, and I think corollary with that is having women be willing to publically say, “Look. I just published in a juried journal.” So for women to be able to promote themselves was also I think an issue. I think you heard earlier about some of the assertiveness training classes that I was teaching on the weekends on my own time. And psychology of women. When I first got to campus, I was getting ready to publish a book on battered women. I will never forget taking it to someone in the Psychology Department, saying I’d like some feedback on this, and him saying, I don’t think it’s an important document.
DSt: Which is an issue many women faced if their research topics were considered ballic (?)

DSa: Exactly. So proceeding women in their work is valuable was a huge issue. Then of course proceeding that there were “qualified” women out there. And I put “qualified” in quotes for search committees. The reality of being able to identify qualified women and encourage them to live in a fairly isolated community like Bozeman, I think it takes, I will just say, I think it takes a special kind of person to live in a pretty small community in a rural state, and so being able to attract women to the Bozeman community. So kind of twofold, one is getting the academic community to see women as qualified and then second, getting the qualified women to see the academic community in Bozeman as a place they may want to be.

DSt: And in the period you’re talking about too, we’re starting to see more women as a result of a lot of different pressures go into graduate school and have those kind of degrees so being somewhat a hot property. How do you attract them to come to Montana, sometimes to be the only women in a field, and so what kind of work did you actually do with say the faculty that were already existing, to get them to be welcoming? I mean some of the women I know were first women faculty, were crazy frankly. Or were driven crazy, let’s put it that way.

DSa: Yes, they may have come in sane but they were driven crazy. Well, one of the things I really tried to do with women when they came to campus, and I think that women’s political caucus and the members of that were really effective in doing that, and that is identifying other women in the community that could support them during their early months and years there, and I think that faculty women were extraordinary in that and so when we had a new faculty women one of the things we really tried to do was connect with them with other women faculty members so there was a support network. One of the, in 1978, we got a very large grant to integrate women’s issues into the curricula. Betty Schmidts (?) was hired; that grant was actually hired by Peggy Lettermenstock (?). Betty Schmidts was hired to be the director of that grant.

Nancy Howard: And then she hired me.

DSa: And then she hired you and a lot of other women. One of the things that we choose to do there was pay a faculty member from each of the colleges, and we looked very carefully to make sure each of the colleges had representatives in that. Dollars did help. So being able to do, people to start doing some curricula development was a huge benefit. What was fascinating was as faculty members, some of whom had to be kind of teased into participating as they began working on it, a lot of them, both women and men, kind of got hooked on the notion that maybe there was a different way of educating. So I think that grant had a huge impact and it just spiraled.

DSa: That it was based at MSU, I think had a huge impact in the sense that the presence, an academic presence around curriculum reform and looking at those materials and they weren’t at UM. They really still need to do that again.
DS: I have often said that I don’t think that women can do this alone. We can be pretty darn good, but if we don’t have male colleagues that we enter into partnerships with, they still, in most organizations, most institutions, have the power. And they’ll hang onto it as long as we let them do that. So, we can do all we want to do, but if we don’t have them as partners, we then become a polarized culture.

DSa: Talking about the assertiveness training program you developed, is that something you offered to faculty, to the community?

DS: I think I offered it to the community. It’s something that I had been doing in California before I moved here, and I think I offered it to the community and I recall community members being there, students being there; I don’t know if faculty attended. I would have to go back, I don’t remember who was there.

DSa: Cause we had a women’s assertiveness training collective in Missoula that was about a dozen of us who did. I did a lot for the Forest Service, and women in non-traditional jobs, training in that sort of things as a reflective, integral part of women moving into some of these positions is often the need to develop those assertive skills versus the passive aggressive model or whatever. That was an important set of skills for women to acquire when going into these positions.

DS: That’s right. I also did a training for trainers so we could expand that and other women could do the training as well. And yes, I agree with you. We can move into all sorts of professional areas and if we can’t hold our own in ways that are at least perceived as being “appropriate,” again I put that in quotes, by our male colleagues, then we don’t necessarily, and I think women sometimes are our own worst enemies in not promoting ourselves and our successes. So being able to stand up for ourselves and also just share our own successes. You know men have no problem talking about what they’ve done that was good. Men have no problem talking about their latest published article, or their latest published book, or their latest great class or latest great whatever, and women tend not to do that for ourselves. So I think learning to do that is really a valuable skill and probably pretty critical to our moving forward.

DSa: Was there as a result of the lawsuit in your work, a restructuring or looking at faculty and staff pay scales and some kind of an adjustment then in the structural wave with the university?

DS: I have to assume yes, and Ellen Kreighbaum, whom you’re going to interview tomorrow, but I was not part of that.

DSa: So what do you think were you’re greatest successes?

DS: Wow! I think you should ask the women in the room. (laughs)
DSa: I mean you must have felt good about the work you did there.

DSt: Don Clark was appointed by the president. He was the president’s assistant, so I did work with him. He was a bit more of a challenge for me frankly. He was often the gatekeeper and was appointed by the president to implement the plan. The plan that came out of the lawsuit. So I did report to him and I did find him a little bit harder. He came out of the military and had a much more male perspective and was much harder to move I think. I don’t know what else I would say about him.

Nancy Howard or Jan Strout: I think probably the greatest success was that I think that we hired additional women on campus and I think that there were a number of women’s organizations. The Women’s Center, the Battered Women’s Center in the community, and I just think relationships among women on campus and in the community was probably something that was a legacy that you probably still see today.

DSa: Were there opponents of this move by certain faculty women as well as some men? I mean we certainly saw that at University of Montana. There were certain very powerful women who had made it in the academic system who were very much opponents of the expansion of this.

DSt: No I did not see that.

Unknown: I think the lawsuit really was a coalescence for women on campus (unintelligible). I think Donna’s presence was, she came at an ideal time because she was very good at bringing people together and bringing out the issues because I think women were ready to move. I think they definitely felt that things could be done. Because lots of reasons why things happened in the community as well as on campus like the Women’s Center.

DSt: I think what that also did is that silenced the men that might have been the opponents. I think the men that were probably in opposition and angry about the lawsuit, probably felt like they did not have a voice right then, and so not that I think there weren’t opponents, I think there were, but male opponents. And there may have been some females. I don’t know. But I do think that the women really, the lawsuit was such a success that it really kind of gave an energy to women to coalesce. I think the men that might have been in opposition simply knew better than to open their mouths. I mean I think it wasn’t a safe environment for them to be in opposition at that point in time.

DSa: Consistent do resist change. There is an inertia of power holders there that are not likely to move and a lawsuit certainly requires officially for a system to change but that’s not the same as the system itself changing.
Yes, and at the same time the lawsuit, I think, was almost like the, I mean it just created such massive movement as a result that I mean you have a significant emotional event that could not be ignored. By the time the organization or the institution might have wanted to kind of settle back into historical behaviors, new behaviors have been created.

DSa: Was there any retribution at all from this lawsuit? Many of the lawsuits I’ve known about in this area, there was some kind of retaliation or retribution to some individuals. None that you know of?

Dst: None that I know of.

Dsa: That’s pretty remarkable in and of itself.

[Nunintelligible conversation]

Nancy Howard or Jan Strout: There was one thing, and sorry I came in late in this, and I don’t know if you mentioned Elena Pratt (?) but she was the acting affirmative director while the search was done that hired Donna for the position. I think she was there maybe 8-6 months. And she was also a candidate for the position, but I think her stature as one of the plaintiffs in the case worked against her in that position. I think, probably, having someone come into the position without baggage was a very healthy move for the institution to move forward with the agenda. To create the agenda basically, cause that’s what you had to do.

DS: Let me tell you a story that I think, this is another whole issue that has nothing to do with the lawsuit. But in 19...maybe ’79, there was an issue in town where a group of conservative women who were anti-abortion, put up, on main street, a billboard that said “Abortion: A women’s right to choose,” and the “choose” was crossed out with red ink and kind of blood dripping. It was on Main Street. No, stop I’m going to back up that was not the issue. Forget that one, that’s another one.

So let me tell you the real story. The real story is this, we had a judge in town, Judge Lessley (?) who sentenced a young man who had pleaded guilty to rape, who was a son of a police officer. Plead guilty so there was no trial, and Judge Lessley said to him, from the bench, said to him, “The next time you think about doing something like this, I think you ought a go home and take a cold shower and read a good book.” All of this was reported in the newspaper. When I got home that night my phone was ringing and it rang and rang and rang. What I finally said is, “Why don’t we write a letter to the judge expressing our concern?”

DSa: Who’s the “we” here?

DS: We meaning everybody that was calling me. The feminist community, the women’s political caucus, the women working on the battered women’s shelter, faculty women on campus. So I said, “Why don’t we write a letter to the judge expressing our concern and try to
educate him with this?” I also talked to the editor at the local newspaper and asked if we submitted him a letter with signatures, would he publish it. He said, “Yes.” I said, “What kind of space are you going to limit us to?”

He said, “Whatever you bring me we will publish.” So, the next day we had Nancy and I prepare some letters and people were coming to the office and coming to my home, and I went to the bank to make a deposit and all of the tellers wanted to sign the letter. It was a landslide of people being concerned about a judge talking like that. I also had social workers call me and attorneys call me and say I understand you got a letter, but I will not sign it because the judge has run people out of business before and I’m afraid to do this but I want you to know I support what you’re doing. So somehow I became the focal point for heading this letter. The next night I got home and the phone was ringing and it was Judge Lessley. He said, “I understand you’re circulating a petition for my recall.”

I said, “No, I’m not, I’m circulating letter expressing concern about your behavior.”

He said, “I want you to know that I’m the judge, and I can say anything I want to from the bench.”

I said, “I respect that and I want you to know, I’m a citizen, and I can circulate any letter that I wish from the streets.”

So the letter went to the newspaper and as I can recall it was two whole pages of signatures. It was unbelievable. The judge had said, “I want you to know that I will never, ever apologize for what I do from the bench.” The following day the first page of the newspaper had a letter apologizing to the community from the judge. Two weeks later, I was in Bill Tietz’s office getting my annual performance evaluation when he said, “I want you to know that you came very close.”

I said, “Very close to what?”

He said, “Just very close.”

I said, “Are you saying you almost fired me?”

He said “Well, you came very close.”

[End of Side A]
DSa: So back up a little bit there.

DSt: So I said to him, “So you’re telling me what I do in the community as a citizen is related to my performance evaluation on this campus.”

He said, “In this community we cannot separate what happens on campus and in the community.” I tell that story because I think that what the women did with their lawsuit, and the Battered Women’s Shelter and the Women’s Center, in Bozeman, in a small community, you really don’t separate those thing. I mean people.

DSa: Do you think that warning from him in anyway impacted what or how you choose to go about doing other actions?

DSt: Nancy’s heard me say a hundred times, If I don’t get fired, I haven’t done my job right.”

DSa: So did you come close to being fired any other times?

DSt: I think I quit first.

DSa: You quit?

DSt: Yes.

DSa: Why?

DSt: I could not live in a community that was as isolated and homogeneous as Bozeman is. [soft crying] Bozeman was the best and hardest three years of my life. I just could not stand being in an all-white community, where feminists were not appreciated, and I went to Seattle to direct a program that advocated for women in sexual minorities. I thought that any city that funds a program whose job is to advocate for lesbians and gays, has got to be a city, I want to live in. I was tired of seeing only white faces. I was tired of having only one bar that I could walk into and have a drink safely.

DSa: And your job as affirmative action officer, were you also mandated to deal with trying to recruit American Indians, people of color to the campus? Or was the focus primarily on women because of the law suit?

DSt: Primarily on women because of the law suit, yes.

DSa: What was the attention at that point to thinking about, and recruiting, and looking at the issues of Montana’s Indian population?
Dst: Virtually none. The focus on the Native American community was really Native American Study, and with a number of some of the academic programs that were really trying to get native students involved and on campus. But there was virtually none with regard to, I think. Nancy and I tried pretty hard to look at that issue, and you know, I kind of struggled with that because it’s one of those issues where do you really want to bring somebody that’s African American into a community that’s already hostile to women for god’s sake?

DSa: Well and I think your discussion about why you left, the sense of isolation and how much homogeneity of the Montana community is reflected in that.

DSt: It’s really tough, I admire people who manage to survive there. I couldn’t do it.

Jan Strout: Could I add something? But I don’t want to take away from the interview here. I wanted to add one other thing that Donna didn’t get a chance to say on her behalf, but I’ll say it. That is one of the other things that we did to help bring more women to campus was we did like a cheerleader team. When any woman was interviewing on campus, they would assemble us to be like, oh yes it’s ok to be a woman, a strong woman, a feminist woman and want to work at MSU. A lot of us sitting around this table were a part of those cheerleading teams. It was not only enough that Donna and Nancy got them here and supported once they were hired. They also organized us to say there is a women’s community. There is a support system of women that you can make it here in this isolated place that was a challenge. So I just want to make sure that credit was due for that and the only other second piece I would add regarding American Indians and people of color and that is Mary Lukan’s (?) program started at September, 1978 and at least that addressed some of the student issues particular for first generation Native Americans that were coming to college with another grant by PD letterman stock that created the events by choice program, and I think that was a place that not only helped really beef up the numbers and retention and support of Native Americans and other more vulnerable populations coming into the state’s system. That program also worked so well with the momentum from the case that prioritized women.

DSa: Relative to both those questions, one that I would have is, since we’re talking about the institution, what was the involvement of the Board of Regents? Was this information reported to them? Was there any leadership at that level at all?

DSt: None.

Ds: No interest, none. Did you work at all then with the affirmative action person, who was there, the person that was at University of Montana at that point?

DSt: No, I really didn’t.
DSa: Because all the campuses were actually going through similar situations. (Unintelligible)

Unknown: There was a question at the time about even having a position of affirmative action on any campus. We had to have one because of the lawsuit, but the other ones were going no I don’t think so, we don’t have to have this, why do we have to have this.

Unknown: And in fact they weren’t called affirmative action then in Missoula, It’s human resources.

Unknown: That came later,

Unknown: Equal opportunity?

Unknown: Human resources came later.

DSt: Well around the country then, it wasn’t just in Montana. Affirmative action officers were data gathers. I remember talking to Nancy when I first got there and saying this is not what we’re going to do here. We’re going to keep the data, but that is not going to be our focus. We will keep the data we need to keep, but we really have to change relationships and attitudes and perceptions here.

DSa: So you were doing programing, not just keeping data.

DSt: Absolutely.

Nancy Howard: Well one of the things that Donna instituted was that a representative from the affirmative action office would meet with each search committee that was established for a faculty or an administrative position. So we worked with the search committees throughout the process. It did help to build a relationship between the office and the various departments and individuals. The other part of what that, and I believe this was out of the plan, was that each of those search committees had to have at least one woman on it.

Twenty five percent women or minorities on every committee on campus.

So there were a lot of four person committees with one women.

DSt: Because I don’t think at the time, we had Bob Paragoy, and Robbie Farren and Mary Lukas but Mary wasn’t faculty. Karen Finn. So we had very few native—

Nancy Howard: If you had Karen Finn or Robbie Farren, you got two for one because they were both women and American Indians so you could—

DSt: Exactly. So they were totally overworked.
JS: Then that bigger issue was, did that service count toward what they were doing either in their job or if they were in any kind of faculty position that was the challenge of whether or not that counted to all the kind of things that lead to tenure.

DSt: That’s an issue today on any campus of higher education. I mean higher education simply doesn’t give women for doing anything but teaching or research. I’m sorry...research and teaching. Not research about women by the way, just for the record, real research.

DSa: When you think back on that period though, you obviously still feel it was worth your time doing that?

DSt: Absolutely, I wouldn’t change a thing. Not a thing.

DSa: Other than the response from the campus.

DSt: The weather would be good.

DSa: When you came there, you also talked about the women’s political caucus in Bozeman, which had already started at that point. While it was a statewide women’s political caucus, it really only took ahold to a large degree some in Bozeman, some in Missoula, some in Helena. I know Eleanor Pratt was really involved in that, Eddie Winn gave me a whole box of women’s political caucus, the first membership list and all that. One of my favorite things there was an article, it was in the Bozeman Chronicle, it’s a picture of Eleanor and someone else who had gone off to the women’s political caucus national meeting and it’s “Mrs. Pratt and Mrs. Wing” who’d gone off and they say they’re not “bra-burning feminists” in there, but they’ve gone up to this national conference. And it’s on the society page of course of the Bozeman paper.

Unknown: Oh my goodness, not surprising.

JS: Well I remember when I joined the women’s political caucus, one of the first moves was to try to get a woman onto the board of education because there was not a woman on the school board in Bozeman and we felt that there was certainly something missing in that regard.

DSt: And what’d you do about it?

JS: We did it. We went door to door. We got us a candidate, and we went door to door is how we did it. And we got fundraisers to provided some support.

Diane Sands: Who was the candidate and who was the appointee?

Diane Stringer: I should remember and I don’t.
DSa: So how many people were in the Bozeman group?

JS or DSt: Well I remember going to my first meeting and Nancy said to me—because I was bemoaning the fact there were no feminists in town—and she said, “Oh you need to come to this meeting with me.” I think there were eight or nine women there that night. There were eight or nine women there that night. It was a small group but they were pretty committed. I think over time it got to be between 20 and 30 but not more than that. And pretty active.

Unknown: Well the fundraisers were amazing.

DSt: Yes, the fundraisers were absolutely extraordinary. We had a lot of fun and made a lot of money.

DSa: And what were you raising money for?

DSt: Usually women’s candidates, women candidates. Or legislative issues that we felt were important.

DSa: Original Emily list.

DSt: That’s exactly right.

Unknown: Our best fundraisers were quilts that we made. I remember we made an our foremothers quilt and then we would raffle them off. We actually would do the squares and we’d take it to the senior citizen center and work with the women that were quilting because they insisted we sit side by side trying to do twelve stitches to the inch I recall. Then we would raffle them off and they were good fundraisers.

DSt: Actually the first quilt we did for the battered women’s shelter, I quilted after everybody did a different quilt and we raffled it off, and here’s the joy. Who won that quilt? The women’s center at UC Davis that I’d been first directing. I want you to know it’s still hanging there. I want you to know I have said to them, “If you ever close this women’s center or you ever get rid of that quilt, I get it.” (laughs) But I was just there last year and it’s still hanging on their entryway. That’s our quilt.

JS: The other thing they did was these amazing dinners which the women’s center appropriated because I remember being at Marilyn and Tom Wessel’s place and Helen Kerr, and they’d have these dinners. I remember one room, bedroom, be a bar and bathroom, I don’t know bathroom but the kitchen was something else and living room. It was just so crowded and so vibrant. It was very much as Donna was describing, Nancy too, the whole community partnership and that everyone got to meet to put forth both women’s agenda and support women’s candidates and we were so powerful back then working with women’s candidates because we had the Dorothys running; Dorothy Eck, Dorothy Bradley, we had other women running for more local
offices and state legislature and senator. It was a very powerful group of women that we were really coming into our own. As we started the women’s center, we went to our mothers of the women’s caucus, and we said, “Could we ask your help to utilize these kinds of dinners for the women’s center?” That’s when we started the pasta extravaganzas that really were built on all of the work that the women’s political caucus started and did so well.

NH: And it sure beat bake sales.

Unknown: I wanted to ask Donna or your or Nancy if you would talk about the fluidity between those groups because Jan is approaching that, but I know I did things. I was not a member, I was a student but I know I did some of that work. There was all of this cross pollination. Now it is a distinct group, but we all ended up helping, many people did, across those lines. So that when you’re trying to talk about individual groups, they are almost a misnomer.

DSt: And that’s actually what Bill Tietz was talking to when he said to me, “What happens on this campus and what happens in the community cannot be separated.” It’s fascinating because I’ve been in three kinds of university communities and I’ve never been in a place where the boundaries are so fluid.

DSa: But I think it’s also indicative of that time. One of the things that I’ve come to realize in looking at the history of that period is the permeability between the campuses and the community and these kinds of organization. It’s fairly uniquely open at that period of time.

DSt: In Montana, Diane. Because I have come from Davis, California which was the same size as Bozeman in terms of both the campus numbers and the community numbers, and we never were able to get the town in gown permeability, and we worked pretty hard at it. It just never happened.

Unknown: But almost likely we considered it larger committees of the same thing.

DSa: We had more of that in the region I know Pullman, Moscow there, and some of these other places this was sort of interesting throughout the region as we sort of looked at it. But clearly that’s changed now, you are either in the university system or the community and they often don’t know each other and there isn’t much cross pollination going on there. For lots of reasons the institutions have become a lot more rigid in their policies.

DSt: Well and the communities become larger and you also, at least as I understand Bozeman, have a lot more, and this may be true in other areas in Montana and Eastern Washington, you have a lot more people who have migrated into the area and don’t have the history of the area. In 1978 I was pretty unusual; Jan Strout was pretty unusual in being new to the area. I mean a lot of the people that were here had been here for a very long time. They knew each other; you knew the history, so there was that kind of integration or fluidity. I think the more people you
get immigrating into the area who don’t know the history, don’t know the community, the
more likely it is that you get stricter boundaries between community and campus.

DSa: Because they don’t have a relationship.

JS: The one thing that I just so valued, and especially since leaving it is, it’s never felt like there’s
been walls between town and gown that I expressed in other university community settings
and the fact that so many of the women, as Emily pointed out, would cross town and gown
because of their role in the university and their role in the community. That we could always
find ways to connect them without a lot of difficulty, and it wouldn’t seem like as we were
thinking about the status of women in the university. We would necessarily stop thinking about
it as cross feed street, so to speak, to the lives of the community. I think the battered women’s
network represented that, maybe the most. But the women’s political caucus also did that
really well.

Unknown: I don’t know that anyone has mentioned the male beauty pageant.

Everyone: “Oh my god!”

DSt: Which was not officially sanctioned by any particular group in Bozeman and I have no idea
what year that was. Maybe 1980? Again it was one of those kind of cross fertilization things.

[Unintelligible conversation]

Unknown: Was it the booster club? Somebody had the bright idea on campus that they would
bring in the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders as a fundraising event. Then had the gall to ask the
director of women’s athletics, Denny Hunt, if her athletes would serve as usherettes for the
event. A number of women were appalled and fortunately Jenny did share that piece of
information with us and we decided, maybe only about five of us, a small group of women,
then rather pick at the event and look like, you know women without a sense of humor, that we
would schedule an alternative event. So we put together a male beauty pageant. Several
people went out and got prizes for contestant so no one would go home empty handed. The
affirmative action director at the time evidently put up the cash of $100 to first place. We only
had about five contestants. Donna’s son was one of them. I do remember Gunter who worked
at Cactus Records won first prize, but we held it in the ballroom of the Baxter Hotel. We had no
idea who might show up, if anyone. When we arrived that night, they were lined up down the
stairs and out the front door and there were women from all over the place. I have no idea who
they were, but we had an open bar and that was the reason the Baxter agreed to let us have it
there. If they could have the cash bar, we could have the event there, and they made big
money. The people from the restaurant downstairs came up continuously throughout the
evening and asked if we could please keep it down because the women would stomp their feet
and pound their fists on the table. I think we raised, back in that day, it was something like
$1,500 dollars. It was huge. We had no idea, we didn’t do it as a fundraiser we just wanted an alternative event.

Unknown: And we got front page coverage of this particular event because it actually usurped the whatever activity was going on in the men’s athletic department, and of course, that was our ultimate goal in terms of shifting the thinking of what was going on. One of the legacies besides having it, I think, there were two great legacies. One as feminists we could have a good time, we could take something and turn it on its head to do the political education about why this was so problematic and that the sorority system at MSU ultimately adopted our idea and began to have Male Beauty contests for their own right.

Unknown: As did the high school in the city of Belgrade. It went on in Belgrade for years.

Unknown: I know from my own job security, because I was in the On Campus Living Department at that point, and my boss Glen Lewis, bless his heart, gave me a lot of slack, but one of the things he was really upset about was that I had helped a number of other women lead this campaign to its successful fruition. He was not going to have me do that again. He was on the Athletic Department’s board or something like that. I’m sorry I don’t know the official name. Athletic Committee, it was a big booster of all things athletic.

DSa: Did you come very close to being fired?

JS: Yes, I did.

[Scattered talk about success of pageant]

Unknown: it was really a fabulous legacy about organizing, protesting and appropriating the kind of sexism that was so rampant at the time, and that we didn’t simply have these bad attitude, anti-male feminists.

DSa: I think also that you bring up the kind of spur of the moment fun things that we would just pull together and do, whereas now we might look for some kind of official sponsorship or do things through some sort of institute or structure that takes all the fun out of it to start off with. That much of the relationship building that you’re talking about as being so important really epitomizes in so many ways in that story in a way that we really don’t see happening any more. We’re much more professionalized, we’re much more structured, in a way that perhaps makes the relationship building part more difficult.

Unknown: And we weren’t afraid of failure. We knew it might happen, but so what?

Unknown: But having the standing room only in the extra hall room.

[Unintelligible conversation]
JS?: You asked several times about institutionalizing women’s roles in the university and this last little piece raises my curiosity of whether you said you’ve become more professionalized, and you wouldn’t do this sort of spontaneous fun stuff in the same way, or do you think that the women’s, the women’s issues around the university, and affirmative action, is that institutionalized now?

DSt: Wow! I’ll just answer for myself that I personally decided in 1982, I’m an adjunct faculty member on three campuses and I decided probably twenty years ago that I really did not want to participate in higher education outside of adjunct faculty because I love to teach. But I think higher education is an institution that kills the soul. I think it kills the soul of women and I think it kills the souls of men. I can’t live there. I think we have a lot more women on faculty than we’ve ever had before. We have women in academic arenas that we’ve never had before, but I do not think that we’ve changed the institution.

Unknown: And I would agree. I’m on a campus now, it’s a lot smaller than MSU, and even though the majority of our deans are women and our president is a woman, it is still a male institution and it is very entrenched.

DSa: I think that goes to what we were saying before about the amazing ability of patriarchal institutions to absorb and use systems whether it’s the domestic violence system or somehow adapt and suck the energy out of it and somehow maintain the power basis they just look different.

Ellen Kreighbaum: This is Ellen, I agree with everything that’s been said. I think that once the Affirmative Action Office and Human Resources, as it has now been called, came under the president that that person, that office works for the president of the institution and therefore is subservient to what the president wants to do. Therefore if the president doesn’t get it, then the office and the person that’s working in that office is required to get it or at least not act on getting it.

[End of Interview]