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Interviewee: Judy Smith

Interviewer: Dawn Walsh

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Project: Montana Feminist History Oral History Collection

Dawn Walsh: This is Dawn Walsh here conducting an interview with Judy Smith as part of the Montana Feminist History Project. We are going to be talking about the history of Women's Place and Judy's involvement in that. We are at the Swift Building which is located at 315 S. 4th East, Missoula, Montana. The date is April 23, year 2001.

So, Judy, I'd like to start off by asking you about the very beginnings of Women's Place. What were the conversations that led to the opening and how were you involved in that?

Judy Smith: Well, Dawn, as I mentioned to you, I had opportunity to reflect on this over the weekend since you've been telling me you were going to do this interview. To some degree, I will have to start out as somewhat of a personal odyssey, and then you'll see how it weaves all of this together, but...I was in Austin, Texas for my graduate work and there I was involved in starting a birth control and abortion referral service and at the timing of all of this, I was also involved in the *Roe v. Wade* abortion case, and, at the end of that moment of being in Austin I moved to Missoula and *Roe v. Wade* had just been decided, so to me it was time to open an abortion clinic.

I was moving to Missoula, and I thought, 'You know, the answer is we will just start an abortion clinic in Missoula.' So, I moved here with that in mind. I started meeting some of the women in the community here. There was a group that was also already in existence called the Women's Health Collective. I went and met with a few of those folks and talked to them about what we had been doing in Austin – that we had our birth control and abortion referral service, and the kinds of things we did there, and that it made sense to me to have an abortion clinic.

So, in many ways, Women's Place became the intermediate step. It was this group of women who had been doing some health-related education and myself coming from somewhere else with an idea, saying 'Let's do this thing,' and realizing that we couldn't immediately start an abortion clinic but that we would build toward that. In those conversations we talked over what would be possible immediately, and talked about starting this referral service. My interest and background was in birth control and abortion.

However, in Austin, just when I was leaving, we began to get some phone calls to our service from women who were the victims of violence. It was one of those organic things I think has happened throughout the feminist movement, which is you don't necessarily think you're looking for this thing, but it starts to happen and then you go 'Okay, women need this. What are we gonna do?' So we started getting these calls from rape victims basically, because we were a campus-based organization and service. And at first, we didn't know what to say either.

I mean, you know, we had to educate ourselves about, okay, women are calling us. What should we do? How can we help? So, we educated ourselves on the laws around rape and on what you would do for rape victims. The whole women's movement was just beginning to learn this. There was no standard way of handling this. And that was just becoming. This was, as I said, '73.

So then, moving up here, um, and starting this idea 'Let's do...' Again 'Let's start a calling place for women,' and we would do birth control and abortion, but we would also do, because I knew at this time this was likely, we would put out the word that we also would take any kind of crisis calls or violence calls.

We started our service in the Y, because in Austin we had our birth control and abortion service in the Y. So, I just went, 'Oh, there's a Y. Let's go talk to the Y.' I didn't realize at that time that that was probably unusual for the Y to be involved in that kind of a thing, but at that...You know, who knew? So we just went and asked. They said 'yes.' So, there was a group of us that started doing this. We were all volunteers. We all basically showed up for our shift and we all did our own collective education.

The calls started coming in. A lot of them were at first abortion calls because, and this is where it gets kind of woven into many other things. Another thing that I did when I moved here is my partner and I moved up, who had both been working on abortion issues in Austin, challenged the Montana Abortion Control Elect. Since we had challenged the law in Texas, we just thought, 'Of course we'll challenge the law in Montana.' And so, we got involved in that and there was a court case. So, we knew that there were no places to get abortions in Montana because it was still illegal here. They tried to keep it illegal even after the *Roe v. Wade* decision with the Montana Abortion Control Act. While we were doing this referral service, we also were challenging the law, and also I was involved in getting the Women's Resource Center started on campus.

All of these kind of weave together, because the women who came to work at Women's Place, some of them had worked on the pro-choice abortion challenge and some had worked at the Resource Center. We had this sort of fluid group of women who were involved in this larger conversation around women's issues and particularly this case. Reproduction and then violence started to come in as one of the themes that we would be talking about there. So I was thinking back about the first training we did for Women's Place volunteers. Several of the women were from the Women's Resource Center, several were from the Missoula pro-choice organization, um, there was a law student who is still a friend of mine who is now a practicing attorney. You know, just various, um, women, that had been part of this grouping and then these women that were also part of the women's health collective. So...this is my experience with feminist institutions. As you begin to build them then women are drawn to them and not necessarily for the particular issue but because they want to be involved in a feminist institution of some kind. So we had this group and we did our first training, and I can remember preparing for that training. I was, as I said, very comfortable doing the birth control and abortion part but the

whole rape crisis and then, by that time, even some domestic violence issues were coming up. That was something we had to learn more about. One of the great things that's been around is the amount of information that different parts of the women's movement have made available so *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which also started out as a sexuality, birth control, and abortion also started going into the whole violence, so you could take material from what they had learned. There were growing resources from other parts of the country that feminists were beginning to engage these issues. So, in many ways feminism for me was always a national movement. Even though each local place was doing whatever it was doing, it was connected up to a lot of other places. We could gather information from places that were already doing this work, and train ourselves on how to do rape crisis intervention and those kinds of things.

So, we got started. We were in the Y. We started getting calls. At first we didn't get an incredible number of calls, but it grew. We met other women who were interested and had some education programs in the community. We began to do different kinds of education classes strictly through the resource center, but also in other parts of the community. Again, not so much just on birth control and abortion anymore, but also then picking up this whole conversation around rape and domestic violence and violence against women, and what did that mean. The whole theoretical concept of, okay, how do you get at violence? I mean, it's not enough to just talk about this particular situation that happened to this particular woman, but how do you understand why it happens and what do you do about it? So, of course having those conversations, and trying to get that information out, because the Women's Resource Center had a newsletter, we would write things for the Women's Resource Center newsletter. I mean, so we had this sort of ...And the Women's Resource Center had annual conferences, so Women's Place would be involved in some of the annual conferences. So there was definitely what would be called now overlapping directorates, you know. Some of the same women that were involved in the Resource Center were involved at Women's Place, and ...vice-versa. You know, just around the community enough that there would be common interests, and people would come up with ideas for conferences and...provide speakers and do those kinds of things. So, this was pretty much in the '70's.

I was trying to remember exactly when Women's Place started. That was kind of interesting, but I think it will be '74. And I think we got the space in the Y and actually established our phone lines and things like that in '74. So the time I'm talking about now is the Seventies, particularly like '74-'77, '78.

Then because of my persistence, I really wanted to start an abortion clinic. Some of the women at Women's Place wanted to, and some really didn't. We formed a separate – or a subcommittee, if you want – and added some other people on that to actually investigate whether it was time to really start a clinic. Several of us went to Seattle and looked at a new abortion technique, which was called the suction technique. It was demonstrated to us how someone who isn't a doctor could certainly do that technique. Some of us decided we would go and survey the medical community in Missoula to see if we could find some medical people that would group with us to start a clinic. Some of us decided to see how we could raise money,

and how much money we'd need. So, there was a small group of us who did a lot of the sort of fundamental work of getting a clinic pulled together. And...I don't know. Maybe it was about a four to six month period where we did that work, and we met very regularly, and took tasks and conferred back and forth. And finally decided that yes, we could actually open the clinic. Then we found a place for it, we built the furniture for it, and we made the standing orders for it and the protocols and hired a doctor.

One of the connection points again was Planned Parenthood. I had, when I first moved here, also got involved at Planned Parenthood, because I was interested to see what role they might have in the whole birth control and abortion discussion. I got to know the nurses that worked over there fairly well. My friend, Barb Burke, who graduated from Sociology that first year or so that I moved here and went away to public health school came back and became the head of Planned Parenthood. So we had another little interlocking directorate there with Planned Parenthood where we had Barb and a couple of nurses that I knew and had some good experience with who were also willing to join us in starting this clinic. We had an interesting array of players that started the clinic.

This was my first foray into alternative capitalization, so one of the ideas we had was to raise money from friends, family, whatever as notes – that they would pay us, give us the money and we would owe them the money back, because this was supposed to be a venture that would make money. Not a lot of money, but at least enough to pay back. We did cash floats and decided we needed to borrow...and I can't remember... it was like ten or twenty thousand dollars at the most that we borrowed. We wrote these notes and then we did pay everybody back the notes. My mom was one and different friends and whatever. It was a very exciting thing to do. We actually set up Blue Mountain Women's Clinic and this isn't the story of Blue Mountain. I'll just say that that was an outgrowth of the conversation that was at Women's Place by a subgroup.

While this was going on, and there was this whole focus there, I think Women's Place itself probably was more and more focusing on the violence aspect. I think one of the things that many of us in Missoula have talked about is allowing this kind of specialization – not everybody trying to do everything, but that different feminist groups working on particular things, but then supporting each other and using their resources and sharing what could go on. So, Women's Place more and more was doing the rape/domestic violence. The birth control/abortion was more and more moving then into Blue Mountain and at first Planned Parenthood was doing some of the birth control. So there was kind of a separation of – or a specialization.

After Blue Mountain really got started – first year or so in there – so we're talking about '78 or '79 – and I couldn't remember this when I was thinking about it. An interesting thing started happening at Women's Place, at least for me, which is a different set of people. The original set of people – a lot of them had moved on, a lot of them were students or were professionals but got other jobs, or they weren't actively involved. Another set of folks came in to work there. It became a very different style. We can talk about this more if you want. But the style moved

away from sort of a focus on education and...it's interesting to think about ...education and an approach of reaching out and working with the community around some specific issues, like, as I say, birth control and abortion, and then violence, and it became more of an alternative cultural experience in my view. It wasn't something that I was particularly interested in or ...wasn't my focus. Again with Blue Mountain coming along and some of these other things happening, there was kind of a division among the people at Women's Place, so that the people that were more of that ...I don't even know...women's culture or whatever language you want to use...persuasion pretty much stayed at Women's Place and the rest of us went on and did other things. I think that would have been '79 – I was trying to pinpoint that. I'm not very good at doing that. There was an actual discussion of...Well, I'll give you an example. To me, and I don't know if you've had this personally, but to me, when I go to meetings, I really am not interested in exhaustively spending a lot of time on how everyone is and the personal processing. Yeah, occasionally I think that's good, but it's not why I go. I have many other things, and I have many other friends, so I don't try to do my social life through my organizations. But Women's Place became a place, in my opinion, where people were doing their political correctness social life and it just wasn't something that engaged me. So I think that was part of the shift that happened there. So some of us left. The ones who kind of started it left and other people took it up.

Also one of the things that had happened is some of the funding issues. When we first started everybody was volunteer, but you can't really run something that way, and so I myself was very interested in getting a volunteer coordinator and CETA money – the Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration money – became available. We had gotten CETA money in Austin for some of the projects I had did there. When it became available in Missoula I immediately went, 'Okay, let's get this money.' We got some money for Women's Place and also for the Women's Resource Center. It was a volunteer coordination type money, so that we had someone who actually then got paid and could help get the materials and the trainings together and all that kind of thing. That was a source of money. This was before there was any like violence against women act money or any of those kinds of things that I think Women's Place later got. None of it was specifically money that had to do with the programming. It was more just a non-profit getting money to support employment and training kinds of opportunities. So, again that - that happened and through all this process Women's Place basically was a collective and made the decisions by consensus, but we did have one or two paid staff that were coordinating and making some of the materials. More detailed things happened.

So, as I say, after we left, then I think people more went into this direction. There became money available around domestic violence itself that they could apply for and do that kind of work, and actually employ people a little bit differently than we were able to at that time. That was a long answer for the first question so you may want to get more - maybe some sub-questions in there.

DW: Right, yeah. A few questions have come up while you were talking. One – I'd like to – you keep referring to Women's Place as a feminist institution, a feminist organization. I'd like to just have you define that a little bit more detailed and clearly, as what that means for you when you say 'Women's Place was a feminist organization.' What does that mean?

JS: Well, I think in the early days, here in Missoula – in the Seventies anyway – what a lot of that meant was that it was consciously political around its understanding of power. Feminist to me isn't just about women, it's also about oppression – and that you're aware that women are a class and they're oppressed in certain ways and power is the issue. It's not enough just to provide services that even though that's important, it doesn't ask the fundamental question of why is the situation the way it is, and what can you do about that situation, as well as working with each individual woman that comes to see if her life can be different. It's a systems analysis as well as a service analysis. And, because you are talking about power, then you have to face it in your own organization. I think feminist organizations may have slightly different power structures, but they're all power structures where there's been questions asked about them. Most feminist organizations start as kind of what I would call the 'everything is equal, so everyone has to be the same' model, which I actually don't like. But, it's a starting out place. You sort of lowest common denominator equalize everybody. No one should have more of anything than anyone else. Often enough it gets into a point of okay, everybody should have an equal say in everything, or everyone should be trained to do everything...just that, in my opinion, rather unsophisticated understanding of what value and equality is really about. A lot of feminist organizations are collectives and they use consensus and more or less understand the power dynamic there of trying to equalize power in those days, in the seventies. Organizations evolved in different ways around that. But at least power is an issue that people talk about and try to figure out what to do about. As I say, there's several different answers. But I don't think you could call something a feminist organization if it just works with women and doesn't have a power analysis because it isn't really asking that large a question then.

DW: Right. So, a big part of a feminist organization, as you said, would be to look at the, the system at the roots, at the causes of how women's lives are, and how they're affected – not just providing services.

JS: Right. Right. And that you're aware that if power is the question in the larger society, you have to deal with it among yourselves.

DW: And then, when you were talking about Bluer Mountain Clinic starting – I know we're not really going to focus on Blue Mountain Clinic here – but when you were talking about needing to provide, or to find an abortion doctor, I was wondering what that was like and what was the...the atmosphere in Missoula at large as you all were trying to start up these services?

JS: That was an interesting process. I have done a few things since I have moved to Missoula that I didn't ever think I would particularly do. One of them was going to doctor to doctor to doctor in the community and interviewing them and seeing if they would be willing to do this.

The way we got started is, as I say, when I first came here we challenged the abortion law, and we actually could get some doctors that were in their practice already doing some abortions, and so we had some conversation with, and I don't know if you want names, but there might have been a handful of doctors that already – they wouldn't have wanted it to be publicized – but they were already trying to do abortions, and were on our side in the whole pro-choice debate. They were the ones I went and talked to first. Then when they weren't interested, I went to the next level of who else anybody knew, and just talked to them about could we find someone that would be willing to work with us. It actually turned out to be quite interesting that the people who were willing to work with us were the ER doctors, not the regular, who I originally thought might be the Ob/Gyn's or anybody like that. In some ways they were too set in their practice and it was a little scary to the idea that they would go contract with this...whatever we were. But the ER doctors were willing to. A couple of them, I'll give a lot of credit to, took grief for it, because St. Pat's Hospital is not exactly wanting their ER doctors to contract with, you know, an abortion clinic. But, they said, 'You don't have the right to control us in our other hours, and if this is what we choose to do, we choose to do it.' So, we had some of those.

Our very first doctor actually was an interesting guy. I have this general theory, and you've heard me probably say it, that if you're on the edge of society, you're out there with everybody else who's on the edge. And a lot of times they're there for a range of reasons. Well, this guy was very good, but he had gotten...I don't know totally why, but he had gotten in trouble with some of the hospital regs, cross-wired with them. So, we tried to spend as much time as we could investigating him, because here was this guy who was very skilled and all that, but for some reason he didn't have hospital privileges, but that was the reason he was willing to work for us. It was one of those challenges. Like, do you trust him enough and think he'll do a good enough job that you're willing to, you know...And we turned out to have a very fortunate circumstance where he was very good, but he didn't stay with us a whole long time, but he was the very first one and probably that's because he didn't have a regular practice. So that's what we did. We'd just go interview doctors and asked them, and looked around, and looked around until we found somebody who would talk to us about it. For most doctors, what they didn't like – and this is what they'd say is, 'Well, we don't want to be seen as an abortionist.' Like, you know, one day a week we...they....We wanted them to come one day a week over to where we had our clinic set up and do maybe fifteen procedures. They would get paid good money. It wasn't that. But, somehow that was just not how they wanted to be known. We had to work around that and to this other way where we got several doctors, most I would say were ER doctors that would come. They would come one maybe Saturday a month. We would rotate and whatever. So it made it harder for us to provide a kind of service that we wanted to, but we felt it was imperative to offer the service.

DW: And could you talk more about the challenge that you did to the Montana Abortion Control Act?

JS: Sure. Well, in Texas, what we did is we challenged the law there in the *Roe v. Wade* case, and we didn't realize we were going to get the kind of decision we got out of *Roe v. Wade*. We thought we might just get either a decision that was under equal protection or a state's rights decision, but we got a privacy right decision, which was a really interesting basis, and it really went broader than we thought. So basically after the *Roe v. Wade* case, the premise had to be that every state had to make abortion legal. They had to follow *Roe v. Wade* and they had to acknowledge there was a right to privacy. Well, Montana in '72 passed their new constitution which acknowledged right to privacy very upfront in it. When we moved to Montana we were looking through all of that, and realized that they had something called the Abortion Control Act, which totally tried to restrict abortion, which was then totally against *Roe v. Wade*. Since we had just worked on the *Roe v. Wade* case, we contracted the ACLU and some other people here in Montana and said, 'Well, let's just get rid of this law.' Because we knew it...would have to go. We worked with a couple of attorneys, Bob Campbell, who's a very interesting guy, and then a Dr. Armstrong up in Kalispell, who's also a very kind of weird guy, but anyway we were this odd coupling of these people who challenged the law and got it kicked out. I think it would have happened anyway, but it just so happened that we came here and knew this and pushed it forward very quickly

DW: So now I want to ask about something different, and that is the Take Back the Night event. Now, were you at Women's Place when Women's Place started to do that event? Because I'm not sure when the first having of it was.

JS: Right. I was just gonna say I tried to think of that today too, because I was seeing the posters around town today and I know I was there I think the first year, but I'm not sure very much longer, so my guess is that must have really started late seventies, very late seventies, and maybe early eighties, but I do recall, the first couple of years, conversations around it. Because, it's probably stayed this way, but some of the very early conversations were this thing about not having men, which is a tired, old conversation, but it is always there. And then, what kind of events? How to make it safe, and how to – do you really want women to tell their story? Because this was a very...It was a question that various people would ask is, 'What's the purpose of that?' And are you trying – what, what are you accomplishing? Is it education for the community? Is it the women's catharsis of saying what she wants to ...you know? How much of that you want to do? I can remember some of those early conversations about what people wanted to do. The first few years marching in the street, and really making that assertion, this is Take Back the Night. This is something. For me personally, I've lost that sense of identity with it, so I don't participate, but I think at certain points, it's a very interesting psychological thing for women to think about, which is 'We have to have the freedom to walk and do what we want where we want. And how do we gain that freedom?' So again the system analysis to me is what's interesting. This is a tactic, right? This is an assertion against a power structure, and, you know, how do you make it the most effective? So that was of interest to me.

DW: Yeah. Okay then. Well let's – let's talk about just the growth of Women's Place in the first few years, because I know they outgrew the Y at some point, right? And Women's Place moved

several times, so how did you experience the growth in those first years that you were there, and did they move while you were still involved?

JS: Yes, but here's what happened. The Y itself moved, so we were in an old house over here on Orange Street, and we were in a little room. Then we moved with the Y over on Broadway, when it moved over on Broadway. When I was with Women's Place it was still there. I know they moved into a whole separate place. The thing about Women's Place when I was involved with it is that because we were pretty much volunteer, you were always recruiting and training new sets of people because we used a lot of students. People would be there for awhile and then gone. That was one of the realities you just had to face is that you needed and I admit I forget how many people were on per shift that's – I was trying to think about that. Two or three people on or one person on per shift, but let's just say you needed...oh, a week. How many slots... Like say you needed two or three – so maybe you had twenty people a week. How do you have that many people, and how many slots will people take, and how do you keep it coordinated and all those things. So, that was always a concern. And then, how did you do your education on top of just being there for your service slots. There were always a fair number of volunteers that were required.

I left before they really got a lot into the schools, but there was also a whole curriculum push on conflict resolution and handling violence in the schools that came from Women's Place too. I think when that domestic violence money, violence against women money came along, they were able to hire more people and maybe expand a little bit that way. And pay more rent. We didn't have to pay rent in the Y, and some things like that. So, we really didn't have to worry much about fundraising. I think it would be interesting for you to talk to the next few folks about this, because I think one of the dilemmas that Women's Place ran into was how much can you fundraise? I mean, what can you really put on the ground and continue to build, and where does that come from? The more established institutions like the Y end up being able to get that money, versus the more free-standing, independent institutions. It's a big question. A lot of feminist organizations have come to ground on that cause they're not part of the established institutions, so unless you can figure out ways to continue to fund yourself, it's hard. Sometimes the community doesn't come through with the money you need. But, I can't say that I really remember this as much, Dawn, because I always remember trying hard to get the volunteers, so I might be not remembering enough that we did grow, but my sense is that we were just always trying to get enough folks to do the thing that we wanted to do.

DW: So I want to ask more about that, about the training. What was involved in training sessions for volunteers at the Women's Place, and who did the trainings, and what were they teaching?

JS: Well, when I was involved anyway, again there was kind of a core group of us who did a lot of the training and, and because of who we were, a lot of what we were doing was that basic values training, that this is a power situation, that this is a dynamic that is in the culture and its sexist and its an expression of the devaluing of women. We did a lot of this whole basic feminist

analysis as part of the training. You did that discussion, then you were adding how do you actually deal with someone in crisis and how do you make a good referral? There were different levels of training. We committed a lot. I don't remember if we asked people, but we might have asked them to commit five evenings of training. I can't remember, but I mean a significant block of training. And as I say, some of it was this larger values discussion, some of it was very specifically just technical, how do you listen to someone? What are listening skills? What are ways you deal with someone who's upset? How do you get them in a place where they can talk? How do you show empathy? You know, just some of those kinds of things. And then, it's the content-specific, which is...Okay, where do you go if you've been raped? Okay, what do you do, the law and all this...So all of those were involved in the training.

DW: So, that makes me think about, well about the law in other institutions that were in place. How did you at Women's Place and all of you at Women's Place work with these other institutions? What type of relationship did you have with the referral institutions that you were sending women to?

JS: Well—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

JS: —had this group of women, you know. So I think they were like, ‘Wow! Who are you?’ And the courts had this group of women – because there had been nothing, right, I mean it had just been the old way and the classic rape victim thing where people wouldn’t report to the police just because they’d been treated so poorly by the police. They wouldn’t want to go into court because of the kind of ways they were treated in court. It was humiliating, and they weren’t virgins, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah...So we faced all of that. So we just would go in and say, ‘Here we are.’ Deschamps was the county attorney at that time, Dusty Deschamps, and because I sort of knew some of these people a little bit, several of us went in and just said, ‘Here’s what we... we’re going to be doing this now. Here’s how we’re going to do it. We’d like to have any information from you. We’d like you to be part of our training.’ You know, you try to pull these people in to be part of your training, so that they feel comfortable with what you’re doing. And then, at first continue it with the police, because part of the challenge of working with the criminal justice system is that, in my opinion, they’re an institution of oppression. They’re the same people often enough that oppress very badly different people. So then, you’ve got, basically, to make them women’s friend, right? There’s a dilemma in there, but people have done a lot of work. We began it certainly. We didn’t begin to finish it. I’m sure other generations at Women’s Place and since then have really helped police and prosecutors understand. Plus women going in to law themselves, becoming the police and the prosecutors or whatever has – I think has helped as well. So they begin to understand that you don’t treat this the way that you’ve treated these other situations. This is different. And you’re going to have these advocates there and you’re going to have to deal with them, and understand what they’re saying and why it’s not okay to make sex jokes. Just all that kind of stuff that used to be around. You had to do a lot of education of the police and the criminal justice system itself to get some of this. But, fortunately it wasn’t just in Missoula – it was happening all around the country. The feminist movement had taken on violence against women everywhere. And so, books, conferences, trainings were going on, so it just percolated through.

We were fortunate in that Missoula, in some ways, is not Montana, right? We were able to be part of a larger conversation that we could bring in and train and whatever, and then turn around and help that happen in some of the rest of the state. Like we could help get some of this started in Kalispell and some of the others by having conferences and things like that, so that that conversation was larger than Missoula. But, I had noted down here, one of my interesting experiences was that – because I was friends with a lot of the women who were in the law school when we did the pro-choice work – they went out and became...a lot of them became county attorneys because that’s where women got their jobs, and so it turned out that my friend Peggy Pollem was the county attorney in Hamilton. It just worked out that I was on the line the first time that we got a rape victim who ended up going through the whole process, and then I was the first rape advocate with her in the courtroom in Hamilton. That was kind of an interesting experience. Because I went with her to the police, I went with her to the hospital, and then I went with her into court to testify for her. That was the first time in the Montana law that someone like myself had been seated as an expert witness. Of course, the other side

wasn't real thrilled with that. This whole idea that these advocates are coming in to the courtroom and can be witnesses about whether or not you believe this woman and what happened, and all that kind of thing. So that was interesting. That was really helpful I think to have Peggy. So I do think, again, having women come into the professions who already get it, and then you can work with them to create the best possible case, has made a big difference.

In fact, this is totally not to do with Women's Place, but I was just working this legislative session on some things, and I was hanging out in the attorney general's office and the woman who is doing a lot of domestic violence work in the legislature for the attorney general is a woman attorney, who I got to know, and we talked. And again, you're really seeing a lot of this now carried by women attorneys. [It's] just nice. That's all. Progress.

DW: Good. So you mentioned the work done here in Missoula, and how you were able to then extend that to other parts of Montana, so can you talk about that? I understand there was, maybe there still is in place – there's the Montana Coalition to Stop Violence Against Women.

JS: Right, right. And that's been around...When did that start? Probably – well, early eighties probably. What we did more is some statewide conferences and brought in speakers. But then, again, as the money became available for the actual violence work, then you got these coalitions, because you could get someone paid to be the head of the coalition, and you got groups started in different parts. So Bozeman has had an organization for quite awhile, and I think they were the place where the coalition got started and was located. Now I think actually it's moved to somewhere here in Missoula. But anyway, there were other places that got services offered and funding so that they could begin to do this kind of coalition work. But the big challenge is the little towns in Montana, and what happens to women that are somewhere where, you know...Thompson Falls or Two Dot or whatever. And that's been the real challenge – is how to get services, much less challenge power, in those places. And I know, having talked to the domestic violence coalition people that they still are working on having safe houses and things spread throughout the state. It's still pretty difficult to get the needs met of just the service part of what they're up to now.

DW: So I want to talk a little bit more... You brought up the legislature and so I want to talk about how what you and the others at the beginning of Women's Place – the work that you were doing there – how that has had effects today. I mean, what have been some of the changes within the system. So you mentioned for instance rape advocates – that was something that came out of feminism in the early and mid-seventies. Are there other new structures that have been created that are still in place now that have ...and maybe even policy itself?

JS: Well, as I say, the thing that comes to my mind right away is just looking at the law in Montana. What was going on around consent and whether women's past sexual history can be brought in. There was a lot of conversation at first around that, just to see if the Montana law was still very prejudicial against women, which it was. And then getting that changed and

pressuring the law school. There was a women's law caucus, and so working with them around the law, to get it cleaned up so that women's past sexual experience couldn't be brought in and some of those kinds of things. Actual rewording of the Montana law has happened.

Related around domestic violence, we actually brought in the whole concept of doing something around child sexual assault and incest pretty early, because that started coming up to in the conversations that people were having, both in Women's Studies and the Resource Center and at Women's Place, all of us. It's been like this throughout my experience with feminism is that issues just bubble up after you've dealt with one, and you're kind of going along...all of a sudden another one, which, in some ways, is the one that's been hidden. So the real hidden ones are on the use and abuse of children - started coming up. We were able to get a whole program set up to look at those questions, and how to deal with them in the court, and how to deal with the children themselves, which came out of conversations that feminist organizations had around violence and education. We got curriculum in schools. I worked on a curriculum project to get that conversation in schools with the children and parents on how to deal with those issues. I think overall, something that feminists have been really interested in doing – and I think have done pretty well - is to look at the specific legal language and change it.

Also to look at community education and start to eat away at the structure of why these things are happening. It will never be easy, but I think those two prongs have gone together, so that rarely do you see someone just working on, 'Oh, let's just look over here at the specifics of the cases.' There's always someone doing some education or asking questions about the fundamentals as well. Which is what leads you into an interesting conversation around once the domestic violence and rape movement began to get money, there began to become public funding for violence against women. Other organizations began to want to come in and take that over. So a lot of the feminist-based organizations lost their money. I have friends who worked around the country in that movement that basically lost their feminist institutions because the established institutions – the social workers or whatever – took it over. That's a common concern that you'll hear from a lot of feminists, which is feminism basically identifies these things for women and begins to get the victim visible, and talk about them, and make change. As soon as it's become acceptable somewhat, these established institution - the social worker, the whatever – moves in and takes the money and does the service, but doesn't do the challenging of the system. At first there's no money to challenge the system. So the feminist education – how does it keep going, because...so that was one of the dilemmas that you'll get a chance to probably talk to Jen Gibson about – that a lot of us felt about Women's Place going away – is that even though maybe we didn't work there anymore, it was important to have a feminist organization doing the work, because it challenged the system in some fundamental ways. And as that isn't true, then that aspect of it goes away.

DW: Right. That's very significant and important. I want to talk a little bit more about community education. I know Women's Place did publications, brochures, booklets, pamphlets and...could you talk about these things?

JS: Well, I just have two here. These were real early ones that...This was again kind of joint projects between the Women's Resource Center on this one, and groups like Women's Place. This was 'The Montana Divorce Handbook.' Because we would get calls about, 'I'm wanting to get divorced. What shall I do?' You'd want to know, okay, well, 'Do you need an attorney?' blah, blah, blah. This was a way to help people make a decision whether they could represent themselves, or if they needed an attorney, and how to get an attorney, and what are the issues. This was again a publishing project that we put together where we got different groups to buy a hundred copies or so ahead of time so we had enough money to publish it, and a group of us wrote it. This was the kind of feminist publishing project that groups did. Then this one again was an early one that I worked on – 'The Missoula Birth Control Handbook' – again, a project when we were starting Women's Place and the clinic and other things of saying, 'We need more birth control information that's easy to read' and made it available. We did this kind of project. We had a CETA position of someone who printed things, so we actually had some money to print and do feminist publishing. That was one of the community education things that we did at that time.

My guess is Women's Place – in fact I know Women's Place put out a couple other publications – it was a little after I left, so someone else I'm sure can mention them to you. But that idea of actually having educational materials and products has always been really important because, again, that's part of your job – is to change the whole perspective and perception.

DW: I want to now talk about the intersection between what is commonly talked about now - race, class and gender – and how was that part of the conversation in the mid-seventies when you were starting Women's Place? What was the level of awareness around race, class and gender, and how did you all think about that and talk about that?

JS: Well, again, the people who started these conversations around Women's Place were all pretty political people. These would be topics they were very aware of and would talk about. Now, some of the people who came in and volunteered and whatever might not have been as aware of them because race is a very odd thing to talk about in Missoula, Montana. It's just not operational. So, we didn't spend a lot of time on it, because it wasn't something that people experienced. We did talk a little bit about Native American culture and if you ended up working in a Native American family situation. But we generally didn't get that. I mean, that just isn't who called us. So, we didn't spend a lot of time preparing people for something that doesn't happen. Class is a funny one because, again, a lot of the women that we would be working with would be called working-class women. I mean, class distinction isn't really heavy in Missoula. The woman I was a rape advocate for, was a classic, if you want to use the words, working-class woman, lived in a trailer port, she had no idea I had a Ph.D., because it wasn't important. I mean, it just wasn't the issue because you were trying to relate at that fundamental woman level. That's that old conversation about what's the most important variable? Well, in my opinion, the violence movement - the point it makes – is that women can relate to each other as women, and overcome all those other categories. Well, some people don't like that analysis, but in my view that's what violence work lets us do. As you get into other work, it's harder. But,

when you're talking strictly about violence, and I found myself – very interesting – several times, on reservations and in different settings, and that's exactly right. If you are talking about violence, you are immediately having a conversation that the other women in the room can connect to you. But, if you're talking about some of the other topics, it's much harder.

DW: Yeah. Well, that's interesting.

JS: So, I guess what I'm answering is that, although we were aware of them, and theoretically occasionally might talk about them practically in our life. As a group that was trying to do what we were doing, that wasn't – they weren't really very significant.

DW: Now, I want to – we're getting near the end of the tape – and so I want to ask about your own view of yourself as a feminist, and maybe you could speak of how you had your own feminist consciousness awakening, and how now you see yourself as a feminist, and how that's changed or not changed?

JS: Well, I think I was very fortunate in the experiences I had of being around at the time I was, because I had a classic experience, which is that I was very involved politically with different kinds of social change movements, and could see that women inside the social change movements were not at all treated any differently than women outside. Men were talking about equality and buh, buh, but it wasn't about women being equal. That whole analysis about the student movement and women basically saying, 'Wait a minute. If we're talking about freedom and equality, it has to be about us, just as well as people of color, or Vietnamese people, or whatever.' Then the withdrawal from the movement and creating your own movement, and talking among yourselves about what it means to be a woman, and how you fit that into understanding the culture you're a part of, and duh, duh, duh...So, I had all of those opportunities, and I think that probably the most important thing that I have learned - and again, this is sort of coming from my experience – is that when I was young, I thought the most important thing was to be smart, and that has worked for me through my life. Up until a certain point, being smart – you got what you wanted, teachers left you alone. You could be whatever. And therefore, since there were very few women that were qualified in this category of being smart, I always thought, 'Well, okay. They just aren't.' You just accept that experience. Well, for some reason women aren't, and they're not in your classes, and they don't do this stuff. So, I accepted the exceptional women category. And again it works for you. You get awards. You get money. You're treated well. Buh, buh, buh...

Finally at some point, at least for me, you reach a point where I – you know – 'there's something really wrong with this. This can't be right.' You know, women aren't dumb. I mean, why are there no other women in your classes? Why do you have no women professors? I mean, why are no women winning the Nobel Peace Prize? I mean, ugh! Then you begin to go, 'Wait. I need to deconstruct this. About the same time I was in graduate school working on those issues, along comes the student movement, and we sort of came together in a way that I could go, 'It's not about me being smart. It's just about the circumstance that I was able to be

who I wanted to be.' Most other women aren't able to do that. I mean, why? The interesting is that I think it was very important for me, but it didn't help me deal with a lot of other women, because they were very different than I was. When I would go to consciousness-raising groups, I couldn't share a lot of similar experience about oppression, because I didn't have it. So, there are pluses and minuses around some of this. But overall, just having that core understanding of suddenly, 'Oh my God! This is really not about me. It's about a whole other thing. And then, just trying to work with it, and to understand it, and to say, 'Well, women's experience creates the reality, and we have to all deconstruct that reality, and understand it, and try to share power. It's been a long road. I'm not in... That's that thing that I was saying with Women's Place, where there was a shift in the perspective around power. That's the – that's the growth I've had as a feminist is that you can't just say you're equal by saying, 'Oh, well every body should just be the same.' We aren't the same. So, you've got to understand how you share power even with difference. How does respect for difference even come in and how do you work with that so you open up power? But don't pretend it's not there and do silly things around saying that no one should have it. Because obviously, people do. And so, how to have a more sophisticated understanding of those things and to build them into your institutions, but to work really hard to open up opportunity and not have a small group of people that really run things. I think that's always a challenge.

DW: And so, I know that you've lived in Missoula for all of this time period. And how have you seen the community at large change with their opinion, if you will, on feminism, and what feminist women are doing in Missoula – have done and are doing in Missoula?

JS: Well, you know it's interesting. I think in the seventies there was more of a kind of paying attention that women were doing a lot of things here, because we were. I mean, there was a lot of things getting started and whatever. Then I think, people almost – because we were there, we just continued – almost lost sight of the fact that yeah, there are a lot of feminists here, and they're doing a lot of things. So it was almost like... You know, sort of like, 'Well, what's happening with feminism?' People didn't see it, but it was still doing all the things. It just wasn't new and different because they were there happening. And now, I think again, depending on who you talk to, people are aware of this feminist energy in this community or they're not. I think, if you talk to people who – who are politically active, they will say, 'Oh yeah. Women are pretty strong and organized in Missoula.' They may not say specifically 'Feminists do A, B, and C,' but they're aware that that's a constituency that they have to pay attention to, that women are organized. If you do something they don't like – like this guy in the legislature, Shockley(?) made some crack about women needing... if they're not smart enough to carry their restraining orders, then they deserve what they get. All of a sudden women responded. So, we're perceived as an organized power group, but whether that's seen as feminists doing the thing they're supposed to do... it depends on who you talk to, I'm sure.

DW: Okay and I recently heard that you identified yourself as an anarchist feminist at one point. Is that still true, and could you talk about that, because that was a big part of feminism when Women's Place was starting out. There was the Marxist feminist, the liberal feminist, the radical feminist, the anarchist feminist. All of these... which isn't really as much the case I don't think

today. But it was then in the seventies, and so can you comment on that? And was that part of Women's Place at all, these different identities of feminism?

JS: Well, let me say two things. One is, I think what happened with Reagan, is that myself and many other feminists went, 'You know, we may not afford that conversation right now. We have to just be feminists. We have to all band together and figure out and work together and not let ourselves be split off into different groupings,' because there's too much, if you will, opposition from the outside. So, we did have some really good conversations and if I were pushed to say what my political philosophy is...Most people don't understand what anarchist means, but yeah. I would say I'm definitely an anarchist feminist, which has a lot to do with this power analysis that I'm telling you. It has a lot to do with how you like to organize. So if you watch my life, I usually have small groups of what we call affinity relationships, which is people I like to work with working on specific kinds of projects that tend to create institutions that challenge other institutions. That's total an anarchist model. But I don't talk about it, because most people have a very strange idea, about anarchism is something about bombs and people wearing black, and weird things...But really, anarchism is about the idea that people shouldn't have power over each other – that the struggle is to have authentic relationships with people as equals, and to build institutions that reinforce that potential in people. But, how you do that is...complicated. There are a few examples of people who have tried it, and it was...There's still some communes and things around that – if you bother – you can find out have been around for numbers of years and are working quite well. But, usually you don't see that in the regular media and people aren't as aware of that. I was just talking to my acupuncturist today, who was telling me about one. It would be fun to go visit. We were just talking about that – it would be fun to go visit. So, I mean, there are people who are practicing that philosophy as well. But I think once the New Right got more power, people became very clear that we need to be feminists together. We started calling it pro-choice feminists, feminists that basically believe women should make choices around their lives, and not get into the divisions of what's liberal versus...you know Marxist versus anarchist movement...It's just like, 'No. We're all in this. We'll have to kind of work together and maybe later on we can have this other conversation.'

You know, the one that was...It didn't happen too much – I mean a little bit with Women's Place, and a little bit in other places as the whole went of this sort of separatist women's culture side, and ...There was some of that that happened in Montana for awhile, and then it hasn't been around for awhile. But that's a whole other arena of feminism that's kind of interesting to explore, which is what would it mean to create a women's culture, or live inside of a women's culture, and how do you do that? See a critique for someone like myself is to say, 'Well, there may be some interest there, but what do you ever do? What do you get done? And what – what does it mean? You may create a nice little space for a few of you, but so what?' That's the sort of big critique. Then the big answer to that from the other side is, 'But if you can't create this alternative space for some, then how do you have a vision for what you want to do for all?' So there's some tensions there, but that was a split that certainly has been around somewhat. Not as much here, but certainly within parts of the feminist movement. Like what's the nature of your work and what are you really doing on that side to create this

alternative values system that gets incorporated. One of my arguments is that I try to put it in place, like at WORD. You know, like you try to have understanding that there are spiritual dimensions to life and you bring – you create flowers, and you have food, and you read poetry. I mean, but you - that's part of who are, wherever you are, not just in your own special little culture, but you bring that into whatever practice or institutions that you can be in. But, you know, all of this is about how you make things different.

DW: So now is there anything that you want to say that we haven't touched on yet?

JS: Well, you know, I want to say the thing I was – I've always been proud of about a lot of the work here in Missoula, and one of them is that the institutions go on. So, for me, I've been involved in starting a lot of institutions, and most of them are still around. And Women's Place worked very hard to be still around, and I have no doubt that the women who made the choice to have to close down – found that a very hard choice, because they were part of an important tradition. But I really appreciate all the work I'm sure that they did and the soul-searching about what alternatives they had because I think it is pretty amazing that women have worked in so many ways to create these institutions and to put themselves in very hard situations to keep them. So, I feel proud of the women who came after those of us who started this, because they had the hard work – that of trying to maintain something, and find resources for it, and take it different ways that they weren't sure were going to work, and whatever, so... I know, having talked to Jen and those folks, when they did make that final decision to close that was a very hard decision. And I know it's probably something that they'll think about all their lives.

DW: And so, then what do you think about when you think about the future of feminism and think about women, say twenty years from now, and that connection of the past, present and future of feminism? Do you have just some thoughts on that?

JS: Well, the thing I am most aware of that I really try to figure out how to do is to spend a fair amount of my time – maybe not enough – with women that are a fair amount younger than I am, because I think everybody has their own experience, and feminists have to be authentic to who they are, what their experience is. So, I don't want received wisdom. See, that's why I'm an anarchist. I don't believe in received wisdom. I believe that people need to see other people's resources, but everyone has to create their own wisdom. So, I think that the more we are all working together in certain ways on projects together, and understanding why each other thinks what they think, and then trying to say, 'Okay, that's how feminism goes forward.' So, it's not like, oh, what people figured out in the sixties and seventies, younger people also believe and then carry forward. No. It's that we figured out some things, and then that helps inform whomever thinking now that figures out something, and then we need to learn from each other, and back and forth. It has to be a living tradition. I think in Missoula we're working on that. I think some places do it better than others. But I think that division between generations is a problem, and I'm just conscious of it, and try to encourage a new way to, kind of work with that. The Bra Show was a good example to me because I think for some people in my generation that was a harder show because of certain elements that younger people didn't

feel. You had to kind of go, 'Well, okay. If that's not their experience, than who are you to say, 'No, it has to mean X, you know. So, it's – it's just not... I feel feminism is alive and well. I don't – I'm not worried about it, the way some people are. To me it's just gonna take whatever it takes on, and become what it can in that particular historic time period, and some are more visible and more flaunting, if you will, than other times, you know. We'll just see, as it goes, which time, what it becomes.

DW: Great. Any final closing words?

JS: No, except that – Well, yes of course. But I'm really glad that Diane and you and whoever else is doing these interviews because we talked several years about trying to get a lot of this done cause Missoula is an interesting place. We've been able to do a lot here. And I think it's a combination of individuals, but also circumstance and environment, and just all that, and how that all came together. And that Montana itself is a...It nurtures feminism, you know. The kinds of connection you can make here, the influence you can have, because we are a pretty self-reliant, small group of people, pretty determined we believe in, in freedom and equality in our own weird ways here. But, when you appeal to these things, you know, people go 'Okay, yeah. Right.' You know, the frontier woman, the old...some of the traditions that we have. That's something that people will still respond to. So, I'm just glad that history is getting gathered, and I appreciate that you are spending your time doing it too.

DW: You're welcome. Thank you.

JS: Sure.

DW: So, that was Judy Smith talking about the history of Women's Place and her involvement in feminism in Missoula. This is Dawn Walsh. And this interview has been for the Montana Feminist History Project.

[End of Interview]