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Interviewee: Karen Cornelius Fenton

Interviewer: Dawn Walsh

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Project: Montana Feminist History Oral History Collection

Dawn Walsh: This is Dawn Walsh with the Montana Feminist History Project. The date is May 9, the year 2001. I'll be interviewing Karen Fenton, from the Salish Kootenai Domestic Violence Program, and we are in the Women Studies Office at the University of Montana. Okay. Hi, Karen.

Karen Fenton: Hi, Dawn.

DW: Thanks so much for coming.

KF: Oh, it's such a pleasure and an honor for me to have this opportunity.

DW: Great. So, I'd like to start out our time together with asking you some personal information about your background. If you could let us know where and when you were born, where you spent your upbringing, where you went to school, those types of basic background questions?

DF: Ok, Dawn. I was born in Chicago, Illinois on August 28, 1943—I'm a grandma of seven now. My parents worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs for U.S. Government, and we lived in numerous places in western United States on many different reservations. In fact, I didn't live on my home reservation until I was an adult, when I came back to work for my tribe. My parents, my mother is enrolled with the Salish Tribe, my father was a full-blood Oneida Tribe from Wisconsin, which is a part of the Five Confederated Tribes that were Iroquois. They met at a government boarding school in Kansas and eventually married. There's two of us, just two of us, my sister is six years younger than I. Like I said, we lived on Sioux reservations, Navaho reservations, we lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, we lived on the Blackfeet Reservation, we lived numerous places in Montana. My dad retired out of the BIA area office in Billings in 1971, I think it was, when they moved back to St. Ignatius.

My schooling, as you can tell by my background, has been in a variety of places. My sister, when we lived on the Navaho Reservation, attended first grade in a rock hogan. I attended school in a one-room school with the rest of the grades. In my class, I was—in my building—I was one of three non-Navaho Indians, and then there were three non-Indians. The rest were all Navaho students, Navaho was their first language, so we didn't fit real well. I was able to finally go to school for five years in one place, which was in Harlem, Montana, over in north-central Montana. My parents worked for the Fort Belknap Tribes, and I graduated from high school in Harlem. Went from there to Eastern Montana College, where I got a B.S. in Secondary Education.

Following that I taught school in eastern Montana, in a small farming community of Hysham, between Billings and Miles City. I taught there for three years, until I married into that community. Only we didn't stay there, we moved to Wyoming. I eventually had two children. This goes into some of the personal experiences. Because of domestic violence, partner-family assault, I eventually left him. In fact, I made a decision to leave him when youngest son was born. I was in the hospital, and I decided I couldn't put another child through what, the trauma my oldest boy had been through. But having an education I was able to get back into work. I went to Billings as an Executive Secretary Education Coordinator for Indian Training and Technical Assistance Program. Didn't put in quite a year there, and came to the University of Montana in special services at the Native American Studies.

Then in February of '93, well in December, I was informed that I'd been selected to be the new director of a tribal program that had been contracted by a tribe from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and that was the Director for the Education, Employment Assistance and Direct Employment. Which was basically a scholarship program as far as the Higher Ed. I worked with the school systems on the reservation, we worked with the vocational schools under the Employment Assistance, and we then helped people who were getting permanent jobs away from the reservation, we helped them with moving expenses. I was there for seven and a half years.

During that time I continued to work, stayed a single parent, and got my Master's Degree from here in Education Administration. Then was lucky enough, I guess lucky enough—my boys don't feel that way—in hindsight I guess it was not a good move. I received a fellowship from Penn State University to work on my doctoral program, and so we moved lock-stock-and-barrel to State College, Pennsylvania. That summer my parents paid for them to come back to Montana to spend the summer with them. As they were boarding the plane, or just prior to boarding the plane at Dulles Airport, they informed me that they weren't coming back. If I wanted to be a family, I either had to get a job back in Montana, or run a doctoral program here.

So, I ended up at Montana State University as the Director of the Native American Graduate Fellowship Program in Education. Spent three years in that position, and then three years as the Coordinator for Native American Community-University Relations, which was basically a direct liaison with the tribes from the President, at that time President Bill Tietz and Vice President Mike Malone. I worked directly under the two of them, and did a lot of liaison work, coordinating work. We visited all the—during one year President Tietz decided he wanted to visit all the reservations, and so, I made arrangements and we traveled to every reservation. I don't think many presidents have done that. Eventually that's one of those programs that got phased out in the late eighties.

I went back to the Flathead, and did consultant work for a period of time. Got involved, my boys were going to an Indian boarding school in Oregon, and I got involved in what they were doing. Ended up being Montana's representative to the Chemawa Indian School Board and its Chairman, so I traveled quite a bit. Continued to do consultant work for a period of time, and

then I went to work for our tribal alternative high school, Two Eagle River, and was Curriculum Coordinator and Assistant Principal. I stayed in that position until, I think it was like '89 or '90, when I went to work for Tribal Administration as Education Coordinator.

Then I left, and got involved in a mid-life relationship, and moved to Washington, to the Spokane Reservation. I continued to do consultant work again, and then eventually became the Indian Health Services, Health Educator. Again got into some domestic abuse, and decided it was time to come back home. I mean, when you are fifty years old, and you still find the wrong kind of people, it's time to make some changes in your life. So, I came back and unfortunately it was a good time, because I had an uncle who had been diagnosed, my mother's only brother. In that time, in '91, both my parents passed away a month apart. In fact we're coming up on my mother's, the anniversary of her death. But her only brother was diagnosed with esophageal cancer, and so I quite working at Salish Kootenai College and took care of him for a couple years.

Then I've gotten back into something I've always been involved with. When I was at Bozeman, I was on the Battered Women's Network Board of Directors. So, domestic violence has always been, whether professionally a part of my life or personally a part of my life. I've seen too much of it. I've had to deal with it as an administrator. When this position came open, I happened to...I was on Safe Harbor, our women's shelter on the Flathead, and was on that board of directors when this job came up. Was fortunate to be selected, and started work in September. I've always been in the field of education, but this is an education too, because I'm having learn a lot of the rules and regulations that go along with federal grants. That are different from—the Office of Justice Program and Family Violence Prevention are all different from the Department of ED and BIA. I'm in whole new learning process. I enjoy it. It is stressful sometimes, especially when there's little ones involved. That kind of brings back a lot of memories. But I think it's finally helped me work through a lot of what, personally, I had to almost, to work through my own pain and anger, in order to work with these ladies. Oh, I shouldn't say ladies; I'm getting a number of men lately. But that's sort of, that's probably a long, a lot longer than what you wanted, but that's my basic background. I never finished my doctorate. That kind of went on the backburner.

DW: Well, great. Well, thank you.

KF: Diane will tell you I'm windy.

DW: That's good for interviews. So, this was just September of 2000, then, that you started in. What is your official title then?

KF: I'm the Program Manager for the Crime Victim Advocate Program for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. I work out of the prosecutor's office. Dusty Deschamps, who is our managing attorney, is my supervisor. That in itself is an education, because I've never—I

thought at one time I wanted to go to law school, but working with these attorneys, I think I may be glad I didn't.

DW: Ok. Well before we move on to talk about the program itself, I want to ask a question about feminism, since this is the Montana Feminist History Project, and ask you if you define yourself as a feminist, and what that means to you, and then how you do your work, you know from what type of definition of that do you do your work?

KF: I think in my younger days, Dawn, I probably—I still consider myself a feminist—but I think in my younger days, and working with Diane and a lot of the ladies that are on her board and others, we did a lot of different kinds of things that I consider... In fact, when I worked at Native American Studies over here, the students used to tease me about being the Bra-burning Native American Woman in their staff. I was never that, I mean, to me that's not feminism. That's how that traditionally the men have thought that way, especially Indian men I think. That kind of carried with me when I went to work for the Tribe, because I was the first, and at that time only, woman department head, and I wasn't thirty years old yet, single parent. I got a lot of flack like that. I think that's when I became—I'm not sure how I define feminism. I define feminism, from my own viewpoint, I think, is women who are empowering each other to be a vital part of, and an equal part of, of our society, of our education, workforce. I don't look at it as the quote-unquote, "bra-burning type of people" or anything. I think it's women who want to empower themselves, and empower others. That's the best definition I can give, I think.

DW: Good. So, how did you deal with the flack that you received at that time? Being a young...

KF: Most of the time I considered the source, and I think, explained what I felt. You know, what feminism was, and that we're equal citizens, and as a Native American woman, I'm also equal citizen to our Native American men. Most of the men that I work with from the other reservations that were in comparable positions in my, or all those positions were all men, and with the exception of one, they were all non-Indian people, but they accepted me. I think at first they were a little leery of why the Tribe had hired a young, inexperienced administrator. Fortunately, I was a fast learner; I didn't have much choice. Then, I got into a situation where I had too many dads and too many brothers looking out for me, when we all had to go to meetings together. I mean, I was doing good to. [I can't] do anything by myself it seems like. I think, for the most part, I had to face a couple of instances where I had proved a tribal councilman wrong in a tribal council meeting. After the meeting was over he walked over to me, and I happened to be talking with the, at that time the Chairman of the Tribal Council, and a couple of other councilmen and department heads. He walked up and he pointed his finger at me, and said, "I'm gonna get you, you skinny little bitch." I didn't have to respond, those guys responded for me. They immediately took him on as far as reaction to it. What they said was, as an employee I had right to be respected. Eventually we overcame, but it took a few years before we had anything to do with each other. I think he was still angry that I proved him wrong, but he was angry, I think, that all those men stood up to him. That kind of went away before long. I mean, they realized that I was dedicated and committed to what I was doing, and

it wasn't just for the women. I treated all my students, clients, whatever, I think fairly—within bounds.

DW: Great. So, now I'd like to ask you about the role of domestic violence within the Native American culture, and how is it there are not, before the influence of Europeans, and how did it change, to what extent, and what is like now?

KF: Well, I think that violence in families is not a Native tradition, because for the most part, most of our tribes are...maternalistic—that's not the term I want.

DW: Matriarchal.

KF: Matriarchal. And the women were highly respected, even though they were the ones who often did some of the hard labor type of things, as far as like tearing down teepees, putting up teepees, and taking care of—you know, doing a lot of the hard labor type of things. I think that they were still respected. I know, just the way I was brought up, my dad, even though he grew up in Indian boarding schools basically, he was taught and we were taught like he was taught, that we respected our mother no matter what. We showed the utmost respect to her.

I think, what I see now is that whole breakdown in our traditional types of, the culture and everything where—and a lot of it goes to economics, I mean, there's so much unemployment. A lot of it has to do with, again, alcohol and drugs, and drugs are very much on the increase. It used to be just that we worried about drugs—I mean, alcohol, and again, that was European influenced too. We didn't have that, other than, I think a lot of the tribes used peyote, of course, for spiritual ceremonies, but not for pleasure. I think there's the lack of, and a lot of times I think it has to do with so many of our women being the ones who are the money makers. It's difficult for the men, for whatever reason they're not working, and a lot of times it's because they can't hold a job. Many of them have awfully big families, and there's really kind of a breakdown, I think, in the whole family concept that used to be there.

As I said earlier, many of the tribes, if there was violence in the traditional setting, they were banished from the tribe. That was their punishment, for many tribes. So it's—and the same with rape, sexual assault, as well as domestic assault. That was pretty much their, the way that a lot of the tribes—I won't say the majority because I don't know that—but a lot of the tribes, that's how they dealt with it. Now we deal with it through courts, and unfortunately, and we'll probably get to that later, so many of our women end up going back, because they have no ties other than this and are afraid of losing everything. It's tough. I do have some information on this (unintelligible) with this, that will kind of show you some (unintelligible), diagrams that are interesting.

DW: Ok, great. So there's been a big shift from sexual assault, rape, domestic violence being dealt with within the community and community members in banishment, as you said, and now it's very different, so there's this program with attorneys, and with the court system and what

not. So, that's what your involved in right now. Do you want to talk, can you talk a little more about that shift, and how that's been for the Native American community to make that shift, and do you think it's—to what extent is it successful, and to what extent doesn't it work?

KF: I think, I can't really speak to that for sure, because I come into all the domestic violence on a professional level just fairly recently. I know that Office of Justice Programs begin to take a look at violence against women, and of course the Violence Against Women Act was passed in '95, I think. Now we have a specific Violence Against Indian Women Office within the Office of Justice Programs. So, they're taking a bigger look, a broader look at violence against women, and we have our own program manager and whatever. Department of Health and Human Services has also taken a look at that, through the Family Violence and Prevention Service grant process. Both of which we currently get, and hope we continue. But, I think that people have finally quit, whether it's Indian people or non-Indian people, it's not something that's hidden so much anymore. We're seeing it recognized, and there's more awareness, and a lot of it has to do with education, and with programs such as what your doing.

Natalie Dennis and I were invited to, from YWCA, were invited to do a two-day program of education awareness for the St. Ignatius seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth grades. Of course we had them by their different classes, and it was amazing how much these kids know. She did date rape and a lot of that portion of it; I did more the domestic. But, it was sad to see how it affected some of those young kids too, when they couldn't really deal with it, when you started talking about domestic violence in the home.

But, I think the awareness—personally, back in the early seventies, when I going through all of this, I had no one to turn to. I didn't dare tell my parents, because in their eyes marriage was forever. You made your bed; you lay in it, that kind of thing. But they supported me when I made a decision to leave, and then acknowledged they knew all along, as did my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, my ex-husband's family. Back in those days you didn't talk about it, you didn't admit it. You lied about your—you know, I had a big cut one time, and I said, "Oh, I got up in the middle of the night with the baby and ran into the door." I still hear some of those things, and think, well it's not completely gone yet, I guess. But I think public awareness and education has really brought it to the surface, where people will talk about it. Our court systems are recognizing it, where again in the past, it was just sort of shoved under whatever.

The tribes are also doing that. I think right now our tribe probably has one of the—I probably don't know if I should say that, that might one of those—I think we have one of the most put together domestic programs for our tribal people. And we work, because of our situation, where we're in a concurrent jurisdiction, where certain violences, offences are felonies, our tribe doesn't handle that, we have to work with Lake County. We do, and we have a Tribal Code, which includes family-partner assault, rape, all of that within it, and it's been newly revised. And follows to a large extent, and our lead attorney and I want to do some changes to make it more specific to us as a tribe, because it basically follows Montana Codes right now, but at least we have it in our codes. Tribes are, we've had a couple tribes contact us on it, what we

have. So, I think the tribes are really beginning to gear up. These kinds of the, the VAWA, and VOCA programs are, I think, really helping tribes to begin to do this.

Montana law enforcement and Montana Board of Crime Control are really taking a lead in—in fact I got a call, yesterday, I guess, there's going to be a meeting of tribal representatives in Great Falls coming up sometimes towards the end of the month. I was at the Law Enforcement Academy last week for the advanced training for advocates, and I was only Native American there. Holly told me the training officer said that they've had little or no involvement from the other tribes, which is sad because it's there. I serve, about half of what I serve right now, are Blackfeet. A large part of that is because of the influx of Blackfeet to our reservation, because of Salish Kootenai College. They have their own college, but we have programs that they don't. We have four-year programs at our college, so we're getting a—it always amazes me when I start doing my statistical reports for Montana Board of Crime Control, that probably half or more of mine are Blackfeet, and about half of what's in the shelter are Blackfeet, and some of them are brought down from Browning. But, I think, the eyes of Tribal Councils and court systems are opening more and more, and fortunately we have a pretty good court system.

DW: Yes. So, you want to talk a little bit more specifically then about the Salish Kootenai Tribal Headquarters and Court System, and the origins of this particular program? Was it in general supported by the community? Did you have to do a lot of educating to get these systems in place?

KF: Again, I wasn't involved. It started, when they first started any kind of a program, it was under our legal services program, and that was back in, I think, mid-90s. I'm not sure. Then when all of this federal money became available, and they began to do some grants, and were able to then open this office, which I'm now program manager for. They placed it under the prosecutors, because it's the prosecutors that we have to work hand-in-hand with. We work with our law enforcement. Generally what they'll do—or of course, I have people that come to me on their own and ask for temporary restraining orders, and then we go to court, and they can get a full-blown restraining order—but if they don't, if they opt not to file any charges, then generally police will send over police reports to the prosecutors, and then we kind of follow from there, and either contact them or they... Now with the, from the new laws that, I think we're going to find more and more that we can do prosecuting without them.

What our process is—they come to me, and I fill out the basic forms for them. I should have brought a copy in here, and I didn't. Then we have them write their affidavit. It has to be in their handwriting and in their own words; I can't do it for them. Then I review it, and determine whether it should go to a prosecutor for review. If the prosecutor deems it, or warrants it, that it needs to go on, he will sign an affidavit to that effect, and then I take it to the court. Then one of the, well our Chief Judge usually reviews it, and if they, again, warrant it a potential danger to the person, they will assign a judge and a hearing date, and that hearing date is usually 14 days from the date of review. So, like today I had one go through which has been assigned the 29 of May. Our petitioner, the person who comes in asking for a protective order, has to be at

the hearing. If they aren't, then it just dies. But the respondents don't have to be at the hearing, if they want to be heard, and we've had some almost knockdown takeouts, but that's been very minimal. Then they—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

KF: If the respondent violates that protective order in any way, he can be jailed and/or fined. Generally, they—well, I don't think it's as black and white as it appears, because we know of instances where they're not telling us, but we've seen it. But, a lot of times the petitioner will come in, and for whatever reason, say, "Oh, I can't go through this. He needs, he has no place to go. He needs cigarettes," so they'll go visit him in jail—I mean it's... But, I talked to a young lady that I've been working with, first time I've had a chance talk to her for a couple of months was today, and everything's going great with her. She's had no problem with him. She followed through. The only problem is that her one boy opted to go back to Browning with the grandparents, that he was having a real difficult time. She was having a difficult time, because of the abuse, she had come to a point where she couldn't even hug her children. They'd come to her to hug, and she said, "I just want to push them away from me. I can't have anyone touch me." But she's working through all of that. We have our success stories, and we have our failures, just like anything.

But I feel like it's a pretty good process. I think having the CVA program directly under the Prosecutor's Office is the most viable place for it, and I think that's how Missoula County is to, that they're pretty much under prosecutor's office. But, you know, there's still a lot of glitches that we're working on. Right now we are trying to hire staff, because I do everything from clerical to... Next week I hope to have a secretary hired for the next, within a period or time, at least and that will take a lot of the time where I can get more towards reports. That's one thing with outside funding; you've got reports galore. Of course, the tribe requires that too. But basically, that's where our program is within the tribal system.

We get a lot of, not financial support, but we get quite a bit of moral support, and sometimes it's just verbal garbage, I think—excuse me, that probably is when you—from the Council. They'll say, "Oh, we want to do this, we want to see this, and we want to see this." We did an honoring during Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, and they were invited, because it was basically an honoring for our law enforcement and the prosecutor. Not one councilman showed up, or council—well, I take that back, one councilwoman showed up. So we get lip service, but when I need a resolution, I usually get a unanimous vote on it. I have to go tomorrow to present a resolution for, this is National Elderly and Disability Abuse Awareness Month. I'm kind of slow getting in there, but I was gone so much last week. But, they're good about doing those kinds of things, and we get a lot of support from them.

I really have a good working relationship with our prosecutors. They want to see programs strengthened. They want to see more strength, more meat to it, than what we currently have, even. And our court system is—we've got five judges, or I don't know if one is full time, he might be. We might have four and a half; I'm not sure. They're all pretty good for domestic violence (unintelligible). I feel real good about the way people (unintelligible).

DW: Well, good. Now, what about support systems for the women, or as you say sometimes men, to—do you offer support groups, or is there a shelter?

KF: We have a shelter. We subcontract with the shelter. We give them direct victim service money out of our Family Violence and Prevention, because it is the only shelter on the reservation. In fact, I think we're still the only reservation that has a shelter on our reservation. And then Family Crisis Center, which has now been named DOVES, which is Domestic Violence Education System, or something—I can't remember, they just renamed themselves. But we work with them, and they basically are like the CVA at this point for Lake County. They work with the non-tribal entity. But Safe Harbor serves anybody, of course it's primarily Native American. They offer support groups. We are trying to get a batterers group going. I need to go for training to do that. We have one man whose been trained, so he and I are going to try to get that going again. We haven't really, since I've been there, put together specific support groups. We kind of recommend different ones to them to go to.

We have the Health Beginnings Program that offers a healthy family support group on Tuesdays, and I usually go to that and help them with different things. Because a lot of what they're, like last night their topic was Family and Stress, well, stress is one of the lead factors. So, I usually go and assist them in whatever they're doing on their Tuesday nights. Unfortunately, it doesn't go through the summer, so we're trying to think of some things. Once I get a secretary, I'm really hoping that we can get some of our, specifically our own women that come through us, because they don't all go to the shelter. Of course, some are, a lot of our people will go back to Browning, probably. But right now we don't have any specific support groups out of our office, but that's in the future.

DW: Ok. And now, I know from some training and other interviews I've done on this issue of violence towards women, that a big part of the feminist belief, if you will, in terms of working with women on these issues, is to empower them and give them as much choice as possible, since in this situation a lot of the choice has been taken away from them. So, do you follow along those types of guidelines and thinking?

KF: As much as we can. We try to empower them to basically take back their lives. I don't guess I really believe that it's up to me to say, "Get a divorce." You know, that's a choice, but I try to talk to them about their choices, and why they need to look at the pros and the cons of either going back into that battered situation, or to go out on their own and seek services. Because we have quite a few services available that will help them, and Safe Harbor is real good about helping with a lot of that too. But, I think that the empowering issue is one of the keys to assisting them to get, whichever way they ought to go, and if they ought to go back into the relationship, they know that we're there. And I've already gone through, I'm not sure how many, who have gone back and then are back, and say, "Karen, I can't take it anymore. You were right." Of course, when they say you're right, I'm not sure—I encourage them to go through with at least the six month protective order to see where they are, see what they can do on their own.

But the problem is so many of them have families, have little guys. I'm working with a young lady right now that's got four little boys, the oldest is in Head Start, but she's a real strong-willed, brave little lady, and we're working with Montana Legal Services on custody and divorce for her. That's what she wants. I ran into her at the store the other night, and she's ready now, because her last little one was born. She wanted to wait until he was born, so she can proceed. So we got some real tough, little cookies, and then we have those who are still (unintelligible-fighting, frightened?), which is typical of any group of people.

DW: Do you want to talk about any ways you think this issue is different, or unique to the Salish-Kootenai Tribe or to Native American Culture in general, then out in the white, quote "white", population? Do you see different concerns that need to be addressed in different ways? Are the same models being able to be applied in different cultures?

KF: I think that, my perception is that, we're all there to try to do the same thing, and I think that the models we use are probably very similar. I think the basis for all of us is to empower these women to get on with their lives and better themselves, but in a safe way—and their children. I work some with Missoula, because the reservation comes into Missoula County, and then of course I work with Sanders County, and definitely Lake County. But I know in working with the Crisis Center, and working with our Safe Harbor, we're all, I mean we work pretty much hand and hand. The only problem we have is everybody uses different forms. But I was talking to a lady at the Crisis Center yesterday, and she said, "Karen, I don't know if we can ever change that, because..." she said, "You look right here at Polson. Polson City Police has their own kind. Lake County has their own system." So, I don't know if we can ever overcome that obstacle.

I think for the most part we all pretty much pattern our... I think our processes are pretty much the same, and I think that it's just a matter of strengthening those processes. Like I said, I worked with the YWCA, and we do some training together, and I've worked with the CVAs here in town on a few occasions. I've been invited over to Seeley-Swan, and I still want to go see their program. I haven't had a chance to. We just recently had a community coordinating conference on domestic violence, and bringing together the different groups. Like all, I mean, representatives, and we didn't have representatives of all of our little town's police forces. We had Tribal Law Enforcement representation. Unfortunately, none of our judges were there, and there was one of them that I wanted to focus on. But we brought together people from Lake County, we had ministerial people, we had anyone who's been involved. It was probably one hundred and thirty people, and I think it got everybody: Indian, non-Indian, community people, Lake County, Tribal Government, the different ones. I think it started opening some doors, and hopefully this will be a step towards a positive thing for the victims of domestic violence. We're hoping.

DW: Sounds good.

KF: And we have... I wasn't there for the first follow-up meeting, so what she's trying to do, the lady who did our coordinating course—because neither Ella Ray or I had time, we're both too swamped to put together a conference. But she's doing a follow-up, and we'll see how it goes. They had, I think, fourteen people. But she's going to try to do a monthly meeting to bring people back together, so that we can continue that dialog—and, I guess, it was a good meeting from what we understood. That's one step, I think, for us. Because we're, with our situation, we're the minority on our own reservation. So, we have some difficulties there.

DW: Um, nothing that the different tribal cultures even have. Would you like to talk about that a little bit? How those differences, what those differences are, or conflicts, tensions?

KF: Well, we're a 280, which is concurrent jurisdiction reservation. So, our tribal law enforcement and Lake County basically have to work hand and hand. We can't pick up non-tribal; they can't pick up our tribal. So, it gets... Like with domestic violence, if there's a call—I think what I understand, and I think it's been working—is that whoever gets the first call, gets on scene, and stays there until the appropriate, whether it's tribal police gets there, or vice-versa. So, I think they have that worked out to, hopefully, the benefit of these people, these victims. The problem is there's still that apathy. If they've been called too many times to a place, they'll just kind of let it, "ah, it's just them again." One of these days, this is liable to happen—I hope not—something really bad could happen. That's not just our tribal police, it's...

I got a call the other day, that the Lake County police had responded, and an ambulance crew, from apparently St. Ignatius, and they were outside laughing and joking about this, because it's been going on all the time. The thing that bothers me is I don't care who they are, how many times they've called, they still deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. I was telling the Safe Harbor Board of Directors about it the other night, and I said I'm going to ask to be the next ambulance crew meeting, because I want to bring that up. And maybe we need to start doing some outreach training to our ambulance crew. I know that my youngest son used to be a volunteer for the EMTs in that mission, and I don't remember him telling me anything like that, but there is some apathy, I think. But, I think we find that pretty much anywhere, probably. Call so many times, I mean, if I'd called somebody every time that I was beat up or knocked down stairs, that's probably what they'd have done with me—"I don't know, that woman up on the mountain is at it again." No, but... So, those are probably some of our greatest obstacles.

DW: You make...bring up a very good point about, well, just the complexity of domestic violence, and how it is such a process to change, and to move forward from a very intensely interpersonal relationship that can't just change overnight, and you're recognition of no matter of how many times, the people need respect and support and understanding, I think is very important thing to keep in mind.

KF: Well, whether it's man or a women, like I said, I'm getting more men coming in, but definitely the women are the majority. I think as time goes on, we will begin to see an increase in the men coming in. It's just my own personal projection. Because I think they feel that they

deserve that whole empowerment thing to, maybe. But generally there are our issues, that they're concerned about the kids, and I think that I've seen that more than they're concerned about themselves. Some of them actually don't want to get restraining orders. I try to go through the pros and cons with them, of what might be in their best interest. I had a young man, who came in, and he didn't want to file any charges or anything, his only concern is that she was threatening to take the child either to Washington or to Browning. So I said, one of the specifics on our TPOs is this child cannot be removed, and so, he did. I know he was reluctant, but, you know, sometimes you have to use a little bit of coercion.

DW: Well, I want to, before we start to close, bringing it back to a more personal note, I want to just give you an opportunity to bring up any topics that we haven't talked about yet, in terms of your work and the program. That this issue of violence against women on the reservation, you know, anything that you may be wanting to share, that I haven't asked about.

KF: I don't really think—I think that I have probably shared a lot with you. I would hope one that would happen is that, the Missoula Family Violence Council pulled together what they call a domestic violence—I was going to say seminar, not seminar—anyway, they brought a group of us together and invited us from Lake County. I would like to see that kind of thing go on more, because it's nice to put names and faces, where we know who we're calling. I had never met Judy Wang. I probably did years ago when we were doing a lot of these things way back when, just different ones. I think it's important because we're all there for the same thing, and like I was saying, we lapse over, part of the reservation, into Missoula County. So, we need to be able to work cohesively with those people. We were hoping that a few of them would be able to make it to our conference, but I know how everybody's schedules are—it's ridiculous.

I would like to see us put together either a domestic—I talked to our lieutenant of our police department yesterday, and he's not real responsive when it comes to domestic violence. But I suggested that, I thought we needed to take a look at developing a domestic violence, domestic assault response team for the reservation. That's part of our problem with us, is—and that needs to go under restriction—is the apathy of the top of our police force. They're just—the guys are willing, I think, to get out and do a little more—but it's the two top guys that, they don't want to get involved. But other than that, I think I've pretty much touched on, and like I said, I'm fairly new to being actually professionally involved. The personal is where I always had my advocacy for working with domestic violence, and I have probably all my working life, in one way, been involved, just not in a position.

DW: Right. So, let's end on a personal note, then. At the beginning of the interview, you had made a comment about how much you've been learning and processing personally from your own past experiences with domestic violence. Now that you're doing this professionally, would you mind sharing what some of that has been like? Or what has that been for you?

KF: Some of it was real hard. I mean I just basically had to take a couple days off work. I couldn't—it was not long after the holidays, and we'd had quite a number of people coming in.

I talked to one of our women in legal department, and I said, “What is it, everybody, is it financial, that after the holidays?” She said, “I think that’s part of it, Karen,” and she said, “Part of it is a lot of them tried to focus on being good, and making it a quality family, and once the holiday were over they went out and got blasted, or whatever.” I don’t know what the problem is right now, if it’s just spring, or sprung, or what. So, for me it took some...I mean, I was—it was real hard. When I first took this job, my boys both told me, because I have two sons, one is thirty-two and one is twenty-nine, they both said, “Are you sure, mom, you can handle this, after...?” Because, like I said, when I was in Washington a few years ago, I was beat up badly and raped, partner raped. Not the same night, it was two different instances. He came home drunk and... And so, I had to process a lot of those things, and I had pushed them all back. Because I was taking care of my uncle, and I didn’t do the counseling I was supposed to do. But this made me come face to face with a lot of it. When I saw some of these young women reminding me of me back in the seventies with my kids, and right now I’m raising, I have two grandkids living with me, nine and eleven. They probably know a lot more about domestic violence than a lot of kids, because I don’t let them watch if it’s going to be a violent type of thing. But they view a lot of videos with me, and they’ll talk to me about it, and through that I’ve been able to do some processing to. One thing I’ve done is I’ve gotten back into, we have two Jesuit priests who come over from Spokane once a month, and we do what we call Kateri Northwest Ministry, and a lot of it is like, based on twelve steps, but we do a lot of sharing. For me that has been really beneficial, because I’ve been able to talk about a lot of these things. I spoke at the—I didn’t think I could do it—I spoke at the Take Back the Night. She told me, she said if you want to share in your personal experience, she said, that’d be great, but don’t feel like you have to. It was just like, something—I didn’t even have anything totally prepared, because it had been such a crazy week—I talked about that partner rape. Never done it before, except in a very, with one or two people that I’ve been very close to. It’s like it was flowing out of me that night. I got done, and I thought what did I just do? After it was over, I thought, I needed that. I needed to do that. Here I was fifty-one years old when all that happened, and you’d think when you get to that age those things don’t happen to you, but they do. I know in talking, I found out there’s people older than me that have been through it. It’s just been a matter of taking a little bit of time, but like I said a lot of these young ladies remind me so much of myself, that I have to kind of set myself aside and talk to them, and then when they’re gone, then I have to sit and think, my god, this one’s just like me. So, I’ve been able to process a lot of that, and it’s been real good for me. Because it’s something I never, even with my marriage, I didn’t really ever—well I did some counseling in the eighties, finally, I think—but then I got real busy in my job, and kids, and everything. I kind of put that aside, and never finished what I needed to finish. This has made me do a lot.

DW: Yeah, I can see that.

KF: Really! So, I think it’s this ongoing processing for me in a lot of ways.

DW: Yeah, I can see that. It's really poignant to see the work being done amongst a different generation. You mentioned your sons, and now your grandchildren, and that all of you together are aware of the issue, and are talking and discussing it, and bringing it out on the table.

KF: My oldest boy remembers some of the violence in our home. He finally made amends with his dad. About three years ago, he was invited by his half-sister, who's from a marriage prior to ours, they did a kind of family reunion in Billings for him, and he went. My youngest son has yet to do any—he doesn't know his dad, if he walked through the door, I don't think he'd know who he is. And he is now captain of the Port Hall Tribal Police Force. Twenty-nine years old and doesn't know his dad, and actually his dad isn't that far from him right now. But I don't think he, I wished he would, because I think he needs to deal with it. It's up to—he's twenty-nine, now—it's up to him. Yeah, it's very intergenerational, trying to overcome for us, and just is intergenerational, I mean, as domestic violence is intergenerational. We're trying to work through it on a positive side, I guess, now.

DW: Well, it sounds like you're doing a good job.

KF: I hope so. I guess that probably offer at that point; it's kind of an ongoing process for me. And when it stops, I'm afraid I might lose some of what I have to offer to people. If I ever think I've come to a point of being through looking at some of my own issues, because this is all empowering me again. At least for a while, I hope it doesn't stop. I don't think I'm quite through. I may have to get back to some counseling again, I don't know. I haven't had time to really think about it, the actual doing some counseling. So, that's kind of where I am with it. I just admire you guys, what you're doing. I think it's great.

DW: Thank you.

KF: And I, like I said, am not the least surprised that Diane would do something.

DW: Right.

KF: I told her that one of these days. She and I used to do some, a variety of kinds of training together, occasionally. I can't even think what now, it's been too long ago. But, yeah, we go back a long ways, longer than you ever want to think about, probably. Probably longer than you are old.

DW: Possibly. Ok, Karen, well is there any final thing you'd like to say?

KF: No, other than thank you, and it was an honor and a pleasure, and I wish you well on your project.

DW: Thank you very much.

Karen: Anything I can do, I will get this back to you—

[End of Interview]