

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 378-021

Interviewee: Jennifer Gibson

Interviewer: Dawn Walsh

Date of Interview: April 27, 2001

Project: Montana Feminist History Oral History Collection

Dawn Walsh: This is Dawn Walsh interviewing Jennifer Gibson for the Montana Feminist History Project. We're going to be talking about Jennifer's involvement with Women's Place. The date is April 27, year 2001. We are in the Women's Studies' Program's Office, University of Montana, 59812.

Okay, hello Jennifer. Thanks for coming and being interviewed about Women's Place and your involvement. So, I'd like to start out with first by asking you about your first contact with Women's Place. What year it was, how you came to find out about them and get involved?

Jennifer Gibson: That's a really good question. I think I've known about Women's Place since when I moved to Missoula, which was in '89. I came to school here, and I was just aware of them. I volunteered a lot at the Women's Center, and then later in '92, '93 I worked at worked at the Women's Center here on campus. So, I was pretty familiar with the Women's Place, and worked with them on Take Back [the Night] activities and that kind of stuff. So, that's what I first remember.

DW: So, then what made you decide to get more involved with Women's Place and do the volunteer training?

JG: Working at the Women's Center at that time, I spent a lot of hours at the office, and we would get people walking in essentially in crisis. That was before SARS, or right at the beginning of the development of SARS. So, we would get a lot of people coming in, and I didn't have the skills to talk to people, so I wanted to go through training to get those skills just because I was finding like most women probably use them a lot in your personal life, and then I was using them in my job here. So, that's I think the original reason I wanted to go through training.

DW: And that was in 1993?

JG: Yeah, I think so.

DW: So, what was that training like for you? What did it involve, and how did it affect you, and what did you learn?

JG: That's a good question, because I've been through that training many times now—I've helped to organize that training for the Victim's Advocates Office now many time, so it's hard to separate them all out. It's essentially the same as the Victim Advocate Training is now, is what

Women's Place was doing then, and the Y to some extent. It's flexed and changed a little tiny bit, since. Essentially the core of it's the same, which is an empowerment-based, peer-based crisis work philosophy. I mean all those topics, domestic violence, sexually assault, child sexual abuse, so I learned a lot. What was great for me from the training—I mean it was good information and good skill development about active listening, and ways to address conflict and things like that—but what was great for me was the group, it was going with group. My particular group at Women's Place was quite small, there were eight of us, and it was great to become really close with those people. That was the cool thing that stood out for me.

DW: Then did you work with those with some of those women at least after the training?

JG: Yes. A couple of them as staff, and all of them as volunteers for a while at least.

DW: So, then what were your duties as a volunteer then after the training?

JG: I did a crisis work of two a week—I don't even remember. You know, I took a pager for a night or sat at the desk for whatever number of hours—four hours or whatever it was a week, I forget. Then we'd have weekly meeting, volunteer meetings. At that time Women's Place—I forget what it was called—but it was still more or less running as a collective where the volunteers were really involved in the decision making, and so our meetings were—people were really involved. So, our meetings were talking about basically debriefing crisis work and talking about services, but also some core decisions of the agency. Some people were really invested.

DW: So, what were some core decisions that you can remember at that time that were needing to be made?

JG: Well, when I first started volunteering I was still in school and pretty busy, so I was—I remember it taking a long time to kind of figure out what was going on. Like what the history of discussion had been at Women's Place, because it was really long. It was twenty years of discussion before I got there. So, as a new volunteer I think I missed tons, because I just wasn't up on where things stood. One—there was ongoing restructuring at Women's Place, and when I started there was some of that going on. I forget the details of that. I know it's written down somewhere. Yeah, I remember this map—I can see it in my head, but I can't really describe what's on it—of different kinds of working groups, essentially, making decisions in particular areas. So, that again was people trying to figure out what's going to work as far as decision-making in this agency. So, that was one of the big things. Then we're always, you know, the ongoing conversations—Take Back comes up, and there's always, "Ok. Are we going to allow men?" I mean that happens every year, always has and always will. There's that kind of discussion at that level happening too.

DW: So a lot of the focus on these types of issues on structure and management has a lot to do with feminism, because feminism was trying to move away from the traditional hierarchical

boss-type structure. So, can you just talk, elaborate on that—you could speak, I suppose, for yourself and maybe you can elaborate a little bit on how that's connected, where is the feminist perspective coming in that regard?

JG: I'm sorry I'm making notes while you're talking. Ok, as far as what that discussion was and how the discussion went on changing, is that what you mean? Well, yeah. I mean you just hit the nail on the head that Women's Place was essentially an experiment in something other than the patriarchal, hierarchical way of things. You talk to Diane and Judy, and they can talk way more about that than I could, but that was also very exciting to me at the time when I went through. It was like, "Oh, yes this is good," coming from high school and college and that, really it was those kinds of structures, it was good to play around with something else. To feel like as an early twenties, young person that I had some input. That I could be heard and participate was (unintelligible), which was harder to do on campus because you have to elbow your way in all the time. So, in that way I just thought that that was very—that was very whole aspect of feminist, of empowerment and a philosophy, even if it didn't always pan out that way, but a philosophy of equal voice really appealed to me. Is that what your asking?

DW: Yeah, that's great. Just there with the idea of an equal voice and even though we know it's hard, still striving for that. So, you just mentioned that when you came along to Women's Place you were in your early twenties, and so looking back at that time how did you see yourself as a feminist, what did feminism mean to you then?

JG: That's a great question. What did feminism mean to mean then? It's hard because things have changed so much for me since then, and yet in so many ways stayed the same, it's hard to separate out what those differences would be. I think my thinking anyway was much more black and white then it is now, and so—I guess a lot of feminism for me was a way of finding—was a place that I fit. It was like kind of putting on an old coat a little bit. Just the idea—you know I was in the Women's Studies program on campus back at that time, and picking classes and working at the Women's Center. It was just stuff that I hadn't had in my experience that it just fit for me. Like it's some kind of a validation, but also just a, "Oh, this works for me," this is—just a rightness to it. It's very hard to explain that part.

Also, I think I have a real strong social justice bend, so it was a way for me to equate that for women, and for other oppressed groups, because feminism is a way of incorporating or at least challenging itself to talk about those things, to talk about racism and homophobia, and that other stuff is in there. We succeed at that at varying degrees, but at least the discussion was there, and that was a new experience for me. I liked that a lot.

DW: Could you describe what was happening at Women's Place when you came in '93, in terms—I mean at this point Women's Place had been in operation for twenty years, so what types of services were in place at this point? What types of groups were happening? What was happening at Women's Place in '93 and '94?

JG: In '93 when I started as a volunteer, Women's Place was running the services that I think had been pretty established for quite a while by then. Again, I don't know exactly how long they all were. There's 24-hour crisis line, staffed predominately by volunteers in addition to the one at the Y, so there's two crisis lines in Missoula at that time. Women's Place also ran an open domestic violence support group, and one for kids, that was a weekly group. When I started we were also running closed—I forget what they were—like nine or ten week session child sexual abuse groups therapist. There were sexual assault groups, and I know that Claudia Merib(?), and she left right as I was coming—I think she was doing—I forget, but there was some sexually assault groups happening too, kind of a standard, you know, what SARS does and the Y does now as far as services.

DW: Now I want to talk a little, go back again to the topic of structure and management style, and so I know there was this ideal of consensus and collective and that was sometimes hard to manage, and so how did you all manage conflict when it did arise? Or what was your experience of conflict there?

JG: Before our last massive structural change, is that what you mean? Like when I started, because it changed a lot first year that I was there. We basically left the collective structure entirely by the end of my first year there, so. When I started it still wasn't—I think I didn't know a lot of what was going on as far as conflict, and so there was a lot of side stuff, people doing things one on one in smaller groups, which I didn't know anything about. The philosophy was to do conflict in really respectful direct ways, but that makes me think of a whole tangent—let me write down a sec. There was some conflict when I first started as a volunteer that I wasn't that aware of when I first started doing crisis work, but they were already in the middle of structural change. It seemed that some, that there was a difference between paid staff and non-paid staff, and that makes complete sense, being...Some of the down sides of collective organizations are people put in a lot of time and have a deeper knowledge of an agency and how it works, and what it's flaws are, and what it needs then somebody who comes in for four hours a week, and yet there is equal power, has potential for huge problems. I think there was quite a bit of that going on, and struggle—just paid staff and people who were there a lot really trying to make things work as an agency that maybe the rest of us weren't fully of what the problems were. So, they were kind of in the middle, I think, of that struggle when I first started in the spring of the '93.

DW: And then you yourself became a staff then in '94?

JG: Good question. Yeah, February '94.

DW: Ok. So, when I was—right, you were hired as the Coordinating Staff. When I was looking through the archives I came across this three-year plan that was written by yourself and some others, and it was for the years '94-'97, do you recall that three-year plan?

JG: Vaguely, vaguely.

DW: If you could just comment a little bit about that. So in '94 when you were hired on as a staff, and you all were thinking about the future of Women's Place, sort of immediate and long-term goals, do you recall what was the purpose was that?

JG: Before doing that three year plan, I mean the only reason I was hired as the staff person at Women's Place was we didn't have staff—all the staff quit, all at once, I think because of conflict around structural change. What happened in January/February of '94 was that the previous staff for whatever reasons left, just kind of walked out. Our funding was pulled at that time, all of it, all of the grants were held, the county and United Way.

DW: Was that related to the...

JG: Yeah, because they were like how are you going to provide if your staff left. So, as volunteers we then, the rest of us, got together and said, "Oh, my god what are we going to do." The choices was to fold or to try and figure something out, so kind of on the spot Kari Lockenbauch(?) and I were hired, and mostly both had just graduated in December of '93, and were jobless and had the time and could do it. So, we were hired as staff to say, "Ok. Can we put this together, and what will that look like?" That was a little bit challenging, because we didn't know too much—Kari was in my training group, so she went through when I did, so we were both relatively new players—players is a funny word, because I don't I was that much of a player I was just doing my crisis work. So, then we had to figure out what had happened as far as structural change, and it seemed like there had been—staff wanted to make a structural change, the volunteers didn't agree with it, and rather than going through the process that a collective would change with, the staff kind of jumped the gun and went two steps faster, and the volunteers then opposed that, and then the staff was frustrated. That would be my analysis of what happened. Probably those people would explain it totally differently and you would have more information, but so that's what had happened. Kari and I were hired in February to try to figure out what we were going to do from here, and in doing so we had to do it within the structure we had. That was one thing about Women's Place was you really—at least how I understood Women's Place—is that you didn't cut corners in process. You do the process even if it takes ten times longer than just doing it. That was my interpretation of conflict with the previous staff.

So, Kari and I had the challenge of getting funding back, maintaining services, within the collectivist structure that was in place—that was a little challenging. Our first steps were—Kari and I where putting our heads together—going to the county to Cindy Klette and Lisa McClintock, and saying, "Alright, we can do this," and going to Judy Wang at United Way and saying, "Look, we can do this. We're still here and volunteers and our services have not even skipped an hour in this transition," because it was staffed by volunteers, and that was the truth. As bureaucratic agencies they had to hold us accountable, which was good to. So, that was our first couple of months was dealing with that, like, "Oh my god. We have to get this money back, because we have a house mortgage payment to make," and just all that stuff—it's not like Women's Place was rich. So that's where we started, and from there once we that we had that

established, and both of those agencies worked with us very well and continued to fund—we had very little gap in money, and then they back-funded what they had held. Really worked with Leslie and Cindy at the County, especially helped us see—helped us make a direction, and figure out where we were going to go. Part of that involved getting more staff people, because we'd lost however many people. So, we hired—I forget the time line of who we hired when—but Katie Benellow(?) came on as Direct Services Coordinator, and Sue Roslin(?) later came on to help us in education stuff. So, we got the other staff people and then—I can't remember if that three year plan was made after we changed our structure. I think it was, because the volunteers were into changing structure. Everybody was very frustrated with collectivism and were not wanting to do it anymore, but they wanted to change it through that structure. Does that make sense? You had to go through the structure to change the structure. You couldn't just step out of it and suddenly make a decision.

So people were trying to hold that limpid way to the best of our ability, and we had totally different experience in training on how to make to even make consensus decision-making or any kind of consensus. That was a problem to, since we were all on different pages with it. I knew very about it. So anyway the volunteers were into the change that the previous staff had been wanting, it's just that it was a timing thing and a jump the gun thing a little bit—out of overwork and frustration, or whatever. So, we worked with the volunteers and then went through the process of making the decision to change the structure, which the volunteers supported to.

So, we did that, and that was pretty much saying, "Ok. We're going hierarchical." We shifted to hiring a Executive Director, and getting a real—before, as a collective you have to file your paper with the state as a non-profit, and it says well, "Who is your Board of Directors?" Well, yeah, whoever volunteer we put on the list is whose are Director. And that was part of the question I always like, "All right you guys have different people here all the time, what's going on?" Everybody had equal power, so it's like whoever's in President slot was in President slot, and whoever was...you know. Part of the structure change was saying we have a Board President; we have the whole hierarchy thing. We have an Executive Director accountable to the Board directly, and staff accountable directly to...you know, pretty traditional. Part of that was a conflict between—ok, I'm going a couple different directions, so bring me back to this one, ok—a conflict between an activist organization and a service provider, I think. Because we'd become so service heavy on that side, we needed a way to be more efficient in doing that, and being more accountable for all of the money we had—not accountable but better use it. That made more sense in a traditional structure. So, we did all of that and we hired a Director who quit like a month later. Not Francine, a previous woman, who came from out of state. So, it took us month to get her here and then she quit. In the meantime we're all still in flux, and holding an agency in flux is really hard, because everybody—it takes a lot of stress toll on people. So, we had...it was just pretty tense around there that whole time. Then we hired another director. I think we made the three-year plan after she started but I can't remember. I was such a blur. So the three-year plan was an attempt to say now under this structure where

are we going, and how are we going to use that. I don't remember the details of that plan at all, so you know better than I do.

DW: Well one document that I came across at that time, it wasn't—I don't know if it was officially part of this plan, but I think it was created around the same time, and it was compiled notes from "fantasy night". Does that ring a bell?

JG: No that was prior to me. I can tell by the way it was written.

DW: Oh... Ok, because there was no date on it. I was wondering.

JG: There was no date on anything. When I closed Women's Place I had twenty years of documents to try to put in order with very few dates. But this, however, predated me, but my guess would be not by too long. I can just tell because it's typed and not on a computer, actually. That's how I know.

DW: Ok, we'll just leave that and we won't talk about that then. So, I want to just sort of skip around a little bit here and talk about a few miscellaneous topics. One document that I came across was in '92 and '93 there was a note saying that women who were involved in Women's Place were wanting more opportunity for developing feminist consciousness, more process time, more time for personal growth and development. So, as I understand there, at times anyway, was a bit of a conflict around there because their question would arise like, "Well what are we here for? What are we doing here?" It can be dichotomized to as we're here to provide services, but then there's this whole other need of personal reflection and growth. So, do you know what was happening around that at that time?

JG: I don't, except that I would guess it that that was a continuous discussion. That's partly from my experience as an advocate since then, and working with volunteers. That's a need, always a need in this field I think. My guess is that was probably a little bit right before I came in or right when I was in training, so I wasn't part of the discussion. But my guess when the agency was in the process of changing so much, volunteers had to be really invested in that. Therefore we got less debriefing time, less on our cause, and less personal support and time around that, because we're making business decisions. That would be my guess on that one.

DW: So how was that handled then after you came on?

JG: Well once we changed the structure, and Katie was our direct services coordinator, she then met with the volunteers. Her whole job was then that support, and working that, and developing a strength in that group to be able to work on personal issues, and to be able to support them one on one or as a group, or whatever was needed. That was her job. They didn't have to talk about business issues. If they wanted to participate in business issues they still could, but not at that meeting. So the whole meeting then was dedicated to processing crisis work and processing personal stuff, and therefore—of course from my biased position I would

say it worked better, but I don't know that for sure. I'm sure it was different for everybody. There's a couple of things, just talking makes me think about that I used to talk with John Spores about, so part of this whole change was a change in climate of the late '80s and 90s. I think that was part of what was going on at Women's Place around structure change in part, because like Women's Place was getting more service heavy, and was getting more money than ever before. It was still was very little, but it was getting more money, and the money was always attached to services, so you had to be accountable to do those services. With that...there's a person who wants to talk to you I think.

[Break in audio]

JG: I think I remember where I was. So what was I saying? So, the services were, we were held really accountable for that, and so the structure worked better for that. To be a traditional structure rather than an alternative collectivist structure, which works more with an agency, I think, that is more radical in some sense, more activist-orientated, more pushing boundaries around things. That worked really well, or less well in different time, but worked in a different way than trying to do use this money to get this done—I don't know if that makes sense.

The other thing that I think was happening maybe culturally, but at least certainly among people involved in the Women's Place, it seemed to me that there was a split between people who—we had a lot of volunteers who were Social Work students, and Counseling students, and Psych students. I'm sure Women's Place always had those people, and the people had different backgrounds, but the tendency seemed to be, even in the short time that I was at Women's Place the tendency seemed to be more of students wanting to provide services, wanting experience doing counseling, doing support in those kinds of ways versus the number of people coming who are activists and radicals and wanted to push that envelope on the other side. So it seemed like there were people pulling one direction, and those tended to be people who'd been around longer at Women's Place, and then there was a lot of new volunteers, who were—I don't want to say all Social Work more comfortable with the traditional thing, but it worked better. They were there not to change the world as much as to provide services and change the world in that way, which is a different way of doing it. So, there was a little tug-of-war going on it felt like to me. I think that really affected the climate overall as well as the change in structure. If you are a Social Work student or you're in counseling you do that in a fairly bureaucratic system, and that's how people are taught and how most of that work is done. So, it's comfortable and works well, and that's all you do and you may not—people were there for personal development to of course, because that happens, but not maybe to the same degree or to the same directions as somebody who's there with a whole social change agenda.

DW: Right, and the whole feminist consciousness doesn't necessarily come with social work. So, how did you all discuss feminism and feminist consciousness as a group at that time? Is that part of ongoing discussions?

JG: Yeah, certainly it was. Particularly it was in training—people went through training that was always the base. It was never like, “Oh we’re just going to provide services, and you guys are going to be doing this peer counseling.” It wasn’t, as it’s never been at SARS of the Y, it’s always been part of that core training. I think that was great for people who had those skills or who were wanting those skills coming right from school without exposure to feminism or gaining that. It would be my guess—who knows—but it would be my guess that those people in their other work and past [unintelligible] were influenced by that. Certainly we talked about that there, like how it was different—peer-counseling base was different than a professional counseling paradigm. You know like that. I can’t remember when SARS went through the period of having a professional counselor, and experienced problems around that as far as—not with the professional counselor at all—but as far as then it makes sexual assault into a problem to be fixed rather than a social problem that peers support each other in. It’s a little different paradigm, and it’s a little—you know, we talked about those things a lot, not necessarily in full on meetings, but in small groups. Especially staff, we’d try to hash that stuff through all the time, and think clearly about that and where we wanted to go. So, I just want to throw that out there, because I think—I don’t know it was in the late ‘80s, early ‘90s thing happening or just a wave that had happened before or not, but it just was interesting to notice that. I think that effected decisions that were made, it certainly effected that we were moving more and more and more into services, and less and less and less into activism and acting out. So, as a group it was easier and easier to move away from collectivism. Maybe that’s not it, that’s just one slant on it—who knows.

DW: Ok, good. Now let’s see, again I don’t think that there was a date on this document that I found, but I think it was around the time that you were there, and it was a structure for doing interviews for Women’s Place—staff or members or volunteers. It was titled “The feminist point system”? Do you recall that?

Jennifer Gibson. Oh god. No.

DW: Well it was really fascinating to me because it had, it was like a one through five, and the questionnaire was divided into six categories. The first category was “The Feminist Perspective”, and so there were questions developed to rate these interviewees on their feminist perspective. Then there was “Crisis Work Experience”, “Women’s Issues”, “Funding, Grant Writing Experience”, “Ability to Work With the Board”, and sort of “Overall Questions”—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

DW: So again was this “Feminist Perspective” and that’s pretty unique to be rated on your feminist perspective for a job.

JG: Yes. You know, I don’t even know what these interviews were for—do you remember. I mean without seeing the document I don’t know. Were they were for staff, or were they for volunteers or...

DW: It seemed that possibly both, but it seemed more that it was oriented towards hiring—actually paid staff.

JG: Ok, that would make more sense then. I was thinking when you said at Women’s Place interviews—of the interviews that we interview potential volunteers, which was a pretty rigorous interview itself. Part or it was that we were screening for some kinds of feminist thought, so we had to be able to—If you weren’t pro-choice for example, that wasn’t an option. But mostly we taught the feminist perspective, so it wasn’t... But if we were hiring, and my guess was at that time we were hiring, the only external hires we did were for the Executive Direction. It was key and crucial to make sure that we got a Director who not only believed in feminism, but thoroughly, thoroughly understood that, because there was going—we just know that coming out of such a long history of collectivism and starting a hierarchical structure there’s going to be traces of that throughout. You know, there’s potential problems that somebody has to be aware of to head off the pass, with the philosophy of empowering her staff and her volunteers enough to make that transition not going from this nice open collective to some really draconian thing, or something. So, my guess is that then what that was for, it was for hiring a executive director, but I don’t remember that specifically or what we might of asked.

DW: OK. We’ll ask Debra about it; I’m going to interview her to. Maybe it was just before...

JG: Debra?

DW: Thomas.

JG: Maybe, although they weren’t—I don’t think they hiring at that point, not an ED, but maybe. I don’t know exactly what they were doing before then, we had to kind of backtrack some.

DW: Well, that’s that then. Now there was some folders in the archives on Women’s Place in the media, in terms of letters to the editor that Women’s Place women would write, as well as clippings from articles on violence against women and whatnot. One controversial topic that the media covered was this policy of Women’s Place to bar men from entering the building, so can you elaborate on that?

JG: On the philosophy of it or the conflict? Or is that questioning all of it?

DW: Yeah, all of the above. Let's just start with the philosophy. How did that come to be, and what is the philosophy behind that?

JG: Oh, I have no idea how it came to be, but the philosophy behind it—I mean, that was just always Women's Place's policy. The philosophy behind it is that Women don't get their own space in our world, and this was a way to try and create that. For survivors of violence, specifically, a safe space, a place where women could go and feel safe. You know, I wasn't there early on, and I don't know how much that dialogue includes lesbian battering, and how much that was really thought of twenty years prior—I don't know. We certainly did talk about that when I was there—ok, women only, but that doesn't mean all women are safe here, and we did try to address that to. The idea was kind of twofold, creating a safe place—since men are the predominate perpetrators of violence, we will kick them out—and the other being a place away from men and all the gender dynamics that happen that—I don't know how we would have phrased it then—but now I would say that prevent women from stepping out, stepping up to the plate and being able to make decisions that are their own decisions. Being able to work as a group, in however they want to work as group, or just—you know what I mean. So creating a space for women, to see what women would do given space to do it, because in our culture we're not given space to do what they could do so often. That would be my take on it. Then it was always challenged, but whatever.

DW: But you always maintained that policy?

JG: Yeah, I think for the most part. I'm sure there were exceptions, but most people involved at Women's Place really thoroughly, thoroughly believed in that. I think the challenges, and we've seen this in years since at Women's Place to—I sure the Women's Center gets it, SARS gets it, the Y gets it—part of that's, "well men are survivors to," and that's true. I don't think anybody's ever said otherwise. And that's not essentially the point of that, the point is men are predominately perpetrators—that's the point of that safety piece. The point of the women's space piece is men are victims too, fine, but we are adamant that we need a space for women to shine. So, I think that a lot of us really firmly believe that, and I still totally believe that to this day. At that time that my thinking has really expanded to really challenge the ways men can be involved, much more then I ever did in those days. I still adamantly believe in women's space.

DW: Well it just happens that we're doing this interview today, on the day of the Take Back the Night Rally, which Women's Place initiated, brought to Missoula, if you will. Now, since Women's Place is closed, the Women's Center on campus now organizes that along with other groups in town—with SARS, the YWCA, and others. Do you want to say a few words about your involvement with Take Back the Night and Women's Place, were you involved with that much?

JG: I wasn't too much. One year from the Women's Center I was heavily involved and one year at Women's Place I was heavily involved, but I was never like the coordinator person. I was involved in helping set things up, and events, and part of those discussions about can men speak or not, and helping out around the edges. When I was at Women's Place Claudia Merib(?) was doing it more. I forget, I don't even remember what years those were.

DW: Let's move now to the closing of Women's Place which happened while you were there, and while you were on staff. Maybe let's backup a little bit to the actual closing day, and talk about what was happening leading up to that. I know that there was a real strong, it seems, effort to do some fundraising to keep it going. There was a room campaign, there was a phone campaign, mail campaign, letters to funders, and I know you were very involved in all that. So, if you could talk about that?

JG: Ok. I was very involved in that. I don't know what to say about it really, except Women's Place had been fundraising all along. Our grants, once we got them back were solid. However, our new structure meant more money, because we had to pay a director more than we'd ever paid anybody—which was nothing to write home about, but it was still more than we'd paid anybody. So, there was a little increased financial pressure in that sense. Also the house was still [unintelligible] to Women's Place, so there some mortgage payment and stuff. Just had to always fundraise, and that's something that I... In a lot of ways I was scared of fundraising, so I said, "Ok. I'll do it," and I wanted to take it on. We had some fun ideas around. I think Ellie might have thought of the room campaign before I even started, but I found the idea somewhere, and said, "Oh, this is a good one for this house." I thought this is so fun, we get to talk to all these women, write something up about them, and sell a plaque on the wall, and it was very successful. I think our—now looking back after fundraising for other things the money was tiny—but I think our goal was thirty-five hundred. We made seventy-five hundred on just the first year campaign, which was fantastic. We all got lot of good fundraising experience, and we did a phone campaign. Those things had always happened, but part of the pressure was we needed a little more revenue than we'd received. I mean we'd always needed it, but now there was somebody we had to pay for that. So, yeah, so that was very—they quite successful, and would have continued to be successful, and I don't think money is the reason that Women's Place closed, at all. I mean it would have been a constant struggle as it is today at the Y, or Victim Advocate or anywhere, anybody dealing with women's issues, but I don't think that's the reason Women's Place closed.

DW: It didn't close because of lack of funds?

JG: No.

DW: So, do you want to talk then about the closing and how it happened? Why?

JG: Sure. Ok. So, we'd done this whole new structure. We'd all agreed to the new structure, and we hired somebody who—that women who agreed to the job—I don't even if she worked. I

remember meeting her, but I'm not sure she even worked, and then she quit. Then we were all like, "Oh, god, no," because it costs a lot of money to do search and do the hiring, and it takes a lot of time, and a lot of energy. So, we did another one, and we hired another person, who came, and we tried this system—this new structure—for about, I think it was about a year. With our Board, and our Board was really great, and really active. It just didn't work, and I don't know—there was a lot of interpersonal dynamics that didn't work. There was a lot of our new Director's experience that didn't work for that transition time. It may have worked at a later date, but in that transition key roll, it was sometime not the right person. Then the following summer, that would have been like—I don't know when we hired her—but the following summer, '94, '95, the staff was the director, me, Sue Rose, Katie Benellow. Katie's mom died and Sue's dad died within two weeks of each other that summer. They were both in their early twenties to, so they were very young, and very unexpected deaths. So, we lost two staff people, [unintelligible] were both from out of state. So, just because of that, and that was a big deal, in two weeks to have two sudden deaths, so they left. Katie and Sue left, and so we had this—that was a lot to lose. At the time that we were in a pretty tumultuous time as a staff, and time as an agency as far as just how this new structure was working. The structure itself could've worked, it's just that we—it just wasn't working exactly right. So, that happened and we wouldn't even hire two more people, and people were tired. There had been a lot of conflict, and people were tired. The Board was really tired. I don't know if I'm going to want you to record this, I might restrict this—but the Director was on probation, the Board put her on probation. She was misusing some money. There was a lot of stuff going on—this is for your information. So, we got to the point like, "Ok, what are we going to do," because Katie and Sue left is what I'm talking about.

So, the Board, getting lots of feedback from volunteers at the time and staff, made the decision to close [unintelligible] rather than, because financially we were not in a place that we could really do another hiring and spend the time. We'd just lost two staff, so we'd have to hire three people—it was just insane. And the Y was doing a fantastic job, and there had been times when there were huge disagreements between the Y and the Women's Place over the years that have waxed and waned in ways that I'll never know, but at the time the Y was doing a fabulous job. It had come, not to the same feminist perspective I don't think that Women's Place was at, but it incorporated enough that a lot of us could breathe fairly easily about how they were providing services. And SARS had started, and so there's another crisis line, and it was just like, "You know what, this is kind of crazy for services." We talked and talked and talked and talked about it, and we decided if the Y would take on the services and the groups and all that, that we would close the agency.

That was again where we talked about the differences between services and activism. We said if we hand off the services to somebody we know will do a good job with them, something will fill that activism void. The Women's Center obviously was very active then too, and whether the Women's Center picks it up or not for the community was debatable, and I think that the Women's Center is still fairly campus based. We thought something would happen. If something is meant to happen activist-wise in this town it's going to. It's not like Women's

Place was, I mean it certainly I think the center, but it's not like all those women belonged to Women's Place. Those women all still were out there, and have fantastic energy and good brains. So, we just had this feeling about let's trust that, which was scary. We fought and fought and fought around and around about it, because it was scary. It was like, "Oh god, what if we lose that activist voice," but we decided to risk it.

So, we worked with Debra Weinstein at the Y. At this point the Director was gone, and I don't remember what happened—it's kind of funny what you blank—so, I was the only person left. Worked with the Y, with my Board—the Board helped—worked it out with them to transfer our grants over. I talked to all our funders, and said 'look we're going to quit services and give it to the Y', but all those same funders already gave money to the Y, so they were familiar and they were fine with that. We had a Denny Washington Grant, United Way, State grants and County grants, and just transferred all that money for services over to the Y, and they took on the services—started running those groups that they hadn't run before.

They'd only done the domestic violence prior, and they incorporated the new issues, child sexual abuse and sexual assault, that they hadn't before into their training. Worked on sexual assault advocacy training, things that Women's Place had done, and the Y just took them on, which was great. With whatever assets we had left, we decided to establish a foundation, so we did that. We sold the house to Peter Talbot, and then with that money established this foundation, the Women's Place Foundation. That was kind of our hook on, like, "Oh we still have to be involved. We can't give it up entirely. We don't entirely trust it," maybe. In retrospect, maybe that was what that was about. So, that's how that went to my memory anyway.

DW: So what is the Foundation, how is that...

JG: So, we invested the money from the house, which by the time we paid off all our debts and paid—when I started, I'd had to hire an accountant to deal with years of back accounting that had not been done correctly, and was being audited. That was the other thing that was happening in all this. So, we'd spent a lot of money on that, and just trying to get things orderly—more as a business, rather than kind of, you know. So, we paid off all our debts with the money from the house, and did whatever. We had a little bit of money, I don't even remember the amount we had left, I want to say \$100,000 or something like that—quite a bit. We started this Foundation, so I changed all the documents at the State, and transferred all over to Foundation and changed the bylaws and all that stuff, and set it up. And then I left the country, so I wasn't involved after that. The Board, a lot of the Board members continued to Board members of the Foundation, and they made choices about how to spend that money, and they gave little grants for a couple years. Then they decided to give the whole shebang away. They gave a chunk to Blue Mountain. Because we were still receiving donations of course from our supporters through all of this, including a Memorial set up in Sue's mom's name that was continued, and we had earmarked that money, and they decided to donate that to Blue Mountain—I think that park that's outside of Blue Mountain Clinic now. They gave another big

chunk to—you know, I'm thinking it wasn't \$100,000. I don't have any idea what it was anymore. They gave another huge chunk to the Family Violence Council, and they gave a chunk to the Y. They gave just a chunk.

DW: So, then all the Foundation was given away.

JG: Yeah, they spent it all out and closed the Foundation, and that was within a couple of years. I bet by '97. I wasn't involved really then, so.

DW: So, what did you all do as a community of women for the closing? What types of closing rituals did you have, or did you? Or was it just so sort of disjointed at that time?

JG: We probably did something that I am not remembering. It was a little disjointed, Katie and Sue both left quickly, unexpectedly. So, they were gone and that was hard. As we changed services we encouraged our volunteers to go to the Y and volunteer there, those who wanted to provide direct services. The Y worked with us great on making that happen. We did, I'm thinking we did a potluck or something, but we did them all the time, so don't remember a specific one for that. We didn't, looking back on it I think it would have been better to do some kind of large group closing with prior Women's Place people, the twenty years worth of people that had been influenced by and influence Women's Place. That would have been great. I think none of us had the energy to deal at the time. In fact I think Diane may have mentioned that at the time, and I was like, "Whatever, I can't do it." But I think, in retrospect, it would have been a great idea. Even if it was a couple years later it would have been good idea, but I personally just kind of moved on from that. At that the time things were so chaos, and so difficult, and Sue and Kate were gone. It was just too much. We worked with our volunteers to close up their experience and listen to them process this year they'd experienced, or six months, or whatever it was. Our Board did the same thing as a group, but not in—it could have been done differently, that would have been neat.

DW: Do you ever think there will be any type of Women's Place reunion?

JG: I don't know. Women's Place is a weird place that really affected people in fantastic ways, and I think helped people grow in just amazing ways, but some of that growing was done through really intense conflict, I think. But, I think it would be very interesting, I would love to see that happen. Part of what's interesting about it is to see how people have grown through those conflicts. Because I know, and I'm not even aware of most of them, but you hear them around town for years, and it's just very interesting. I just wonder how that would play out. I think it would be great. It would be a fantastic thing. It might be very healing for a lot of people. So—if you ever want another project you could do that.

DW: Yeah. I'm seeing it in my minds eye, this big reunion. So, I want to ask you what you think about this fear that you all had when Women's Place was closing that what is going to happen to feminist activism in town. Can the Women's Center pick it up? They're so campus-orientated,

they're so young—although you didn't say young. But, they are young and very much focused on the campus. So, what are your impressions of the current state of feminist activism in town, in terms of the women that were at the Women's Place or women who weren't?

JG: I think it's happened. I think what's happening anyways—we just had our own little world going on—I think the Women's Center has done a great. I don't think the Women's Center has a huge impact off of campus but they do a great job here. I worked at the Women's Center when I was very young and I thought it was great to be [unintelligible]. I think that there're people who've been feminists for a long time who do a fabulous job at encouraging young people. I mean, I know Diane's done that for me for years.

DW: Who?

JG: Diane Sands, just being very, very encouraging, like to this day, about whatever direction that means—and holding that vision. This project you're doing right is part of that, not just her but lots of people being invested and help carrying that. Then there are all these groups that are—you know WEEL is new. That came up after Women's Place, and that's a great organization doing awesome stuff. WORD continues to do its thing. It's all those, whether agencies are just people doing cool things, it continues. So, I think that that was kind of an unfounded fear. It's nice when you have a name associated with a certain kind of activity over time, because you get associated. Sometimes I get frustrated, I want to see a lot more radical stuff happening that may not be happening. Particularly in the field...you know it's...feminism seems to change over times, there's different priorities. The one that I've plugged into and I've continued to work in is the anti-violence stuff. So that's where I want to see more stuff happening—kind of pushing the edge stuff happening—but knowing that poverty issues and welfare issues are also really, and they are all connected, but those are also different arenas to work in, and there's some really cool stuff happening. You know, I always want the Y to be more radical then they are, and I always want my agency to be way more radical then they are, but we work for the government and it's—I would always love to see more, but I think that lots of people who've stepped into that gap that was left by Women's Place, for sure.

DW: So, in what ways do you see the violence against women work, how could it be more radical, when you say you'd like to see it more radical?

JG: I was of the little factions at Women's Place that I was talking about at the end between the social workers and the activists. I was definitely not on the social work side. So, I think it's sometimes hysterical that I've been working as a social worker for the County as a Victim Advocate, which is a weird role of being a social worker and an activist. So, I've lived my life kind of in-between, my professional like. I think there is a lot of emphasis on providing services, and services are need, that need's never going to go away, but boy—maybe, I'm just tired of providing services. We've got to make some other kind of change, because we are...

DW: More systematic change, you mean?

JG: More cultural change, more social change. We will never be able to provide enough services if we keep going at this rate, we already can't. So, I get discouraged around that. So, a lot of the discussion about how do we provide for better services, how do you provide more services, how to get money to do this—and all of that's totally important, and you can't quit any of that. But we—"prevention" is kind of the buzzword—but we have to do something. We just have to do something. You know, I may not even be able to articulate what it is but... I thought it was interesting in that *Kaimin* this week, I was reading that article about—there was a letter to the editor about—what was it now, I forget. Something about accusing men of being all perpetrators, so this guy was responding to that, and—what I really firmly believe is that it takes all levels of activism to make anything happen. We need the people out on the fringe saying, "All you guys suck," and we need all the people in the middle providing services and all the people at the other end doing, really organizing and getting people involved. That's where I've been trying to stretch in my work for the County is—I've learned a lot from Claudia Merib(?), who also has worked there and Christine Swanson(?), stretching my thinking around this issue to how can we be the most inclusive, how can we make this not a women's issue, to make this a social issue that communities and micro-communities are willing to take on. How can we get communities to talk about it? How can we get communities to say, "What can we do? What can we be empowered to do?" I think that's—you're getting my whole spiel now, my whole new spiel.

One thing, by professionalizing victim services, which is what we've done, and that part of Women's Place closing, is the professionalization. Moving more towards it being a governmental thing, being—even the Y with a less radical bent [unintelligible] is more professional in some sense. We've kind of industrialized, I guess, victim services, and the problem with that is our communities are saying, "Oh well, our professions can deal with it." Well, we can't. We will never be able to deal with all of the services needed, and we'll never be able to stop it as victim services providers, to prevent it. We're not the right people, I mean we're part of the people to fix it, but we're not the only one's that can fix it. I think it's allowed our communities to hand the problem to us as a women's movement, as a domestic violence movement. So, what we've been doing in our program is, a bunch of our program provides services, and the rest of us try to say, "Ok, how can we get our communities back to taking back this responsibility," and not in a negative way, but in a positive way—like embracing it and saying, "Yeah, these are our women, let's help. These are our men; let's help. What is going on with these offenders? How can we help these offenders change their behavior?" So, that's where we've really been focusing, which I think is pretty, it's different, and it's a stretch in a different direction, which I'm liking right now. But I think we need to move our, we need to start stretching our thinking in lots of ways, and not just violence but all the women's stuff. It's fun.

DW: Right. So, it seems to me that it's very much a change within feminist thinking, because the beginning of the second wave of feminists anyway was very focused on women, and only women, and just women, and now I see what you're talking about—much more

acknowledgement of needing men and whole communities to make social change, because, well I think, women don't live in a vacuum we're in a relationship with the men, and so the men have to be on board. The whole community has to be on board for social change to happen.

JG: And that's how I like to think about it as communities, because there's been a sense of saying, ok well, it started out as helping women, and then it started out as blaming men. Then it stated saying, well men need to be involved, but they need to do it. Certainly, I was totally part of that, those Take Back discussions, I was like, "Yeah, they can be involved, but they need to be in here organizing too. Not coming and getting involved it the last week, when we've been meeting for months." You know, that was my—I was just like, "Whatever. Go organize our event." I certainly had some of that. Now, I'm feeling like there's lots of women who aren't involved, we've got to think of these as communities, and how can we create—just how do we make it priority? How do we motivate people to take it on? Part of my thinking on it, and how I do my education on it, and how I do my education now and try to work from a place of this flipping it over and being really positive, like obnoxiously positive about it. Because I think that that's how people, and it's also influence by NCPI, and all that other stuff I do, but I think that's how people feel big enough to make a difference. They need support; they need a pat on the back for any little tiny thing they do. If they say, "Having a bad day," to an offender, who they know is an offender—whatever, whatever they say, I want us to support that. I think that will make change in communities, building strength.

We've seen that in our program in Seeley Lake, how that community's kind of taken this issue, and said, "Ok, we're talk about that." Huge! We were figuring it out this summer, and if the same proportion of people volunteered for say the Y or our program in Missoula that volunteers for the Seeley Lake part of our problem, it would be five hundred people in people. That's the percentage of their community that's volunteering for the STEP up there. They've taken it on, and part of that's been a real positive, like you guys can do this, your community can change and create. But it's less black and white thinking, we can't... It's being willing to go a community that not everybody is pro-choice—ok, what do we do with that? You know, that thinking that in Women's Place was not encouraged a lot of the time. I think that's an evolution of feminism is being able to, it's more complex, maybe—going out on a limb there, but somehow it seems like it's getting to be more...

DW: interrelated.

JG: interrelated in a complex, way. Not just a, "Oh, everything's all great" kind of way, but in a...

DW: Just really acknowledging the way that communities are interrelated and are connected.

JG: And I think our job as feminists—I always say my job is a educator, but I really think of as feminist is to say "How do I support that?" How do I—previous things I've done as feminist are putting out negatives—look what's not happening, look what's bad, look what... There's a place for that. There's a place for look what's good. Then there's a place for saying, "How do we make

change, and how do all make changes we can live with?" I feel like that's our goal too. So that I can take my other victim services hat off some day, because that's going to be a never-ending pit, kind of. I keep babbling now, turn it off. (laughs)

DW: Great. Well I think we just have a minute or two, is there anything that you want to add before we end, like something that came up that you haven't talked about.

JG: No, no I don't.

DW: Well I think that's a great place to end then. Okay?

JG: Okay.

[End of Interview]