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Interviewee: Kelly Slattery-Robinson

Interviewer: Dawn Walsh

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Dawn Walsh: This is Dawn Walsh and I'm here about to begin an interview with Kelly Slattery-Robinson of the YWCA. This interview is part of the Montana Feminist History Project. The date is May 10, 2001 and we are sitting in Kelly's office at the YWCA, 1130, West Broadway, Missoula Montana. Hello, Kelly.

Kelly Slattery-Robinson: Hello Dawn.

DW: I'd like to start our interview with asking you some personal background information, the basics: where you were born, when, where you grew up, and what education you had, a little bit about your family.

KSR: Sounds good. Born Dec. 16 1965, I'm a Montana girl, I was born in Billings, Montana, though my parents were living in Hardin, Montana, which is in southeastern Montana. Grew up kind of all over in that area, my dad was in construction, so kind of followed the time that they were building the big power plants and Colstrip.

We lived for some time in Sheridan, Wyoming, which, you know, is Wyoming, but is part of Montana in many ways, too. But I graduated from Hardin High school, and kind of finally set roots in Hardin; my parents are still there to this day. And background growing up, you know, moving every couple of years, which is always interesting, I think, for a child, though we did settle down when I was about a fourth grader.

But I think as far as- as I think about the influences in my life regarding the feminist background, one of them would be my grandmother, or both my grandmothers. Neither of whom would have then called themselves feminists, but one of my grandmothers was a farm wife, and worked very, very, very hard alongside raising seven kids, and then many grandchildren in many ways throughout her life.

And my other grandmother who begged me not to get married until after I graduated, and just having ideas in her head but again wouldn't have called herself a feminist, but had some really good thoughts. Then my mom and dad, my mother was one of those really active, still is, individuals in things, you know, PTA, now it's Hospice, there's just been different things that she's always been active in.

And my dad, at one point, when I was a teenager, was president of the Operating Engineers Union of the State of Montana, so [he] was a very active union member and is still involved,

even though he's now farming, is still somewhat involved in that. We joke that he is the only Democrat in Hardin, because a lot of his buddies are Republican, and literally put all these Republican signs on his house one weekend when he was gone.

So that's probably some of my quick background and influence. So I spend a lot of time in more country-like areas too, visiting grandpa and grandma in, near Fort Smith, which is another small town; lived outside of Fort Smith. So I spent a lot of time outdoors, and those types of things as well and 4H.

Some of those more country things that you do when you live out in those areas. So, a conservative area, but surrounded by people, and then I think my grandfather, Melvin, has always been the biggest influence in my life, just simply based on his care and concern for all individuals. He taught me a lot about just treating people as people, and not necessarily what they look like. Things like that.

DW: And so then did you go to college?

KSR: Oh, yeah. I actually spent one year at Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri, which is an all-girls junior college, just to do something different, and didn't like it too well. I think part of it was just home-sickness, part of it was just a bunch of girls in one space. It felt like a big sorority house at times.

But I also did a lot of neat things there that I would never have had the opportunity if I hadn't done it. Then came back to the University of Montana, and graduated in '89 with a degree in Social Work. Then just a year or two, it's been what? A year now?, Last May graduated with an MSW from Walla Walla College, but the Montana site that's here in Missoula.

DW: Nice. Well, great. Congratulations.

KSR: Thanks. Or has it been two years? It's probably been two years now that I think about it. It has been two years! It feels like it's only a year, but it's been two!

DW: And so then you talked about having a "feminist influence" from your grandmothers even though they wouldn't have used that term. Will you tell me a little bit more about your other experiences with feminism, how you came to identify yourself as a feminist, what were your influences, and then also, how you define "feminism"?

KSR: I've had an interesting... I call myself, I do consider myself a feminist, I've had an interesting road to there, because when I was in high school, I actually became quite involved what I would call the born-again Christian Pentecostal movement and was involved until pretty much through my freshman year in college. Which by no means would I consider anybody in that movement a feminist, maybe we should check it out!

But as a whole the feminist values are very different than those values, they're definitely not pro-choice... And started to question, for all sorts of reasons, why I was involved in this movement. I was involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, and a church, and there were some differences going on there, and some frustration related to that. I just started to question and question and question and question, and I think just, I can't even really say when, other than my grandmother and some of the voices- those tapes in your head of people, but just people started to come into my life that started helping me see things a little differently and I always was kind of a little quirky, even when I was involved in this movement. I never quite fit in.

You could just tell that this wasn't really a match that was working for me. I tried to make it work, I thought I wanted to make it work, and then as I began to question my beliefs, and what I thought the way they treated, felt about women. On one side there was this "treat your wife with all this respect," but then there was this other side that made me think, "what is this all about?" And then just, like I said, just being at the University of Montana, which, as I said, does have Campus Crusade for Christ, and stuff, but also has a lot of liberalism and a lot of people that question.

I think part of it, going into social work, where I was really able to look at my values and morals and that was, I think, for me one of the things, other than the educational part, one of the biggest things I got out of my social work degree was learning a little bit more about who I was. And so I was just influenced by the people around me, in a good way in the sense of making me question, not that I went "oh, yeah, I believe that" It was like "well, what does that mean, and what does that mean?"

And then I kind of arrived at the Y at the same time that all this was happening, because I did my practicum here. Stacey Sanders, who was here at the time, was a young woman who, the main reason I even did my practicum, was because I was really interesting in some of the things that she was saying, it wasn't so much domestic violence and all of that, it was actually kind of who she was and in some ways I think she was the biggest influence for me to start looking at more (unintelligible) all of that "who I am, and what I want to be?" I think in some ways it's the person I've always been, but it just got lost for awhile. And it's now back, and it's now free and its all these things.

Which I don't think feminism always is, but for that stereotypical feminist, I actually fit that! In some ways, not all of it, but some ways. Even though I think some people don't always see the YWCA as a feminist organization, and I think there have been times when it hasn't been, there have been many times that it has been and has been quite a strong feminist organization and I don't think that people realize that sometimes, just from...I don't know...

Battered women don't have quite thedon't quite get the emotional-ness up like pro-life or pro-choice does. Sometimes people are like, how nice of them to have these poor women, versus more what I believe we're trying to do more is trying to do this whole social change. So, but that's, I feel like I'm rambling, but that's kind of theand then as time has gone on, I just

continue to surround myself with people who make me that make me think about what I believe, and question what I want to believe and I continue to do that because I think it's important to continue one's growth. Just don't go with the flow.

DW: And so then if you just had to sum up feminism, for me, how would you define it?

KSR: I mean there's this...I don't think it's simple in any way. For me it's the idea that everyone...it's shared power, it's that all people should be treated equally and with respect and have the same opportunities which seem like the good old American way, but it's not the good old American way, because it most certainly isn't the way it is in America.

So , I think it's that, but for me it's also....It's for all people, but it starts and comes back to me as a woman and how I want to be treated as a woman and what people allow me to do in my own body and those types of things. For me it starts there, but it's a broader, much more belief system of people's shared power and that people should be treated with the same amount of respect and opportunities and ideals and those types of things...

DW: Thank you. So let's move on to talk about the Missoula Y and more specifically now. I know you haven't been here since the beginning, but....

KSR: I think it's 80 years old, 90 years old this year, I can't remember, I think 90.

DW: And so. This has been documented, so we don't need to spend a lot of time on it anyway, so maybe we could just start with when you came to the Y. I already know you came as a practicum student, maybe we could just start from there and how you got to where you are now. The history of you with the Y.

KSR: I came in 1988, I started my practicum and like I said before, Stacey and her influence was what was the most interesting to me. And I jumped in with both feet. What it became for me was not just being interested in Stacey, and who she was. She was a feminist and had some strong beliefs, but was a great opportunity to wrap around a social issue that I knew very little about and now I know more about than most people should have to know, I think.

Just the stories I've heard and stuff like that, but what happened is that I visited with the women and worked with the women, all of a sudden it just became amazing to me when meeting some amazing strong women whose lives have been torn apart by violence and so the issue became my issue. And not just domestic violence, but violence against women in general. I put my fingers around it and watched the Y in the time I've been here go up and down, up and down, up and down.

That's the sad part about this organization is that I think it does some amazing things, but we can't always seem to get to that place, that plateau, like where I see WORD[Women's Opportunity and Resource Development, Inc.] at? And part of that is just that we seem to have

a hard time hooking in and keeping good exec directors for any length of time, I think that change can be hard at times for people.

We've gone from, when I was here we had a whole staff of what was called vocational services that worked with displaced home-makers and helped get job training skills and those types of things. We had the shelter and the 24-hour crisis line, we were just starting the transitional housing program at the time I was here.

We started with three duplexes or six units and started that program. The exec director at the time was a very business minded, person that I liked a lot but the match wasn't working very well, and so she was on her way...

And then we had Janet Stephens come in for a year to get us back on our feet again, and then had Weinstein come in who was a powerhouse, in the sense of just a bundle of energy, definitely a feminist, really wanting to get this place on their feet and in many ways succeeded in doing that.

The store, the larger second hand store was her idea, that got built, that got pretty much nearly paid for. The new shelter was a combination of her and my idea that we were just out going 'So what are we gonna do?' and those types of things. She just was a mover and shaker and loved, and worked at a Y in Charleston, West Virginia, and just loved the Y's and also loved the Y itself, and did some great work. And then the next ED, and these are just things I'm going to say, that she was overwhelmed by a lot of things and did some good things, but had some bumps along the road.

And I left, actually, so in many ways I can't speak about that period, I did leave and went to get my master's degree, and I know that there were bumps, and then when she left they settled on (unintelligible) to bring us back to a better place. What I've seen change over the years, we don't have vocational services anymore, just a smaller computer education program. The shelter had grown by leaps and bounds in all sorts of ways, and the whole pathways program....

We're no longer just the battered women's shelter; we're a whole program of all sorts of things. And that grew over the time I was here including staffing and services and all of that, and then transitional housing, we now have ten units versus the six. We fight with rent planning every year like every non-profit. I think that right now, I feel like this organization is the most "feminist" that when I've been here, I've seen it.

I would say that the majority of young women who work here identify themselves with that title, want the Y to look like that, want the Y to be known as that, and so I'd say over the next couple of years it will probably be an interesting transition, that's probably going to happen here in a little bit.

DW: Yeah, that's interesting.

KSR: So, I think the things that's probably that's been the most interesting is the growth of the issue of domestic and sexual violence, where even when I started in 89, people that didn't want to talk about it or knew nothing about it or didn't believe it happened. I mean, even in 1989, even though the battered women's movement had been in existence for about 15-20 years.

And now to where, the wife no only automatically identified with this issue, I mean the domestic violence issue, but we actually have staffing, not 24 hour staff, but we usually have staffing from 8-10, and we're not completely volunteer, I mean, I still think volunteers are very important, since they keep the grass-root-ness of the organization, but we're not so dependant about them. I begged. I mean, there was 1.5 of us.

I begged people to work shifts. They didn't work them. This is weak. This is hour number 60. I can't do it anymore. We weren't serving the numbers that we serve now. Still, everything had to be covered. That's really changed. We now, because of the closure of women's places fortunately, now have those services as well. Those are starting to be different with the addition of First Step at St. Pat's Hospital.

And we're now going into actual support for children who have been sexually abused and being with them in their exams. It's just interesting to watch this thing, that was a shelter with a crisis line and some groups, grow into this children's program, now we have a multicultural facet to our program now, which is amazing. So it really has been this really cute-little-baby thing that just went boom!

That's exciting because the women we serve deserve good services. Children, in particular, deserve good services. It's been sad to watch the other end for job training program (unintelligible) very little. This is the wave. I think the biggest thing, in terms of since I've been here; the three biggest things were the celebrating of the 20th anniversary of the shelter actually existing, which I think is really great that Missoula can.

I mean, we're not one of the forefront people, but pretty darn close for Montana. I thought that was pretty cool. Being able to move into another shelter that was nicer, and had more room and had more space. It's not the perfect shelter, but the perfect shelter would be one we'd build. That was an interesting process, actually, in itself because we were trying to- we'd asked the owners of the house through realtors and stuff like that to please keep it quiet that we were going to buy this shelter mainly because we were trying to keep the shelter confidential.

It accidentally got out to a couple of neighbors and they started this huge petition drive to keep us out of the neighborhood. So that was actually a very interesting experience for me just because, at least, I feel like I'm pretty passionate about this issue, and I just couldn't understand at all why- I mean, I understand that the concern that there might be some danger to it, but to just not welcome these families into this neighborhood with open arms was just

appalling to me. Literally, we had, I don't know how many, I'm sure the petition is still sitting around here.

Not only what happened was that the four-block area knew we were going to make the shelter there, so the confidentiality issue was somewhat moot, even though we can still consider it confidential. Just to watch so much anger. We had this big neighborhood meeting at a school. The anger was just amazing to me, just to watch people get up and say this. The belief about people in poverty, the belief about people in- the reality is they had to be honest about the danger level.

That yes, there's a potential for that. I'm not saying there isn't, but just- one woman cried because we were coming in and how appalled and upset she was. What was also interesting about this meeting that there was a gentleman and an older woman who both stood up and chastised their neighbors and said, "How dare you?" One even compared his neighbors to Nazi Germany. You know, 'you turn your back here, when are you going to turn your back next?' So that was interesting to also watch. All this anger, frustration and people being in fear. All of that coming out was also a few little amazing- and then the reality is, we chose to go to the neighborhood.

There was nothing they could do to stop us because we're considered a boarding house. There are not, per se, regulations about that. Jim Nugent, the city attorney, came and basically said to the group and it was a hard choice. So far, since we've been there as a whole, we get calls once in a while complaining about the yard, those kinds of things. People have been actually- I knew it was okay when somebody showed up one day during Christmas with a whole box of cookies.

We still have a few little, you know, mainly yard work is probably the biggest issue, which, you know, when you live in a neighborhood, you want people's yards to look nice. That was interesting just to watch. That was 1997. We're not talking... It was also interesting because a police officer came and spoke on our behalf about danger level. He printed off all these field addresses, field shelters to 611 Cleveland and he pulled up his name 911, calls and stuff he could find for that area.

He said that he couldn't find anything and that they shouldn't be nervous about it. I think he was a very calming influence to people of the city. He's more nervous about that they're more close to a high school in town that things that went on in the high school before all of these high school shootings started to happen (unintelligible) over there. (Unintelligible). So anyway, I'm sorry. Bla-bla-bla.

DW: It's a great story, from somebody who was right there.

KSR: I'm sure it's what every feminist faced in terms of, 100+ years ago. Nothing like that, but it was just interesting to watch that small- what it must have felt like every day for Susan B. Anthony and all of those women who had things thrown at them. Not here. Not going to

happen. Very brave woman. Even Judy Smiths and Sally Mullens and all those other women here who have done good stuff for a long time.

DW: Well since we're talking about the shelter, do you know anything at all about the origins of the first domestic violence shelter? I read it was in 1977 that there was some dialogue between the Y and the law enforcement. Do you have any experience with that?

KSR: This is the story that I have been told- and I've actually been trying to think in my head the woman that I want you to talk to. It's sort of almost there. From this particular woman, I would have to sit down with her. From my understanding, that's what the conversation started. They were responding to what, at that point, wasn't considered a crime as a whole.

There was the assault crime, which was bad enough. They asked the Y, I think it was the Y, was kind of part of the Y and moved on. We actually moved to a little trailer on the fairgrounds. I don't know if it's the same location because the fairgrounds have been there for a while. At one point, one winter, all the pipes burst and they were hauling water back and forth to this trailer on the fairgrounds trying to keep it open.

Women were only allowed to stay fairly short periods of time. It was all volunteers and some volunteers would even go cook. It was that real grass roots effort to keep the shelters open completely. Then it moved out to some place on West Broadway. They were a bit clear about where this has been. That some sort-of cabin somewhere was out past Russell Street on West Broadway and was there for a while and in much better shape.

From there, we moved to a building that- I think by this point this woman was not involved anymore and they actually had a director for the shelter- and it was Doubleday(?) actually who was at the Blue Mountain Clinic as a counselor during the early 80s. Then they moved to West Broadway. There used to be an old building across from St. Pat's Hospital, the area that's being built now. There used to be an old house. They had the first and third floors. The second floor was... some individual lived on that floor. The laundry room was outside.

Then we got a HUG(?) grant of some sort, just as I came in. They had just moved in to 611 Cleveland address. So I think that that's pretty much it. So then we own that building. The other building is (unintelligible) for a while. A lot of it was very- only until recently, when I say that it hasn't been almost pretty much all volunteer people, people like Carol Graham. Carol is probably the longest volunteer. There's been thousands probably by the time you figure it out, mostly women, but some men who did wonderful things at that place.

DW: So this domestic violence services that started at the Y early to mid 70s, in my mind, came with a whole host of issues, if you will, that second wave of feminism was really bringing to light. Trips to the legislature. Before that, a lot of the activity was spent on dances and sort of more social activity.

Then all of a sudden in the early 70s, we have women at the Y going to Helena and getting active. We have sex-ed classes, sliding scales, awareness of economics. The domestic violence shelter, divorce. All of these things were happening. I know a big part of what the Y does now, along with the domestic violence, sexual assault and rape, those types of violence, which also came with a cluster of second-wave feminist issues.

Do you just want to comment on that shift for the Y, that transition? Also, just your reflections of how it is that these issues have stuck for this amount of time and this has now become the focus of the Y.

KSR: Many Ys. Not just the Missoula Y. Many Ys have domestic, sexual violence, and teen mentoring, but mostly youth mentoring, which we're not doing as much, but also teenage girls. Kind of leadership mentoring is a big wave for a lot of Ys throughout the United States. My guess is that the Y was caught up a little bit in just what was happening. In the 60s you had this big push of activism, kind of this wave in the 70s where it was just really grown up there, in terms of the feminist and feminism and women's rights.

I think that some just got caught up in that. I'm really glad because I think that if you do read our history, it is interesting to me because it was more these dances for teens. We had classes. Until I left we had all these classes like crocheting, dance classes. About 1989, those went. I think some of it must have had to do with that. I'd love to be able to talk to some of the women there too. I'm just wondering if it was just the right set of circumstances and it just kind of happened.

One thing that also happened in, I don't even know exactly and whether it's in the book, the year imperative that the YWCA has, which is the elimination of racism by any means necessary happened probably in the 60s and not any sooner. I think that nationally, the Y was starting to, had always kind of been for women, but it was like they were starting to take these steps that, I think, were pretty large. I don't know when they actually said they were pro-choice. We were quite national as pro-choice. They do national (unintelligible) on issues of domestic violence and children's issues.

So I think it was a combination of the national Y itself and what it was doing and probably getting caught up at the right time. I wish I had known. One of our former members just died this week.

DW: Part of the focus on these issues now has to do with the Women's Place closing and you taking on some services that they used to do. Do you want to talk about that transition at all, were you a part of that?

KSR: I was part of that transition. I had just cut back my hours and a month later I was...It was really interesting. Women's Place and the Y had definitely had their problems. I will say that

even though I do consider the Y a feminist organization, we were a little more mainstream, at that point in time anyway.

Probably a little more mainstream, a little more white middle-class women who were feminists. Women's Place, luckily wasn't, do you know what I mean? So the Y and Women's Place had its problems. Even when I got here, I remember trying to go to meetings to talk about this stuff and people not really yelling at each other, but almost. It was like, this is what the issue is about. This is how we're supposed to deal with it. We just couldn't get it off.

We were starting to, and off and on, tried to mend fences and bridges in the County of Missoula, trying to make that happen. As time went on, I think that the only reason that Women's Place felt somewhat comfortable, even though I don't think they were 100%.

I don't know where they're at. Somewhat comfortable giving their services. A lot of healing had happened and that we were on the same team and had something great to offer and we were starting to do some of that work together. Some respect was starting to happen between—

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[Side B]

KSR: —unfortunately, when it all comes down to money. And when Women's Place figured out when they weren't able to keep their doors open any more, they came to us. I was honored, surprised, and happy. I felt we did our best at the time. It was crazy. It was wild just because it seemed to happen- they did such a good job of keeping it not a secret, not because it was a secret, but keeping it in control until it was really time to make a decision.

So I don't think any of us were really expecting the phone call (unintelligible) Weinstein got she came looking for me. She was saying, "What do you think about this?" The Y thought about saying no in many ways. It was up to the board, ultimately. Luckily, the board asked other people what they thought about it. We said, "You know what, we already have a 24-hour crisis line up and going. It's just a matter of training."

A lot of our advocates were already trained to sexual violence to an extent because many battered women, whether child sexual abuse, violence, rapes or having sexual violence and abuse in their relationships- we already knew quite a bit about it, but just needed to take it to this other level. Women's Place people came and did all of our training for our advocates and finally came up with a new name.

We did a big press conference and just tried to figure it all out. I would say it was rough going because the sexual assault number is huge compared to DV. DV still takes up most of our time. I think just wanting to feel like we were doing the right job, we made it huge. One of the things that was different about our shelter that we had off-and-on controversy about- in many ways, I think was probably the biggest rub between Women's Place and us.

We actually had male advocates at the time. So we actually asked that male advocates step down. We had a lot of soul-searching to do, lots of things to do. That was probably the biggest one just because I was going back and forth and back and forth about the male advocate issue. One of the reasons I felt they were positive was for the children themselves. They needed healthy male role models. I also thought it was very inappropriate.

It was okay for being on the DV hotline, but I didn't think it was okay at all for a sexual assault hotline, men answering the phone. That was the biggest thing that happened. We didn't have a whole lot at the time. We only had a couple. Asking them to step down and things like that- so we made some pretty, I think some good choices for the women we were going to be serving even if they were our choices for the Y in general.

We thought about the whole, where would be the best place, and those types of things. I think it's turned out, I would hope, that at least some of the former Women's Place people would be happy and proud. I'm hoping they would be thrilled that we have doing good in serving women in good ways.

With the addition of the First Step advocacy, this whole sexual trauma evaluation program at St. Pat's has kind of taken it to this whole other level, as far as the sexual violence issues go. They've kept us hopping over there. It was a hard decision. I was sad. It was interesting because after all the fighting between each other, I was really sad. For the people they served, for sure, but I thought there was this other icon in Missoula leaving that has a lot of- completely based on this feminist model was leaving.

DW: That brings me- an organization based on a feminist model- brings me back to feminism in the Y now. Earlier you were saying that, in your opinion, the Y right now is more feminist perhaps than it has been. Can you elaborate on that in terms of the organization, the management style, and how feminism plays into the Y right now? Feminist ideals of that?

KSR: At this point, we still have the pretty traditional (unintelligible) in a sense of- if you were to take a flow chart, we have a traditional ED, Board, program manager business, which happens to be my position and those types of things. That's what it looks like on a flow chart. The way it works inside is that, and I think it all depends on management style, is that Sally is very much a believer in sharing of power, giving people leadership, wanting women to have leadership skills and abilities.

So we decide a lot of things as a team. Whether it's the whole staff, which has happened or the program manager, Betty the store manager, Sally, we have our administrative assistant, human resources person, financial person. Whether it's us making the decision, the whole Y, Pathway staff, that's kind of the way we try- I supervise the Pathway Shelter manager, but she supervises people. We try to do the exact same thing. Supervision is even wrong.

We've been trying to figure out a new way forever because it's almost more mentoring. I feel I'm supporting people as- they're usually the ones that have to do the tough stuff- and I'm here to help them, whether they want to yell about it, cry about it, problem solve it through. Then it's not- If you've got to come down on hard on somebody for something, I just don't see myself doing it that way.

It's sitting down with people and having conversations. So that's what I would say is kind of more of that feminist management model. It's more of an idea of mentoring people and getting people to do the best stuff they can and not punishing them and not disciplining them. None of that works. None of that comes from feminist ideals. It does make me nervous with Sally leaving. What is going to be next?

The reality is, the next person might have very different ideas. I'm hoping not. The Board as a whole has some pretty strong feminist ideals as well. So I don't think it's going to end up that way, but it makes me nervous.

DW: Also, another huge feminist element to an organization would be doing a critical analysis of the structure of society at large versus just providing services without examining, critiquing the system, if you will. So do you find that's part of what the Y is doing now?

KSR: I think it's coming closer and closer to that. I think that we at times have just provided services, and pretty darn good services. I would say that Sally has brought, as well as the people we've hired, have brought that ideal. I think particularly of Naomi, the multicultural coordinator, who is doing that almost daily in her work. She's the one that's brought in a new presentation a couple of weeks ago "The F Word." The feminism and those types of things. And she's doing some great things.

And she looks at a lot of the societal, what's going on in society and the Y. And where do we fit into that picture? She does a good job with that. I think that in some ways, I was taught that by Stacey in a sense of that when I public speak about this issue, I always discuss what I believe is a society that allows this to happen. I talk a lot about why I feel the society has set that up and how things have to change and those types of things. The shelter, the domestic violence program and that came from Stacey, I think is always trying to throw that societal piece out there to people.

This isn't just about individual people who happen to be mentally ill, which is what a lot of people like to think. This is about society that allows people to train their little boys and girls almost to be victims and perpetrators and mediate violence, violence against women, and how women are treated and looked at. Even in my old traditional speeches, I sometimes throw in some points about that and (unintelligible) more traditional and try to get people to- that was taught to me by Stacey and Lucy Pope.

I would say only in the last year or two I think we have come- I just see it growing and happening more and more. We've definitely been to legislature many times- usually on domestic violence bills. Not as much as I'd like to see us do, and I think that's one thing I love about WORD in particular is that they've been able to balance that out. The Y quite hasn't figured that out yet. It seems like there's so much work to do in terms of direct service that we haven't totally figured out the advocates in part as well. Definitely the individual advocacy we have down pretty well.

In the part of the political advocacy, we're not there yet. But we're all sending e-mails to each other about something. The whole idea is that the feminist is personal. That happens here. I told somebody, "Stop sending me e-mails because it's depressing." We're doing some of that and I think that some of the people here compared to some of the people- and I think the work can- especially the way a shelter used to be run, it was exhausting.

So you didn't always have time to think about- you had to make sure you had diapers for the kids. You didn't always get your mind outside that box. It's nice to be able to start getting it outside the box a little bit. I don't know if that answered your question, but...

DW: It did yes, and I can see that it's a huge amount of work when you provide direct services and that you have to be really established and steady to go on to something else.

KSR: What's been done is that they tended to hire people that were really good at that, but not necessarily, that did look at the bigger picture stuff. What we see happening now is that we have people that are able to do- maybe they aren't doing as much direct service (unintelligible) Natalie, two young women here who are doing that. They don't do as much direct service, so I think they have a little bit of the (unintelligible) the rest not mean as much because they don't do as much direct stuff.

DW: So talking about Naomi, who runs the multicultural project, makes me think of the intersection of race, class, and gender. You all deal on a daily basis with that intersection. Do you want to say a few words about that and how you deal with that?

KSR: I think by hiring Naomi, we've come a long way. We still deal with the class issue probably more than any of the issues in many ways just in terms of Missoula, Montana and what it's made up of. We deal with the class issue daily I think just even at the shelter. We've had good conversations about, you know, what is this about?

Is this about you and your values put on top of this person? We look at that a lot. So we have those conversations quite often here about what is that about? And taking a look at yourself. Based on your value system, is your value system middle-class? Yes, for most of us probably. So where does that fit in to this?

Naomi has been a great reminder of that for us all. I have always had great manners from that. So from the beginning I've been here- I don't know how many times I've been called on my stuff. People are still calling me on my stuff and now I get to call them on their stuff. I think we intersect a lot on the issues especially with the class issue. All of them and we deal with a lot of mentally ill women. So we have to deal with that issue. I think that's a big "ism."

Alcoholism and, which is not an "ism" in the sense of that. Just all of those values and all of those beliefs, child abuse and all, parenting and- like any service organization, you get all of those moral value ethical things thrown at you on a regular basis. The Y itself, (unintelligible) necessary is a pretty strong statement to say the very least. So the national Y, could do more work. We could do more work. We're doing more with Naomi's position (unintelligible).

DW: So I want to make sure we talk about your trip to Beijing, which was a very significant event in your life. So I'll just let you tell it.

KSR: My trip to Beijing in just a couple of sentences, because we're probably running out of tape, it was a life-changing experience in a sense that I was able to see world issues in a way that I had never thought about them before. Just some of the personal things that happened- a

woman from India falling asleep on my lap. I gave her permission because she was so tired on this bus.

To talking with another woman from South Africa just about some of the amazing-African woman, not a white woman but an African woman from South Africa-talking about some of the changes that were happening and what was going to happen to Nelson Mandela and the constitution. It was just one experience after another experience- just like that.

From me being up in the Asian tents, Southeast Asian tent and they happened to have- they happened to be celebrating- they and the Vietnamese were celebrating some cultural things and dragging me into dance. I'm like, "Okay." After that it was just sitting what was called the world-court. They actually had people considering themselves judges, though per se, there wasn't going to be any consequences of women telling their stories. Just horrible, violence, rapes, things that I had heard on my little smaller level and doing my work.

It was like all of a sudden, these things about my belief system in feminism, where and how I fit in, just did some gelling. It was kind of like, I'm part of this amazing network of women. I'm just a speck and there are these women doing amazing things. But I felt like I could be part of it. I think that was what was the most amazing part. And they are. Even though I rag and scream about George Bush, it's nothing compared to what women in Pakistan are suffering right now all over the place.

I also learned the importance of helping my sisters when they asked for the help, but not making assumptions as a white woman in the United States that I know what's best for them. I think that's one of the things that American feminists, especially white American feminists have done wrong before is that we get pissed off about something, we think that's the way it should be. I think that we need to wait for our sisters, whether it's Pakistan, Africa, that we can offer our help, but make sure it's what they're needing and wanting, not what we think they need or want.

That's another thing that I was taught by being there. I was just- being white was unusual. There were Indian woman and Native American women and there were African women and there were Islamic women and there were just- all, you know. That was told me in more than several workshops. I agree. What can we do to help? That's why I do try to look at some of the stuff that comes over the Internet. Is that them asking for help? Or is this some white feminist somewhere that's decided that this is a bad thing. I think we have to be very careful with that.

We have power and we have money and we can do some good things for people if we choose to do them. We can also do some bad things, like just jumping on to a bandwagon. That's one of the reasons I joined Soroptimists, which is this mostly middle-class women. But what they do world-wide is amazing in different countries. They are in Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, and are working on issues that are important to them, not us saying, "Do this."

They have this great nation project in Taiwan that was started by people in Taiwan, but Soroptimists put money into it to help women so they don't have to become prostitutes or sex workers. That's probably what Beijing did for me.

DW: And what year was that?

KSR: '95.

DW: And that was the second, what was the title of that the-

KSR: Fourth UN Conference on Women. I went to the NGO part, the Non-Governmental Organization. Not of course the United Nations one, which had mostly men. The good things weren't happening in there. They were happening in a completely different city in Hairu (?) versus Beijing, which is just out of Beijing. That's where the good things were happening.

Another one of my favorite- they had a woman, they had various workshops and those sorts of things- and an Afro-American woman had this, basically had this gospel singing section and talked about gospel songs in relation to how they were created during the slavery and those types of things. They had these women from all over the world and just watching some of the people watching this woman sing who had an amazing, gorgeous, incredible voice, but just had never heard that kind of music before- true gospel.

Just watching these eyes- I'm sure I was the same way in this experience too. As I stepped on the great Wall going, "Oh my!" It was great. I highly recommend it to anybody because I don't know when they are going to have the next one. So Beijing was amazing. I think that it's something that should be happening every five to ten years because the world needs to get together. Powerful, good things did come out of it, whether it was information to share about to when you go back, maybe had to do something different.

DW: Okay, well thanks. We've just finished legislative session in Montana here. I want to ask you if you could just comment on what happened there in terms of bills that deal with violence towards women?

KSR: There were several different ones. We were actually somewhat successful. There was a change in the rape and sexual assault law regarding what consent is and isn't. Prior to this year, it used to be- it pretty much had to be threatened with your life for it to be considered rape, or even sexual assault.

So they changed the law to include, I'm trying to remember the exact language. Something else would bring about a charge of rape or sexual assault without consent- all these different levels in the law. This came about partially because of the whole, both photographer, massage thing that happened here in Missoula where the photographer sexually abused his clients and the

masseuse who did because the photographer one was thrown out based on- (unintelligible) seminar was thrown out because it wasn't considered that anybody felt threatened.

So they added this, which I think was a very good thing. The DV legislation that- the victim can collect unemployment if she has to flee her job based on the violence. We were able to increase, amazingly so- the one law that was fought a lot, and actually that was fought more by the counselors and some people. There was a law that was going to be involving information between the court system and the batterer's counselor, the amount of counseling hours.

Just a few things in there- we were trying to get the batterer's counselor certified because, even though you use the word counselor, they actually don't have to be licensed to be batterer's counseling. So we were trying to do some things there. (unintelligible) not me, not even (unintelligible) testify this matter, or even letters to go testify. That one had some problems off-and-on. It was actually the counselors who weren't very thrilled about it. They felt that they shouldn't have to go through certification. We were trying to explain to them that there are people doing it. And they said, "No they're not."

Well, we all know, what we do, especially small town, there are individuals who are not professional licensed counselors doing this work. We ended up with that one. A lot of things got thrown out, including certification, but increased from 24 hours to 40 hours in counseling for batterers. The court system will send information to the batterer's counselor about the arrest incident and that children- if children witness what occurred during sentencing, that could be that kind of mitigating factor, so the judge can make a decision if females (unintelligible) report or if the prosecutor can stand up and say, "These two young children watched this man do this to this woman."

And the judge could actually consider that as a factor and could increase the penalties. That was able to stay. So that one was a struggle. That was an interesting place. We didn't expect that. Judy had contacted a lot of the counseling people, in terms of the bigger groups, NSAW Montana chapter. All of a sudden we had this huge influx of 'this is not a good idea.' It wasn't even Republicans at all, it was this other group of people we weren't expecting.

I want to say that there was some cleanup of Safe Haven(?) credits. Safe Haven(?) credit ideas that if there is a TOP in Washington, they will be also accepted here. There was some cleanup stuff done with that. I suppose those were some of the things that did happen.

The things that failed were, we tried to get- Montana legal services tried to get a surcharge so they could tax things, so they could get some more money for (unintelligible). Anything with money, not surprising. I don't know how much of it had to do with money and how much of it had to do with the whole idea of breaking up families.

DW: Well we're coming to an end here. So I just want to end on a more personal note and just ask you to reflect on the work you've done in this arena and how that's affected your life? Sort of a personal growth and development kind of question.

KSR: Well I'm a much different person than I think that anybody in my family, in particular, had ever believed I'd ever turned out. I've always been somewhat mouthy, but I definitely stand firmly in what I believe in and usually unafraid to- if I hear something, whether it's racist or sexist to make my own little comments when I don't get so upset I don't breathe.

I think that's surprising for my family. I don't see that changing. I've heard and seen way too much of the violence against women that it sometimes makes me so angry I want to cry and sometimes I'm so angry that I want something to be different. I know that things happen different, and that shelters have made things different. There's a long ways to go, but I also know I'm not ready to quit. So I came back to the Y because I'm not ready to quit. I was involved with that (unintelligible) council because I wasn't ready to quit, and I'm not ready to quit. I want to try to change- that women and children should be able to live peacefully, especially with the person that's supposed to care and love them the most.

Many women who I've worked with in the program have definitely changed me just by them honoring me by allowing me to hear their story. Even though it can be hard, it is an honor, if somebody's willing to tell you some of their deepest, darkest secrets, it is a complete and absolute honor on several levels. Another reason that brought me back is that I needed that. Even though I don't do as much direct service, I do enough in many ways to keep remembering that time and time again.

I'm honored to have been a part of their lives. I also have the wonderful opportunity to watch several women blossom and grow and be amazing. They were already pretty amazing, but I mean, just go to this other place in their lives. There's nothing, nothing like that to watch on women and children who succeed. You don't even see why they should make it, given what they've experienced, but they do.

That's been a privilege and an honor too. So it's changed me immensely in many ways. Now my spouse, partner, can definitely have the talk too. My sister is getting (unintelligible). The Bobcat assistant coach just got arrested for breaking his ex-girlfriend's arm. She had to send me all the information and I was appalled. That would be it probably.

Thank you Dawn. This was an amazing experience just to talk about the Y and me. I want to thank you for that opportunity.

DW: You're welcome. Thank you.

[End of Interview]