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Interviewee: Catherine Lynn Robson

Interviewer: Diane Sands

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Diane Sands: Let's see here if I can get all of my levels fixed. This is Diane Sands interviewing Lynn Robson at her house and it's August—what? Twelfth, tenth, eighth? The ninth of 2001. So, why don't you just start, Lynn, by telling me something about your background and how you came to be a woman activist. You have such a different background than some of us with your Republican roots. Do tell.

Catherine Lynn Robson: It's a hard thing to reflect on where it came from because I'm not sure when it began. I do know that I think it makes me less clear by having to spend every Christmas half-Republican, half-Democrat; all strong-minded, very vocal people about issues. And I think it makes me understand that there's not one altar to genuflect at. I've been a Democrat and I can kind of think whatever—I think the first time I voted was for Nixon, frankly. And I know I worked for Goldwater.

And many people have, including Hillary Clinton; kind of interesting to hear that. But at some point in there, and this was in the sixties, I think it began to reach me as a woman and as someone of a rational nature that war, that fairness, that the fact that those of us who had our health and our intelligence and family wealth behind them had a leg up that others could never compete against; that it wasn't a level playing field. And I'm not sure when that came in. I went to undergraduate school at the University of Idaho. It was a very conservative school.

Most people who I graduated with are still Republicans, even though some of them have done some very good things in terms of contributing to the world. But even after 30, 40 years, they're still very strong Republicans. I have very, very good friends from college. I don't leave my friends very easily. They're warm and they've done some very good things. And excellent teachers. Some wonderful [inaudible] and other practitioners. I think that when I went to California to go to graduate school, I began to discover a comfort level with being a progressive: that it wasn't thoughtlessness; that it was not just gut with emotions; that it wasn't out of guilt.

These are things I grew up hearing, of course, from the arch-conservatives in my home and, of course, the people I dearly loved, who were arch-conservatives: that liberals and progressives weren't very thoughtful, that they weren't rational about what they were doing, that it was purely emotional and it was out of guilt.

As I began to pursue my first study English—high school English—to be a teacher; as I began to pursue something called genetic epistemology and then slowly began to look at environmental issues—especially about children and learning, and how environmental issues affected poor children; their nutrition and their ability to learn, even learning to read or be cognizant—it

became clear to me that there were issues we would never overcome if we weren't willing to have redistribution of wealth and a certain understanding that every neighborhood where children played...

I grew up in Kellogg, Idaho—eating lead dust myself—but my house had gardeners and none of us really did the gardening and we went on vacations a lot and didn't have to breathe the smelter smoke all the time and didn't have to swim in the lead crick because we had our own swimming pool, thank you, and our boat and our place on Coeur d'Alene Lake. So we weren't immersed in the toxic issues of that mine constantly, though we certainly had the wealth of it. But there was a real, I think, understanding as a very young person what elite and wealth meant—because I got to grow up with it—but it was in a mining town and you couldn't get too far from the poverty and the affected.

So when I got to California in graduate school, some of the rationality took hold quite rapidly and I began to be even more interested in economics, particularly the distribution of wealth and how do you empower people about money and capitalism when they know nothing about it? And they have no vision of what it would be like to have it, or live with it, when actually they're not very stressed out about not having it? Middle class people and, I think, people who are wealthy, have a lot more stress over not having wealth than low-income people. It was just the people that I was around.

They were more stressed about being employed than having money or having wealth, and they didn't have the vision. Usually the boys I dated were from the other side of the tracks, and it was in the family anthology that if there was a stray dog, Lynn would go find it.

And even my women friends were the more interesting people, who were really bright who lived down by the whorehouses, and I remember walking down to see my friend and running into Ginger who was the local madam. And of course it was legal back then. Ginger had bleached hair and a long fur coat and jewels. I'd seen her in my father's office because she was his client, but I just happened to run into her and she recognized me and I recognized her, and we had this interesting visit just about—it was nearly Christmastime and she asked how my father was doing, and she always brought him a fifth of something at Christmas. And I said, "So what is it that you do?" I mean, I was an utterly protected individual. I was probably 16 or 17. I had no idea. And I said, "So where do you work?" and "What a beautiful coat." I realized she didn't quite fit, but what an ignorant—I mean, I was so overprotected. Dating was like with a chaperone. I did not go in a car alone with a boy until I was over 16.

DS: What did Ginger say?

CLR: She looked at me as though I was teasing her, like I was making fun of her. And I think she realized that I didn't have a clue, and she gave me one of the most generous gifts anybody could give me. She didn't make fun of me, she wasn't derisive, she just told me. It was a

wonderful exchange and evermore after that, when she came to my father's office, we had sort of a bond. It was great. It was probably my first experience with feminism.

DS: How crazy. What a story.

CLR: Yeah, I haven't talked about it probably ever. Yeah, I can just see her face right now. And I'm sure she's dead. My father would remember, but he's such a sexist I don't know that I'd want to talk to him. Anyway. So it became clear to me that the oldest way for women to earn money...And of course, growing up in a sexist household; my mother with her Master's degree in Math and a statistician in World War II was relegated to being a domestic.

And she was raised in the south where you had black people, colored folks, to be the domestics. So we grew up in a real messy, dirty household. She did not do nigger work. And she was not allowed to work or be employed because any woman my father would be married to would not be working, even though paying attention to money was beyond him because he was a spoiled only child of very wealthy parents. So there were some real issues around that, in that he did not pay attention to money and didn't pay his taxes. One time he nearly went to prison when they discovered that he hadn't paid his taxes. His father had to bail him out. He absolutely, to this day, doesn't think it's incumbent upon him to have to be responsible to debts or anything.

DS: So how did that lack of role models and being in a mining community as well—where most women were miners, certainly—how did you see your future in terms of jobs or careers or that?

CLR: Well, I'll tell you, I still to this day have dreams about being Jo in *Jo's Boys*. Louisa May Alcott wrote the vision for me. I was certain I would be married to a professor and have 20 children and adopt children and run a school in the country. I still, to this day, think that's most my personality. [Laughs]. Thank God for Louisa May Alcott. That's really the vision I had and that's what I thought I would be. It didn't turn out that way. In fact, when I bought my first house when I was 32, I was a little bit pissed off about having to buy my own house. And thank God. Now I rather am delighted about that whole evolution. I mean, how did you feel when you bought your first house?

DS: Well it makes total sense to me how you talk about your family's economic background, and that your interest became economics so that the work you have primarily done in your life has been around economic development and women's economic self-sufficiency. And that connection for you in that history makes total sense to me that that's how you first came to understand the world; was in those economic terms, and that that's where you focused your life's work, really. Teaching, I don't even see where that connection comes in here.

CLR: It was what I was told I would be good at. I really wanted to be a lawyer, and I worked in law firms and applied at the University of Idaho to the School of Law, but they had no women in law school at that time in 1960—none. They'd had two go through the school in its history. And

when I went to apply, my father was Attorney General of [Idaho] under [Governor Don William] Samuelson. And I was on one of the lead debate teams at the University of Idaho.

And I was probably a pretty big candidate, but I had an undergraduate degree in education, and they challenged me by saying, “Well, you’re going to need to do a year in business and political science.” And I talked to some of my male friends who were applying, and that wasn’t required of them. It really made me very unhappy. That was another disservice. And then I talked to my father about it, who just said, “Oh, no, you should never think about being a lawyer. Women in the legal field is only going to be a disservice to your clients. No judge is ever going to give you a decision. No jury is ever going to honor anything you have to say.”

And I talked to the Dean of the Law School again. He said the same thing. And I believed them. So I went into genetic epistemology instead. And you know, to this day, I look back and I’m not sorry that I did not go to law school. But I do know women who, shortly thereafter, went into the University of Idaho Law School and have had really great careers. Actually, it would have served me well in the non-profit world. And I’m the only child my parents even had that was even interested. My brothers all went into dentistry. [Laughs].

DS: [Laughs]. Causing pain in a different arena.

CLR: Yeah, right. Because I don’t think I’m terribly aggressive. I don’t know that I would have been a wonderful courtroom lawyer. My father was very good at that. He was brilliant on his feet and better with words than anyone I know. He could make a coherent speech without notes, without preparation. And his writing is stunning, the first draft.

DS: So how did you then move from being a person who was really in education into—

CLR: Economics?

DS: Mmm hmm.

CLR: Well, I think running the book store in Libby, and really becoming an activist.

DS: How did you get to [inaudible].

CLR: Oh, good heavens. It’s called being married and following husband and my childhood sweetheart, who graduated from [inaudible], went to Vietnam, had a horrible experience of an alcoholic.

DS: Joe Roberts, for the record.

CLR: No, it was Aaron Spurway. The father of Jessie.

DS: Oh really?

CLR: Yeah. And he was in the nuclear subs and when he wouldn't re-op, they took him off, put him on a river boat, and he took ammunition up and brought bodies back and, you know, he was 26 years old. He was just berserk when it was over. We were married for five years and he was not sober more than five minutes. Would disappear for a week—blacked out. Finding him took up a lot of time. Small baby. And it was a disaster. It was just...It's still really emotional for me to talk about. He's very happy today. He quit drinking when she was about 16 and I think he's very happily married and raising [inaudible] and being a publisher in Spokane. He's been dry for—

DS: The father of your beautiful daughter, Jessie.

CLR: Yeah. And they're very good friends, which is wonderful.

DS: So you ended up in Montana.

CLR: Followed him up here to Libby and opened a book store and shipping. The way I made the bookstore work was I would buy books from book people in Seattle, they would come into Libby, and I wrote a newsletter and mailed it out to the people who were my customers. A lot of them were being hired on the Alaska pipeline, so pretty soon I had the whole Alaska pipeline ordering books from me. So they would come to me from Seattle and I would box them back up and send them back to Seattle.

The irony did not escape me. I thought, this is a waste. I should just move to Seattle and do this, except I want to live here. And at that time there was a real burgeoning environmental evolution in Montana, I think. That was in the mid-seventies. We had the [inaudible], which was wanting to come through those narrow valleys up there. We had nuclear waste wanting to be dumped up there. Not the waste itself, but people in charge of it.

We had dams going up on rivers where they shouldn't go. We began raising money to hire economists to come and do the testimony and do the write-ups on why these things should not happen, putting value to natural resources and tourism and other kinds of economies. And it was pretty interesting. At the same time, met some wonderful women—strong, wonderful women in Montana: Anne German, Judy Smith. Anne German was a new attorney and she and Jan van Riper (?) came to do their summer internship in Libby.

And what a great summer we had. I was just going through a very sad divorce and the three of us just got to be such friends. I had—at that time, on my own, was going through this divorce and I was wanting to value housework and other services versus what my husband did or did not do. And it was just making no sense at all that out of his anger I should have no money to live on or to raise my child. And that conflict, at the same time as meeting these great women—

DS: Who were already well-developed and articulate—

CLR: And very comfortable with all of these kinds of issues. Gave me language. Made me really comfortable with what feminism was about. It was just a wonderful, wonderful time. So the environmental issues and the feminist issues and housewife housework—all of those things were just at the same time.

DS: And the environmental group was probably done with Cabinet Resource Group.

CLR: Cabinet Resource Group. There was also—

DS: Hewitt? Jewitt? And all of that stuff going on.

CLR: Well, actually, Jewitt (?) wasn't up there, but it was Bill Morrow, it was Steve Lokan (?), it was...I can't think of them all, but wonderful, passionate, intelligent people. And a lot of really good folks. They just hired a lot of biologists in the Fish and Parks system in Montana who are all about to retire. And there was a huge influx at that time. They were all pretty progressive and very bright. And they were our allies. We stopped a lot of these kinds of things: clear cut logging that was eroding Quartz Crick, and one thing after another. Even for vermiculite at the Libby mine which people, at that time, were putting in their gardens.

They weren't just insulating their houses, they were actually putting it in cakes. It was in Betty Crocker. I'm waiting for that lawsuit. Betty Crocker put vermiculite in its cake mix food. I remember somebody telling me that they used the stuff that we were putting in our gardens into their cakes to make them light and fluffy. Why would you do that? And they pointed to a cake box and said, "Vermiculite, there it is." They use it in cakes. I'm waiting for that lawsuit. Maybe that's a fundraiser.

DS: So do you worry, having moved up there and being exposed to vermiculite, about asbestosis?

CLR: Well, yes. And I called up there because the five new docs came in. We're part of the folks that we helped recruit. I was elected to the Chamber of Commerce board, I was elected to the City Council, and we brought in these five new docs when our three old guys retired. These five new docs were so progressive and fun. They were all outdoor enthusiasts. They were very, very bright people.

DS: So why not, in all of that time period wasn't this asbestosis issue—which has now in the last couple of years just exploded in the state...For those of you 50 years from now who read this, we have several hundred people who have died of asbestosis-related disease. We've got it about to be declared an [Environmental Protection Agency] EPA toxic waste site, et cetera. But yeah, it was known 20 years prior to this that this was somewhat of a problem. And you were there.

CLR: It was known, and we started taking it out of our houses. We were saving the trees, we were keeping the nuclear waste out of there, we were stopping the dams, and this was just one of a list of about six or seven things. And I can remember being called an environmental princess by Downing—whose dad?

DS: Is it Downing?

CLR: Ted Downing (?) came up there from the [Natural Resources Defense Council] (?) NRC and I remember in a public meeting him shaking his pipe at me and calling me some kind of environmental princess. And he's dead now; I wonder what he died of. He is from Libby, by the way. I remember I was a vegetarian at that time, which was early. It was like being a communist.

DS: Macrobiotic diets and brown rice and—

CLR: Yeah, soybeans had been discovered. And I think that you couldn't get people's attention. You'd get their attention but they were in such denial. Probably some of the very people now who are such activists just thought that we were nuts and that we were just trying to ruin their way of living, and the messengers were to be killed. We clearly had enough support to be elected to some offices, so I can't say that was *carte blanche*.

I mean, there were some before or during it, even back then. I called Bradblack, who was one of the docs that came in then. He was in charge of the whole W.R. Grace screening clinic for the EPA. And do you know that I could not get an appointment? He said, "I can't give you an appointment. You have to go through the EPA." So I called the EPA and one; it took three calls. It took being on hold for 15 to 20 minutes each time.

When I finally got through, they could not make an appointment. It was in D.C.—it was not in Libby, yet you called the number. So they could not give you an appointment or even a day. I said, "Well, can you give me a day that I should be there?" No, you just had to come up and hang out. And I said, "You mean I have to come to Libby?" First of all, you had to go to Libby

DS: Just in the last year [inaudible].

CLR: Yeah, this screening thing. I said, "What about my daughter, whose working in the fisheries in Alaska? Can she not be checked there? Why can't I be checked down here? Why do I need to come clear to Libby, Montana? That means I've got to take three days off from work and then come up there and stand around and hopefully get in. Are you trying not to have people be screened?" And I've had a couple follow-ups since then, but it's always a message on my voicemail.

So there's no way that I'm going to take a week off when I'm healthy as a horse and so is my daughter and go up there and fool around with that. I might be sorry someday, but I'm pretty healthy. I don't seem to have any lung problems [inaudible]. But anyway, that's the way that's going.

DS: So the environmental background of activism of yours continues through here in a thoroughly personal way in that particular case.

CLR: Well it's interesting for me to see that things are progressing. It was such an uphill battle back then. It was such a cry in the dark. I think the dialogue has been heard and I think that many, many people understand that toxicity will kill and that we've poisoned our own homes and our own environment.

DS: And our own cake mix.

CLR: Yeah, can you imagine that? I mean isn't that [inaudible]?

DS: So how did you come to leave Libby? Is that when you moved to Bozeman?

CLR: It's when I married Joe. Following another man.

DS: Joe Roberts, in this case.

CLR: He was an attorney and he was a liberal Democrat leader in the state and interested in all these things and very passionate about them; very able to get things done, and working for a judge.

DS: Top judge.

CLR: No, he was at that time working for—oh, I can't think of his name. He was a district court judge. I can't think of his name

DS: Graybill?

CLR: Not Graybill. He's gone, he's dead. He was a very big name. I loved his wife. She was from Wallace. Died of cancer. Anyway, so Joe was a very bright, capable activist and elected to the legislature when he was 20, 21 or something. Quite a defender of women's rights and the environment. Turned out to not be all that I thought. So I followed him to Helena and went to work in the public library here and ran one of the first electronic inventories of anything.

It was called [inaudible]. Talk to Suzy Holt about this. She was the director of the library at the time and we had this ancient, old—I mean, it was brand new at the time. They had just passed a bond election, so they had first-rate, top-of-the-line equipment and gear. And they hired me,

who knew nothing about programming of any kind, to set this up. They said, “Well, nobody knows how, so the company’s going to train you.” So we put in the first electronic inventory and re-ordering of library books. It was really interesting. It was so hard to use. I think back now from what we can do with databases and it was like the covered wagon days of electronics. [Laughs].

The beehive. She and I were just laughing. We nearly fell on our knees laughing about it just the other night. It was like, “Can you believe what we went through?” Then I went back to school at [Montana State University] MSU in economics at a really propitious time when every teacher there was getting ready to go to work for Ronald Reagan—Terry Anderson and you name it, the whole list. Just [inaudible]. Kind of in a similar setting, there were Libertarians who thought that if your pig ran across my land I should be able to shoot it.

Others, like Oscar Burt, who thought mathematics described the economy; they never had one Fulbright. They never had one graduate be given any honors. It soon became clear to me that I was not going to be very successful. I got to the point of writing my thesis and it became clear that I was never going to get that thesis through. It was on labor issues and they just didn’t do labor. It was capital all the way.

DS: You were at the wrong school.

CLR: I was! But they gave me a [teaching assistantship] and money, whereas I went to [the University of Montana] and they didn’t have any scholarships or any money for me. So there you are.

DS: You had moved to Bozeman at that time.

CLR: I had. And then I started—in order to support myself as well—I started working on a small employment grant for women. It became a displaced homemaker program, and you know the history of that. It became interesting.

DS: But the women who will listen to this tape in 25 or 50 years do not know the history of that, so tell them history of that.

CLR: Oh, it makes me tired to think about.

DS: We’re talking ballpark 19—

CLR: 80.

DS: Early eighties.

CLR: Yeah, or '81. There were not women in employment programs. The grant seemed to go along with my thesis and I thought, "OK, I can use this, possibly, in my thesis as well." Part time, you know, and I'm at that juncture. So I started working there. I remember walking into this dusty little hot office on the second floor in Bozeman. There was a big garbage can with overflowing garbage and one old, ratty couch. And we had this grant for 20 thousand and that's it.

There were no pencils, no paper, no phone. And I thought, "Oh, you don't have time to do this." I had a small child and I thought—I had never run a non-profit before and so I got some pencils, got some paper, got a telephone, and we set up a displaced homemaker program. At that time, there were one or two other sites around the state. I just became compelled by the subject. It just became more and more interesting to me.

You know, I had no fear of doing things. I think women don't have much promise and at that point there was no opportunity cost. If you took on something that was unpopular or unsupportive or against the grain, there was no opportunity cost. The men that I knew who were pretty interesting had opportunity cost. If they did things that were this far out or this against the grain, they would lose their ability to have power and be heard and earn money. And I think that's one of the problems we've had in the Democratic Party all this time, is that the men had too much to give up and we women had nothing to lose, and we've never been able to...

I still feel so disassociated with the men in the Democratic Party. I still have no more connection to them than I do the men who are in the Republican Party. In fact, sometimes there might be a Republican or two that I have a little more connection with. There are men, of course. I'm trying to think of who they are. But there are probably more women in the Republican Party that I am comfortable with than men in the Democratic Party, and that's the darn truth. So I realized that I had nothing to lose.

DS: What was a displaced homemaker center?

CLR: Well it was for women who had been a homemaker. And remember my earlier days, going through my first divorce? And then the second one was devastating and equally ugly. And of course it was so unfair. No assets were divided, no support. And then you were challenged—if you can't support your child then you can't keep her. So I had to get out and get a job and have some income in order to keep my child, even though everything was against me being employed. It doesn't take a brain surgeon to figure out how unfair that was in those days. Women earned—what was it—thirty-some odd cents to the dollar? We've come up a ways. I think we're all the way to 54 cents or something by now, aren't we?

DS: The census just came out and we now earn in Montana 58 cents for every dollar a man makes.

CLR: Hot dog.

DS: Until the '70s, nationally it was women were making 59 cents. We're still one cent below where we were 30 years ago nationally. Seventy-eight cents nationally, 58 cents in Montana. And if you're a Native American or a woman of color, it's 10 cents lower than that.

CLR: Losing ground! That breaks my heart.

DS: Breaks my heart after all the years of work.

CLR: All the work we have put into this and we have had no effect. It's a little defeating, isn't it?

DS: Well it's also in relationship to men's income, too, and you have to look at what's going on in the men's economy.

CLR: And the distribution of wealth.

DS: And that could be a factor [inaudible] anything. But it is discouraging that—and these economies are still largely natural resource economies. Women still are in a [inaudible] world.

CLR: Well, now technology and capital, and women cannot command capital. These are very capital-intensive companies that are coming into Montana. And the technology, you have to be so aggressive. I just finished reading a book called *Burn Rate*. Christ, no woman would do that. I mean, one of the things we know in creating business is that women are very dependable. They don't overextend in debt and they're very practical and they're very methodical. Men, on the other hand, my god, are gamblers are so arrogant, they expect they should be given. Women do not have that expectation. So they're going to succeed in these new frontier businesses. I mean, I just watch it day in and day out. It's probably one of my dissatisfactions in staying here as the director of the [unintelligible] corporation for these few counties, that we've had some...Well, that's all history.

DS: You started working in the displaced homemaker program. Were you the only staff there a while? What did you all do in general?

CLR: I was the only one, part time. Then we hired a woman ten hours a week to be a job developer. We had no idea what that was supposed to be. Well, we started at 20,000 a year, and each year...In fact, I'm just writing an application for a job. I was looking over the list of...I mean, this is so hilarious, you've got to see. I mean, this—

DS: In some ways I think it's amazing because, you say you didn't know what you were supposed to do. We made these things up at that point.

CLR: Yes.

DS: You made up what Displaced Homemakers became. You made it up from scratch.

CLR: Yes, and you know, displaced homemaker sounds like a disease, we always said. So we changed it to women in transition or we gave it a different—

DS: I need a copy your resume for the file.

CLR: Well, what I have here somewhere is a list of all of the grants, which we had to first create the fund to apply to, write the policy in the law, get federal and state. I mean, how many laws federally and locally did we work on and get passed to get the money, and then we had to go back to our nonprofits and apply for it and then administer it and then develop the next set of money.

DS: (Unintelligible) and then develop the next set of it.

CLR: Yes, and it hurts me to hear what you just told me because it sounds like we haven't had any effect on...Oh, here we go.

DS: Well, we certainly have. I think you grew the displaced homemaker / women in transition program there phenomenally. I don't know how many years you were there but it was, I think, one of the most innovative of the displaced homemaker programs in the state of Montana.

CLR: Well, we finally had eight across the state, and then I was the director of the district of displaced homemaker meeting these four states of Utah and Oregon and Colorado.

DS: Well, the first time we tried to hook those together—

CLR: Wyoming.

DS: —which you should probably tell the story of. I remember the first meetings we tried to have—

CLR: (Laughs)

DS: A state displaced homemaker. And that tale, Lynn?

CLR: That's such a great story because my friend Diane...Oh my god! We were just certain that this was the thing to do. We had a retreat at Chico Hot Springs, which became my place, my venue of meetings. We had the displaced homemakers there, and they were pretty conservative farm women and rural community women. There were eight centers, and I had written this grant to have trainings. I'd hired a woman who was Bob Friedman's sister-in-law to come out and talk to us about grants. It was the first time we'd heard about some of the major

grants. Then we had a woman also from somewhere else who was a psychiatrist who was going to have us...I can see that woman to this day and I can't think of her name or even her discipline, but she was here to talk to us about the psychology of women. I had my friend Diane there who was going to talk to us about...Was it about the lobby fund? Or about policy in the lobby fund, I think, possibly. But the psychiatrist had us all put on blindfolds and start talking about issues that were challenging and to learn to trust each other and get to know each other. Oh my god! We started with our personal lives, you know, that's how you do this ice breaking thing. It got to Diane Sands—

DS: I don't remember this!

CLR: —and I ripped off my blindfold, and I was going to go to put my hand over her mouth. “Oh yeah, me and my partner is a woman and we're gay, and I really resent the fact that all of this language is heterosexual. I mean, some of us are attracted to women.” I'm telling you, that was the end of that exercise. Those women—

DS: (Laughs) I don't remember that a bit.

CLR: Oh, I do. I thought it was the end of my career as I had begun to imagine it. I thought, “What is she on?” I mean, it was before people were out, you know? These poor, shocked women.

DS: From Miles City and Lewiston and—

CLR: Glued to their chairs and that was the end of that group. The poor psychiatrist was absolutely blown away. I don't think she'd ever probably worked with gay or lesbian women. I mean, she was more shaken than the women in the room. Eventually, most of them in that room became not only dear friends of Diane but utter supporters and complete and devoted—

DS: (Laughs) I don't recall that that way at all. It's interesting how we—

CLR: How did you- well, tell...how would you say?

DS: I remember that incident, I mean, now that you bring it up, I remember a vague remembrance of not liking whoever the psychiatrist was at all. I remember the difficulty also, of even getting these people to come to this meeting—

CLR: Oh, yes.

DS: -because they had found no reason why women would want to be together with other women. I mean, it wasn't like they viewed themselves as feminists and you certainly did. Those of us who came from Missoula and were doing—

CLR: More radical things.

DS: More radical things, viewed of course, that we'd want to get together as women. They just were having a fit about having to come to this meeting with a group presenter.

CLR: Oh, there was that piece too. Oh right, the radical stuff and being feminists. Oh yes, then you did have to conduct that part about being...well, something about women's issues and, of course, you decided to frame it in terms of feminism. Okay, it's out of control anyway. I'm just going to relax.

DS: We couldn't hardly get them to come to the meeting. I remember you had so much trouble even getting them (unintelligible).

CLR: Oh, trying to keep them not smoking in there was a big deal. They were all smokers at the time.

DS: Eventually, of course, this network becomes really quite a strong, well-bonded around women's issues and higher consciousness—

CLR: Absolutely. Holy god.

DS: —but boy, that was probably the rockiest start to the network.

CLR: I think that was 1984 or something.

DS: Probably. Yes, that was really tough.

CLR: Yes. Then I was on the National Governor's Board of Displaced Homemakers.

DS: I served on different parts of that and read your grants and the Carl Perkins (unintelligible) and that. That network of displaced homemaker centers around the state did all kinds of—

CLR: And it's still alive and well. We, at one time, I remember one of the best years we had at the legislature. We did a conference in the first week of legislature. This is one of the more brilliant things I've ever done. We had the grant the year before and we set it up, and we had this wonderful, I remember, newspaper print that had the agenda on it and all these facts about women all the way around. It was this big oversize thing. People still keep it. We had those posters. They were pink, and we had the women on tractors and stuff and it was so stupid. I mean, now. Today you look at it, I'm a little embarrassed when I see them. I still see them in other people's offices, and they still kind of embarrass me. It was so early. We had...This is brilliant. We had such a big turnout. We had legislators on every panel: four legislators and one facilitator who would be the deep throat. In other words, the person who really knew the subject and how it was supposed to happen. We had all these egos up there

telling us about this subject and the facilitator would be a plant. I forget how many we had, but we had every subject up there. We started the Women's Lobby Fund about then in order to advance these issues. Everything from veteran's preference...I mean, if you tried to get a woman employed, you could not get her even signed up at the job service because veterans got the first five slots on any job that had any pay to it.

DS: And almost everybody who work at the job service were all men.

CLR: Yes. And / or the wives of the veterans. Forget it, if you're divorced. I mean, their current wives. The ones that are 20 years younger than the women who are now divorced and looking for some way to keep a roof over their heads. We had non-gender insurance, we had veteran's preference, we had comparable work where we went to war with our dear friends at the AFL-CIO. Hardest thing I ever did was fight Candy Brown and Pat Harper and a few others who were...Sue Bartlet. Big AFL people.

DS: Let's take that topic, you want to flip the tape over.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

CLR: You were one of the speakers, and you know the wind-up person was Selinda (?), I think in her prime.

DS: Yes, back in the early '80s.

CLR: Yes, but Nancy Keenan, and WORD was just emerging. She was splendid.

DS: (Unintelligible) legislature at that point.

CLR: Yes. It was one of the best things I think I've ever done. It was a real huge turnout, and I remember Linda Greyson (?) following me around, being pissy because there weren't enough bagels. (laughs) I'm going, "Snap out of it. Here, here's five bucks, go get some breakfast. Get off my back and go away."

DS: You were involved in the early start of the women's lobby in a way...I mean, people think I started the women's lobby. I always tell them, "I didn't start the women's lobby, I wasn't even on the first board."

CLR: Institutionalistic.

DS: You were on that first really formative period of time. How did that come to be?

CLR: (laughs) If you can call it that.

DS: Well, talk about it. How did it come to be? What was your role in all of that?

CLR: Oh, let me think back then. Well, you remember it was Paula.

DS: Paula Petrick (?).

CLR: Petrick and a couple of other people from MSU who actually went to the Democratic...I think it was the Democratic Party Convention and held out their hats and said we're going to start...At that time, ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] groups were around and women's consciousness groups were around. There were some sack-lunch seminars. Sort of support groups for women where you could talk about your problems but not really figure out what to do about them.

DS: With a lot of local activist groups, there wasn't really an organized statewide political effort. We had been doing abortion lobbying for years already up here, and occasionally the NOW [National Organization for Women] people would have somebody up here or whatever, NAAW (?), et cetera, but there was no unified—

CLR: PPW.

DS: —legislative presence or connection between these groups at a policy level.

CLR: I really think Paula was the lead on that. I don't know who else was with her, but I remember Paula Petrick with hats and hand and collecting money and sort of intimidating people that they couldn't leave the room until they put something in the hat.

DS: Well, the '81 legislative session was dreadful. That was the one where they had gotten rid of the women's bureau that Sue Bartlet had belonged to.

CLR: That's right.

DS: There was the (unintelligible) —

CLR: Joy McGraff (?)?

DS: Yes.

CLR: What's her name, down at Dillards? Black woman—

DS: Joan Duncan.

CLR: Joan Duncan, yes.

DS: Got rid of them, got rid of new (unintelligible) funding for family planning and stories (unintelligible) saran wrap. So that '81 session—

CLR: Maribel Morgan (?)? (Laughs)

DS: Was particularly awful. As I understand, a lot of the react came out of how really conservative and how really anti-woman—

CLR: Renter's rights, we couldn't get any renter...I mean, women and children couldn't get a house to live in. Forget it. Yes, it was pretty wretched. Our daughters don't know that. My daughter, to this day does not understand that you couldn't even get a library card in your name if you were married. You could not have a checking account in your name if you were married. If you were single, you couldn't get a house to live in or a job. It was just bizarre.

DS: You were caught on either end of it. The first real public coming out, I think, of a women's lobby was in 1982 when we were doing the conference in Missoula called "Combating a New

Life: 1982.” Which had been after the moral majority had already been here, and Jerry Fallwell had been in Helena.

CLR: That was a great turnout.

DS: It was this big conference in Missoula, and Kathy Van Hook (?) came in with her sandwich board and had a sandwich board about the new Montana women’s lobby, lobbyist fund—

CLR: Yes, that’s right.

DS: —and got up and talked at this conference.

CLR: So Kathy was early in (unintelligible)?

DS: She was the first president.

CLR: Oh yes, she was.

DS: But it was called the Women’s Lobbyist Fund because they were going looking for money for a fund to hire a woman lobbyist.

CLR: Yes, right.

DS: Were you on that first board?

CLR: No.

DS: You were on the second board—

CLR: Yes, right.

DS: —because you were the second president. Kathy Van Hook was the first president.

CLR: Kathy was the first president.

DS: And you were the second president.

CLR: Yes.

DS: And how did you get sucked into that then? Being on that board?

CLR: I cannot remember. (laughs)

DS: (Unintelligible)

CLR: I cannot remember. I just remember being thrilled that it existed. Meeting these powerful women from Helena. Missoula women weren't a part of it so much. It was a group of women who were pretty good activists from Helena after they really put something together, and then the Bozeman women too. About that time Corky Bush (?) was coming over. I mean moving into the state to Bozeman. I remember Jerry Fallwell coming to, I think that was about the time that I got involved. I remember him coming, and Ann German came down from Libby. He had these stunned looking women staggering to the gathering out on the capital lawn, collecting money. I remember that Jerry Fallwell had a gun in his jacket. He was furious with Ann because she had filed and taken the name Montana—

DS: Moral Majority.

CLR: —Moral Majority. So he couldn't file and raise any money here. She truly was concerned about being assaulted by him. We were all sort of together with her. Were you there?

DS: Yes, I was there. We had signs and those things.

CLR: Yes. I remember our attorney general, who wasn't particularly a risk taker came out and—

DS: Hold that. Somebody called Ann from the Secretary of State's office, called us and said, "You probably don't know this, but the Moral Majority is not a registered name in this state."

CLR: Who was it?

DS: I don't remember who had called, but somebody called us and told us that. We decided to file and incorporate that (unintelligible)—

CLR: (Unintelligible)

DS: —and Ann did that. Because we had earlier on actually the old AUW people who had lobbied for abortion issues pre-Roe [Roe v. Wade] were called the Montana Organization for the Repeal of Abortion Legislation. Moral, M-O-R-A-L. Montana MORAL. So we used that to claim that we had the legitimate right to that name. We made their lawyers just go crazy. We (unintelligible) papers and everything.

CLR: Well Mike, the attorney general, Mike Greely, came out and he was also concerned. He took the mic, and I remember he surprised me in his defense of Ann and us. Then I know that Ann suffered for a long time because the Chicago lawyers were just after her. That was a dreadful, really hurtful thing. Well, at any rate I do not remember how I got elected. I don't think there was any campaign. It was sort of like, "Okay, who's going to do this next?"

DS: Well, wasn't the theory partly that it would alternate in legislative years or it would be...first we'd have a president from the Helena area and a cabinet and then you'd have a group of leadership from outside of Helena and it would go back to Helena and then outside of Helena. Some sort of—

CLR: I think the Helena women were exhausted, and they were just delighted to just have anybody. We thought that up after they—

DS: Oh, not before?

CLR: (Laughs) They recruited somebody who happened to live in Bozeman. So they thought, "Well, we don't want to give it up entirely. We want it back for the legislature." It sort of went like that. Okay, whatever. They just needed a rest. I think they were exhausted.

DS: You presidency, I mean the women's lobby had sprung on the ground, hiring .(?) to be its first lobbyist and then Stacy Guaredy (?) or whoever it was.

CLR: Was next. It was first Selinda, and I can remember vividly Selinda and I going up because somehow it didn't get transferred back to Helena in time for the legislature. I was still doing it, and we would go together. I can remember her and I going in, two little country bumpkins in our tennis shoes and long skirts and our flip charts, and in came....I'll never, as long as I live, forget the fear in my heart when I saw the suited men, about five of them, come trooping in in their Gucci shoes and their expensive briefcases and I thought, oh my god, we're about to get killed. Especially since the legislature was like two-thirds insurance salesmen. This is non-gender insurance. I thought, let's see, this is the time to be on drugs, I think. So Selinda, I think she's not someone who would ever confess to being nervous or fearful of anything, but she wasn't making any jokes, I'll tell you. She was pretty rigid and we both were like...and I was to introduce her and give some data about the Women's Lobby Fund and about our grassroots efforts and researches. I'm so surprised when I went up to the microphone that my voice wasn't shaking and that something came out. It was like an out-of-body experience. People say that I spoke eloquently and as though I knew something. I was so terrified that I have no idea what I said or who was saying it. When I sat down, she got up and was brilliant. She was absolutely brilliant. I could tell that she was kind of uptight but she absolutely...Then they did their stuff and they were so unprepared. They were so arrogant. They so did not know what they were talking about.

DS: It passed?

CLR: It passed.

DS: [Unintelligible] caught them by surprise. It was the first law-

CLR: The next day they flew in a bevy of women. They decided, "Oh it's just because there are these two bumpkin women who look like they need some new shoes." One of them commented about our clothes. I do remember that.

DS: There were so few women up there. I had been doing lobbying around abortion issues even then, and there were so few women lobbyists in the halls that it was always really striking to see women.

CLR: So they were jetted in, a group of insurance women. We had our insurance women. Ours were like on crutches. Jane Lopp came in on her crutches. We had insurance women but they were like, didn't look like they were insurance women. We were quite suited and put together.

DS: For the next five or six legislative sessions you did battle every time.

CLR: That was going to the well, though. That was empowering. Then after that it was [unintelligible]. We had got some remarkable things. It was pretty hard to watch them get eroded afterwards. That was one of the most powerful times for us. We passed things that should never have been passed. The battles internally were very personally hurtful.

DS: We had a whole special session on veteran's preference just because of the women's lobby.

CLR: Topical work, though. Those were the major ones. We became national consultants on gender preference and—

DS: Non-gendered insurance. That formed the national clearing house for non-gendered insurance (unintelligible).

CLR: I remember recruiting Marcia who had done some work on women and landlords. She said, "You know I don't really know if I believe in this." I remember trying to recruit her.

DS: She was a Christian scientist.

CLR: I don't know that I think that insurance is a problem. Why shouldn't we have to pay more? Sit down here, let me walk you through this. The fact that women are still paying a really high rate of risk when they're 29, when they're driving conservatively and had years of—just going to practice, rather than actuarial. This is such a lesson to me in that math-wise—actuarial tables. Good god.

DS: A lot of [unintelligible] so de-mythologized expertise in some ways that we could in some ways [unintelligible] self-taught and just battle with major insurance companies all over the country.

CLR: That was a big one. We lost all the sexual preference that we won. We lost a lot of the [unintelligible]. The unions got us. Then I'm trying to think...minimum wage. I think that's—

DS: The domestic violence?

CLR: The domestic violence sexual preference issues are advancing [unintelligible].

DS: [Unintelligible] we didn't win many so we didn't lose many.

CLR: Once we finally had and then he came along and institutionalized everything and we got incremental advancement and protected what we had.

DS: Those were dramatic leaps.

CLR: Lasting.

DS: There was so much to be done then, too.

CLR: We always did these political campaigns and training. I remember putting that first one on. Everyone was mad at everybody. The criticism was so rampant. We were also insecure that the pie was so small that we ate each other alive. So hurtful.

DS: What were the internal struggles in those early—

CLR: "We know what's going on, you don't. We can't make that decision, we have to stay with the union." Missoula women wouldn't even say our names or join us or do anything. Just a lot of vicious competition amongst women for power and positions, which was a sign—to me—that we were getting some power positions.

DS: On the other hand, I think that's such a remarkable time because the joining together of all those organizations was a [unintelligible]. In 1990, there were 55 organizations that had joined together; really rural groups out there in Glendive, but it was a precursor—

CLR: Cattle Women Association.

DS: Yes, I mean the Junior League involvement in the beginning. All of those organizations—the YWCAs and AAUW—all of those groups coming together on so many of those issues. That kind of connection to stand together on the issue—

CLR: And then [unintelligible] and to stay with it when it's just ugly. Joan, who had a [unintelligible].

DS: McCracken.

CLR: Did she just die?

DS: No, she just retired.

CLR: Oh, yes, she was a pillar.

DS: The process of how these issues were actually dealt with was a process. How does the lobby with all those different points come to these issues?

CLR: At first it was a very small clique of women who really thought alike; about five or six really smart energetic women political Democrats. It's fully opened up a little bit. We started insisting [unintelligible] that Republican women be a part of it. We started bringing it; having a bigger tent, and a bigger tent, and a bigger tent.

It became clear that everybody who was going to come in wasn't going to agree on every issue. So there could be a smart—you could have a cafeteria plan if you would. This is where you and Corky came in just at the right time with your energy and your intelligence and refined everything. I was just burned out by then and exhausted. My work—the Displaced Homemakers developing a region and funding for that—and trying to raise children. Then the lobby thing—you guys came in at just the right time, just in the nick of time. There was nobody who wanted to take it from me.

DS: Nobody would?

CLR: No. It was too big of a damn job. It was too hot. It was too much of being in a sector of—

DS: It was going from me and [unintelligible] agreed to be co-chair. I did that for a year and no one would take it from me.

CLR: Laurie Lamson was in there somewhere.

DS: Laurie Lamson was the president and then she turned it over to Nancy and I.

CLR: She couldn't stand it.

DS: I did the external traveling around—networking—and Nancy did all the internal administration, paperwork thing. We had no staff except in the legislative session. No one would take it. We called a meeting of the former presidents and said, "Okay. We pose that we disband."

CLR: Yes.

DS: People just went ballistic. I said, "Okay, find us a staff."

CLR: Right, "Do something. Just because we look good doesn't mean that you—"

DS: They just assumed that—

CLR: I remember my [unintelligible] was so big. They were bigger than my rent and there was no money to pay for it. I was in utter poverty.

DS: That's when they decided they would agree to hire me in that case.

CLR: How did that work? Where did the money come from?

DS: We went out and raised it. Not much at the time, but we said, "Well, we have to make a commitment and find out how to raise it." We never had enough money but we—

CLR: Inch it and couldn't finish it.

DS: There started to be more national monies for it too—

CLR: The national interest. It was too radical for the national interest in every [Americans for Tax Reform (?)] ATR or even [unintelligible] progressive. They finally chipped in. You couldn't get Kellogg or Ford. They like to think of themselves as being so progressive.

DS: They would do educational work, and they were organized not as a [unintelligible] but as a pact and [unintelligible].

CLR: They still didn't do very progressive things. That's the problem I really have with foundations, is that they don't generally do what we allow them tax abatement for. I probably shouldn't say that in my interview.

DS: Probably not. Why don't you talk about [unintelligible]. We both have to go home and go to bed here. So, how you moved into doing women's [unintelligible] and your moving on into economic development work from the lobby: where did you leave the Displaced Homemakers, and where did you go to?

CLR: I don't even remember how I got a hold of the women's [unintelligible] banking, that it was true that the displaced homemaker somehow—I don't really remember how I bumped into them. I was very active with them and there was another group out of Minneapolis. God, I can't think of their name. It was all emerging at the same time. We started doing a self-employment project and getting people to put up CDs to back loans to women to start businesses. In fact we finally got a loan for women by going down to Wyoming for God's sake. Then I just got mad.

I went to the banks and said, “You know, why is that? What’s the deal? Why do we have to go out of state to get loans? I came to you with this loan.” And at that time didn’t know much about lending or finance, so I wrote to Health and Human Services. I was getting quite a bit of money from them at that time for Displaced Homemakers and re-employment, but I wanted to do self-employment. So we started doing self-employment and it became clear to me that you could do all the training in the world with women with fabulous business plans and they still could not have accessed the capital. Access to capital; it was clearly a gender issue and that door was not opening. So we said, “Fine. We’re going to start our own loan funds.”

This was pretty much ahead of the community lending and community banking. The norm was then to get it from your family and friends. Yeah, right. If you’re just divorced, your family isn’t speaking to you—oh, that’s a good idea. So we put together some loan funds that—we didn’t know the women bankers we had would take the risk to come help us write the rig. So we just figured it out. I think back now and I think we were idiots. We just made it up. We set up six loan funds under the capital fund. There was one in Missoula under the Minneapolis group. We all came together and wrote legislation under May Ann Ellingson, who was another woman.

DS: Micro Business—

CLR: Montana Micro Business—

DS: 1990—

CLR: 1991. We tried in 1989 but we did not make it. Then we came back in ’91 and were successful; 3.5 million dollars out of the coal tax trust fund. No money had ever been expensed from it. Then they gave us another three million dollars. I went to the commerce and we set up 12 across the state. We got another three million dollars. We started being part of the national movement on community lending and just practices. I think we got the President’s Award for Micro Business because we had a cost benefit analysis. We were the only people who were idiots not to try and do that. Fortunately, they don’t do that anymore.

We did two of them where we would use the rolls—the electronic rolls—and then they got beyond the [unintelligible] started on the library for welfare. We could look at the deductions through social security numbers of welfare and the entries and taxes paid. We had three different measures; [unintelligible] not straight measures. There were three different measures on each level. We hired economists to help us set up that framework. That’s a whole other story. So anyway, we got that designed and that’s really what they worked for. The legislature was just thrilled.

They really liked seeing the cost benefit the first time, and now the Micro Business Program is in trouble because the woman who superseded me was a woman who was an accountant and said that there was no way she was going to do that. It was too much work. So the legislative auditors came in and they sent some young guy who had been a banker. They said, “The

legislature should never have done this in the first place.” So now they have some problems [unintelligible] pay the money back and stuff like that. Of course they’re blaming me.

DS: What happens with that? Of course we create the beginnings of these things and they function so well and the people who begin them are so capable and competent and have a clear vision. Then you get to that next generation and they just turn into mush. You get into people who don’t have the same vision, people who don’t care about them in the same way.

CLR: I don’t know. They didn’t create it so they don’t understand what the value is. They didn’t have the passion. This woman had been fired from five different jobs. She just wanted to get in the door to [unintelligible].

Remember the Montana Women’s Capital Fund? We got a 300,000 dollar operating grant from Northwest [unintelligible] Foundation. I would have died to have that kind of—it was just straight admin. It was such a sweet deal. Plus they had the Micro Business money already in place. Plus we got Calvert Fund money.

Who did we hire first—was it Kelly Flaherty? She was hysterical and gleaming. Then we hired a neighbor of yours we don’t need to mention. She was equally arrogant; in your face, signing and writing the checks herself—to herself—mismanaging. They didn’t make laws, they made [unintelligible]. They didn’t set up process. They didn’t go to work. They didn’t bring in any grants. They didn’t raise any money. It was like—these are feminist women. They are the next generation and pretty spoiled. They are princesses. I got so—I could hardly talk to them because I was so mad at them. Then of course now, I have formed the—

DS: Those organizations are both gone now.

CLR: They are. Well Micro Business is still here, but it’s struggling. It doesn’t have the vision.

DS: It wasn’t the focus at all.

CLR: No, it wasn’t. Those of us who were in the beginning have moved on. There must be some fault in us for not leaving a vision or finding what—I know it’s even struggling nationwide. I’ve noticed the latest from [Corporation For Enterprise Development] CFED doesn’t talk anymore about Micro Business. Micro Business is on several websites and functioning in South America and Third World countries, but it has lost its cache if you will.

DS: For your work and doing all of that, you—

CLR: There are a couple of things that have happened. Micro Business programs [unintelligible]. I will tell you this, banker lending is [unintelligible]. They take great pride in making small loans. There are a number of other programs, federal programs, that have taken on doing that kind of work. It has opened up lending and access to capital. It truly has.

DS: [Unintelligible] Small Business Administration, which—

CLR: The SBA.

DS: They wouldn't have touched anything.

CLR: That's right. That was the whole idea back then. The smallest business they wanted to look at was under net proceeds of—

DS: And that is a lot of money.

CLR: So things have changed, but nobody would own up to the fact that because we practiced and showed that good loans can be made. And we taught communities how to handle money. We brought the whole [Community Development Block Grant] CDBG Revolving Fund out to the communities. We brought the whole FBDC (?) programs out. Micro Business dragged a lot of business support into the communities and taught communities how to lend money and to own it.

DS: There's another trend [unintelligible] whole women's economic development really became the community economic development.

CLR: It has. I just came back from a board meeting of Montana Economic Developers and they're all very progressive people. They're all Democrats. It's Evan Barrett from Butte and he is about as liberal as you can get. Dick Cain—oh, I just love this new woman up in Columbia Falls who lives here and was from Alabama and is no iron magnolia. She is terrific. I thought she was a total progressive. Great Falls was a Republican who came by and was just in tears about two weeks ago about how hard it was to leave his work. He's on the Board of Investors that's been appointed by Bush.

DS: [Unintelligible].

CLR: I really do. I was starting to get into a funk. They're all failing. We did make major change. There is major change here that's happened and that no one will probably notice or give—or understand the connection. I almost don't. We almost don't understand the connection.

DS: [unintelligible].

CLR: Right.

DS: [Unintelligible] when we started this, women couldn't have credit in their own name. Their husband was the legal person for ownership of property, insurance—every other thing. She

couldn't get a loan in her own name; couldn't own a house. All of those things have been difficulties, and that women were in much more job segregation than they are currently.

CLR: My mother drives my father's car. He hasn't had a license in 10 years and it's her money to buy the car, but it's his car.

DS: In that generation—in younger women, how do you think they perceive their economic life differently?

CLR: I think they feel a lot of pressure. My daughter feels a lot of pressure to succeed at everything. I think her generation has had so many opportunities that girls think they have the same opportunities and know they're expected to do the same. I mean I have a young girl working the office. They know they should have careers and that they should be successful. I think a couple understand that they still do not have level playing fields. Most young girls of that generation think they do. Then there's shock when they find that it's not.

When I talk to my own daughter who lived through a lot of this, she thinks they're making it up sometimes. You know, Jessie. She's such a cool person. Sometimes she thinks I'm making it up.

DS: Do you think the young women you're dealing with think about the barriers—when they do come across them—to their opportunities as being individual? Do they perceive themselves as part of a group versus when you started encountering different problems—you clearly saw that organized women were a group.

CLR: We were very conflicted internally whereas they are not. Jessie's friends are sort of [unintelligible] and so comfortable being devoted to each other; helping each other go through child birth, supporting each other in every way. They are so generous to each other. They really love each other. The technician and the waitresses—and they are not leaders. They really truly do not fight over little pieces of power. I don't see it.

I not only have my daughter and her friends, but Haika and her friends, and Kathy and her friends. Some of the young women who grew up in my house with Jessie. They truly, I think, have a different relationship to each other. There is less competition between each other, which I don't really understand. There was such vicious competition in our generation between each other. I don't think that's me feeling that. I feel it coming from women of our ages. I think we all sort of aren't pleased with that and don't understand why it happened, and wish it hadn't. It was there. It really was. I think that this next generation has a real much easier relationship with each other. They're a lot less intense about pursuing things in their life too. There's a lot less stress in their lives. They have a lot more—us supporting them financially and emotionally. So they don't have to not totally be 180 degrees with their mother. In fact their mother is supporting them, and their fathers too are supporting them at being successful women and independent.

DS: Of course, having fathers tell them they can't go to law school—

CLR: Right and—or being awful to them. That awful abusive sexism isn't as around. There's still plenty of nasty, nasty things going on, but our middle class daughters have less stress on them. So they are easier with each other. And they're easier on themselves. There's still a lot of anxiety about success; medical school, making money, doing it all, finding the perfect name, having children while you're doing all of this.

DS: Do you think that's partly because in many ways we as a generation believe that most of these barriers have been removed and so now the opportunities are totally there and if they—

CLR: They sort of owe it to us. They sort of feel that. We can kind of feel it too. Yes we do. We would expect them to take advantage of these things. It's subtle. Sometimes it's not direct. I mean I know have done my best to give my daughter full permission and she [unintelligible] the pressure I put on her. And I have.

DS: Also do you see many more young women not believing that a lot of the barriers still exist then when they come up against them; use them as their personal failures versus the system as still not a level playing field? Do they as a group perceive that women in this state are still making 58 cents for every dollar a man makes? That's not a level playing field issue versus their personal ability.

CLR: They don't know that. One of the reasons Jessie thinks that her medical school was such adjunct sexism was in the application process and the interviewing process, the questions men asked. Then she spent a summer interning with Barbara in a women's clinic. I don't know if you know her. She's written a lot of books on menopause. She turned out to be such an [unintelligible] and so competitive for anyone to work with. It was hard for Jessie to work with her. She also worked in a county hospital in the ER and she said it was so revolting to her to watch what happened.

Some young kid, he was a doc's son, came in. He was mowed over. She was also doing some work at a Catholic private hospital. She had three different positions down there. The catholic hospital was a [unintelligible] she was doing [unintelligible] there. Then the guy who ran the lab really put the hit on her sexually—in a Catholic school. So she ran into a lot of sexism. She said, "I don't really like people that much." So she's in marine biology and she's working in a very male world up there. It's going out on fishing boats where she's the only woman for months. She's living in communities where she's the only female. There are some women getting into marine biology and they bond very closely and it felt like a mash in it or something.

I can't read the sexism there. She gets very angry over sexism and inequality period. She doesn't—like we, I don't know if we were as active as such a ferocious "I'm not accepting of anger kind of a thing." We were kind of like, "Okay what are we going to do about it?" We were intense and focused, but we had to kind of piece it together and figure it out and understand

how we would approach it. We didn't have a right to just be angry about it. Though I think we were. She just goes, "What the hell?" She doesn't even stop to think about it: "This is not fair." We would stop and think that and agonize over it and philosophize about until the damn cows came home. What do you think?

DS: She's adoring of you. I want to ask you a question, you were talking about creating this economic opportunity for many middle class women, one of the criticisms sometimes still leveled against the second wave of feminism is that it's the middle class' inability to connect with working women or lower income women. I think so much of the field is just like [unintelligible] a lot of that work went on across class lines and women of all different economic levels. So I wanted to ask you in the mix of kind of people that you dealt with, how would you talk about them in terms of that perception of being sort of an inclusive white middle class women's club?

CLR: Percentages?

DS: That aspect of women's women. And economic development—Micro Business and that whole area of economic sculpturing that you worked in.

CLR: And how the women involved in all that—

DS: Has it only benefited white already-privileged middle class women?

CLR: No. Our state is so white, so there are very few—I had the pleasure of getting to know the Native American women. One of the best experiences I had [unintelligible]. The women on the Crow reservation, they're brilliant. It was a teeny piece [unintelligible] the lawyer. Her sister Jeanie and the two of them set up this non-profit. Oh, I can't think of her name. She's just a lovely, fabulously intelligent lawyer who beats back First Interstate Bank in terms of keeping—taking the deposit records and not lending anything back. [Unintelligible]. It was a wonderful theory and they worked real hard on that.

Of course the bank takes great pride having set up the first bank [unintelligible] on the Crow reservation. Then we started working on—because we had collection problems on the Indian tribal justice issues and Clay was his name—at the U of M law school—took it on and [unintelligible] Attorney General's office. A Native American who was on staff at U of M took it on. So there were many things in terms of a universal commercial code with the tribe—very important getting their Justices trained for collections, and fabulous Native Americans involved.

DS: I think there's a couple of minutes left on this tape but I wanted to give you one last chance to say something to women. Not just this generation, but Jessie's children's generation, or more about what this work has meant to you personally being a feminist doing the type of work that you've done. What do you see heading your life? What would you tell them?

CLR: Louisa May Alcott would not recognize the life I've led. It's been a rich, fabulous life. I tell you I look at that picture right there of my six aunts. One of them was one of the first positions in the state of Montana. They have big skirts, they came out on covered wagons, and they've always been a real picture in my mind. My little grandmother was out in the living room and she was a single parent from 40 on with six children and had them all college educated. I think the women that are two generations behind me left as strong an image as I hope that I'll leave for my own grandchildren. If I have any! Jessie! [Laughs]. Now Haika has had one. That's good. I don't see Kathy doing anything in that line. I'm not sure that I'm going to be having any. I might be having to adopt some.

DS: They might be. Some of us have adopted granddaughters.

CLR: Yes. So I just hope that there's a same image that we can—

DS: I think that's an importance also, to know we really carry our grandmothers with us—

CLR: I know you do yours.

DS: And it's important to have their strength with us all the time because it's what gives us the strength to go on.

CLR: In the middle of the night, that's what sustains me, is my grandmothers. And I know that's true for you. It ain't somebody else. Those were—and for one reason or another, they were single. You know, that's a whole 'nother issue. But I don't know. I hope I have some.

DS: Well, you have strength. Whether you have grandchildren or not will become someone else's decision.

CLR: Not my issue.

[End of Interview]