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Oral Interview of Peggy Badran by Marli Werner and Mazie Hough for the Feminist Oral History Project (Part #2)

Marli Werner

Mazie Hough

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Oral Interviews for the Feminist Oral History Project.

Interviewer: Marli Werner (MW), Mazie Hough (MH)

Interviewee: Peggy Badran (PB)

Date: 8/3/1994

Recording number: MF223-BadranP-T1b

Length of recording: 32:00

[Transcript begins]

PB: There are definitely two parts to this. One is, I again living up in the woods or no houses around me came to grips with well you know if I were that woman how would I find safety? How would I reach the police if somebody caught my phone lines? You know all of those issues that I know firsthand. And fortunately, I was not stalked, that wasn't an issue, but it really got me in touch with my terror and the issues that women in rural areas are dealing with day after day after day. And so it was. It was really important to me to reach out and to do more work if we could in the area that was also calling out for help. You know, please, you know, figure out how you can do more right here in in this area. So, so that was one piece in terms of my supporting an office. The other part it had, it was very difficult to figure out how staff was going to support that project, and so because Catherine was the person who had kept in store was the person who was in that project, and we were good friends, and it was also easier for me to say, OK, you know, Kevin needs something, I will go and see what I can provide. But it was also because we have buddies for every other piece of the work. It also was very important to have a buddy, and so I think even sort of unofficially I became the buddy for that office because there were so many issues that were coming out that we couldn't predict, you know. And even from Ellen, Catherine, and Drew had drawn a picture, where it looked like because, you know, women weren't calling, women weren't coming to the office, and she draws this picture of this spaceship and she said here we are in Bangor, we're landing in Ellsworth. We got into this differently. We've got to figure out how we can provide services so women will use the services. And there were those kinds of issues that we were strangers, we were trying to do this work, but we were city people, you know. We were viewed as city people. And so it was a real

struggle to get going, to get established into, to be respected enough for people to actually break the barriers and come in. You know 'cause it's a scary thing to in that community. If somebody sees you walking through the door, then you know they they're going to be a million questions, and a million people are going to know that that person walked through, so that's an ongoing struggle.

MH: Was there anything you did in particular to change the spaceship?

PB: I think that. I'm trying to think whether we showed up in the courts, we open then office more days a week, we decided that that was, you know, one way I think that originally, we were open on a non- court date so we switched it over to a court day. We talked to the DAS office, and you know asked him for them to please do referrals and I think again just very slowly they started doing interesting things. He said that this was an area that was crying.

MW: He said that this was an area that was crying out for your services. What did you mean by that? How was how was it coming out?

PB: Again, there were community people that were saying we need this. We absolutely were talking with people every day that you know, they're battered women, they need services, and so they probably were referring women to us, but the woman you know there was something between the referrals and the women getting to us.

MH: And it was a reticence as much as anything else yet on the women's part.

MW: You've mentioned a couple of times that each person has a buddy around certain issues tell us more about that and how it works?

PB: Again, when we had a smaller staff, it worked a lot better. The idea is that no one person is the holder of all the information about a particular job, so that if you know if something happened with that person, if they took a vacation, whatever, wed had to stop dead and so I'm not sure when that started. I know that it was the case when I came on staff, we assigned whatever the overall particular piece of that job was, we would assign anybody to that. So, in terms of outreach, then that's where I was inviting for Catherine and the children buddy, so this stuff was there so we have some need to talk things over with or to do some small program planning as a way of getting ready for annual meetings, then what else do we do? Brainstorming, processing, you know, whatever was necessary, and there would be two people coming from the same place or having the same information about something so that we could then present it to a larger group.

MH: How did you choose your buddy?

PB: I think for the most part it was interest. It was very natural for me to be a children buddy because I'd already been doing a lot of the work in the children program anyway. Sometimes it was skilled areas, so the finance, the financial people. It was very obvious and it's easy if somebody was paying the bills, you know they might be the buddy to the administrative person so that there can be checks and balances.

MW: And was this just staff people being staffed for buddies or were the steering committee members involved in some way as well?

PB: I think that it was staff. I want to say very rarely there was a volunteer involved, but I don't believe that it was steering committee. We tried several ways to get steering committee involved and to know what was going on day-to-day in the organization. We had something that we called group supervision, but we always called the group soup and all the... some of the steering committee would be advisors, or, you know, would be working with that particular staff person and we would all meet together in a room, 16 to 20 people trying to talk together, and so that didn't last very long 'cause it had to be during the day and people weren't available and we have steering committee of Staff Advisors now so that we can meet when I want to talk about what's going on and so sometimes they act anybody in a better role, but it's a little different and I think because we're we've grown so much that that's probably more useful in a lot of areas than trying to do the buddy thing on staff.

MH: So for this staff supervision you first started with the group soup and then we moved to the individual advisors for individual?

PB: I think we did some individual and then as a way of bringing everybody together to have the same information. We tried to do the group meetings as well. So that's it. That was just it was too formidable and the issues that came up, It was interesting 'cause there were lots of differences in the way people perceive things and how their advisors would perceive it. Given the information that the staff person gave them.

MW: The advisor is now on the steering committee?

PB: Right.

MW: I would just shift the topic again and I'm not sure how to phrase this. We know clearly that domestic violence is difficult issue to confront and to deal with on a daily basis, and I want to ask how people working with Spruce Run cope with the stress? There's an assumption there that you may not share, and I want to leave you room to reject that assumption if that's what you want to do, that's why I'm hesitating on how to ask this question?

PB: OK, so you're asking individually to like on a day-to-day, ok. I think that one of the things that Spruce Run has set up for people who are doing direct service, is the backup system. And we've always had that, and it's always been really, really important because if we're talking on the phones or talking the shelter with somebody. There's somebody to process with right there, right available, because sometimes I wanted to tell them what to do and I can't, and I know that. And so I sit there and I do my very best to try to work with her, and then I need to go and scream. And you know Brands and Raven do whatever they say. Things I couldn't say to her to somebody else and that's always worked really well for me. Let me think what else? At one point we were signing up for a lot of shifts, and we've really peered that down and said, you know, we again try and check one another to make sure that we're not overdoing that we're not diving in and doing only direct service because that'll burn any of us out very quickly. And the other piece for me is again the what I call the success stories talking even just talking with a woman at shelter and she's saying you know, well, I don't know how to do this and I don't know how to do this. And he's told me I'm a lousy mother and I see her doing something and I can say to her look at what you just did with your kid. I mean, I will not wonderful you know you supported him, you praised him. You know, it doesn't sound like your lousy mother to me. I mean, look, this kid is trusting you, you know, and just pointing those things out. And when she gets in when she says, yeah. Yeah, you're right. That really helps to reduce the stress, because it you know it feeds me. It tells me that my work is there's something going on here between us. What else do we do?

MW: Have there been times where we've been burned out over the last 12 years?

PB: Oh yes. I want to say that most of it it's been administrative, nightmare kinds of things. Once in a while I used to do 5 shifts a week. I used to spend half my week doing direct service and there were times that I got too involved with women who were calling. It was like I wanted to take them home and I would forget to set limits and you know it, it just it just got to the point where I was just too involved and sometimes I could see it and sometimes I couldn't and so people would say OK, you know that's it, you can't talk with this particular person anymore, No, no, I have to, I have to be the

one! And so, you know, I've seen from time to time that I do have that burnout just the how is the organization getting changed? How do we respond to the community?, you know, there's been both positive and negative response through the years. It's like, yes, we've gotten much better. We're very well supported by the community now. It hasn't always been that way you know. People would sit at the mall you know to sell tickets through fundraiser and people would make those, you know those fine line, you know really calculated around me to make sure that they didn't come near or talk about the issues, and it used to be very lonely. And so, things have changed and yet as we get comfortable, we also tread on people toes and that's hard because we end up spending a lot of time on issues that are just... when we go over them and over them and over them it's like I don't want to do this anymore. You know I'm getting very tired and I'm getting very burnt on these kinds of things. And sometimes staff conflicts. You know it's like for months and months it feels like the same thing, and you know again, I may be right in the middle, depending on what's going on, so I tried really hard to set limits and figure out you know who I am in this organization. And as a volunteer coordinator, I got very much burnt because I was spending so much time trying to place every single volunteer and I know that's unrealistic, and I still want to do it. And in getting some negative feedback from volunteers about how they were graded in the organization and trying to trying to talk with other staff about this. How we change this? How do we move things around? So that people are feeling appreciated. And getting resistance to that, no, no, we're wonderful to volunteers. Of course, we are. We are a volunteer organization, and the reality is people are saying I don't like coming here anymore. I don't like coming to your office, you know. And that's really hard. And so, for me struggling with that and believing that I'm all alone in this 'cause for a while I didn't have a volunteer buddy, and the volunteer community wasn't functioning, so it's like as I got more isolated, I started really taking everything on.

MW: What brought you back from that?

PB: I think, probably the job changes. But that's why I watch the graphic too, it's like you know every few years should change. Just do something different. And for me, recognizing that I couldn't be the volunteer coordinator anymore because I couldn't bring that vitality to the job I had done as much as I could do, I was frustrated because there were things, I wanted to do that there was no time to do, and being able to say I need a change. And finally, making that change, recognizing that that was really what was going on and making another change, positive.

MW: And have you felt supported in making those changes by the organization?

PB: For the most part, I have felt supported. It has been so slow it's like, OK so two years ago I was saying I can't do this anymore. Planning Volunteer party was such a drag for me because it was like I have to figure out all these things and then I can go with the volunteer party going to Appreciation Party, but I can't because I'm busy organizing it and I said I want to be there. You know I will be there. I want to enjoy. I want somebody else to do this and staff actually did pick that up and do that of course it was the time that I was taking a leave of absence, but they did support me in that. But again, it was like I didn't recognize that I was burnt until this point, and staff who couldn't figure out what to do about that until this point. And finally, there was a change at this point, so it's you know it's again a slow, slow process.

MW: You started off by telling us you had made a list of things that you wanted to talk about, and I want to invite you to look down your list and tell us the things that we haven't thought to ask you or know to ask you?

PB: What I was trying to do is remember little things that you know that, one piece is like being... oh, these blankets here, we have a woman who moved down the street from the shelter building and every once in a while, she would come and knock on her door and hands as one of these blankets that she had made and say, please, you know, please pass this on to the women that you serve, and at one point she and Mary Cathcart went out for tea. But that was a little piece of community support that was very, very important. Every time she would knock on that door, was like oh, there is this bright light. You know somebody supporting the work that we did, and she did that for years, you know. I need to do a piece clarifying the yellow binder story because super... was not the person who answered the door. I was a volunteer in the office, and I had been fairly fresh out of training and the doorbell rang and I went, and he says I have a delivery for you, and so I ran back into Nancy's office and said there's a delivery, so we just put it in the hallway. Well ok, so I told him you can put it right here, and he said, no you don't understand. And we said OK, and he pointed, and we see this tractor trailer. And I went back into the office, and I said, what is it? Well, it says here binders. And so then at that point they had to come out because I don't even know what was going on and they sort of had to sort, obviously and figure out what the binders were, and basically where they came from and where we were going to put them 'cause we had, I think there is another volunteer in the office and we were all like, going up and down the stairs with all of these cartons, and that when I heard the story of Nancy how frugal she was, and that she would not pass on an opportunity and that she had no idea how many binders were going to come here.

MW: I do have a few other questions that I want to ask, but I also want to respect you and if you are getting too tired you should let us know. One of the issues that we want to ask about is homophobia within Spruce Run and how the organization dealt with that issue?

PB: OK, I certainly remember the training around the issue of homophobia, and I remember being confused by it because for me coming from San Francisco, alright we are talking about this. It was a piece of training that was important and had its own place in the training, just to make sure that we were open and that we could handle the calls from lesbians and... that we were definitely addressing the issues and not projecting that it was always a male batterer or whatever. So that was a piece throughout training in any of the training groups. It was like they could make or break a trainee and I remember in the early days when I was doing training, losing people around that issue, which always surprised me. You know people said, I'm not gonna deal with this. But what we did is, we gave them a piece of homework and they would take it and we asked him to spend like 10 minutes around reading the scenario, which is, you know that something about people were sitting around a shelter and talking about how the staff are all lesbians. They were, you know, slept with one and trying to figure out who slept with whom, that kind of thing. And asking them to write down their first response to that and then write down some sort of a scenario, how they would handle that situation and so that's usually session five. So, we handed out in session four, and session five a few people wouldn't show up. And sometimes we would talk to them, and sometimes we wouldn't. They were gone. They were gone from training, and I remember one woman in particular who is just appalled. That we would mention the issue, that we would think about talking with lesbians, you know it's just absolutely horrible. That doesn't seem to happen. You know, as much these days. It's like you know the shock value is gone, and we've also started turning that around and talking more, splitting up the sections and talking about lesbian battering. And I think still, I mean as much as we try to be open and aware and put out there that we will talk with lesbians seen as small problem, we are not getting the calls as much as we know is happening. So part of it is that we're, you know, people aren't going to call us because they don't want to break their anonymity and the other piece is still that it's not safe for women to talk about that, so as open as we can be about, you know about the issues. It's not that we still, we're still continuing to work on committees on how do we make this safe. And the other side of that, you know, is remember Mary Cathcart going up to Lincoln to talk with the radio station. And she came back and she said, Yep, he asked me the classical question, are there lesbians on staff, you know how many lesbians are there on staff, you know this was the big deal. And she handled that, I don't know

whether she said what does it matter or whatever. She responded very well. That the issue was domestic violence and that's what she was there to talk about. But again, I mean that's still, you know, because we are very open about it, but that's still an issue for a lot of people.

MW: Has there been conflict of any sort between lesbians and non-lesbians on the staff?

PB: The only issues that I think came up, I don't know maybe I'm not sure. Are whether or not we should have a lesbian talking with a lesbian. So if she specifically calls and says I want to talk with a lesbian, are we going to break our policy that anybody talks to anybody? You know we don't have to have had that kind of battery in order to, to, you know, work with her and we've had many conversations about that, and I don't know it just pops up and then it goes away and then it pops up again. So, I think that to me is the biggest issue, I don't know that there have been any problems with you know, straight versus lesbian. I think you know, again, we tread on each other's toes once in a while. But I think that's just people being people.

MW: Spruce Run has been around now for 21 years I guess; how can you explain its survival for that long?

PB: Persistence. I believe that from the very beginning, you know, while things sounded like they were coming together, that people really worked together and planned and made a conscious effort to provide the best services and to make sure that we were keeping up with things and I think the planning has been crucial. Financial planning, program planning, whatever that we've always, sometimes even now it's like we hold back and where the rest of the state you know it's like no, you have to jump into this, we've got to do it, and we hold back. And that's not necessarily viewed very well. And yet that's part of how we survive. You know, we try and take things in their right time and a lot of times it's ahead of what we want to do even. But I think that I really believe that that's part of what's kept us around.

MW: What has kept you part of the organization for as long as you have been a part of it?

PB: Well, I do love the people that I work with and you know where they do a lot of the turnovers and gotten wonderful people back into the organization and, so I think that there's enough balance for me around working with the women and the children and working with the staff and being able to have a voice and from time to time I say I want to be bank teller... but at this point I haven't seen any other jobs that sound as interested that have the flexibility, that pays the same you know. There is not a whole lot with social work that is available. I question, you know how much can we

be putting into it and should I be making wait for other people to bring their voice into it? and then the other piece, there's the National Coalition Conference is going on right now. I've been to three conferences and I think they've been having that nationwide and then worldwide perspective is something that revitalizes when just meeting with other people and seeing where we're at, you know where we're at compared to other projects, and knowing that this is a huge movement that we really are making progress, which is really exciting.

MH: I want to ask you about Nancy Gentile and what she means to you? She's so missing in all the interviews, so if you have anything you want to say about Nancy Gentile?

PB: What I remember, Nancy she was around my first year as a volunteer a year and a half I guess, 'cause I was gone for six months. I remember she was just a character. She was very fun loving, and she was very serious and the work was so basic to her that I really learned a lot from her about that. Treating people equal, you know respecting people, that kind of thing, and makes it fun to be there. You know the buddies, I don't know whether Nancy started that, but it was sort of there when Nancy was there and a very crucial part of the work. But just, you know, riding to meetings and hearing the way she approached things was it was just... it's hard for me to describe how near and dear it was to her and how her spirit really carried through Spruce Run and the way we do they work that we do. I wasn't there when she was a director, I can't imagine what that would have been like.

MW: We obviously can't interview her, but are there other people that you think we should interview? You came forward and I'm just so glad that you did and we need to know if there are other people that we've missed.

PB: I think I was talking about the middle period, and have you interviewed Mary Cathcart?

MW: Yes.

PB: OK. 'cause I saw her name and Marian Allen?

MH: We're trying to. She's hard to pin down.

PB: Yeah, OK, and another person Martha Wild, is another person. What about Kathleen?

MW: She was part of our feminist...

PB: And I think it's like, you know there's the first 10 years. And then there's the middle like two or three years and Kathleen is the beginning of that. Of the next part when shelter had been open and we were starting to really change and say OK, where do we go from here? We are done with the nuances and now we have growing payments.

MW: And the other question that goes along those lines is if you have paper of any sort or memorabilia that we should know about, will you tell us?

PB: OK. Actually. I mean we have news articles and all kinds of stuff.

MW: Right, we've seen most of the formal materials. Am I right about that?

MH: I think so.

MW: I'm thinking more of anything that you might have separate from the organization. That would help us to learn about Spruce Run's history and what kept it going.

PB: I probably can wander around through my things and see if I can come up with stuff.

MW: If you have something, please let us know.

MH: Is there anything else that you want to say at this point?

PB: Thank you

MW: Peggy, you know that we will eventually. It's taking us a very long time. Eventually we will send you a copy of the transcript of this and then come back and talk to you again so that you can add in any things that you want. But because it's taking us so long to do, that made our process very slow too. If there are things that you think we need to know, please call. But obviously we didn't want you to think that we've forgotten you. We work collectively as well, but also because it just takes time to get tapes transcribed. And so if you think of things please be in touch.

PB: OK.

[End of transcript]