

The 'Somebody Else' Was Us



A Readers' Theater Presentation
by the Feminist Oral History Project
at the University of Maine
under the Auspices of the
Women in the Curriculum Program



Script developed by Celeste DeRoche

@ 1995, 1997

Revised Edition

The Feminist Oral History Project (FOHP) is a collective of women from the University of Maine and its local community. Under the auspices of the Women in the Curriculum and Women's Studies Program and with major funding from the University and the Maine Humanities Council, the FOHP aims to document for preservation the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Since it began in 1992 the FOHP's primary focus has been the origins and evolution of Spruce Run Association __ Bangor, Maine, a grass-roots, feminist organization committed to social change and social justice.

Spruce Run began in 1972 when a group of women in domestic crises gathered together to discuss their experiences. Over the next twenty years Spruce Run brought together women from all backgrounds: both those who had experienced abuse and those who hadn't; women of all incomes, ethnicities, and sexual orientations; and women both with and without grass-roots organizing experience. What unified them was a belief that domestic violence is both an individual and a community problem. They chose to work against it in two ways: public education and provision of resources.

Spruce Run was instrumental in establishing the Maine Coalition for Family Crisis Services and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Its lobbying efforts were critical to passage of the Maine Protection From Abuse Act and to securing state funding for services for battered women. Through regular volunteer training sessions, police training, and work with churches and schools, the women of Spruce Run have profoundly affected community response to domestic violence.

The history of Spruce Run is not simply a story about domestic violence. Understanding that power imbalances are the root cause of violence, Spruce Run members devised organizational structures and procedures which model the egalitarianism which might exist in a more just society. Spruce Run members attribute the longevity of the organization in part to its nonhierarchical structure and commitment to consensus-based decision making.

The FOHP began its data collection by videotaping a Founders Day reunion of women active in the early years of Spruce Run. FOHP members learned interview techniques from the Maine Folklife Center and then went out in pairs to record the memories of individual Spruce Run activists. FOHP member Celeste DeRoche, then a graduate student in history, developed the script, "The 'Somebody Else' Was Us," using excerpts from the interviews. (In 1996 the script was revised to reflect the correction of errors in the original transcripts of the interviews.) This readers theater piece documents in storytelling form the founding and development of an organization remarkable for its empowerment of battered women, its impact on social systems and institutions, and its development of an organizational mode uniquely suited to feminist activism.

"The 'Somebody Else' Was Us" is suitable for reading aloud by small groups with minimal theatrical experience. The FOHP has presented its public performances with readers from the University, the community, and Spruce Run staff and volunteers. The staging required no more than six chairs placed in a semi-circle so that performers could readily view each other. Readers remained seated until they rose and stepped forward to introduce themselves or present a bridge story.

The performance was designed for six readers, each reading two parts. Props such as hats and scarves helped the audience identify separate roles presented by the same reader. The FOHP bound the scripts during the performance in yellow, three-ring binders. The "piggy nosewarmer" is unique to the Spruce Run story. While the FOHP does have an original piggy nosewarmer, some creative thinking could fill the lack of an "official" piggy nosewarmer.

Following the presentation of the script, FOHP members and representatives of the local community's domestic violence organization led discussions with the audience. The discussions opened up lines of communication and increased public awareness of these issues. They typically included such topics as domestic violence, the mode of scholarship followed by the FOHP, and the history and effects of women's organizing. Often, discussions focused on issues of values. How is it, for example, that our society protects women, exalts motherhood, and condemns the use of violence against strangers--yet for so long has institutionally ignored violence against women? The FOHP was particularly interested in how the history of Spruce Run connected with the experiences audience members have had in their own activist lives.

Besides the public performances of "The 'Somebody Else' Was Us" the members of the FOHP have made the script available to other groups for use. When University of Maine students in Introduction to Women's Studies work on the topic of violence against women, they read the script together, one or two students per part. The professor who teaches the course on family violence in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies also uses the script. A rural Maine high school class in law enforcement has even used it. Outside the classroom the 40-hour volunteer training at Spruce Run now includes either a viewing of a videotape of a performance or a reading of the script. These have proved to be dramatic ways of connecting new volunteers with their foremothers in the movement.

The work of the FOHP is ongoing so comments and reactions are welcomed. Please address responses to:

Feminist Oral History Project
Women in the Curriculum and Women's Studies Program
5728 Fernald Hall
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04469-5728
(207) 581-1229
e-mail: hough@maine.maine.edu

"THE `SOMEBODY ELSE' WAS US"
AN ORAL HISTORY OF SPRUCE RUN

INTRODUCTION

The history of feminism and feminist organizations in the 1960s and 1970s is only now beginning to be recorded. In writing this history attention is often focused on large movements in urban areas. But history is also made in rural landscapes.

Bangor, Maine was - and is - the site of a powerful experiment in the possibilities offered by grass-roots organization. Spruce Run, one of the oldest domestic violence projects in the country, remains an example of what can happen when women recognize a need and decide to do something about it.

Created in 1972 by battered women, Spruce Run remains an explicitly feminist organization, committed to consensus decision-making and to an analysis of domestic violence as rooted in power imbalance.

Tonight's (today's) presentation is one piece of a larger body of work on Spruce Run. The Feminist Oral History Project was created out of a concern that this important

piece of our history, the Spruce Run story, would be lost. Founded in 1992, the Oral History Project started its data collection with a truly memorable "Founders' Day", bringing together twelve women active in Spruce Run's first ten years. This event captured on video and audio tape began the process of recording the history of Spruce Run. Individual interviews with these founding women followed. What you will hear tonight is Spruce Run's early history as told to the Feminist Oral History Project through these interviews. The words you will hear are drawn from the interviews of Spruce Run women.

And now, "The `Somebody Else' Was Us."

INTRODUCTIONS

Lou Chamberland: Last spring I went to speak to a displaced homemakers group, the New Ventures Group, which are all women that are starting their own businesses. I always share my own story when I do that, and one of the women there came up to me afterwards and said, "Do you know that you saved my life?" And I said, "No." I had never met this woman before. She said, "Five years ago Spruce Run saved my life." She ended up going back to the battering situation, but at the point where I met her this spring, she had left that situation, had her own business and was feeling very strong about what she was doing. She really credited Spruce Run with helping her find this strength. And I said, boy, you know that's enough to keep me going for another 10 years. It was amazing to have something from my past come back and touch me that way, so directly, you know it was really amazing.

I'm Lou Chamberland. I got involved with Spruce Run almost by accident. It was a fluke. They needed one more person to sign the incorporation papers and I was there so I signed. I remember being concerned about what it meant for me to sign on the papers.

I'm Kay Lucas. Some of the women that worked with the women's center in Bangor, which had been at the Unitarian Church, came to my house to use one of our big rooms when they had to leave the church. From the women's center came these consciousness raising groups. And that's where Spruce Run really took form.

I'm Mary McPherson. My work with Spruce Run came about because I worked at Pine Tree Legal. We had this sort of amorphous Spruce Run in the early days and that involvement came about because I lived in the same house as Lou Chamberland in 1974. She had this wonderful friend, Kay Lucas, one street down and I hung out with them.

I'm Linda Monko. In 1974 I was at the University in the position of Coordinator of Women's Programs and Services. Part of my role was to create a resource directory and have information available to women students and community women about the various kinds of services that were available to them. I became familiar with Spruce Run in that research process. I ran the training for the first group of volunteers.

I'm Susan Dunn Nichols. I got involved with Spruce Run around 1975. Spruce Run had actually already been incorporated and started and they had moved into the Central Street office when I actually got more involved.

I'm Connie Huntley. The first time I heard about Spruce Run was my thirtieth birthday, when I was a student at the University. And a friend had bought two little tie tack pins that he said were a fundraiser for a group called Spruce Run, that were working with battered women, and he thought I might be interested.

I'm Terri Lewis. In 1977, I was watching the news one night and Nancy Gentile was on the news talking about Spruce Run. She seemed a little angry and mentioned that Spruce Run needed volunteers and so I became a volunteer.

I'm Sue Bradford. My first knowledge of Spruce Run came from Lou Chamberland when I was working for the Federation of Co-ops. And all of those offices - Spruce Run's offices and the Bangor Tenants Union and the Federation of Co-ops and all of those places - were all sort of together. I heard about the work of Spruce Run then.

I'm Ann Schonberger. I got involved with Spruce Run in 1977 or 1978. And it was in the spring, more or less, I think, that I met Linda Monko in LaVerdiere's Drug Store on Main Street. She told me that Spruce Run was looking for some new Steering Committee members, and they were particularly interested in having new Steering Committee members who would lend respectability to the Steering Committee. I've been on the Steering Committee ever since.

I'm Elaine Tucker. I got involved with Spruce Run completely by accident. I saw an ad in the newspaper asking for hotline volunteers for Spruce Run. The thing that was attractive to me was that I could work at night and from my home, because I had three small children at the time. All my life I've volunteered with something. So it seemed like a good thing to do.

I'm Karen Marysdaughter. I got involved in the fall of 1985. I had been hearing about Spruce Run for a number of years from a close friend. She had been trying to recruit me for Spruce Run for some time.

PAUSE

PROLOGUE

Terri Lewis: What's so interesting is that each of us has done our work at different times and in different amounts of intensities and for different amounts of time; but everything that each of us has done has contributed to making the organization be twenty years old and successful. And each little piece helped. You know, little piece, big piece. And it's a feeling that nothing is lost.

Linda Monko: But it's like you're getting them, you're getting the oppressors, the people who violate, the ones who abuse. We're getting them by eliminating the victim. We're disempowering the perpetrator by taking away their victims, by empowering those people who would be their victims: the children and the women, and everybody who would be a victim. That's the work that's being done. You know, the more you empower someone to not be a victim, the more you get at the people who only have power if they have a victim.

Connie Huntley: You know, I've quit Spruce Run several times. And I keep going back. Part of it, I keep going back because I get something out of it: talking to someone, connecting, knowing I'm not the only one, having more issues that come up. And I can go back and I can talk to someone.

Even if I'm listening to some other woman's story I can get another piece of closure for mine. It's a place that gets things done. It's my neighborhood.

PAUSE

PART ONE

Kay Lucas: Now this was the time, the wonderful early 1970's, when people were organizing around all problems. It was the war on poverty, and we were going to win it. And we were going to solve all these problems, change the world. We had a big duplex. In fact, it had nine fireplaces and it had, like, five bedrooms. It was a huge house. And my husband and I were going to rent rooms and do the business thing with it, but it turned out to be a place where all the different alternative solutions to problems developed. And soon it was the home of the Land Trust, the Bangor Tenants Union, the food co-op. Where-ever, whenever people needed to get together and talk about what to do about a problem they wound up at our house. So, my husband was in Jersey at this time, he hadn't moved up. And of course he had a fit when he found out what was going on in the house. But by that time we had already decided we were getting a divorce.

Lou Chamberland: We just had continuous meetings. We used to call it Hammond Street. "We'll meet you at Hammond Street," we'd say. And it was a real gathering place, and the stuff that came out of that house is unbelievable. It was the Women's Center for a while; we had a room downstairs. It was where Spruce Run was born. It was the real center of activity for Sam Ely Community Services, and the Maine Community Land Trust, twenty years ago, you know, when people didn't talk about land trusts, you know, and thought we were all crazy. It was the center for all the anti-war activities that were happening in the Bangor area. It was the way station for guys going up into Canada. And all these people used to come by the house. And the Bangor Tenants Union . The food co-op. We had a food co-op that we started. I mean, all this stuff, you know?

Kay Lucas: I belonged to a women's group. That women's group really changed my life because in my generation you didn't talk about your problems. You were married in the forties and you just didn't talk about your problems to anybody. And it was the first time I opened up. And I didn't do it until everybody -- you know, I had been listening to all these women's stories and realizing, "This is how I feel; this is what happened to me, too." And really responding to their honesty and their opening up. And that was the first time when I really let it all out. And I found that it was perfectly all right to do that. That people accepted me the way I was. And I started feeling that I

wasn't such a weird person after all. That I was all right. It really was the rest of that world that was wrong.

Lou Chamberland: And, we didn't know what we were doing. I mean, I think at the time I was 19 or 20 years old. I mean, I was, you know, real, real young. But we just kind of kept trucking. You know, we kind of kept doing these things and looking for funds and looking...

Sue Bradford: I think I was born a feminist. As I said, before ever I knew Spruce Run existed I really did want some hands-on way to change the world. I am a child of the Sixties and, you know, so I always wanted to do that.

Connie Huntley: I went to school in seventy - in the fall of '72, as a welfare mother with two kids. And when I graduated, I was still a welfare mother with two kids, but the difference between those two people was incredible. And I look back at that period of time with just amazement. I learned to stand up.

Susan Dunn Nichols: Originally I came to the University of Maine in '68-69 and -- you know, right out of high school. I wasn't raised to be a radical by my parents. I was born in '50, and when I graduated from high school it was '68 and I don't really remember it coming up in high school as

being that big a thing of concern. There wasn't much activity up around here until the late Sixties. And it was happening up here at the University and some other campuses. That's when I came to the University of Maine. And the first thing one of the people I had gone to high school with (he was a year older than me) said, "Don't get involved with that SDS whatever you do." And I didn't like this guy. And I thought, "Ah ha! That's the first thing I'm going to find out about when I get there." And that's what I did.

Kay Lucas: When Spruce Run started we did everything wrong. Everything! We made decisions for people. We, you know, we were in the "We'll solve your problem." Well, we were a rag tag bunch of divorced women going through crises, and there were no professionals to advise us. And we got into a lot of trouble, but the spirit was there.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Lou Chamberland: I was working at Pine Tree Legal and they had me doing intake, and this woman came in from the hospital. Her neighbors brought her in. She was foreign and didn't speak English very well. Her husband was in the military and she had, I don't know, both her arms were broken; she had five or six broken ribs; her whole face was all cut up; black and blue like everywhere. And she just sat there and said, "I have no place to go". So -- and a woman named Diane was also a paralegal at Pine Tree at that point. And I went in and said to Diane, "Diane, you know, the neighbors don't want anything to do with her. They brought her to Pine Tree and left her. And, so now what do we do?" She said, "Well, we have Spruce Run. You know, that's what Spruce Run's supposed to do." Well, Spruce Run was all of us, so we called up Kay and Kay said, "Well, we can bring her to Betty's." Betty's house in Aroostook. "Betty will take her," she said. So, Diane and I got this woman lunch and sat her in the office and went with the police to pick up some clothes and her children, and then we took off for Aroostook. And we drove all night and dropped her at Betty's house, and drove all the way back and went to work the next morning, pretending we hadn't done this because we weren't supposed to. And that was Spruce Run's first, um, customer.

Kay: When we went to bring her back I left her at our house, and I said, "I'm going to go down and pick up the mail from the mailbox." When I came back, her husband was there in his car, because she'd called him! And this is a very violent man and well, we had a lot to learn.

PAUSE

PART TWO

Lou Chamberland: I think -- I mean in the beginning, things were so desperate personally for the people involved. I mean, Kay was going through a really horrendous divorce. And her husband was violent and had done things. And -- oh, and Rae was getting beat up. The original idea was just a safe place. I mean, if there was a place that people could go to, then they'd -- I mean, and that was the constraint, I think, that, that like Rae, for example, felt. You know, she had children, and there was literally no place for her to go to get away from her husband.

Kay Lucas: And that's where Spruce Run really took form. Because in telling our stories to one another, it kept coming up that we'd always dreamed of a place where we could go just for some respite and maybe be able to talk to people about some of the things we were feeling and maybe take the children. You know, just some place to escape to for a while. And that was the idea at first, that it would be wonderful to have a place to go to.

Lou Chamberland: We realized we couldn't keep bringing women to other people's houses. And we realized that there was a whole lot of issues there that we were just learning about, in terms of like this first lady calling her husband and, we felt, putting all of us in jeopardy because of what we had done. And realized that we had to deal -- I mean we had to -- you know, this wasn't going to work the way we thought. But we were all obsessed with -- I remember driving all over central Maine talking about capturing a house. Kay kept saying, "We have to capture a house." It was like going out with a butterfly net. And once we have it, we'll never let it go, because otherwise they're too hard to get. You know, we had no place.

Kay Lucas: If we could only go some place for a couple of days, to think, to get out of our situation, where we would have childcare and where somebody could tell us what our alternatives were. And this kept coming up in different ways in almost all of our thinking and talking. And out of that came the idea that maybe we could start something like that or work for something like that.

Lou Chamberland: I mean, that's where we started from. Which goes, if you had a place, then people could go there and they'd be safe. At least they'd be safe. I don't think we thought much beyond that. It was really like an immediate thing of getting people out of danger so they didn't get

beat up and broken. But then when that happened with the foreign lady, we realized that it wasn't so simple. You know, it wasn't just a matter of having a safe place to go. It wasn't so easy. We realized how heavily invested we had become in her not going back to him. And we said, "This is wrong. We're not here to play God." I think that that was a real change in the thinking. At that point we started thinking about not rescuing women. We still were obsessed with having a safe place, with having a shelter, but it was more like, "This is available. If you want it, this is available."

Elaine Tucker: I think I was two years or two and a half years on the hotline with no shelter. And that was a trip because to get shelter, we had to call Bangor City Welfare. And since I worked on the hotline and most of the volunteers worked during the night, when we called Bangor City Welfare it was in the middle of the night. Which meant we had to wake up somebody and then retell a story that we had just heard, and try to get approval from Bangor City Welfare to bring a woman in, or a woman and kids in. And this was not an easy thing. It took a lot of advocacy. There was a call that came in on a Saturday morning. And I was on call Saturday afternoon or Saturday evening, after the volunteer who had first dealt with this woman was on call. And this volunteer had tried pretty much all morning to get this woman cleared for shelter. And then she

went off shift, and it was left for me that I would hear back from the battered woman. She had to change locations, we were going to hear back, the clearance was through, she was approved for shelter. I never heard back from her, and then I learned Monday morning that she had been killed. I think that certainly encouraged me to do quite a lot more work than I might have done on getting the shelter ready because it really became personal to me. This can never ever happen again. I don't think that it was Bangor City Welfare's fault; I think that what happened was that the woman was not in a safe place, and that there was probably nothing we could have done to save her in any case. But it took too long. It was too much. She was trying. She was trying very hard to get out, and we didn't respond quickly enough. We were unable to respond quickly enough.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Sue Bradford: I would love to tell you all about my first hot line shift. There we were on Central Street in the old 44 Central Street building, where you'd go up these dark cavernous stairs. It was where the training was too, so I was used to it by that time. Then you go into the office with the broken down couch, with the tie-dyed throw over it, and have phones and paper and people scurrying all over the place. I walked into this office one fine day, and a woman named Donna was

there. And she was -- I forget what her position was, I think she was a children's worker at that point. And she said, "Oh, hello. I'm so glad to see you and you must be the person who's on call, and I've got to go to lunch." And she left. Then another woman, I think it was Joan said, "Great to see you. I'm the office coordinator. And I've got to go, I have an appointment." And she left. And there I was, in this big empty room with a phone over on the window sill, and the phone rang. "Oh. Okay, the phone's ringing. This must be for me." So I picked it up and said something like, "Ah, ah, ah, Spruce Run." And had my first couple of hot line calls during that shift, which were fairly classic hot line calls. There was one who was in a very small town at the end of a very long dirt road, who lived in a trailer and had three pre-school kids, and was being battered and was terrified, and had no resources, and in fact she was using a neighbor's phone 'cause she herself didn't have a phone, so -. We chatted for a while and came up with a couple of different plans, and my heart was here, just, just pounding, like a -. You never forget these calls, ever! You know? Ever!

PAUSE

PART THREE

Linda Monko: I think that we actually did the first crisis training of the volunteers in '75. I would just say that, for myself personally, I had an interest in -- when they started getting into the battered

women's stuff because I had been in an abusive marriage myself. And had gone through not only the ordeal of being physically abused but of going through the whole legal process of being told that really the only thing I could do to protect myself was to leave the area. And, and then just going through the whole custody battle process and all. So I had a personal interest in knowing that services didn't exist and that they were certainly necessary. I think like most things at that time I think all of us knew that if anything was going to happen we had to do it ourselves.

Elaine Tucker: The training? It was very arduous. We had -- at that time we were doing ten 4-hour sessions. Four hours in the evening is a long time to sit and talk about hard things. It was very demanding. It was a wonderful group that I was in. I think there were about 12 of us. It was an eye opener for me because I'd certainly heard about battered women, but I didn't realize the extent of the problem. And I also didn't realize how closely it touched me and how angry it made me feel that this could happen to women just because they were women, not for any other reason. And so I felt very vulnerable.

Linda Monko: I can remember we had the training at my office at the Counseling Center in Bangor because there was a big space to be able to do it in. I just trained them in the basics of

crisis intervention, which if I had to repeat every step right now, I'd probably miss some. But, you know, basically it was of developing listening skills, learning how to do reflective feedback, being able to identify feelings, or question -- a process of questioning and reflecting back to the person what their feelings might be.

Ann Schonberger: I have never been involved with direct service. People who are involved with direct service take a 40-hour training program and either are hotline volunteers or office workers or kids' workers, or things like that, and I've never chosen to do that. Partly, I think, because the kinds of skills I have are administrative and financial, and that's very badly needed in the organization. It's always been in sort of scarce supply, I think, and so I spent a lot of time on that. But the other thing is that I'm a very direct person. And although I theoretically and philosophically believe in the self-help philosophy, I think I would have a very difficult time implementing it in my own case. I know that what I would be supposed to be saying to a client on the telephone is, "I hear you saying that you think when he comes back he's going to hit you. What do you think are your options?" And what I would probably be saying is "Sweetheart, when he comes back he's going to hit you. Get all the money you can get together, pack a suitcase, and I'll meet you at the pizza parlor in 15 minutes." I always kid around about how they don't let me do direct service work at

Spruce Run, and they always say, "Oh, no, no, we'd love you to get involved in direct service." But

I think that I know myself better than that.

Linda Monko: The volunteers were very values oriented and really driven by principles and practicalities. That was very hard, in the training, to work in crisis intervention where the whole point in intervening in the crisis is to help the person who's in the crisis be able to identify their own needs, identify what the problem is, and to come up with their own solutions and decisions about how they're going to handle it. That was the hardest part of the training because everybody wanted to do it for them and lead them to conclusions.

Elaine Tucker: I still remember my first call. It was a woman in Hancock County, who was very isolated, lived in a very isolated location to begin with. And then also was isolated because she had no friends and wasn't allowed to leave the home. It was a foreign woman, anyway, had come to this country knowing only her husband. She had married him overseas and then come back. And

she was very, very alone, had no one to talk to, was living in very primitive conditions; and was being battered and didn't know what to do, where to turn. That was my first call.

Sue Bradford: I felt fine about the calls that I'd done. The woman in the trailer with the preschool kids taught me a valuable lesson, because I got caught right up in her situation. I lived 50 miles north of here in the woods with no phone, and what I did was to go up to the general store and call her back the next day - which is not something that we do - and asked how she was, and she was fine and couldn't for the life of her figure out why it was I was calling her. It just like gave me this whole perspective of -- taught me in a real life way about why it is people call, and when they call, and how they call, and how much they do on their own, and just what is my part in these people's lives. It was invaluable instruction, and I thank her to this day for that.

Elaine Tucker: I'm on the hotline tonight. Twelve years later, I'm still on the hotline.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Sue Bradford: But I have to tell this story, Okay? There's a 1980 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence conference, and that was in Milwaukee, and that's where Nancy and Marian and Connie and I all got in this car and, like, drove for a million hours to Milwaukee, right? And we drove back. And all of the conference proceedings were in these yellow plastic, really obnoxious binders. They were donated by an insurance company to the conference. But Nancy got a call from the people who put the conference on: "My gosh, we have a whole lot of left-over binders. Really, you should have these. They're free. Do you think you could use them?" Well, Nancy, unfortunately, was one of those folks who, like, really could not resist a bargain, ever. "Free? Let me at it." And they gave her a choice of numbers to pick from, how many binders she wanted, and I guess she picked a number. And so there we were. We'd gotten the shelter, and I don't believe it was opened yet - no it wasn't. We were all doing something, I don't know what, and I looked out the window and a tractor trailer - a tractor trailer! - pulled up. Guy got out of the tractor trailer and rang the bell, and I said, "Yeah? What have you got?" And he said, "Well, we've got a bunch of binders here." Binders? And I looked at the truck and I looked at him. I turned around and said, "Naaaancy?" And there began the saga of the yellow binders, and it's really important that people throughout Spruce Run's history know about these yellow binders, because nobody knows where they really came from. He started unloading them with a little dolly, carton

after carton, after carton, after carton, after carton of yellow binders. And we put them on the second floor and then when we had to renovate, we hauled them to the cellar. And no, we hauled them to the third floor, which we hadn't renovated yet. So, and after we were done with the second floor and had this successful capital funds campaign, we had to haul them down to the cellar so that we could do the third floor. We've been hauling them around ever since. And we use them for everything. And they live on. They're totally indestructible. You can jump up and down on them. You can try and crimp the rings. You can try and bend the plastic. Those things are indestructible. And we've tried to give them away. So, that's where they came from.

PAUSE

PART FOUR

Terri Lewis: Consensus. I found that very difficult because I am the sort of person who is -- I'm impatient. I just like to get things done and I usually know what I think. But I think it's a very good way to get things done. And I -- it took me a lot of effort to participate in it, but I did it, and it was good for me, and I believe in it. It is just very time-consuming. But I think that the decisions that come out of it are usually more successful than ones that are done other ways.

Sue Bradford: At the beginning there were, I think there were shades of anxiety and fear and "What's this going to be like?" You know, "Where are things going to be?" You know, everybody likes to know what the boundaries and the limits are, and it wasn't clear when we first started talking about doing this consensus business.

Connie Huntley: I just remember being very frustrated in some staff meetings if the five of us couldn't come to a decision. And Nancy wouldn't say, "Well this is the way I want it." You know, when she was the director and could. She'd say, "No, now how are we going to work this out?" But I got to like it.

Sue Bradford: The fights were about what color rug, and "What are we going to put on these brochures?" Before that was, "Do we hire staff or do we not hire staff? Are you a grass roots organization who's rooted in the folks who call and the everyday citizens of the community, or are we a social service agency with that kind of structure and that kind of image to maintain?"

Elaine Tucker: The worst disagreement I can remember, and it still has its -- it has ghosts that travel through the halls in Spruce Run, and involved boundaries -- boundary issues. How involved can a volunteer, how involved can a staff person, become with one of our callers? And there was always a big split in the organization saying that if we say that we will not be these women's friends, we will not get to know them as friends, we will not take them out to coffee, then we're no better than any social service agency, and we're just people with pens and forms. And then the other half of the agency saying that if we don't keep our boundaries, we'll burn ourselves out. We'll expose ourselves to hurt. We take advantage of people who are in a very needy place and say, "Be my friend, give me something." When a woman in that position is really not usually able to give very much because she needs help. She needs to get on her feet before she's able to give people anything in return. And that issue just about split us in half. Just about brought Spruce Run right to its knees. We were so divided over that issue. But it came to the conclusion that we will keep boundaries, and we will have that so-called professional behavior that other agencies have, to save the agency. We would never agree that it was the best thing to do, but we could agree that we needed to do it to save the agency.

Connie Huntley: It would get very lively. But we also learned -- a part of it is the listening that's so important at Spruce Run. A part of it is listening to the other person's side and allowing them their feelings and hearing them out. And sometimes the disagreements would get just evened out when, when, when I'm heard. I may be very upset about something, but if somebody will take the time to listen, and at least hear what I'm upset about, even if they can't change it, it makes it easier if they'd just listen. And so that would happen in meetings. And we'd keep working at it until we reached some level of consensus.

Ann Schonberger: The things about the Capital Funds Campaign were -- there were times when, especially Terri and I, just laid it on the line; the staff would have to come up with this information, they would have to show up at the training session. I remember getting into a real hassle with one staff member, who was supposed to be the person to go and work with the people who were going to go out and raise the money from the special gifts part of the campaign, which was the people that had the power to give more money, bigger donations. A group of them were assembled at a very wealthy woman's house and this staff person was supposed to go and do the public education to them about the agency. And I said that she ought to wear her best clothes and she ought to wear stockings. And what a scene! "I don't own a pair of panty hose and I'm not going to buy one for

this." So in the end, she wore boots. High leather boots. And then she was making jokes about tea cakes and having gone to this thing and if I had really known how difficult it would be for her, I would have gone myself. But I thought that it was her job to go.

Connie Huntley: And now it makes sense. You know, I'll go to a meeting and people are doing this jumping over each other and nobody listens to anybody else, and it makes me crazy. It's like, "Wait a minute. One person at a time. Let's come to some consensus." And I'm involved now with another project that is not built on that, and there's some serious problems that we've got. We've had to go out and hire somebody to help us work through these when, if we'd gone through consensus in the first place, we wouldn't be here. So, I really have liked the decision making process. Everyone has a voice and that voice gets heard. And usually one person doesn't stop everything without a good reason.

Sue Bradford: I think consensus really has seen us through some really hard times.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Karen Marysdaughter: A high point was the hats. Oh, the hats. The very first meeting I went to was this long-range planning meeting, and here Sue Bradford pulled out this whole box of hats; little frilly flowered hats, and big sun hats, and kind of svelte black velveteen hats, and just this range of old fashioned hats. Oh, there was a boy scout hat; her private collection. Hats were apparently a Spruce Run tradition. There is a picture of me helping to facilitate that meeting with a little pink hat with frothy flowers and a little veil on. And various other people in these hats. The hats were a trademark of Spruce Run. And the tradition was that whenever a Steering Committee member or staff person left Spruce Run, they would get a hat as a going away present, usually draped or hung with all sorts of little trinkets or something that had some meaning for them. I'm trying to remember what was on mine. I got the pink frilly hat as my going away hat. And it had -- it actually had a little toy bomb on it for my tax resistance and anti-war work. And what else? Oh dear, I'd have to go back and look at it. Anyway, so we would get these kind of, ah, works of art incorporated in a hat. And I think just the silliness: there was a fair amount of laughing and silliness at Spruce Run meetings. We would get bogged down and tear out our hair and stuff like that. But it was a big help to be in this very serious meeting and look up and see somebody in this idiotic hat, across the room. It really helped to remind us not to take ourselves so seriously.

PAUSE

PART FIVE

Lou Chamberland: One of the things is we had a lot of fun. I mean, you think about that now, you think, God, I mean these people typing minutes at midnight, right? And stuffing envelopes and laying out a newspaper edition in the middle of the night. We had a lot of fun. I can remember just some real giggle sessions and laughing. I think we just really enjoyed each other. And I think that that's part of what sustained us, that no matter how bad it got, you know. And plus some of the people involved had -- I mean, they're real funny people. I mean, Kay has a terrific sense of humor. And Sue Nichols. You know, I mean, they were funny people. And they'd look at something, they'd look at a total disaster, and they'd take off on a whatever about it. And have us all in stitches. And then after we'd -- and sometimes you couldn't tell if you were crying 'cause you were laughing or 'cause you were desperate. It was a release. I mean, it was -- and it made things easier. It just made it easier to go on.

Sue Bradford: We liked to laugh. And we liked to hug.

Lou Chamberland: I mean after a while you just have to laugh.

Susan Dunn Nichols: Well, I did the piggy nose warmers. Some of those things, they just all run together. Well, the piggy nose warmer thing, that was just a little joke and I can't even remember how -- we were just sitting around the office on Harlow Street and somehow, just fooling around, and I'm sure it was something that Nancy Gentile and I were just joking around about. I really can't remember how the piggy part of this happened, but I ended up making an awful lot of those and we'd sell them for a dollar. And I made over 200 of them, I know. And it was just kind of a fun thing to do, and we did make some money on it. I guess I was the major contributor to the zucchini cookbook and the chocolate cookbook. That was done thinking that someday we would actually come up with a real cookbook like churches do. You know, that would be a nicely bound one and have all these different chapters. I think at one time we even had kind of a little outline. It was mostly just fooling around, trying to relieve the stress. Because of course, it got pretty tense at times.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Mary McPherson: Actually, I can tell you about it and not tell you who it was. That's what I can do. Because I think it's an important piece of this legislative process. Probably, who knows, 50 percent of the women from the Coalition were lesbians. Of course, one of the pieces of rumor that started going the circle of the legislature was you know this is a bunch of lesbians who are trying to da, da, da, da. And one of the legislators -- in the House you're not allowed on the floor, you have to be behind the glass unless you're specifically invited. So a specific legislator invited us down. And this legislator, who was one of our lead supporters, turned - and who was very staid and proper and mainstream America - turned to Nancy and - not as if this was a big problem, but she just needed to make sure that it wasn't true - said, "So are there lesbians in this group? I mean I heard that the lesbians are like really taking over this organization." The session was out, but we're down in the bowels of the legislature. And Nancy, who had managed to maintain this incredible, diplomatic serenity and absolutely appropriate behavior - this is down to the wire. It's after the veto. I don't know where we are exactly, but we have been through a lot. We are fairly at the ends of our little psychic ropes and we have been being really nice to people for a really long time. And this legislator says this to Nancy, who explodes. Absolutely loses it. It's one of the only times I've

ever seen Nancy - if I ever saw Nancy - be inappropriate. And she did the "in your face" and Nancy called her the 1977 equivalent of a "homophobic asshole" but I can't remember her exact words. And I was -- it was, again, one of those "This is a very serious and drastic moment," because this was the key supporter. At the same time I thought, "We have a real crisis here," I was thinking, "This is one of the funniest moments I've ever seen." So I grabbed Nancy - who was wearing her usual tasteful jacket - grabbed her lapels and literally dragged her out of the House and just kept going with her. I mean, she was still ranting and I just dragged her out of the State House and threw her in her car and said "We're going to Bangor now."

I think that it's really important to acknowledge that there was -- that this is an issue that had to be dealt with from the get-go with the Coalition. That homophobia internally and externally was, was there, brewing and being an unspoken piece of agenda and an unspoken bigotry that really was used against the movement.

PAUSE

PART SIX

Connie Huntley: Spruce Run has always had on staff, in all the time that I've been there - well, of course, all that time that I've been there they've had at least one lesbian on staff. And usually more than one. So we've always done -- provided some level of service to lesbians in battering

relationships. We've always provided in training, some level of discussion on homophobia, and trying to desensitize the topic. And sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, and sometimes I think it depends on the trainer's emphasis on how important it is to break through some people's denial systems. At the last conference that I went to - the national conference down in Massachusetts - there was a very large contingent of battered lesbians, who made a very strong statement to the conference as a whole, of what it was that we needed to be safe when we worked in the shelters and when we went to shelters asking for services. There's still a lot of ingrained homophobia in our community, and there's still -- and it's in our groups. And it has been in our domestic violence projects. And the people who keep it going are usually us, because we don't want to move too quickly to upset the others and have them think that, you know, we're being militant or pushing too far.

Linda Monko: I think it's just that many lesbians who were feminists tended to be perhaps more outgoing and definitely involved in programs for women. I think it was difficult because in the Seventies we're talking about close to the beginning years of the feminist movement. And, of course, the big fear at that time was the fear of being labeled as a lesbian or a man-hater. I think that there was concern about that organizationally because there was so much emphasis on trying to

work in the mainstream, trying to get the support of the community. That there was a lot of concern that we not be seen as a lesbian organization. That happened in every women's group that existed at that time. And so of course it would always create conflicts between the lesbians and the straight women. That was just always there as a conflict in any women's organization, at least in my experience. Spruce Run was founded by straight women. And again, I can't remember specific anecdotes, but I hold the feeling that this was an issue. That those of us who were lesbian never felt completely welcome, in terms of visibility.

Karen Marysdaughter: There isn't any one specific incident around homophobia, but I certainly know that there were people in the community during my time of involvement with Spruce Run who did lesbian baiting, you know, tried to claim that everyone at Spruce Run was lesbian, and made public statements to that effect. And there was an internal debate at Spruce Run about being "out" about lesbians working at Spruce Run or not, and how that'd affect the organization. And of course, some people, you know, different people wanted to respond differently to the community about that. And we can't help it that we've all been affected by homophobia and internalized sexism, and all that. So we're going to play it out inevitably.

Susan Dunn Nichols: We had a lot of people involved. We had a lot of energy and a lot of commitment. And there were three or four of them from the lesbian community, and friends of theirs. They had all known each other from campus. I don't think Spruce Run could have been as quite successful if they didn't have that energy. The commitment of those lesbian women really helped, really got it going and kept it going. People were not in the closet; everyone knew they were lesbians and accepted them. So you had all kinds of people: low income people from the community, and people who were professors at the university, lesbian and straight. So it was really nice to see such a mixture of people.

PAUSE

BRIDGE STORY

Elaine Tucker: Many of the women who come into shelter do not look battered. They have been battered, or they have been at the emergency room, and they are better by the time they come to us. There was one woman, I remember, who came in right after a beating, and she was battered. I have never seen anything -- it looked as though she'd been hit by a truck. And she herself was so shocked by how she looked and what had happened to her that she had to tell somebody. And I

walked into the shelter, and she was standing in the kitchen; she had just arrived. She had a vacant, horrified look on her face and looked at me and had to tell me what happened to her. And told me what happened to her in the most bizarre way. I didn't even know her name at that point; she was just probably in shock, and she was telling me about this beating. And she started to take off her clothing while she was talking. And she showed me her arms, and then she took off her blouse and showed me her chest, and took off her bra and showed me her breasts, which were hamburger, just hamburger. And then she was naked. She was standing naked in the kitchen by the time we finished this, and she was one bruise from her -- her face wasn't touched, but from her neck down, she was one solid bruise. And just the painfulness, the whole -- how painful her injuries looked, but also the picture of a woman standing naked in the kitchen just trying to explain what happened to her. It was horrific, very horrific. That someone could continue to beat the body of someone they were going to love and cherish forever is shocking. And just her reaction to that. She was normally a modest woman. But just taking off piece after piece of clothing to show me what happened to her was terrible.

PAUSE

PART SEVEN

Ann Schonberger: It doesn't work perfectly. We all get tired and there are not enough workers and there's too much to do. There are still pockets of resistance out there and bad guys still shoot their wives with guns that they have too many of in their houses. I mean every time one of those things happens, it just enrages you all over again.

Elaine Tucker: Well, we're certainly trying. And we're a drop in the bucket; we really are. It takes a whole lot more than Spruce Run to turn around domestic violence; it takes everybody. But we do try.

Susan Dunn Nichols: People were so afraid of just the topic of domestic violence and, I mean, I don't think that much has really changed. I don't think we've wiped out "x" percent of domestic violence that happens. But I think there are more services for people and all of that. Some people are more aware, but I think there's still a lot of ignorance.

Connie Huntley: I had him arrested. And I was very lucky that the minister of my church, my grandmother, the sheriff, they all supported what I was doing. That was very rare for women. This was twenty five years ago. Very rare. So I know how much Spruce Run and what it represents is needed, both for the education of the community and making those services available. And letting the community know that it is not the woman's problem, and it's not the man's problem, it's society's problem. And if we don't start teaching our sons that women are human beings too, and if we don't start teaching our daughters that they have a right not to be abused, then we're never going to have compassionate police, judges, husbands and fathers. It just isn't going to happen. And it hasn't. It's changed some but it seems so terribly slow.

Elaine Tucker: I think acceptance in the community has been the biggest thing to change. When I first began in Spruce Run, if I went to a party or a gathering or anything and said that I was a Spruce Run volunteer, it would spark immediate sexist jokes, battering jokes. Even in the emergency room at the hospital, I had doctors telling me battering jokes, in the middle of the night when I was in with a battered woman. It was embarrassing to people, people didn't want to talk about it, and they relieved that by telling jokes and being very unpleasant in that way. The police were not helpful. It was hard, it was hard being a Spruce Run volunteer, but nowadays, it's even a good thing to be a Spruce Run volunteer. The police are helpful; they try very hard. The

courts are more aware of what's going on. The community is wonderful; we have a lot of support from the community. There's a lot more interest in the school system to have people come in and talk to younger and younger people about this problem. So I think that the message is getting out in lots of different ways.

Ann Schonberger: The other thing that is much better is church response. It was really the case 20 years ago and even 15 years ago that women were told by both ministers and priests that they were to -- you know, this is their lot in life for Eve's sins or that their major responsibility in a Christian home was to keep the family together and if that meant putting up with the battering, it meant putting up with the battering.

Linda Monko: Many of the things that I've done in the past are no longer happening as organizations or as groups. I mean, they stopped. So I have my memory and that's it. It's become static. I don't think that that's true of Spruce Run.

Ann Schonberger: I guess maybe nobody told us the women's movement was dead. We just kept plugging along doing our little thing up here in our corner of the world and that's what we were doing. I think if it were just a service provision, that's like a social service agency. And certainly that's good to have those, but I don't know that I would be as interested. Spruce Run really, truly

sees itself as a social change organization, not just as a social service organization. I think that's another reason why people stick with it and continue to work with it.

Connie Huntley: Spruce Run does what it says it's going to do. Battering hasn't gone away, and we continue to reach out to the battered women. And there have been caring people working. And the people who have worked for Spruce Run, no matter where they are, have cared about the women who are going to be on the other end of that phone call. As frustrated as I was with the Steering Committee sometimes seeming not to remember why we're there, each one of those women were dedicated to being sure that that project remained. People know what Spruce Run does. And it's continued. It's continued to draw in volunteers when other agencies are having a real hard time doing that. But it does what it says it's going to do. It provides shelter and it provides services in a self-help mode that leaves the individual woman's dignity intact. She is the one who decides what happens to her life. And she is valued. And now we're a -- you know, it's a fixture in the community. People turn to Spruce Run when they want to do a seminar or they want -- you know, Spruce Run workers and volunteers are the experts in the field. And that's an incredible thing.

PAUSE

Lou Chamberland: Nobody wanted to deal with this. Nobody wanted to talk about it as a problem. Or it was always somebody else's problem. But there was no somebody else. I mean, the "somebody else" was us.