

Project: YWCA Centennial: *100 Years of Challenge and Change: Whatcom Women and the YWCA*

Interviewee: Julie Foster, Executive Director, Bellingham YWCA, 1998-present

Interviewers: Dr. Lynne Masland, YWCA Centennial history chair; Jo Collinge, Board President

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Place: Jo's home, 3813 Fraser, Bellingham

Transcriber: Lori Torres

Say your name, please.

Julie Foster

And you are?

Executive Director of the YWCA.

And we were talking about the 1990s and you came on board in 1996? Go on with what you were saying

I came on in 1996; let's see, as a member of the Board.

We were talking about budget and Board (and) staff issues

Right, there was a transition going on with the YWCA at the time.

Nationally, or local?

Locally. YWCA Bellingham was going through times; they needed to reorganize, and I came on just after their transitional executive director had delivered bad news about budget. That's what she did; she told them what they had to do to stay in business and if they couldn't do that, things were going to have to change, and things did. By the time I, let's see, the timing was really weird, but I guess it was '95, they just cut staff entirely. I mean, just everyone was gone except just one office manager...

In 1995?

I think it was '95, 1995/96. See, I wasn't there when there was a huge staff. [Executive Director] Mary [Somerville] was gone, Elizabeth [Harris, Program Director] was gone, [Housing Director] Ann Sulloway was gone. Everybody was gone. And they [the Board] had just decided that they needed to hire a new director to replace this transition person who had said, you know, things just have to change, we can't afford to do all of this anymore. And then who did they hire after that? Mary Somerville was gone and so Shannon Elmendorf... What was her name?

Ever...

Eberhart! Right. And she left just as I came on the Board.

She was the transitional director who said, you know you just can't afford this.

Yes she was, that's right. And she tried to get them – and you know they worked really hard, they all had passion plans and they went out and raised money and they talked to the community and they did all sorts of things, but it just didn't work. So, now, I'm trying to figure out what happened with... We really had nobody running the place at all. The Board came on and there was no Executive Director, there was no Housing Director, there was somebody in the office and a freelance money person, you know, an accountant. The accountant had also left and, you know what I'm saying: I really couldn't go back and delve into the details of how angry and how distressing it was that people couldn't come to any... And on top of that Dorothy Place was in the works. That was started in '95, I think, when they had their first meeting and decided that the YW was going to develop this as Dorothy Giesecke's dream: the domestic violence [transitional housing] for women and children next door, connected to the Y and being run by the Y. And of course that was a huge amount of stress on top of everything that was going on because now they had to raise money, apply for grants. And it was extra work of course for everybody. Mary had started in on the committee, Mary Somerville, and then she left in '95 I think

(Jo) She said she left in '96 but she wasn't sure.

It could have been '96 because Shannon was not there very long, just months; and then the Board... various presidents resigned, members resigned and it was just really hard 'cause everybody was trying so hard to keep everything going. So then we had a very small board; we wound up with a pretty small board although we lost the Board President at the time, too, because – [laughing] you really don't want to know all of this. [**Lynne nods, yes.**] We still had one of the treasurers, the accountants, who had been there forever, was still on when I got there, she was still on. But she, because of all this stuff that was going on with Dorothy Place and the State wanting – they were applying for State grants and the State gets involved in all of your business if they're going to give you a grant. And she was worried about irregularities in the accounting. She had been asking for a computer for ages. She'd been doing all this stuff and she was worried – and that was right 'cause everything was falling apart. So she wrote to a lawyer and the lawyer wrote – and this is just a little tiny thing – but she wrote the lawyer and the lawyer read it as if there's any auditing, we, you know, so... So, she was just covering herself and that was fine and if I was there, I would have done it too. There I was at one of my first Board meetings [when this happened].

You were just coming on?

Yes, just coming on. There was so much emotion going on, and it was just too bad, and besides it turned out Joan [President Joan Fortune] had a really difficult, tough [personal] problem, as it turned out, so all this stress was making her crazy anyway. So that's kind of what I came into: There was total destruction in terms of anybody getting on, and now we didn't have an accountant. So finally when I got to be Board President somehow after Joan left, I just started volunteering and coming in and cleaning things up because – literally – the accounting office had just been abandoned. The office where they did all the Encore [breast cancer rehabilitation] program had just been abandoned. I mean they just left things.

And I got Peggy Onustack, who's [now] one of our trustees: I said, Peggy, you need to come in and help me. I don't know what I can throw away. There were duplicate records that people had kept, and there were so many memos to each other about the blaming. You know that was going on, you know staff was blaming each other, and Board was blaming staff and, you know, Mary [Somerville] was just caught up in the middle of all of this. Looking back, I feel so bad for what she went through because there were a lot of powerful women up there, and there was a big staff, and there were lots of programs going on, and really good programs; and so you know it (was) just (bad) that (that) had to happen. So I had Peggy come in, and we went through just everything and tried to figure out how to get back on an even keel. You know we had to go talk to United Way to make sure they still supported us, and had to go re-represent. And I didn't really have any experience in all this but I was old enough to know you could ask anybody for anything; the worst they could do was say no, so I did. I didn't have any experience in the non-profit world, but we stumbled on through. And then we [the Board] hired Laurel Forsythe to do the housing and she would really rather be Executive Director and that was okay, so then we hired [the late] Teri Smith to do the housing.

But first it was Laurel

Yep, and then Teri and, I forget, we had some part-time office [staff] off and on, but that was something that the Board could do and I could do; I did most of it for quite a while.

And then Teri, and I knew Teri.

Yeah and, at the same time, I mean all these things are going on, and the Board under Shannon's direction had really started to think about what the future was going to be for the Y. And she said, rightly, that there was no focus on the things that they were doing and so she came up with some recommendations, which they didn't follow then. And I didn't even see this memo. But later we came to almost exactly the same thing: that we needed to focus and we needed to do transitional and emergency housing. And so Laurel was on for that. She started working on emergency housing, but meanwhile we had women who had lived there [as low-cost housing tenants] for up to 15 years. We had to get these folks re-settled before we did anything else, and Teri was wonderful in making that transition. So meantime, Laurel had problems in her family: her mother was dying in Hawaii; her husband had health problems; and she was spending less and less time at

work and also was one of those folks who thinks Board members don't need to be in her office, don't need to tell her what to do, don't need to be putting on a volunteer hat. You know you look back and you can see, a lot of times – not just our agency but a lot of agencies – that that's what happens; relationship between Board and staff gets really... and if you don't be very careful of that and pay attention to it from an Executive Director's point of view, that it's a disaster! So I was kind of careful.

And it's awful, it's terrible for all concerned, and the Board hates that because it puts you as a Board member in an untenable position.

It does, and ultimately they're responsible and so that was... and I went to quite a bit of effort to get Board members who'd quit, who'd resigned, back with the Y and there was only one, I don't even know... I think most of them came back and did something and got involved some way because you just can't have that whole negative... And poor Eva Hunter, who took all the minutes and was there for all the meetings and was so devoted to Dorothy Place. And she used to come in and start talking about all that stuff, and I finally said, 'Eva: I'm done. I don't want to go back there. Come and help me do membership, let's get more board members, but every time you start talking about the old bad past, I'm going to walk [laughing] 'cause I don't want to know.' And she helped me to get other folks back involved.

So there was a transition period from -- well it sounds like for -- about three years?

I'd say, well, Mary left in '96. Oh a couple of years, yes, because, by the time... it was October '98 when I came on as Executive Director and we, the Board, we were able to expand the Board quite a bit. We started work on the [NW Women's] Hall of Fame; we got the (Back-to-Work) Boutique up and going and, of course, all of this time we were working on Dorothy Place (which) was finishing up. But then we started work on our building, started looking for money which was a really intense process and not because... I got some wonderful help. I recruited lots of folks and we got it going, but the State wasn't too sure that they wanted to give us money after what they'd been through with Dorothy Place. What happened with Dorothy Place was there was finally a big meeting: yelling, screaming, who knows what. It was an emotional meeting where they [the Y Board] joined up with Opportunity Council finally. But there was so much fear that the Opportunity Council was just going to take over and we would have nothing to do with it anymore and they wouldn't name it Dorothy Giesecke YWCA Emergency... I mean they had this long name that they wanted on the building. And I finally said, 'you know, nobody is going to call it that anyway; let's get with something small and quick and if it doesn't say YWCA it's okay with me because everybody is going to think it's a YWCA program anyway.' They do. Everybody thinks we own that, and it's a little thorn in the side of the Opportunity Council all the time. So they settled on Dorothy Place and, of course... poor Ray Giesecke [Dorothy's widower]... and Dorothy just died in 96/97 [February 1997 of cancer].

I would have to go back and look at when she died but it was not very long before it opened

No, because I was getting calls from folks saying have you seen Dorothy? She drove; apparently she was driving to the Y and didn't arrive. And she would lose her bearings when she was driving, and it was really so sad 'cause I'd been a Soroptimist [business women's organization] with her, too. And Soroptimist had been very supportive of the Y for quite a while, some of the programs that were going on.

That's how you got into the Y, by way of Soroptimist?

Well no. I knew about it and I knew Dorothy, of course, (but) I didn't know too much about it. I got into the Y because Claudia McCain and Jane Freudenberger decided I should be on the Board. So every time I see Jane she says how are you and I say tired and it's all your fault. That was our joke

So you got this, I hopefully got this, on tape because one of my threads that begins at the very beginning [of "100 Years of Challenge and Change"] is club women and the way that the clubs interact with each other and women who bring each other in. I'm talking about the networking aspect. . .

Right! Soroptimist was a big networking for me as ..that's why I knew Dorothy; I had known her for quite a while.

And so that's...I even have a chapter in the early -- you haven't seen the book yet -- about the club women here in Bellingham and the ways that they interacted: Aftermath, Monday Club, had those members (who) were very involved in the Y, so forth and so on. So this is a way of keeping that thread going. So Soroptimist was for you a...

Right. It was an object to quite a few of those women. Claudia McCain was, as I said, that's why she knew me.

Was she in Soroptimist also?

Yep, she was. And then Zonta was another club at the time. And Myra Smith, who was just really a rock during this whole transition, she talked her husband into buying what was then a state-of-the-art computer to bring into the Y 'cause you know that's another thing that was going on was all this transition to computer, which was a whole other layer of difficulty for Mary and for the accountants and all of that. It just put an extra layer of stress and cost and money when other things at the same time were difficult. And Myra was on the Board at the time, and she did recruit some folks to help and volunteer and she was just great.

Myra was in Zonta?

Zonta. And the Zonta folks were still doing the decorations for the Hall of Fame the first two or three or four years. I think they came in and did all the decorations. Then one of the other programs that we were doing at the time in the 90s was Expanding Your Horizons with AAUW [American Association of University Women]. That was a big program that they were working on. So you're right, there are all these connections.

It actually makes fascinating reading when you sort of start taking it apart and you realize it's kind of mysterious and somewhat shadowy back then. But when we look at our lives today and realize how this all operates in our own lives, it brings you more closely in touch with those early women 'cause that's what they were doing, making friends, having a social life at the same time that they were doing organizations and clubs.

Where somebody could call them by their first name instead of Mrs. Whatever.

Exactly. What was the Expanding your Horizons program, was that a high school age program?

It was high school, and it was run with the AAUW program up at the college and we all, several groups together, offered to provide teachers and support different classes that kids could take. And I must say I didn't get involved in it in a one-on-one basis. I recruited folks to work on it and it went on for I think 5 years or something. That's what I think I remember.

(Jo) When you say Expanding Your Horizons, I think now we think science and technology.

Right, which was different from... We had the SMART program which had been going on for quite some time in 80s and I don't know how long that went on, it came into the 90s as well. And it was science, math and relevant technology (and) whatever came out to be SMART for [middle-school] girls. And that was a program that was presented by the YW national organization. When it was done in the 80s or early 90s, it was a pretty expensive program to underwrite and to teach, and they charged for it. And when I came in and started looking, they had quit it because they couldn't get the underwriting for it and it was expensive to do, and they weren't getting enough kids to sign up. When I came in and looked at it and I thought it was expensive for kids to sign up, and I thought we needed to get more diversity there so it should be free. We got some underwriting to run it for 2 or 3 years, I guess maybe, and I just got volunteers to come in and teach all the classes and they may have done that before or maybe just [then]. Sally Manifold from the City [of Bellingham], I remember her. She was just excited about it and she came in and we worked on a curriculum and got it going and it was pretty much free unless you could pay. We asked for people to pay if they could and it was pretty fun.

Sally who?

Manifold, she's no longer here; she got married and moved away.

Is it manifold like...

Same thing, MANIFOLD and she worked at Parks and Rec at the city for a long time and I don't think she was on the Board. And then, of course, all this time the golf tournament was still going on.

Was it 20 years?

Thirty, 31 years I think, and we finally ended it.

And did Pat O'Brien start it? I know she was involved in it.

I don't know if she started it, I'd have to go back and look; it's very possible. And she won it quite a few times. The thing with the golf tournament, there was no place for good golf women to play and have a competition; there just wasn't. It was, if you belonged to the golf club you were a Mrs. Whoever, and you were auxiliary and you couldn't play in tournaments. Those were the days. So they decided to start one and it was for good golfers.

(Jo) And it was a fund raiser?

And it was a fund raiser, yes.

(Jo) In the early 90s because it didn't stop until very recently.

Oh yes. I don't know about recent, but 2000 maybe? Because it was 32 years. I would have to go back and look; but we ended it. The [Board of Trustees member Frank] Chmelik Golf Tournament would have been the 32nd year I think.

(Jo) That would have been, let's see...

That was about five years ago was it?

(Jo) Uh, about four I think. I could go back and confirm that.

Because they [Law firm of Chmelik Sitkin Davis] did it for two years [2005 and 2006, raising \$28,000 for the YWCA].

(Jo) I was on the Board when we (the Y) considered doing it again but turned out not to and I came on the Board in, '04. So it went well into...

It did, nobody wanted it to go away. Barbara Gunn, do you know Barbara Gunn? I've got to find Barbara Gunn. I just think of her every time I think of the golf tournament.

She was devoted to the golf tournament and she was devoted to Teri [Smith] mostly. And she would just come and drop off \$500 or \$100 or whatever; and come in and check. And she just really wanted the golf tournament to keep going. And her husband would run sandwiches out to the golfers. She was just a good golfer and that last year, we made it a very short tournament and she came and played anyway and did pretty well and she was so proud of herself. I usually try to keep in touch with her and I haven't heard from her for a while; they moved out of their house and I don't know where they are and I keep trying to figure out. I think maybe Mary Somerville knows her because I think they were Jewish – I'm pretty sure. And so I keep trying to talk to people and see if somebody knows because she was so sweet and so devoted.

Do you remember his name?

Alf

And what was her first name?

Barbara.

Gun...

Two "n's, her husband's name is Alf. Yeah, that would be good.

(Jo) If I can ask a question here, in '98 you did a focus group?

Was it in '98? Probably.

Yes, in '98 you did the focus group and brought in

community members

and a professional...

Holly what's-her-name

A professional facilitator; and was, that was the point at which you decided to keep the pool closed? How long had the pool been closed by then?

I think they closed it in '95, it was one of the money-saving things. They just couldn't do it anymore. And all those years between '95 and '98, I must have had a zillion folks in saying when are you going to open the pool again! Especially the older folks and the Encore, the breast cancer folks, had used it for recovery. And there were still quite a few of those activities going on at the Y too, meetings and support groups for breast cancer 'cause there wasn't – the breast cancer center wasn't there yet – there wasn't any

attention locally so we kind of gradually... We even had appointments with folks with prosthesis breasts coming into lounge in my office – that was where they could go. I still have a bag of those [prosthesis] someplace if anybody wants to see what they look like.

Anyway, part of the pool and the Encore program were sort of together; the Encore folks used that pool and older ladies just hated losing it so we did a lot of research on that too. We did the forum, I mean the focus group, which was good because we wanted to know what people thought the Y should be doing and we got good direction out of that. And right after that we had some help with the strategic plan which really focused on getting the building done [renovated] and the programs that were going to go on in the building; ensure that we didn't stray off onto other things because it's very tempting. We have this one thing called the Hall of Fame. I initially resisted that because I just didn't see how we, staff/Board, were going to get that going and make it right unless we did it in a slightly different way 'cause, once again, we were going to go off on another tangent; do another program, do another so... But the way it turned out, there was enough enthusiasm around it and Mauri Ingram and I and a couple other folks got together and said, you know we can probably do it this way. So that worked really well without stressing 'cause I know we were working on developing our building.

And was that the clean break between low-cost housing and emergency and transitional housing for women?

Yes, right. I noticed, going back in some of those minutes, they referred to emergency housing as a need they wanted to do 'cause what is now our emergency housing they were still charging half for what a room was worth. And there wasn't really a defined program around transition. I mean, yes, we were helping all of these folks but it was really, as you say, low cost, and in that time period we decided that if we were headed in that direction we had to help those folks that were there get on with their lives someplace else. The second floor, which is all housing [now], when I came in, was abandoned office space. The director had been up there, the accountants had been up there, the Encore program had an office up there; mostly the second floor was offices. And that was where, I'm sure, back when you [Lynne] were doing notes on the 70s, there were other things that started up there. And then in the 90s, Lydia Place came and asked if we would partner up with them, and it was decided not to, which was a good idea at the time, too, because they [the Y Board] didn't have the resources to spare on doing that. So I was involved in lots of other organizations and groups,

You brought up Lydia Place, I know in the early 90s the Other Bank was operating out of the Y and was a Y project which is now (in) Lydia Place...it isn't?

No. The Salvation Army took it

I'm sorry, the Salvation Army took it. Lydia Place took Y's Buys.

They did, yes. And they did that because they had a lot of ladies on their Board who needed hands-on work and had done it for the Y and so, anyway, it worked fine.

And what was the Other Bank?

The Other Bank was an alternative to the Food Bank, but you can't get diapers there, you can't get soap there, you can't shampoo there, you can't get toothpaste there. So it was the other bank for all of those personal products and it was very, very successful. Another little piece of stress on the Y because – my understanding it was [successful] because it was obviously gone when I got there. There would be lineups around the block when it was open a couple of days a week. And they couldn't get enough donations to supply things so they wound up buying things; they wound up writing grants for it, of course. So it got to be like grabbing a tiger by the tail, it got to be a little too big. I just was looking in the minutes last night, and they went and talked to Salvation Army and Salvation Army was thrilled to get it and took it and it's not... I don't know, it still works but a lot of it is now diapers and kids things that you can't get anyplace else, but it's still there. And we still collect shampoos and little things and personal products which we use for our women [residents], a lot of it. And we give it to the Salvation Army when we have too much. And that was a good idea, I don't know whose idea that was, I don't know if the National folks were doing that at the time or not. I don't know.

(Jo) I can't tell. The only Y in the NW Region that mentioned having an "other bank" was the one in Longview [actually, Olympia; there is no Longview YWCA]. I haven't seen anything anywhere else.

(Lynne)Do you know when it started? Or when it left roughly?

(Shakes head, no.) Ann (Sulloway) might know.

I was reading the minutes from...some minutes last night and those minutes go from '94 to '99. I think it left in '90. No, I should go back and get the (minutes) book but it was the early 90s. It was gone before I got there for sure so it was probably '93.

Okay, 'cause I've never seen...I've run into the term but I've never seen it's birthing exactly.

I have all the minutes, I can check anything if you want 'cause I did go find everything. I have all of those things, and then it reminded me I better go spiff up. I mean we keep them all but I don't always go and see if everything is there, and we should. We have discs now. That's the other problem 'cause we had computers, and we had lots of discs from that period that we're talking about, too, which of course will not boot up on any modern computer. It will crash your computer so I think they thought they were keeping wonderful records and, of course, we now think we're keeping wonderful records that are on discs.

Don't get me started about...

So that's one thing we have to take care of and make sure we have...

So by the 1990s, particularly the middle of the 1990s, programs were being cut, you know, the public programs cut back.

Yes, and Shannon just cut everything in, what, '90? I looked it up last night but now I forget, where they fired everyone. I worked it up last night but now I forget where they fired everybody... '95 or '96? I got there in '96, right? And it had just happened. She had just taken the final step and just said we're done. And everybody was let go and the programs were just stopped and Ann Sulloway stayed on for a transition period and then she resigned. And she's back now because, of course, I called her when Teri was sick and I said, 'Can you come?' And she said yes. I had called around and I knew she was in transition so I knew she was available. She had worked for the Opportunity Council for years and so I called her and said can you be there for a little time or for a long time or whatever you want to come in, and she stepped right in [as Housing Director], which we needed. Teri had been sick for quite a while at that time, and we were kind of... we were lucky we didn't have too many... too much fallout from residents and crises. And staff was really good about backing her up and letting me know what was going on, making sure we got a pro in if we needed to. But so much of Teri's identity was the YW by that time. That was her, and she just couldn't let go of it.

It meant a tremendous amount to her.

Yes it did.

And what kinds of programs then were developed? So by the 90s, the public programs are over and in some senses there are other organizations in town, it seems to me, that began to pick them up. Not necessarily pick them up but fulfill those functions for example, Whatcom Community College has an extensive program...

Oh, yes, they rent the ballroom.

I was thinking....

Oh for....

Educating the community, enrichment classes and all of that for the community that the Y used to do.

Well the Road Less Graveled or something, came out of a Y program, I think, and then the other one was the one that Robin Bailey runs.

Displaced...

Displaced Homemakers, and I don't know if that came out of the Y, but I definitely know that it was a concept of something that they were working on. Robin Bailey was actually on the Board at the time and was very involved in the Y at the time 'cause I see a reference to that. But the transitional Murphy House [jail alternative for women] had been over for some time. There were classes every day in the ballroom of various things, you know, support groups and exercise groups and anything that women were interested in. And going back, I don't know. I mean there was this huge range of classes. I thought at the time I would like to go back and see really what the outcomes were. How many folks showed up and what they did. And it was kind of in my mind to see if that was another one of the pieces that was just hard 'cause that was labor intensive. Funding and using the building and the pool was going on in the 80s and the first part of the 90s as well; so they were doing so much it was astonishing.

At that time they were Y funded.

Yes they were all Y classes.

And I can tell you from where I've been with the minutes, they offered a tremendous number of classes, particularly after the war. Mid 40s up until the 80s

Oh the 80s they were doing it too. I think the room was used every day just about, you know that was why I was looking for those.

So that was still being used.

In the 80s for sure and the early 90s. But you know those were public things, sign up and come in for the classes and they hired...I guess they hired the teachers and they did all that stuff but they ran those entirely. . .

Yes in fact I took a Jazzercise class.

There you go, and there were dancing classes and everything.

Oh yes, all of that, but by the mid-90s that's all over with.

Pretty much.

I'm just trying to get a cut off.

Yeah I think so, mid-90s for sure because by the time I came in there weren't that many classes running and then one other program was going on besides the Expanding Your Horizons. Choices for Girls, which Fran [Maas] was involved (with), and that ran for about 5 years, maybe 5 or 6 years. Soroptimist supported that quite a bit. Dorothy [Giesecke] would come to Soroptimist and ask for money and she always got it. I was on

this money committee with her; so [we'd say] 'Dorothy, what's the YW doing?' And she would say we're doing this and that and the other thing. And this [Choices] was a good program cause it was moms and daughters, it was mothers and daughters, came to the program

And was it kind of...

It's talking about making choices and it was a National Y program as well so those were going and the SMART program was going and um...

Now when was Choices?

Choices was early 90s I think

Okay. And was the SMART program still going when you came on?

It had stopped because of financial reasons and then I picked it up again for a few years. That was Sally Manifold; (she) came in and said now we should do this again.

So that was throughout the 90s.

Pretty much. We ended it when we started to work on the building because we didn't have the space or the...

So you did a major remodel because I know my Rotary Club [Bellingham Sunrise Rotary] was the one that did your upper office.

Yes they did. I've still got that carpet. It was fabulous. That was Bonnie [Hines] who I knew from Soroptimist. There you go. And I tried to get her on the Board at the Y at one point. Don't forget the PTA; there's a couple of folks. Mary Hudson at the bank, Key Bank, who gives us a thousand dollars every year, she and I were in PTA together and there were a couple of other folks. I don't know. God if you started thinking about all of those connections it really is amazing how it works.

The way it...

The real Old Girls' Network. Now Peggy Onustack was a Soroptimist. That's when I called Peggy and said I need help. 'Cause that's what you do, you turn to the people you know are going to do the job well. And you say pretty please, I'm down on my knees here.

Okay. And the remodel that was done in the late 90s?

The work actually started in 2000 but two years before that were planning, designs and getting the money. Turned out to be \$1.6 million. If you go back and look at what you

spent – I have boxes of stuff from the course of that project because... And there we got with Pat Rose again too, who I know from Soroptimist, who came on to help get it focused because she was in construction, of course, and is helping with the next [renovation phase], this current project where we're going to finish up [ballroom refurbish/kitchen remodel]. She said, you know, the 10 years between '98 and now were a huge transition and I mean it's just been a real transition period. That's why I was so excited that we'd finally get to where a Board could design to start new programs, which is really exciting. I mean we're finally getting the work done on the building, get it in the black and then start going broke once again. [She laughs.]

(Jo) Not while I'm alive, thank you

No I don't think (so); we've got systems in place. Part of the thing that happened while I was there too was that I just had great Board people and we did work really well as teams; we got to take advantage of Board abilities and talents and connections and all those kinds of stuff. With Laurel, as short of time as she was there and even as involved, she didn't like me in her office at all. She would just get freaked out and just felt very threatened. And I don't see how you could work like that in this kind of thing that we do – and why you would even want to. So I spent quite a bit of time when I started (as) Executive Director to just meeting, the same thing you [speaking to Jo] do now with our Board members. Not all Board Presidents do that: Pat Rose for instance did not have time to coddle Board members. You know, I mean she was a business person and go-go-go and her meetings were dut-dut-dut [snaps fingers three times]. And have lunch with the other Board members on the side and just make sure they know what was going on, what the history was and just trying to get them up to speed and make sure they know that they were welcome to come in any time so they would feel involved. Her meetings were great, but [laughing] there was no time for discussions.

Well you talk about the networking part of things and what that's actually fulfilling for women. I mean in a sense it's not like, you know in a sense, [indistinct, someone's pouring coffee] -- it's more like your labor and if you're not having fun or enjoying it...

That's right, learning, feeling good or doing something you're interested in. That's why Jo and I we always say okay, what do you think they [Board members] want to (do) and it's a good thing.

Otherwise people find other things to do.

They do.

And again, if it can be something where you're with people, people that you like, find interesting, find stimulating and you work well together and you develop projects that challenge them.

But you have to work, make time for that.

But the relationship aspect is a big part of it.

It's huge.

I wanted to ask you, 'cause we just talked a lot about how the public programs stopped. But what kinds of programs; you really develop programs now for the... your transitional residents and do you still do emergency housing (as well as) transitional housing?

Sure. The whole 4th floor that you guys [Sunset Rotary] fixed up is emergency housing now. When I first got there, (it) was one bed in one of the alcoves, like one emergency bed. Laurel and I worked on it 'cause she agreed that we really need emergency housing so she started working on that; so did I. Then, when we did our Strategic Plan, we determined that we were gonna work on the transitional (and) emergency and only do things for a while that were related to the women in those programs. We were going to try and make sure that everything we did focused on their needs and, then, as we could step out, we'd do it.

But that didn't mean we didn't have the speaker series, the fall speaker series and the lunch series. And the Hall of Fame was going on. So there were things that people got involved in and miscellaneous advocacy programs that came out. And there as a big debate, of course, after we weren't doing anything for the public, about what membership at the Y actually meant. And that was... I did some research, quite a bit of research, about other non-profits and also I was going through some matrix training – there was a nice program that was training non –profit directors at the time – and people will join without necessarily getting anything back if they believe in the mission and they believe what's going on, they don't always need a thing. So we worked on that approach and started working on outreach, which, as you know, people still, after all these years, still don't know what we do. It takes work. Thank goodness we have someone like Jo who is relentless, which is fabulous. Obviously we kept doing that, and it was one of the things on the focus group's... It was one of the things always: People don't know what we do, they don't understand who we are. But if they do, and if they feel good about it, they will be members and they'll continue to be members. You just have to make sure you go back to those folks and do something they like, which is why I worry a whole lot if we even think about changing the Leadership Breakfast because I get so many people who love to come to that event [since 1995, the Y's major public fund-raiser].

It's a tradition at a time where traditions are, you know, fragile and it's so stirring to see all those cars turning into the Lakeway Inn; the parking lot is full

You go in and the level of talk is just wonderful; that's what people come to do. That's why I get so nervous about somebody saying, 'Well, why don't we go ahead and sell

tickets, why don't we do this?' No, we'll have to do another event. If we want more money we will do another event which is I think...

It's your signature event I would say at this point. I wanted to ask what kind of programs do you do for the residents?

They change all the time because the needs change; we get different types of residents. There was a time when we were doing classes where Board members said 'Can I go to that class? I want to.' You know there were esteem classes, there were journal writing, there were making plans for your future, there were all kinds of things that were for anybody. Gradually we realized that some of the folks we had – we have up to 50% of folks who have domestic violence somewhere in their background, we have about 40% who have some sort of disability, not necessarily physical but some other kind. Especially now, when the building got accessible so that we had an elevator, of course we get older folks and people with limited ability who still can come and live at the Y just fine.

Lately, in the past years, we're getting much more, many more mental health issues. And we have to be really careful about those folks that we admit because it's a community living situation. You have to share facilities, you have to share bathrooms, you have to share kitchens. On the whole, that is really a good thing. It's been a place where women help each other. Not just us helping the women, but them helping each other. Many of them, the other 50%, are folks who have just come on incredible bad luck or have just had health problems, lost a job, lost a car. You know, the same thing that we talk about: There, but the grace of God go all of us. And these people scraping for gas money (now) are getting the idea that they could be there too. So they (the residents) needed budgeting, cooking, know to cook on a budget; they needed self esteem – that wasn't your fault this happened to you – they needed planning for their retirement, all of those things. We still do some of that except the class/support groups were {used to be} very cool. You know at one point everybody had a support group and now days it doesn't work as well, and we're not sure why.

One-on-one approach works much better and we just realized – staff has realized – that we were doing one-on-one all the time in the hallways, in the lobby, whenever a resident would stop us and wanted to ask us about this, that or the other thing. It's possible, we were speculating, that people can go online now or they can do other things that can give them a different kind of support and there are other places they can go in the community, too, I think, which didn't exist when the Y was doing it. So now we really focus more on one-on-one help. (The) Financial Fitness program is one-on-one. That came out of the [Back-to-Work] Boutique, too, because we realized that the boutique folks [volunteers] were doing more than picking out clothes. They were doing a little mentoring and talking to them [clients, including low-income women from the community as well as residents] about their interview that was coming up and listening to people and making them feel good when they left. So we realized that that works better, and now we're starting a new one-on-one computer training thing.

The effort is not to duplicate anything that is going on in the community. But if you look at what's going on, sometimes these folks don't have the language they need to go in and ask for what they want. I started worrying about this when somebody brought me an application for temporary work that they had to fill out. Astonishing! You have to put 'no,' you don't know so many things, it just makes you feel totally inadequate.

Why am I bothering?

Yes, exactly. So eventually I think we should have one of those [computers] around so we can show people what they're like and help them understand that it's okay. Not everybody knows that, not everybody knows this. But we did...one of the things we did find out (is) that there are certain computer things that you don't always get in a class. How do you do Outlook? How do you do email? All sorts of things. By the way how do you get online? And they can be, even 5 years being away from your computer, the whole system can change.

(Jo) Sometimes I think 32 minutes

And you get back to Microsoft Word and oh, it's changed all of this. So we're trying to do more one-on-one things to help people get exactly what they need, and, by the way, volunteers like that. We don't have any problems getting volunteers for the Boutique. The Financial Fitness is sort of in change mode; we've got an intern coming to do some outreach and get that going a little bit more. I mean it's just matching up, you just have to have the people matching up, it takes a little bit more time to get it going, but for folks who've done it, the outcomes are great. So it's been really great, both (for) our volunteers and the people who get the help.

The volunteers are part of the one-to-one equation?

Yes, have to be. That's good 'cause then we get members. Members turn into volunteers; volunteers turn into members; probably about equal.

I was going to say, meanwhile, when all this was going on, I think in '97, '98 – '97, I think, the YW National was going through their huge change. Very big. And I was getting calls as the Board President because we weren't in compliance. We had no money, and we're saying the Board is running this place right now, we're gonna get through it; we'll be okay. Well, (National said) Board shouldn't run that place. You should just hire yourself an Executive Director. I said, so does National have money to give us for hiring an Executive Director? If you do that's fine. Well, no, we don't actually but we'll come out and visit, see how you're doing. [So, she says:] 'Could you pick me up at the airport and find me a place to stay?' And you know, it's like another piece that we didn't really need at that time. I wasn't very nice to them just because. But it changes my view now of what the YW can do for folks [YWCA's] who are in trouble, and one of them is not to make them jump through hoops and spend money and, you

know, do all of that stuff. Anyway, she finally came and wasn't very helpful. She said, Oh! Because I think at one time we had about 1,000 bucks in the bank, you know, and that was right around the time that they [National] were wanting dues. She said, oh, well, it looks like the Board has a good plan, so they kept in touch. Another networking thing: I met some very nice folks. I went to a couple of their [YWCA] trainings and met some very nice folks that I could call and say okay, this is what's happening, now what?

But ultimately the Y decentralized, I guess you would say, and changed into, how many regions, Jo? Are there nine? Yes, nine regions nationwide. And it's been really good especially for, I mean probably for every region it's been really good, but the Northwest Region has gotten together. I know all the other Executive Directors. I can call any of them any time and get help. It's been much better than it was; they used to (require you) to go to somewhere far away from the West Coast for training Had to do that. It was expensive. And you were out of compliance if you didn't send one or two people at least. And it was really top-down stuff. We used to get boxes of information about kids' athletics programs that we couldn't use, and boxes of this, and boxes of that. Other programs were quite good. I mean the Encore [breast cancer recovery] program was good, and there were things that worked, so it took a while to get transitioned out of that. It's been a good transition, but it took lots of meetings with lots of people. You know, it was the first time I ever went to Texas. Where was I? In Dallas, I guess. It was a whole weird place. I think they had 4,000 people show up or something like. I think there were that many.

(Jo) You were talking about money and money is a constant. Like networking, money is a constant in the history of the Y and I guess all non-profits. You've come back, the Y came back, from a time when it was down to the last \$1000 to this past year when we actually had slight surplus and that's..

Well even in operations.

(Jo) Even in operations and that's the first time in all the time that you've been with the Y.

Pretty much in operations. Yeah, we saved the money when we did Dorothy Place and they [Opportunity Council] bought the property from us, we did save that chunk. And we had a few more, we had two or three lucky donations, sizeable donations, so we would have never had to close the doors because we had some backup by 2000, I guess. But the operations was always running at a slight deficit, so that's taken a while to get that (surplus). But mostly that's because the Executive Director says no to everything [laughing]. It's making me a little nervous these days because we forget the days when we had to say no to everything.

Let me ask you another question, we may be reaching into the past too much but the story of the 80s was like this too. The story of the 80s had deficits in the early period,

the early part of the decade, and they borrowed from something called this Soo...oh what was her name?

Oh, Lim Bong Soo?

Ling, Lim yeah, Lim...Bon

Yeah, I think its B.O.N.G. Yeah, She... I didn't know they did that, I didn't think...how they could do that because that was a...?

That's the question, how could they? And she was apparently still living.

Oh well. So maybe...okay.

So maybe they asked her if maybe they could do that.

Okay.

[End of Tape 1]

(You) seem to know about the Lim Bong Soo Trust.

Well there's a trust and we still are part heirs of the trust, beneficiaries of the trust. Was it Alice Richards [Residence/Deputy Director, 1969-82] who first connected with Lim Bong Soo? I forget. Anyway, she remembered them at the Y in her will, and we get reports every year about the trust. We don't get anything from the trust until the primary beneficiary dies. There's a woman who's being supported quite a bit by it. I don't think fully but...So we get reports every year and it makes us look quite wealthy in our profit and loss statement or our balance sheet 'cause it's, I don't know, several hundred thousand I think. Three hundred, I forget, [to Jo] did you look lately? I haven't looked; it goes up and down depending on how stocks are. So anyway... and I didn't know they borrowed from it, I didn't know you could. That's a good thing.

Apparently she was still alive, so they wrote to her 'cause they had a lot of discussion, too. There wasn't any information as to how much was in it, it was just a fund but apparently she was okay with it.

We have files in there, I'm sure it says.

(Jo) I think it's mentioned in the Medina or the Murdock grant (request).

Well probably. We had to mention a trust.

And it was stipulated that they had to repay what they borrowed. I have no idea how that happened.

I don't either. Well, Dorothy and Ray Giesecke came up with a chunk of money in the 80s too and it was like 40,000 bucks. And Ray came in one day, I knew him but not well, came in here when we were doing Dorothy Place, and he said 'I want to see the minutes of all the meetings' and I let him. I think he was trying to figure out what had happened to the 40,000 bucks because the Y came very close to closing up, which would have...Dorothy Place would not have happened, you know, it was just...that was sometime during that period. So anyway, there were lots of money things that came through from the 80s. There were bank accounts all over. There were five or six bank accounts where they had put money to try to keep from accessing it. You know what I mean? Different savings accounts in different places. When we got Cindy Landers on (as accountant) we got that. And, well, we had some really good women on the Board, too, who were really good with money. Mary Shea was very good. There were several that were really good, that really started getting it clear what we needed to do and get all the policies in place. We had some really good Board people that got that going so...

And there was a point in the mid-80s when they somehow managed to get themselves in a slight surplus situation again which was a cause for rejoicing. I haven't found anything about...

How that happened? I don't know.

No, and also how. Now Dorothy was on the Board and Executive Director in the late 80s wasn't she?

Yes, I believe so.

Okay and how they got back to that point again of being almost going under...

Maybe because then they did some work on the building. That was when Carol Welch of Horizon Bank was on the Board. There were several of them and they did some fund raising and there was Rotary support and various things. And they repaired the pillars on the front of the building, which were, you know, were really doing badly and that was about the same time they cut down those huge trees that were in the front of the building. That was on the front page of the *Herald*, 'City goes to the Y and says don't disturb the trees.' The Y did it anyway; it was damaging the building. That was one of those things that was kind of a kick. And they did some...so that was when they had the surplus and I think it was just in the 90s they did some work on the ballroom and they did some work on those pillars that was just...

Was that when they painted the ballroom? Because I know they painted it.

I think so; yes, they did.

And everything to do with a big building like that is so expensive now.

Yes it is and they did a good job; lasted a long time.

Well I don't have any more questions at this point that I can see...

[Looking at photos and book outline] These are headlines here, 'United Way funds cut to local...'

This is kind of my chapter outline.

[Looking at photo] Diana Ward, I didn't know it was arthritis that she has, is that right?

(Jo) No, it's a degenerative muscle disease, it's really a rare disease, right, it's been 20 years and it's progressive.... [Diana Ward, who taught swimming and led the Encore program for many years died June 2, 2009 of polymyositis.]

Okay, 'cause I was reading something in the paper.

[Tape stops briefly]

Okay, this is the pool [Lynne hands Julie a photo] *and you did have an analysis in the 90s?*

Yeah, when I was there in 97/98, because we wanted to know whether to make it part of the remodeling. And so anything I could find out said it was too expensive to do so. We started talking about maybe it would be a rehab pool – could we do that? – even more expensive and, on top of that, who would use it and who would pay for it and how would we...? So ultimately, yeah, financially it was ridiculous and, ultimately, what made everybody happy is that I talked to Kathy Buckley at the Bellingham Athletic Club. She was about to open a new facility and she agreed that we could hold classes there, teach classes there, and have low-cost classes, not just for athletic club members. So we had a very nice agreement. But then she didn't go ahead with the new facility and her own facility, the pool on Meridian, is so heavily used it wasn't something that we could do. But you know that made everybody happy at the time that we would be able to.

The worry was that people who couldn't afford it, especially aging folks and Social Security folks, didn't have access to any kind of pool so... It's still in the back of my head. I think I want to go to St. Joe's [St. Joseph's Hospital annex] up the hill on South Campus and see if we can't get a way to use their pool – which is not used all the time – to run classes. But that's a little wishful thinking, way down the road thing, because there's still some of the older women who don't have access without having to run around 9-year-old boys pushing them over. So it's one of those things... That's why the pool was so special. It was really for the older women. I mean, it used to be that it was a

great pool because it was warm. And it was the boys liked it just as well as the girls, and lots of people learned how to swim there. Then it just needed work; it needed to be brought up to code, it needed lots of things and how are you going to get your money back on that.? That was one of the other things that just poured money out of the Y was that pool. It cost me a chunk of money to get rid of all the chemicals.

(Jo) I haven't made an extensive search on the Web but I get the impression that a lot of YWCA pools have closed over the years and they're very few left.

Yeah, there aren't, and I think Spokane gave up theirs too

(Jo) Tacoma's is a big hole. I don't know about Seattle and Portland

Seattle has one, but I don't think Portland has one. Well that's the thing after all those years they were there forever, to upgrade them was amazing. I mean, ours I don't think was even safe as it was. They dove in that pool, and I think, it's what, 7 feet deep maybe at the most in one place? I don't know why they didn't have serious problems with it all those years...

Well actually I talked to Pat O'Brien who mentioned -- actually she sent me an email I've been using -- but she said in the 60s I think it was, they took out the diving board. And we have so many, as you know, photos from the 20s, the 30s, the post-war period, the 50s of people on the diving board and she said they took it out in the 60s because the pool wasn't deep enough and it was dangerous.

Right. I saw that it was gone, of course, but the fact that they had had one was kind of amazing, plus the chemical thing was huge. They spent a lot of time getting those chemicals balanced all the time because you had to have people doing so. When I came on I thought now I'm going to find out how much it costs to have that done automatically. Well that's huge. By the time it got to be, back when I was looking 10 years ago, would have been way over ½ million dollars to get it to some kind of useable... and even then, not useable for too many things 'cause there's not enough room down there for a pool. If you go down there, you'll see that we did expand it to the left. We moved the wall so that it would give a wider edge on one side which would have been sort of almost to code. But otherwise we really couldn't get it to code. And if it was going to be a rehab pool there were other problems involved so... We did get the elevator to go down there [during the 2000-02 renovation]. But it took a lot of work to make people happy that we weren't going to do it [have a pool] again or to understand why we weren't going to do it again. It's another one of those things that just goes on and on and you get another call, another report, where we finally hired I think it was Barron or somebody to do a study on it to make sure that we weren't wrong. And we went to all the physical therapists in town to see if they would use it and pay for it if we did [reopen] it. Well (they said) 'maybe.' Oh, it was going to be another pour-money-in-a-hole kind of thing. It took a long time to get past that but I'm certainly glad we did.

Okay, I don't think I have any more questions

Good!

*At this point And I do feel you're accessible so if I need... [everyone talking at once]
the ice is broken...[everyone talking at once]*

Yes. I mean, I've got so many files, I've got this big book of stuff I did keep on reports and analysis and all that kind of stuff.

[End of tape 2]