

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

**Interviewee:** Roseanna Stilwell Page, YWCA Executive Director (1972-1978)

**Interviewer:** Dr. Lynne Masland, YWCA Centennial history chair

**Date:** June 3, 2008

**Place:** Jo's home at 3813 Fraser, Bellingham

**Transcriber:** Lori Torres

**[Lynne shows Roseanna photos to be used in the book, "One Hundred Years of Challenge and Change: Whatcom Women and the YWCA of Bellingham."]**

**(Roseanna)** These pictures reminded me of the feeling I had all of the time because some times you sit in a chair and you don't know where the money will be to pay the next bills, much less the payroll. And I could feel the prayers of the women who had come before me and these women who set up the Y. Over the years I think there was a lot of prayerfulness. And I came to the Y because my prayer had been could I find a place to work where I could grow and serve. And so I felt that I could feel the strength of that prayer supporting the YW. Even in the 70s, I felt the congruence or the continuity of that prayerfulness so I didn't expect to be hit by everything [laughing].

*I'm sure there were many prayers said over the century to keep this organization going.*

Yes and finding the right form. **[Looking at another photo]** And here's the employment bureau, see I didn't know about that. When I came, one of the things I did was give talks to the women about what they thought was needed in the 70s. Earla Swift, who worked at the community college, she thought one of the things that was needed was economic support, that more and more women were needing to work and that getting women into employment was important. And [Board member] Phyllis Jones (and) some other people had already started some things like that with young single mothers who were getting their GED [General Education Degree – a high school equivalent]. They'd come to the Y and have a support group and social life and free swimming passes and you know they'd get donations through the community for them and then the community college had a GED teacher for them. So that was one economic thing.

Anyway, that was one of the projects that we did. It wasn't one of the first ones but we started to look at economic things.

*[Jo] Could we talk about that for just a moment? You said that more young mothers were working or I think you said needed to work, what....*

More women in general needed help finding work and then I switched to the program, it was called Options, YWCA Options, and maybe Phyllis (Jones) has told you about that.

*No, but I have a letter from Anne Brown about it. At that time she was a nurse and she's working in some capacity with young teenage mothers who didn't have high*

*school GEDs and, didn't you know, were struggling. So did the Options program come out of that?*

Yes, and it was happening already when I came. I remember it as a program that Phyllis did very well. She was like the program person on the Board. I'd like to back up a bit because one of the first – you probably know the context – when I came the Y had just been sort of rescued because (Board President) Mary (Robinson) had organized selling a piece of property that the YW owned to the courthouse...

*And that was a financial rescue.*

Yes, yes.

*And that property had not been held very long because in the 60s they acquired it.*

I didn't know that.

*Oh that's down at the end of the block.*

I'm interested in it. Well, when you have time I'll read that bit [in the book]. So when I came, there was the residence pool and a few exercise classes and somebody who worked with youth, and I can't remember what that was, and Options.

*Was that (the youth program) Y Teens?*

I don't know. Alisa Keefer did it and I can't...I don't know, Alice [Richards, YWCA staff member 1969-82] or Phyllis maybe. I can't recall, I think I was pretty overwhelmed when I came. But the reason I came was because when I came for my interview, so many people came to meet me. It wasn't just with two people or something, I had a meeting with the personnel committee and, you know, staff made me welcome. And then there was this big open time, and people could meet me, and I still remember some of those women. And when I went back home and thought about it, I thought I would never ever in my whole life get an opportunity to meet with, to work with women like that again. The breadth of interest and commitment of a party of women at this Y was incredible and they had humor and welcomingness, and they sat around in that big ballroom, and I was taken from table to table to meet them, and we sat, and we talked a bit, and I mean when else do you have that happen? And nobody was trying to find a fault with me, they just cared about the Y, and they wanted to know if I might care about it enough to, you know? So I never felt like, I don't know how to explain it, like you're the head of a company or something without a strong support and a strong board, you have to be in charge but I didn't feel like that. It was like it was always a team and I know people say terrible things about women working together but I hardly ever experienced it.

So Alisa Keefer came to see me – she was in her 20s – and she said, when the Y program had started to grow, she said I suddenly understand a bit more about why the program wasn't growing too much in the last few years 'cause [Executive Director] Sybil [Tucker]

had gotten older and she said I [Alisa] had no idea how much energy it took just to allow things to happen. And I have to say a lot of what I felt happened is I sat and allowed things to blossom. Alice told me that Sybil said something once which is that this is a different time for women, still in the 70s women were burgeoning. But anyway, she could still see the truth of what Sybil had said which is that if women in their personal life didn't have a big enough, like a platform or space to be that, then the YW could become that and I heard...

I need to talk a bit about the national Y too. I heard a speaker at the national YW training session say that she was now bursar of this state university system in NY and she thought she found the courage, the willingness to take on this extraordinary job that women had never had before because when she was young she had been at a series of YW programs from when she was a child in daycare to through the teens. And she said she saw extraordinary women doing things as if they were ordinary. And that's it I think.

**[20-second gap in tape, tape commences at count 120]**

*Mary Robinson once said to me, she said, you know the tide doesn't turn in your direction very often, but if you find it running in your direction paddle it as far and as fast as you can go because it won't last, and I remembered that.*

What a good mentor she is.

*Remarkable, yes.*

*Because under you, or while you were there, the YWCA became extraordinarily active. The programs that started at the Y in the 70s, most of them are still in action, have been taken over by other groups. But for example, the Encore program, which I know was a (YW) National initiative for breast examinations and talking about breast cancer, we take for granted now. We all get our mammographies once a year or whatever and we take it for granted that you can talk about it and so forth but in those days it was a forbidden subject as was rape. And battering.*

Boy, didn't we learn a lot.

*But those programs did flourish during your time.*

In the first couple months I was there, National Y sent a woman or two – and very experienced women – to help and one of them said money doesn't go to needy organizations it goes to promising programs, and if you have..You know Phyllis (Jones) used to quote that all the time. She and I loved program, and we could find lots of ideas, and I had had experience writing grants in previous jobs and there was suddenly money and all these things came. But what would happen, I think generally, I think is people would get interested in something or we would hear there is money and we would consider it. Which is the program you just asked about before?

### *Encore.*

So if you could talk to Joyce Bush, but she's under Joyce and Terry Bush in the phone book. She read about it in the national news magazine from the YW, and she had several connections with the issue and a degree as a P[hysical] E[ducation] teacher and training in group work and counseling and a personal interest in supporting women in this issue. And we had that wonderful pool which we could keep warm. So she came by and said could she look into that and see what was involved, and then she made a presentation to the Board. And this is an example – you see, this is another thing – this is a time when women were understanding that they could talk honestly with each other and support each other. And we also take, I mean that's mainstream now, but we did a lot of that at the Y. And it was the quality of the coordinators, the organizers, the teachers, whatever. And I have to say we had some severe objections from the Cancer Society and one woman, the woman who was the head of it, came and lost her temper at Joyce and me. This was after it was established; we were getting lots of referrals, the women loved to come. They would have exercise in the pool and a meal or conversation and Joyce went to the national training program and she did a wonderful job and this woman just...

### *(Jo) What was the objection?*

We should not pay attention to such things; we should not encourage people to pay attention to these things; we should just...had to live like it didn't happen basically. And it's very hard to put our minds back [to that time]. I mean it really is. Anyway, that was really hard. And after Joyce stopped doing it, Diana Ward did it, and I don't know who took it over from her 'cause I wasn't here. She [Diana] told me once when I came for a visit [from England] but anyway.

So Encore, and then, let's see, so then we also beefed up our classes so that we had support-group classes, and I can remember finding out that how we called the class was really important. You know, we hired someone just to be the coordinator of the pool; she was a lifeguard and she was so good, and that's Susan Patay Lancaster, and she's still in town. And I remember a friend of mine, who was on the staff and on the Board alternately, said Susan taught me how to have a calendar and really be organized. And anyway we had lots more classes, phys-ed kinds of ones, swimming ones and then we started having other ones. And Linda Lambert came, and she taught how to put together a newsletter. Anyway, by the time we started doing the parenting classes and things, I hired somebody from the University of Seattle who authored a book on assertiveness, and my deal was that people could have the course free if they would then teach it at the YW free, and most of them did that. But when we called it assertiveness, people didn't come. But when we changed the name to *How To Say No Without Feeling Guilty*, we got enrolled. And when we had parenting classes, they weren't too interested, but when we said *How To Survive Your Teenager's Adolescence*, we had a lot of people. And that was a time that was more toward the end of when I was here. And there were counselors – we didn't have to train them, they just wanted ways to meet people. So early on, a minister's wife told me about Cheryl Hockett so we started having massage. That was also new, and so we had a massage room and people could book massages – in a reputable place.

*(Jo) I'd like to see that come back*

I would too.

*I used to go, we (the YW) used to also have a sauna, and it was a wonderful place to have a woman's sauna, it just felt so comfortable.*

Thank you for that because I got some flack for that too, but not a lot. I have to say most of the people were so excited. So I'm going to tell you what else Phyllis did

*Now that was Phyllis Jones?*

Um hmm, she (was) doing Encore and – not Encore but Options. But she had...I didn't know Brown Bag was a generic term then, I just thought it was a Phyllisism title, Brown Bag Lunches every Tuesday. And we'd set up tables around the ballroom and have speakers. And I can remember going once when Terry Bush came; he was a new physiotherapist in town; he would tease the women. But sometimes they were about current affairs, and sometimes they were about health or family issues and things like that. And then she (Phyllis) also had this wonderful cooking thing, so every year we'd have a series of people coming and demonstrating something and how to cook something, and I can remember bagels and potato pancakes are two. But she had this outgoing personality and if she'd meet somebody who was from a different culture, she would say, "what do you like to cook and could you come?" So we got this cultural mix as well as the cooking. And you know now people are charging 30 and 40 dollars and this was, you know, a pittance and then you got to take home or sometimes we'd sit down. I remember a lot of women making pies for different dinners and things. If we were having anything (an event), we'd have homemade food and lots of women bringing pies. I don't remember all the occasions, but we had a lot more use of the room I think. Where the offices are now were meeting rooms. Most of the time so we had two lounge rooms at the end of the hallway, one on the right and one on the left and it could be made big, like for Options, or we could draw the partition and then...

*Can we talk about Rape Relief for a little bit 'cause I have a photo and I also have an oral history interview with a woman that I interviewed [the late Geneil Chevalier]. She's in her mid-80s at least and she was not terribly connected with the YWCA, as it turned out, but she was very interesting in terms of her background on local conditions. And she said tellingly she worked as a secretary for, I think, the police department; had done this for several years probably from the 50s on. And she commented that then rape had not existed as a crime, that was the thing that she noticed a lot and mentioned in this tape. It wasn't until the 70s that she started seeing this as a crime on the police blotter and she said, "Well, we know it occurred it just wasn't dealt with until".....*

Until we came along? That makes me [indistinct]. Sometimes you just do what's in front of you and you don't..... It probably started with the availability of grant money 'cause

we could hardly manage. I will say that I think I got the endorsement of the police – we had a really old-fashioned police chief. And you know it isn't seemly to mention this, but I can remember talking at the Board: You know there is this money and I can write the grant and we could have a coordinator. We could get some admin money to support [a program] like for a secretary, for a phone line and a coordinator, but we would have to get volunteers to do the phones and go to the trials and things. And we did that and, you know, the Board was supportive; there was not any negative comment on it. But I tell you what happened to everybody that was there – that night – as soon as they mentioned it to anybody that our kitchen tables were suddenly hostessing people who had been a victim of violence. It came as soon as the next day one of the Board members showed up at mine, and so we were talking about her experience and in walked my next-door neighbor. I mean these are both women who had families and positions of respect and had never talked about it and suddenly there's this woman and in her situation it had been worse because it had been a relative as a child. It opened Pandora's Box. And so we so what do we do. We hired Judy Simmer, have you run into her?

*I know who she is but I don't know if she's in town anymore.*

She'd already left before I left; she'd gone to Colorado I think. She and her husband, who was a teacher at the college, broke up. She was a very strong, able woman and I can't remember her academic background but she knew enough to get the right kind of training for the volunteers and that was really good. And that brings me to how we got into the mental health

*Ah yes, that was going to be one of my other...*

Which was before Rape Relief. But just before I came, the State closed the mental hospitals with this fantasy that there was care in the community.

*Wasn't that a Reagan fantasy?*

*[Talking over each other: comments on origin of cuts]*

So have you heard the story of how we got the grant? So this is probably one of the major reasons why I don't remember what was going on in the youth program (laughing) 'cause it was sort of taking care of itself. But because we had low-income housing, suddenly these women [mental patients] appeared at the Y to stay, and we had a mix of students and women new to town, you know that kind of thing. And these women would show up and their behavior was unusual. One used to shout through the night and make other people nervous.

Alice [Richards, Housing Director] is imperturbable. She grew up with a lot of brothers, but she was only there daytimes, and she had a lot of other things to do, and although I had some training in counseling, this was different. It was night and day different from the three of us [Lynne, Jo and herself] sorting each other out. Then there was – Alice probably read in the paper or something – anyway that there was, (that) the state was

going to set up a local mental health community board and giving it some money to help this transition. So we asked for some money. We needed it.

And meanwhile we were calling the mental health clinic, and Don Berg was the director then and he... Things can work if people want them to, you know, and he asked some questions. He or his staff people did, I don't know who it was. We had to call out the emergency team often enough that they started to meet with us, and this is before we got a grant. They had a woman psychiatric social worker and a woman psychiatric nurse and he made them available to us once a fortnight. So one week we would have a staff meeting which was staff meeting and the next week we would have a staff meeting thing about how to manage, how to cope, how to understand, how to help; how to give these women support, and that was wonderful. That was Rena Ziegler and somebody else. I can't remember her name; it's embarrassing. Toward the end, Kathy Brown got involved, but anyway the doctors were Gene Rondeau and Nate Kronenberg and so this is how it was; you know there would be somebody with a problem and you think: who might have some support? And I can remember leaving the Y and driving up the hill to the Campus Christian Ministry house because I would ask a Catholic priest, this woman was Catholic. Anyway I was going up to see him about it, and I was pondering this, and what I understood about life is that is all you can do is follow the next step. I didn't know how I was going to solve this problem but none of us knew. But I had had this thought (to see the priest) and maybe that was all I could do for this moment.

***Was the mental health program Murphy House?***

***(Jo) No, that was the [alternative to] jail [residential program]***

***Did the mental health program have a name?***

Yes, I think so. Alice might remember if we gave it a name, but you can't really say, "Well we have some residents who were in it who can't get dressed or fall down the stairs 'cause they want attention and the ambulance to come rescue them or"...

***(Jo) There wasn't a separate facility? It was, they were residents in the Y mixed in with the other residents. That doesn't quite come through in the newspaper articles and the things that I've seen and I was trying to figure out where was this separate facility. But there was none, okay? I wanted to be clear on that.***

That's why it was so really hard 'cause sometimes what we had to do was support the other women, sometimes we had to decide if we could have this woman and I can – they always had real problems. One came to my house on a Friday and she wouldn't leave til.....

**[Byplay about cookies on the table]**

So, anyway in a way, because it was quite obvious that we were trying to be an integrated facility for everybody who came. They might come for belly dancing or a parenting class

and they'd see us and it really got to, you know, a lot of thoughtful people. I mean people would pour though that lobby every day. And they could see, but okay. So here's one thing that happened that one night that woman [from National who] was saying money follows promising programs [was speaking], so we were expecting a lot of people to come – board members and former board members and potential [board members] – to talk to this woman. Somebody came down, and she said she thought that somebody tried to kill themselves. So Alice went upstairs, and then she came downstairs, and she said we have to call the ambulance. This was before we had funding, and the ambulance... I have to say to you we have many wonderful funny stories about the women who stay at the Y and this is, you know maybe we should be telling the funny delightful stories more.

**[Laughter and byplay about wanting to hear funny stories]**

And this was when I understood that I wasn't carrying the can alone because when the ambulance is there, about dinner time, in front of the building. So what happens, in walks Mary Robinson (longtime board member): "I was driving, saw the ambulance could I help?" In walks Charles Kress, whose wife had been active on the board, and he was later on the Board of Trustees: "What's going on, can I help?" It just was like, alright I'm the woman to leave [or, possibly lead, can't distinguish]. But it was a bit hard to know whether I should go to the hospital with her or wait for the meeting, and somebody did go to the hospital and I went to the meeting.

So how did we get the funding? This is such a good story; this is a delightful story to me. Vivian somebody was the head of this mental health committee, and she kept turning us down, and we kept saying really we have this and talk to the people at the mental health clinic and blah, blah, blah. So eventually she said, "We'll come meet with you, we'll come to the Y and meet with you." So, meanwhile, one of the women was this very petite, very beautiful woman. She always presented herself nicely. She lived in the alcove, and we had had many encounters. And the law was these people have the same rights of choice as anybody because they had medication didn't... But her brothers showed up, her big brothers, and wanted to take her home and she said she didn't want to go. And so I'm trying to deal with them, and finally I said I'm going to get a staff member who's in charge of the residence because I was intimidated. And I went in and said Alice – and she looked at me, and she said I have five brothers, I'm not afraid of them [laughter]. So she came, and we were talking to them and then what happened...

Oh, so then we had to find the on-call person who was a public health nurse named Esther; I can't remember her last name. And it just happened: We were all in this lobby, Esther, two or three big brothers, this woman, Alice and me and then a few people who were watching. And Esther said she was the legal person so she had the right to because she was part of this mental health, and she was saying to this woman, do you want to go? And in walks this committee who were reviewing funding, and they got to see the whole bloomin' scene which involved Esther having to take this woman's hand and shield her from menacing brothers. Anyway, we were given the money to have a half-time psychiatric social worker work with the residents. So that was all timed to a T by some synchronistic organizer in [looks heavenward]



***The budget committee was the funding organization, not just the YWCA budget committee?***

No, that was supplemental health, the mental health community support board or whatever.

***(Jo) So that was the local group that had the State funds funneled through.***

[Nods yes] Well, I think a lot of funding was cut you know, and partly why we had this is that we had a few employment programs. We had the [Women's] Trade Center and one [program] to go to the high schools to talk to kids, to girls, about work options, and it was funded through the local employment people. You know the State gave the local community budgets. I don't imagine they do that anymore.

***No, but that program has a descendent which is the Road Less Graveled out at BTC which is still going***

***(Jo) Sure does. Were both the trade school, the one at the trade center, and the one at the high school state funded?***

Through the local employment program. I had been a member of that board and had to resign when we got the funding

***So speakers went to high schools and talked to them about non-traditional occupations?***

Well it was more than that; it was just how are you going to find your way to work and how to find what suits you. During that time there was some public funding, it was like a work training

***Oh CETA?***

***[Comprehensive Employment & Training Act of 1973 providing on-the-job training for low-income people who were assigned to non-profits]***

Yes, and we had a lot of those to the point where Phyllis used to say our staff is part of their program because they were people who need training. When I came, somebody had organized to get work done by a – they were just beginning to do [court-ordered] community service [as part of sentencing] – by a builder and he had a some drunk driving, lost his license or went to jail or something, and blah, blah, blah. And so he re-laid the floor in the dressing rooms when he had surplus concrete, and that was really a great help, and that was the beginning of our having people for community service. Then Murphy House grew out of that because it was quite – more and more women were working you know – and sometimes their crimes were sufficient or their home life was dreadful enough or something and they had to be separate, so that's when we set up the

program. Other than that, I mean Katie had been a wonderful President of the Board. She'd been on the board...

***Katie Murphy?***

Um hmm. And for some reason, she really responded to this program, and she was virtually the supervisor of that program because by then the staff had grown so much and there weren't any intermediate middle-layer managers, and I couldn't supervise everybody. And I think Susie Cosgrove was involved in that; she may still be around, I don't know. I think she married somebody named Rayburger but I don't know if they're still together.

***Somebody mentioned all these grants when we had our Eco Action board or group interview which was just a sketch. You would have loved it. It was wonderful. But they mentioned that you were managing at least five grants at once.***

Yeah. Yeah. I learned something in retrospect which is everybody's nature is good for a certain size or certain situations, and I had really reached my level, had already reached my level. You know I already should have had somebody else before I left I think. So what were the grants? Rape Relief, the alternative to jail (Murphy House)?

***That was it?***

There was the Trade Center.

***Was that the community service program? And did you have a mental health grant?***

Yes.

***(Jo) What about Encore, was that a?...How was Encore funded?***

It wasn't an expensive program because Joyce and Diana were volunteers, so it was just like free swimming and free use of whatever room they had their lunch in and probably the sauna.

***(Jo) And for the Options what's that?***

That was locally funded. Some things didn't last, were only a few years.

***(Jo) A lot of it appears going back -- and Lynne knows better than I do -- that pretty much all of that funding dried up at the end of that decade, the end of the 80s***

I think that's probably true, I know that after the Rape Relief money, the original stuff dried up, then we got a grant from the city to continue it for a while. That was about the time I left; when I left there was a future source of money for it, but I don't know if that actually happened or if the program ended; by then Judy had gone and I don't remember

who was managing.

***(Jo) When you talk about Rape Relief are you also talking about domestic violence or are they two separate...?***

No, my memory about DV is that the residence is open to women and children with, you know, who have suffered from it and Lydia Place, an off-shoot of that, grew out of that. I can remember we had men and children in the residence. Sometimes we took in homeless families. This was before the 80s, and in the 80s people are supposed to somehow fend for themselves and live on the street. So we had an extreme amount of flexibility, and Alice had very good judgment; and sometimes we would have the men because the Salvation Army asked us, or sometimes we'd phone the Salvation Army and say what's going on? And Al Archer was at the Lighthouse Mission, and if it seemed better to those people – Alice and Al and the Salvation Army – not to split up the family, you know, it's just ...so and I'm not the best person to talk to. Mary was involved in the early board of Lydia Place and...

***Mary Robinson?***

Um hmm. But board members I remember were both involved in the YW [and Lydia Place], and that the other two have moved and I don't know how to find them, but Alice or Phyllis or Mary may know more.

***Okay, and I know Mary so I can easil...***

I think, but I'm not sure about this, but I think the YW got a second residence for battered women and their children. Oh I'm sorry, I just don't....I can't remember....

**[Tape stops for an indeterminate time, probably 20-40 seconds]**

***(Jo) It all depends on the people; you can't do anything without the people. Well, I wanted very much to get back to that question of what happened. Why was it that the 70s were what they were? I have some thoughts of my own, but I'm far more interested in what you think. What happened, how far back did it go, why in this particular place, was it just part of the whole national trend or is there something different in Bellingham? Well, four or five questions.***

I think some of it was going on everywhere, but there weren't very many places where this much was going on at once, and I think part of that had to do with the community because there aren't many places with the size. Bellingham was about 45,000, and the County another 45,000. We had a daily newspaper, TV station, a university, a community college, a tech school, a great tradition of people being involved with the community. And at that time women had more space but also increasing energy, 'cause I can remember meeting a woman and she said "Oh yeah, I'm beginning to have some time; I'll have to go the YW and see if there's anything I can do." And the YW was a place where many women thought they might meet other women, and they might have

something that they could do that would be interesting or benefit them. So it would be hard to put all that into a community like Seattle or Portland, you know, where there were many more things. Indeed, in Bellingham now, there are many more things but still the same spirit of involvement is just wonderful. I think in the YW there is always this history, of tradition, of women looking at what's needed and tackling it. I don't think we knew anything different, we were just responding in a way, but I will say I think there was courage in the women who did it.

I think by and large the women who were involved in the YW trusted each other, and if they saw something that troubled them, they would look at it and they maybe thought is there anything we can do here? And I was really touched when Lynne said, until there was this awareness about rape, it didn't even show up in the crime blotter. That's pretty amazing to me because there were a lot of people who had that in their background – as I found out. So I don't know... Maybe there were also enough of us that somebody got really angry the way someone did at Encore, or people might think we were making too much of issues like rape or the need for housing or whatever, maybe we could just talk to each other and get support again.

One of the most wonderful experiences I had was at an executive committee meeting. By nature of people's time, most of these women – their youngest children would be teenagers already by this time, before they were on the board.

***(Jo) That's pretty much the pattern from the very start.***

So here I am sitting with, you know, there were maybe half a dozen of us, and I was the only one without children and I was probably the youngest – I was in my 30s – and there were women of very diverse backgrounds: People with and without advanced degrees, people from the town, the county, the reservation and different religious traditions, all in this room. Six people, maybe six, and one woman was distraught because of something that was happening in her family. We did no business that day, and I didn't open my mouth because I had nothing I could say. But every woman in that room had had a problem very much like this woman's, and it was all something that maybe in a nice family – that's in quotes – you wouldn't expect it to happen but it happens in everybody's families. But the thing that happened was every woman there was willing to tell the truth, and it didn't solve the woman's problem but she was no longer alone, and I believe that's the best thing we can do for each other...

***(Jo) Maybe that is the crucial point. That it was the coming together and the power of all of those women at the Y at that time, no matter what they may have been individually involved with but that sense of community was the key to the kingdom if you will. But, now, you promised me funny stories.***

We used to have a head resident there who was a retired retail clerk and, oh, she could entertain us. Her father had been a good storyteller and she was, too, about people coming down those grand stairs in their ball gowns and their bottoms stuck in the air...and I'll think some more about them (funny stories).

***(Jo) Well I loved your story about the committee walking in to the middle of a very graphic explanation of why...***

That was really great. I considered that the Holy Spirit myself. The timing of the whole process was incredible and there are some funny stories about people: One woman who liked to sleep under her mattress 'cause she felt more secure. But the funnier stories are the college kids and the new kids coming to town, and I haven't thought about them in a while but I will.

***(Jo) That was quite a mix of people. About how many people could the Y accommodate at that time?***

Well I don't know 'cause one of the things we did was put a kitchen on every floor so we took away two rooms that way, and we took one room for an office. I think I'd just have to go count. But we didn't have the laundry room upstairs and we didn't have as big a kitchen, so if you counted all the rooms and multiplied by two and then the alcove...

***(Jo) I was trying to figure out 'cause you didn't... There was an office upstairs.***

Only the last couple of years.

***(Jo) And at one time there were several offices up on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and the lounges were still lounges so I was trying to figure out where you put everybody.***

Alice probably will remember better because she and Julie [Foster, Executive Director since 1998] were... When we went around right before the [2008] annual meeting; she and Alice were talking about which of these rooms used to be bedrooms and which didn't, and she might remember the count. You know we used to have this board, and each person had a card so we could tell if the rooms were full or not, but I don't remember. I don't know why the number 36 came to mind, but it might have been 20. Well, it couldn't have been 'cause I think there are 8 in the alcove or 10.

***(Jo) Well nine now, we have 36 all together, we have nine on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and then 27 single rooms on 2 and 3.***

A good question would be to ask if they are all doubles, I don't know; my memory...

***(Jo) They might well have been, that size room in a college dormitory, at least when I was in college, would have been bunk beds so there would have been two.***

Me too but I'm not sure. But surely for families there would be more than one bed in the room.

**[End of tape 1]**

**[Tape 2 begins with Roseanna talking about the tape recorders being used.]**

***[Jo] What would you say was the greatest challenge that you faced or that the Y faced in the time that you were there or, for that matter, you sort of indicated finances were a bit of a problem.***

Oh yeah, yeah.

Well it was truly interesting. It seemed to always work out but...and we had lots of different ideas about fund raising, too. We started an auction, and we started the Y's Buys [thrift shop], and we researched whether we should do bingo and decided we couldn't cope with that. We had people who were willing to spend time but it wasn't something that interested most of us, and I think I told you that the smoking environment was a problem. So we passed that up and we're sorry we did in a way because we never thought to do what other people do which is hire someone to manage it. That's really interesting: We were still caught in this women thing of always doing it ourselves. So I had to learn to talk to groups. That was hard to me, and I never really got good at it, but it was essential, and I can remember the first year getting a bit sick before going to talk to church [or] women's groups and by then I was only sick if I had to talk to a really great big group. And I always wished I could to it with flair.

**[Side conversation about the performance of speakers at the 2008 Leadership Breakfast.]**

***[Jo] When I was on the board, in 88/89 probably, Y's Buys was still operating. That was a revenue thing and then....with the golf...***

But it turned out. Oh yes, I'll start at the golf tournament. Oh, and we started a run; we were the first run and it was called Y Run; that was a good name. No, we did things first. I think it was the...if it wasn't the first auction [in town] I would be surprised. It was in Jackie Mumma's house. Did you know Jackie Mumma? It's a big house on Forest, I think [the Alfred Black home]. And, very elegant and has a big room, and I think they staged plays there too. YTeens did things there but I didn't see Jackie very much, cause she's moved out in the County I think, so it's as if I rented your house. And Penny Berg, who is also part of Eco Action, started the auction. And she did it really well. So, and I can't remember who her co-chair was, it might have been Norma Schwartz. Norma has died but anyway, Penny's available; she's still here. She did a really good job. And then, that was to raise money and to have fun, and then Y's Buys turned out to be a program as well in that it was a good quality thrift shop at the time. It was on Champion or something, was it there when you?..

***[Jo] Yeah***

Well if you were on the Board then you knew Shirley Murray.

***[Jo] I was on the Board a very short time. I know of her.***

Well she was one of the ones who did the Y and got Lydia Place going, and then she was...after Trula Smith gave up Y's Buys, I think Shirley took it over and then eventually she took it to Lydia Place at 1607 [street not named]. And I don't know quite, this was after my time, but there was some...the more I think about it, the more I think we did rent a residence for battered women. That was quite close to the end of my time but somehow Dorothy Place came out of the YW and the Opportunity Council and then I don't know the story of that 'cause I was gone.

***[Jo] Yeah, the prime mover of that, I mean none of these things is ever just one person, but Dorothy Giesecke was the prime mover of Dorothy Place. She was on the Board, she was President, I think she was volunteer ED, and that was something that she wanted very, very badly to happen***

She was a wonderful woman, and she was a lifetime YW person.

***[Jo] from the age of 12.***

That's great.

***[Jo] What did you perhaps want to do? Considering all that was being done, was there something you wanted to do? Was there something you thought needed to be done that you couldn't do?***

Yeah, I never found the right avenue to serve and support women with young children; and it's really interesting because as soon as I had young children I could see things I could have done and, you know, we did talk about it. And Nadia Woodcock started a toy exchange and we did have a crèche (nursery school), and we built a playground that was taken over, it was on some of the land that Dorothy Place is now on.

One of the people that came to us through CETA (federally funded job training program), it was her job to try to work it out and sometimes people just have an instinct for program and sometimes they don't. But Nadia had young children, and that's why I was asking her; she was on the Board then, I think, or had phased out but the one CETA person didn't have children. You need somebody like that nurse who's working with teenage mothers or I mean like Hadiyah [Carlyle, a prime mover of the Women's Trade Center] just knew that people, women, needed help to get into the trades 'cause she'd been the pioneer. And that's one thing about the YW I think is really important. The way Hadiyah said it is: Every time it's easy for a woman to be somewhere, it's because a pioneer went before her. And so it's like pioneer programming isn't it? And if it works at Tech School or the Community College you know you can't recreate what worked in the past for the YW 'cause it's almost...you know, we don't have dance things 'cause there are dance schools and studios – and one right across the street – and the community college and the tech school have all these incredible classes. So does the Co-op and the Re Store. I wanted so badly to have, when we replaced the boiler in the 70's – the boiler took up the whole room and the new one only a little – and I wanted to outfit that so much with

tools and, like, a lot of sinks, and have somebody come teach women how to replace washers in the sinks, and things like that. And we did have a few classes; we had a woman come in to teach people how to replace window panes, and a few basic things on cars. And then my next dream was to get Shucks [Auto Supply] to have a class to have it for women so that we wouldn't feel too clumsy, and so that the YW would sponsor classes with a company. Somebody was already doing that with bicycles; here's a class on how to repair your bikes. I don't know if he was doing cars. But..., and I think one thing that we didn't...

In the 60s there were a lot of civil rights things, and now there are lots and lots of international things, and there's a difference between social service programs and whatever it is that...

I went to a series once a few years ago, and I was visiting (from England where she had lived for many years at the time of the interview), and it was about the Middle East, and I thought it was so important, that kind of education. And I tell you what I think there's a great need for now, and it's to help people talk to each other in this country. I just can't believe that...My son goes to, I don't know what they're called, but he goes to either Christ the King or Cornwall Church and they have incredible programs on a volunteer basis. And I went to a class there on grief, handling grief, and classes (on) setting boundaries. These are all classes that the YW would have had, you know, when I was there, I mean that kind of class. And they need to be done for non-church, you know, not through churches because everybody needs them or where people from all churches can meet and support each other. But as far as I can tell, the people from those churches are really involved in making a small community within a big community. And so the people from the Presbyterian and they [the other churches] may never meet, and then the people from no church and churches may meet/not meet, and I found the Y a place where I could live my Christian commitment really fully in a way that was ordinary and normal. But was still a kind of two of us, what the basis of what I wanted to be the basis. I mean nobody's life is safer or was motivated with prayer and guidance but we put our emphasis in that way.

And in the last election (2004), I could not believe the lack of willingness of people to talk to each other. It's scary, it's really scary, and certain words that used to be normal words are hot bones of contention. I haven't been here (in the States) so I didn't know what they are, and then I used them and somebody's away! Why are you away, I just was saying something normal [laughing] what's with this word now! So that's the future, I don't know...

***[Jo] Would you give me a list so I can avoid them?***

Yeah, so that's really bad.

***[Jo] I think that it's extraordinarily crazy. I've been mulling over in my head how do you do it, without turning that venue into a shouting match, it's tricky.***



Yes it is it's really tricky. So...

***[Jo] Of all the things that went on -- and you've kept very close touch even the geographic distance that you've been, you keep up with people you knew then. Of all the things, what do you think makes you the proudest of what was done during your time and what you think has had the most impact? May not be the same thing, maybe two different things.***

I think the thing I would probably be proudest about is if everyone who came through that door has felt welcomed and accepted or into any program, maybe not in that door. I think that is maybe our greatest need as human beings. I don't know what had impact. I remember hearing Andy Young talk once about the great sense of strength and vitality in the civil rights movement and then the anti-poverty movement, and how it seemed that if the tide was going to turn. And then how the election hung on one quarter of the percent of voters, and it went the other way and political arena changed, and these things got put on the back burner. And it's a lot of things that we worked really hard for in the 70s are on the back burner now; things like affirmative action and inclusion and a supportive society or I think I would mean by that, supportive. I don't think – at least that I was aware of – we weren't working for big political supportive things but to set in the culture that each group of people could have support. So if you've been raped you could have support. If you were a parent and overwhelmed you could have support. If you were a teenager, and that's one other thing we started was peer counseling in the schools. I just can't remember the last name of the woman that started that.

So, this is my take on 30 years later or 40 years later. Women have moved into independence a lot more in a sense that the employment thing and the education issues have worked but then there's kindness. I don't know – on a personal level there's an inordinate amount of kindness in this community, but on a bigger level there appears to be a lot of desperation. They are the things – what do you do about house prices, what do you do about somebody shooting through your house and you have kids...so things are changing faster and faster.

***[Jo] Yeah, I was reading it was a science piece in the NY Times this morning about the acceleration of technological change and how long it took, let's say computers, to become accessible really, and then how long it took to be miniaturized, and it's a geometric progression where 10 years becomes one year becomes 10 minutes and that may be part of our sense of desperation. We're running so hard to catch up it keeps running away from us..***

Yes, yes, and on a political level, there's that same issue. I think when my older boy was a teenager, so somewhere between 10 and 14 years ago, he said to me, Mom, do you know why people of my generation are angry at their parents, besides what you did to us personally, and he said cause you're not leaving us any world to live in. And so I said, "Nick, everyone we know is working to make everything better." And he says to me, yes and you all lost. And that's more and more true I think you know, well it will get into a political discussion...

*[Lynne] let's turn off the tape [laughing]*

But I didn't know if there was anything more.

*[Jo] well before we do that and before we get into the political discussion, if there's something that you would like to have remembered that we haven't had the wit to ask, something that comes to your mind about that time, about the Y in general, about anything related to women's lives, to the Y to your time in Bellingham that you think is important for people reading this book to know.*

This is maybe not for the book but it's for women who are working hard to keep the Y going and it's...I'm not very good at images but it's almost like keeping a torch going, because the sense that women have strength and that discounting women's problems or reality is normal and correct. That sense of discount's wrong, and the way I read the world is, for our culture, it's endemic and the thing, you know, it's like all the difficulty that went into starting and maintaining the Y through this century, the grace that came from it, the benefit that came to it from women and from our family, it's really important and as much as we can continue it and there's always this place to assemble the possibility of women coming together. And it's true that a lot of other programs are done now by other people.

I'll tell you a story about me which is when my children were young I found myself in Santa Cruz, California, and I wanted to find a child care center so that I could have some time without children so that I could take advantage of some medical treatments. And so I was reading up about the daycare centers, and there's one that said parents could have free time in exchange for volunteer hours. So of course I went there, and when I got there I thought this is no ordinary place; the teachers were as aware of the parents as they were of the children. And after I had done a lot of volunteer hours, they said, "How come you're not taking any break?" and I said, "Well, I'm saving them until I had blocks of so and so 'cause I had to get on the bus and go so and so, and then have a few hours and then a few hours back, and I want my children to be really settled before I'd done that." And they accepted that, and then it worked really well.

Then after a few months they came to me and said we have an agreement with some center; they're starting a new series of parenting classes, and we'd like to send a few people from (our) center. Could we go? So I went to the parenting classes, which is very different. I had set up parenting classes but it's very different to be a parent and have them, it's wonderful, absolutely wonderful. So, lo and behold, guess what? This daycare center had been set up by a YW and they had, just that year that I went there, handed it over to the parks department so it was a parks department program, but it was still run like a YW program. And they were really on the ball, so that's an example of how there can be a content and awareness. I think it isn't just meeting the outer program needs, it's not just providing a service, it's really having an intention to relate and to create through this flexible awareness, a flexible attitude, a program that meets what you become aware

of. And I can honestly say that the best we knew how, we did that, and I think it's still going on if I read the YW right.

*[Jo and Lynne] Thank you very much.*