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

Mazie Hough

Marli Werner

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Oral Interviews for the Feminist Oral History Project.

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

Interviewee: Edgar Brown (EB)

Date: 08/03/1994

Recording number: MF223-BrownE-T1b

Length of recording: 21:38

[Transcript begins]

MW: ...the director, did you have contact with sort of your counterparts at Spruce Run?

EB: I never, I went down once, down to their office.

MW: OK, what happened then?

EB: Well, I was talking about what we had and to meet them.

MW: OK. What do you remember about that day?

EB: Well, I don't know. I'm not going to say. No, I don't want to say some of the things that was different from what I was used to. That doesn't mean that it wasn't a good thing, just something that I wasn't used to.

MW: Clearly the two groups had similar ultimate goals, although obviously very different strategies for getting to those goals and...

EB: Yeah then of course my age, my sex and everything looks at many of these things differently, I mean from a different point of view. I suspect it's really the same idea about the battered women needing services are the same. I'm not sure. I'm not sure what you would have done if you have been in my that position in 1970. I don't know what you've done?

MW: And the reason I ask those questions is so that we can tell both sides of the story fairly, not just the Spruce Run side, but obviously we also want to know what your side was,

EB: I don't know what they said about me.

MW: Just that they called you in the middle of the night and had to wake you up to get people in the shelter. And they were glad that you were around. They did say that because you provided something that nobody else provided, so...

EB: I didn't, the city did.

MW: The city did, but people mention your name. The person who was clearly instrumental in that. What we heard and again part of the reason why we are here today is what we heard was that you were really a key person in terms of being aware and being committed and having the same kinds of goals. And we did not hear anything about any of the rest of it that I can see you smiling with that.

EB: Well, you see, when you run at the department you got to respond to the needs that you see for that department. You see the same kind of thing happened, where you see the alcoholics shelter, I ran one of them. I ran a shelter for single man, that's another issue. Because I did not want them in the family shelter and if you if you don't know why, I'm not going to tell you. So, you know I was trying to solve problems that made it, you need a battered women shelter, I don't care who provided it, I was getting ready to retire about the time their came out. And I did, I spend a lot of time. I've been told that by a person that was close to me, that I spend a lot of time doing this kind of stuff, but I'm happy that the service is available, period.

MW: I'm interested that the women that worked for you could tell you that they had been battered, but we must have made it clear that was a concern of yours and they could come to you.

EB: I passed around this book.

MW: You passed around that book? So, Carolyn Dow gave you that...?

EB: I mean, many of the questions you are asking right now are in there. I would... something about politics, for having a different view about religion, for... I've been threatened... I mean you know... and this is a book that...

MW: When did you first read this book?

EB: '70... well it came out in '76 and that's when I read it.

MW: And Carolyn Dow gave it to you?

EB: That's right. It's her book.

MW: And passed it around to the people that you were working with. What was the response of the people that you were, when you passed this book around and talked to your staff, what was their response to the book or to your concern about?

EB: Well, you know, I have not met anybody that's exposed to this kind of reading that wouldn't be in favor. I think I'll pass it around police departments and three council chambers and then...

MW: Yeah, and so you think so because you had that knowledge, it maybe you want to do something about that problem, yeah?

EB: That's right, and if you are in a position to make a decision. And you know about it, and do not do anything that says something.

MW: How did you work out the agreements with the police? Was that a hard, a difficult thing to do?

EB: No.

MW: They didn't resist at all?

EB: They, I think the Bangor Police Department had sensitivity training for a long, long time, I've never heard that they might take the side of the batterer. Could you? I mean...

MW: No, not here no.

EB: And, the under-covered, the patrol, was very sympathetic to the needs of the battered woman. I'll tell you when they get in my shelter, they were safe.

MW: And then you worked with them to find them alternatives so they didn't necessarily have to go back to the batterer if you could with everything....

EB: They would never, never decide to run back to the batterer. I've seen running with that would be my best judgment to say don't well but again, I don't know what to do about that.

MW: I don't think anybody really knows.

EB: I don't either, not really.

MW: Are there things we haven't asked you that you want to tell us things that we haven't thought of to ask you? Are there things that we haven't thought of that you want to tell us?

EB: I don't think so. I only wrote out about the shelters. Well, the only one thing is, I did make a note here, I think anybody that offers help to a battered woman, in some instances are in danger.

MW: Now you said before you've been threatened a couple of times.

EB: I had someone take a swing at me.

MW: How did that happen? Can you tell us?

EB: Well, you see, another rule that I violated was that, some welfare departments have as a rule, if a male is available, he is supposed to make an application, supposed to come in a make the application, well as it relates to the batterer, the battered women you don't; want that rule, because that puts her in a terrible position. And so in this instance, he thought he saw this wife with a man, and he came in a said, well the applications are private and we can't tell you if your wife made an application or not and said if you were here for welfare for your family make an application, then he got furious because I wasn't going to give him any information. He'd been drinking too, he missed.

MW: Well, I'm glad.

EB: I am too.

MW: Were you working? Did you come from Maine, and were you working as a supervisor before a caseworker before you became the director?

EB: Yes, I was involved, I went to college at age 36, graduate when I was 40, and me and my wife and children went through the whole thing. Where I had accepted a job as a general assistant caseworker. And at that time, they had the legal settlement of support law and so I traveled in Aroostook, Washington, Waldo, Penobscot Counties doing legal settlements for clients that were state settled. And do you know about state settled law?

MW: No, I don't know.

EB: Basically, it is that if you've lived five consecutive years in the place you gain settlement, if you haven't had any relief. So, on the basis of legal settlement, five years after I had lived in the city of Bangor, I would have been a resident for welfare purposes in the city.

MW: And then was the city obliged to support you with food and shelter? Is that correct?

EB: What you did, the reason that was important, you sent a notice to the town of settlement, and it said we are furnishing aid to this person, and we authorized that return... and I wish I could remember what the form said, but basically that was the left, and they use that to say, well, please send them up.

MW: So, the person would be sent back to where they came from?

EB: Town of settlement. I mean, that's why we've got to change the law, now every person, the day they come here, in other words, you don't have any residency requirement.

MW: Was it unusual, did Maine supply more support for people than other states?

EB: I don't think so.

MW: It was all the same.

EB: Uh, one of the problems with welfare is, you have to have rules and sometimes those rules should be broken. And I'm just giving you some pretty good examples of why rules should be broken. And then it will frustrate down the line.

MW: I have another question along those lines. When a person came and made application to be put into the shelter, the battered women shelter. How long before that application was processed, and she could in fact go there?

EB: She will be in there before the application was taken.

MW: Right, OK. So, it wasn't a case of it would have to be evaluated by lots of different people, OK.

EB: That is important criteria, that in the fall of night, you're see that the person gets in there.

MW: I thought that was what you were going to say, but I wanted to be sure. Were you the one who approved of it? Did they have, did a caseworker have to call you to get approval for a person to go in?

EB: No.

MW: The caseworker could make the approval.

EB: My attitude about a caseworker is that they have a large latitude of independent judgment now that is a tricky one because some people abuse it, but I'd rather have them abuse it before I talk. You

know, but by and large they do not. And of course, I was a hand on type of I know how to do casework.

MW: Because you did this up, that's what we were talking about. You did it up in in Aroostook County. You seem very sympathetic to the people that you're working with. The people who have the problems.

EB: Right, that's my background. I mean, I came from poor stock from the other side to track. I realize that many of the things I did should not have been done, but I was one of the lucky ones I was able to overcome it, but I never forgot where I came from, never, never will.

MW: And it sounds like you were a renegade in the department here, but they hired you, so they must have wanted somebody or at least a renegade compared to other places.

EB: No, no, I'm conservative too. But I do not want to be ahead of the Department of Services on that. If you can see that problem and in the case of battered women, there's no more serious problem that social services faced today. And you need to get all that you can. And that is why many of the women that shoot a man get out of it... it is awful, I mean don't put that down.

MW: I think we're. I think we're just about finished. I would like to ask you though. I want to go back to the possibility of talking to other people, and whether you think there are other people we should talk to because clearly, Spruce Run and people who've worked with Spruce Run only have one side of the story of battered women in Bangor, and I wondered if you would be willing to either give us Carolyn Dow's address or write to her?

EB: See, I don't even have it.

MW: That's too bad.

EB: It is too bad. Because she... contributed much as anybody to social services in this city. It just happen that she saw me differently I guess than some people did I guess I don't know, really I guess because she came back here when she came from California, that's how I happen to know because she found me.

MW: Does she have family here who might know how to reach her?

EB: Hope she, I don't think, I don't think so. She had a daughter and a son both whom went to college in California I think.

MW: So, they would be...

EB: How come you go to school in the summer?

MW: Oh, we are not going to school this is a history project. Yeah, this is we're gathering oral histories of people who worked helped to develop Spruce Run, and now we're going wider to find out what the services were for women, and we want to do so. We've already put together a play, I don't know if you've, a reader's theater where we read the women words who talk about the starting of Spruce Run and the need for Spruce Run and things like that. I thank you very much for your willingness to talk to us this afternoon.

EB: You're welcome.

MW: This is the end of our tape 95 2.

EB: Talk about the fact that the city of Bangor Welfare part was already dealing with the welfare client now there are middle class and upper-class women that are also become abused or battered and in many instances, they too would really be without resources. If they left their home, and often that keeps them from doing it.

MW: Did you provide service to any anybody who was not a welfare client?

EB: I can only remember one.

MW: And how did she get in?

EB: Well, I think you'll find this through if you really research in the social agencies. And that probably was my biggest referral is that dial help and that's another thing that mentioned dial help the department of health and welfare, all of them knew my name. I didn't have to advertise, I guess.

MW: Did you have to turn people away?

EB: I never have. Another reason for having a shelter is that I've seen a caseworker waste all day to find a place to place somebody.

MW: Interesting point, yeah, sure. If you have a shelter, it's much quicker.

EB: Yeah, you're talking about caseworker time, right? Which is being paid by the city?

MW: I bet that was an argument you used in the City Council.

EB: Well, it might have been.

EB: There's probably a lot of things that I...

MW: Well, as we said we would like to come and talk with you again.

EB: Would you?

MW: And if anybody, if you know of anybody or if you talked to anybody about this and they're interested and would like to talk with us, please let us know. Or at least might like to find out more about what we do right. Either contact either you can contact us if you would be willing, or if you invite that person to contact us.

EB: Well, I had y'all telephone number lunch but I didn't keep it.

[End of transcript]