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### **Listening to women**

I was involved with the very beginning of Women's Advocates, which turned out to be the first, or one of the first, shelters for battered women in the country. And one of the earmarks of that adventure was how little we knew about what we were really doing and had no idea in the beginning, especially of the problem of battering. It was not about that. And I think that it's an interesting social change movement, because it didn't really come out of a political feminist analysis. It really came out of a grass roots group who just, who created a telephone service for women for legal information, in the legal aid office, and ended up with all kinds of women calling and wanting a place to stay. And then because because of, a sort of challenge within our group around how we were going to proceed. we had a weekend-long discussion and I feel that the result of that was a decision to listen to a woman rather than be the people on our end of the phone who were not in crisis -- women know what they want. They just can't get the resources, and so we didn't have to tell her what she needed or wanted, but we had to help her define it and then help her find them, those resources. And that opened the door in a sense for women to just begin to tell their stories. And we were amazed. That word, I love that word God smacked. We were God smacked. We didn't, we had no idea of the, of the sort of the terrible secrets that were amongst all of us, of women's violence in their, in their, relationships and that's how the shelter began.

### **Not out of the women's movement**

I don't think any of us defined ourselves as feminists. I thought that feminists were women who could spend all this time talking with each other and hire women to clean their houses that they paid no wages to. I was struggling I was pretty skeptical about the women's movement. It didn't come out of the women's movement. It really didn't. It didn't come out of, and there were, you could say, women's movements, because there was kind of the NOW movement which was around equalizing pay for women more. And then there were the radical lesbian feminists. I mean I was fascinated by them. I couldn't believe the whole argument that they had about claiming reproductive power by never having, by not conceiving children or something like that. It was like "wow." And I didn't agree with it, but it was that time of bursting forward, forth and how important consciousness raising groups were.

### **Testimony of this terrible secret**

In my own research, because I actually wrote a dissertation on trying to figure out, how does a grass roots movement really start. Why, how did women with all these stories, how did this kind of the testimony of this terrible secret come out? And not be individual women who were in bad marriages, or individual women who had psychological

problems, or individual men who, you know, had pathological tendencies. Those were the kind of traditional explanations when battering would kind of arise, and break through the surface of a scandalous, a murder, or a case where the injuries were so bad they'd be reported in the newspaper. But, women were really trying to, we found, get help, desperately trying. There were people within the traditional services who really wanted to help them. That's what I needed to learn. It wasn't like we were good and they were bad, the institutions were really quite bad in the sense of being based on continuing their existence by not consciously but unconsciously always silencing women.

### **A never ending struggle**

This is a very wonderful community here, and its really how we keep, how we keep responding to the evolving needs of women. As you're looking at the laws and the institutions, but also how we keep from the increasing attempts by sort of the power structure to undue what we've done. I mean it's a never ending struggle. We have to expect that there will always be a backlash, and it's very creative. It's like its malleable. It finds all these different ways to get at the women's movement. It's not predictable. It's like this contest we are always in a contest to keep what we've achieved alive and-and-true to its source and intention; and also learn, to learn what works and what doesn't work. I think the fact that there are places for women to go who need it, who are in danger, is really important, no matter how much we might disagree with how they're run, or what their philosophy is. I think we have to think about the women that need the services in terms of judging where we are now.