

Interview with Matt Weise

Interviewer: Jane Ryan

JR: Northern Michigan University has offered the opportunity to record oral interviews and eventually to transcribe them to a printed form relating to the establishment and development of the Women's Center, which served throughout the UP beginning in the mid 1970's. Funding and other issues have forced the Women's Center to narrow its focus a bit from those early years, but it continues as an important resource. It is located on South Front Street in Marquette, Michigan. The Women's Center celebrated its 40th anniversary last year in 2014. I am happy to have the opportunity to speak with Matt Weise, who is currently serving Marquette County as its prosecuting attorney. Mr. Weise will talk to us about his personal background and how he came to live in Marquette and become involved in the Women's Center. He will tell us about his involvement and his perception of its mission and value of that mission. Mr. Weise...

MW: Thank you. Well, I came to Marquette, Michigan in 1980 to attend Northern Michigan University. I wanted to go as far away from home as I could; I grew up in the thumb area downstate. I was thinking that I might want to go into some sort of outdoors type of profession, maybe go into law, I wasn't really sure. I ended up graduating with a double major, psychology and political science, and I had a minor in speech communications. I kind of toyed with the idea of maybe going to grad school for psychology, but I felt an attraction to go towards the law. So, when I graduated in 1984 I was accepted at a number of law schools, but one that really caught my attention was Vermont Law School. Vermont Law School at the time... and still is... is ranked as the number one environmental law school in the country, and I envisioned maybe going into environmental law and working to save the environment. What I realized early on in law school at Vermont Law... they have an environmental law center, was that... two things. One, environmental law is not very glamorous and it's very dry. I often compared it to like working tax code law and things of that nature. That I could have maybe dealt with, but the thing that was the clincher for me to not go into environmental law was the fact that if you wanted to make a living you had to work for the corporations to defend their polluting of the environment. For example, when I graduated law school in 1987 some of the starting wages for going to work for the Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, or for Greenpeace... they were 10, 11, 12 thousand dollars a year. By comparison a major chemical company was offering attorneys that would go to work as corporate counsel 60 thousand a year. So, I knew that the money wasn't there and I liked trial work. In law school I had a trial skills course, but probably what was my biggest influence was my first year of law school. Everybody who goes to law school takes core courses and one of them is criminal law. I took a criminal law course from a professor named Heather Wishik, and Professor Wishik was a hard and fast, zealous advocate for women's rights and women's equality. She took it upon herself to educate the uneducated males in the classroom about certain things like white male privilege, traditional gender role discrimination, and she would call us out. The rule of thumb that comes from... where a judge is reputed to have said, "You can you beat your wife, but not with anything thicker than the width of your thumb." One of my fellow male classmates unfortunately one day said, "Isn't the rule of thumb..." and she just... 20 minutes later we were done learning about the rule of thumb. So, for me that was at first a very defensive to be in, feeling like she was a man-hater, but what I realized by the end of that course was

that she wasn't a man-hater, but she was trying to balance the scales from centuries of discrimination in our society, country, and world.

JR: Was that a relatively new concept for you personally? Did it ring true?

MW: Well, I was not raised... it wasn't relatively new, because I was not raised in a traditional home. So it wasn't like I had the traditional parents where my mother was a homemaker and my father went to work. I didn't have hard and fast ideas that, "Men do this and women do that," but I... as far as the practical living, and existing, and going about your day-to-day business, I didn't have gender roles that I thought were either for men or for women. What I lacked was a good basic base of knowledge and history as to these things. The concept of White male privilege to me was a new concept, because I was thinking, "Wait a minute, I grew up poor. I put myself through college, I'm putting myself through law school, where's the privilege for this White male?" For me it took a while to understand that unequal footing as compared to say, a White female or an African American female, who maybe even came from different social status... you know, higher than what I was raised... I might be on an equal level because of the traditional notions of who gets these jobs, who gets these opportunities. So, that to me was a learning experience. Then Professor Wishek offered... she obviously taught more courses, and one of the courses that I took from her was a seminar called Women in the Law. She could not discriminate and say that men couldn't take the course, but she intended the course to be a seminar for just women law students. And... you had to take a seminar course to graduate law school. It was a two-credit course I believe that lasted for the semester. You had to develop a topic and a thesis and you had to have a paper... it wasn't like a doctoral thing... but it had to be of publishable quality.

JR: Substantial content.

MW: Yes, and it had to be backed up by appropriate sources, legal sources, and whatnot. So I petitioned her... because you had to have... each professor that taught a seminar course, you had to have their permission to take the course, and you had to take one. So, I petitioned her to let me take her Women in the Law seminar, and I was the only one of... I think there were maybe 12 or 15... I was the only male in the class. That was my third year of law school. Maybe there was another male, but anyway, we were the minority. What I had learned in criminal law my first year, was the whole idea of women who use violence against an intimate male partner to defend themselves, and around that time I want to say the burning bed case was rather infamous, and the idea of Battered Women's Syndrome, and of a battered woman using physical force to defend herself against an intimate partner who is a male, who was threatening to harm her or kill her. So, my whole seminar paper and what I focused on was, "Could you develop a legal defense that was viable for a woman who uses violence against her batterer?" And I focused on the cases where when the woman who had been a victim killed her abuser, and the problem with that is that the typical notions of self-defense don't really fit in that scenario, because self-defense usually means you are faced with an immediate threat, and you have to react immediately with force or violence to defend yourself. Many of the battered of the women that were documented as to killing their abusers, they would kill them in circumstances where the violence to them was not immediate, so self-defense legally would not work. So in other words, if he came home, threatened to kill her, was maybe drunk, told her that this is it, and he passes out in the chair... she may then kill him, because when she wakes up or sobers up I'm going to be dead, and she knows that he's always followed through on his violence because there's a history. Self-defense didn't work, so I focused on, "If the immediacy of the threat wasn't there, could we come up with some sort of a psychological defense?" And of course

you go right to mental illness, or the person was mentally ill, but the battered woman wasn't really mentally ill. She was suffering perhaps from emotional abuse in addition to physical abuse, and she might have some symptoms of depression or maybe even bi-polar, because of living in the circumstance, but didn't rise to the level of a criminal defense for legal insanity. So, what I focused on were those two areas, and I concluded that the states and legislatures around the country... and the courts... should allow for battered women to raise this as a defense when they kill their batterer. Of course that was really controversial, because people that don't understand the concept say, "We're creating a hunting season on men by women" by legalizing that, so it was pretty controversial. But, that to me I thought was an important thing to look at. That led me later in my career to work with Sue Osthoff, who was the Director of the Battered Women's Legal Defense Fund out of Philadelphia... not directly and regularly, but in more of a professional dialogue at conferences and various areas, to be one of the prosecutors that'd be willing to stand up and say "We shouldn't prosecute this woman for murder." Not that we're excusing an act of homicide, but it's different than the other act of homicide where it's premeditated and intentional with malice. This is maybe premeditated, maybe even intentional... I should say maybe it was intentional and maybe even premeditated, but it wasn't done with malice. It was done out of a fear for their own safety and wellbeing.

JR: Would I be understanding it correctly... also, there weren't other remedies at that time for those women. If they came and complained they might be dismissed as a family affair/you have to work something out.

MW: Right, and this is at a time when most law enforcement agencies in the countries did not have a pro-arrest, or a mandatory arrest. Most states not even at that time had the ability for a police officer to make an arrest of a batterer. So they'd get called to a house, domestic violence going on, if they don't view the domestic violence happening they could not make an arrest. In the early 80's that was still the status of the law in many states in our country, if not most of them.

JR: So, again I'm just trying to clarify for myself; the woman could easily feel she had no other options?

MW: Exactly, the shelter movement had been getting going around the country. In our own community had been established by then and they did provide shelter services I believe, but maybe not until the mid-80's that we really had a designated shelter. So, we didn't have... all these things and the theories of domestic violence and battering, these were concepts that I had learned in law school, but it was nothing that was accepted yet in the mainstream. It wasn't part of what we trained law enforcement on, it wasn't part of what we trained judges on. The idea of even working with a non-profit community based program like the Women's Center would have been kind of unheard of. Why would the system work with them? So, that was kind of a background for me, and I wanted to get back to Marquette. I either wanted to live in Marquette where I could be in the mountains, or get back to Marquette where I could be by the lake, and the lake won out. I was fortunate enough to get hired by Gary Walker in 1987.

JR: How did you meet up with Gary?

MW: The interesting thing about that is that I had a job offer with Legal Services... which is advocacy for people that can't afford legal advocacy... in the Saginaw area, which was close to where I grew up. I had a job offer in the works in Newport, Vermont to be a state's attorney; that never formally got offered to me. I also had applied to the prosecutor's office in Marquette thinking if they had... it was just a cold application... and as it happened, the day I applied Gary Walker had just received the resignation from

one of his assistants the day before or the day after. So, I was right at the top of the list. My letter and my resume was right there. I submitted a writing sample, I'd had all my good legal references for what I'd done in law school, and he didn't check any of them. He saw that I'd been the student government president at Northern when I was a student and he knows that the student government is advised by the Dean of Students Office, and his good friend was Sandra Michaels, the Dean of Students. So, rather than check any of my legal references he checked with her... if she knew anything about me... and that led to him reaching out and asking me if I wanted to have an interview. So, I took the Amtrak from Burlington, Vermont to Anne Arbor, because I had an old crappy Subaru that was falling apart, and then I borrowed my sister's Honda... she was living in Anne Arbor... and I drove to Lansing and I met Gary there and interviewed for the job. Then I...

JR: Did he pick up on your interest in the women's issues at that point?

MW: I don't think we talked about any of that. We talked about, you know, "Why do you want to be a criminal prosecutor?" I said, "I like trial work." "Are you willing to go to court and try cases?" "Yeah, that's what I want to do." "How long are you willing to commit if I hired you?" and I distinctly remember telling him that I would be willing to give him a five-year commitment. And my idea then was... and I hadn't yet fully experienced... the seed had been planted on women's issues and legal issues involving women, and equality and fairness, but it hadn't yet grown into anything. So, I was more interested looking at a lot of debt, in having a job and doing good work, and I thought this was an honorable way to do that. I would do this for a while and maybe then go on to make some real money someday. That didn't work out for me, because when I started with Gary I handled a steady misdemeanor docket, and on that docket are domestic violence cases, where primarily men are charged with criminal crimes of assault or assault and battery upon there... at the time it had to be their spouse, or former spouse, or person that they lived with or used to live with. That definition has now been expanded to include someone they have a child in common with, or someone they have a dating relationship with. So, those cases were showing up on the docket and I was handling those cases with quite a bit of regularity—that and drunk-driving and all kinds of other cases.

JR: Do I understand correctly? He was doing more... would the term be aggressive... on those cases than in other communities. In other words they were arresting abusers.

MW: We were... in Marquette County at that time we had a stated purpose, mission, goal to treat domestic violence seriously, and we knew the issues, but we didn't have a full... our toolbox didn't have all the tools it needed. I know Pat Micklow... I worked for Gary previously and she really brought a lot of enlightenment as to women in the law, and women in equality and legal issues. She did work I know in law school on this type of issues also. But we didn't have all the tools. When I say tools... we didn't have law enforcement training curriculum. We didn't even have requirements that law enforcement be trained to look for these things. We didn't have judicial training for that.

JR: What year did you come here?

MW: '87.

JR: Okay.

MW: So we didn't have a... Our position was "We need to do something about these cases" and "How can we be effective." In the course of my 28 years we kind of evolved, changed, adapted, and modified

as we went along, and as laws changed, as societal views changed, as law enforcement attitudes changed, and we kind of defined our approach to how we were going to handle these types of cases.

JR: Would you say you were more ready to do that than other communities? That's the sense I got from talking to people—that Marquette stayed at the cutting edge on these issues.

MW: I would say yes. Where it all kind of started... I have to give credit to Ruth Oja, who was an advocate with the Women's Center back when I was a rookie prosecutor. Ruth and I... she now works with the Hannahville tribe... Ruth and I went to a law enforcement... it's now called the Michigan commission on law enforcement standards... we went to Higgins Lake to the MacMullen center where they have a state conference center. I went there with her and Captain Sal Sorbello of the Marquette City Police Department, he was a detective. This was some of the earlier discussions on how we were going to handle domestic violence response. People around the state were starting to realize that we needed to have not only cops and prosecutors taking a keen interest in these cases and focusing... but we also needed to bring in our community based advocacy centers, like the Women's Center. Now the Women's Center is... I'm sure people have told you... it was the oldest such center I believe in the country, if not the country, at least the state.

JR: Actually that has been corrected, we're the second, because we learned from Oakland University, and they're still existent, because I'd had that in my mind until two days ago.

MW: So one of the oldest in the state.

JR: Yes.

MW: To kind of get back to the point... Ruth... I'll never forget the day we walked in our office... we didn't have any women assistants on staff at the time, it was just men, and she wanted to talk about a particular case. I remember Gary calling me in and saying, "What happened with this case?" and I said, "I don't know," and I remember the Chief's assistant saying, "Well what did you do?" and I said, "I don't know what I did." I thought she was here to talk about a recent case where we had made an arrest, but what she was really there for was to talk to me about a different case. So they basically said, "Go talk to her and find out what's going on." To give you some context, to have a Women's Center advocate show up at our office was kind of a foreign idea. They were there because we must have done something wrong. That was our mindset. What Ruth wanted to talk to me about was a tragic incident that happened in the city of Marquette where a woman was killed by her abuser. It happened in the city, she was shot to death with a rifle as she was leaving her home, and I believe it was during the evening hours. I believe she worked the midnight shift at one of the local nursing homes. As the police rolled in on the scene he turned the gun on himself and killed himself. Law enforcement is... you have to keep in mind, they are cynical, but they deal with lots of bad stuff. Gallows humor is not unheard of in this type of work, and I can recall a detective talking to me about that case prior to Ruth coming in, and he talked about how it was too bad that she got killed, but he had done himself in and saved the taxpayers all of this money, and that kind of discussion ensued. It was not meant to be shared in an archive discussion, but that was the reality of it, that it was sad, she was dead, it was unfortunate he killed himself, but the case was done. There was no case. Ruth wanted to talk to me about that woman's story, and that it was frustrating in that there was nothing I can do. I can't prosecute a dead guy. What she challenged me to do was to look at her history in when she'd had interaction with law enforcement and with our office. When I looked at our history she had had two prior contacts with us as a crime victim of domestic

violence, and in both instances we didn't do in hindsight, the job we could have done to try to protect her or to try to encourage her that when she's ready to leave we'll do what we can to support you. Back then you have to keep in mind the attitude was "Why would this woman stay with this guy?" and "Why would she go back to this guy?" Those messages of help and accountability that should have been given, those weren't part of our vocabulary back then. We may not have ever saved her, but she never received messages of help and accountability because in both prior cases she did not want to participate in the criminal prosecution of her husband, which led to frustration by the police, and frustration by us who prosecute cases, because we wanted her to step up to the plate and do her part so we could hold him accountable. That thinking is half-right, but it's not whole-right. It's not the whole picture. The whole picture is "How can we offer support and offer messages of help, and safety, and accountability for him?" and we didn't have that system in place. So, I don't know what she thought, but she had finally left this guy, and that's the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence quite often, when she leaves. Because then he's lost the ability to control her. He knows that he is losing control of the situation. Often times batterers have low self-esteem, they have high jealousy issues. To them, that relationship networking and their failures, whether it was because they were emotionally or physically abusive, leads to them to just look at it like their world is ending. That's when they become most dangerous... or can be.

JR: And this would certainly have been an example of that.

MW: Right, and that's what happened in that case. So what Ruth did was challenge me to look at that so that we never had another case like that if we could avoid it. We can't make people not kill people, but we can certainly set a system response into place that does a better job. People often use the phrase, "The victim refused to cooperate." What I've learned over the years... it's not about her just making a conscious choice of "I'm not going to cooperate." It's about her saying, "What do I need to keep me safe?" "I need to know that if I call the police they're going to respond. If he's beating on me or my children that they'll take him out of the house; that the prosecutor will listen to me and hear what I have to say; that necessarily locking him up for a long time and having him lose his job isn't going to help me." It's very complicated. Looking at all of those issues are the things that I've learned we have to do. Victim centered activities is probably what I've learned as the best way to handle these cases. So how do you do that? Over the years that's evolved to recognition not only by me, but by people in the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women, that for a community to have an effective intervention in response to crimes like domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, that you need to bring in the experts, and your experts are your community based advocacy programs, like our Women's Center. So, that's right now really the focus is "How do we link law enforcement with our shelter advocates, how do we link our shelter advocates with the criminal justice system through prosecution, and how do we make sure that the victims know that we have a common theme that's trying to make sure that we hold him accountable for his violence and provide safety for her when she needs it." Understand that there are common things that happen with every case, but they're all in a different place. Trying to individualize how we look at each incident of violence, making sure we get good input from the person who is a victim of that violence, trying to make sure we balance that out with the public interest of who and how should the punishment be... that's kind of the approach we're taking now. We've just recently submitted for funding for a grant project in Marquette County called The Blueprint for Safety, which is a interagency response to domestic violence. We've had a good coordinated community response for 20, 30, 40 years, but what this focuses on is how we can do a better job to make sure that these linkages are

all there in the system, and to identify gaps in the response—whether it's law enforcement response, prosecution response, probation sanctions, and look to institutionalize processes that will address those gaps or harms so that we can eliminate them and still focus on each individual case and help each individual victim as we go through the process.

JR: So this is a new application as of March or early winter or 2015? Because grants have been mentioned in previous interviews... will this be building off those other grants? It's sounding familiar like this whole thing that you've described has happened. Are we talking maintenance or new approaches with this grant?

MW: Well, maybe I could back up a little bit. After 10 years with the prosecutor's office I left to go to work for the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. Duluth, Minnesota was one of the national leaders on creating a coordinated community response to domestic violence. So I worked for that organization in two capacities. One, they shared me as a staff attorney half-time with the Battered Women's Justice Project, and half-time with the Marine Corps Domestic Violence Project. So I worked with the Marine Corps on trying to create an appropriate response to crimes with domestic violence that occurred within the Marine Corps, and then I worked at the Battered Women's Justice Project working with Violence Against Women Office grantees that received funding to do domestic violence programs in their communities. Marquette was one of the first communities to get one of those grants—this was back in the early 90's when I was still with the prosecutor's office—and that was because we were recognized for having done a good job in trying to address this problem. I took that and decided I would try to make that my work for a while, and I worked for a national profit. I did that for two years. Now, the grants... the person that I worked with primarily in that job was a woman by the name of Ellen Pence. Ellen Pence was one the co-founders of the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. Ellen went on to get her... she was basically a community organizer and an activist—and she took that background and through that got her masters and her PhD to do actual evaluations of systems and systems responses so that it was not just some activist talking; it was an activist who had got the training and education to actually look at systems and systems responses. Ellen passed away two years ago and the last project that she worked on and completed was this thing called the Blueprint for Safety. The idea behind the Blueprint is to basically revitalize a community's response in coordination to domestic violence. They looked at each part of the system and did system audits on it, how everyone does their job, and how does that effect... you know, six key areas? Two of those key areas making sure that we offer messages of safety for victims and accountability for defendants, and to look at ways to not cause unintended harm to victims or unintended consequences by how the system responds and deals with a perpetrator of domestic violence.

JR: Were we evaluated under that?

MW: That's the program that I'm trying to implement right now. That is through a grant from the Department of Justice, and they've recognized that thing called "The Blueprint for Safety" is something that could be a pilot project that they could provide funding for. I've wanted to implement that for a while in our community, and these grant's applications were due this year in March and I decided to do that. So, it's maintenance and it's new, but it's not the type of thing where we're asking for money and then we have to find money in three years. It's the type of thing where we would hire a coordinator to coordinate our systems better and identify areas of concern and gaps. I also put in for funding for an advocate for the Harbor House who would work with victims on all domestic violence cases and be

involved with the system on all domestic violence cases. It's a three year project and if you do it right at the end of three years we'll lose the funding, but we won't need a coordinator anymore. We'll put in place systems changes and a mechanism to constantly review those... how we process... so that we can constantly adjust and change to different approaches keeping in my things that happened within the law. Like the US Supreme Court might make a ruling—like they did on domestic violence—that totally affected how we can prosecute a domestic violence case. So, how do we get around that? When we have problems that we see... how can we propose new legislation to address those problems? When I started as a prosecutor there was no crime of stalking; that was not a crime. That became a crime in my career. If you think about that everyone knows what stalking is now, but 30 years ago we all *knew* what stalking was, it was creepy, weird behavior, but it was not a crime unless they did something to you. That's an area where we've looked at aberrant, inappropriate behavior and we've criminalized it. Stalking could be just the stalker without a relationship, but what we've learned is that most stalking is related to domestic violence types of relationships. I've kind of rambled all over the place here...

JR: No, this is in a way new to some of these interviews. Gary alluded to some of this, but bringing up to date is very helpful and it gives a chance... most of what we've heard through the view of the Women's Center organizers is how positive and how fortunate we've been to have the relationship with the prosecuting attorney and to get some trainings and also to draw in volunteers to support women in the courtroom and in all of these places. So, it's good to know that there will be something more of an evaluation to find the strengths and weaknesses and make adaptations. That seems like really good news for the future, because these issues aren't going to go away. Even with the best of systems there are going to be people in the position... both male and female, but usually males who are males, who are perpetrating these crimes.

MW: Exactly, and the thing that I've noticed about systems is that... and this is something that Ellen Pence was real big on, because Ellen was very charismatic. She could take the most cynical, surly, knot-headed cop in a room and turn him around to get him to start to see things the way that she was seeing things. This would be a cop that would be a traditional guy that you would never think would even venture a thought to endorsing women's issues. What Ellen always talked about was that you can have the best cop, or the best prosecutor, or the best anything in a system, but they're going to move on, they're going to leave, they're going to change, and if you don't focus on the institutionalized practices of the response it will fall apart when the good person that you like to go to leaves. You're going to have good judges and you're going to have bad judges. You can have good prosecutors, you can have bad prosecutors. You can have cops that do a better job than other cops. So, if you put the practices in and say, "This is how everyone has to do business," it shouldn't be focused on personality ever, it should be focused on the job and what the job requires.

JR: Do you feel we have a pretty good system here in our area? It may need tweaking, but we do have it so we're not dependent on a few good people?

MW: I think we do, and the thing that I really value with the Women's Center most of all right now, other than the idea of living in a community where we have this center and the mission that they promote, which is the overarching thing, is that the day-to-day when I handle criminal cases of sexual assault and domestic violence, I have one of their people in my office when I meet with the victim. So, if they had not linked up yet through a law enforcement referral, they were there when I'd meet with the victim. They were there when I'd go to court with the victim. They were there to help explain to the

victim, because they've been through this enough, they could address their questions, and their concerns and their fears. They can say, "Here's why this is happening... just stay the course, the prosecutor knows what's going on," or they're there to say, "Hey prosecutor, there's something the victim is telling me that maybe you're not aware of."

JR: Yes, that addresses that issue that you were talking about before where the woman... where now if they have a person on their side so to speak. That's really quite exciting.

MW: So that's something they do day in, day out, and as the prosecutor I handle most of the sexual assault crimes. I'm assigning most of the serious domestic violence cases to myself, and I work with the advocates that are our community based advocates for both sexual assault and domestic violence, and they're invaluable. I do law enforcement training every year around the UP. I do legal updates for all the police officers in the Upper Peninsula. Two of their advocates come and I give them two hours of my training to talk about issues of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and now human trafficking. So, the police get more comfortable and familiar with the idea that we have these people who are advocates, but they're not there to tell the cops how to do their job. They're not there to rail against the system. They're there to work collaboratively with us. The hardest issue for most systems people to accept is that when that crime victim chooses to not be a part... or cannot be a part of the response... the advocate is still going to be standing by her side. For an officer who sees that that is kind of a disconnect where, "Wait a minute, I thought you're supposed to be there to help us?" No, the Women's Center advocate is not there to help the cop, or the prosecutor. They're there to support that victim. That was a lesson that I had to learn many years ago. That's the beauty of it, you have a community based program that is just there for the victim. Whether she's got issues, whether she doesn't have issues. Whether she has baggage or the baggage is because of a bad relationship. Whether she wants to participate or not participate. That's the beauty of it, they take people as they are and try to help them rebuild their lives.

JR: And also in the process may very well educate them to be more interactive with the system. It seems like a win-win.

MW: It is a win-win, and I think for us in the system we just need to accept that there are going to come times when a crime victim, especially in domestic violence is going to say, "No, what are you going to do for me in the criminal justice system that's going to help me?" and "Do I want to go to court? I wanted him to stop hitting me and he did, and he's been arrested. That's all I wanted." So yeah, their ultimate goal may not be to go to court. Even if they leave him and they have children in common, they may not want me to prosecute because maybe he has a job, and maybe he pays child support. So how do we balance all of that out to make sure he's held accountable and that her interests and safety needs are still addressed? It gets complicated and you've got to be open minded in how you handle the cases.

JR: That's where... backing up on these grants and things... the education of all the parts of the system help you understand one another and deal with those frustrations as best you can. Still protecting the community as your job, but also an individual person who needs help.

MW: And there've been highs and lows in our relationship, and it's usually over something silly like... the police officer knows the victim went to the shelter, and now the victim doesn't want anyone to know that she's at the shelter, and then the police officer goes back the next day and wants to talk to her and they can't produce her. It's not their job. So, we work by training and education, police now know,

“Okay, there’s a process. If she’s here would you tell her I would really like to talk to her and here’s why...” and then the shelter can say, “Well, here’s the message. It’s up to you, but if you talk to him these are the things that might happen. If you don’t, these are the things that might happen,” so that she’s empowered to make decisions, and not have a system tell her how she should live her life.

JR: Very good. Now, we’ve really gone in depth here which is helpful I think, and it adds a lot to what we’ve learned in the other interviews. Do you have any other comments on the Women’s Center itself?

MW: Oh yeah, I was on their Shelter Board at one time when the Shelter Board... we weren’t a non-profit, we thought we were and we had to do all of the paperwork to get that status so that if people wanted to donate they could take a tax deduction. That’s close to twenty years ago now, and I’ve actually been on the Women’s Center Board of Directors for a short period of time when they were in transition the last few years when more of the original founding mothers became involved, I was also involved with that initially.

JR: Can you comment on why that happened? What brought that back?

MW: What brought that back was that for many years we had a strong executive director with a number of people in that position. There was good funding streams to help the work that was being done, and I don’t... this is just my opinion, but I don’t think that people saw it coming that the funding streams were going to dry up. Then there was... most of the traditional folks that had been involved were no longer involved. The workers that were day-to-day were pretty much the same, the advocates and whatnot, and there was a financial crisis at the Women’s Center. There was not enough money to meet payroll, to pay the bills.

JR: And that sort of was a perfect storm if I understood it. The bingo issue, the space, grants were drying up because of the recession, and a whole complicated... it wasn’t one thing that happened.

MW: Correct, it was a combination of things. The recession, the lack of grant funding, the money that was being made from bingo for so many years dried up, there was some legal allegations that went on, and it was just a whole... kind of a mess. I was involved with Pat Nichols, Sally May, Carolyn Report...

JR: The founding ladies, they were still hanging out in the community.

MW: Yes, and Martha Parks was also involved. She had been a former Director of the Women’s Center way back in the day, a program manager. We just went to the current board at the time and said, “Somethings got to change,” and we weren’t necessarily trying to say we wanted to take over, but they basically said, “If you want to try go ahead,” so a new board transitioned in. The thing that struck me about... especially folks like Karlyn Rapport, and Pat Micklows, and Sally May, was that they exhausted me, because of their willingness to put in so much time and effort into it, and granted maybe it’s because they weren’t still full-time in their professions anymore, but they are some hardworking folks.

JR: And they’re still doing it after several years. We’re talking volunteers too, and that’s come through, that yes there’ve been some paid staff-positions, not overpaid staff-positions, but the predominant energy has come from volunteers, and I think that speaks to this community.

MW: Yes. So, I was involved for about a year with that first position when they came back. I was proud to do it, I was happy to do it, but I was also a brand new prosecutor taking over for Gary Walker, and I’m trying cases, and I have children. I couldn’t put in the time that they put in for that, and I think my skills

are best used by doing what I do in the criminal justice system, and being supportive of the Women's Center. One of the ways I'm trying to do that is if we get this new grant, I'll have funding for three years to give them to hire a domestic violence advocate full-time to just work on domestic violence cases. That will give us three years to figure out, "How can we maintain this position? How could we change what we're doing when the funding goes away to continue it?" but that'd be three years of funding that we would not have had before. For me that helps more than... it's more effective from my perspective if I can find a way to give some funding source to them to help us work with victims and get them through the system.

JR: And I have to assume staff and all are aware of this process and we all have our fingers crossed at this point.

MW: Oh yeah, the Women's Center Director, Phyllis Loonsfoot, signed the memorandum of understanding as well as myself, and as well as Chief Mike Angelly, who's the Chairman of the Marquette County Law Enforcement Administrators, so every law enforcement agency in Marquette has signed on doing this.

JR: Excellent. It's wonderful to hear good news, these things, and we'll follow! We'll update this for the archives, but also... Now, is there anything we haven't touched on that you would like to comment on?

MW: I met my wife at the Women's Center [laughs].

JR: Really?

MW: Yes, I was working... she was hired as the office administrator out of college, and I went in on a Saturday morning to help do some envelope stuffing for a fundraiser for the Harbor House, and that's where I first met her. I was talking to Sue Kensington about a grant that we should propose, and she said, "I will support that, but I don't have the time to do this. Would you want to do it?" and I said, "Yeah, but I'm going to need some help," so my wife helped. So, basically she and I co-wrote a grant that received funding for the center, and that's how we met.

JR: I think that's a great story. I'm glad you mentioned that for the archives. It's on the record so...

MW: [Laughs] Yeah, that's kind of a cool aspect of it.

JR: Great. Well, if there's nothing else at this point—we can always do another interview—but thank you for sharing your time and your insight, and for what you've done for the Women's Center.

MW: Sure.

JR: Thank You.

[RECORDING ENDS]