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Sandra Kay Martz : Papier-Mache Press & the gentle art of consciousness raising 1984-1999

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Introduction

Following in the footsteps of the second wave feminist publishers of the 1970s, Sandra Kay Martz founded Papier-Mache Press in 1984. Papier-Mache Press was known for publishing accessible books which, “presented important social issues through enduring works of beauty, grace, and strength,” and “created a bridge of understanding between the mainstream audience and those who might not otherwise be heard.” This accessibility, combined with hard work, and savvy marketing and business sense, catapulted Papier-Mache to remarkable financial success and visibility. Of the 60,000 book titles published in the United States each year, less than one percent sell over 100,000 copies. Over 1.6 million copies of the anthology *When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* were sold in bookstores and gift stores across the United States. This groundbreaking collection was one of the first non-clinical and positive books on women and aging, and was written by older women themselves. It challenged stereotypes and confronted the invisibility of older women in America. Several years later, another book in Martz’s anthology series entitled *I Am Becoming the Woman I’ve Wanted* won the 1995 American Book Award. By 1998, Papier-Mache Press had published over sixty titles.

Sandra Kay Martz was born in Lubbock, Texas in 1944, and grew up in rural Texas. Her marriage brought her to California in 1964. She settled in Southern California after she and her husband were divorced. Struggling to raise two young sons as a single mother, in 1969 Martz took a job as a clerical worker at the engineering firm TRW. She worked her way up at TRW into middle management, and also returned to college, eventually earning her MBA from California State University at Dominguez Hills. Her emerging feminism was fostered by women’s support groups within TRW in the mid-to late 1970s. Looking for new challenges, and an outlet for her creative energies, in 1983 Martz joined a writing class in Los Angeles, where she met several writers interested in publishing creative writing about the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. That project metamorphosed

into *Atalanta*, an anthology about women athletes, which Martz self-published in 1984. It was followed in 1985 by a second, self-published volume, *More Golden Apples*.

By 1986, Martz realized she had fallen in love with publishing, and wanted to “do a serious book, a book that had a broader range, a broader reach.” That book was *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*. Manuscripts flooded into her mailbox. Martz struggled to balance editing the anthology with her stressful career at TRW, and raising her sons who were now teenagers. She printed 3000 copies of *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*, which she funded out of her salary, and immediately they began to sell. In September 1988, she made the decision to move to Watsonville, California. She was attracted by the area’s rural and agricultural character, which reminded her of her childhood in rural Texas and New Mexico, and by the proximity of UC Santa Cruz and the rich literary and artistic culture of Santa Cruz County. At first Martz ran Papier-Mache out of her house, but as the press grew in size to its eventual staff of eighteen, she moved the offices and the warehouse to commercial locations in Watsonville.

Despite this remarkable success, by 1999 Papier-Mache Press was bankrupt. What happened? As Martz discusses in her oral history, enormous changes in the book industry took place in the late 1990s. According to the American Booksellers Association, the number of independent bookstores in the United States dropped from 5,132 in 1991 to 3,200 in 1999, with many more teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Most of these independent stores were displaced by the chain superstores Barnes and Noble and Borders, who have greater capital resources and access to larger discounts from corporate publishers than those available to independents. They also engage in higher rates of returns than independent bookstores. As *Feminist Bookstore News* publisher Carol Seajay has pointed out, “these chain stores also return twenty to thirty percent of the books they order to the publisher, whereas independent stores have an average return rate of fifteen percent.” Publishers outlay significant amounts of capital to fill large orders from the chains, and when the chains return the books for credit the results are devastating.

Barnes and Noble and Borders now control over two thousand stores in the United States (including their mall stores, B. Dalton and Waldenbooks. In 2000 only 15% of all books sold were sold through independent bookstores. The rise of the Internet and online bookstores such as Amazon.com also took sales away from so-called brick-and-mortar stores. According to a study released in June of 2000 by the NPD Group, 1999 online book sales represented 5.45% of all books sold—up 1.9% over 1998. Overall book sales, meanwhile, rose just 3%. Over 5% of all books purchased in 1999 were bought online.

All of these factors, along with a perception that feminism is somehow passé, have had a significant impact on feminist bookstores, which decreased from 120 stores in the United States and Canada in 1997, to less than 80 in 1999. *Feminist Bookstore News*, the trade journal for feminist bookstores and publishers which Martz credits with mentoring her as a publisher, ceased publication in 1999.

In her narrative, Martz describes how Papier-Mache Press began to cater its list of titles to the tastes of Barnes and Noble and Borders superstores, with whom they would have biannual sales conferences. This economic pressure became a force which undermined Martz's feminist politics. As she describes, she began to lose her integrity. Sales at both bookstores and gift stores began to spiral downwards and exacerbated existing internal tensions among the staff at the press. Martz and her staff attempted to save the press by carefully evaluating their list of titles, adjusting print runs, and doing their own distribution. But it was too late. In May 1999, Papier-Mache Press filed for bankruptcy. As Martz describes, her goal was to go bankrupt with integrity. She prioritized paying local vendors, and continued to have an honest, open relationship with her authors.

In her oral history Martz credits feminist culture and politics with her success, and discusses her collegial relationships with other feminist publishers in the United States and Canada, many of whom were her inspiration. She provides an astute assessment of the future of feminist and independent publishing, and discusses the implications of the changes in book publishing in the 1990s for literacy and the exchange of ideas in a free society.

Papier-Mache Press is one of three presses archived at UC Santa Cruz's University Library, as part of the UC/Stanford US History and Women's Studies Consortium California Feminist Presses Project. The project is designed to preserve the output as well as the history of feminist presses in California. The other two presses collected are Shameless Hussy Press and HerBooks. My experience as the publisher of HerBooks provided a unique vantage point from which to conduct this oral history. HerBooks also began publishing anthologies in 1984, but unlike Papier-Mache Press, HerBooks remained a very small, all-volunteer press running on low overhead, and its titles appealed to a radical feminist, rather than a mainstream audience. Yet both presses operated and flourished within the cultural milieu of feminism, independent bookstores, and alternative book distribution.

I conducted these two 90-minute interviews with Sandra Martz in July and August of 2001. This manuscript was transcribed verbatim and returned to Sandra Martz for additions and corrections. She checked the manuscript carefully, and kindly lent us the photograph for the frontispiece reproduced here. I wish to thank Jacquelyn Marie, Women's Studies Librarian Emeritus at McHenry Library, who initiated the California Feminist Presses Project, and the collection of Papier-Mache Press's archive; Paul Stubbs and the staff of Special Collections for facilitating access to the archive; and Randall Jarrell, Director of the Regional History Project, for her support of this project.

Copies of the manuscript are on deposit in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; and in Special Collections at McHenry Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The Project is supported administratively by Christine Bunting, head of Collection Planning, and University Librarian Allan J. Dyson.

—*Irene Reti*
November 2001
Regional History Project
McHenry Library
University of California, Santa Cruz

Early Life

Reti: It's Tuesday, July 24, 2001 and I'm at Sandra Martz's house in Hollister, California.

Sandra, where were you born and what year?

Martz: I was born in Lubbock, Texas in 1944. I lived in Texas until I was about twelve. Then we moved just barely across the state line to Hobbs, New Mexico. I went to school there, dropped out of school after the tenth grade, got married, had a couple of children, and then moved to California in 1964.

Reti: What was your early life like?

Martz: My early life was very mixed. My mother had married my father when she was fourteen. I was born when she was sixteen, and then they divorced by the time I was two years old. I ended up living with my maternal grandparents in a very small town of about three hundred people. It's in central Texas, a bit north of Abilene. I spent about two and a half months in Texas last summer revisiting my birthplace and the town where I grew up. The town is changed only in that all the businesses have dried up. The people are still the same. It's a very heavily religious town, a church town, three hundred people and four churches.

It was a fairly conservative environment that I grew up in, but my grandmother was pretty radical for her time. Her husband, my actual grandfather, had died in 1935. She had raised their children by herself, took in laundry, and then eventually as one of her daughters married and moved away, she took in a boarder, whom she ended up marrying the same year that I was born. That was the grandfather whom I knew as a

child. I found out when I went back there to visit that it was quite a scandal for her to have this man living in her home. It was a tiny house . . . I found it interesting to reflect on the nature of their relationship before they got married. My grandmother was very unique. She was a very colorful person. Her house was not decorated like everybody else's. I remember the wallpaper in one of the rooms was black and deep green jungle vines, and the woodwork was all painted green. The kitchen was painted bright green. She made quilts. She sewed. And she gardened. She had three lots in town, the one the house was on and a lot on either side. They were all covered with flowers and cactus, and she raised cows and chickens.

Even though it was a conservative town, she opened up a lot of windows and doors for me. Growing up with my grandparents was a gift that I've reflected on many times. It made a major difference in my life. My grandmother died when I was ten. I went to live with my father and stepmother, and my life from that point on until I was probably in my thirties, was pretty tumultuous. It was difficult. I was working out a lot of issues of being abandoned by my birth mother, conflicts with my father, conflicts with my stepmother, never feeling like I belonged. What brought me through it was that early sense of being completely loved, unconditionally loved by my grandparents, and the lessons that I learned from them. My grandfather had been a bachelor until he met my grandmother, and so I was the only child he ever had. It was difficult, challenging, financially very impoverished, but emotionally very rich.

Reti: And then you ended up in California.

Martz: I ended up in California because I married at seventeen. I had my first child about a year later, then another child fifteen months after that. My husband had been in the air force. When his service time was up we originally moved next door to my parents to see if we wanted to try to make a life there, but it was really difficult. There were no jobs and we didn't have the resources. My husband wanted to farm. That's what my father did. We didn't have the money to get the property and the equipment. So he decided that we should try moving back to California where his parents lived. And that's what brought me to California. I think we lasted as a couple about a year after we moved.

From that point on it was a pretty wild stage of life. I had never had freedom. All of a sudden I'm dropped down in California, first Orange County and then Los Angeles with access to all these experiences that I'd only read about in books. I didn't have any skills, so I originally worked as a waitress and then later found out I could actually make more money and have more fun working in beer bars. They paid \$1.50 an hour, what seemed to me like a lot of money. So I did that and raised my two children. They were just babies. My youngest was only about six months old when we separated. It was exciting and hard. I made a lot of mistakes, had a lot of fun, and a lot of experiences.

My pattern in life is that I learn best from experience. I think that that's what drew me to publishing, the awareness that I learn from my own experiences and from other women's experiences through their stories. That's how I figure things out in life. School is great, but really seeing how people face events, the things that happen in their lives, the challenges, or even how they deal with success, that's what's informed my life.

TRW and the Second Wave of Feminism

Reti: Were you part of the early feminist movement in Los Angeles?

Martz: Yes, by that time I had moved out of the bars and into the office, at least during my working hours. (laughter) I had gotten a job with an engineering company called TRW. I started out in a clerical position, and within a couple of years realized that I was struggling to raise my two children on a clerk's wages. So I started out by going back to school in the community college system. When I got married at seventeen I left school after the tenth grade, so I didn't have much education. I started out as a math major, then got into a training program for computer programmers. That was really great, because it shifted me into an environment with a lot of professional women, very different from the rest of the company. It was an engineering company, and the clerical positions were all held by women, while the administrative and engineering positions were almost all held by men. There were a few women engineers and administrators, but over in the computer programming area, especially the business programming area, there were a lot of women. Some had technical degrees and some had gotten into it through other means, because it was a growing field and there was a huge demand.

That's also where I discovered feminism. We started having brown bag lunches and it was a form of consciousness-raising. We'd get together and share our stories, what was working for us and what wasn't, and begin to think about things that needed to change within the company's environment. Eventually I was invited to join a group that was an advisory board to our local company president. After about a year and a half of lots of meetings and lots of position papers, we felt pretty frustrated because it seemed like we

were being used. The affirmative action officer would come in and see this advisory board of women, but very little was really changing. They had started open job posting so you could at least find out what jobs were open when you wanted to make a move. And there were some training programs like the internship program that got me into the computer programming area. Instead of going out to the college campuses and bringing in interns, you could apply for an internal internship. So there had been some changes. But there were other things, bigger issues that the company wouldn't do more than give lip service to, things like child care and better systems for advancement once you got past an internship. Getting women into management positions. So this group of women got together one night over more than just a couple of bottles of wine, and we signed our "manifesto." We resigned. We disbanded this board. The management was just shocked. I don't know if it actually made any real change, but at least we felt like we weren't being manipulated by the system.

And from that group of women, we formed another informal group of women. We called ourselves SLUG. You got to define your own "S," but it was Ladies Under Ground and we would meet weekly for lunch at one of the local pubs. We came from all different parts of the company. There were women from HR, administration, and engineering. We would get together and compare notes. There were no secrets. The women in HR would tell us what the salary increase pools were, so when we were given our performance reviews we had the real information. It turned out to be a much more powerful group for us personally than the more formal group. All of us were able to use the support of the women and to use the information that we got, to not only further our careers, but to help other women back in our divisions, our departments. It was a pretty exciting time.

Reti: What year are we talking about?

Martz: This would have been from the mid-to late 1970s. Our big disbandment was in 1975. Interestingly enough, the women in that group are still in touch with each other. We've dispersed. We've retired. We've done many different things. But the core group—they live anywhere from San Diego to the San Francisco Bay area—still gets together at least once a year and are in touch, now with e-mail. It's an interesting connection that we built that transcended the problem. Problems brought us together but it was more than that that kept us together.

Reti: And then you started publishing *Atalanta*.

Martz: Yes. I had started with TRW in 1969. It was about 1973 that I made the shift into the professional world. From that time until about 1984, I had moved around because of the open job posting system and my own tendency to get kind of bored with anything if I stayed with it too long. I had moved from computer programming into a human relations job, and from that into a general management job. I received a lot of promotions (there were always reorganizations going on), and had gotten to the point where I had a department of about 200 people. I enjoyed the work, but it was extremely stressful. It had a lot of budget responsibilities. You were always on the end of somebody else's chain. About that time the company also began to have its own financial challenges, cutbacks in government programs. So it put a lot of pressure on the department managers. I also began to realize that I was really where I was because I had followed the opportunities. I had not ever really consciously asked if this was what I wanted to do with my life.

Atalanta

In 1984 I was forty years old, facing kind of a mid-life crisis. I was thinking, what am I doing with my life? I had sacrificed, quite honestly, a lot of my personal life with my children. I had been divorced most of the time. I felt, surely, this couldn't be all there was.

Not as a career move at all, but more trying to find something that gave me a different perspective, I joined a writing class. I met a whole different slate of people—writers, screenwriters, and a whole new world. Unfortunately I didn't have much of a natural gift for writing. I had hoped that I would. I had a lot of stories. But I didn't really have the skill, and it wasn't a how-to class. It was mostly critiquing. But I loved working with the folks I met there.

The writers group came up with the idea to do a book about the Olympics that was coming to Los Angeles in 1984. This was probably 1983. The original idea was to contact the Olympic athletes, because everybody's a closet writer, right? We would gather material that they had written, hopefully about their sport, and then publish this collection and market and sell it at the Olympics. Eventually we decided to make it about women athletes and expand it beyond the people who were participating in the Olympics. Well, I ran an ad in *Poets and Writers Magazine*. By the time the ad came out, everybody else had bailed on the project. I went to the mailbox one day and it's full of manuscripts.

The material came in. It was pretty interesting. I probably got a hundred submissions—poems and stories and photographs. I didn't really know what to do with them. I was

able to get one of the folks from the writing group to consult with me. She had worked on a literary magazine, so she gave me some ideas. I had another friend who was a typesetter, and she said she would lay it out for me. So I put together this small book. I had no background in this; I had no classes. But I loved the process. I absolutely fell in love with the process of reading all this material and figuring out how to put it into some sort of flow, how to make it graphically inviting, interesting to read. The result was a nice little book. The folks who were in it were thrilled because they were used to being in little homemade mimeographed books . . . this was before personal computers and all the graphics ability that a small press has these days. To them it seemed quite professional. When I took the book around to bookstores they thought it looked nice. But it was pretty funny. They would be looking at the book, and then they'd turn it over. It didn't have anything on the spine and it didn't have anything on the back. There were a few things about book production that I didn't quite have together . . . Like I said, I tend to learn from experience.

More Golden Apples

That book led to a second book. I had received a number of poems and stories after the deadline, and after I'd already gone to print. I thought, well I'll just do another book on the same subject. So I came out with *More Golden Apples*.

With the first book, not only did I have a personal friend who did the layout for me, but a small, local, women-owned printer did the printing. They had helped me by choosing the paper and everything. These two middle-aged women, with a cat, of course, ran a printing shop in Venice, California. They'd really taken care of a lot of things for me. My

typesetter friend couldn't do the layout, so I hired someone else to do the layout. I decided to try graphic art instead of photographs this time. I found out that you could get cheaper printing in the midwest, and so I got bids from a printer in Michigan. Everything seemed like it was going along okay. There were little problems like the first galleys that I looked at from the layout folks didn't look very good, and the graphic artist came and showed me what I thought were conceptual sketches for the art. They weren't great, but I thought they were going in the right direction. So when the final layouts came—and again this is back before desktop publishing, so it was art boards—on the day I was ready to ship to the printer, I realized that the artwork was not conceptual sketches, but this was the artwork. I didn't have enough experience to know what to do, so I just sent it off to the printer. When the books came I was shocked. The paper they had used was thin and cheesy. Whereas my buddies from Venice had given me a nice, heavy, high-bulking stock, and a cover that was extra thick, this new printer had given me their standard stock, so it hardly was thick enough to perfect bind. It had a title on the spine, but it was this tiny little thing, this flimsy thing, with horrible artwork and horrible cover art. The artwork for the cover was supposed to look like an apple being tossed, and in fact it looked like a big banana slug! I was just stunned. And of course it had cost a lot of money, so I had no choice but to go ahead and use them. So it didn't get quite the raves from the authors as the first one, but in a lot of ways it was a much more useful book for me. I still loved the process. It was like having an ugly child. You love them anyway. But I realized that if I was going to do this as a professional I needed to hire professional designers, not just people who said, oh yeah I can do sketches, or

typesetters that typeset ads for the grocery store. I needed people who knew how to build a book.

I also realized that this was more than just a hobby. I wanted to do a serious book, a book that had a broader range, a broader reach. That's how I ended up with a book about women and aging, which changed my whole life, personally, professionally. Everything about my life shifted as a result of that book. And of course that book was *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*.

When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple

The book was inspired by a poem by Ruth Harriet Jacobs, one of the poets whom I had worked with on the other two books. She sent me a poem about her fear of growing old and now she realized that there were a lot of gifts that came with reaching her 60s, being able to do things, new friends and new creativity that sprang out of nowhere, and reconnection with her spirituality. All of this she embodied in this small poem.

I placed another ad in *Poets and Writers Magazine* but this time I got six or eight hundred, a deluge of manuscripts. This was 1986, a time when a lot of shifts were taking place at TRW. So all the time I am doing this I'm still in the throes of heavy-duty career building, sixty, seventy hour work weeks, and sons who were now teenagers, who hate each other. There was a lot going on. And then the company started making cutbacks. I had worked very hard building up a department, developing employees, doing succession planning, doing all the things that the textbooks say you should be doing. And now it was being disbanded and dispersed. I was going through a personal crisis on many levels. The book became almost a cathartic process to work out my own sense that while I wasn't

exactly facing old age, I was going through a time of life that was quite different from being 21 and the world is your oyster.

I like to think that with everything coming together at once, it helped me create a many-layered book that spoke on different levels. There was a working-out process that shows up in the book in ways that speak beyond just the issue of aging. The book speaks to the issue of your value in society, your role, how those roles shift. I think the shifts are deeper and richer for women. I think, unfortunately men aren't given enough slack by society to make those shifts and connections.

I spent about a year and a half working on the book. Reading all the material was an incredible experience. There was so much pain. People often comment, geez, it's a kind of depressing book. Little do they know that this was some of the lighter material that was submitted. There was a lot of anger in some of the writing that came in. I very consciously tried to choose stories and poems that showed that there is a process you work through, and then you can see this whole aging experience differently. I also wanted to call attention to some of the things that society needed to look at, that we as members of society needed to look at. It was both a personal and a political experience. I edited the book myself but I did hire a professional designer this time. He picked up and moved to Minneapolis when the book was 95% done. Mailed it to me in a box. Again, this is layout sheets. This is back in the old days when you set up your crop marks and laid out your rolls of RC paper. I finally found somebody to finish up most of it and even got involved doing a little layout myself.

I particularly was drawn to the photos. There was one young woman in particular who had submitted a lot of photos, Lori Burkhalter. I worked with her throughout the whole time I was at Papier-Mache. She worked in nursing homes and she would ask the women who lived there if they would be willing to sit for her, to model for her. She'd do extraordinary photographs. It was a very, very radical thing. She would take their pictures, not all shrouded the way we tended to want to see our old women. You know, it's okay to be old as long as you wear high collars and scarves and long sleeves, and look matronly enough. She would photograph them in their slips or in sleeveless blouses. What she brought to it was a caring and a love for these women. These were women whom she was in relationship with. She wasn't just snapping some pictures and going away. These were women whom she lived with day in and day out.

When the layout was finished I also found a new printer, Malloy Lithographing. They guided me through things that I really needed to know about paper selection. I told them that I wanted the best quality paper that I could afford, that I needed the photographs to be done very nicely. I printed 3000 copies, which seemed like stepping off the end of a very, very high bridge. I had a good job, but I still also had a house and two children to support.

Reti: You were funding this out of your salary?

Martz: Just funding this out of my salary. Fortunately those 3000 copies were sold within three months. It was incredible. I found a couple of wholesalers who agreed to take the books. I had never really explored the business end of things. One of the things that made a huge difference early on, even in the production process and clearly in the

marketing and distribution, was advice and support that I got from *Feminist Bookstore News*. Carol Seajay was this fountain of support. She consulted with me on the phone. She made her mailing list of feminist bookstores available.

While that book went on to sell a gazillion copies, and the press went on to do many, many more books, nothing was ever as exciting as that first year. It was filling my car full of books and driving from Los Angeles to Seattle and back. Staying off the interstate, and with a list of the feminist bookstores. I did a reading in Mother Kali's [in Eugene, Oregon] and other small bookstores along the way. But mainly I just stayed off the interstate, stopping in a town that would be of a size that conceivably would have a bookstore, driving around on the main streets until I found the bookstore, which would always be on the main street, and then walking in with a complimentary book and a packet of materials telling them that they could buy the book from Bookpeople. So I gave away books, did readings, met women.

Reti: Was this hard for you, this kind of promotion?

Martz: It really wasn't. I had learned in my work at TRW to do public speaking, because you have to give presentations, financial status reports and things like that. But while that helped a lot, I think that I was so passionately in love with this book that I was a zealot. That's what I wanted to do. That's what I wanted to talk about. I lived, breathed *When I Am an Old Woman . . .* It was a pretty exciting time. I got another wholesaler in the Seattle area, which helped open up the Pacific Northwest. They've since gone out of business. They were one of the earlier distributors of new age books.

I was running my sales out of my garage and off the corner of my bed. My sales doubled because of this one trip. I was gone for nine days. My sales immediately doubled and stayed at that level. So I learned that that's the difference between making it and not making it. You have to have the distributors. And you have to get out and be known. You have to put a face to the book. You have to do what it takes to get people to write about the book in their local newspapers. You have to get the bookstores to put copies up near the cash register. The other interesting thing was that women booksellers would look at the book and they would just know. The men would look at the book and they were clueless. They just couldn't get it. Later on, gift stores began to pick up the book, which was very unusual for a book that was fairly serious in nature. There was just something about it. The title, the space on the cover. And that's where I began to deal with a lot of male buyers. Men were more likely to be buying for the gift stores. They would call up and reorder the book and say, I don't understand this. I don't know what's going on, but we sold out those six copies already. Send us six more. Send us a dozen more. It was a really interesting thing. And because I was running the business single-handedly all of this information was really useful. It was all direct feedback.

Moving to Watsonville, California

By September, 1988 I had quit my job at TRW. I moved to Northern California. I had made the trip to Seattle in June, and I was so convinced that it would work. When I think about it now, I just think oh my God! I sold my house in the Los Angeles area, quit my job, bought a house with a big mortgage in Watsonville, moved up here, and said I am a publisher.

Reti: How did you choose Watsonville?

Martz: I chose Watsonville because my best friend, one of the key people in this group of women back at TRW, had moved to Capitola, and another gal from that same group was also living there. I would come up to visit them. I would also come up every September for the jazz festival in Monterey. I fell in love with the area. What's not to love when compared to the Los Angeles area? I lived in Manhattan Beach and it was very beautiful there. But the difference between there and here was that you could find these beautiful pockets, but you would drive through wasteland in between, miles and miles of wasteland. When I moved up here it was sort of symbolic. It was the journey. It's not just getting from point A to point B. Here the journey was as beautiful as any destination.

I chose Watsonville specifically because my childhood, even when I was living with my grandparents, was in a rural community. My father was a cotton farmer. There was something about the agricultural nature of the community that felt familiar, that felt like home. I didn't realize at the time, I didn't have the language at the time to describe it, but I realized later that Watsonville was a working class community, and that I am more comfortable with working class folks. I just am. I *am* one. (laughter) I have passed at times in my life for middle class and could now if necessary, but I'm really a working class person. I like what that means in terms of families and communities and neighborhoods and how you look at the world. Watsonville seemed perfect.

And from a business standpoint it made a lot of sense, because since it had agribusiness it had the infrastructure that I needed. It had UPS. It had people who did graphic design. It also had UCSC and all the culture and the art and the creative talent that I could and

did draw on. I very quickly found a local designer who handled all my book design for most of the life of the press. Many of the pieces of the cover art were local, Santa Cruz County artists. It also provided me some balance. When I bought the house in Watsonville it was out in the country and it was very isolated. And except for a very brief, disastrous attempt at living with my son and his wife and their new baby, which is another whole story, I was pretty isolated out there. There was no Internet and e-mail back then. I needed the isolation in order to keep myself focused. I realized that I needed to focus in a way that I had never needed to in my whole life, and that I needed a structure to do it. Here I was. I could sleep until noon if I wanted to. I needed to not want to. So I decided that I would schedule my time from 7 in the morning until 11 at night, seven days a week. I had also taken on some volunteer work in town, because I wanted some sort of a connection. I provided counseling to home-bound elders, folks that needed peer counseling, but who couldn't or wouldn't travel. So I was doing that counseling and I was running the press, and managing two and a half acres with sheep. Because of course the first thing I did was run out and get some sheep, and some dogs and cats. You gotta do the country thing as well. And I had apple trees so I was making apple butter, as if I could live on apple butter.

It was really easy to sit and read manuscripts. By this time I had started other books. I published two books within months of moving, and had two more books underway. But I really needed to get a handle on the marketing piece of it. That was the piece that was harder, that I knew less about. I could draw some conclusions from my experiences, what seemed to work, what didn't. It was also, interestingly enough, some of the most exciting marketing that I would do. I did things then that later, when the press was

bigger, and when there was staff to do things, we would never do. Things like writing customized press releases for all of the media in each town where an author or photographer lived. Customized. A collection would have sixty or seventy folks in it. And coming up with ways to use advertising that seemed to make sense. Coming up with interesting ways to package material that was going out. I happened to have some notecards that had the same cover art as one of the new books. So instead of doing the regular press release, I had a mini press release inside the notecard.

It was in the course of trying to be more creative that I stumbled into the key to the gift market. I had created t-shirts, and I would send promotional t-shirts to key stores or key reviewers. The next thing you know the stores were buying some of these t-shirts. So I developed a whole line of t-shirts. T-shirts led to posters. It was a whole new product line that would account for as much as twenty or twenty five percent of sales. It opened the gift market, which would have been far less interested in just books. That market, for most of the life of the press, accounted for forty percent of the sales. So it was a major breakthrough. It wasn't luck, but a combination of experimenting with things and then taking advantage of the things that did work.

My intentions when I moved to Watsonville were to go full time with the press, and support myself with the press. That came out of some work that I did with a consultant. These days you would call what she did personal coaching, but they didn't have that name then. She was just a friend who was a fairly high-powered consultant for organizations. She agreed to spend a day with me. We met at her house up in Big Sur and spent the day talking. I was desperate to leave TRW. I was burned out, fed up, really

had to do something different. I had this idea that I would write manuals. As a manager I had had to do a lot of procedure development for my own departments, and I knew what manuals companies needed. That was going to be my new job. I would use word processing. I had bought myself a personal computer. I would come to you as a business owner and say, I'll write your personnel manual, and your safety manual, and your accounting manual. I told my friend that will support me, and then I can continue to do the press as a part-time job. That was after the *Old Woman* book had just come out. At the end of the day my friend said, what would happen if you were to put all of your energy into the publishing? What would you do? Then she handed me a book that I never needed to read. The title said it all: *Do What You Love and the Money Will Follow*. I went home and I began putting together a plan that would move me out of the area. I really was ready to leave Los Angeles. My son and his wife were going to share a house with me and they would pay rent and that would help. Again, that really didn't work out. They were there a month. A very hard month. I guess they moved there the second month that I was there. The first month that I was there I was so anxious about having no income and a big house payment.

I was so nervous about the money that I took this job that this friend of mine told me about. I was a "chip fluffer," for a small, independent tortilla chip manufacturer. They had drivers who would go out five days a week to deliver new stuff and pick up the stale product, but they had to pay the drivers big dollars. So they would hire somebody to drive around on Mondays and go into the stores and check on the product. I would restock the shelves, pick up any chips that were out of date, move Frito Lay out of our space, check in with the manager and say hello to them, and they would pay me seventy

five dollars. Well, I drove a 1978 Chrysler, which got about ten miles to the gallon. I'm living outside of Watsonville. The stores are in Morgan Hill, Gilroy, Hollister, and Salinas. I drove at least two hundred miles. I had to start at 5 a.m. I barely made my gas money. But it was cash. And it was security. It was enough to get me over that piece. I think sometimes you just have to do what you have to do to get past the fear. After a couple of months I told them that I wouldn't be able to do that anymore. So I moved here in 1988, and ran the press alone until 1990.

Naming Papier-Mache Press

Reti: How did you come up with the name Papier-Mache?

Martz: Well, the name actually came from the art. I love papier-mache art. I had that giraffe [now in the corner of Martz's current home] when I first decided to start the press. I was sitting around, and sort of as a joke somebody said, well you love papier-mache so much . . . I thought, that's a nice name. It violates one of the cardinal rules of naming a business. You never pick a foreign word, because people don't know how to spell it, and they are afraid they don't know how to pronounce it. But it turned out to be the perfect metaphor for the press and eventually I began to use that in some of our materials. I redefined papier-mache as the art of using common, everyday materials to create articles of great strength and beauty. I felt that accurately depicted both papier-mache art and what we were trying to do with the books. There were a couple of times later on when, almost by accident, we would publish somebody who either had a well-known name or became well-known later, but from the beginning my interest was in hearing from women just like myself, like these women friends whom I was so in love

with. I valued their experiences and what they had to say about life. Those were the women that I wanted to hear from. As much as I adore Gloria Steinem, her experiences aren't very relevant to my life. They don't help me. She's not looking at the same kinds of things I am. So that's who I wanted to hear from, the kind of issues I wanted to look at.

Papier-Mache Press: The Art of Gentle Consciousness Raising

The success with *When I Am An Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple* convinced me that it was in fact possible to use the medium of storytelling, whether it was stories through the photographs, through the poems, or through actual stories. This was a good medium to reach women about these issues. The work was accessible, both in terms of the nature of the writing, and in the way I tried to put the books together. By interspersing the material, generally keeping to shorter stories, and using photographs, I was able to draw in a lot of readers who wouldn't ever buy a book of poetry, or who might not even buy novels or short story collections, women who might have bought an occasional novel but who were just as likely to be romance readers. But if I could come up with a topic that they felt was relevant to their lives, that they would be interested in, then I had a chance with them. And when they would thumb the book it would look to them like something they would want to read.

When the production part was done, I would take on the role as spokesperson for the book. I would go and do readings. Hundreds of times women would say, "I've never been to a reading before. This is so interesting." It was not only reaching them with my book, but opening up a window into a world for them. They would go and explore other writings. They would push into other kinds of experiences that they might not have

reached for before. The work didn't talk down to anybody. But it didn't talk over their heads either.

Reti: Did you intend to start a press that had a feminist politic?

Martz: The original book on women and sports, *Atalanta*, shifted to be about women and sports because in the 1984 Olympics women's role was almost double what it had been in the past. There were many, many new events for women. It was the first time women were allowed to run the marathon, which is amazing to realize. I was then, and am now, and will always be a feminist. So yes, the idea of the press was definitely to be a feminist press. I used to have a quote I loved on a little plaque in my office. It was from Carol Seajay. She said that if there was an award for the gentle art of consciousness raising for the not yet radicalized that it would go to Papier-Mache. We reached women who didn't label themselves feminist, but these were their issues. We helped bring their thinking to different levels, helped them challenge things that maybe they had just accepted before. And while some of the women in the stories are dealing with tragic events, they are not tragic figures. They are women who are taking an experience, figuring it out, and growing from it.

Reti: And you focused on older women.

Martz: Absolutely. I think that that was partially a personal interest, being able to use this whole business to work out my personal issues about growing older. The other piece of it is that it was a good business decision. Especially early on there was a hunger for this kind of work, and there weren't that many people doing anything in this area in the

mainstream. There have of course always been academic, scholarly works. There was only, to my knowledge, one book anywhere near it, and that was Calyx Press's really fine book on women and aging, which I saw before I finished the *Old Woman* book, but was not aware of when I began the book. Which is really good because if I had seen that book I would probably have said oh, it's been done, and it might have ended there.

I also was very committed to having the business part of the press be feminist. The qualities that I wanted to capture in the book itself needed to show up in the design of the book, in the promotional literature that accompanied the book, in the promotional process, in the staff who were chosen to work with these books to represent us, in how that staff worked with each other, and how I worked with them. I have to confess that it was not always perfect. I wish that some of my maturing process could have happened earlier. Maybe I would have made better business decisions, better decisions about how to handle the people piece of the business. But there's no sin in making mistakes. It's being willing to step up to them, and to have your values in place in the first place. Values like loyalty to the customers, both our store customers and our readers. Occasionally I would get a very hard letter to read from someone whose own aging process was very painful. They would pick up one of our books, often the *Old Woman* book, and it would trigger hurt for them instead of healing. I received a number of angry letters. The first couple of times that happened I didn't know what to do. Finally I realized that integrity meant engaging with this person. So I would sit down and write to them, and apologize for any hurt or distress that it brought to them. I would explain what the book was about, and why I was doing it. I would usually try to pick some other book that I had published that I thought would be less likely to be a problem for them,

and would send them that book. Nine times out of ten I would get a letter back saying, thank you, I see what you are saying. I understand and I'm sorry that I felt so bad at first and now I understand better. That was important.

Sometimes this commitment to these kinds of values would show up in ways that other people didn't understand. When I started the *Old Woman* book I realized I needed a bigger printer. I needed somebody in the Great Lakes area because they are more economical because they are closer to paper mills. That printer that I went to with *When I Am An Old Woman* printed all of our books except those with four color interiors.

Reti: Which printer was that?

Martz: Malloy Lithographing in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Other printers would ask, can we quote? I would say sure, I'm glad to have you quote any book that we do, but I need you to know that this is where I am. It was an extraordinary relationship. It was like being family. They were a big printing company with six hundred employees, but they were about at the same place in the spectrum for a book printer that we were as a publisher. We could relate to each other's business issues. We shared information and met regularly to figure things out. If things didn't go well we'd figure out what we needed to do differently, what they needed to do differently. Again, it was just like family. There was just no way I would have taken the business someplace else to save five cents a book, or to save twenty five cents a book. My advice to new publishers about the printing process is to spend a lot of time up front. Do all your screening and ask all the hard questions up front. Pick somebody whom you can have a long-term relationship with, because that's your most important business relationship, that and your distributor.

Key Papier-Mache Personnel

Reti: Who were some of the key personnel with the press?

Martz: As far as staff, the really key, key person for me personally was Shirley Coe, who came into the process fairly early on to help with the production and with the editing. She had done some editing. She had experience with IDG Books way back before they became mega-successful with their “Dummies” series. She had done a lot of the computer stuff with them. She came on board and grew into the acquisitions editor. Ultimately she did all of the pre-screening of everything that came in, and worked with me very closely through the whole process. At one point we got large enough that we needed to have a different production person, so she let go of that part of it. She was really essential. And I was really glad that before we finally closed the doors she and I co-edited a book, which was a different role for her than her role as acquisitions editor. Before it was a matter of screening, but in that case it was a matter of helping me actually create the book.

Another person who was involved with the press was my ex-husband, Dan Haldeman. That was very exciting. He was very smart in ways that I wasn't, and very challenging because he was not as connected to this idea of being a values-driven organization.

His business ideas were very valuable. When he came on board I was still very small. He's the one who said you have to have an 800 number and be able to take credit cards, some of the things that I just didn't spend time on. He had some excellent ideas around marketing. He had excellent people skills externally. He would go to the movers and shakers within the industry, *Publishers Weekly*, Barnes and Noble, and schmooze and do

all those things that I really was not that interested in. When you are not interested, it's harder to be good at something. I'd like to think that I could have been good at that. Of course I used to say I was going to have this t-shirt printed that says, "I could be tall if I wanted to." (laughter) I have a feeling schmoozing is in the same category. So he helped build the company over a number of years.

The Growth of Papier-Mache Press

Dan joined the company in 1991. It was a big breakthrough year for the company even before he got there. *When I Am An Old Woman* was picked by the American Booksellers Association as one of ten candidates for a new award. It made it to the top five, which made it an "honors" winner. We took the title Abby Honors Award, and just went crazy publicity-wise. It was fabulous. It was a very, very exciting time. There was a big ceremony. Gloria Steinem was on the podium as one of the speakers at the awards ceremony. And even as a runner-up I got to go on stage and accept an award. It was pretty thrilling.

Dan came in with these more aggressive marketing ideas at a time when we had something we could market, and it really helped grow the press. Within a year we had added six employees. When he came on board we had a half-time shipping clerk and the two of us. That was it. It was an enormous growth in one year. The first year that I actually was running the press full time I did sales of about \$80,000. By the next year sales were up to \$300,000. In 1991 we did a million in sales. By 1992 we were up to three million.

It was very exciting, and very hard, because as the company grew, the places where Dan and I didn't mesh very well began to have an opportunity to rub. We had brought on lots of new people. The year after we hit three million in sales we grew to eighteen staff. We had to move to bigger quarters. And there's where I have to say that I personally got off track. It's really easy to Monday morning quarterback. It's a lot easier in hindsight, so much clearer.

Much of it was a lot of fun and very exciting, having big contingents go off to all the trade shows. For a couple of years there we attended thirty to thirty-five trade shows and conferences a year.

Reti: Those are exhausting!

Martz: My ex handled marketing and I handled the basic publishing, running the acquisitions and the business part of the operation. My son came on board back when we first started to grow and he ran our operations. Then at one point I moved him over into running the finances. I couldn't run finances because I was out touring two or three months at a time. I was traveling back and forth all of the time. I wouldn't just leave and come back two months later, but it would have almost been easier if I had done that.

In that mix I also began to operate from fear, instead of operating from love. It was like okay now we're here, we have to keep growing. Instead of saying, this is great, this is a nice size. Let's stay this size. At the point when we were at about six employees we had a small warehouse in town that my son ran with a couple of people helping him doing shipping and receiving. We had three or four of us working out at my house. When we

made the shift to really grow, that meant having to move into town and get a real office building. Our overhead quadrupled, between salaries and space. All of a sudden we had this big lease payment, where before not only were we spending a very modest amount on renting warehouse space, but it was subsidizing some of our housing costs at home. With the pressure to make this all work financially, the company began to be driven by this financial fear, instead of the love of, oh my God, this is a book that I just have to publish. It became—where can I find a book good enough to publish?

At the same time our customer base had also begun to shift. Before we had always sold a lot to the chains, but it was at the mall stores, which at the mall store level are like a little independent store.

Reti: Do you mean Waldenbooks?

Martz: Yes, B. Dalton and Walden's. You walk into one of those stores; it's probably somebody who lives down the street who manages the store. It's a store about the size of this house. It's got two or three clerks. The mall stores, and independently-owned and run book and gift stores were our customer base.

Changes in the Book Industry

Well, everybody knows what happened to bookselling. The superstores came in. The chains consolidated. Borders, which had been this really nifty, neat store, a small independent chain that was actually started as a collective of stores, said we'll consolidate our buying and warehousing power. Then they became a superstore chain, and they built bigger and bigger stores. Barnes and Noble said gee, we're going to do

this too. They both began to close mall stores, and replace them with superstores. Independents began to close their doors right and left.

Reti: We're talking the mid-nineties by now?

Martz: 1995 was when we began to see changes. Not only did we see it in our order processing, and what showed up on our sales reports, but at the same time we began to see this shift in our relationship with those chains. We began to be more and more indebted to them, and more and more controlled by them. Our original relationship was that we had been selling the *Old Woman* book quite successfully, and even selling it to them, but through Bookpeople and other wholesalers. With the new superstores, that evolved into us being in a direct relationship with them. We had to present new books to them six months in advance of book shipping. Getting feedback from them like oh, I don't like that, or no, we're not interested in that kind of book anymore, or that's a horrible cover. My ex handed that interface. That worked well for him, because he's the kind of person who would say okay, tell me what the rules are and I'll play by the rules. He could shift to be effective in working with them. Much of that then would come back as feedback to me, exacerbating our conflicts and my own fears of not making the right decisions. I would find myself more and more going with well, what will Borders and Barnes and Noble like? Or, trying to sit around a table with a group of people thinking—well what could we do that they would accept.

Reti: You became essentially a corporate arm of Borders and Barnes and Noble at that point, and lost your own vision?

Martz: Exactly. From their perspective, we were just a speck. We had almost no real relationship with them. But from our perspective, it was like having this board of directors that you have to respond to. And they themselves didn't necessarily agree on what they wanted. It also meant building in all kinds of expensive procedures that we had to have internally to comply with what they required. Everything from how we'd ship and bill, to how we would present titles, when we would present titles, information that we would have to acquire from authors that had to accompany submission of a new title, bookcover design . . . it just permeated everything.

Then on an almost humorous level . . . I can almost laugh about it now. Remember, forty percent of our sales were going to the gift stores. It had always been a stretch for them to stock our books, but they would do it because they would sell. One of the things that created this big quantum leap in sales is that we published a sequel to the *Old Woman* book, which was also very successful. So the gift stores primarily stocked those two books, and the t-shirts, and the coffee mugs and everything else that we trotted out for the gift stores. But the concept of books about old women, especially books with old women's faces on the cover, was still a stretch for them. Well, here comes *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. It displaced us in all but the die-hard gift stores. They would still carry some of the gift products—maybe—but our profit margin on a t-shirt was almost non-existent. We'd do a little better on posters, and somewhere in between those two on things like coffee mugs. So at the same time that we're trying to chase Barnes and Noble and Borders, we also began to manufacture a whole bunch of other gift products not as book-related, trying to come up with something that can compete with the *Chicken Soup* books in the gift stores.

Reti: What kinds of things?

Martz: Well, we came up with a line of stationery items, note pads. We had a line that was kind of loosely related to a little book that we should have never done. We did these little books.

Reti: I saw those in the archive.

Martz: I mean, do they look Papier-Mache? Not really. We did them because by this time our whole company was acting from desperation. Occasionally something would work, and often it wouldn't. Sales began to drop. I guess our peak was 3.5 million. The next year it was 2.8. Then it dropped to 2.3. Then it was 1.8. When it hit a million well . . . Those are big numbers but I had a \$400,000 payroll, and manufacturing would represent forty to forty-five percent of sales. That means for every dollar of sales we spent forty five cents to manufacture the product.

Reti: Production costs.

Martz: Yes. There was a critical point where it became a downward spiral. The profit got smaller and smaller. We had to start cutting back on marketing and publicity, advertising, staff. And probably at a point where we should have known better we moved into a new building. It was one of those things where it actually didn't increase our costs that much and it was a much easier building to be in because we didn't have much warehousing space in the other one.

I've looked many times at our last two seasons of books, spring and fall 1998. The last two seasons we were in production we had been looking for something different and we had expanded into nonfiction books. Four out of the last ten books that we published were these single author, nonfiction books that sold out their first printings. We had finally gotten some clarity around what we should be publishing besides anthologies. That had always been our problem. The anthologies were making lots of money, so I published poetry and fiction by single authors as sort of my own little charity award.

Reti: The anthologies were funding that?

Martz: Exactly. They were subsidizing all of it, and I never worried about whether the single author books were going to make money or not. So we finally had found something besides anthologies. We had tailored down the print quantities, figured out how many we could print where we could sell them all and actually make a profit. But by the time we had figured all this out it was too late. It was really too late.

This part's hard. [pause] In the spring of 1997, when I lost my son, it was a big wake-up call. It was a terrible tragedy and an irreplaceable loss, and a huge, huge reminder of what life's really all about. I took some hard looks at how I was living my life. I decided that life was not about being in a marriage that was over in everything except the legal papers, and that it was not about operating a business just for business. It was really about getting back to my own personal integrity.

I had some wonderful help in getting there. I went to a woman friend who was a personal coach. I worked with her for the next two years. She's up in Ashland, and we

met on the phone weekly and in person quarterly. In September 1997 she came to Watsonville and we spent three days one-on-one offsite, and developed my mission statement. That was the primary condition of working with her, that I had to work on who I was as a person. The business decisions would be subtiered to that, until we worked out what my mission was as a human being. We couldn't work on my mission as publisher, or whatever else until then. It was a wonderful process. I took my mission statement and wrote it on flip charts just like I used to do with TRW. Later I transformed it into a little flip book, captured all the crucial elements of it, so that I could have it with me all the time and remind myself what it was. I concluded that my mission was to live with integrity; that's where I had gotten off track. I had let go of my integrity. I had known that all along and I had let go of it. Once I got back on track it was still pretty hard. The following spring I filed for divorce and moved into the second floor offices of Papier-Mache.

Bankruptcy

Going through bankruptcy was very interesting. I could write a whole book about how to go through bankruptcy with integrity. I managed to work that whole process, with the help of an incredibly loving attorney, a guy, which surprised me. I always choose women doctors, lawyers, accountants. But he was a person of integrity, and he helped me. He said he'd never had anybody go through the process the way I chose to go through the process. The day after we filed the papers I went down to see the bank. I said, you're going to get papers in the mail. This is what's happening. Please work with me to make whole all of the local vendors. I knew that we couldn't do it for everybody. There was a printer, not my printer in Michigan, but an overseas printer that I owed a lot of money. I

owed the authors some money. And every credit card company that operates west of the Mississippi I owed lots of money. I said if you will let me make whole all the local utilities, all the local vendors, like the t-shirt guy that did the screenprinting, I will work for you for free. I will run the company until we can find a buyer and liquidate what we can't sell. Thank goodness the guy that I worked with at the bank was also a really fine person. We worked together for the next five months, meeting weekly. Every week I would make the deposits and submit a list of checks that I needed to write that week to pay UPS and the other vendors, to keep the company going. I had to let all the staff go. So here I was in this big office and warehouse. Every morning I'd come to work and sit at one desk and run the orders. Then I would take the orders out to the warehouse, pick up the stock, and bring it to the packing area, pack all the boxes, run them through the UPS machine, and stage them for the UPS guy to pick up. Then I would go to the post office and pick up the mail, and go back to the same desk to process orders and payments. Then I would have to go to a different desk, because different computers have different software on them. Later I'd have to go to the accountant's desk to do my bookkeeping.

Reti: You were returning to where you started in a corner of your bedroom, only the press was now diffused all over a huge office. You wore all the hats again.

Martz: It was actually a wonderful way to work through the letting go of everything. I filed bankruptcy the beginning of May. I closed the doors September 30, 1999. I had sold everything, all the furniture, the office partitions, the shelving, the pallet racks in the warehouse, the forklift. I sold all the books. Some of them were sold to a paper recycler, so they were sold to be shredded, but they were recycled. I sold books to the 99 cent

stores. I had sold books to the authors at the end, and said if you can pay the shipping I can give you as many of these books as you want. I sold the name of the press and the anthologies to LPC which was my old distributor. It was great. At the end my son came with his pickup truck, and we hauled away a cartful of stuff that I was taking with me, and left a broom to sweep the floor. Everything was empty. It was an incredible catharsis. A sense of completion.

The other very nice thing was that early on when things were getting harder, but before I knew how hard they were going to get, I had gone to my printer and had told them that I really wanted them to have more protection. Printers don't have much protection. When the books leave their warehouse it's really hard for them to make good if you don't pay them. I got to a point where I owed them about \$200,000. It was basically unsecured money. I gave them a lien against some real estate that I had. So when we went through the bankruptcy they had a secured note.

Reti: Wow. That's really integrity.

Martz: I was so glad that I had had the foresight to do that. I wouldn't have been able to live with myself. They had been so good to me. We had worked together so hard and so long. So that was really good.

I have a bunch of correspondence that needs to be organized and put in the archives. And there's a whole raft of it right at the end. By this time e-mail is a big thing. About two hundred of the authors who were in the anthologies, especially the ones who had any outstanding amounts due under bankruptcy, were on e-mail. So I had an ongoing

correspondence with them. I tried to contact the others by letter. At one point it looked like that there was a possibility that we could make a deal to sell the press that would keep the press intact as far as the anthologies, but the buyer was a little hesitant because of the outstanding royalties. So I wrote to the authors, it's the bank's decision, but they are relying on me for my recommendations. I want to hear what you have to say. I got wonderful letters. I mean here they are, some of them could conceivably have been owed a couple thousand dollars, which is a lot of money for a writer. Wonderful, wonderful letters of support. That relationship with the authors was very, very sustaining at the end, because I felt a lot of shame, guilt, failure, and like I had done them a disservice. I mean here I have their creative force tied up in this mess. The support that came back from them, the offers of anything they could do. It was really wonderful. From the beginning I'd always tried to let them know what was going on. At least a couple times each year I sent out a letter saying what's going on with Papier-Mache, not just with their book, but what's going on with Papier-Mache. I tried to be open with them. There's this whole series of letters about when their royalties were due. Each letter would say, I'm really sorry there just isn't enough cash right now but there will be later. If you can't send money at least send information.

Reti: Yes. Instead of just disappearing.

Martz: It paid off in the interim, and it paid off at the end. Unfortunately in the end the authors didn't get any of their money from the new owner. Legally it had been discharged. LPC decided not to do anything about that. LPC was very up front. Their intent never was to try to maintain this community. For me, Papier-Mache wasn't just a

business. It was a community. And they had no intent around the community. They had only intent to reprint and sell the books as long as they could.

The Challenges of Book Distribution

Reti: What do you think of the Internet as a place to promote and distribute books?

Martz: We didn't have our own website, and we didn't use the Internet a lot. I think probably the biggest advantage was the ability to use e-mail in the publicity department, to be able to send out information, not so much your general press releases. We had to do those through the mail because you couldn't count on them getting to who you needed them to get to, and many of the people were still requesting paper press releases. But once you were in conversation with someone, e-mail was a wonderful way to pass information about all of the details of scheduling interviews. Some of the stores used e-mail, and a lot of newspapers and radio stations were using the technology.

We did make sure that our books were listed on Barnes and Noble and Amazon.com, and those kinds of websites. At that time everything was free. It was, give us your information. You can add pictures, etc. I understand that today a lot of websites are charging for information that was free back then. I'm really not surprised, because being successful on the Internet isn't any easier, and is perhaps even harder than being successful in the brick-and-mortar world. You still have to reach the readers directly. It's not any more likely that someone is going to stumble on your book, among millions of books on an Internet site, than they are going to stumble on your one book when it's one of a hundred thousand books on a shelf in the store. I think that it's more of a

convenience to the customers when they already know what they want, rather than a big boon to the publisher or the author.

Reti: Did you make a deliberate decision not to develop a website for Papier-Mache?

Martz: We actually were looking at doing a website and had registered a website domain name. But what I was concerned about was not just putting a catalog online. It needed to be some sort of content-based site. That's why it was taking us longer. We had a preliminary design but we never really got a website loaded. I really wanted to make it a women's community online, and have the books as an adjunct to that. Particularly women writers and women artists, and women who perhaps weren't published. A way to work with the same community that we had worked with in collecting material for the books, and in selling the books. I realized early on that our reading audience and our writers were really the same community. It wasn't this hierarchy of famous writers who write for the masses.

Reti: Did you have a college market for your books?

Martz: Almost an accidental college market. The books were not appropriate as a primary text for a class, but were often used as supplementary texts, for women's re-entry programs, for gerontology and nursing classes, women in literature. They found their way into quite a few classrooms, usually by word of mouth. We tried doing a bit of marketing to professors, but since the books were not going to be the primary texts, it was a lot of work for a small return. We felt that just letting the professors discover the books for themselves was probably as effective as anything. We provided catalogs and

we made review copies readily available. We made it as easy for them as possible. But we didn't spend a lot of money and time on that.

Reti: What about the American Booksellers Association/Book Expo of America tradeshow?

Martz: That was probably the most exciting time for us. It was the one event during the year in which the whole staff got involved; everybody had some piece in it, whether it was designing the materials, planning, staffing the booths, packing up things for us to ship to the show, or the people in production getting the books to the galley stage so that we could take copies. It was a very focused and exciting time, and the folks who went to the show loved it. It was fun and was also a place to reconnect with your peers. Watsonville is not exactly a publishing mecca, although it did have one of the other larger independent presses down the street, Crossing Press.

I think that distribution in general, and the way we participated in it, was a two-edged sword. When, as a small press you sign up to have an exclusive distribution arrangement, you get a lot from that. They are your entrée into things. You have sales reps. You have more visibility. You are in the distributor catalogs. The not-so-good part of it is that all of a sudden someone else is speaking for you. And no matter how good the distributor is, unless you are on their top ten list, and an individual title is the hot book for the season, you are just not going to get as much attention. They are never going to do it for you as well as you would do it for yourself. So again, the whole system of distribution favors the larger presses. Distributors, especially these days, are primarily selling to the chains, to the big stores. It all comes down to the same basic problem. In

terms of our distribution, our most successful period was when Inland Book Company created the Inbook program. You weren't really distributed on an exclusive basis, but you were given extra attention in the Inbook catalog, and you had the shipping and billing stuff being handled by the wholesale part of the business. They could ship and bill as well as we could. But when it shifted to exclusive distribution, we lost control of some of our better customers. We had always had an excellent relationship with Baker and Taylor Books. The distributor took over Baker and Taylor, so they took a cut of that, and we lost a lot of the visibility. I think that was probably the thing that was hardest. The money was also hard, losing 25 percent of the revenue from some of the larger customers.

Reti: Baker and Taylor is a library distributor.

Martz: They are a library distributor, and they also do some stores and some gift stores. When you are dealing directly with someone like that, you are creating a database of who is buying what. What are the returns looking like? Are there some problems? Baker and Taylor has six warehouses across the country. You could see what part of the country books were selling in. That information was lost when we shifted over to being distributed and started getting a consolidated report. If you had had a room full of twenty people with calculators, you could have dug this information out, but it was also old data. When we were doing it ourselves, the day the order would come in, we would see aha! This book is doing better than we thought it was. We better make sure we've got plenty in stock. This is a re-order. You are seeing this all real time. With the exclusive arrangement you are seeing it more than a month out. And you are seeing it in this sort

of conglomeration of data that isn't as useful. Also, if a customer is having a problem with your distributor you don't know it. If the rep who calls on a bookstore or a distributor gets crossways with the person they are calling on, you can have something going on that you have no control over.

Reti: Were you part of the Womensource [feminist book] program under Inbook?

Martz: Yes. Womensource was great. It had an identity. And Inland had an identity at that time. There was something more to it than just making money. Even the principal of Inland, David Wilk, he had a different heart. There was a time when I considered him my closest, most intimate, business friend. That seemed to change. As things shifted, to survive I think he shifted. I think that he made some decisions simply to survive. Some of those decisions then flowed down into the relationship that I had with him. I can't speak for anyone else. There was a time when I would have trusted him with anything, and I lost my ability to trust that completely.

Reti: Did you get caught in the bankruptcy of Inland Book Company?

Martz: I did. We had about \$200,000 at risk with them at the time. I did two things. One I signed an exclusive distribution agreement in the middle of their bankruptcy. I did it because there were a number of other major publishers looking at whether to cut their losses and abandon ship. I knew that my decision would have an impact on some of the others. I also knew that the only chance we had was if we could stand together. So I made the choice to do that, against the thinking of everybody at my company, who said what are you doing? I also loaned them \$50,000 until they could find a buyer and work

through the bankruptcy. As a result, they were able to find a buyer for Inbook. Without that they would have nothing to sell. Without Papier-Mache and the other handful of large publishers, they would have had nothing to sell. The problems with it all were manifold. One was the new company they went to, Login Distribution, was so completely different. Then they created LPC Distributors. When I was still with them they had two catalogs. They were so completely different you couldn't even think about merging them into one catalog. So that was hard. Then there were enormous transition problems for the new company. Computer systems that didn't work and new systems that never manifested. Relationships with customers that weren't as strong as they had been with the Inland concept. Even though they took the Inbook name, I don't think that the world out there perceived them as the old Inbook. Which was right, it wasn't the same anymore.

Then the other part that was really hard was that some of the smaller publishers weren't really treated very well. We talked in our previous interview about losing one's integrity and authenticity. This is a good example, feeling this is the decision I've got to make, knowing it was incongruent with what I knew in my heart was the right thing. I said, and they have to figure out their own thing. Many of them lost money. Some had problems getting control of their books. Some made out better than others. Some shifted with Inland and Inland was bought by Koen. That was a hard, ugly period of time, late 1995, and early 1996. It was a nightmare because it coincided with all these other things that were going on in my company. I had to deal with a lot of different things at one time. I lost my ability to really think clearly about any of it. I tried to live with what was there, rather than creating something. It became survival mode.

Later, about 1998, we decided to cancel our distribution agreement. I think that was a good decision. Along with finding a new niche of books, we adjusted print runs so they were more reasonable. We had books that sold out their first printings. We had a pretty decent marketing program. We re-upped our direct relationships with the wholesalers. The changes were positive, because we gave ourselves a 25 percent raise just by not paying that much to the distributor, just right off the bat. Part of our success was scaling down in certain areas, like being more cautious with the single author books that we picked. Shifting into some nonfiction stuff helped. But by that time we were so far behind the financial eight ball that we couldn't dig out. By scaling down the print runs, when we'd sell out the first printing we just probably had broken even on our costs. It didn't help much with the overhead or the profit. So it was too little, too late.

But those were good strategies. Maybe we should have done it sooner. I don't know whether that would have been enough to have made a big difference. There were too many things going on at the same time to say that any one decision could have saved the farm. But that was interesting, and we tried to put as positive a spin on it as we could.

I think if we could have a magic wand where we could have just wiped out our debt at that point, and started fresh, I think we could have, even with the existing staff . . . I don't think we would have had to cut back. But it was the debt. By that time we had a line of credit of \$550,000.

Reti: The interest would kill you!

Martz: I knew the writing was on the wall the day that accounts receivable couldn't cover all of our accounts payable, including our long-term debt. We had usually run an accounts receivable of around a million. That started dropping and the debt was way up there. When those two passed each other going in opposite directions, I thought this is it. We're gone.

Reti: As a very small feminist publisher, when I heard that Papier-Mache was going under, I thought oh my God! I might as well just give it up right now. You had been so successful. What did this mean for feminist publishing, and for small presses?

Martz: It was hard. Way back before we had made any decisions, when we were still trying to figure out how to make this work, I had been interviewed for an article in *Poets and Writers Magazine*. The article finally came out in April, 1999 and we filed bankruptcy in May. One of my authors had written the article, and I had to call her up and tell her. She took it pretty well, thank goodness.

Reti: Looking back at all of these years of publishing, which titles are you proudest of?

Martz: I think my all time favorite is *I Am Becoming the Woman I Have Wanted*. We got the American Book Award for that, which was thrilling. Just thrilling. I loved that award. It was a true highlight for me. I love that book because it's such a direct look at women's self-image. When I was out touring with the book it was so easy to see its impact on women. I was in Amazon Books in Minneapolis to do a reading. I was waiting for the reading to begin, and this young woman walked over to me. She seemed real shy. She was a very large woman. She walked up and she had the book open to a photograph of a

large woman nude. She said, “I just want to thank you. This is the first time that I ever seen that my body is really beautiful.” Tears were coming down her face. That moment was worth everything I did in publishing. It was a book that spoke to a really broad range of women. It wasn’t about aging, but it included older women. It was very, very universal in its look. I loved that. I loved that connection. It felt more real than anything else.

I have to love the *Purple* book because that would be like saying you don’t love your mother. She was the mother of Papier-Mache. I still think that it was a really important book. It did a lot to change society’s ideas about older women. I am addressing a group of gerontologists in October. I’m going to talk about that book and the poem that inspired it, changed our society. There’s not a doubt in my mind that it changed how women look at the aging process. As we were shutting down Papier-Mache, I bought a going away present for one of the gals. I found this little stuffed doll in the gift store. She’s in gym shorts and she’s got on a little purple t-shirt with some slogan on it about loving yourself. So I gave it to her with a note that said we are responsible for this little doll. That’s the message that I have for the gerontologists. The book wasn’t a medical breakthrough or any change in the social services structure. What it was was a change in attitude of older women themselves. And when their attitudes began to change then other people had no choice but to go along with it.

Reti: The idea of self-acceptance.

Martz: Absolutely. It used to be very common, for instance, that a newspaper reporter would never ask a woman being interviewed her age. Whether you were famous or not,

you just didn't reveal your age. That's really uncommon now for a woman to want to hide her age. When I was traveling I could see more and more women not dyeing their hair, letting their hair go its natural color. And either not using make-up or using more natural make-up. Not making themselves into these sort of plastic-looking women. I think that those are things that a woman has to choose to do for herself. It isn't someone else saying, oh it's okay. That doesn't work. I think that that was the power of that message. Women said it's okay to be old. And it's not okay to be invisible. It is not okay for you act like I don't exist, like you don't see me.

Reti: Wearing purple is symbolic of being out there, visible, beautiful.

Martz: Exactly. So those are the two books for which I have the tenderest places. There are only two books that I'm not proud of.

Reti: That's not bad. Out of how many?

Martz: Out of about sixty there are two that I'm a little embarrassed about. Even then I say, well they made the author really happy, and there are some people who thought they were really cute books. They were two miniature books. The author came to us. She had collected sayings from her grandmother. She was also a graphic artist, so she basically delivered the book to us designed. All we had to do is tweak it a little bit, work with her on the cover design, and publish it. It actually sold all of its first printing, ten to twelve thousand copies. Then she wanted to do a second one because her mother was an elementary school principal and they got this idea that they would collect all these sayings from the kids in school about what they had learned from their grandmothers.

So we did a second little book. They were both cute little books but we had no business publishing them. They didn't really fit. I like to think that all the other books we published caused somebody to think. These books are just sweet. They are like dropping a sugar cube in your tea. They didn't challenge you to think about things in a different way.

Reti: Did you work hands-on as an editor with the authors?

Martz: Yes. Less so as Shirley Coe became more and more skilled at it. Our acquisitions process was that Shirley would screen everything. Over time I got to rely on her not to screen out something that I really would love. Then she would present me with a dozen books or whatever. As we got more sophisticated at it, we began to say, we would like to do one novel, and one poetry book, etc. She would look for those kinds of books. She would communicate with the list of folks who wanted guidelines for writers to let them know what we wanted. Later on we both got very involved in doing some preliminary analysis of what was out there. What were areas where we thought we could do a good job? I think that's kind of how we ended up with these books that did better at the end. Rather than just publishing them because we liked them. Here's where we used the Internet. The Internet is lousy for buying, but good for doing research. We would make sure that the market wasn't already saturated in that book. We would look for ideas and avoid using somebody else's title, that sort of thing.

She would pass the manuscripts to me, I would pick a couple that I also liked and then we would do this analysis—which of these could we do something with? If there was really substantive editing that needed to be done, I tended to do that. For one of the

books that did real well, I guided the author through a complete rewrite of the book. It was a much, much stronger book. She was a therapist and her writing was too therapeutic. It was like writing her case histories. I said we need to warm this up. I could tell from some of her writing that she had the ability to write in a more conversational tone so I guided her through the process. We'd work on a chapter and when that was through we'd work on the next chapter. As far as copyediting, Shirley was much stronger at that than me. She took some classes and did some reading about copyediting. She had stronger skills than I did. I would catch a lot of things intuitively. But the . . . do we have a dangling participle . . . I don't even want to know. She learned how to find those kinds of things.

The anthologies, of course, were a whole different thing. The anthologies were always the hardest. I knew that in putting together the book, that there were times when something needed to be in the book, even though it wasn't necessarily the strongest piece of writing, because I was looking for something that would tell the whole story and maybe this was the only piece that really dealt with this particular piece of the issue. I knew that it was difficult for Shirley to know when not to screen something out like that. She might screen something out because it wasn't well written. I would look at it, and because I was the one who worked with the authors in rewriting, I could tell whether it could be rewritten or not.

The reading for the anthologies got more and more challenging. For one of the last anthologies, the one about men and women aging, we had seven thousand submissions. Just reading everything was massive. At that time I still read everything, but Shirley

would do an ABC. I really like this. This is a maybe. This is a, No. So if it was in the C pile I would maybe only read the first page. But with the earlier anthologies I did read everything, and we never got less than three thousand submissions. Just reading for the anthologies was a big job. I sometimes worried that Shirley thought I didn't trust her judgement, but it really wasn't that. I learned that reading everything, even the bad stuff, was really helpful in understanding the issue. My style of editing was to pick as broad a theme as I could think of and let the actual book come out of the writing. I wouldn't really have a structure. I would just have some general guidelines such as when dealing with a problem it's important to show the hard parts as well as the upbeat parts. Also, I tended to use chronology to organize the submissions because it's easier for the reader to know where we're going, to have an organic structure. But you could tell by the volume and the intensity of the submissions what the salient issues were. The book on women and power was an interesting book from that standpoint, because it did not turn out to be at all what I would have thought we were going to be talking about.

Reti: How so?

Martz: Proportionally, there was very little writing about power in the traditional ways power is described. There was almost nothing about career, or money, or political power. How else do we define power in our society? That's it, right there. Maybe looks. But the power issues women wrote about were about having control over your life, and about having the power to do what you want, the power to help other people. Any time there was work discussed, it was about the part of work where you can test yourself. By and large the writing was not about the traditional ways that we define power.

Early in the reading process I had already begun to get this sense, so I decided to do an informal survey. I got responses from about forty women. A few were my family members. Many were my e-mail buddies because they were the easiest ones to get to. It was real interesting because what they had to say about power correlated so completely with what the fiction and poetry and personal essays were saying.

Reti: It's a real example of how what you were doing was about community. Anthologies can be a very feminist form.

Martz: Yes. As opposed to, I know what is right, and now I'm going to prove it to you with this collection of writing.

Other Feminist Publishers

Feminist publishers would meet each year prior to the BEA [Book Expo America]. That was nice, to touch bases with the other women, and find out what's going on. The meetings themselves were sometimes very interesting. But they were always fun. Even when they were frustrating they were still interesting. A lot of strong personalities. They were sort of a microcosm of any feminist, women-centered group, where you've got the older women and the younger women, and the challenge of passing on leadership, and frustration around the problem of supporting women of color in a meaningful way in leadership roles. More than once, we would sit there all day long, and then at the end of the day someone would point out that many times the women of color were pretty silent, and that no one had paid any attention to that. There were some real challenges to it. What I liked about it though, was that as hard as it got, the women never gave up. They kept looking at the process and working on the issues. If you challenged the

process, you were listened to, generally pretty respectfully. The problem was that we came from all parts of the United States, and Canada, and for most publishers this was the one time that we met as a group. There were a few people who tried to work in some sort of regional meetings. Often then it would include other small presses. And when you only meet once a year, it's really hard to get too much going in terms of making real change, or coming up with ways to work cooperatively. It was unfortunate that we were never really able to come up with any ways to share distribution. Carol Seajay's *Feminist Bookstore News* [advertising] program featuring feminist presses was about the only thing that was ever worked out jointly. There were always ideas. I think that would have been a good place to look at a website that represented the books of all of these publishers. You would have had enormous diversity. I think that would have been a really good thing. But again, just not enough contact throughout the year to get something like that moving. Mev Miller put together the Women's Presses Library Project. She had a great deal of frustration with it, because it was a lot of work on her part, and hard to get all of the materials together. She had minimum requirements that you had to meet in order for her to be able to represent the books at the different shows.

Reti: Was Papier-Mache part of that project?

Martz: Yes. I felt like it was the most cost-effective thing that we could possibly do to reach libraries. I mean the fees that she charged were almost nothing.

Reti: Did you find it effective?

Martz: I think that that's how we reached a lot of individual librarians.

Reti: Were there particular feminist presses that you had a stronger connection with, or particular people?

Martz: There are a lot of folks that I still think of. For awhile I was still connected to the online discussion group.

Reti: Bookbabes.

Martz: Yes. (laughter) When I came back to the office and said 'Bookbabes' they all said what?

New Victoria Publishers was one of my favorite presses, Beth Dingman and Claudia McKay. Ruth Gundle from Eighth Mountain Press. I thought very highly of her. She was a very fine person. Nancy Bereano from Firebrand Books. I always enjoyed getting a chance to check in with her. And Gynergy from Canada who published feminist children's books. They were out on Prince Edward Island. The publisher was a fascinating woman. I just loved her. Naiad Press down in Florida, who do all the trashy romance novels. Barbara Grier. Some of these folks never change. Part of their appeal is that they are so predictable. They are always going to be just who they are, and very up front about who they are, and what kind of books they do. We don't care about whether you like our books or not, but we're making a lot of money. So part of the fun was the interaction, getting a chance to be with women you admire and respect, regardless of what genre they have decided to focus on. And also, the women of Spinsters Ink up in Duluth, Minnesota. I felt very close with them. They went to some of the other smaller,

regional shows that we went to. So we would run into them more often. We had very strong distribution in the Upper Midwest, so that took us to that area more.

Reti: Why?

Martz: I think there were two probable reasons. One, there was something about the nature of the books. Probably because I grew up in Texas and southeastern New Mexico . . . there was sort of a Midwestern sensibility to them, a sort of a plainness, if you will. I think that they spoke very strongly to the women in that part of the world. Then we got our first gift reps who would actually take the books into stores in Minneapolis. So that really helped a lot. There was a real nice symbiosis there. The customer would see the books in the gift store and tell the bookstore about them. And vice versa. But mostly from the gift stores to the bookstores.

What I found was that the feminist press gatherings were also one of the few places that you could talk honestly about what was going on with your press. When you are out there with everybody else, even when you don't want to look at it that way, you feel like you have to hold back. I always felt like with the other women's presses you could be completely open. If things were tough, you could share that and not have to worry about it going someplace. You didn't need Barnes and Noble to know that things weren't going really well.

The other feminist publishers felt like colleagues most of the time. I think initially Carol Seajay was [a kind of mentor]. It was a combination not only of the person who had this knowledge, this information, but who wanted to make it available to other women. That

really impressed me. In a lot of ways that set my concept of what feminist publishing was about. I didn't know any other feminist publishers when I started. I just kind of fell into this thing.

I have to say that I deliberately took a pretty low-key role with the feminist publishers group. I always felt that because the work I was publishing was not as radical, I didn't have as much to contribute on some of the issues. I don't know. The word shy comes to me. I felt it was a privilege to be there, that I wasn't completely entitled to be there.

Reti: Did you feel that was coming from them?

Martz: I doubt it. Knowing myself and human nature, I doubt it. I just felt some of the women there, the Nancy Bereanos, seemed to have been so much more involved politically than I had. I felt that they were the ones who had the power in the group. I have a feeling that I have some insight into why some of the women of color would sit through some of these meetings and not say anything. Because when you have really strong presences there, who have all this history, like Nancy who used to be an editor at the Crossing Press. These are women with twenty years or more experience . . . There's something a little intimidating about it. For me, it wasn't that they were individually intimidating. It was that the situation was a little intimidating. I loved to be there, but I usually wouldn't say a whole lot. If it got around to how to do your spreadsheets or financial analysis . . . I'd offer my two cents. I just felt that they were more knowledgeable in a lot of areas than I was.

Reti: Do you think there was a class aspect to that? Were they mostly middle-class women?

Martz: Oh God. I'm sure there was, and I didn't even look at that. That's really funny. In other situations I usually think of class first. But I never thought about it with the feminist presses. I bet you're right. Not all, but the ones who were the most outspoken [were middle class]. I think that that's one of the privileges that's exercised when you are middle class or upper class, the right to speak out.

The Future of Feminist Publishing

Reti: What do you think is going to happen to feminist publishing in the future?

Martz: I don't know. Sadly, I am not as in touch with it, especially in the last year. When I dropped off of Bookbabes, I lost an access point there. I haven't heard anything positive. I only hear about folks who are giving it up because of burnout. Sometimes they are looking at other options. I know that Nancy Bereano of Firebrand Books signed up with LPC Distributors. I never spoke with her afterwards to find out what the exact terms were. A lot of them just close the doors. Even when I was still involved, a lot of folks just couldn't handle it anymore. The financial stress around it. The gal up in Canada whom I was speaking of was just desperately looking for someone to buy her press, because [she and her partner] needed to have a life. They had a daughter who was growing up before their eyes, without enough time to enjoy her and spend time with her.

My current observation is that the environment isn't very supportive of feminist presses. Certain parts of feminism have become very mainstream, so there is no edge. Other parts

are just taken for granted. The whole concept of supporting your local feminist store versus buying the books cheaper . . . I don't think there is a critical mass of folks out there thinking that way. Even looking at the larger issue of just supporting independent stores . . . I think that the majority of people are willing to settle for what they will be able to get through the chains, through the Internet. They are willing to sacrifice those books that are too risky for the mainstream to carry, that they decide are not in good taste, or not relevant. Bookselling and book publishing are only one piece of a much larger puzzle that's all going that way. A lot of my friends challenge the corporations that are behind this. I lay it at the feet of the consumers. I think that consumers are the only answer, the only possible solution. The corporations are only doing what they can get the consumers to go along with. Something like feminist publishing . . . I'm not talking about books like Papier-Mache published. Those were way on the mainstream edge of feminist publishing. I'm talking about books that really challenge the status quo, books that present thinking that might not be popular, issues that might be hard to look at. I don't have a whole lot of faith in the future for radical publishing. I think there will always be folks who are willing to do it anyway, who are willing to do whatever is necessary to get the books out, whether that is driving around with a case of books in your car all the time. Maybe there will be a cycle. It will taper down, and then when it gets obvious enough that there's something really missing, a new generation will discover it again. I don't know. I hope I'm wrong. I hope I have a limited vision and that there is more going on out there to support feminist publishing than what I can see.

Reti: You are describing a composite of factors behind these changes in feminist publishing. One is that feminism is being taken for granted by a younger generation.

Martz: Absolutely. I hear women say, well feminism just isn't relevant anymore. I am shocked. I'm just shocked. I see a lot of the very young women, high school to early college age women pursuing a brand of something that I think is mostly that they are being exploited. I think that those folks who are creating products for women in that age group are convincing young women that going around scantily clad is a way of showing their power. I have a hard time with that. Some of the girl rock groups, whatever they are calling the music. The Madonna thing gone extremely haywire. There is a certain amount of power in that for young women, but I don't think it's very effective power, and I don't think it will serve them very well in the long run. I think it's part of what's being used to paint feminism as a passé, not relevant, not a useful concept anymore.

All of the women who I know who call themselves feminists, the ones I know personally, are 40 and over.

Reti: Whew! I just made the cut-off by a couple of months. (laughter) As the publisher of HerBooks, I've always been one of the younger feminist publishers. I started my press when I was 23. I've been very aware that there's a generation ahead of me that paved the way.

Martz: There's a good example. Look at your typical 23 year old today. What are their priorities? What are they looking at, compared to you, at 23, starting a publishing company to bring out these voices. Not to say that there aren't some young women who are doing similar things. There are websites. And there are a couple of decent magazines for younger women. It just seemed like in the early 1970s, that energy was broader, and was touching more people.

Reti: Do you think it would be possible to start a feminist press now as a 23 year old? Have the capital requirements and other kinds of things changed dramatically?

Martz: That's another piece of it. This is an example of the personal and political devastation of the loss of the small bookstores. The reason why you could start a press on a shoestring then was that there was a network, not only of feminist bookstores, because that went hand-in-hand with feminist publishing, but of smaller, independent bookstores, who didn't have to answer to some corporate accountant. They were able to make a living on what you could do with a small, 1000 square foot store. There are very few communities that you can do that anymore. It would be interesting to study the correlation between the cost of housing and the presence of independent bookstores. We tend to experience it dramatically on the coast, but the cost of housing is rising across the country. There are a lot of communities which used to be very, very affordable, which aren't anymore. The cost of real estate drives who can be in business for themselves. So now the supposed alternative would be buying into a franchise, if you want to be in business for yourself. Instead of having a concept you really believe in, and opening up a little storefront somewhere, it's well, come up with \$100,000 and get yourself a McDonald's franchise. That's the American dream now. And that's not really the same thing.

Reti: No, I don't think HerHamburgers would really interest me! (laughter)

Martz: If you're not part of the book business, if you haven't looked at these issues, you think oh, okay, so what if Hollister Books is not there anymore? It's not going to be a big deal. I can get online and buy books. Or I can drive to Santa Cruz, or San Jose, or Morgan

Hill, to the nearest Borders, or Barnes and Noble. It's no big deal. But it is a big deal. It begins to have a tremendous impact on what you see and are exposed to, what you might read, and how that might change your life. That's the difference. The feminist presses that I've known, they do these books by and large because they think that reading their books will change your life.

Reti: But what about the people who say, well Barnes and Noble and Borders carry feminist titles. They will order anything I want, and they have all kinds of interesting books.

Martz: That's true to an extent, but it's chicken and egg. They are only going to order the book if the customer comes in and asks for the book. Well, how is the customer going to ask for a book that they've never seen or heard of? Whereas, when you go into a smaller store you really can browse and see something new.

Reti: The concept of browsing doesn't work with online or large stores.

Martz: It really doesn't. I mean the theory is that you can go online and say, I want the latest in lesbian fiction, or a book on female genital mutilation. But when you do these searches online you get massive lists, which by and large are sorted by bestselling status. That's the way the data is presented, unless you challenge that and ask for it differently.

If you walk into a store the size of Herland feminist bookstore in Santa Cruz, first of all it's small enough that it invites you to browse. It invites you to look. You can say that these larger stores do that. They invite you to hang out, but you can't browse a 30,000 square foot store. You get overwhelmed. It's like smelling ten perfumes, or tasting

twelve salsas. You can't browse in the same way. The more insidious thing, is that even the books that are on the shelf to browse, money has put some of them higher up on the potential browsing tree. It's really not the same.

Barnes and Noble has Marcella Smith, who does nothing but work with small presses, but you are still lost. You get maybe one copy in a third of the Barnes and Noble stores. That one copy sits spine out, buried somewhere in a category shelf that they think works, that may have nothing to do with your readers. It's just not a system that's set up for the small players. The big publishers will take occasional risks with something new, but they are not going to put out many risky books, something a little on the edge. They're just not going to do it. I see them going through a funnel. They keep funneling down and getting narrower and narrower in their range of ideas. Unless they see somebody else with something new and different. And then everybody jumps on that and clones it.

Reti: Chicken soup for the masses.

Martz: (laughter). Exactly.

Reti: Do you think people are reading as much as they did twenty years ago?

Martz: I think that people are probably reading as much, but the quality of what they read is probably not as good. I think we are less educated. I got an e-mail from somebody. It was supposedly from a genealogical society in Kansas. It's a copy of a test that was given to eighth graders in order to pass the eighth grade in 1895. There is no way that our eighth graders, our seniors, or most of our graduating college students

would be able to pass this test. If you look at older books, they are much more demanding intellectually, expect the reader to have a good vocabulary. The classics, just try to read some of the classics. In some ways we have a broader education now. We know a little bit about a lot more things. I think that there is a direct connection between the books, and what we read and how we read, and our general educational emphasis. We are producing uneducated folks. Only the special kids get out of school with an education.

Reti: If you had it to do all over again, what would you do differently?

Martz: I would change those things where I hurt another person. But not those times where I got knocked down and picked myself up again. There's a popular song about that that I love. I wouldn't think about changing that because those times made me stronger. But where I did things that hurt other people, I think those made me weaker.

Reti: What are you doing now? What are your plans for the future?

Martz: Well I am waiting with baited breath, hoping that I get a full-time teaching position. If I don't, I'm leaning toward just substitute teaching for awhile, giving myself a little transition period, because I'm totally freaked at having to work full-time. Substituting would allow me a little flexibility. I would probably mostly work full-time but I would have the flexibility not to. I have an offer in hand, verbal, to edit a book. I told them that I needed a couple of weeks to think about it. It's interesting, but I think I'm going to turn them down. I am watching myself and I don't seem to have any juice around this project. And the money is not enough to overcome the lack of enthusiasm.

Reti: And you were teaching writing workshops for awhile?

Martz: Yes. I plan to restart those. I'm kind of dragging my heels right now to see what happens with the teaching so I can make sure I figure out how to schedule it in my life in a way that works. I love the writing workshops. I do them just for women. I did some one-day workshops. That's kind of fun and it's easier to schedule. But I want to get back to having ongoing sessions. I love the sense of continuity and watching people grow. I attract a lot of new writers, and it's fun to watch people grow in a process.

I also want to get back to working on my papier-mache bowls. I'm really anxious to do more of that. I haven't felt the urge, and I think it's because I'm doing so much other stuff that's with my hands [around her new house]. Even though it doesn't have the same kind of qualities, it takes a lot of the same energy, and I think it's using up what little creativity I have. I'm quite proud of my sheetrocking job. If you stand back and squint your eyes a little bit you can't see the seams.

Reti: Is there anything else you want to add?

Martz: I've really enjoyed this because it's interesting to revisit my life as a publisher. It also reminds me that I, in fact, do like the connection with other feminist publishers. I'm missing that. I've also gotten myself down to the poetry reading that's held here in Hollister twice a month at one of the local coffee shops. It was really wonderful. A wide range of readers, all the way from tattooed and pierced teenagers to older men and women. Some people doing music. The person who runs the program is so supportive. You can read anything you want to read. You can read from your journal. You can read

poems. You can read prose. You can sing. You can read something someone else has written. It was just a fabulous evening. I can't wait for the next one. And I'm hoping that I'll even begin to do some of my own writing.

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