DVIP: Unconditional Shelter?
Epilogue

At its annual auction, the DVIP Board raised $28,000, $7,000 more than they had hoped for, and more than they had ever raised before.

County Attorney Pat White’s investigation dragged on for fifteen months. After several months of strained relations with the board, Pat Meyer says she offered her resignation and claims the board asked her to take time off instead. She agreed, and said that when she came back, she wanted her position to be redefined freeing her from management and giving her more time to work with women. According to Pat, the only way they could give her an extended leave was to call it a medical leave. The announcement left community members thinking Pat had had a nervous breakdown, which she denies. Everyone who saw her knew, however, that she was under terrible stress. Shortly thereafter, she read in the paper a job advertisement for her position. She still feels bitter about the way she was, in her mind, fired. Others report that Pat was indeed fired by the board. After working at a grocery store, she now works for a neighborhood center.

Beth George pleaded guilty to charges in Arkansas of fleeing illegally with her children. The judge gave her probation. Her husband gained custody of both boys. County Attorney J. Patrick White charged her with two charges of fraud for using fake identification and the Iowa judge also gave her probation. White reported that, once he could finally interview Beth after her trial finished in Arkansas, he found her to be a very credible witness. He believed that her husband had abused her and that she genuinely believed, because of her husband’s taunts, that she would never receive a fair hearing. The small-town Arkansas judge was a friend of her husband, the sole proprietor of George Termite and Pest Control, and had himself, allegedly, gained notoriety by throwing his own wife through a plate glass window. When he interviewed her, J. Patrick White found Beth to be remorseful, regretting that she had not realized that she had legal options short of running. Beth broke her silence in September and gave a lengthy interview

Sally J. Kenney, Professor, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, and Director of the Center on Women and Public Policy, wrote this case for the Center on Women and Public Policy as part of its 2003 Case Writing Summer Institute. The Center on Women and Public Policy and the Otto Bremer Foundation provided supporting funds. ©Sally J. Kenney 2005.
with the *Iowa City Press Citizen*, describing the extent of the violence she had suffered and how, when she called the police, they did nothing (see Appendix J). Her husband repeatedly told her that he had the judge and police “in his pocket.” When she confided her secret identity to a shelter director in another state, that director told her she had to leave, but that she should go to DVIP because, “it was one of the best.”

J. Patrick White deposed Board Chair Barbara Xakellis and the subpoena included all employment records of Beth George/Kathleen Ruddell. One W-2 had the name Beth Benefield (Beth’s maiden name) on it. Apparently, no I-9s had been done for DVIP employees. W-4s had the name Beth Page Benefield on it, although that name did not appear on payroll reports. An Iowa Unemployment Compensation form listed Kathleen L. Ruddell with a different social security number on it. A woman named Rose Metts did the payroll for DVIP and Pat Meyer signed the forms.

Fifteen months after Beth was arrested, County Attorney J. Patrick White decided the evidence was not strong enough to support criminal prosecutions against DVIP Executive Director Pat Meyer or any members of the DVIP staff or the board. Pat Meyer never agreed to be interviewed by investigators. In 2002, White received the annual Pat Meyer Vision Award for outstanding commitment to end domestic violence. In 2005, he announced his retirement.

Beth’s husband brought a civil action against DVIP, which its insurers settled for approximately $40,000, far less than what he had sought.

Beth moved back to Dardenelle, Arkansas to be near her boys. Her husband was not a successful parent and, in a very unusual twist of events, she regained custody within a year. She became an employee and spokesperson for the Arkansas Domestic Violence Movement. Tragically, her son Casey (Ryan) was killed in a car accident at 17. She has remarried to a “well-to-do” man.

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1 Board chair Gwen Stewart-Hayes disputes that this statement supports the position that DVIP was part of an underground sheltering fugitives from justice. She said people knew where the good shelters were just like one knows which are the good schools of journalism. Back then, the best shelters were in Iowa City and Minneapolis.

2 According to Board Chair Barbara Xakellis who served on the selection committee, the personnel committee received 30-40 applications for the position. Director of Johnson County Human Services and board member Carol Thompson chaired the committee. Beth’s credentials were superior to Barb’s, not that the choice came down to the two of them. Beth had a college degree, and experience as a Christian counselor at her church. As a volunteer, Barb had been too emotionally volatile, Board members believed, and lacked the necessary interpersonal skills. Beth had done a good job as a counselor, vindicating the choice. However, how much of her resume was fabricated? Merely her identity? Or her qualifications as well? One can only speculate, but Barb may have been especially aggrieved to have been passed over in favor of Beth if she felt Beth lied about her qualifications. It was the task of the Executive Director, Pat Meyer, to check Beth’s references.
Barbara Xakellis resigned as board chair after the episode ended and shortly thereafter moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Twelve years later, the new Executive Director Cris Kinkead wept as she tried to explain to new board members what had happened. More than ten years later, feminists in town remain embittered over J. Patrick White’s fifteen-month criminal investigation which they regard as a punishment in and of itself. The new board chair, Henrietta Logan, went to churches and service organizations, such as the Rotary Club, to widen the sphere of community support for the shelter. She recruited former mayor Susan Horowitz to succeed her. Horowitz boldly declared, “This is not a feminist organization.” Horowitz actively courted Republicans who were devoted to DVIP. Because of Horowitz’s drive, leadership, contacts, and willingness to “shake down” businesses for in-kind contributions, DVIP paid off the mortgage on the new building.

Pat Meyer’s exit and the transformation of the organization were difficult for many loyal volunteers who felt betrayed and cut off from the changed organization. According to Barbara Xakellis, the episode destroyed many lives. It was, “a sad episode in the history of a good organization.” At least one board member’s marriage ended. The shelter worker who had encountered the FBI searching for Beth George was a survivor of domestic violence. She became frightened and hysterical, convinced that she was going to be taken away, or killed by Jess George. Shortly thereafter, she entered a psychiatric hospital.

The new board chair, clinical law professor Lois Cox, tells all new members of the board that the DVIP is, indeed, a feminist organization. She reflects:

My personal take on all this is that the events you describe marked an end to a period in Iowa City history when every feminist of whatever stripe felt she had a personal ownership stake in DVIP. Afterward, as you note, that was no longer true for all sorts of reasons. Some felt the agency betrayed Pat Meyer. Others thought it betrayed itself by harboring a fugitive. Still others felt that it had just begun to answer to too many masters, so was no longer really the creature of the feminist movement. And I think that for a long time, maybe even still, the board has neglected its relationship with its spiritual mothers, often in the name of fiscal responsibility. This was epitomized a few years ago when one of our major fundraisers was a golf tournament.

3 Since I conducted this research, Kinkead has moved on to become the director of a homeless shelter in Hull, England. The board is hiring a new director. Lois Cox remains on the board, but is no longer co-president. Because of conflicts between the legislature and the Attorney General, domestic violence funding was cut by 15%. In response to funding cuts, DVIP restructured its staff and reduced their hours. Twice a year, they issue direct mail appeals to the community, who responds more generously each time, although their receipts were down, as were those to most non-profits, after 9/11. They celebrated their 25th anniversary and served more than 400 people at their “Souper Bowl” in 2005.
And every day, more women are beaten. More children observe horrible family violence. And more women are killed by intimates. In 1993, over 4 million American women were victims of domestic violence.