**Oral History Interview**

**with**

**Lee Dunn**

Interview Conducted by

Karen Neurohr

March 10, 2017

Spotlighting Oklahoma

Oral History Project

**Oklahoma Oral History Research Program**

**Edmon Low Library ● Oklahoma State University**

**© 2017**

**Spotlighting Oklahoma**

***Oral History Project***

**Interview History**

Interviewer: Karen Neurohr

Transcriber: Lauren Gray

Editors: Karen Neurohr, Micki White

The recording and transcript of this interview were processed at the Oklahoma State University Library in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

**Project Detail**

The purpose of the *Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History Project* is to document the development of the state by recording its cultural and intellectual history.

This project was approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on April 15, 2009.

**Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recordings and transcripts of the interview with Lee Dunn is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 10, 2017.

**Spotlighting Oklahoma**

***Oral History Project***

**About Lee Dunn…**

Lee Dunn founded *I.M. Cowgirl* magazine, which, as far as she knows, was the first magazine designed to honor and recognize Western women. Born in New York, Dunn moved with her family to Oklahoma in 1968 when she was eight years old. She was raised in Oologah and graduated from Oologah High School. Her family had horses and cattle, and when she was young she did barrel and flag racing. She also did trail riding, competed in local rodeos, and belonged to a group called the Oklahoma Rough Riders that performed entertaining routines on horseback at rodeos. She attended Rogers State University where she studied journalism and dreamed of becoming the next Barbara Walters. She is the mother of three (Erin, Caleb, and Chase) and grandmother of five.

Lee’s early career work included purchasing at a large manufacturing company, and managing international trade imports and exports for several companies. Around 2003, she began dreaming of starting her own magazine which would feature real-life cowgirls because she felt that cowgirls had never gotten the recognition they deserved. Without any background or experience in publishing and while maintaining a full-time job, she spent four years diligently researching everything she needed to know about publishing a magazine. From Owasso, Oklahoma, she launched the first issue of *I.M. Cowgirl* in October 2007 with a print run of fifteen hundred copies. Readership rapidly grew to fifteen hundred stores in the United States, and the magazine was distributed in about fourteen different countries. For two years, she maintained her full-time job in international trade, published the magazine, and also battled cancer. By 2009, the magazine had grown in popularity and had attained a readership and subscriber base of 42,000. Unfortunately, when the economy declined, she was unable to continue publishing the magazine. The tenth issue, September-October 2009, was the final issue.

In this interview, Lee describes the story of *I.M. Cowgirl* magazine. She shares her inspiration for the magazine, the content she chose to include, aspects of advertising, marketing, printing, and distribution, the team of people who helped her, and the heartbreaking decision to cease publication. Her message to women everywhere is one of hope, faith, and following dreams.

*[Interviewer note: References to the Cowboy Poetry Society and Cowboy Poetry Association are the same thing as the Center for Western and Cowboy Poetry, Inc.]*

**Spotlighting Oklahoma**

***Oral History Project***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Lee Dunn**  Oral History Interview  Interviewed by Karen Neurohr  March 10, 2017  Tulsa, Oklahoma |  |

**Neurohr** *Today is March 10, 2017. My name is Karen Neurohr. I’m a librarian at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, and I’m here today to do a Spotlighting Oklahoma Oral History interview with Lee Dunn. Lee, thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview today.*

**Dunn** Well, thank you for doing it.

**Neurohr** *Okay, so tell me a little bit about yourself.*

**Dunn** Well, I was born in 1960, so that tells you my age. I was born in Long Island, New York. My dad was in the Air Force, and then he was hired on by American Airlines. We moved from New York to California, and then we moved from California to the Tulsa area. My dad was raised out in the Oklahoma wheat country, [in] Manchester, and he was raised by wheat farmers. My grandparents were immigrant wheat farmers, and let’s see….

**Neurohr** *What year did you move to Tulsa?*

**Dunn** We moved to Tulsa in 1968. I was about eight years old then. We originally moved to Tulsa, were there for like a year, then we moved out to Oologah, Oklahoma, which is the birthplace of Will Rogers. (Laughs) That’s where I graduated, and that’s where I have a lot of roots.

**Neurohr** *Okay, so that’s the part that feels like home, then?*

**Dunn** Yeah.

**Neurohr** *And you have three children?*

**Dunn** I have three children: Erin, Caleb, and Chase. Erin is the oldest, and she’s a nurse. Caleb is my oldest son, and he’s a preacher. Then my youngest son, Chase, is still trying to obtain his computer engineering degree. Then I have five grandkids and love them very much. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Okay, so, we’re here today to talk about the* I.M. Cowgirl *magazine, which you started, so tell me how you got the idea for this magazine.*

**Dunn** Well, it was about 2003, and at that time I was working as a buyer for a company in Tulsa. When you’re in the manufacturing industry back—I realize it doesn’t seem like it was that long ago, but it actually was. Women in the manufacturing industry, it’s a very male-oriented environment. I was in the purchasing department. I had landed some big deals, and I did not get the credit for it. The senior buyer got the credit for it, so I was really upset that day. I was driving home, and it was about an hour commute from my work to my home. In that hour commute, I came up with the idea of the magazine. It was like a God thing. I mean, it truly was. In, like, five minutes I had the magazine, I had the layout of the magazine, I had the topics, what the magazine was going to cover, and all in, like, five minutes. That was it. The main thing for the magazine was it was going to showcase women and their contributions to the Western industry that they have never ever been recognized for. That was when the idea came.

Then in, it was 2007, I moved in with—I was getting a divorce. I moved in with my dad into a bedroom that he had that was empty. I moved myself in there, and I worked. At this point, I was doing international law, clearing cargo through exports and imports, clearing cargo through Homeland Security, and so I worked a day job. At night, I would go back there in my little room, and I had my laptop. (Laughter) I had my laptop, and I used a TV tray. I would go back there, and I started doing stories, contacting people, and getting the groundwork for the magazine. That’s when I got the first editor, the first graphic designer and all of this stuff. I was working on that laptop on the TV tray back there in my little room, and that’s how the first issue sprang up. That’s where it started, the first issue came out. I started working on that in, like, probably about June of 2007, and in October of 2007 our first issue came out.

**Neurohr** *Okay, let’s back up just a little bit here. Did you have a background in, with horses or rodeo or agriculture in any way?*

**Dunn** I was brought up in Oologah, and my dad ran cattle. We had horses, and when I was young I did barrel racing and the flags and all that. My brother did show horses, and my other brother, he did steers, showed steers. My grandfather, he was into race horses. He had some race horses, so I did grow up in, had a background, rode a lot of horses, a lot of horses, and a lot of different types, quarter horses, Tennessee Walkers, Paso Finos. I did trail riding, and I also belonged to a group called the Oklahoma Roughriders, and we did….

**Neurohr** *Tell me about that group. What is that?*

**Dunn** They did, it’s like square dancing on horses for entertainment at the rodeos. It was a lot of fun. It was real dangerous, but, you know, we had a lot of fun doing that.

**Neurohr** *Was that around in Oklahoma?*

**Dunn** Yes.

**Neurohr** *And where did you perform?*

**Dunn** Like, over in, just like in the Tulsa area, this area. It was a lot of fun.

**Neurohr** *So, were you involved in 4-H or ag in school at all?*

**Dunn** No, I was not involved in any of that. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Okay. What about, were you, did you do competitive barrel racing?*

**Dunn** I did local rodeos. That’s what I did, local rodeos.

**Neurohr** *Okay. All right, so you had a little bit of a background with the culture, the Western culture, and you have the idea for this. Had you changed jobs when you actually moved in with your dad and you were starting to work on this, or were you still at the same job?*

**Dunn** Yes, I went from purchasing into…. One of my customers when I was doing purchasing—the people that cleared our cargo through customs asked me if I’d be interested in going to their side and learning the trade. I said yes, and so I did. It was real easy for me to learn all the international trade stuff. Not very many people do imports and exports at the same time, and I could. It just clicked with me. I had no problems with it whatsoever, and I did enjoy it because I probably talked to someone in every country around the world. I made a lot of connections.

**Neurohr** *What does it take to be able to do the imports and exports?*

**Dunn** Well, usually somebody just does imports, or somebody just does exports because the laws change on a day-to-day basis. It’s totally different clearing freight coming into the US than it is clearing freight leaving the US. There’s a lot of details, and you have to…. With that, the fines are astronomical. I mean, if you have one period missing off of a document, you could be fined ten thousands of dollars. It’s real, very detail-oriented type of stuff. Each country that you’re shipping to, they have their own set of import laws and, you know, requirements, so you have to be familiar with each country’s, what they want and what they need. Nothing is the same, and it’s definitely not mundane, every day doing the same thing over and over. Every day is something new. I did a lot of specialty stuff. The Tulsa customs, they did recommend me to a lot of people whenever they were trying to get stuff cleared, and then I did a lot of difficulty stuff, things like people trying to bring in drugs. If they found something that was illegal, it could have been drugs, or there was one case where there was monkey blood on a arrow. You can’t do that. (Laughs) It’s a lot of different stuff, and I did a lot of foods, alcohol, stuff like that.

**Neurohr** *Did you have any special training, education in your background that helped you with the skills that you needed for this kind of work?*

**Dunn** For which one, the international or the magazine?

**Neurohr** *Both, actually.*

**Dunn** Actually, no. I mean, I just kind of fell into the international trade stuff. Whenever you go into that, either you’re going to get it or you’re not going to get it, and you’ll know if you’re going to get it within three to six months. It just clicked for me, and it was…. I enjoyed it, but it’s high stress, very high stress. The magazine, I went to Rogers [State] University, and that was my major, was journalism. I never finished, but that was my goal. My dream was to become the next Barbara Walters (Laughs) whenever I went to college, but, of course, detours.

**Neurohr** *Things change.*

**Dunn** Yeah, they do.

**Neurohr** *Yeah. Okay, so you talked about—I’m amazed at how quickly everything came to you as far as the idea, the layout. What were your—did you have models in mind, magazine models that you read or enjoyed or anything for this?*

**Dunn** No. No, I always was kind of upset with some of the other major magazines because they never featured women as the cover page story. That was really my main goal, was to get those women, as many women as I could, their stories out there and let them be a feature story because, really, if you go back in history, the cowboy wouldn’t be the cowboy without the cowgirl behind him. The cowgirls have never, never gotten the recognition that they deserve, so that was my main goal, was to put them in the show, you know, in the spotlight and get their stories out there.

**Neurohr** *Okay, so walk me through the process a little bit, of what you had to do to get it started. You said that you were calling people and getting people onboard.*

**Dunn** Yeah, I mean, we’re talking ground zero here, (Laughs) so I started calling people and interviewing people, asking people their opinions. I got a lot of contacts with writers, you know. Just going, talking to someone will lead you to someone else, and they’ll lead you to someone else, and they’ll lead you to someone else. So it was kind of like a spiral, and it happened real fast. It happened real fast. When I decided—I was going through a divorce, and I decided, “You know what? If I can’t be married, I’m going to be a millionaire.” (Laughter) That was it. I just started calling people and talking to people, and they would recommend, “Well, you need to call this person, and you need to call this person,” or “You need to call this person,” and so I did. Everybody, everybody I talked to, they were so excited that finally there was going to be a magazine that showcased the cowgirl. Everybody was willing to do whatever they could do to help, and they weren’t even asking for payment. They wanted to get the magazine going so that these women could be showcased. They were just so excited. I think that is probably the most amazing part of the whole magazine, is because even the men, even the men were saying, “I’ll do whatever I can do to help you because them women, their stories need to be told.” That was pretty…and I kind of feel like, you know, it was a God thing. God was leading the whole thing.

**Neurohr** *Did you have a process in mind of, like, “I need to get writers lined up first,” or, “I need to get graphic design lined up first,” or was it all converging at the same time?*

**Dunn** It was all converging at the same time. It was, it was overwhelming, but it was a good, good thing. At the same time, they had found cancer in me the second time. At the same time, I was working my day job. Then I would go to my dad’s immediately after work, and I would start right then. I would work on the magazine until about two in the morning, and at the same time, I was doing chemo. There was a lot going on, but God gave me the strength and the will and the ability to make it through all that. I think, really, because of the chemo, I think the magazine was the drive that kept me going. It was tough, very tough, but I did it, and we had a great product for it. Great people, everybody contributed. Everybody was wanting that magazine to make it, so everybody was willing to do whatever they could. Nobody got paid…

**Neurohr** *That’s amazing.*

**Dunn** …until the end whenever we started really coming up.

**Neurohr** *Were you selling the ads for it, too?*

**Dunn** I did everything. I did marketing. I did accounting. I did the editing. I did the layouts. I did everything from A to Z. I was on top of that.

**Neurohr** *Wow. I’m amazed.*

**Dunn** Yeah. It was a lot of work, but it was good.

**Neurohr** *What did you feel was the most challenging aspect early on?*

**Dunn** I think it was finances. I poured everything I had. My retirement, I sold almost everything I had, and I dumped every penny I could into that magazine. I believed in that magazine, and I still do believe in it. Then one of my customers that I cleared his cargo through customs for, he got wind of that and he became a silent partner, donor. I mean, he was really more of a financial supporter, and so he started helping me financially. But then, of course, you know, the market crashed, and the first thing that goes is marketing dollars. That’s when I had to…. His company was hurting, and so it was one of those things that I just kind of figure, well, God’s purpose for that has been met, so it’s time to move on to something else. It about killed me, oh, gosh. I still get upset about it because I still believe in it. They say that this…from what we know, this is the first Western women’s magazine ever published. It also started—we noticed that once we came out with this, about the third or fourth issue into the magazine, the other Western magazines started featuring women as feature articles in their magazine, so it did do some good.

**Neurohr** *Did anything surprise you, as you were getting it started?*

**Dunn** I think what surprised me the most was the willingness for people to want to do whatever they could without reaping some kind of reward from it except just to help this magazine be a success. That was probably the most amazing thing that really surprised me because usually people want something in return. These people, they were willing to do whatever they could for however long it needed in order to get that up off the ground.

**Neurohr** *At any point did it start to get easier?*

**Dunn** …it usually takes about five years for a magazine to really get out of the red and into the black. At three years, we were just coming up, hitting the top of the hump. We had landed some really good marketing deals. I had writers in many, many countries. I had writers; I had photographers all set up. The I.M. stands for *International Magazine of Cowgirls*, so it was around the world. We were covering women from all parts of the world.

**Neurohr** *What were some of the countries that you had writers from?*

**Dunn** Australia. We did a story on a woman in Africa. Italy. I can’t really remember, but we were really starting to get a lot of good stuff in there. There’s women all over the place that…. There’s so many. If you try to write a story on every one of them, it would take, you know, decades to cover a quarter of them. I mean, there’s just so much out there.

**Neurohr** *When you had that first idea and you were thinking it through all at once, it sounded like, did the title come to you at that time, as well?*

**Dunn** No, the title, that was a funny story. My girlfriend and I, she’s my best friend—I was living in a house in Oologah, and I was telling her about this idea. This was before I had got married and was getting a divorce, so it was probably about 2004. I told her about my idea, and we were sitting there, throwing names out. From 2003 to 2007, I had a lot of time there, and some of that time I didn’t even think about the magazine, you know. This was an idea, and then I went about life. But anyway, we were sitting there. We were just kind of throwing names out, and I don’t know how many names we threw out. (Laughter) There was a lot, but then this one came up. I think this one came up after she had left that day or a couple of weeks later, and that’s what it ended up being.

**Neurohr** *How did you feel when you held the first issue in your hands?*

**Dunn** Oh, my gosh, that was the greatest feeling.

**Neurohr** *Is this the first issue, on the top here?*

**Dunn** Yes, this is the first issue. I actually have the very first printed copy (I have it in a frame and glassed up) that came off the press, so that’s pretty good. But yeah, this is the first issue. Of course there’s a lot of trial and error in doing these. This one right here, our main story was about Georgie Sicking. She was a cowboy. She’d tell you she was a cowboy; she’s not a cowgirl. She was a cowboy. She’s actually an honoree in the Cowgirl Hall of Fame.

**Neurohr** *Is that in Fort Worth, Texas?*

**Dunn** Yes, in Fort Worth. We couldn’t get a really good picture of her, so we had to modify this so that it was clear so you could see it. I wanted to use this as a whole cover. It wouldn’t work, so we found this model right here. She took a picture, and that’s how that happened. Usually you wouldn’t have a floating head on the cover, but this worked, and at least we got Georgie on the cover there. She was a really, really fantastic lady. She passed away here a few months ago, but she was a bull-riding cowboy, ranch-working lady. Plus, she did cowboy poetry. It was a really good article that was written up about her, and she’s certainly going to be very missed by a lot of people. Anyway, we did a lot of stories, as many stories as we could, on women. The Cowboy Poetry Society took part of this. We did Miss Rodeo America. She was going through cancer at the time, so she told her story. We really tried to tell stories that had meaning, maybe inspirational stories, too. We had Gail Warner. She did the history of barrel racing here. We did a story on the Spanish Mustangs, which that was a really good article on that, plus really great pictures.

**Neurohr** *Beautiful photography.*

**Dunn** Yeah, we had great photographers. We had great designers that laid it out. The colors were just really good. I really wanted something that was going to look good, feel good, and make you want to come back and read the story again. I paid a lot of attention to color, the quality of the paper. OSU had a column in the magazine, too.

**Neurohr** *How did that get started?*

**Dunn** Because all of our women, they are involved in horses or cattle, dogs, whatever, so I felt like it was really important that we had some kind of a column that addressed subjects to help women get, if they had questions or something, knowledge. I really wanted this to be educational, inspiring, and fun, and so that’s what our goal was. We had the WPRA [Women’s Professional Rodeo Association]. Then we had *Stall 13*. He’s [B. J. Rickard] a local horse expert, so he had a column in here, too. Plus, he had a radio show at the same time. Then we did some Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honors for that year.

**Neurohr** *You said the Cowboy Poetry Association was a partnership?*

**Dunn** Well, they did submit some. They supplied some of their writers. Then we published—in every issue we had cowboy poetry. We called it “True Spirit: Reflections of a Cowgirl.” We wanted to give as much information as we could. Later on we started having a history column where we would feature some woman that had influential history in the Western industry. There’s so much history out there people are not aware of, women that have contributed in shaping the West to where it is today.

**Neurohr** *I see that you even added a food section?*

**Dunn** Yes, we added food. I’m all about good recipes, (Laughter) but in this one right here was kind of like our Christmas for 2008. In here, we had some of our people, we submitted our favorite recipes. This was a fun issue. A lot of people really enjoyed that, too. I even put my grandmother’s apple cake recipe in here because it is probably the best apple cake I’ve ever had. This little girl right here, she came over from Australia. She’s a real big country western singer in Australia, so we wanted to help her, maybe get her name out there. She came over to Nashville; really sweet, sweet girl. Her mom is a champion barrel racer, and her dad is a [bull rider and bareback champion] over in Australia. They’re champions over there in Australia.

**Neurohr** *What’s her name?*

**Dunn** Her name is Shea Fisher. She’s real cute. I hope that she’s a big huge star over there in Australia, but she was trying to get, taking off over here. I don’t know if she ever did. Kind of went underground for a while, but she’s a really, really cute girl. Has a great voice, too. We did a lot of stuff. These girls right here are—let me see. I don’t know issue it was, but these girls right here, they’re the [All] American Cowgirl Chicks, and they do trick riding. [V. 2, No. 3, July-Aug 2008]. They’re a group of girls out of Texas, and they do trick riding. Well, we did a story on them. Then they went to Sweden for the International Horse Show, and they performed in Sweden. Our photographer went to Sweden and photographed them over there doing the show, and so that was kind of fun. Those girls are really good, and one of the girls is blind. She’s a trick rider, and she was blind. They do a lot of stuff here in the US. You might want to check out their programs.

**Neurohr** *What issue was that?*

**Dunn** This issue, this issue right here, the printers made a mistake. They used the wrong paper, so it has a thicker cover on it. This issue right here’s the January-February 2009. In this one, we also did a article on a lady in Egypt. She does trekking over there. You can rent horses, and she’ll take you to go trekking and stuff. That was fun, too. That was pretty cool stuff. They’re real talented.

**Neurohr** *The quality of the paper is really nice.*

**Dunn** Yes, yeah. I think that makes a big difference. You can have real thin, cheap paper…. When the economy crashed, the magazines either went under or they did cut costs. It does hurt. I think it does hurt the overall looks of the magazine or the article, but you got to do what you got to do to survive. I really wish that we could’ve kept going because we were well on our way, but something happens financially…. I’ll probably start it again.

**Neurohr** *Did you start off by selling subscriptions?*

**Dunn** No, I started off, what I did is I contracted with a company that handles distribution, like getting your magazine into certain stores like Barnes & Noble, and those kind of stores, and the airports, on any kind of magazine rack that they could. That’s how it started. Then once they got out there, it was really a great thing because women basically promoted the magazine. We didn’t have to really do a whole lot of promoting because women were telling other women, and then they were telling other women, then they were telling other women. It really cascaded really fast, very fast, faster than I thought it would. I mean, it was….

**Neurohr** *How many issues were in your first run, did you print?*

**Dunn** I think I printed fifteen hundred. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Fifteen hundred!*

**Dunn** I think that’s what it was.

**Neurohr** *And then did that change?*

**Dunn** Oh, my gosh, yeah, because then we ended up, by the time I stopped printing, we were in over fifteen hundred stores across the US. I had forty-two thousand readers, and that’s reader-subscribers.

**Neurohr** *Forty-two thousand reader-subscribers?*

**Dunn** Yes.

**Neurohr** *And were you still managing all of those details?*

**Dunn** Yes, yes, I was.

**Neurohr** *Were you still working?*

**Dunn** No, I had finally quit, like about a year. In the first of 2009, I quit my other job because I was working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. I was just at the point where I knew I needed to get help, but then things change. We were in about fourteen different countries, our magazine was.

**Neurohr** *And that was all through the distribution?*

**Dunn** No, I did that myself.

**Neurohr** *Oh, you did that yourself?*

**Dunn** Yes.

**Neurohr** *Well, how did that work? How did you find where to take it?*

**Dunn** You know, you just got to…. I had contacts over there so they…. They were talking about the magazine. I would send magazines to them, and then they would pass them out. That brought in subscribers, and it just kind of….

**Neurohr** *Were you printing it only in English?*

**Dunn** Yes, yes, because we were not big enough yet to…. I was talking to people about getting it translated, but we hadn’t reached that point yet.

**Neurohr** *Going back to your education at Rogers State and you were studying journalism, did any of that help you as far—did any particular classes or anything help you at all?*

**Dunn** No, no. I mean, yes, I did do editing until I got an editor, and even then I edited because I wanted to make sure I wasn’t going to get sued. (Laughs) Law is where I really grab on to the laws. It’s just knowing, and then you have to have lawyers. If I had any questions, I would contact my lawyers. I had about seven lawyers to make sure we were on the up, and above the….

**Neurohr** *What kinds of things does a publisher have to worry about the most? What would be some of the top things?*

**Dunn** I’m going to say my biggest thing was I just wanted to make sure that our readers was getting some kind of inspiration out of this book. I know a lot of people say you need to leave God out of it, but I didn’t leave God out of it because this is God. This is God’s making. He just used me as a tool to get whatever it is He wanted out of this. Somebody out there needed a certain story to help them make it through whatever challenges they were getting through, and it gave hope. It gave hope to a lot of women thinking, “My, gosh, finally! Finally we’re going to be recognized.” I really don’t take a lot of credit for this. It was really—that’s God right there because I was just a little olʽ nobody, working a job and barely making it day to day raising my kids. He said, “Pshoo! There it is! Let’s go get it!” He provided all the people that helped in this. It wasn’t really me.

**Neurohr** *Did you have anything going as far as an online presence or social media presence when you first started?*

**Dunn** I got online. I believe you can do anything you want to do. You’ve got to put your mind to it, and you’ve got to want to do it. I got online, and I bought a little website package. I went in there, and I made up a little bit of stuff. We actually got to the point where I hired a professional, and we had the most amazing website. Oh, my gosh, it was just great! She did a fantastic job on that. We had started to put some of the stories on there. We were thinking about doing an online magazine because some people like to hold it and some people just like to look at it online. That didn’t ever happen because we had to shut printing down, but, man, it was really spectacular. Yeah, she did a great job.

**Neurohr** *Were you having it printed in Oklahoma?*

**Dunn** I had it printed in Kansas and Missouri. I talked to some people in Oklahoma, but it was more expensive here in Oklahoma. Unfortunately, it wasn’t in Oklahoma. It was Kansas and Missouri.

**Neurohr** *What was it like finding stories?*

**Dunn** Very easy. (Laughter) Very easy. I have a lot of friends that are writers, anyway, in the Western industry. Women, the women are subscribers. They would call in and say, “Hey, you need to write a story about this lady,” or write a letter, “You need to write about this lady.” That was the easiest part of the whole thing was finding women to do stories on.

**Neurohr** *I noticed that you had some contributors, when I looked through some of the issues before the interview today, that were with you, it looked like, pretty much every step of the way.*

**Dunn** Yes.

**Neurohr** *Would you tell me a little bit about some of them and your connections with them? B. J. Rickard?*

**Dunn** Okay, he’s the *Stall 13*, and he’s actually from Bixby, Oklahoma.He’s known as a very good—he was a horseshoer. That’s his trade job, but he also had a radio show, and he also gave advice. He’s an expert on horses. That guy knows everything there is to know about a horse, let me tell you, so he was right there from the beginning.

**Neurohr** *Rhonda Sedgwick Stearns?*

**Dunn** Rhonda is a Cowgirl Hall of Fame Honoree, and she’s a known writer. She’s written a lot of articles, lot of stories. She’s a really good friend of mine now. It was kind of funny because a man saw the magazine, and he called me up. He said, “Hey, you need to call this lady.” (Laughter) I got her number and found her and called her, and we hit it off just like that. She was in it from the beginning to the end, and she is a great…. A lot of people know, they know who she is. She played the organ at the rodeos for Clem McSpadden.

**Neurohr** *Clem McSpadden, the famous….*

**Dunn** The famous Clem. He’s the one that wrote the “Cowboy Prayer.” She knows a lot; a lot of people know her. Her husband, Bill Stearns, he was a champion bronc rider. He passed away a few years ago, but they are very well known in the cowboy industry. She does a lot of cowboy poetry, and she’s written a lot of books.

**Neurohr** *Diane Tribitt?*

**Dunn** Diane, she is from Minnesota, and she just kind of happened. She called me one day and said, “I really want to be your editor. Can you please….” She didn’t have any experience at it, and she ended up being a really good editor.

**Neurohr** *Who else stands out to you that was there quite a ways through?*

**Dunn** Well, OSU was there from the beginning, pretty much the beginning. The Cowboy Poetry people (check out their website) because they have some really good poets on there.

**Neurohr** *Are they still based in California?*

**Dunn** Yes. Then we have Jan Swan Wood, and she was our comedy. We even had cowgirl humor, and she is a very funny lady. She actually has books that she sells, and we love her. We’re still really good friends. Who else? The O’Reillys, they’re the Long Riders Association [Guild], and they write books and stories of people that do long horse trekking. We’re talking thousands of miles. They go in and tell their stories and all of that. They’re a good—they supplied a few stories for that.

**Neurohr** *Where are they from?*

**Dunn** You know, I can’t really, I don’t really remember. They were really from all over, big European people. They did have a place here in the US. I want to say Kentucky or Tennessee or someplace, but they were really overseas type people. Then we had—let me see. We had Mary Ziegler. She started doing our recipes each month. Her husband, Randy, was one of our photographers, and he was a really great photographer. She was a great person. We always had really…. Then we started doing a gardening, there. I think it was, like, at the end of 2008. We started doing some gardening articles, having a garden section every month, and that was because our women are country and they like to garden. (Laughs) I like to garden, too. We hired some people, a guy out of Arizona [Dave Owens], actually, to do a gardening section. That was real big. Then we had a section where we started doing women’s health topics, and that was a big success, too. We were just trying to do as much as we could, knowledge and inspirational, healthy, country living kind of stuff.

**Neurohr** *Were you getting feedback from readers in the form of letters or emails?*

**Dunn** Oh, I don’t know how many thank yous. Women would send in thank you cards, or when they would send in for their subscription, they would write little notes, “Thank you so much for starting this magazine.”

**Neurohr** *Do you still have those?*

**Dunn** I do. I do have those. I have some of those in a….

**Neurohr** *Tell me about the graphic design. It’s beautiful.*

**Dunn** I had a great graphic designer. Her name is Janie [Thomas], and she’s out of Bixby. She came onboard willing to do it for free until we got up and were able to start paying people. Yeah, she did a great job, and when she couldn’t do it any longer was about the last two, these two right here. She wasn’t able to do it anymore because that’s when the economy started crashing. Then I had a young lady that was in school, going to graphic designing school. She came in and did it just for the experience alone was good for her. She was Diane’s daughter. She did, like, the last two issues, and she did a really good job. It was unfortunate because at this time we could start seeing the light, but things happen. You have to move on.

**Neurohr** *It seemed to grow in size, page-wise.*

**Dunn** Yeah, we were really starting to get some advertising, some really good advertising. It was around this time. We had just landed a big contract with Harlequin Romance, and then we had to shut it down.

**Neurohr** *What was that for?*

**Dunn** Marketing.

**Neurohr** *Oh, marketing*

**Dunn** Yes. Marketing because, see, they write Western novels, too, and that’s what they were going to advertise.

**Neurohr** *Do you remember how many were you up to, as far as printing? Started with fifteen hundred, then how did that evolve?*

**Dunn** Yeah, I started with fifteen hundred. (Laughter)

**Neurohr** *You laugh about that now. (Laughter)*

**Dunn** I was like, “Oh, my gosh, fifteen hundred magazines!” That was like, exploded. Like I said, by the time we quit printing, we had forty-two thousand readers and subscribers, and then the magazines that went out to the stores and….

**Neurohr** *How many would typically go in a store on a rack?*

**Dunn** Usually about five to ten, and if they needed more, they would….

**Neurohr** *So you were printing extras and keeping some on hand?*

**Dunn** Yeah, because when we would go to shows and stuff…. We still went to shows.

**Neurohr** *What do you mean by that?*

**Dunn** Well, like, in Jackson, Wyoming, they have a Western design conference every year, so we would be a sponsor for that and go up there, and rodeos and get booths and stuff, just go.

**Neurohr** *And you were doing all that, too? (Laughs)*

**Dunn** Yes. I know. I’m an over-doer. (Laughter) I’m telling you, doing this and working twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, wasn’t as hard as going to my eight-to-five day job because I believed in this. I loved this, and this was something that I truly, truly knew this was my purpose in life, even though it was hard. It didn’t seem like I was really working. I was creating something, and I met so many great people, so many great people.

**Neurohr** *Do any particular photographs stand out to you? Let’s do photographs, and then we’ll do stories.*

**Dunn** Okay. A friend of mine, from Oologah, she was doing photography. I took her, and she did a great job photographing Donna McSpadden. You just couldn’t get any better pictures than that. I mean, look at that! That’s a great picture.

**Neurohr** *Is this Debbie White?*

**Dunn** Yeah, this is a great picture, and Debbie did a fantastic job. She took several pictures of Donna. Then my other photographer, Randy [Ziegler], he did some great photographs, too. Lori Merritt, she wasn’t hired by us, but she donated photographs that she had done. Well, she didn’t donate. I paid for some of them, but some of them she donated. She did some great pictures, too. Look at Deana [Dickinson McCall] on her horse; that’s a great cover right there.

**Neurohr** *That is.*

**Dunn** That’s a great cover. This right here, Jamie Williams, she was doing a project on the American cowgirl, and she’s a photographer. These photographs are hers that were in her collection. She took some great pictures of these women that are…and she has a website, too. Absolutely fantastic photography. That’s one thing I really…. Look at this little lady right here. Isn’t that a great photo?

**Neurohr** *Yes.*

**Dunn** That was really something, and this little girl right here, with her dog. That is so…. That’s probably the number one, highest requirement that I had, was the photographs had to be spectacular, so we really didn’t have too much in here. I love this picture right here. That is really good. Photography had to be something that people, they’re going to look at that and go, “Wow, look at that!” That was a big thing for me. Randy took this picture of Mollie [Mollie Taylor Stevenson Jr.]. Mollie is the first black ranch woman in Texas, her family was. She’s a great, great lady. She’s actually in the Cowgirl Hall of Fame, and she does a lot of history with the kids. They have a little history museum. They bus in kids from all over to go through it, so I really like her. That was really something that I was pretty…. This is a great picture of Susie [Susie McEntire Luchsinger] that our photographer took. Photos was definitely a…. That’s what brings a person to a magazine, anyway, as far as I’m concerned. If you don’t have good pictures, people aren’t going to sit there and want to read the article.

**Neurohr** *Talk about the one that’s on top right now.*

**Dunn** This is Patty Eckman, and she has a great story. Her daughter had cancer, and so it’s kind of her story about getting through that process. At the same time, she is a excellent artist. This right here is some of her artwork. They make their own paper, and all of this is made out of their paper. Every little detail, she is into every little detail, even the thread in a button. Her talent is just so amazing. It blew me away. The first time I heard about her was she had her stuff, some of her artwork, at the Cowgirl Hall of Fame. I had gone to a ceremony, one of their inductee programs, and they were showcasing her artwork. It is just stunning. Some of her stuff can be as long as this table right here. It is just absolutely stunning. I urge anybody to check out her artwork because everything she does is made out of the paper that she makes.

**Neurohr** *Wow.*

**Dunn** I mean, it’s just unbelievable. Super nice lady. That’s a hard, hard thing is to lose your child, but she has a really good, inspirational story. She’s very family connected. She’s a good person. I know I get kind of choked up every once in a while.

**Neurohr** *That’s okay. Were there any stories that you had in the works that you wanted or planned to do but weren’t able to get around to?*

**Dunn** There’s millions of stories I wanted to do. Yes, we had lots of stories in the making that we weren’t able to get published, but, you know, God’s a miracle worker. One of these days, maybe they will. We were actually working on a—I really wanted to showcase women that didn’t have, that weren’t already famous. Some people I did, though. Like Susie, she has a history of….

**Neurohr** *Susie McEntire?*

**Dunn** Yes. She was known as Luchsinger then. Her story is she was in a physically abusive relationship, so this story right here, there was a benefit to it. Hopefully it helped somebody else that might be going through the same thing. There was some people. We were working on interviewing Barbara Bush. Barbara’s really good with—she’s very into children and women, so I felt like she was going to have something, have a good story to maybe help somebody else. That’s really what our mission was, God, and maybe helping other women that were going through some kind of a difficult situation, and, of course, you know, happy stuff, too.

**Neurohr** *Did you have an articulated purpose or mission statement?*

**Dunn** I did have a mission, and I think I wrote it in one of these. I don’t remember which one.

**Neurohr** *I remember your first issue had a little statement you wrote…*

**Dunn** Oh, maybe that was it.

**Neurohr** *…which I saw on, maybe, page four? [V. 1, No. 1, Oct. 2007]*

**Dunn** “Dear readers,” I wrote, “As I sit back and contemplate the last four years of working hard to get this magazine into your hands…” (I spent that time getting familiar with the publishing laws and really finding out what all it was going to take to really do this, and that was a lot of research) “…my thoughts can only be grateful. Grateful for all the wonderful people that have blessed me, and believe in this publication so much that the majority of them worked for little or no payment in return. We all believe it is time for women to be recognized and honored for our role in modern society. Each one of us has a story, and the stories of Western women are bountiful.

The sacrifices that each woman has made through the years provides positive role models for generations of women to come, a whisper of hope and a source of encouragement for our fellow sisters around the globe.

I hope you all will join us in making this publication your magazine by interacting with us and personalizing it to fit your needs. We are open to all suggestions, comments and criticism. Welcome, ladies. Saddle up, grab those reins, and let’s hit the trail. You’re entering cowgirl country!” (Cries) I’m sorry.

**Neurohr** *That’s okay. You have an amazing legacy there, very amazing. Are there any Oklahoma women whose stories need to be told that come to your mind?*

**Dunn** Oh, there’s thousands of them.

**Neurohr** *Can you name a few?*

**Dunn** Well, we wrote about Donna. She was there. There’s a….

**Neurohr** *Has anyone ever written about Reba and Susie’s mom?*

**Dunn** No, you know, we were working our way up there. (Laughter) It’s just like I said. There’s just so many women that have so many inspiring stories, and it’s hard to…. That was probably the hardest thing, was trying to pick out which one to do next. It wasn’t hard getting the stories. It was hard picking out the one to do next because there’s just so many of them.

**Neurohr** *How in the world did you figure that out?*

**Dunn** Well, what I did is I would talk to all of our people that were the closest, and then we would discuss, “Okay, let’s do this story. Let’s do this story. We’ll do this story in the next issue.”

**Neurohr** *Were you trying to have a variety in some way?*

**Dunn** Yes, yeah, and we did have a variety. We had Susie’s story about domestic violence. We had Basha [O’Reilly]. She was a world trekker, and she went on thousands of miles of trekking journeys all over the world, Russia, everywhere, in places you wouldn’t want to go. She’s an amazing girl. We had Jamie Williams. Her purpose was kind of like mine. There’s so many women out there that don’t have their stories told, so she was trying to get some of those out. Then you have the American Cowgirl Chicks. They’re trick riding, and then each one of them has their own personal story of tribulations that they’re trying to get through. Georgie Sicking and how she fought her way in the world of the cowboy and ranching and trying to prove that she could do anything a cowboy could do, and she pretty much did that. Then you have Donna McSpadden, super great lady. They did so much stuff for the college rodeo in this area and just the rodeo…

**Neurohr** *Family?*

**Dunn** …family, period. Then you have Mollie Taylor, [a descendent of the] first African American to have a ranch in Texas. She’s real big into helping kids and getting scholarships for kids, and making sure the history is out there and told. Patty Eckman. Then we have other stories inside that are short stories, too. There’s just so much out there.

**Neurohr** *Okay. Any other Oklahoma women come to mind?*

**Dunn** Donna, yeah. I have a friend, Donna. She has lupus, and she’s a big little cowgirl because she’s shorter than I am. She started in this area a Christian horse club for the youth. Plus, she’s done other things, so there’s a story right there in this area alone right here. There’s a lot in Oklahoma. There’s a lot of stories that haven’t been told out there yet.

**Neurohr** *Do you have connections with the Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Fort Worth?*

**Dunn** I don’t really have connections with them. I’ve been to some of their inductees with Rhonda, but I don’t really. Whenever I started doing this, everybody was your best friend. (Laughs) Everybody was your best friend. Even though you didn’t know them, they was your best friend. (Laughter) I really had to stay neutral, not show favoritism like the WPRA or the Cowgirl Hall of Fame. I really had to kind of stay neutral, so I didn’t. That’s why I said I probably made some people mad. I wasn’t in this to gain fame. I was in this to let these ladies get the fame that they deserved.

**Neurohr** *Okay, so you and I—oh, I had one question. Let me go back. So you had a team of people you were working with. So how were you all communicating? Was it telephone calls? Were you emailing each other? How did you work together?*

**Dunn** Yeah, telephone and email. Whenever you’re getting these ready to print, you upload them. Well, the graphic designer—everybody would turn in their stories and not already laid out or anything. They would turn in their stories, then everything, pictures to go with those stories. They would send it to me, and I would run through them real quick just to make sure that’s what I wanted. Then I would send it all to Janie, our graphic designer. Then she would go through, her and I both would go through, and lay out each page.

**Neurohr** *Together? You were at the same place?*

**Dunn** Yes. Together, and then she would take it, and she would do her thing to it. I would say, “Okay, let’s put this story on these two pages, these pictures. Lay them out however is going to work,”…with the advertisements. We would get all that. “Let’s put this advertisement here, this one here.” Of course, people would pay for a certain page placement, anyway, for advertising, so those were the easy ones. The advertisers, 99 percent of them would make their own ads and send us their ads. If they wanted us, we could do their ad, (we were going to charge them for it) but usually they already had their own marketing team. That was the easy part. (Laughs) Then we would go through and find pictures. I mean, it’s a long process.

**Neurohr** *How much time does it take…*

**Dunn** A lot of time.

**Neurohr** *…to lay out one?*

**Dunn** A lot of time. It takes a lot of time to lay one out because you would lay it out, then she would do her thing to it. Then you would lay it out again to make sure it looked good, and then any changes, she would make the changes. Then you would lay it out again and make your changes. In the meantime, your editor is editing the stories, making sure grammar’s right, making sure nobody is being mentioned. There’s so many specifics in writing your stories. You can’t say something about somebody unless you have concrete evidence it’s true. You have to go through and make sure all that stuff is…. If somebody’s name was mentioned, then you’d have to go and get permission from that person to say, “Yes, you can use me in this story.” There’s a lot. (Laughs) There’s a lot to it.

**Neurohr** *You mentioned that you were teaching yourself about the legal side of it the first few years before you actually got it up and going. How did you do that? Were you reading books? Were you looking online?*

**Dunn** I was reading books, looking online. I was going to libraries, checking out the laws.

**Neurohr** *Well, what libraries did you go to?*

**Dunn** I went to, well, the Tulsa library, places like that.

**Neurohr** *The law library [University of Tulsa]?*

**Dunn** Yes, and then I was also getting my lawyers lined up. They helped a lot, of course, because they’re publishing lawyers. Between them and me doing my own research and stuff….

**Neurohr** *If somebody came and said, “Lee, I’m thinking about starting a magazine,” what advice would you give them?*

**Dunn** Make sure you know your publishing laws. That is the key, number one. Make sure you know the laws on everything there is in publishing because people are sue happy, and it only takes one person to destroy your dream. Just make sure you know your publishing laws. It’s like this name right here. I was going to just call it *Cowgirl*, and I went in to try to trademark “cowgirl.” Well, “cowgirl” is an ordinary word, and you can’t trademark that. That’s whenever I came back and thought of this *I.M. Cowgirl*. Well, then, you can trademark that because it’s not ordinary, but “cowgirl” you cannot. You can’t trademark that word.

**Neurohr** *Hmm, didn’t know that.*

**Dunn** Yeah, so anyway, I came up with *I.M. Cowgirl,* and that’s not something people would write in a sentence every day.

**Neurohr** *It stands out.*

**Dunn** Right.

**Neurohr** *What about your rights statement in the magazine? It seems like it maybe changed a little bit. Did you tweak it a few times?*

**Dunn** Yeah, we probably tweaked it a few times, yeah. Yeah, you want to make sure you have that in there. That was supposed to be right there, but I don’t see it there. Oh, yeah, “Reproduction of the magazine in whole or in part…if the postal service…we are not responsible for returned or lost….” Yeah, you got to have your rights in there, too. That’s why I said you just need to make sure you have all of your publishing, you know what you’re doing, and get some lawyers. Get some lawyers. If you’re ever in doubt, then they’re there to protect you. I had really great lawyers. They are some people here in Tulsa, a publishing firm.

**Neurohr** *Okay, as I mentioned as we first started, the Oklahoma State University Library Archives will have one copy of each issue that you are donating.*

**Dunn** Right.

**Neurohr** *So what are your thoughts on that?*

**Dunn** I’m just excited that these women’s stories are always going to be available for people to read about them. That means more to me than anything because they deserve it. They deserve it. It’s not about me. It’s about them.

**Neurohr** *And, what’s the, what are your thoughts on the digitizing?*

**Dunn** Oh, I think that would be, that’s fine. That’ll be great, too, because more people would have access to it, so that means their stories is going to be read by more people.

**Neurohr** *Well, we appreciate your generosity in doing that. One of the focuses of our archives are women’s stories, Oklahoma women. That goes back a ways, so one of the areas that we particularly collect in are women of the Dust Bowl and those stories, and women out in the Panhandle.*

**Dunn** Oh, yeah.

**Neurohr** *I don’t know if you knew that.*

**Dunn** Actually, Rhonda Stearns, she wrote a book about Miz Mac [*Prairie Trails of Miz Mac*]. Have you heard of her, Miz Mac?

**Neurohr** *No.*

**Dunn** She’s actually out there in the Panhandle, and she’s actually the first woman to ever compete in jumping. Of course, that jumping was done in Canada, but she went to Canada. She was out there just helping work horses and stuff, and one of the guys couldn’t ride. They asked her if she would take his place. All the men were thinking, “She’s not going to win,” and then she won! (Laughter) So she started competing after that in the men’s jumping. Well, the men got mad, and that’s when they started women’s jumping, so that she couldn’t compete against the men anymore. (Laughter) That is hilarious.

**Neurohr** *That is!*

**Dunn** That’s how women’s competition in jumping started.

**Neurohr** *Oh! I’ll have to look into that.*

**Dunn** So, see, there’s another story we wanted to do, but…. (Laughs) That cracks me up every time I think about that.

**Neurohr** *Looking back, is there anything you would do differently?*

**Dunn** Probably change the timing (Laughter) to where it didn’t hit the economy crash, and that way it would still be out there. No, I don’t think I would. Maybe, I think what I did, probably the worst thing I did was, is I made promises that I couldn’t keep. The promise was to pay these people for their work whenever the magazine became a success. That is one thing that I do regret, that I wasn’t able to thank them properly. (Cries) I made a promise that, unfortunately, I couldn’t keep…and I’ll carry that until the day I die because they are great people. Everybody says, “You didn’t have any control over the economy,” but still, I don’t like making promises I can’t keep. If I do win Publisher’s Clearinghouse or anything like that, I will be sending out some checks. (Laughter)

**Neurohr** *When did you realize that your last issue was going to be your last issue?*

**Dunn** Oh, gosh, you know, I started thinking about that probably about three issues into the end. That was when the economy really started to crash, and it was getting harder for me to get the funds to do the printing.

**Neurohr** *So you had to come up with that upfront, kind of?*

**Dunn** Well, yes, because every business was hurting, and so they wanted their money upfront, which I don’t blame them. I just don’t blame them. That was when it was really starting to get…. If you can’t print an issue….

**Neurohr** *Was that your major expense?*

**Dunn** Yes, oh, my gosh, yes. Printing is, whew, expensive. Of course, that was whenever I started thinking, “I need to not use such good paper, make some changes,” but still.

**Neurohr** *Did you ever change the paper?*

**Dunn** I didn’t change the paper. I was starting to think about it. The only thing that changed on this one was the printers made a mistake and they used the wrong cover paper.

**Neurohr** *Did you have to eat that cost?*

**Dunn** No, that wasn’t my fault. That was their fault. I had already started talking to the printers about, “Let’s see what it would look like on this paper or this paper or this paper.” I had started, but the economy just crashed, like, so fast. It was unbelievable how that just, bam.

**Neurohr** *Did your cost change, or was it the same the whole time, what you were selling them for?*

**Dunn** Well, your cost changes because you’re printing more issues, so, no. You know, ten thousand, fifteen thousand dollars. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Well, I mean, what you were selling it for, what it was being sold for.*

**Dunn** Oh, no. It was at $4.99 in the US; $6.99 in Canada. We charged people more money to send it overseas. If it was a subscription, we would cover our cost in sending it overseas. A lot of times I would ship a box overseas to some connections, and they would pass them out. I didn’t charge people for that, but if it was a subscriber then we would cover the cost. They would have to cover the cost for that because we didn’t just send it like this, like you do in the US. It had to go into a envelope. Otherwise, it would have never made it. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *So, your barcodes on them, does that incur a cost?*

**Dunn** Yes, it has USA.

**Neurohr** *That’s really some great paper.*

**Dunn** Yeah, this was the mistake one [V. 3, No. 1, Jan.-Feb. 2009].

**Neurohr** *The mistake one. (Laughs)*

**Dunn** Yeah. I didn’t like that feeling. It felt more like a program that you would get at a football game or something. I like the feel of this one right here. It was still thick, but it didn’t feel like a program.

**Neurohr** *Yes, it has a really nice sheen to it, as well. I know there’s differences in paper with that, too.*

**Dunn** Yeah.

**Neurohr** *Were the covers different from the inside pages…*

**Dunn** Yeah, yes, there is a difference.

**Neurohr** *…as far as the weight?*

**Dunn** Yes. We had started a group up in Kansas. They had started the Women’s Ranch Rodeo Association, and I love those girls. (Laughs)

**Neurohr** *Tell me about them.*

**Dunn** They are just so fun, and so country, and say it like it is, and that’s kind of the way I am. We started a column for them, just to help promote the Women’s Ranch Rodeo Association.

**Neurohr** *WRA?*

**Dunn** Women’s Ranch Rodeo.

**Neurohr** *WRRA?*

**Dunn** Yes. I just love them. They are a great group of girls. They worked really, really hard in getting that started. The reason why they started that is because women aren’t allowed to…. There was one thing in here that we did that was my idea. (Laughs) The Women’s Ranch Rodeo Association, and what they’ve done is they started a women’s ranch rodeo where women can compete in ranching, and it’s actually taken off now pretty good. I heard they got up into Wyoming and South Dakota, so they’re really kind of stretching their wings out. This right here, when my graphic designer sent this to me and we had this picture right here of Bobbie [Pickrell], I told Janie, I said, “Write underneath that, ‘Tough enough to wear mud.’” (Laughter) So she did that [V. 3, No. 2, Mar.-Apr. 2009, p. 36]. I had more calls on that little statement right there, going, “Oh, my gosh, we love that little statement, ‘tough enough….’” Everybody says, “Tough enough to wear pink.” Well, we’re tough enough to wear mud. (Laughter) I really like these people. These girls, they worked real hard in getting their association out there, and this Mike Donnell, he helped them. There were so many. I had women contacting me from all over the world.

There’s a lot of women out there that likes to bull ride, a lot more than people realize. The Women’s Professional Rodeo Association, they’ve done a lot of good for women, but they are really kind of stuck on, like, two events. That association was started to give women equal opportunity to ride the bulls, ride the broncs, do the stuff that they were not allowed to do in the men’s rodeo. I had a lot of women calling me from Australia, all over the place, saying, “We really want some place to ride bulls.” This Mike guy, he was trying to promote a women’s bull riding competition to where women could come in and ride bulls and broncs in their own competition. I really had hoped that he had gotten it started, but with the economy crashing, you just couldn’t get the sponsors and stuff. I really hope someday that the Women’s Professional Rodeo Association, that they will really start sponsoring that type of thing because I think they would be amazed. I have lots of friends that are women, and they want to ride bulls. Maybe someday they can bring that in and make the money like the guys do because, I’m telling you what, watching a woman ride a bull is entertainment. (Laughter) They can do it just as good as the guys can.

**Neurohr** *Is there anything that I haven’t asked that you would like to share for the interview?*

**Dunn** I don’t really know of anything. No, I think you covered it all.

**Neurohr** *How did your family feel about this venture?*

**Dunn** They were very—my dad was very supportive, my family was. In my family, my dad and I, we’re the country, horse-riding, cow kind of people. Him and I are close, pretty close, but I don’t think he, (and I’m not saying this to bad-mouth my dad), he was so amazed that I could pull something like this off. It wasn’t because he didn’t think I could do something. It was just I had never talked about doing a magazine, so it was really a surprise that this was something I had always dreamed of. I never shared that with anybody.

**Neurohr** *You did? It was something you had dreamed of?*

**Dunn** Yeah, yes. Like I said, I wanted to be the next Barbara Walters, but this is better. (Laughter) But, yeah, they were real supportive. Everybody was real excited about it.

**Neurohr** *That’s good. Do you keep in touch with some of the people that you did stories on?*

**Dunn** Yes. Yeah, I do. I keep in touch with a lot of people. Whenever I had to shut it down, it was a death. It was a death. I still feel that, yeah, because when you put everything you have into something, and you know it’s something good and you don’t have the means to keep it going until you can get through the hard part of it…. People start businesses all the time, and it takes a lot of money to get them going until you can get past…. They say five years on a magazine, and we had made it three. I wasn’t a rich girl. I pulled money out of my pocket. I was making forty thousand dollars a year, supporting three kids, and that’s what I started this on. And I’d do it again.

**Neurohr** *You would?*

**Dunn** Yeah, I would, most definitely. … For that to happen is really going to be another God thing. (Laughter) I would not bring it back as *I.M. Cowgirl*. I think this right here has its own story, and this right here is history just because it is the first Western women’s magazine, and just because of how it was started on a shoestring budget, and how fast it grew in popularity. I think it needs to stay right where it’s at, but I would start another magazine to showcase women and call it something different.

**Neurohr** *I hope you do.*

**Dunn** That would be great, wouldn’t it, maybe, or maybe even help somebody else get one started. I would be all for that. They do have a cowgirl magazine out there. I think that’s great, but I think what women really want is real-life stories not on everyday celebrities that people already know about. That’s why this took off so big is because these are real people living real cowgirl lives every day.

**Neurohr** *You’ve talked about your faith a lot. Big part of your life?*

**Dunn** Huge, especially right now. [Cries] I’m in my third round of cancer, and this one is the biggie, the life threatening one, so, whew. Without God, what is there?

**Neurohr** *Thank you so much for sharing your story with me today.*

**Dunn** You’re welcome. Thank you for letting these women’s stories live on.

**Neurohr** *I’m honored to even be a part of this at all.*

**Dunn** Thank you.

**Neurohr** *I am.* *I don’t know how this all came together like it did… (Laughter)*

**Dunn** I know.

**Neurohr** *…in some ways, but I feel very blessed and honored with your gift to the library and with your story. I think that other people are going to get a lot out of your story.*

**Dunn** Well, I hope so. I hope they get inspiration and maybe some kind of hope through a story in one of the magazines, and that’s what it’s all about: hope.

**Neurohr** *What do you want to tell women everywhere?*

**Dunn** Don’t give up on your dreams. It’s scary to go after something you really believe in, but if you really believe in it, go after it, whatever it takes, as long as it’s guided by God.

**Neurohr** *Thank you so much.*

**Dunn** Thank you.

**------- *End of interview*** *-------*