

WOMEN IN CLARINGTON WOMEN
IN OSHAWA
WOMEN IN . . .

WRITING PROJECTS
2005 2006

THE IRIS GROUP INTERNATIONAL WOMENS' DAY EVENTS

Women in . . .

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THE QUESTIONS

1. In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?
2. Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?
3. Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

A Journal Project: *Me at 8 years; at 20 years; and so on.*

Women in



Figure 1 Girl Guide Badge - Polish

In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?

Although there are areas still needing improvement vis-à-vis women's lives (sex trade, war casualties, arranged marriage, workplace and professional inequities, etc.) there have been a number of positive changes - gains - in my lifetime that have impacted on many women, myself included, notably education. I am a baby-boomer child of post-war immigrants. The 'cues' I got through my childhood of my place in this world were, from my father, that I would grow up to be a mother. A given. From my mother, I would grow up to be a mother, but I should have some practical training like nursing or secretarial 'just in case'. These cues were not uncommon through my childhood in the 1960s among my peers. I had always wanted to go to university, was told the money would be there if needed, however a) the money was never going to be there; and, b) the support really wasn't there either. I did, however, enroll in a two-year college program from which I successfully graduated with a practical diploma in Legal Secretarial Science, a suitable choice of occupation for the daughter of immigrants who would one day provide them with grandchildren. Upon graduation, I purchased a college jacket with my program emblazoned on the sleeve, upper arm. Because the width of the sleeve was narrow, the program name was shortened to "Legal Secs". Cute.

I immediately married, and worked for a few years in various secretarial capacities, making coffee for men, making appointments for men, paying bills for men, organizing and planning the working lives of men, and covering up affairs for men... until my first son was born, following which I 'retired' to do what I was destined to do: raise a family. After all, my mother proudly noted, often, that I was gifted with 'good Catholic hips' while I considered those hips a curse every time I tried to buy a pair of jeans!

And then, I decided to finally chase my dream to go to university. It was a male friend who encouraged me to apply. And there, in the halls of higher learning, I found my brain - it wasn't in my hips! - and I found collegiality among many women, many my age and who were also mothers, all of us seeking something, making plans, learning as much about our selves as about the texts we were exposed to. And even though my father never understood my desire for an education - "You should be home taking care of your family" - my mother encouraged me and supported me and loved to hear what I was doing and learning. And my mother-in-law helped me with childcare because I was doing what she had wanted to do - go to school to pursue an interest - but was denied the opportunity.

Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?

Yes. I appreciate that women have a day where we can collectively reflect on our gains and on areas that still need improvement. I value that through this reflection process we are confronted with the question of action. If we are to consider the day as a day to ponder women's lives, one must consider: a) what are the areas of lack and of need in women's lives, everywhere?; b) how we are going to educate others about the lacks still existing in women's lives; and, c) what we, as communities of women and as individuals are going to do to help improve the lives of women both locally and globally. Thus, it is a day of reflection and a day for action.

Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

This story is not an easy story to write for there are so many women who have impacted on my life. Women of family, women who have made a public mark. Women friends and neighbours and sisters. Women who have achieved great things and women who have suffered great sufferings. All impact on my life. But not meaning to be cliché, I would have to say one woman who has had the greatest impact is my mother: as role model through my life, as a 'mirror' from which I can reflect on those aspects of me that I cherish and those aspects which I wish to change or improve. My mother has nurtured me since before birth and has supported me in my nurturing of my own family. She acknowledges my talents and abilities and supports my efforts while also 'is there' when I need comfort or kindness or a compass to direct me in 'the right' direction. She 'understands' me. She demonstrates to me and my siblings and our children open affection and keen interest in all of our lives. She is strong and brave, having traveled across the ocean to search for a new life and simply just doing that. As she ages, I feel it is 'my turn' more than hers to be the nurturer, the strong one, the brave one. And our mutual sharing and shifting in these roles is a wonderful life transition I hadn't expected. She is in me and comes into my days through my actions, or speech, or thoughts. And the most miraculous thing about her being in me, and my recognition that she exists in an essence of my being, is that I realize her mother travels through this essence, and her mother before that. Through my mother I feel and 'am' the essence of all the mothers who have traveled this life, one generation to the next, sharing wisdom and experience and cautions and hopes and dreams. Thus, the impact is overarching; it cannot be felt in one event, through one memory, at any one

time. It is felt always. My mother's impact is life and living and the essences of past thriving in the everyday ordinariness of my life.

Clarington 2005

Women in . . .



Figure 2 canoe

I didn't come from a "liberated" family. My mother's idea of being independent came from not wanting to be married to my father – her message was –don't ever depend on a man. When she finally left him (Was 20), about six other wives in the same middle class area left their husbands. "... If Ruth can do it . . ." One woman just left her husband and moved in across the road with the man she'd been having a long affair with. They'd all been feeling stuck in marriages, where there was a status in being "provided for", which left them with a lot of time to play bridge after their children went to school, while not providing them with or allowing them any sense of accomplishment beyond the lowly status of housewife.

My liberation came after I had both kids, had moved to Newcastle where we knew nobody, and I was going crazy without my business (clothing designer/manufacturer in Toronto). The timing was beyond post-partum depression. I felt lost in this new life. My husband was well into writing his first novel – full of purpose. I had two pre-school children for company. I met another woman who was starting a moms and tots once a week play group with around twelve moms – no dads. I never thought I'd wind up in a church basement with a group of strangers, but we quickly formed a solid support group, sharing children, coping techniques, recipes, hopes and dreams. Within three years most of us had gone on to working on those dreams through higher education. I went to U of T to take Fine Arts courses. I started making art and showing it. Six of the other women in this group went to university for teaching degrees – all of them are teachers now. We also became early members of FOCUS, a united feminists/activist group in the Clarington area. As we became more educated, we shared our ideas with each other and the community. Although many of these ideas had been written about by much earlier feminists, it took numerous waves of the movement to reach this small but vital community. It also collapsed marriages; brave women armed with decent jobs, able to provide for themselves and their children, left the men they realized could not accept them as their equals and all that that entailed. More than half the women from that early group divorced. Some of them found more “liberated” men. Oh Goddess!!! Positive changes are slow to fruition and come with a heavy price. The pendulum continues to swing with even the most basic of women's rights – their decisions for their own bodies. My children have grown up seeing both their parents cook, clean, and pursue careers. My daughter thinks nothing of it – this is normal. My son complains that his friends' mothers do their kids' laundry. I remind him of his wonderful ability to care for himself – something he'll have to do soon as he moves out into the big wide world.

MARALYNN CHERRY

A JOURNAL PROJECT: ME AT 8 YEARS; AT 20 YEARS; AND SO ON.

Eight years and moving to the city from the country

My imagination is unnerved by too many stimulants and I retreat to the riverbed that runs through the center of town

Girls had scooters, skorts, and hula hoops

I loved Elvis Presley ...Jail House Rock....I felt like suburbia was my jail house

I wanted to be back in the country and immediate open spaces

At twenty I was glad to leave High School and move to Toronto....Ontario College of Art

Art and Ideas then many travels to Europe and through Canada and down into the United States

I lived on an island in BC for two years in a small cabin and wandered again up and down the coast through the wilderness

Back to Toronto.....thinking about philosophy and physics.....moving tentatively in and out of the art scene....buried in the University Librarytaking classes and wandering the city as though it were another kind of wilderness....many years of collecting images..impressions...ideas....shaping a library

Marriage, working childbearing and being immersed in the life of ones child, husband and still trying to shape an aesthetic that weaves things together in an organic way...Moving my family out of the city to be find studio and living space...and be near my ailing parentsbalancing many lives and feeling myself back in the rural countrysideseeing the horizon line again.....quietly piecing together an new community of friends that shape the whole re positioning of ones life and art....

Teaching and working with the artistic community that bridges the spaces between the urban the rural the wild.....

Women in ...

CATHY IRELAND

I believe that women today have the freedom to become whatever they want to be. This wasn't so with my mother's generation and I believe it wrought much dissatisfaction and discontentment. When I reflect upon my own life I see how my ideal of what I thought constituted as womanhood has changed dramatically. As a child I longed to grow up and become a woman. I believed that my hearts desire would be finally be fulfilled. As a woman I thought I'd like to have children and to be a caretaker of a family. Perhaps, I was really looking to fulfill that which my childhood lacked -the basics of tender touches, warm embraces and simple moments of youthful jubilation. In the end now at 40 I feel fulfilled having mothered to adorable human beings, letting a husband leave and having the complete and terrifying freedom to explore who I am. I've found creativity that I never knew existed and a love for life that bubbles out from a desire to see and explore everything to its fullest. This attitude to life is contagious! I see my mom now in her 70's exploring new things and bravely entering her world in areas that she was afraid to do on her own before. I see my daughter in 3rd year university, stretched to the limits, but determined to succeed, and I see the changes in view points from the perspectives of three generations intimately interlocked. We enjoy being together. We recognize that we don't have to agree with each other. It's okay with all of us to have different perspectives and be able to share intimately our thoughts and feelings about life. I think that we would all say that we benefit from this dialogue and the wisdom and experiences that we all bring to the table of our unique life experience. It's a powerful sharing that enriches all of our lives. I remember receiving in grade school a little green book, at pre menstrual time, that outlined the physical changes to expect titled, "It's Wonderful Being a Women", which I have found is indeed true!

Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you? In 1995 I moved to the United States and became involved at the Canadian Embassy with Women's events. One of the first projects that I was involved with was efforts to coordinate a special International Women's Day event, under the direction of Astrid Pregel, the Minister Counselor of the Business Development Group. I had the great opportunity to meet many powerful Canadian business women who rose to the challenges of life and were leading successful businesses. The beauty of it is that these strong women were motivated not only for their personal success but also for the value that their business success brought to the family members that were employed under them. Giving viable employment opportunities was at the top of their personal job satisfaction lists.

Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life? Astrid Pregel was the Minister Counselor at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC. She led the very first Canadian Women's International Business Initiative which brought over 150 Canadian business women to the US to meet with their US counterparts. The event explored opportunities for Canadian and US partnerships, workshop on learning how to build cross border business, and access to influential professionals that fostered further success for many Canadian business women. Throughout this time I worked under Astrid's direction. I was going through the demise of my marriage and she was as thoughtfully concerned at the micro level of my life as she was changing the world for business opportunities for women. Astrid is a strong woman who had a powerful impact on my life. I learned the value of female networks because we are powered by deeper values than our own personal success factor. Astrid taught me first hand the ingredients of success and was a powerful cheerleader that gave me the courage to leap into a life alone that I was afraid to leap into. She was a trail blazer and fearlessly fought for the all of us on the most complex levels. Although some thought she was tough. She really wasn't she was just passionate about her mission and succeeded on a very broad

and personal level that I benefited from and admire deeply.

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Women in ...



Figure 3 Matryoshka from Russia with love

In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?

I notice great changes in women's lives nowadays. One of them is that women being busy with families and work have a great opportunity to express themselves in all spheres of life.

Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?

I am from Russia and International Women's Day has really special meaning there. Long time ago it was created with a special purpose – women's fight for their freedoms and rights. But now it turned into a really nice holiday. On that day all men in the family get up early, clean, cook breakfast and dinner, take their moms, wives and sisters to nice restaurants and bring them flowers and small gifts. On that day you can see flowers everywhere. Streets are full with men holding 3-5 flower bouquets. Even at work women get flowers from their bosses and co-workers. This day is a wonderful celebration of women's beauty, appreciation of their work and efforts.

Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

MY MOM

What makes us special? What is love? What are the most important things in our life? Have you ever asked yourself such questions? Have you found the answers? I did, after my mom's death.

If you think this is a sad story, you are wrong. What I am going to write about is the most beautiful narrative because it's about HER

Yes, she was a special person. Why?

She was like a rainbow. We all know that rainbows exist; we've seen them thousands of times. But every time you see a rainbow again you feel like a child -- it's a wonder. It fills your heart with admiration and joy. That's how I felt every time I saw my mom.

Have you ever felt the warm touch of the first sunrays on an early summer morning? It's like my Mom's kiss. Has a sudden spring rain caught you and have you ever felt gentle silver drops of water on your face? It's like my mom's hands touching my cheeks. Do you remember how pleasant it was to come home at snowy winter evening and relax near the fireplace with a warm blanket on your shoulders? This is like my mom's hug. Her heart was as big as the universe, as kind as God's and as full of love as our earth is full of flowers. And she shared her love with every person she met in her life. She gave everybody a piece of her magic love -- a flower of her soul..

I like flowers. They always remind me of the smile of someone very wise, like my mom, who taught me a very important lesson in my life. You don't have to be famous or rich to make this world better. Sometimes it's enough to be a good mother and to help your children discover all the beauties of the world and the magic of love. These are the most powerful things on earth - more powerful than death.

CLARINGTON 2005

THELMA DAVIDSON

IN MY LIFETIME THE FOLLOWING ARE POSITIVE CHANGES I HAVE SEEN FOR MYSELF AND WOMEN IN GENERAL:

Menstruation is no longer an embarrassing secret. Modess and Kotex boxes are no longer wrapped in plain, brown paper and hidden behind the pharmacy counter

Girls don't have to wear bloomers

Mothers don't have to wear girdles with bones that stab and leave red welts

Girls don't have to wear brown or black oxfords until they go to high school

Girls don't have to get their hair cut at the barbershop because it's cheaper

Mothers don't get blue hair rinses for special occasions

Mothers don't spend hours darning socks

Mothers don't spend hours ironing six white shirts per week; five for the office and one for Sunday

The length of one's skirt is a personal decision

Women have taken back control of the birth experience

It's okay to ask about birth control

It's okay to question your medical treatment

Your doctor might be a woman

Your nurse might be a man

It's okay to say the word "breast"

It's okay to say the words "breast cancer" if someone you love has it or if you have it

Women know there is life after a mastectomy

It's okay to tell someone you had a hysterectomy

Women don't need to isolate themselves if they are breast feeding

Hardwood floors don't need to be rubbed down with steel wool, then waxed, and polished

Diapers no longer need to be washed, rinsed, hung out to dry, then folded

It's not a waste of time to educate a girl

It's okay to return to school later in life

It's not the end of the world if a woman does not marry

It's not the end of the world if a woman does not have children

You don't have to get married to get out of your parents' house

You don't have to get married to live with a man

Unmarried women can adopt children

It's okay for a woman to learn to drive a car

It's okay for a woman to buy her own car

It's okay for a woman to take control of her own money

Women are insisting on prenuptial agreements

Women are leaving loveless marriages

Widows are recreating themselves

More women are getting elected to public office

Women are creating and operating their own businesses

Women are traveling with other women

Women are going out on Saturday nights with other women

Women are buying their own homes

Women are moving up the academic and corporate ladders

Women are learning to fly.

Clarington 2005

MARIE MCNULTY

POEM "THE ROSE"

It stands alone, my single full blossomed rose, on its stem which bears 3 leaves to a stem.

The vase is tall and slender and made of glass, which pleases the eye. See me it says,

I sit amongst the clutter of medicine bottles, and paper which lay strewn across the table.

When I'm able, I think I'll bring order out of this mess.

Yes, I am normally a clean freak, but Diabetes has disabled me somewhat,

However, from the time I bought my imitation, graceful pink rose in its tall, slender container,

I feel a winner by enjoying the sight of the full blown rose, because I love it.

Sometime between the 70's and the 90's, men's view of women changed.

This was due to women wanting equality in the work place and the home.

Women wanted liberation from the role they were forced to play at home, and in the work place. We saw women's necklines plunge, midriffs bare, skirts shorter, and all of this

done to attract men to themselves, who frowned on the "liberation."

However, men were born to be dominant, and mothers doted on their sons.

So, sons were revered from their birth. However, the females in society wanted freedom from dominance, but the men had backed away because women's dominance could destroy their natural role in society. Protector – wage earner- and a warrior when needed.

Let's face it – We can't do what men do – nor do we want to.

A teacher in the 10th grade was also an artist. She encouraged me and showed me
How to paint pictures.

All of my artwork was hung up on the back wall of the classroom.

This made me feel a sense of pride which I had not felt before.

As I grew older and found boredom creeping in on me, I recalled

How this teacher had explained the desire to create was needed at such times as
these.

So, I joined an art class and learned the art of picture making in oils. This was a
Medium I enjoyed.

I got excellent tuition from this lady whose first name was “Zerviah” and my paintings
Started to sell when on display, which pleased me.

To lose yourself in your artwork takes away boredom. Life is what you make it – I
guess.

Clarrington 2005



Figure 4 a roving hand spun by me

1. In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?
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positive changes for myself...pew...that's a bit intense...I was living in the Yukon

for about 4 years working at the Women's Shelter,
Daycare and spending a lot of time with the really amazing women that surrounded
me. In getting to know these women I discovered this "sisterhood" that I had always
been so cynical about in the past. The survival stories that were shared furthered my
understanding of the intensity and pride I now embrace as a woman: Survival in the
wilderness, survival from abusive situations and survival from self doubt...My
celebrating Women's Day is a way of celebrating my voice and the voices of so many
past women who weren't allowed to speak their piece...an acknowledgement of
thanks to the strength that I have gained in reading history and crossing paths with so
many incredible women, and growing into one myself.

Growing up I so desperately wanted to be male...because I believed that men were
the only people who were heard, and the only people who could truly achieve their
heart's desire.

I don't feel that way now.

Clarrington 2005

- 1 In my lifetime I have seen changes occurring for women in a variety of ways, some gradual, some in the form of "two steps forward and one back."

What comes to mind first, due to the stage of life in which I find myself, is the increasing openness with which women can now discuss not only issues of sexuality, but the specifics of menarche, menstruation and menopause. Where they were once dealt with as taboo subjects, we have now found out so much more about what is "normal"; and these stages of a woman's life are more often reclaimed and celebrated, rather than covered up with shame and given an aura of uncleanness or illness. Not that there isn't a lot of work left to do, in light the medical profession's over prescription of hormone replacement therapy and more recently, manipulation to the point of eradication of our "cycles". The birth control pill was given the status of partially liberating us, but by continuing to tamper with "mother nature", are we contributing to our own social and ethical demise?

A female athlete could argue that these changes/advancements are a necessary step on the path to creating a truly equal footing with men; that surely more control over fertility and the "inconvenience" of monthly bleeding would give us more power in all arenas in which we compete with men. I agree that it's wonderful to have seen both girls and women come so far with access to athletic programs, visibility and achievement in the last three or four decades. But at the same time, can we not just stop and look at ourselves, and admit, that we are not men, and then reclaim and rejoice in our own special powers and abilities.

2. I remember being much more aware of International Women's Day while in my teens, back in the late seventies. I remember borrowing (and later, gradually appropriating) from my mother's wardrobe, a bright orange, polyester t-shirt with a the shapely outline of a woman with the feminine/feminist symbol below, and strutting around in it knowing how well it revealed my C-cup breasts. I can't think why I would have parted with it, except due to the eighties fashion move to oversized t-shirts. After that the yearly event passed me by unnoticed, as I drifted, fought, struggled and flew through the university years, the dating years, the first career years, the back to school years, and finally the marriage and baby years. Now that I have finished with weaning and diapers, International Women's Day has taken on new meaning. I have listening to the struggles and successes of friends and family members; fumed while listening to newscasts of abuse, denial and persecution of women in Afghanistan; wept while knowing that my monthly donation cannot save the lives of more than a handful of children living in poverty. But at the same time, I realize that through out the world, all women essentially want and need the same things from life, apart from food and shelter. We need a voice, and ear, a palette and a canvas, a dance and a stage. For this is how we will overcome, and ultimately reclaim what we have lost, and most deserve - our own self respect.

3. Wow! How can I begin to choose a particular woman that has made an impact on my life? Just in my own family tree there have been models of determination, sacrifice, selflessness, ambition and independent spirit that have shaped who I am both

consciously and unconsciously. I think one of the most moving has to be the story of my own mother in law, Nina. She was born in 1925, in Ukraine, the eldest child of four, and the only daughter. Before her father was taken away to Siberia, when she was eleven, she would often sneak into his workshop and tinker with his tools. She fantasized about being a pilot, but, sadly was not able to complete her schooling beyond the grade four level. At the age of 16, she came home to the news that her family was to be relocated by soldiers at an hour's notice. She chose not to join her mother, grandmother and brothers, but hid in the ditch, and watched them for the last time as the wagon carried them away.

From then on, she placed her fate in the hands of strangers, and used her most valuable skill, the use of German she had learned from her own grandmother, in order to work as a translator for the Germans. After two years, with no address - but the help of a German soldier who happened to be a genealogist - she was able to track down an aunt and uncle living in Germany, and made her way there. With their assistance, Nina was able to live and work, until an opportunity to come to Canada, on a work contract with Bata Shoe Company, in Batawa. There, her determination to save money had her producing several hundred shoes a day within a few months. It was also there she met her husband to be, and within a few years they were able to buy their own house in Oshawa, with cash.

Always an avid reader, an intelligent and articulate woman in three languages, Nina is what I like to think of as a truly "self made" woman. If she had had the opportunity to attend University, in the right era, she could have been anything she wanted. After the birth of her two children, she did work again, as a Ukrainian school teacher for many years, as well as contribute generously with her time to the Ukrainian Community. In the twelve years I've known her I've witnessed her endure an agonizing hospitalization with acute pancreatitis and suffer the yearly loss of many friends and relatives (including the only brother she ever saw again). At the age of eighty, she still remains generous, loving, appreciative and sympathetic, loves a good joke, and dotes on her three grandchildren.

Yet, there are moments when I can see and hear the pain she relives - with how much frequency I cannot tell - when she revisits that memory in which she says to her mother, "I'm not coming". Perhaps it's now knowing that her mother froze to death, looking for food in a field one year later; that her brothers were sent to an orphanage, where one ran away, and was never found, and the third went, at thirteen to work in a coal mine. Perhaps, it's the fact that her mother never said, "Stay". I know I cannot judge, or relieve her pain, but I can be thankful for the legacy she has created in being the grandmother of my two children.

Oshawa 2006

SUZETTE LEWIS

1. In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?

In my life time I have seen some positive changes for women in general and myself as a woman. I am 35 years old married for 14 years and two wonderful children ages 17 and 11 years of age. Growing up I have seen the unfair treatment of women in full force...I saw up-close the victimization my mother suffered at the hands of her husband and the neglect that was shown to her for all the work she was doing for us in our home. Today I see women becoming proud of what they are accomplishing in their lives and strong roles models that lead and fight for their children to live life with a purpose and passion. I am grateful for the example I have today in my mother and many strong women around me. They have spirituality and conviction for that I am proud to pass this along to my own children.

2. Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?

I celebrate this wonderful time of year with my community and with the many women who have so much to live for. They are survivors and I will always give thanks for their strength and dignity that lives in us as women.

3. Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

There are so many women in my life that have made an impact in my life, but the woman that has made the greatest impact on me has without a doubt been my mother. She is a survivor in every sense of the word. We were always taught as kids to never let people take advantage of you, love God and have pride in yourself.

Although I still learnt these virtues the hard way her words still echo through my life even to this day. Today my own daughter hears these very words from me. How powerful ...to be able to pass on what every woman should believe about themselves. I know this is because she has heard these very words from her own mother and the grandmother before her.

Oshawa 2006

1. In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?

In my lifetime I have seen that being independent is one of the greatest attributes a woman can ever possess. By learning to use my own thoughts I can envision my plans go into action. This change, personally has given me an opportunity to create a business for myself by helping families in the community that have children with developmental disability to enjoy meaningful fun they would normally have been left out of. Many women in the past would not have such opportunities.

2. Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?

International Women's Day gives me recognition for being who I am, for my success and my failures. As a victim that has encounter domestic violence, this day has reminded me that I have overcome.

3. Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

My mother has been a great influence, through her parenting and the love and concern she has always shown for others. Throughout the years she always taught me that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to do.

Oshawa 2006

VERONICA GUINDON

I started my first job in a printing shop when I was fifteen years old. I continued for the next thirty years working for the same company. Machinery was my favorite line of work, but precision work was my art. The company allowed me, a petite 4 foot 11 inch woman who weighed 100 pounds to run a five ton cast iron Heidelberg press. With my height they had to build climbing benches in order for me to make adjustments to the top of this huge machine. I retired with a printing licence and [the distinction] of being the second woman in Ontario to run this type of machinery. Running this gigantic printing machine proves regardless of a woman's size she can accomplish any task.

Oshawa 2006

WENDY SKYBA

A JOURNAL PROJECT: ME AT 8 YEARS; AT 20 YEARS; AND SO ON.

When I was finishing high school in the late 60's girls were counseled to pursue an education that would lead to jobs in teaching, nursing or interior decorating. I thought engineers drove trains. I would have been a good candidate for a career in engineering but this option was never presented to me.

The first time I built a house I did it because I couldn't find a home I liked that I could afford. The whole process of getting permits and hiring trades and managing the project was such a huge job with so many stumbling blocks that I had not anticipated and only recognized as they presented themselves, that I swore I would never move again and would never build another house once this one was finished. Several months after the house was completed, I realized I had learned a great deal and that it would be a shame to waste the knowledge. The next year I built a house for my brother and then another for myself.

In the mid-80's I was offered a job as a construction supervisor by a large volume production home builder. I didn't know that such a job existed but thought it would be interesting to try. I took a leave of absence from my middle management job with the federal government and started building houses for a living.

There were very few women working in construction in those days. People assumed that I was the wife, daughter, or lover of one of the construction company's owners. No-one considered the possibility that this was something I was good at. I was such a novelty that I was the subject of articles in trade publications and even a national women's magazine. I built several hundred houses and also took courses during my vacations to become certified as an Ontario Building Official.

When the bottom fell out of the construction market in the early 90's I was able to move from building to inspection with a large municipality. Needless to say, I was the first female building official to work in that city. The trades people and local builders knew me but when I went to private jobs to do an inspection, I would be greeted with comments like, "You don't look like a building inspector." I would answer, "All building inspectors look like me in the 90's".

As the century ended, I decided to make another change to inspection and enforcement of a Provincial Act in the construction industry. I had a friend who I had taught Building Code courses with, who worked for this company. I called him and told him I was thinking of applying for the job and asked what he thought. He replied that I was perfect for the job but that a woman would never be hired. They did hire me and during the past six years have hired six more women.

Today people only rarely question my ability to do my job or ask me for credentials. I see women working as trades people and in construction management more and more each year and I celebrate this.

CLARINGTON 2005

RUTH SMITH

1. In your lifetime what, if any, positive changes have you seen for yourself or women in general?

Confidence! Awareness.

2. Does International Women's Day have any special meaning for you?

I actually hadn't heard about this day until this year. As I now know the knowledge makes me feel positive/negative.

Negative: that I hadn't known about the day before now.

Positive: pride in being a woman and mother.

3. Can you tell a story about a woman that has made an impact on your life?

There has been and continues to be a variety of women who have influenced me in both positive and negative ways. I would like to talk about a person who has and continues to be a steadfast and truly positive influence in my life, my sister Jill. I cannot think of a time when she hasn't been in my life. We are opposites in so many aspects and always have been that it's hard to believe we have been close all these years.

My life has been chaotic to say the least, and as I have traveled through the tumultuous hills and valleys, Jill has always been there. We haven't always agreed on the decisions that we have made as individuals but we have allowed each other the space and respect to grow within our personal choices. The event that stands out early in our journey was moving to Canada from Scotland. I was nine years; Jill was seven. I think that move sealed our friendship. When I think about the negative time in my life, with our parents, my various sordid relationships, self doubt, self pity, self inflicted pain, she may not have agreed with these levels of depravity as they transpired, but her love for me never wavered. I love her as no one else in my life time and beyond.

Oshawa 2006

NANCY SKYBA

A woman that has made an impact on my life would be my mother. Yes, it may be a bit cliché, but it is true. No matter what I choose to do in life I know that my mother will be behind me one hundred per cent. She does everything in and even out of her means to help me become a better athlete. She is up early to help with the horses and a dedicated horse trailer driver. My mom listens to me and all of my babble and tries to make sense of my totally random comments. She is the best support system that a person could ever have. Not only to me but to all of those around her. If someone needs a hand she is the first person to offer assistance. She has taught me to be brave, caring, outgoing, outspoken and most of all independent. She did not teach me to be a follower, but to be a leader. She put a good head on my shoulders, teaching me that I do not need to follow my peers, but to do what I want. I know that my mom will always be there for me no matter what and it is because of this that she is the woman that has made an impact on my life.

Clarrington 2005

Writings compiled and (lightly) edited by Margaret Rodgers

Women in . . .