

REFLECTIONS

*Celebrating Women of Character,
Courage and Commitment*

March 2014



Advancing Women Mentoring Program
Authentic. Engaging. Empowering.

Why We Celebrate Women's History Month and Why We Must Continue to Celebrate the Achievements of Women

During women's history month, we pause and take some time to remember our history...our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, peers, colleagues and friends...and honor their contribution to our lives. This year we focus on those women of "character, courage, and commitment" that have impacted us and we celebrate their achievements.

So why do we need to pause and take note of women and their accomplishments? One reason is that women's stories were left out of history and text books and we have to put them back in. Another reason is that strong cultural mandates still exist which suggest that women subordinate our need for recognition to that of others so often we don't get the credit we deserve.

During the second wave of feminist activism in the 1970's (Equal Rights Amendment, Title IX of the Higher Education Act, The Pregnancy Discrimination Act) it was discovered that women's achievements were not recognized by our K-12 curriculum or included in our history books. So, in 1978 the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women started a "Women's History Week" and gave volunteer presentations about women's achievements in classrooms throughout the county.

The event was so well-received and successful that it spread across the country culminating in a Presidential Proclamation by President Jimmy Carter declaring the Week of March 8th 1980 as National Women's History Week. Eventually a lobbying effort came together to ask Congress to declare a national Women's History Month. In 1987, Congress agreed and declared March as National Women's History Month in perpetuity. So, every March we turn our attention to women and their achievements so that these stories will be a part of our collective memory and national celebrations.

As for the second reason, women have a difficult time "tooting their own horn." Research shows that women seek mastery and want recognition for a job well done as ardently as men. However, there may be social or career penalties if a woman is seen as "bragging" or too "ambitious". In her article "Do Women Lack Ambition?" (Harvard Business Review, April 2004, p.33) psychiatrist Anna Fels, notes that social context is also very important, "Girls and women more openly seek and compete for affirmation when they are with other women—for example, in sports or in all-girl academic settings. ..But they change their behaviors when it comes to competing directly with men."

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Dr. Fels notes that traditional notions of femininity require that women have to be seen as serving others and even relinquishing resources (including recognition) to others. She cites as an example the traits associated with femininity in the BEM Sex Role Inventory, an applied psychological measure of femininity and masculinity and androgyny. The suggested traits for women lead to these two tenets of “femininity. “The first is that femininity exists only in the context of a relationship...the second tenet that emerges from the BSRI adjectives is that a woman must be providing something for the other person... Giving is the chief activity that defines femininity .” (Page 34)

Taking credit for a job well done would be considered the opposite of this gender role expectation of “giving.” And yet, as Dr. Fels points out expectation of recognition is a huge motivator for achieving mastery of anything for men and women especially to master a skill or knowledge that requires a prolonged effort. So the dilemma for women is obvious...how to achieve recognition for mastery and achievement when our culture looks askance at women tooting their own horn too loudly or calls their gender identity into question when they do achieve social influence and recognition.

Her advice to women is that we identify and purposefully cultivate “spheres of recognition” that will provide recognition to sustain us. And if we can’t find it in one venue, move on to find a more supportive venue.

Professor Joan Williams, University of California, Hastings Law School, has a similar idea. She suggests that women need to develop a “posse.” In her book, What Works for Women at Work (New York University Press, 2014) she suggests that women need to develop a team of people that will publicly celebrate your successes. This could be a reciprocal process where you write award nomination letters for one another, or write articles for publication together, or it could be sponsors and mentors who are willing to promote and support you for choice assignments or recognition.

And finally, we can learn to say “thank you” when someone calls attention to our achievements. Research shows that women have a tendency to attribute their success to external factors saying things like, “I was just lucky” or “I had great team support.” Men will typically assume their success is from innate ability or skills. So the next time you get a compliment or recognition for a job well done, don’t explain it away...just say “thank you” like you earned it....because you did!



Kathy Grove
Director
IUPUI Office for Women

Milestones in the History of Women at IUPUI



1969

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis is established.



1973

Chancellor Maynard Hine appoints first IUPUI Commission on the Status of Women with Frances Dodson Rhomes as Chairperson

1975

September 19 was the official opening of the Continuing Education Center for Women at 1301 E. 38th Street, in a 2-story building which provided a home-like atmosphere for where women can come for career and educational counseling and for continuing education classes, as well as a meeting place.

1977

Committee on Women's Studies is formed

1987

Office of Women's Research and Resources established in Cavanaugh Hall combining the resources of the Women's Studies Program and the Center for Continuing Education for Women

1988

Institute of Women's Health opens at IU School of Medicine with Diane Brashear, MD as executive director



1994

Campus-wide Task Force on the Status of Women appointed by Chancellor Gerald Bepko to review data and current conditions for women at IUPUI and make recommendations for strategies to assure that IUPUI is a campus where women can succeed.



1996

The Office of Women established under the leadership of Dr. Kathleen Warfel, Professor of Pathology, IU School of Medicine

1997

Established the IUPUI Commission on Women: a volunteer group of faculty, staff, and students.

1999

On March 24, Campus Interrelations and the Office for Women co-sponsor a Female Student Leadership Luncheon at the Faculty Club,

2002

The Faculty and Staff Awards were initiated in 2002 at the Fifth Annual Women's History Month Leadership Reception

2004

After three years of no director, the Office for Women was happy to become active again under the leadership of Kathleen Grove.



2005

Purdue School of Science at IUPUI starts Women in Science House

2006

IU School of Medicine establishes Women's Advisory Council

2013

Executive Vice Chancellor Nassar Paydar appoints new Task Force on the Status of Women

Celebrating My Grandmother as a Woman of Character and Commitment

I have been fortunate to have many women of great character, courage and commitment as role models in my life. While many names come to mind, the person at the top of the list is my maternal grandmother Hazel Murdock. In our family, no matter your relationship, Hazel was known as “Mother.” Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren all referred to her as “Mother.” Born in 1913 in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, her family relocated to Kansas when she was a child. Although her brother William was encouraged to pursue his studies, their father believed education was wasted on girls. Instead, Hazel was instructed to master other skills such as cooking. Like many of her time, she married as a teenager.

A young wife and mother of four children, Hazel had two burning desires in her heart. She felt a “calling” to enter the ministry and deeply wanted to become a school teacher. As her marriage failed, she sought multiple ways to support her family. She became a licensed cosmetologist, cook for the officers at the military base in Leavenworth, Kansas and was ordained as an evangelist in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World. My family continues to talk about Mother being denied a place in the pulpit alongside the male ministers of her time.

Between taking care of her children, working as a beautician, preaching in local churches and on the radio, as well as cooking for large parties, beginning at the age of 18 she enrolled in college courses at Kansas State University. When my mother, her oldest child, relocated to Chicago, Mother joined her and enrolled at Chicago Teacher’s College (now Chicago State University) and took classes at the University of Illinois at Chicago in its temporary location at Chicago’s Navy Pier.

My sister remembers Mother sitting up late at night writing assignments by hand at the kitchen table for correspondence courses at Kansas State University. There were no online courses (or personal computers) back then! In 1963, at the age of 50, Hazel Murdock earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Kansas State University, realizing a lifelong dream. She went on to get credentialed in what was then known as EMH (Educable Mentally Handicapped) and TMH (Trainable Mentally Handicapped)—today’s Special Education.

Mother was always of the philosophy that women should hold some specialized training or skill or, as she called it, “something to fall back on” should hard times come along. Hence, although she stopped working as a cosmetologist in the early 1960s, she maintained a cosmetology license until she was in her late 70s. My grandmother, Hazel Murdock, was quite a role model, trail-blazer and a woman of great faith, passion, integrity, commitment, courage and character and I am honored to share just a little of her story.

Karen Dace
Vice Chancellor of
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

