

ABOUT Women

Manitoba
Women's
Directorate



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Long-Time Activist Uses Words to Initiate Actions

O have a vague recollection of my mother and father taking me to a meeting when I was very young... I think it was Nellie McClung who spoke. I remember that the woman's right to vote was discussed."

This was to be the first of many alliances with the women's movement for Dr. Sybil Shack, a Winnipeg writer, speaker and educator who turns 90 this April. Dr. Shack says that in her formative years she never felt at a disadvantage being female. She attributes this to being raised in a home that espoused equal treatment of boys and girls.

It wasn't until Dr. Shack was in university, and working summer vacations, that she began to see and experience the inequalities between the sexes. "The going wage for women was 20 cents an hour. My male cousin, who was the same age as me, worked on the roads and was paid five dollars a day."

The current honorary president of the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties (MARL) and past president of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA),

Dr. Shack continues, in her own way, to advocate for women's rights. As author of several books, and numerous articles, she has publicly examined the changing role of women in education and business.

Recipient of the gold medal in Education from the University of Manitoba in 1945, Dr. Shack places a high priority on academic studies. However, her long-time involvement with the Manitoba Teachers' Society, (first serving on the Women's Local Conference Committee — the committee that negotiated with the school board — and eventually becoming president of the Society), taught her countless life lessons that could not be learned in a classroom.

"My contribution to the women's struggle has, of course, been political," she says. "However, it has taken the form of speaking and writing, not marching and demonstrating."

Since Dr. Shack's retirement in 1976, she has continued to serve on numerous committees, including a Manitoba Task Force on Post-Secondary Education. Among her many distinguished awards are an honorary doctor of laws degree in



Dr. Sybil Shack celebrates her 90th birthday on April 1, 2001.

1969, the Persons' Award in 1983 and induction by the Governor General into the Order of Canada in 1984. More recently, Dr. Shack was named to the Winnipeg Hall of Fame.

Four and a half decades as a teacher, then principal, in schools throughout Winnipeg and Manitoba (Diane McGifford was in Grade 4 at Rockwood School when Dr. Shack was principal), have provided the outspoken educator with many outlets to voice her opinions.

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Minister's Message

O am pleased to have the opportunity to address you as we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8. As Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I will host a reception on the 8th at the Legislative Building to recognize the accomplishments of women and to consider the challenges we have yet to meet. The theme of this year's International Women's Day will be women's health.

We recognize many accomplishments as we mark this, the 80th anniversary of Manitoba women being granted the right to vote. This momentous accomplishment was a result of the work of many grassroots individuals and organizations. In fact, Manitoba led the way in women's suffrage, and was the first province to grant women the right to vote.

Manitoba women have always been leaders in seeking changes that improve women's lives. This issue of *About Women* gives us a special opportunity to salute some of the women who have made a difference through their work as individuals and in organizations. We've also noted some of the grassroots activities which have taken place recently.

This January we held a consultation on women's health for women in Winnipeg to express their concerns

to me, along with officials from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Manitoba Health. The presentations are being compiled now and will be useful in developing policy, both for government and the WRHA. We are planning to hold a consultation later in the spring to facilitate a dialogue with northern women and grassroots organizations, so that we will be able to hear the different concerns from women in northern areas.

Last fall, the Women's Directorate organized an Economic Symposium to offer participants from across Manitoba a chance to share and discuss their views on women's current economic circumstances and the future. I had the privilege of opening the symposium and was very pleased that so many women took the time to participate. They shared personal stories—both frustrations and triumphs—in their efforts to create a secure economic future for themselves and their families. The discussions included specific topics such as pensions, minimum wage and access to training, as well as a variety of other issues raised by the women participants. The issues raised will help to inform future public policy development in support of women's efforts to achieve economic security.

I know you will enjoy the ongoing articles which highlight the accom-



plishments of women in our communities. This issue features profiles on Dr. Sybil Shack, who made so many contributions to the women's movement and the field of education in Manitoba, and Marilyn Stewart Stothers, a very talented artist whose work is known across Canada and internationally.

As we acknowledge our accomplishments, and move to future challenges, I look forward to joining with you to celebrate International Women's Day. ■

Diane McGifford

Diane McGifford
Minister responsible for
the Status of Women

History of International Women's Day

Every year, on March 8, millions of women and men around the world celebrate International Women's Day. It is a day to celebrate the progress women have made in achieving equality, as well as to recognize the challenges that still exist.

"We still have many challenges to face before women reach full equality in our society," says Diane McGifford. "Each of us has a role to play, and we all will benefit from working towards the goal of full equality."

International Women's Day had its roots in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century with the struggle of working

women to obtain better working conditions and the recognition of their fundamental rights, including the right to vote.

In 1910, at the Second International Conference of Socialist Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark, Clara Zetiken presented a resolution calling for the designation of an International Women's Day to recognize women's struggles around the world. The resolution was passed unanimously, and the day was celebrated in many European, as well as North American, countries on varying dates.

Eighty-five years ago, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to grant women the right to vote, although not all women were in-

cluded at that time. Like their sisters who struggled for better working conditions and fundamental rights, Manitoba women worked tirelessly to obtain the right to vote, led by women like Nellie McClung, Cora Hind, and Lillian Beynon Thomas.

In 1977, the United Nations adopted a resolution inviting countries to dedicate one day to celebrate the rights of women and international peace. March 8 became the date of recognition.

"This year, as we celebrate International Women's Day, it is fitting to remember and honour the work of Manitoba women that led to the granting of women's right to vote," said McGifford. ■

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She is quick to point out, however, her reluctance to "impose my point of view on my students". Instead she tried to teach her students to "question everything, not take anything for granted, even what I'm saying to you now."

In her role as principal, however, Dr. Shack says she did feel an obligation to ensure that in her actions, and the policies she established, girls were not treated or perceived as second-class citizens. When she was principal of Isaac Brock School in the late 60's, she recalls that the school president was a very bright girl and the vice-president was a boy. It soon occurred to her that whenever the two of them would come to discuss some situation with her, it was always the boy who spoke up.

Dr. Shack finally approached the girl about her actions. "You're the

president. You're speaking for the school. I want to hear what your opinions are. Why are you letting him speak for you?"

After much hesitation, the girl replied: "I want him to like me."

Dr. Shack says she's had her share of experiences being treated like the weaker sex. Early on in her career, she was teaching junior high school while working on her thesis for a master's degree. She needed to get permission from the superintendent to try an experiment comparing two different teaching techniques.

After posing her question to her superior, his reply was: "Now why do you want to bother your pretty little head about that?" Dr. Shack recalls being so angry she was tempted to walk right out of his office. However, she kept her anger in check, knowing she needed his permission to proceed.

Dr. Shack believes it is still harder for a woman to be taken seriously and move up in the hierarchy, particularly in the business world. "There is still that element of prejudice, although not nearly what it was in those days. I have certainly seen a tremendous change."

As a teacher, she has been a good role model for her students. After attending an annual meeting of Creative Retirement recently (Dr. Shack was a founding member), she was surprised by the exceptionally warm greeting from the chairperson, a woman she did not recognize. The chairperson promptly explained that Dr. Shack had been her teacher in Grade 4.

"She told me Grade 4 was the best year she ever had in school... That's been one of the greatest compliments I've ever had." ■

Winnipeg Women Advocate for More Responsive Health Care

A consultation on the 'Health Concerns of Women Living in Winnipeg', held on January 23 at the Norquay Building, included presentations from over 30 women who endorsed a health care system that is more responsive to women from all walks of life. The event closely precedes International Women's Day, whose theme this year is women's health.

In her opening remarks, Diane McGifford, Minister responsible for the Status of Women, stressed the importance of the words being spoken there. "What you tell us will help us develop policies that support women's efforts to have

access to health care services and programs."

McGifford went on to say that wherever possible, these programs and services should acknowledge, and be sensitive to, the different viewpoints and approaches that women of diverse backgrounds and life experiences bring to health issues.

Approximately 100 people attended the one-day event, which brought together individual women, women's organizations, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) and the Manitoba government to address mutual concerns regarding women's health.

Presenters spoke passionately about their experiences in the health care system with respect to issues like breast cancer, mental health, the increasing demands on caregivers, mature women's health, the level of care in personal care homes, addictions, and support for immigrant women. Many of the presentations noted the direct link between poverty and health.

The Women's Directorate, who sponsored the event, has begun compiling the verbal and written presentations for use by the government and the WRHA in their ongoing work developing policies and programs on women's health.

Similar consultations will be held in rural and northern Manitoba later this year. ■

Council Thrives With Clare at the Helm

Kim Clare says her first year as chairperson for the Women's Advisory Council has been both challenging and rewarding. "Collectively we have decided to focus on the areas of economic security, women's health and well-being, violence against women, and women in conflict with the law."

Clare adds that the Council continues to deepen its knowledge of emerging concerns for Manitoba women through community consultation and research. The arms-length advisory body has provided the Manitoba government with information and recommendations for action in the following key areas:

- gender-specific analysis in government policy
- reducing poverty among women, particularly older women and single mothers
- improving women's economic participation through the development of adequate housing
- the need for enhanced services for women affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effect
- the increased incidence of HIV/AIDS in women

In the area of domestic violence, the council continues to participate in the yearly public awareness campaign, regularly hosts information sessions, and has addressed vio-

lence prevention against girls and young women through a series of roundtable discussions.

A highlight, says Clare, was hosting the annual Sunrise Breakfast on December 6 at the Legislative Building, with over 150 people in attendance. "The event provided a much-needed venue for members of the community to mark the anniversary date of the 1989 Montreal massacre, and to remember the Manitoba women who've lost their lives to violence in the past year."

Anyone wishing more information about the Women's Advisory Council and its activities, can call 945-6281 or toll-free at 1-800-282-8069. ■

Women's Personal Stories Highlight Quest for Economic Independence

On September 28, 2000, approximately 200 women from across Manitoba gathered at the Ramada Marlborough Hotel in Winnipeg for the Symposium on the Economic Status of Women.

Diane McGifford, Minister responsible for the Status of Women, opened the event, noting that women continue to face challenges in their pursuit of economic equality and independence. Hosted by the Manitoba Women's Directorate, the day offered participants a chance to both share their views about women's economic situations, and help inform future public policy.

Laura Doucette of SEED Winnipeg, spoke about economic policies and issues and of her own experience as a single mother working to find economic security. In turn, she was touched by the stories of others. Her participation was, in her words, "by fluke, but it was a gift. It was what I needed and I was really inspired," she said.

Doucette, along with Sandra Funk, Original Women's Network; Muriel Smith, former MLA and UNPAC member; and Susan White, professor and member of Canadian Women's Health Network, was part of a panel called "Creating Economic Security". The panel discussed policies and issues that relate to women's economic well-being: pensions, minimum wage, and business development.

Another panel featured Georgia Angom, Employment Projects of Winnipeg; Gladys Cook, Aboriginal Elder; Chandra Mayor, Student; Lou Ella Shannacappo, First Nations disABILITY Association of Manitoba; and Debbie Spence of the George Hickes Constituency Office. They shared stories about their efforts to establish their own economic security.

At lunch, the keynote speaker, Deborah Stienstra, Royal Bank Research Chair in Disability Studies at the Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, spoke about her experience at the United Nations Beijing +5 Conference in New

York. Speaking about the value or devaluing of women's unpaid labour, she noted that "for many women, our experience of the economy is quite a bit different from what most economists describe as the economy... those who do unpaid work at home taking care of their children, elderly relatives or people with disabilities or doing volunteer work are not considered part of the economy..."

The day's proceedings — from panels about policies and issues to discussions about education, housing, poverty, and distinct communities of women — brought together women to speak to a common theme: the economic status of women. For many women, the opportunity to share was the highlight of the event.

"We get caught up in our day to day (lives)...we feel alone, fragile. Events like the symposium are important because they unite women," said Doucette.

"I heard stories that spoke to me...I was moved." ■



Call the Directorate about its Trade Up Program

Quilt Artisan Celebrates Suffrage

Women - We've Come a Long Way - and Still... is the name of an art quilt, depicting the women's suffrage movement that currently hangs in Diane McGifford's office. The inspiring work was created by Marilyn Stewart Stothers, a unique local artist whose canvas is fabric and whose brush is a needle and thread.

Stothers, born in southwest Ontario, has spent most of her adult life in Winnipeg. A graduate of Michigan State University with a degree in textiles, she later pursued post-graduate work at the University of Manitoba in Textiles and Fine Arts. However, it wasn't until 1976 that Stothers began what was to be a prolific career in quilting.

"That year was the American bicentennial and there were countless books and magazines promoting quilting. So I started working on a traditional bed quilt."

Stothers quickly discovered that following a pattern someone else had designed did not satisfy her creative needs. "I started doing my own designs, choosing my own colours and fabrics and putting quilts together in my own way."

Creating these "art quilts" — a term coined by the industry to describe the emerging non-traditional quilts — became Stothers' labour of love and one she has been hard at work at ever since.

The Winnipeg mother and grandmother says the inspiration for her quilts comes from a variety of sources. Sometimes it's a life experience, a memory, something of value or a statement the artist wants to make.

One of Stothers' favourite quilts, aptly named 'Mommy, will there always be flowers?' is an allegori-



Stothers beside art quilt, Hall of Honour, Parliament Building of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, October 18, 2000, "Persons' Day".

cal quilt expressing the artist's concern for the environment and the future of our children. "Some viewers prefer to see the work only as a garden behind a fence in a summer storm. Others are wary of the seven sentinels or poised missiles."

The past two decades have seen Stothers' rise to prominence as a quilt artisan. She has exhibited and received awards in national and international juried and invitational exhibitions in Canada, the U.S., Australia, Japan and southeast Asia. But this artist's list of accomplishments doesn't stop there.

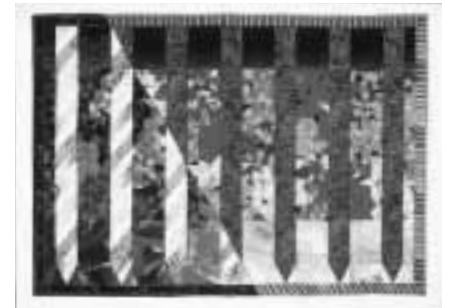
Stothers wrote and published a book introducing a new technique for sewing fabric. She continues to teach and lecture on quilting in various parts of the world, and has a home studio where she works on commissioned quilts for clients. Stothers also owned and operated a quilt shop in Winnipeg called Patchwork House for a number of years.

The quilt 'Women - We've Come a Long Way - and Still...', chosen by

Minister McGifford to grace the wall behind her desk, continues to receive numerous compliments. Perhaps the biggest compliment came when Stothers was invited by the Senate to display the quilt in the Parliament Building's Hall of Honour in Ottawa last year, at a ceremony commemorating "Persons Day", which is celebrated annually on October 18.

"It was wonderful to see my quilt play a role in that memorable event," says Stothers, who created the piece to honour and recognize the many Canadian women who fought for the vote and for the right to be legally recognized as "persons".

Stothers, who has always been active in the crafts community, is currently regional president of the World Crafts Council, North America Region; a past-president and honorary member of the



Quilt by Stothers "Mommy, Will There Always be Flowers?"

Canadian Crafts Council; and a current board member of the Manitoba Crafts Council.

She has recently been invited to join Winnipeg's SITE Gallery, a local artists' cooperative where painters, sculptors and other artisans display and sell their work. Stothers is pleased to be the first fabric artist accepted into the co-op.

"I'm looking forward to more local exposure of my work," says Stothers. ■

Training for Tomorrow Scholarship Awards Program Celebrates Future Leaders

As we celebrate International Women's Day, there's no better time to honour some of the young women who will be making a difference in the future: the newest Training for Tomorrow Scholarship Awards recipients. The scholarships are awarded to women entering full-time, two-year diploma programs in math, science and technology courses at one of the province's community colleges, to train for high-demand occupations.

The latest recipients of the Training for Tomorrow Scholarship Awards were announced by Diane McGifford in September of 2000. This brings the total number of women who have received this scholarship to 341. The recipients include:

Assiniboine Community College — Erin Corbett, Deborah Deniset.

Keewatin Community College — Peggy Lathlin, Karen Crowder, Vicki Richardson.

Red River College — Liza Alupay, Bonnie Booth, Andrea Cooke, Michelle Convery, Jennifer



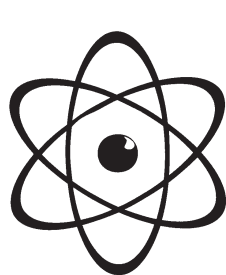
Ostafichuk, Sarah Proulx, Jennifer Ridge, Melissa Florence Salvador, Trina Stestski, Laura Davis, Jennifer Funk, Cynthia McGill, Sharlee Pajak, Kimberly Van Lancker, Leesa Baskerville, Naomi Fjeldsted, Rebekah Hiebert, Sherri Penner, Janice Santos, Tara Fernandez, Melissa Gislason, Mary Ann Gow, Sheila Harris, Violeta Jelinic-Perisic, Karen Kabaluk, Nancy Chan, Twila Falk, Lisa Fraser, Julie Kentner, Cheryl Miki,

Andrea Slobodian, Jana Asmundson, Melissa Selman, Beverly Shaw, Linda Sexsmith, Julia Reimer, Kavita Tandon, Shannon Harris, Teresa Howe, Silvia Magna, Charlotte Simcoe.

College St. Boniface — Jolyne Martel, Lise Sylvie Mabon, Lianne Sabourin, and Lorraine LeTourneau.

The eligible course list is revised regularly and includes: Computer System Technology, Computer Programmer/Analyst, Natural Resource Management, Accelerated Nursing Diploma, Advertising Art, Chemical & Bio Sciences, Civil Technology, Creative Communications, Greenspace Management, Health Information Technology, Information Technology Systems, Medical Radiological Technologist, Radiation Therapy, and Multimedia Communications.

Under this program, the next awards will be given in the fall of 2001. For further information on the Training for Tomorrow Scholarships, call the Manitoba Women's Directorate at (204) 945-3476, or toll-free at 1-800-263-0234. ■



TRAINING FOR TOMORROW

Scholarship Awards Program

The 2001 Application Deadline is September 15.

Changes in Maternity Leave Benefits

A shorter qualifying period for collecting Employment Insurance and a longer maternity/parental leave spell good news for new parents in Manitoba.

Beverly Baker, soon to be affected by the current benefits program, is very pleased. "The changes will make a difference to me and our family as I will be able to stay at home with my children, while they are still young, for a longer period of time. I think this is a step in the right direction for families."

The new eligibility requirement is 600 hours of insured work within the past 52 weeks, or seven consecutive months of employment with an employer. As a result of the newly extended parental benefits,

Manitoba parents are now eligible for a combined leave of up to 54 weeks: 17 weeks maternity leave and 37 weeks parental leave. Partners may share parental benefits.

These changes are a result of amendments to the Manitoba Employment Standard Code, on December 31, 2000, reflecting changes introduced by the federal government.

To find out more about Employment Insurance benefits for maternity/parental leave, visit the Internet site at www.hrddrhc.gc.ca/.

For more information on Manitoba's Employment Standards, call 945-3352 or toll-free at 1-800-821-4307, or visit the Internet site at www.gov.mb.ca/labour/standards/ ■

ABOUT **women**

is a publication of the Manitoba Women's Directorate that focuses on issues, concerns, information and activities of interest to women. It is available without charge upon request.

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