

Patience, Tact And Tenacity And The Ability To Ask For What You Want!

A Farewell Address

**To the 1994 Building Bridges, Building Partnerships WITT National
Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia**

**Marcia Braundy - WITT National Network's 1st National Coordinator, on the occasion of her
required stepping down after two terms.**

I'd like to talk a bit about personal history, because in the feminist movement, the personal is political. It is by identifying the commonalities in our experience that we begin to see the use in individual and collective action to change the circumstances of our lives. Then I will share with you some of the changes I have seen us accomplish. For some of these I have been a part. I will highlight the difficulties, the challenges, and the successes, and where I believe the work for the future needs to be focused.

My first trade was as a hairdresser, one of only a few options open to women in 1965 who wanted the satisfaction of manifesting that great connection between our minds and our hands. The other was nursing. The only other career options for women at the time required working with children, being a social worker, as a nurse, or in clerical support to "men's" work. I opted for working with my hands. It was only later that I was given the opportunity to develop my capacity for organizing and community development work, both as an educator and as an activist. I got a university degree, and became involved in self-motivated education, but ultimately I came back to working with my hands.

20 years ago last month, I started work on a community centre in the Slocan Valley. As the person who was there every day, it was my job to organize the volunteer crews according to their abilities and the work needing to be done. The only thing I had ever built was a bookcase I nailed to the wall because it wouldn't stand up. Women, children and men built that building, working out some of the issues that would later re-appear again and again when women wanted to take up tools and learn the skills

that would enable them to both care for themselves and earn a good living. Sometimes we had women-only work days, when women who had only a few skills would come to build, without fear that the tools would be taken out of their hands or that they would be undermined or made to feel out of place.

Two years later I was earning my living as a carpenter, but felt the need to go to school and learn the tricks of the trade, to get an apprenticeship and journey papers, ensuring that I was recognized as a qualified tradesperson. I overcame discrimination to get into school, and encountered steady and outrageous harassment every day of my training. I erased the blackboard and took down the pornography in silence, because I imagined that if I didn't talk about it, it wouldn't spread and maybe it would go away. I kept telling myself that I was just there to get my training, I was not there to educate those men about sexism and discrimination. And I learned I was wrong on both counts.

When you don't call it, harassment gets worse, and they keep pushing until they can see how far you will go. And for many women, it has been right out of the technical workforce. And if I who am experiencing it cannot educate them about it, who can?

Finally, after telling the instructor and having him start to erase the blackboard, not speaking to the students who were harassing, I wrote to the college council. I documented my experience and that of others, and suggested it was time to take a stand on the degradation of women on their campus. And lo and behold, the principal went to every trades training classroom on campus and told the students that sexist language and action was inappropriate at an institution of higher learning, and if it continued they would be thrown out of school and would not get an apprenticeship anywhere in BC. Needless to say, I was very surprised. But I learned something: when called to attention, it is possible for the powers that be to act. And when I pushed, the powers that be moved. While the whole experience was painful for a period of time, my belief in my own ability to change or effect my surroundings was to have a profound effect throughout the next 17 years.

In 1981, the Vancouver Women In Trades Association presented a brief to Pacific Vocational Institute, now BCIT. One of the elements it called for was "non-sexist training" for instructors. It seemed that I was not the only woman who had run into problems at trade school. By then, I was in 4th year, about to get my interprovincial journey ticket. I had had three good years of work, including two more in school training programs, and had joined the construction side of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners as the first woman to be allowed to do so in British Columbia. But after all those years, I was again being harassed at a training institution in BC. Not so frequently this time, and by only one or two guys, but still the instructor did not live up to what I expected was his responsibility in the matter. If he had spoken up and set the tone early in the class, the students would have understood that their behaviour would not be acceptable. There were staff members with a role to play who were not recognizing and living up to their responsibilities. Was it my job, yet again to point this out? Who else had the knowledge and experience to do so?

A couple of years later, I queried when the Women's Program was going to launch "non-sexist training" for instructors, as women were continuing to tell me of their difficult experiences at schools around the province. The Director suggested that I had the skills to do this, and further that I should put together the funding for it among the labour market partners. Maybe it was up to me/us to educate those instructors and front line workers, who were responsible for the work environment, about what it was like for us in their classrooms and worksites.

In 1983, I went to my union, the employers on the joint training board, and the federal and provincial governments, and put my first funded project together. I travelled to Ontario, where I knew they were working on Affirmative Action, and they had WITT exploratory courses at community colleges. They must have already dealt with this issue...But, after visiting the state of the art WITT course, Susan Booth's program at Fanshawe, and talking to many of the women who became the Ontario Committee, it was clear that particular piece of work had not yet been done. By the way, it was at Fanshawe, where Susan asked me to speak to her class as a role model, that I first came into contact with Maggie McDonald, our next National Coordinator.

She was a student in the program at that time. But I will let her tell that story if she wishes to.

Back home, after some rather depressing research interviews into what the instructors, employers and union reps saw as the barriers to women getting into their trade, the woman who was then my apprentice, Sally Mackenzie and I put together the first training for instructors, employers, stewards, and apprenticeship counsellors in Canada. We received some excellent assistance from the EIC regional women's employment consultant, Valerie Ward.

We piloted it with the Joint Training Coordinator's of the Building Trade Unions, the Provincial Council of Carpenters, and instructors at Selkirk College. In each case, we made sure that there were working tradeswomen as participants among the group, to speak to women's real experiences in the field, as it was clear the men had many misconceptions about that. We called them pilots, but we were pleased to be training those particular groups of men. Ultimately, we have delivered over 40 sessions to employers and unions and vocational instructors, apprenticeship and employment counsellors, and WITT women. Perhaps it was this work that most showed me the importance of working together with our labour market partners to try to make the way easier for women.

During the 1980's, I worked construction when it was available. We built coal silos, hospitals, seniors citizen's housing, renovations, (oh those renovations!). I was also delivering integration seminars and teaching WITT courses.

At the same time, women were working all over this country for the same ends. Eileen Johnson, a machinist, was assisting women and aboriginal people in Northern Manitoba get apprenticeships on the Limestone Project. Mary Addison, a welder, was doing the same in Northern Ontario. WITT groups in Vancouver, Toronto, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, and the Kootenays were providing a place to express the anguish, frustration and sometimes the joy of women who were personally challenging an often alien system. Linda Skomorowski, a plumber/gasfitter, was working with the

Saskatchewan Apprenticeship Board to develop a plan to integrate women. Mary Vickers, a scientist, was working to help young women get their hands into science and technology; Joanne Stead, an advocate was trying to help the Canadian Construction Association members do something about employment equity; Jacqueline Frewin, who was to play a strong role in our structural development, was hiring and training women to work for her in construction contracting in BC; Caroline Zondervan was training women to become machinists at West End Women Enter Machining; Kate Braid, a construction carpenter, and Heather Watt, BC's first female Boilermaker were writing briefs and acting as role models speaking at schools in Vancouver; Leslee Nicholson and Kate Harrison, machinists in Halifax were slugging it out at DND, while Bonnie Robichaud, an operations worker from Ottawa, took that department to the highest court in the land and won a landmark sexual harassment case for all of us; Joyce Rankin, who later became a truck driver with some of her students, was teaching women how to use the tools and develop the skills they will need to survive in a blue collar workplace; Laurie Purdy and Lois Bailee, a technician and technologist from Saskatchewan were working to expand women's opportunities there; Judie Myers, a computer technician from rural BC, was finding ways to share her skills with other women; Madeleine Gregoire was working with employers in Quebec to get training placements and jobs for TTO/BCW women in that province.

These are the women who pulled together before, during and after the Surviving and Thriving conference in BC. These are the women who we can thank first of all for their long term dedication to the formation of this organization. Many of them are here today, sharing the fruits of their labours with those who have come along since or who have worked in the background in one province or another.

Perhaps because of the unique experiences with which I have been blessed and cursed, I have been able to articulate a vision, but it was not just my vision. It was the vision of many women who have seen what needs to change to make the way more welcoming for all of us. This also required that we go after the funding to make it happen.

You have the herstory of WITT in your packages, but something that must be kept to two pages can hardly provide the true picture of the many hours of devoted volunteer work that have gone into bringing us to where we are today, both individually and collectively. There is hardly room to tell the delightful and sorrowful stories that have gone in to making the fabric that weaves us together. We did not allow our momentary defeats to move us too far off our paths, though occasionally, as in 1980, some of us had to withdraw to take up the challenges of our daily work, our "real jobs." The jobs that feed our pride and make our living. The jobs from which we can gain such a sense of personal efficacy, a tangible accomplishment. And some of us have continued to bat our heads against the brick walls and push so hard at the mountains, and now, slowly, we are beginning to see the brick walls start to crumble, and the mountains start to move. I am reminded of Laura Sky's movie made for the Steelworkers, *Moving Mountains*, about the women at Fording Coal in the early 1980's in Southeastern British Columbia: giant truck drivers, blasters, mothers, men and women working together. I ran into Laura at an international women's day event in Toronto this year, and was able to tell her how wonderful and important that film was to me, particularly when I had been in a camp with 400 men and 5 women just down the road building another coal development project at Green Hills. She was thrilled to be reminded of a piece of work that had touched so many women.

And I was reminded yet again of that film just last month when I attended the 50th Anniversary of Apprenticeship Conference in Alberta. The contrast between men who were clutching onto their small bits of power with both hands, and the Vice-President of Operations at the Syncrude Oil Sands project, who proudly told me of the success of their Bridges program in moving women from clerical into trades areas and indicated that 25% of their heavy equipment operators were women, because they handle the machinery with more respect, have fewer breakdowns and are safer. Women now make up 20% of their technical and operational workforce.

Another contrast that tells our story begins with the Action Travail des Femmes sex discrimination case against CN. It was a landmark decision in Canada. Nothing before or since has as clearly defined the issues or delved as deeply into what was needed to

come to the solutions. The women who slugged it out and stuck with that case to the end are to be celebrated. I recently read the Canadian Human Rights Reporter's detailed description and analysis of that case for a reason I will get to a bit later. I highly recommend it as required reading for those of us who are working in the Equity field, as it so clearly describes the basis for the decision, and outlines better than anything I have seen the particular elements that are necessary to overcome the systemic discrimination that is so common, and so little understood, in workplaces today.

It is the only circumstance in Canada where quotas have been imposed: 1 in 4 hires to be women until 13% is reached, the approximate % of blue collar women available in the workforce in 1985. The case also highlighted the need for a "critical mass" of women on site beyond which negative reactions might become more limited. While we can fault CN for challenging the original decision, the work they have undertaken to meet the requirements of the decision has become a model for true employment equity initiatives. They still have a long way to go regarding the trades area, but they have met the requirements for operations and have set in place policies and programs to move women into many places in that company where none have been before. They have become leaders in training their workforce on sexual harassment issues and training their managers on managing diversity. We still hear of individual women who have valid criticism, and know that the whole world does not change in a few years. But good faith efforts must be commended too. We have certainly valued Marie Tellier's ongoing commitment to the development of our Network since the 1988 conference.

We have often been supported in our work by many labour market partners, who are just as committed to the issues as we have been, and often bring another unique perspective to the table. During the development of the DataBank project, the knowledge base of Marilyn Mohan, an equity consultant, Nancy Jackson and Jane Gaskell, sociologists and educators, was invaluable, as was the assistance of our consultants, Marylee Stevenson and Janie Cawley. Many of the Women's Employment Consultants from the former EIC, now HRD, including Rute Soste, Mary Farell, Grete

Rasmussen, Helen Gosine, and the two Mary Scotts, have shown great dedication in supporting and assisting WITT women across this country.

It was Helen Gosine who first introduced me to the potential of Hibernia. I had been invited by Women In Science and Engineering to keynote a conference in Newfoundland which brought together WITT women as a potential sister organization to WISE. I spent 10 days in that province, talking to a lot of people with some responsibility to move the issues forward about what they might do to prepare both the site and women for effective integration at Hibernia. It is a shame those responsible did not take it seriously enough and now, instead of a several hundred women working and contributing to the Hibernia Oil Development Project, they have a major and clear cut Human Rights Case on their hands. Since that initial trip, Heather, Robbie and Brenda Grzetic have helped WITT Newfoundland to grow and flourish. With support from Human Resources Development (HRD), women have been trained to work on the site sponsored by the Ironworkers Union, and WITT has provided exploratory training to other women to enable them to make informed career choices in a number of trades and technical areas. The women who were trained through the Ironworkers should have been hired on the Hibernia site. Instead after going to great lengths to work it out, they were forced to file a Human Rights case. They have proven to be courageous and dedicated not only to their own opportunities, but also to ensuring the site opens up for members of all the designated groups. These women, and some of them are here with us today, have faced deep despair over the failed opportunities to provide a living for themselves and their families in a province where economic hard times are a way of life. Perhaps the administration of the site and the unions read the details of the CN case, because they have quickly asked to settle the case before it goes to court. We can only hope that they see and recognize the value of the well-thought-out proposals brought to them by these women, and settle this case quickly for all concerned.

On the other hand, we see in British Columbia a negotiated agreement with the Building Trade Unions to implement Employment Equity on Hydro and major infrastructure projects. We see infrastructure being defined more widely to include

child care centres and community based initiatives and this being built into the legislation. In Nelson, near my home, after years of fundraising and saving, the women's association has finally bought a house. Work started this week, spearheaded by my former apprentice, journey level carpenter/joiner Sally Mackenzie. She will train and lead a crew of women to renovate the house and ready it for all the warmth and work it will hold in the future. Then perhaps they will move on to Trail, to the transition house there that also needs infrastructure development.

Over these next few days, we will be hearing of many initiatives, some successes and perhaps some disturbing stories. We know the way is not yet smooth, that there is still much work to be done. But we also know that none of these changes would have been made without someone to say that change is needed, someone to say that a particular experience or behaviour is not acceptable, and someone to suggest what those changes need to be. It has become clear to me, after all these years, that it is up to us, to help make our way better. We will have help, and colleagues along the way, but it is up to us to challenge those situations that are not in our best interests. For some this will be easy, others may choose not to work in this area - each will do what we can.

Many individuals have worked as a part of our industrial adjustment committee to develop effective ways and means to train and integrate women into the trades, technology, operations and blue collar workforce. They have shown enthusiasm and initiative, dedication and creativity. We greatly appreciate their efforts. Dr. Hilda Ching, a scientist and educator, and one of the founding members of the Society of Canadian Women in Science and Technology still continues as a strong supporter, as do Georgina MacDonald, the Principal of Nova Scotia Community College who was part of our local conference planning committee for this conference, Marilyn Kenny, one of the first female Directors of Apprenticeship in Canada from Manitoba whose efforts on behalf of women and minorities were known nationally and stifled in her own province; Janis McKeag, a technological literacy educator who will be sharing her skills with us at this conference, and who ran fairly against me for the leadership of this organization at the last conference, and made me this wonderful needlepoint

pillow. Nancy Riche, Penni Richmond, Erna Post and Maureen Prebinski and Lynn Brophy have contributed both Labour's perspective and ongoing support for the work we are undertaking. Marilyn Stanton, of the CARS Council, continues to demonstrate the unfaltering sustenance and attention to detail on hiring and other committees that had enabled us to hire the best people for our work. Shirley Boucher, of the Gabriel Dumont Society and SIAST has brought aboriginal issues to the table, and has shown us some of what we miss by not having greater input from that constituency. As well, as with everyone, that constituency has gained from the ideas gathered at our table. Indian and Metis Girls Exploring Trades and Technology has grown from an idea to a full fledged program with a video to describe it. Rhonda McCoy from YW-NOW, and Lunette Pineau, an advocate from Quebec have also been extremely instrumental in promoting WITT issues in their respective communities, and Sandra Steinhouse has supported WITT's work by advocating throughout the bureaucracy of first EIC and now HRD with humour, clarity and an ability to make the system work for the people that is commendable.

It has been very rewarding to work with the men who have been our colleagues in these initiatives. Our successful application to the former EIC's Industrial Adjustment Program came as a result of advice and support provided by Mike McGrath, President of the CARS Council and an early member of our committee. It has been our continued work with CARS, some of which was documented in our last newsletter, that has demonstrated the potential we have to work with all of the Sectoral Councils. Paul Scott, newly appointed as Executive Director of the Ontario Employment Equity Commission, has worked with us since 1990. He has provided useful and practical advice and suggestions, never assuming, and always checking for the appropriateness of interventions. His depth of knowledge and compassion for our group process have proven invaluable on a regular basis. Ed Tickle, VP of Operations at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology came to us with very little experience in WITT issues, but an inclination in our direction, an unfailing pragmatism and drive to implement practical solutions. With Ed, a little WITT knowledge was a valuable thing, and he quickly identified immediate activities he could undertake to move the issues forward in his circle of influence. And not least at all, Gary Greenman, Alan Jones and John

McWhinnie who have fostered our work through HRD's Labour Market Services.

Throughout our work as an Industrial Adjustment Committee, and our Sectoral Council working committee, we have enjoyed the wisdom, the ability to synthesize ideas and build ideas, and the political acumen of our independent Chair, Anne Harvey, who is now the executive director of the BC Nurse's Union.

I have learned throughout the past 7 years that it is essential for us to ask for what we want, to be able to describe why that is important and necessary, and how it is in the best interests of those being asked to provide us with what we need. We must be clear, direct and forthright, a style that has been traditionally discouraged in women to keep them in line. This is true of our relationships with politicians and with bureaucrats, with employers, unions and educators. This direct and clear approach, backed up by unquestionable rationale has brought needed cash and in-kind support into this organization from all of those constituencies to assist us with our work. This approach has continued to educate, to change attitudes, ideas, policies and programs. When we said we wanted to change an old program to better meet a new constituency, we wrote it into our proposal objectives to do so. We were funded to make change and did not have to couch what we were doing in their old terms. In doing so, we have opened the way for other groups to do the same. We have learned when to talk to the politicians, and when to work with which level of bureaucrats to achieve our goals. We made it clear that we did not want to compete for the small pots of money desperately needed by women's organizations for women's centres and transition houses across this country. We wanted access to the large dollars that have been traditionally allocated for labour market adjustment in male-dominated industries, those same industries in which our women wanted and needed to find training and employment. And we have been successful because we can clearly identify how the work that we want to do for our constituency will benefit Canadian industry in the long run; and that you can't spend that much public money without equity considerations. We have worked with some of the finest public servants and we have run into only a few who would block our way, though we know many women have found some of the most difficult bureaucrats on the very front lines we need to

serve us. To develop into the self-sufficient organization we must become in the next 3 years, we will all have to better learn to ask for what we want in clear and dramatic terms, including financial support from industry for the services we can provide.

Many of the recommendations from the 1988 conference have either been achieved or are well on the road. Many of the recommendations from the 1992 conference are in process, but it is clear that if even only those items were acted upon, we would be living in a much better world. We know what we want, and what we need, and it will take concerted efforts on all of our parts to bring this about across this vast country of ours. At this conference, we are not so much looking for a new mandate, more recommendations, but a gathering of energy, skill building and information sharing that will provide us all with a stronger base from which to move forward with our already identified work.

If there has been one area in which WITT has not focused the attention required, it would be active advocacy in issues for technicians and technologists. Clearly they face many of the same barriers as tradeswomen and operations workers. But even though women make up only 3% of professional associations, there seems to be a feeling that gathering them together to look seriously at why this is so might be viewed as "unprofessional" by their peers. This is an impression based on only a few encounters with these professional associations, and some feedback from a few women who work with them. There are a number of recommendations in *Winning With Women*, the report of the National Advisory Board on Science and Technology that would move the issues forward for all of us. A recommendation was made at a recent think tank sponsored by the former Labour Canada Women's Bureau that the report be re-presented to the current Prime Minister, as the previous one did not have time to act upon it when it was presented to him a short time ago. The pace of change on this issue hardly requires us to hold onto our shirrtails.

Moving that report forward might deal with some of the substantive issues, but WITT National Network will have to examine its own organizational activities in relation to this issue, as we all were challenged to do in the think tank. The organization of the

DataBank may be an opportunity to begin more dedicated work in this area.

I hear, every so often, from a woman who has benefited from the work that we do, or something that was said, a letter that was written, or information that was made available through the Network or the Newsletter that helped a woman move forward on her issues. That is heartwarming. This is not the kind of work that regularly provides the kind of tangible results I found in my construction work, and is therefore not always as immediately rewarding. There have been difficult times internally, as we try to build an effective national organization to our own very critical satisfactions. We as women have not been well trained to handle power and leadership issues. As TTO/BCW women we are very independent and eschew leadership from outside ourselves. I recently found reading Naomi Wolf's book, "Fire with Fire" provided some insights into these issues. Some of our growing pains have been hard on me personally. Certainly the intensity of the travel that has been necessary to ensure the national recognition and respect that we have achieved has taken a toll. As we continue to gain credibility for our active presence at the decision making tables of the Sectoral Initiatives, we will have to learn both to trust each other more, and provide honest, constructive feedback, as well as support, for those we have chosen to carry the flag for us and with us.

When we were discussing the necessary changes in leadership for this organization over the past year, I was asked what it was that I had learned in working for WITT National Network. In fairly short order, I named off patience, tact and tenacity. All most necessary to achieving our ends over the long term. Take the DataBank for one example. Its been 6 years since we decided to go after it, and it has only just now been funded for implementation. Changes in the Apprenticeship system for another, only after 6 years of dedicated work we are seeing even a few lights through the brick walls of that system, and the country is still looking for a way to fund it. We still don't have ongoing and secure funding for WITT exploratory courses across this country, though we do now have National Standards. Later in our leadership discussions I remembered not what I had learned, but what I had brought with me to this job: the ability to ask for what I want for the greater good. Its a hangover from my community

organizing days. Now I do it with greater tact perhaps, and recognize that things do take time, but we will never achieve them if we do not persevere, with a bit of bull-headedness.

I have been carrying the flag for the WITT National Network for 6 years, a flag for the issues for much longer than that. I am tired. I have been a front line Carpenter, a WITT instructor, an advocate, an organizer, a lobbyist, a effective member of many committees and a writer or commenter on many documents. I have also been a fundraiser. We have a clause in our structure document that says two terms only for the National Coordinator position. I think that is a good clause. It is important for our organization to develop and promote its leadership from the grassroots of its membership. It is important to provide training opportunities through participation on conference planning committees, as National Representatives and Advisory Committee members, on our Human Resource Council and its working groups. We all need to further develop our skills, and we need to take a lesson from the Canada Geese, as described in our Spring 1993 newsletter: "When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies pilot...the geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.....and By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own."

Our work and our membership has grown many fold during that time, and we have reached a point where there is far too much work for one person, even with the greatest support staff an organization could have. We have identified roles and responsibilities and have built into our initiatives the hiring of two senior staff to work with our new National Coordinator. This new leadership team will work together to achieve our goals. Through an extensive and thorough process, we have hired Louise Nichol and Jill Jones to work with Maggie McDonald who will shortly be acclaimed as our new National Coordinator. They are charged with leading us through this next phase of our work, building the grassroots and working with the industries by sector to increase and enhance women's training and integration into TTO/BCW jobs. I have full confidence they are up to the job, with a good sense of humour and a clear

dedication.

They will be working in the WITT regions of this country with WITT women, educators, employers and unions. They will need the assistance of your representatives to accomplish this. You will be meeting later this morning by province and by region to select your provincially-based National Representatives and alternates, and from that group, who will represent your region on the Advisory Committee for the next couple of years. This is a very exciting opportunity to become actively involved in our ongoing work. I wish you well in your deliberations.

And now I would like those who have been given the responsibility for moving the issues of this organization forward in the coming years to come to the podium at this time to receive their flags. While I understand that a new logo will be developed to promote a new image for our work, this is the banner under which we have become nationally known to this day. Maggie, Jill, Louise: I officially pass the flags to you.

And a last note: When I went to Streetfront Graphics in Nelson to pick up the flags, I was introduced to the new colour stripper, a trade in which there are still far too few women. Janice Bell said, "WITT! It is because of WITT that I am still in my trade! When I was being harassed in a large graphic company in Toronto 5-6 years ago, I called WITT and they got the Toronto Star to come down and do a story on me. The men never harassed me again!" She had worked on this WITT flag, and our important work goes on.