

ORAL HISTORY PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN'S STUDIES

Panelists

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"Women in the B.C. Labour Movement"

by Sara Diamond

I began the Women's Labour History Project in the summer of 1978. As a part time journalist and history student I wanted to understand the consciousness and motivations of women's involvement in trade union organizations. I felt that this information was particularly relevant to the growing organization and organizing experience of women workers. However I found a tremendous vacuum in historical information, one which could provide a view of women's response to changing conditions and their choices of modes of organization appropriate to their needs.

I chose to study the years 1930 to 1950. This was period of dramatic changes of women's position within the labour market both numerically, and in the composition of the labour force. Women remained in traditional service jobs but were mobilized into industrial occupations and then demobilized. Mar-

ried women entered the work force in large numbers. At the same time the very nature of trade unionism changed. In the 1930's women faced rigid craft unions on one hand and militant left unionism on the other, both in the general context of a battered and defeated labour movement.

In the early 1940's women dealt with massive organizing campaigns in the industrial sectors and in the growth of public sector unionism. In the later post-war period women contended with the centralization and growing economism of unions. I wanted to understand what, if any, impact these conditions had on women's ability to put their desires for activism into practice. And what initiative women themselves took which departed from the general context of the labour movement.

My first step was to embark on extensive primary and secondary research. I examined union publications, government documents and every secondary source I could find. What was lacking was information on women's complex realities within the labour movement and their consciousness. My interest in the sub-

jective consciousness of active women could only be met through extensive oral history interviews. It is this use of oral history as a tool to study and interpret consciousness and ideology I find most valuable.

Over the last four years I've conducted approximately seventy interviews with British Columbia working women. These women were involved in either union or labour based organizations, such as the Womens Labour League, womens' auxiliaries or unemployed organizations.

The interviews encompassed related aspects of women's life history and also concentrated on questions about their period of active involvement. The interviews followed a standard format and include questions about childhood, family attitudes towards working class organizations, reasons for entering the labour force, women's changing relationship to the workforce, their working conditions, reasons for their initial involvement in unions, the forms their involvement took, their changing status within union structures, their responses to their union activities from their fellow workers and unions. I also included membership in outside support groups whether cultural or political, their assessment of union responsiveness to women and women needs, and a retrospective overview of the union's activity in relation to women.

Now these women are to some extent exceptional women. Their experiences are those of individuals. Yet I feel that the data has allowed me to make some limited generalizations about the experiences of those women who did become active in unions. (Now I'm currently engaged in excerpting segments of the interviews into a book which will be titled From Chambermaids to Whistle Punks.)

I want to continue now with a brief outline of the interpretive process. I was interested in creating a social history of working women, the integration of individual conditions with social forces. So at each stage of my

research process I developed a set of theorizations about factors that generate a sense consciousness amongst women. These were based on women's domestic and workplace world, and the process of institutionalization within society: who controls institutions, how they are structured, where women have historically been located within them. So I examined trade unions as a form of institution. I developed questions which could provide information to test these theories and then I went back to revise my theorization against the data. I saw interviewing as an interactive process in which I both formed the context of the interviews and pushed the respondents for their theorization about their own activity and ideas.

Some of my findings are as follows. I've seen that women's consciousness emerged as a dynamic force, responding to the material limits and pressures that women experienced. There is an implicit consciousness in their initial union activity, a kind of self-protective impulse and identification with other workers which was often in conflict with the self identity women brought in from their conditioning within the home or within traditional women's job sectors.

As women became long-term activists they discarded strategies which they found were ineffective and began to develop a view often in conflict with other elements of their lives, their families in particular. What I found in comparing some of my data was quite a high level of family breakup amongst the women that I interviewed. Also sexual division of labour for working class women placed them in a situation of double indemnity, committed on one hand to their families and on the other hand to the workplace. As women became increasingly conscious, this conflict was expressed as a personal refusal to return to past subordination. Thus the tensions were generated and increased within their personal lives.

Women's consciousness and forms of organization varied with the type of

work that they performed. Union women in wartime industrial jobs experienced a drastic transformation in their self image, reinforced by media and government portrayal of their wartime heroism. A growing conflict emerged between a somewhat permanently changed self esteem and hope for ongoing employment and male worker and employer concepts of women as temporary workers. Women in industrial jobs became union activists to defend the newly gained autonomy out of an identification with other unskilled male workers and with a desire to change their conditions of employment. Women describe a very confusing and contradictory response from the men around them. They were at first met with hostility which transformed into an apparent social acceptance.

The conditions affecting women's activity in the secondary labour market are both similar and distinct from those of their industrial sisters. Poor conditions resulted in women often looking for solutions outside of the work place such as marriage. Yet at the same time, women in long established female jobs, felt less challenged in periods of high unemployment as to the legitimacy of their right to remain in the labour force. A lack of mobility meant that women felt compelled to stay put and fight for better conditions. Thus surprisingly in the 1930's in Vancouver, a time of tremendous defeat for B.C. workers in general, women waitresses were extremely militant despite the difficulty in defending their short term union gains.

The biggest inhibiting material factor for women's activism was childcare responsibilities. Women spoke to this again and again. Married women faced the largest barrier. In periods when women were unwanted in the labour force, social attitudes towards married women made it difficult for them to be taken seriously as union activists. It was assumed that their employment was not based on material needs. And active women actually retreated from union positions in some of these times.

In B.C.'s war industries women became active on a shop floor level, and by the time layoffs began, were integrated to the point that they had developed women's committees in unions. An embryonic consciousness of the special needs that women had was beginning. But the period of work place involvement was too short for women to consolidate their organization. This is both my assessment and that of many of the women I interviewed.

Women's union activity reflected traditional female skills of social organization and mediation. Women were most often active in rank and file development, as shop stewards, in consciousness raising, in day to day organization. Women established control over the structures closest to them, shop stewards committees, shop floor organization and their activity flourished best in periods of union democracy. When centralization and bureaucracy overtook unions women lost control at the place where they were most strongly located, the bottom rungs of the unions. Women commented that they had accepted the notion of other women as being more backwards than themselves, and that they saw themselves as exceptions as activists. They saw their involvement as a means of propelling other women into trade unionism. However as they became more active they began to understand that women face specific problems which blocked or limited their own organization.

In the secondary labour market unionists expressed a much clearer conception of women's particular needs. These issues came to the floor because women comprised the majority of the work force and rose to the leadership because they had support from other women workers. To organize effectively, women's concerns had to be addressed. Again women often adapted traditional union models such as industrial unionism to their needs. Thus women in the hotel and restaurant industry in British Columbia fought for a master contract and industrial organization including waitresses

and cooks into their union. To do so they had fight and debate the bartenders within their union who were very strong supporters of craft organization.

I think that these findings demonstrate the extent to which oral history can be used as an interpretive research source. What I found so compelling about the project is the dual character of the interviews. On one hand their ability to stand on their own as individual testimonies, but on the other, the ways that they can be decoded and used to interpret and reveal a deeper sense of motivation and process. An interdisciplinary approach combining sociology, economic analysis, historical analysis and psychological theory has helped me extrapolate these ideas from the raw data.

I just want to end by describing some of the special qualities that I perceive in women. One is a sense of connection between workplace practice and personal needs. Women are much clearer about that relationship than some of the men who I interviewed who are also active within the unions. There is a sense of the role of personal life inside the process of radicalization. For example, family, the impact of sexuality in marriage, the information on the domestic life-cycle. There is a very different sense of historical times, a sense of cyclical times based on women's life-cycles and cycles such as the labour market. There is a sense of the importance of social skills, personal knowledge and social and political organizations. There is a sense of the ways that communities and groups operate, a sense of team functioning over individual roles within that kind of collective structure.

Women have a strong sense of the effect of moral and social judgments on people's lives and on group and individual behaviour. The interviews also can provide a model for other analyses of minority treatment by institutions and minority reaction to such treatment. I think there is also a sense of day-to-

day process in terms of history and the role of maintenance and organization within historical events that women have.

Some of the problems I found in my interviewing is that women have very little sense of their own self-importance within historical processes. I found that to some extent around primary material where two women who I interviewed -- one was a leader of the Women's Labour Leagues and the other was leader of the Housewives' League -- both of these women had independently destroyed 20-year collections of minutes from these organizations which can't be found anywhere. They were just cleaning up their basement and were in their 80s, and said: "Well, no one will ever be interested in this," and tossed them away. There is that kind of lack of sense of self which, I think, has an impact on some of the interviewing process. On the other hand, there is a real emotional quality to the interviews as women begin to realize and relive events in which they played an important part.

Another point I found is that there is a very intense rapport in interviews with women, and it can sometimes be hard for the interviewer to separate herself, because women are very skilled at creating a comfortable social environment around the interview. So if you want to ask challenging questions or even take on historical facts that you don't think are quite correct, it can be very uncomfortable.

Lastly, I think another weakness is that sometimes women have a desire to please the interviewer. That means that you have to break through, because they want you to be socially comfortable so they'll start to anticipate answers, almost intuitively, to the questions you are asking. So I found with the women I interviewed that I often had to approach things from several different directions to try and generate what I felt were more accurate senses of what women really felt at the time.

"Washington Women's Heritage Project"

by Kathryn Anderson

It always feels so audacious to be associated with a project whose aims are to uncover the daily lives and realities of Washington's women, even though we did have three years to work on it. Actually none of us presumed that we would even be able to understand it all. Rather I guess I would say that our goals in the Washington Women's Heritage Project were to begin to develop materials in women's history after discovering that those materials were very scarce among the traditional sources of historical information, and certainly in all of the secondary sources of information in Washington state. Also in the process of developing these materials we would try to help other people gain the skills to do it on their own, because we knew that we couldn't possibly do it, even in a well-funded period of time, so that the project would continue to last even after we were finished with it.

What I would like to talk about today are some general aspects of the project by talking about the ways in which I think oral history is particularly useful and valuable for understanding things about women's lives and women's history. Then I would like to conclude by talking not so much about what we found, but the way in which we decided to organize what we found, in particular in the exhibit that toured the state of Washington. I think it is an illustration of how women's oral history is tremendously useful for our understanding of the past in general.

The thing we focused on in the planning stage was a series of training seminars and workshops for people interested in local history. The project involved not only oral history techniques but photographic collection techniques. We conducted numbers of workshops which reached several hundred people

throughout the state. We distributed tapes as well and actually got some of them back, although I must say that our exhibit probably drew most heavily from interviews that we conducted ourselves or that were already part of existing projects in archives and museums.

Just a couple of words about developing the exhibit. The exhibit itself consists of six large panels, approximately four by eight, which are free-standing and can be taken apart and assembled in a new location relatively easily. It is accompanied by a slide-tape presentation, which some of you will have an opportunity to see tomorrow.

Altogether the exhibit has toured over 23 locations in the year in which it was funded by the national endowment. We've taken it into a variety of places. It opened in the Transit Terminal in Bellingham, Washington, in the Christmas shopping season, so that everybody who was using the bus to do their Christmas shopping had a chance to stop and wait for their bus in the waiting room where this exhibit was opening. We got some tremendously interesting responses, all of them positive, liking the fact that they had something to do between their buses. They kept on saying, "This is a terrific idea." We took it to shopping malls, bank lobbies and so forth. We wanted to say it to people who might not necessarily come to the local museum.

In the time we were putting together the exhibit we saw ourselves facing a series of problems in terms of how to interpret this information for a wide audience. (We had several hundred hours of tape and several hundred photographs.) We wanted the exhibit to be as appealing to a six-year-old as well as to raise questions and reminiscences for the 90-year-old. We knew that people had certain ideas of what history is. We knew that those certain ideas probably tended to define the kind of history that left us out in the first place as women. We wanted to figure out a way of changing that idea without violating

people's sense of reality in a way that would be so enormous that they would not pay any attention to the exhibit whatsoever.

In the process of tossing things around, rejecting traditional ways of organizing material—we didn't want to do "This is the native American period" and "This is the early settlement period" and "This is the modern period." We didn't even want to say "This is western Washington" and "This is eastern Washington." We didn't want to focus on some set of categories typically used in women's history by defining or sectioning off public activities of women from their private spheres. The information was telling us something different that didn't fit into any of the categories with which we were familiar, so we tried a new tactic. We looked at the information to tell us how we should organize the material.

We found ourselves using our oral history interviews, which were themselves very open-ended life history type interviews, as a way of generating the categories that we would use to describe the material that we had found. As a result we found ourselves learning something about a way of looking at women's lives. We developed a conceptual framework which I find tremendously helpful in the subsequent classes I've taught on women's history in understanding the realities of women's lives nationwide, although it came from the material that we found in Washington state.

We found that when women talked about their lives they didn't make arbitrary distinctions between what they did that we could call of a public nature and what they did as a private nature. We identified these as two main themes running through the material. The themes that had to do with work, productive activity of all sorts, some of it that's paid, some of it that's unpaid and the other category of caring. That's not a theme and that's not a topic that appears in historical indices very often; maybe it will eventually.

We found it much easier to understand the complexities of the kinds of work that women do and told us about in their interviews than we did to understand the complexities of the relationships that they told us about in their lives. In fact, from historical approaches, we learned very little about that aspect of women's lives.

Fortunately we were putting the exhibit together at a time when developments were happening in other aspects in the social sciences. Research in adult development, for example, had begun to discover that at least in terms of thinking about what it means to be an adult there may be two views, one of which has to do predominantly with the way men see themselves and see the world (although making no presumptions to causality or biological connections here) and one which tends to describe more often the way women see themselves and their world; that is, that men tend to define themselves as autonomous beings in an independent relationship to the world, and they defined questions of morality in terms of rights and principles and abstractions. Women, on the other hand, tend to see ourselves in context. Sarah's comments on the work that she's done tends to confirm what we found in our materials that contextual sense of, "I exist in this place in relationship to these people," and see ourselves in relation to others and see moral principles or moral issues in terms of people rather than abstract principles. That helped us understand what women were telling us, when we looked at our interview.

Let me just give you an example. When I went back over some of the interviews that I did with rural women in northwest Washington, in the first interview, there was only seven minutes out of three and a half hours where she wasn't talking directly about herself in relation to someone else, where she was using the first-person pronoun. It was always "we" or "so and so and I" or "such and such." I found that kind of

contextual setting to be fairly common in the interviews that we collected.

This process of seeing the way women order their lives itself as data is perhaps the most important conceptual tool that we applied. Not so much looking at the information itself; we knew we were not going to get complete information about that. We simply hadn't had the time or the resources to do an exhaustive study of women's lives in Washington state. But we were looking at: "How do women order their lives?" "Given a fairly free and open chance to do that, what kinds of things take priority? What kinds of things do women say?" Ultimately then we organized an exhibit along these two themes of working and caring.

Within those two themes we created sort of sub-categories, which I'll talk about now. The most dominant, because it affects most women most times, is that

of housework. But again we wanted to try to present information that we had learned about housework, in a way that showed people in our audience something new. The pictures that we chose to include in this section included not only a woman baking a cake, but also native American women making baskets and the work with children and so on. The aim or the goal of the presentation was to try to inform and also try to illustrate the essentialness of the kinds of work that women produce in the house. The pictures showed these "doing" kinds of things. My favourite quotation on this panel of the exhibit is one that comes from eastern Washington, where a woman describes what she did with her spare time by taking in boarders and selling eggs and milk here and there. She concluded by saying, "Well, actually all I did was feed the family." In other cultures that's seen as pretty essential, the providing role, which is



WASHINGTON WOMEN'S HERITAGE: Working and Caring
Brochure cover, titled: "Wing workers, Seattle, 1916"
Photograph courtesy of Boeing Archives

often seen as a male role. But as we all know in times of economic recession and other times it's often what women do, either directly by producing what's needed in the home or indirectly by conserving what's used in the home.

Then we talked about working for wages, first the kind that is very closely related to housework and has a very similar place on the scale of values as housework. Work like sewing and cooking and working in the laundry: some people might even include prostitution. It's directly related to the kinds of work that women do in the home but without wages. This work was very often sporadic. We've had no problem finding a series of photographs illustrating the kinds of work that women do in this category. In fact, we divided this wage work that's related to housework into two categories: one that had to do with skills that are very similar to housework, like sewing and cooking and laundry and so on; the other had to do with attributes that are closely related to housework: therefore nursing, teaching sales clerks, social welfare workers and so forth constitute an area that seemed to be women's work. Then there's a whole category of work that women do together because of the occupationally segregated workforce that we have, that's women's work only by virtue of the fact that women do it. There's nothing intrinsic about the skill employed that makes it more appropriate for women than for men, even if one grants a sexual division of labour. Neither is there anything intrinsic about the qualities or attributes that the worker needs in this particular situation that would necessarily mean that it's more appropriate for women than for men, work such as all of the line work involved in harvesting or in any of the industrial work that we found photographs of lines of women doing work. The work itself seemed to be genderless but the fact that all women are doing it defines it as women's work. And, of course, it's paid at a woman's

wage.

The most interesting category that we developed had to do with non-traditional work. One of the things that we found in the oral history interviews is the incredible variety of work that women have done in their lives. This goes all the way back to the incredible variety of work that native Americans did in pre-contact times to the ways in which women helped out on the Oregon Trail and the westward migration, and doing anything really that had to be done. In fact, these are their words: "Well, we just helped out. We did what had to be done." Also the denial: the fact of "this work doesn't really count" because it's done in terms of, "Oh, I just helped out." Well, what do you do? You do what has to be done! That's a way of denying that you actually did something that's really a man's job. But at the same time there's a certain pride: "I did it; I got through with it. Everything worked out as a result of my perseverance and the work that I did." Now I think that we call most of that work non-traditional work. We see it--I think most people do--as something that's a relatively new phenomenon.

There are two things that I've learned about that: number one, it's really not all that common. We still have an incredibly segregated occupational force, at least in the U.S. Secondly, that it's not new. We know as a result of the oral history interviews that we conducted that women have always done just about everything there is to be done, even though they deny it by placing it in the category of helping out and doing what needs to be done.

The other category that we define as work (also a category that's usually dismissed) is women's clubs. Some of the work that's coming out now by historians on women's clubs tends to focus on clubs of elite women, clubs that were professionally oriented or open by invitation only. What we found in the oral history interviews is that every woman was involved with clubs at different

points in their life. These clubs, in addition to having a social function and providing an opportunity to gain support and validation, provide community-maintaining functions. This, I call work: we call work. In fact, one might call it politics at the basic level, because it's work that keeps communities going. In Washington we have lots of communities where women maintain community functions because men are off fishing, logging and so forth. Women talked about what they did in women's clubs by basically talking about local community issues. In addition to raising money for hospitals and libraries and so forth, and, before the 1940s, a kind of a local social welfare system for people in need.

The rest of our exhibit tended to focus on the relationships in women's lives and the kinds of relationships that women told us about that were extremely valuable to them. This included the integral relationship between the work and the caring aspect of women's lives, even though we had to depict them separately. Again, one of the important aspects is the way in which women validate each others lives, either in the work force, at home, in clubs, in the community activities. There was the sense of the importance of relationships with other women in all aspects of what they did.

The pictures also tended to validate the comments that women would make in their oral history. Pictures of not only formal pictures of women working together but also casual pictures of women either within families or in neighbours doing various things together, various chores together or having fun together or whatever.

The final categories had to do with relationships within the family and especially with children. Again we wanted to take familiar information and familiar ideas and try to talk about some of the importance and complexities of these aspects of women's lives. The idea, the notion of family is very

broad. The idea that the work that women do in writing the letters, baking the cakes for birthday parties, the role of women in celebrations and various occasions for families were things that were fairly easy to describe both because it was easy to find that sorts in the oral history interviews and also easy to find photographs that spoke to the same information.

Finally, the idea of women and children--how to deal with this topic without being so overly sentimental or without playing into the hands of the anti ERA forces in the U.S. by saying women belong with children in the home doing housework. We tried to do this by indicating that the relationship between women and children is not confined to the relationship between biological mothers and their offspring but rather that community leaders and teachers and so on all have a vital role because it fits into that category of women's by virtue of the attributes associated with housework. They all have a vital role in basically the future in the role that they play in their training children.

I'd like to close with some of the comments that come from the guest book and the locations where we displayed the exhibit. As much as we wanted to we couldn't be present all the time to sort of eavesdrop and find out what people really thought of all this work that we had done. So we left a guest book that was opened for people to respond to and at one point we actually said: "Please give us your negative responses, we really want to know what you think is wrong with this exhibit because we want to do some more things on this general topic and we really want your honest responses." They still didn't give us any nasty notes.

As I kind of moved around the exhibit I heard a couple of comments like: "Well, they're just taking jobs away from men." as she was looking at a job, you know, like washing clothes or taking care of children or something like that, that men don't do. My favourite actual-

ly didn't come from the guest book. It comes from my neighbour who is my six year old son's best friend. I took him to see the exhibit and he said--after a minute--"Where are the boys, aren't there any boys in this? I don't see any boys." He was on my lap and I thought this six year old boy has a more clear sense of himself as a historical person than I did until I was 26. It never would have occurred to me to have asked that question and, certainly, I saw lots of films where there weren't any girls.

Among the comments were: "It is an inspiration." "We need to put women in the spotlight more often." "Loved it." "Having been a single working mother most of my life I treasured...." "Ah, this sure takes me back." "Tears come to my eyes. It is all so close to me." An overwhelming sense of the impact of the exhibit had to do with these quotations. We were so close to it that it was hard for me to see what the impact might be. But the overwhelming response that we got from all ages including the six year olds and 80 year olds was a sense of being moved by a portrayal of diversity and the importance of women's lives in our state.

"Canadian Women in the Second World War"

by Jean Bruce

You could say that every woman who lived in Canada between 1939 and 1945 was affected by the Second World War in one way or another. Significant numbers of women were actively involved in that they were employed in some war related occupation. Close to 740,000 women worked in war industries and 50,000 enlisted in the armed forces. That adds up to nearly 800,000 women out of a total population of 11,000,000 and it doesn't include the numbers who worked in agriculture. I have never found

figures to show the exact numbers of women who worked either temporarily or year round on the farms in the war years but it is safe to say there would have been thousands of them. Of course women didn't have to be employed to be actively employed in the war. Thousands of women who didn't have work answered the patriotic appeals for volunteers.

And of course women were affected by the war in other and more personal ways as wives and mothers, sisters and sweethearts of men who went away to war. For some women that meant taking over a family business or a farm as well as running a household as a single parent. For other, less incumbent women the war offered unprecedented opportunities to have a thoroughly good time. The story told about social life in Halifax, which was the major embarkation point for troops headed for Europe, testifies to the carnival atmosphere which goes along with war, or some aspects of war.

On another plain all Canadian women as consumers were subject to rationing of butter and sugar, of gasoline and to the government's demands for conservation and salvage, for making over and making do. And for contributions to things like war bonds drives. Well, with all the aspects of women's involvement in the Second World War in my mind, I began in 1979 to draft the outline of a book about it.

There was one thing I was to find over and over again when I interviewed women who had served in the armed forces during the war. In the minds of those women there were indeed girls who enlisted temporarily to release men for combat duty. And combat after all is what war is really all about. The slogan adopted by the RCAF Women's Division sums up women's role as it was perceived by the military: "With wings on their shoulders that men may fly." Women were hired into the three services at two thirds of the pay given to enlisted men. Later the pay was raised to 80 percent. The difference was justified by the military because women were not involved

in combat duties. But then of course neither were a great many men.

Initially women were engaged in a limited number of trades. Clerks and cooks, laundry workers, light transport drivers among them. By the end of the war, however, service women were involved in a great many other trades. They worked as signalers, decoders, censors. They inspected ammunition and equipment, they serviced aircraft and transport vehicles. They helped train servicemen in a number of specialized fields but WRCNS never went to sea or operated harbour craft as British WRCNS did. CWACS were never trained to staff anti-aircraft batteries as the auxiliary territorial service in Britain did. And WD's in the airforce were never allowed to fly although some of the women who enlisted had pilots licenses. Women doctors who served with the Royal Army Medical Corps were never sent into combat areas.

So it is misleading in my view to place too much emphasis on the employments of women in the armed forces when considering women's part of the national experience in the Second World War. However highly visible those service women in their uniforms were, in terms of sheer numbers, the 740,000 or so women working in war related industry were more significant.

Women worked in shipyards, aircraft factories, on the railways. They pumped gasoline at service stations, they drove streetcars and taxi cabs. A few worked as miners. Many more were civil servants and teachers and journalists and broadcasters. And women workers during those years were admitted to unions. And in various instances, unlike the armed forces, they earned equal pay for equal work. The Toronto Transit Commission in its 1943 campaign to recruit women drivers advertised equal pay on the sides of its vehicles. I have photographs to prove it.

It didn't last of course. The war came to an end and so did the pressing need to recruit women into the labour

force and into the armed forces. A compelling urge to get back to normal again after the war made itself felt in a number of ways. One was to insure that jobs were available for servicemen returning from war. So women workers left abruptly in many cases. Day care centres which had been established during the war to enable and to encourage married women to work were closed down because this was a society which regarded the family as its basic social unit and in normal times married women's place was in the home.

An essential part of getting back to normal for single women meant getting married and settling down and starting a family. So back within a very few years, not quite to where they had started but an end to what was obviously a very major change for a few years in the early 40's. My research showed that many women felt a sense of grievance when their horizons were so very abruptly narrowed at the end of the war. The stimulation, the comradeship and the income earned through employment, these were all missed. So was the tremendous sense of involvement in a common cause which the volunteers had shared and so had the servicewomen.

But I would be misleading you if I suggested that everybody felt aggrieved. I talked to servicewomen who couldn't wait to get out of the forces and get married and who apparently have never regretted that decision. Some working women who held down a job and looked after children talked to me about how tired they felt physically, how exhausted by the end of the war. Sometimes it was a relief when their husbands came home and wives could quit boring and repetitive jobs. One can't dismiss these things however tempting it is to those with feminist inclination like myself.

Other women believed that it was right for women to quit work when the men returned and particularly when their own husbands came back. They were thinking of other women in this case. The First World War had been followed by a

depression. Who was to say what was going to happen after 1945. Jobs for the boys was a need which many women recognized. Behind all that I heard in my interviews there was a sense that women's involvement in war service was understood from the outset to be temporary. The war and the jobs did not last long enough for patterns and expectations to change significantly.

In 1944 with the end of war already in sight the leaders of the three women's services, Margaret Eaton, Willa Walker and Adelaide Sinclair, along with other senior officers began to stress the importance of women returning "home to their own fireside"--was a much used phrase by all these women. Eaton and Walker practiced what they preached. They left their positions before hostilities ceased to marry, in Eaton's case, and to await the return of her husband from a prisoner of war camp, in the case of Willa Walker. So the pressure on women to get back to normal in 1945--46 was not applied solely by men. Women's organizations and magazines, women radio broadcasters all helped to carry the message. And we know from the social history of the later 40's and 50's that it was a very compelling message.

I would like to read you some limited selected transcripts of interviews that I've recorded in the past three years for the kind of variety of experience and the attitudes that they will show. Two of these interviews are with CWACs--women from the Canadian Women's Army Corps--one an officer who is stationed in Saint John, New Brunswick, another who was a clerk who came back to be demobilized after three and half years in Europe. There is a munitions worker from Toronto, and a Winnipeg housewife who has an interesting kind of angle which I think my fellow panelist will remember.

To start with the nurse, the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps nurse from Nova Scotia. She went to Normandy shortly after D-day and she said:

"You had to be able to carry everything you took to Europe. We prac-

ticed en route marches with all our gear before we left for Normandy. Our nice dressed navy blues were sent back to Aldershot,--that was in England--with our excess baggage. We changed from our blue into khaki like the men and we wore slacks and lace up boots, high boots. We went to Normandy in August 1944, the hospital was set up in an apple orchard, near...where the famous tapestry is. You could hear the gunfire from where we were. We got patients with gravel and grass in their wounds and terrible mosquito bites around them but it didn't get to me personally. I didn't become involved. I thought I had this job to do. It's easier when you are young.

"It was shortly after penicillin was discovered and all I did all day long was to give injections. We had to give them every three hours. We didn't have many needles. I had three, the best one I kept for Canadians, the next best for our Allies, the British and the Americans and the one with the biggest hook on it I used for the prisoners of war. It was hard to get that one out. According to our Geneva convention we had to treat prisoners of war the same as our men.

"We lived two to a tent and one of our problems was rain. It was muddy inside the tent it had no floor so you had to keep your boots ready to put your feet into when you got out of bed. But then you had to watch for small lizards which got inside them. The mud bothered me, sometimes your boots stuck in it and your foot would come right out.

"Despite the rain, drinking water was very scarce. Your canteen was filled each day and you got a chlorine tablet to disinfect it. You had a canvas bucket for washing which you took to the community pump and that was all the water you got to keep yourself clean and your clothes clean. And at one point somebody stole my bucket. We had all kinds of

innoculations, mind you. The only disease in the camp was dysentery, we all had that. If you doing were something for a patient you might have to stop and run to the latrines. Everybody knew what the trouble was and you weren't embarrassed, you couldn't be. but you hoped you wouldn't have to line up when you got there."

The next person is the CWAC officer stationed in New Brunswick.

"I was sent to Saint John's and there I was the lowest of the low. The T. Eaton Company put an honour role in the window with every CWAC recruit's name in gold letters. And it turned out that the entire red light district had enrolled. From then on any CWAC was by definition a street walker. Young women would come into my office and cry because of the way they were treated. In Saint John's a joint Kinsmen-YWCA centre was operated by volunteers, and volunteer work was a status thing. But the Kinsmen and YWCA didn't want armed forces women to get there, just nice civilian girls. The Y had a rest house where service people could go to get out of barracks for a while but we didn't go because the Y women wouldn't have their nice girls serve CWACs. It wasn't any better at work. The men regarded CWACs as girls to be exploited, and many of them were ripe for exploitation. They had no education, they were straight off the farm. There was one handsome officer with a limp who got several girls pregnant. The medical officer knew but he did nothing about it. In fact, he laughed. These characters were older men, permanent forces men. They were not young enough to fight.

"If you were an officer you had to go to parties in the mess. You could be ordered to go. But a party meant getting drunk, and I'd been brought up in a house where no liquor was served. I didn't know how

to behave, so I played the kid and had to be protected. There was an older man who protected me, and I suppose I protected him too. He was 15 years older than me and married."

This woman worked in Toronto for a company that was set up specifically to make munitions. It was called the General Engineering Company, otherwise known as G.E.Co.

"The majority of workers were women, although they used men for the heavy work heaving boxes around. Women worked on the line. We had a heck of a lot of fun. We did a lot of singing, everything from the Hit Parade to hymns, lovely rollicking hymns. A lot of the women were married, and they still enjoyed the companionship. Up to that time, married women didn't go out to work. A lot of them were mad as hell when the war ended. They were earning good money and they knew they'd never do that again. You have to remember there'd been a depression before the war, and they just didn't want this bloody war to end. The whole plant shut down when the war ended. But they did bring in personnel from other companies to talk to those who wanted to go on working."

That's an interesting point, because in actual practise, this woman did and got another job.

Finally, the woman who was at home. She was at home in Winnipeg, and she said:

"I remember the Sunday war was declared. My young brother was taking flying lessons that summer. He'd just graduated from high school. My husband had studied aeronautical engineering. They both greeted the onset of war as if a carnival had been announced. It would be wrong to say that they were ecstatic, but they were really excited. I was appalled by their reaction--surprised and appalled. I went off alone to church to think, 'Oh, God, our help in ages

past,' and let a few tears trickle down my cheek. My husband enlisted right away in the air force, but this was something that wasn't discussed. The fact that it was going to change my life completely wasn't pertinent. I wasn't to worry my pretty little head. I must say that it didn't seem very odd at that point, though it seems extraordinary now. This was my first experience with being alone with small children, and I saw my house in a completely different way. Areas which had been completely male, like the furnace room, the hot water tank, like the garage, all became my domain, my responsibility. I didn't

have any brothers or my father around to be supportive, and I had never carried on the day-to-day financing, paying the coal bills, the electric bills and the taxes. There were some fun parts. I found that you could still go to the symphony concerts, that a woman didn't need an escort to go out. Over five years you do build up a social life with friends in the same situation. It was the first sharing of my life with women and finding the depths of companionship that there is in a woman-to-woman relationship and how supportive that relationship can be."