

4 January 2006

**To British Columbia Labour Councils**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters:**

As we move, in this time of skills shortages, to increased participation of women and other designated equity groups in British Columbia's training and employment system, sometimes employers, unions and co-workers struggle with their integration, in training programs and on the job. Many are at a loss as to how to respond, or even whether it is even their role to respond.

I am a journeylevel carpenter with over 30 years in my trade. In 1980, I became the first woman in the construction sector of the Carpenter's Union in British Columbia, joining as a 3<sup>rd</sup> year apprentice. Through the subsequent years, I continued in construction carpentry, led the national women in trades and technology organization, participated in the Canadian Labour Force Development Board and British Columbia Apprenticeship boards and committees, and chaired their Equity Committees. During those years, it became clear that resistance to women training and working in technical and operational jobs was pervasive and persistent, though not from all men, and often from those in gatekeeper roles.

Last year I received my PhD in Technology Studies in the Faculty of Education at UBC, where I decided to examine these issues on the micro rather than the macro level. This resulted in a play, *Men & Women and Tools*, becoming the centrepiece of my dissertation. While 19 people were interviewed, the play was based on a group interview in which I participated with four tradesmen from a variety of trades, and at various stages of their careers, all of who had some experience working with women. "Wherefrom comes the resistance to women training and working alongside men in technical workplaces?" I asked. The quality of response was high, the men willing to talk frankly. Wanting others to experience what they were saying, I turned it into a poker game, and honed the two-hour interview to 17 minutes for the Brave New Play Rites Festival at UBC. Videotaped, and digitally edited, the DVD of the play sat in a pocket in the centre of the dissertation. In some chapters I talked about the need for this kind of education to develop an "*emotional understanding*" as Carolyn Ellis would say. In other chapters, I explored where these ideas were rooted, in history, culture and psychology. In my PhD defence I talked about the themes that emerged from all of this. Notions of breadwinning, fear of handling issues of sexuality, demands for competency, fear of change, the impact of socialization and the meaning of tools in people's lives.

Almost immediately, PhD in hand, I went back on the tools, to the comfortable world of skills and tangible accomplishment, of constructing things to be seen and used. Realizing that my play was also a tool, an educational tool with great potential for both brothers and sisters, I received funding from Status of Women Canada to take

the DVD of the 17-minute play to union halls and technical schools in British Columbia and Yukon Territory. **Jim Sinclair, President of the BC Federation of Labour, wrote a strong letter of support for the project proposal.**

Last Fall I went to Whitehorse, where I spent 8 days talking with college staff, senior government bureaucrats, and unions about the skill shortages they are experiencing, and talking about ways to make the workplace more welcoming for women and men to work together. At Yukon College, after people watched the DVD, moments of self-reflection were engaged in which people answered a short questionnaire. This led to a more fruitful large group discussion. It was considered to be a very successful series of events, and CBC Whitehorse called me to follow up. Sessions have since taken place with the UBC Faculty of Forestry fourth-year students, sponsored by their Associate Dean of Undergraduates, and at BCIT, sponsored by the Student Association.

It would be wonderful to share the DVD of the play in your area, sponsored by the Labour Council. This could be a public event with large group discussion, a workshop for labour movement members and activists with more focused discussion, or a combination. It could be a workshop at a weekend labour school. Status of Women has provided some funds for travel in the next three months, until March 31st, and those that contact me early will have these costs covered. An honorarium would be welcomed though not absolutely required during this time.

If you would like to see clips from the play, they are available in a powerpoint presentation on my research on the Retention page of my website.

<http://www.cust.educ.ubc.ca/wstudents/tsced/braundy/home/retention.htm>

Scroll down and click on the link for Men & Women and Tools. It takes a while to load for dial-up. Please be patient. Click on the photos in the centre of the last 5 slides in slide show mode.

Looking forward to working with you in the near future,

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"Feminism is to strive towards eliminating all forms of oppression and inequalities. Feminism means I am neither above you nor below you but that I struggle and triumph alongside you." (Mabel D. Nipshank, 1998)