

Reflections on C-4 Conference by Jane E. Burton Feb 22, 2010

- The Confidence Competence and Community Cooperation Conference was held May 22-24, 1998 at Selkirk College Castlegar campus. The Conference opened on the Friday evening with a speech by Mary Woo Sims who was Chairperson of the BC Human Rights Commission at the time. Saturday morning workshops were followed by a speech by Dr. Margaret Fulton, Order of Canada recipient, ex Dean of Women at UBC and education consultant. Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning there were more workshops and then Audrey Moore, at the time, Chairperson of the Selkirk College Board, and former Mayor of Castlegar, gave the closing plenary speech.
- It was organized by WKWA with financial assistance from the BC Ministry of Women's Equality. That fact that that ministry was one of the first to be closed when the Liberals came to power in 2001 means similar hopeful exercises are no longer an option.
- The goal of the conference was to increase women's participation in community decision making bodies in order to create a climate where violence against women becomes intolerable. Selkirk College and Shaw Cable were also co-sponsors of the Conference. Selkirk College provided the meeting rooms, and dorm facilities were available at very low cost. I believe we paid for the Conference meals provided by the cafeteria services. I think we pretty well had the whole college to ourselves that weekend. Plenary sessions were held in a gym, which we dressed up with a beautiful podium/head table area. The audience sat on wooden bleachers which were not very comfortable. Shaw Cable agreed to provide their mobile unit, two studio type cameras and a technician to record the plenary sessions. An ENG unit was also provided for videotaping the workshops which were held in various rooms throughout the campus. Shaw Cable also assisted me to train a volunteer crew to work on videotaping the conference. We held one pre-conference training session at Shaw's studio. Shaw Cable also aired the four programs a number of times after they were produced.
- Moe Lyons & Karen Newmoon were the two co-coordinators of WKWA's Nelson & District Women's Centre in 1998. Moe was in charge of the C-4 project. I was hired on contract to assist with organizing the conference and to produce and direct a video record of the event. I was also charged with trying to get the registry of women activated, along with a women's mentor network, finding women interested in serving on boards and commissions, or running for office.
- My recollections of the C-4 Conference are stimulated by a screening the four videos produced. A composite video of the Conference, and the three plenary speaker's presentations.

- Being twelve years ago nearly, I can attest to the fact that we all looked quite a bit younger in 1998. It was a real trip down memory lane to see the faces of many good friends in the videos.
- Unfortunately with that passage of time, my C-4 file has gone by the way-side, so I do not have a conference agenda to remind me of all the workshops that were offered. Reference is made in the videos to the following workshops: the gender lens (which I think Marcia lead), networking, lobbying & building activism, changing power structures, consensus decision making, self care, stress management, wen li do self defence, breath and song, art therapy, and preventing violence against women.
- The women who volunteered for the crew were amazing. They picked up the camera techniques very quickly and generally seemed to be having fun. Confident that everything would go okay in the gym without me being present, I was able to reduce post production costs by directing the shooting from the mobile unit. The Shaw technician worked as the switcher. In this manner we had near finished products at the end of each speech that needed only minor post production work for titles etc. Jan Inglis and I worked together to write the composite program script, and Jan also recorded the narration for the composite.
- I recall that we had an interesting list of speakers to whom we sent invitations to participate in the conference. The one that stands out in my mind is that we really wanted to get Kim Campbell, Canada's first and only female prime minister to attend. Unfortunately she declined our offer. Moe will likely remember more of the list of people we invited?
- In 1998 women were earning 67% of what men earned. The need for more women to get involved in the decision making bodies of their communities was readily apparent. By-in-large, the 1998 stats illustrated the inequality of representation between women and men: members of municipal councils 253 women 962 men; members of the House of Commons 60 women 240 men; members of the BC Cabinet 7 women 12 men; members of the Supreme Court 2 women 7 men; members of BC agencies boards and commissions 1528 women 1891 men; chairpersons of those agencies, boards & commissions 173 women 342 men.
- Mary Woo Sims speech was titled "What's A Woman Like You Doing In a Job Like This?" In it she recalled her mother's encouragement to aim high in life. She gave a good review of equity issues, at times citing experiences in her own life as she tried to move into non-traditional work. Mary Woo asked the audience to consider many questions about how women in non-traditional work should cope with the barriers that are placed before them. Her speech concluded by quoting Margaret Mead and urging women to have the confidence to gain the competence to help change the world.

- Dr. Margaret Fulton's speech was titled "The Dominant Male Culture: Spinning Out of Control". For over an hour Dr Fulton reviewed the traditional hierarchical structures and then proposed changes to those systems that would aid everyone and in particular, women. Doctor Fulton urged the audience to focus on the points of light, to take heart and not be discouraged by the seemingly overwhelming obstacles.
- Following an excellent introduction by MC Moe Lyons, Audrey Moore concluded the conference with her speech entitled "Left, Right, or Centre: Women's Issues Cross Party Lines". Audrey began by thanking Moe and saying she didn't think in her many years of public life that she had ever been so well introduced. Audrey then proceeded to give what I can only describe as one of the most thoughtful and passionate speeches that I have ever heard. She truly summarized all that had occurred over the weekend while sharing her story. She began by saying that she had never really shared her story in this way before. Audrey also credited her mother for giving her encouragement at an early age to stand up for her rights. After graduating from university, marrying and starting a family Audrey embarked on many volunteer projects to fix facilities or raise funds for various causes. Due to her husband's military career the family moved often, with new locations providing new challenges. Audrey explained how she transitioned from librarian at the Castlegar library to her many years in public life as a councillor, mayor, chairperson of the Union of BC Municipalities, board member of the Federation of Canadian municipalities, and chair of Selkirk College board. Throughout she brought the audience back to the conference title and themes as she explored the challenges and victories she encountered. Audrey ended her speech with the following question: "in 1973 when I first got on council there was one woman, me, over the ensuing years there was at most four women on council. Now, in 1998 there is but one woman. Why? Where are you? Why are you not there?"
- Participants attended the conference from the communities of Nakusp, Trail, Castlegar, Nelson, the Slocan Valley and Christina Lake. Overall it was an invigorating weekend for those who attended. Unfortunately only about 125 women attended through the weekend. It was a beautiful warm sunny May weekend, and, we rationalized, being May 24th many women must be at home planting their gardens. I remember being disappointed that so few women were left on Sunday to hear Audrey Moore's fine wrap up speech.
- Following the Conference, the attempts to set up a registry of women interested in being on boards or running for office did not have a lot of success. Women did step forward to be mentors but were not, to my knowledge, ever paired up with women with aspirations to run for office.