

**"EASING THE PANG OF SOMETHING MISSED OR LOST":
WOMEN OVER SIXTY GET DEGREES THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING.**

By

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"FINDING THE PAIN OF SOMETHING MISSED
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THROUGH DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The lasting, cumulative effect of class and gender inequality on women in Canada born between the two world wars, with consequent lost opportunity to attend university, is largely absent from scholarly analysis. No research has told how, in the 1990s, women in their sixties and seventies seek distance learning to achieve the higher education they missed when young. This thesis uses the life histories of nine such women enrolled in the degree programme of the British Columbia Open University in an attempt to close this gap.

The themes of this study are two-fold. First, experiences of this small group of women form a microcosm of many Canadian women's lives in the Great Depression, war-time and ensuing peace-time environments. Political, economic and social pressures in family, school and market place led them, as women, into acceptance of their responsibility as unpaid wives and child-carers, concentration in low-paying and low-status waged jobs, and the double-day of juggling both. Secondly, the strength of aging women is confirmed. Survivors, they cling to life-time wishes to learn, challenge the myth of declining mental capacity, and find in the flexibility of distance learning a long-delayed sense of enhanced self-worth. The conclusion asks whether, in light of academe's increasing focus on vocational and professional education, continuation of the liberal arts favoured by such elderly students will be deemed practicable, or indeed necessary.

DEDICATION

**This thesis is dedicated to "Corrie",
who did not quite make it.
(1924 to 1992)**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval page	p. ii
Abstract	p. iii
Dedication	p. iv
Acknowledgements	p. v
Table of Contents	p. vi
Chapter One	
Writings about Class and Gender Inequality, Older Learners and Distance Education	p. 1
Chapter Two	
"They were all going to get married anyway": Class and Gender Inequality in Family and School	p. 30
Chapter Three	
"Women in Those Days Just Did Their Jobs and then got Married": Paid and Unpaid Work Places	p. 57
Chapter Four	
"Still 'In The Middle of Life', Where it's Going on, Not left Behind." Finally Getting The Degree by Distance Learning	p. 84
Chapter Five	
Conclusion: "There it all is. Why don't I know it?"	p. 106
Questionnaire	p. 118
Bibliography	p. 121

CHAPTER ONE

Writings about Class and Gender Inequality, Older Learners and Distance Education.

To date there has been little scholarly analysis of the lasting, cumulative effects of class and gender inequality on women in Canada born between World War One and World War Two. No research has told the consequences of lost academic opportunities of this generation of women. Neither has research examined how women in their sixties and seventies in the 1990s seek distance learning to achieve the higher education they missed when young. This thesis uses life histories of nine women, born between 1919 and 1931, enrolled in the degree programme of the British Columbia Open University, to offer some answers to such questions. Casual reading of the life histories would seem to indicate that these women had little time when younger to attend university because they were too busy working, either in the public workplace or in the private workplace of the home. More sustained analyses of the data reveal lives shaped both by different experiences of class and gender, and by common patterns which influenced childhood relationships in family and school and adult relationships in the private and public workplaces.

The themes of this thesis are twofold. Firstly it will show that the lifetime experiences of this small group of elderly women form a microcosm of many Canadian women's lives in the decades after World War One. Although from different social and economic backgrounds, as women, they shared crucial experiences shaped by social attitudes and beliefs. Their gender determined the broad configuration of their lives, and far more than their male contemporaries of equivalent social status, many were denied the opportunity to experience the sense of self-fulfillment, and also the material advantages, that higher education could have given. Secondly, the life histories confirmed older

women's strength. As they aged they still clung to lifetime wishes to learn and have challenged old age to find in distance learning a long-delayed sense of enhanced self-worth.

In reviewing the literature pertinent to the themes of this thesis, two major texts, *Canadian Women: A History*¹ (1988) written by Alison Prentice and others and *Quebec Women, A History*² (1987) written by the Clio Collective, build an invaluable foundation upon which to examine the significance of the social, economic and political changes in Canadian history which have governed women's lives over the past four centuries. The essays assembled by Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*³ (1992) also trace the common theme of patriarchal custom and male authority. These works confirm the importance of what historian Susan Mann Trofimenkoff calls "squeezing every drop of information from every kind of source".⁴

Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, editors of *No Easy Road, Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s*⁵ and Veronica Strong-Boag author of *The New Day Recalled, Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada 1919-1929*⁶ provide valuable overviews of class, gender and ethnic inequality experienced by Canadian women under review in this thesis. Chapters relating to experiences during childhood, and in the paid and unpaid labour forces, offer particular guidance. The analysis in *No Easy Road* of a broad spectrum of women's voices taken from letters or diary entries, together with documentary data from archival and journal sources, provides useful material for comparison. However, these recorded voices speak of isolated, unrelated, incidents in women's lives. They fail to convey the continuity of individual women's lifetime experiences of inequality, and consequently ignore lost academic opportunities. Another study makes these connections. Rolf Knight in *A Very Ordinary Life*,⁷ has affectionately transcribed his mother's personal memories of survival,

from birth in Germany in the early 1900s to death in Canada in the 1970s. Here we see the cumulative effects of one woman's lifetime fight against class and gender, as well as ethnic, inequality. Phyllis Knight does not appear to share, however, the continuing dreams and struggle for higher education experienced by the women here.

Analysis of the life histories confirms what Light and Pierson argue, that a woman's life "is lived as a complex and ever-changing flux of relationships, work demands, impulses and constraining influences".⁸ Of the women under review, six are Canadian-born, of Scottish, Welsh, Scottish-Metis, Russo-German or Icelandic descent. The remainder come from England, Ireland, or Germany. With family backgrounds that may be generally characterized as middle-class, lower middle-class or working-class,⁹ the majority left school early and worked, until marriage, in low-paid jobs in offices, sweatshops, fish-packing plants or domestic service. Only one woman broke this pattern, going to university and training as a doctor. Childhood family disruptions of adoption, divorce, or separation led to much instability in schooling. For many, adult family disruptions of divorce, illness or alcoholism brought personal stress and increased responsibility. Throughout their lives the majority strove to continue learning but made little progress due to economic forces and ideologies.

Because of the complexity of the life histories, the primary source of this study, a thematic approach will be adopted as organizing principle. Themes will focus specifically on childhood experiences of class and gender inequality in family and school, adult experiences in the paid public and unpaid private work forces, and finally aging women's triumph over negative societal myths about learning abilities, their experiences with distance education and their realization of greater human potential.

Looking first at discussions in the literature of gender inequality, the feminist critique of the past thirty years, from whichever discipline it emanates, has insisted that writings no longer neglect women's contribution to all facets of human activities. As historian Strong-Boag says:

. . . gender or the social meaning of femaleness and maleness, is constructed and expressed in various ways and these ways lie at the heart of what it means to be human. To concern itself with human beings, and not just a small number of men, the study of history needs to include women.¹⁰

In Europe, North America and elsewhere feminist scholars challenge and seek to correct the previous white male elite interpretation of conventions in politics, society and the economy. However, this reevaluation involves more than inserting women into accounts framed by male experience. It has meant raising such questions as whether gender is the pre-eminent factor in shaping distinctive female consciousness and actions, or whether women's behaviour in society is predominately dictated by considerations of class or race, among other factors.¹¹

Sociologists Nancy Adamson and others in *Feminist Organizing for Change, The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada*,¹² (1988) admit that class is a difficult concept, and that "debate continues over how to understand/use and, in particular, apply it to women".¹³ They argue that fundamentally "class" refers to the control of differential amounts of social and economic power and that within each class women have less power.¹⁴ Racism also divides women in their struggle against oppression. Privileged white women are situated to exploit many women of colour. To avoid such oppression, the authors urge closer alliance among and better understanding between women of all races.¹⁵

Sociologist Marlene Mackie's *Gender Relations in Canada. Further Explorations*¹⁶ provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on general class and ethnic equality

and inequality. The chapters on gender and ethnic socialization in the family and school, theories on gender relations in work, marriage and aging, are particularly useful in understanding the experiences of the women in this study. Mackie argues that the definition of social class largely depends on the parents', especially the fathers' and husbands' education, income and occupation.¹⁷ With Adamson, she points to the potential oppression of women of colour in the work place.¹⁸

When discussing the lives of girls and women in *The New Day Recalled*, historian Strong-Boag also found difficulty in coming to terms with the relative significance of class, race and gender in charting individual lives. She notes that sociologists have routinely assigned women to the classes of their husbands and fathers. Like her, I use the terms "working class" and "middle class" to refer to the status and power of the women's families generally based on the status of the fathers, rather than as a "reliable measure of women's ability to command resources or to share in full the values of male capitalist society".¹⁹ Like Strong-Boag too, I intend to concentrate on the effect of gender on women's lives, while acknowledging that class and race play a role. In particular, with respect to race, it should be noted that all the women of this study were "white" and of European origin. This fact gave them undeniable advantages of women who were reckoned "African" or "Asian" in origin. Discussion of that advantage is not, however, a main theme here.

While feminists have not resolved the difficulties about how to apply the concepts of class and race to women, they have amassed a substantial critique of the family and how it socializes women generally to accept a subordinate place in society. As he discusses the family in *Family and the State of Theory*, sociologist David Cheal acknowledges the effects of the recent feminist critique on social family theories when he says:

Feminist scholars have provided a global forum within which new ideas have been rapidly exchanged. Also feminists have subjected marriage and other social institutions to the most profound questioning . . . The recent history of the sociology of the family is of course much more than the history of feminism; however, it is above all in the history of feminist influence upon theories of family relationships that the major directions of change today can be directed.²⁰

Jane Flax agrees that what is termed as the family is central to both the oppression and liberation of women. However, she outlines the complexities of analyzing an abstract entity called "the family" which she feels "does not exist". In her review of the contemporary feminist critique of family relations, Flax points to the general consensus among such authors as Juliet Mitchell, Gayle Rubin, Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow on the centrality of child-rearing arrangements and the construction of gender identity as "central elements in the origin and replication of patriarchy".²¹

In her article "The Changing Canadian Family: Women's Roles and the Impact of Feminism", Susan McDaniel reinforces this notion that women's place in society is intrinsically intertwined with the family when she says:

. . . not because of women's biologies, but because of the social roles women play, the ways we are constrained and provided opportunities through these roles, and by the prevalent images of both the family and of women held by Canadians.²²

Useful as these writings are regarding the importance of the family in children's lives, there is a lack of research into the children's own experiences. Sociologist Margrit Eichler realizes this limitation. While acknowledging the volume of research into family theory, in *Families in Canada Today, Recent Changes and Their Policy Consequences* (1988), she stresses the general lack of research into children's personal perceptions and experience of families. She suggests that questions should be asked, or observations made, of the children themselves, rather than parents or other adults, as to how the children "experience particular events while they happen".²³

Historian Neil Sutherland has already taken a step in this direction. He has recently produced important work on recollections of childhood experiences in the family and school, based on exhaustive studies of interviews taken in both urban and rural British Columbia. I have found his paper "'I can't recall when I didn't help': the Working Lives of Pioneering Children in Twentieth-Century British Columbia"²⁴ (1991) of assistance in comparing the childhood experiences of the women I interviewed. Although Sutherland explores adult memories of childhoods of hard work in the harsh environment of a pioneering community in northern British Columbia in the 1920's and 1930's, the experiences in family and school were similar to those of the women being studied here. Boys assumed that masculine strength and privilege justified dominance. Girls realized that, although women might work at least as hard as men, they generally played a distinctly secondary role.

The subjects of this thesis, when children, were exposed to powerful images of female inferiority. Marriage and the bearing and rearing of children constituted their prime duties in life. The educational systems and media, that upheld the "traditional" family of united wedded parents supporting their children also promoted "femininity, domesticity and dependence" in women.²⁵ Their lives, however, did not necessarily, or even often, confirm these ideals. Some women interviewed, with many others of their time, suffered family disruptions of adoption, divorce, or separation which often dramatically influenced the course of their lives. One woman was physically abused and neglected as a child. Others faced emotional violence in feelings of abandonment or manipulation.

Historian Linda Gordon in *Heroes of Their Own Lives, the Politics and History of Family Violence*²⁶ (1988), provides a painstaking investigation of child abuse, child neglect,

wife-beating and incest in Boston, Massachusetts between 1880 and 1960. Gordon observes that:

. . . the "independent" family . . . remains as a norm despite the fact that so few live this way, and that disjunction between ideal and reality also creates stress in child-raising. . . . In the actual neglect cases, we have seen how often class and sexual inequalities were themselves implicated in causes of child neglect, as well as defining it in the first place.²⁷

For the women of this thesis who encountered such problems, family breakdown and/or physical and emotional violence fed feelings of low self-esteem and helplessness.

Whatever their family background, these women continued to confront inequality as girls in the schools of the 1920s and 1930s. As Strong-Boag argues in *The New Day Recalled* schools, like families, were organized around ideologies of gender. Different entrances, play areas and games divided children according to sex, age and social group.²⁸ This gender socialization in the establishment of schools is of particular relevance to the experiences of the women here. Their life histories reveal the extent to which a major childhood experience, schooling, reinforced gender-biased assumptions about adult roles in society. By 1931 school reforms in Canada had ensured that boys and girls spent almost ten years in the classroom. Notwithstanding that elementary and secondary school curricula provided girls with basic literary and cultural information, it also prepared "them for marriage and motherhood, and the careers that complemented these roles." In the universities, the enrollment of women undergraduates reached its peak in 1930, but again most women were channeled into the "female departments" of home economics, nursing and secretarial science.²⁹

At the highest educational levels, male mainstream academe in fields such as psychology, sociology and moral philosophy³⁰ fostered assumptions of male mastery and female accommodation. Functionalist thinkers such as the influential sociologist Talcott S.

Parsons³¹ have taken class and gender differentiation in the school system for granted. Nor is there mention of race, which is effectively naturalized or made invisible. Although Parsons admitted that objections have been made to the "anchorage of the feminine role in marriage and the family",³² he reminded girls that their main concern is marriage and a family. While not excluding women entirely from higher education, he presumed they would come from privileged socio-economic backgrounds and, as educated women, beneficially influence their children.³³

In contrast to such functionalist theory, the Canadian sociologist John Porter confronted inequality in the educational system. His chapter, "Social Class and Educational Opportunity" in *The Vertical Mosaic*,³⁴ argued that class structure kept lower-income families from attaining higher education.³⁵ He also attacked gender inequality in university attendance and deplored the wastage of intellectual capacity in women's traditional exclusion from so many of the higher status professions.³⁶

From the United States, sociologist Samuel Bowles brought a neo-Marxist viewpoint, focused on the social division of labour in the hierarchical structure of production and its reproduction in schools. His argument in "Unequal education and the reproduction of the social division of labor"³⁷ (1970) is germane to the schooling experiences of the women here in Canada. The class of their families largely determined women's educational opportunities. Schooling reflected many of the inequalities of the larger society.

The next section reviews literature on women's paid and unpaid work, showing that inequalities continued in women's adult lives, further hindering their academic activity. This section first examines writings on women's experiences of class and gender inequality on leaving school and entering the paid labour force. Secondly, it reviews the

literature on women's experiences in the unpaid workplace of the home, and the meaning of the double day of juggling the responsibilities of work in both the paid and unpaid spheres.

There has been considerable general discussion in the literature of the hierarchical division of labour between "women's work" and "men's work". As sociologists Pat and Hugh Armstrong have pointed out in *The Double Ghetto, Canadian Women and their Segregated Work* (1986) women's over-riding responsibility for unpaid domestic work is closely tied to their concentration in low-paying and low-status waged jobs.³⁸ In *Last Hired First Fired: Women and the Canadian Work Force*³⁹ (1978) Patricia Connelly explained this inequality from a marxist-feminist perspective, noting that:

. . . not only does female domestic labour have no exchange value, but female wage labour receives less than its exchange value.⁴⁰

Her discussions of women as a reserve army of labour are particularly relevant to women's experiences during and after World War Two. While men served in the military and female labour was needed, strenuous political and social inducement brought women into paid employment. When veterans returned, equally strong forces sent many women out of industry and business back into the unpaid private workplace of the home.

Since six out of the nine women in this thesis worked at one time in office jobs, sociologist Graham Lowe's "Women, Work and the Office: The Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada, 1901-1931"⁴¹ is especially useful. By the 1930's clerical work, although still a "clean white-collar job", had become a job ghetto, employing large numbers of low-paid women. Both business and state required clerical workers and exploited women in their management of the administrative hierarchies. Women were viewed as cheap employees, with "naturally" less attachment to the labour force than men who were on track, at least in theory, to management. The on-going "feminization" of

office work in the 20th century meant that girls, such as several of the women under review, could leave school early and find an office job without previous experience of clerical work.

Other jobs in the paid labour force undertaken by the women interviewed continue the pattern of menial tasks. For a time, one woman was a postal worker. In the autobiographical "Sorting the Mail", in *Hard Earned Wages. Women Fighting for Better Work*⁴² (1983) Marion Pollock outlined common experiences of the often dehumanizing boredom of a low-paid simplified job and petty male supervision in the postal service.

Several of the women interviewed held jobs in the "sweatshops" of the garment industry. Both *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century*⁴³ (1978) edited by Irving Abella and David Millar, and *Working Lives Vancouver, 1886 - 1986*⁴⁴ (1985), describe how women toiled in garment factories which "have been called sweatshops for good reasons". Exploitation included low wages, long hours and bad working conditions. The section in *The Canadian Worker* headed "Immigrants and Women: Sweatshops of the 1970's"⁴⁵ provides crucial background for appreciating the experience of one woman in this study who came to Canada from Germany in the 1960s to find employment in the garment industry.

Ruth Roach Pierson in "*They're Still Women After All*": *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*,⁴⁶ and the authors of *Canadian Women*⁴⁷ in their exploration of the impact of World War Two on Canadian women, have guided my assessment of the disappointment of another woman who served in the Canadian armed forces during the war. She had hoped, like many other women at that time, to be sent overseas but, despite hard work and successful training, had to serve in Canada.

Girls from both middle and working-class families were encouraged to expect work in low-paid women's jobs. They were also encouraged to expect that they would "naturally" exchange the public sphere for the private sphere as housewives and mothers. *Canadian Women, No Easy Road* and *The New Day Recalled*⁴⁸ provide useful arguments on the often oppressive nature of housewifery and motherhood. The actual life histories provided by Ann Oakley and Meg Luxton, the trail-blazers in studies of housework, have also been invaluable in their revelation of women's own perspectives of housewifery.

In *Women's Work, The Housewife Past and Present*⁴⁹ (1974) based on studies of housewives in Great Britain, Oakley argued that women's domesticity is "a crisis of learnt deprivation and induced subjugation". She pointed to oppression passed from mother to daughter, and concluded that the vicious circle can only be broken by women themselves denouncing their special duties.⁵⁰ Oakley's findings of housewives' feelings of fragmentation, monotony, low status, and social isolation are synonymous with those of many of the women subjects of this thesis. Luxton echoed these findings in *More Than a Labour of Love. Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home*⁵¹ (1980), an analysis of the life histories of women working in the home from 1927 to 1977 in Flin Flon, a small mining town in Manitoba. Although her conclusions specifically addressed the conditions in a company town, they further confirmed the oppressive nature of housework. Luxton agreed with Oakley that oppression can only be ended when women no longer assume the inferiority associated with housewives. She felt that only cooperation with other women privately in the home, or in the public sphere of the work place, trade union or pro-labour political parties, would give women "genuine self-respect".⁵² The interviews of the women in Flin Flon identified by Luxton as Generation 11, working as housewives and mothers in the 1940's and 1950s, confirm many of Oakley's and my own findings.

Despite low-paid jobs and low status a few women retained the desire to expand their knowledge through higher learning and sought opportunity for adult education. The next section examines writings on adult education and the educational opportunities available for "older" as compared to "adult" learners. The myth of the elderly's decreased mental capacity is also considered. Finally, I review the prospects of older women studying by university level distance learning.

Women's continuing interest in learning formed the focal point of sociologist Arlene Tigar McLaren's *Ambitions and Realizations. Women in Adult Education*.⁵³ In the 1970's McLaren studied the life histories of a diverse group of women in Great Britain, aged from their late twenties to early fifties, then enrolled in a residential college for adult education. She discovered the frustrations of disappointing childhood education, and continuing ambitions for learning. The women she interviewed were:

. . . in general, raised by parents who subscribed to the dominant cultural ideal that a woman had a subordinate role in society and who perceived that few educational and occupational opportunities would be available to their daughters.⁵⁴

These women survived the same type of social environment as the women I interviewed in Canada.

This thesis attempts to extend McLaren's analysis twofold. First, her study involved the lifetime experiences and aspirations of "adult" women enrolled in a campus setting. In contrast the women of this thesis are "elderly", and study at home by distance learning. Secondly, McLaren concentrated on women who hoped to use university degrees to enhance job opportunities. The Canadians, motivated primarily by needs for personal growth and enhanced self-esteem, seek the opportunity to learn what they feel they missed when young.

In her chapter "The Struggle to Achieve" McLaren points to the obstacles to university enrollment faced by the women in Great Britain. These are predominately financial, familial and psychological. Her study does not examine the cultural myths about the learning defects of the elderly. In contrast, psychologist Marion Perlmutter, in "Cognitive Potential Throughout Life",⁵⁵ has examined the meaning of a positive attitude towards the mental capacity of aging learners. She defines "cognition" as the psychological ability that accounts for all of mental life, including memory, intelligence, reasoning, judging and decision-making. Healthy individuals exhibit no age-related deterioration of the knowledge base supporting thinking and action. Nor is it likely that there is age-related fragmentation of the existing system or structure of personality. Perlmutter goes so far as to say that there is the possibility that life-long cognitive abilities may not only continue to improve through life, but some new abilities may emerge in later life. She brings an encouraging message to aging learners when she concludes:

. . . because psychological processes tend to be relatively malleable and mold to expectation, it is likely that rejection of past images of late life decline and acceptance of new images of continued potential throughout life will facilitate the actualities of greater potential in late life. Butterflies should fly.⁵⁶

Writing from Great Britain, Tony Buzan, in *Use Your Head*, also denies that mental abilities decline naturally and unavoidably with age. Using actual studies of older learners, he explained that:

Increasingly we are finding positive 'Renegades from Norm'...people over the age of 70 whose defining characteristics are: vitality, optimism, humour, physical strength, persistence, mischievousness, enthusiasm, interest, expanding knowledge, curiosity, kindness, exhaustive memory and sensuality. The very characteristics that one would ascribe to children.⁵⁷

Nor are such findings unique. Members of the Older Students Research Group of the Open University, also in Great Britain, have conducted exhaustive research over recent years into the needs of approximately 3000 students over the age of sixty in the

university's undergraduate programme. These studies conclude that mature students require no special arrangements "solely on the grounds of age". Many, like the women under review here, accept the negative stereotypes which link old age with physical and mental decline, but in fact they have met fewer difficulties than anticipated. Research showed that these older students did not take the decision to study lightly. High motivation, willingness to sacrifice other interests if necessary, thorough mastery of material and well-organized and diligent work habits meant that their performance compared favourably with all other Open University students. The fact that the over-sixties did slightly better than the under-sixties on their assignment and essay work at home, compensated for slightly worse performance on examinations. Thus, students' overall pass rate, regardless of age, remained virtually the same.⁵⁸

Although he makes no gender-differentiation, Patrick Kelly's paper, *Supporting and Developing Adult Learning: Older Students in Education*⁵⁹ examined individual students ranging in age from sixty to ninety, enrolled in the University's degree programme. Kelly's studies show that two-thirds of older students said, as did the women under review, that one reason for enrolling was to make up for lack of past opportunities. In *The Older Open University Student*⁶⁰ Nigel Cutress and other members of the Older Students Research Group confirmed that the main motives for older student enrollment in Great Britain parallel those of the women interviewed in Canada. Each group wished to continue developing as a person, to stretch themselves, to keep the mind active, and to get a degree to make up for missed educational opportunities.⁶¹

Despite positive findings on the continuance of learning capacity with age, Jenny Shaw, Sharon Harold, Jean M. Buzan, Margaret Kidd and Beverley Jean Brunet in *Women's Education des femmes*⁶² point to the negative attitudes towards education for

older women in Canada. Each author decried the insensitive and inappropriate stereotypes attached to the aging woman, and the continuing myth of declining learning abilities. Harold in particular, in "Gaining Visibility: Older Women and Education"⁶³ deplored the scarcity of educational opportunities for "older" as opposed to "adult" women. She argued that, although feminists acknowledge the problems of women and aging, research focuses more on middle-aged women, and that "older" adult education is "geared either to leisure-oriented, expressive activities", or to programmes designed to help transitions related to health, family and retirement. Harold maintained that these programmes fail to provide for the intellectual growth sought by older women, such as those of this thesis. In *Older Women Learning: Now and Always*,⁶⁴ Margaret Kidd argued that for those who remain physically and emotionally healthy, such intellectual growth can continue throughout life. She compared the brain to a muscle which improves with age, and that older people who use their brains continue to learn.

The neglect of aging women students is typified in the edited collection *Women and Education a Canadian Perspective*⁶⁵ termed in 1987 as "the first book-length overview of women and Canadian education". The editors, sociologists Jane S. Gaskell and Arlene Tigar McLaren, examine women's childhood and adult education and job training. Specific discussion of higher education for older women is absent, but McLaren's essay "Rethinking 'Femininity': Women in Adult Education" applied to women of all ages. She criticized socialization theory which tends to suggest that women "choose" their subordinate position according to traditional values. She argued that socialization does not acknowledge that misogyny, neglect, discrimination or harassment may have forced women into acceptance of such a position.⁶⁶

In their introduction to the second edition of *Women and Education* published in 1991, Gaskell and McLaren discuss "Part Four: Beyond Schooling: Adult Education and Training". This section looks at education outside the traditional arena of schooling:

. . . we are drawn to places which have been relatively ignored in the study of education. By looking at a variety of institutional arrangements for learning, we come to better understand the peculiarities of what we commonly take for granted as "school" and the variations of what constitutes "students".⁶⁷

The essays in the section under discussion include "Literacy as Threat/Desire: Longing to be SOMEBODY",⁶⁸ "Skill Training in Transition: Implications for Women",⁶⁹ and "Contesting the Meaning of Skill in Clerical Training: The 'Art' of Managing Horses, or the 'Skill' of Driving".⁷⁰ Again the subject of distance education for older women is missing, a lacuna which unfortunately typifies the more general Canadian literature on education.

Nor do more specialized studies offer much. *Distance Education in Canada*⁷¹ (1986), edited by Ian Mugridge and David Kaufman, provided an overview of distance education institutions, focusing primarily on historical and administrative perspectives. It is revealing to note that in "University Programmes"⁷² Robert Sweet quotes from W. Tetler and R. Taylor's description of the "mature non-employed" Canadians enrolled in university programmes. Tetler and Taylor's categorization of these students as consisting of the principal sub-groups of "housewives" (my emphasis) and retired persons, provides the sole reference to women students, whether "adult" or "elderly" in any of the essays.

In contrast, Karlene Faith in *Toward New Horizons for Women in Distance Education. International Perspectives*⁷³ has assembled female distance learners from the east and west coasts of Canada to Europe and Israel, from Australia and New Zealand to Africa and India. In the foreword, under the heading "Light a Candle, don't curse the dark", Elizabeth Burge observes that the publication coincides with the fiftieth anniversary

of the publication of "Three Guineas", in which Virginia Woolf claimed legitimacy for educated women:

. . . that would provide a different kind of person who valued civilized existence, in balance between private and public worlds, an education that should teach the art of understanding other people's lives and minds.⁷⁴

In other words, the type of education sought by the women of this thesis.

Although the authors in *Toward New Horizons* concentrated primarily on women re-entering the educational field through distance learning in order to increase their job opportunities, there is also a strong awareness of the varied influence of cultural, religious, family and class backgrounds. In "Naming the Problem",⁷⁵ Faith confirmed many of the explanations for their enrollment in distance education noted by the subjects of this thesis, including isolation from educational institutions, preference for guided or tutorial independent rather than class-room study, economy, and flexibility.

For older women returning to education through distance learning, the scant literature begins to paint a positive picture overall. This is aptly summed up by Mrs. Akila Sivaraman in her presidential address to the Women's International Network's National Workshop held in Madras in 1988, when she said:

. . . distance education. . . does a lot of benefit to those women like myself who were deprived of higher education in their earlier years. Education is not a one-shot affair but it is life-time & sky is the limit. For heaven's sake, let there not be a full stop at any stage of woman's education . . . As a former student of distance education & the director of the powerful medium, I will offer any assistance & provide programmes for women's enrichment, employment and emancipation.⁷⁶

The expression "life-time" or "life-long" learners now appears frequently in writings on education in Canada, but emphasis is on the "older" or "middle-aged", rather than the "aging" learner. Research into the lives and aspirations of women who have had to wait until they are sixty or seventy years of age before seeking university degrees through distance learning is again missing. The literature is clear that the women of this

thesis grew up in capitalist, patriarchal societies in which gender and class ideologies informed their behaviour in family and school as well as in their work in the public and private spheres. The cumulative, lifetime effects of such ideologies, however, still remain to be explored in the context of missed academic opportunity. The educational literature is also clear that as decreased mental abilities are not necessarily synonymous with increased age, the elderly are capable of attaining higher learning, and that such learning is available to them through distance education. Analysis of the life histories in this thesis will show that, as sociologist Ellen Gee and psychologist Meredith Kimball point out in *Women and Aging*⁷⁷ (1989), women frequently cope well with aging. Despite an overall social and economic environment that devalues women in general and older women in particular, the women here are survivors, they have not "broken down".

The basis of the primary research in this thesis is data obtained from personal interviews. Before proceeding with research I obtained permission from the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Committee which had received written approval from the Open Learning Agency and copies of Agency forms relating to release of names, and the assurance to the women interviewed of their anonymity in any subsequent publication, together with their consent to be interviewed. The Agency next supplied me with the names of nine women over sixty years of age who had already received a degree, or were still enrolled in their university degree programme. All nine women volunteered to be interviewed. I then wrote to each volunteer, introduced myself, and conducted six taped interviews, each approximately two hours' duration in the homes of women in the Vancouver district and on Vancouver Island. I also received answers to a broadly worded questionnaire sent with an explanatory letter detailing the purpose of my study, from three women who lived too far away from me for personal interviews. One lived in northern

British Columbia, another in Calgary, Alberta, and a third in Halifax, Nova Scotia (see Appendix A). In addition I took notes of subsequent telephone conversations with five of the women. I transcribed the taped interviews myself. My twenty-five years' experience as a court reporter assured maximum accuracy. As there were only nine interviews I was able to prepare individual, shortened life histories from each transcription. I then returned to the original transcripts and extracted detailed specific data of each woman's experiences under the headings "Family", "Schooling", and "Work". It was apparent from this data that, despite different family backgrounds and experiences, a pattern of missed hopes of educational advancement revealed gender and class inequality.

Although broadly-worded, the questionnaire restricted the intensity and diversity of many recollections compared to the outpourings of some of the women with whom I had personal contact. However, I feel that the fact I am an "older" learner, created a rapport with all these women. They knew that I, as interviewer, had an insider's perspective of studying by distance. At the age of seventy-five I had recently received a Bachelor of Arts degree after nine years of study in the British Columbia Open University degree programme. This created a sense of comradeship and shared pride because I had already reached the goal for which my subjects were striving. One of their "peers" had "got there": they were helping to extend academic work. Furthermore, at many points my own life history touches the lives of the women I interviewed. Born in 1914 into a middle-class family in Great Britain, I was educated in a private girls' school. Family financial losses during the Great Depression prevented my attending university: instead I received secretarial training. I worked for many years in an office and, after marriage during World War Two, experienced the double-day of work in both the public and private spheres. On emigrating to Canada in 1952, I worked first in domestic service as a ranch-

cook, and later in offices. In 1954 I became a court reporter, and on retirement in 1979 was able to enroll in the degree programme of the Open University. I have no children, but for most of my time in Canada supported an ailing husband until his death in 1988. My life history is included in the stories here.

Sociologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna support the inclusion of the interviewer's "self" in data collection in *Experience, Research. Social Change: Methods from the Margins* (1989). They argue that the interview is not only an instrument of research, but a "sharing of ideas and philosophy and experience and symbolic expressions . . . a sharing of self".⁷⁸ Sociologists Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler echoed this concept in *Membership Roles in Field Research* (1987). Focusing on the extent to which researchers can, or should, be integrated into study subject matters, they concluded that by drawing on their "complex and multifaceted human selves (of which the research self is but one dimension, rather than a separate entity)", interviewers can get closer to their subjects' behaviour.⁷⁹ I hope that our shared experience has improved communication between me and the other women of this thesis.

The interviews I conducted developed an informality and became more of a conversation than a formal questioning session. Through casual "off-the-cuff" remarks and sudden revelation of distant memories I tended to receive more personal information than I could otherwise have obtained. This sense of freely given information, particularly about childhood recollections, is reinforced by historian Sutherland in "When you Listen to the Winds of Childhood, How Much Can You Believe?" (1992), in which he says:

. . . a series of basically unconnected but vividly recalled vignettes suggests a childhood on which the interviewee has not yet reflected or taken a final stance, and which may come fairly close to the actualities of the childhood from which the anecdotes were drawn.⁸⁰

Sociologists Ann Oakley and Arlene McLaren also provided support for my decision to adopt an informal stance during the interviews, rather than to follow the "traditional" more male-oriented methodology. Both draw on their experiences as feminists interviewing women. In "Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms"⁸¹ (1987), Oakley supported extending the interviewer "relationship" in order to obviate a protocol which assumes a "predominately masculine model of sociology and society". As a feminist interviewer, she encouraged her subjects to regard her as a friend rather than purely as a data-gatherer. Oakley felt that feminists must replace the myth surrounding the researcher and researched as being "objective instruments of data production", by recognizing that personal involvement rather than dangerous bias is "the condition under which people come to know each other and to admit others into their lives". In the introduction to *Ambitions and Realizations* McLaren explains her dilemma about the methodology to adopt in her two-year study of the group of "adult" women enrolled in a residential college for adult education in Great Britain. She decided to use participant observations and in-depth interviews, and strove to ensure that the reality of the women's experiences was not lost nor that they became simply a set of statistics.⁸³

McLaren's research involved continuous formal and informal observation of forty-eight women from 1974 to 1976, with a follow-up study in 1982. As an M.A. thesis this work cannot match McLaren's. It is, however, a beginning. My research involved the analysis of interviews conducted in 1991 with six women over sixty years-of-age, together with answers to questionnaires from an additional three. All were enrolled in the degree programme of the British Columbia Open University. The experiences of these nine elderly women, like my own, cover a broad spectrum of women's lives in Canada. Yet these women were finally not helpless casualties of subordination, as the early feminist critiques

of the 1960s and 1970s often suggest,⁸⁴ but resourceful figures who took up long with-held educational opportunities with energy and enthusiasm. Chapter Two will turn to these women's own words to uncover the inequality revealed in childhood memories of family and school. Chapter Three concentrates on recollections of inequalities in jobs in the paid public labour force, and unpaid workers as wives and mothers in the private sphere of the home. Chapter Four first explores the motivations, doubts, and aspirations of these women in achieving the life-long wish for higher education. Second, it examines the experiences as older learners in an Open University setting. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the lack of research into academic education for older women, and makes suggestions for further study.

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2. *Quebec Women, A History*, The Clio Collective, eds. Micheline Dumont et al., (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987).
3. *Rethinking Canada: the Promise of Women's History* eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd. 1986).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
5. *No Easy Road, Women in Canada 1920s to 1950s*, Volume III, ed. Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990).
6. Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled, Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Markham: Penguin Books Canada Ltd. 1988).
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9. Using the formula suggested by Adamson and others in *Feminist Organizing for Change, The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 103-104 to assess family backgrounds by fathers' occupations, two women under review were what could be termed "middle-class", their fathers being a lawyer and an engineer in the German civil service, two lower middle class, with fathers working for the Canadian pacific Railway or postal service. The remainder came from working-class backgrounds, with fathers' occupations ranging from a steelworker to a harness-maker and repairer. As my father was in trade, I can claim a middle-class background.
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 19. *New Day Recalled*, p. 3.
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 29. *Canadian Women*, p. 242.

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31. Talcott Parsons, "The School Class as a Social System: Some of its Functions in American Society". (Originally *Harvard Educational Review*, 29 (4) pp. 297-318). *Achievement in American Society*, eds. B.C. Rosen et al. (New York: Schenkman, 1969), pp. 239-259.
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33. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
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38. Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto. Canadian Women and their Segregated Work*. Revised Edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1986), p. 203.
39. Patricia Connolly, *Last Hired, First Fired*, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1978).
40. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- For general discussion of the hierarchal division of labour, see *No Easy Road*, Chapter Six, "Paid Work", pp. 251-312. *Canadian Women*, Chapter Fifteen, "Work in the electronic age", pp. 367-331, *New Day Recalled*, Chapter Two, "Working for Pay", pp. 41-80.
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44. *Working Lives Vancouver 1886-1986* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1985), p. 61.

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In further writings on interviewing women, Shulamit Reinharz, in "Experiential analysis: a contribution to feminist research", *Theories of Women's Studies*, eds. Bowles and Duellin-Klein (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 162, argues the advantages of the "alternative or feminist" research model in contemporary sociology over the "conventional or patriarchal" model. She says, "The publication by feminist scholars at a prolific rate of their criticisms of conventional methodology...lend not only support to continuing effort to fashion an alternative research method but also contribute new ideas for its refinement", p. 185. In *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books Inc. 1986), Mary Field Belenky et al explore how women learn and think about learning. Their research is based on interviews in a comprehensive study of women in academic institutions and the "invisible colleges"(family service agencies which deal with assistance with parenting). The authors' procedures for the conducting and analyzing of interview data are of particular guidance. They say in their preface that they found "an extra-ordinary sense of intimacy and collaboration with all the women" by allowing the women interviewed to speak for themselves.

84. *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd. 1986), p. 6.

CHAPTER TWO

"They were all going to get married anyway": Class and Gender Inequality in Family and School.

This chapter turns to the life histories of the women of this thesis. It examines childhood realities of class and gender in family and school shared by the great majority of women growing up in the 1920s and 1930s which made higher learning largely impossible. In historian Sutherland's paper "When You Listen to the Winds of Childhood, How Much Can You Believe?" he says, ". . . if we are ever to get 'inside' childhood experiences, then we must ask adults to recall how they thought, felt and experienced their growing up".¹ I aim to "get inside" these women's memories of family and school and by use of their life histories to explore how childhood experiences of social and gender inequality influenced the course of their lives. I also aim to step outside my role of interviewer and researcher in order to look at the reality of my own experiences. By drawing, as Adler and Adler (1987) advise, on my own "complex and multifaceted" human self, I hope to get closer insight into the lives of the women interviewed.² Although from different social and economic backgrounds, the subjects of this thesis, including myself, are singularly alike as women. Prevailing attitudes led us to believe that, as with other girls of our time, our primary place in society was to be a wife and mother. It was not individual abilities but, as McLaren (1985) notes in her study of women in adult education, gender which determines the broad configuration of our lives.³

During women's childhood's in the 1920s and 1930s social attitudes reflected many nineteenth century myths, assumptions and misconceptions.⁴ In both family and school the majority of girls were still assigned to a subordinate place and, whether from a middle or working class background, they were pointed, as women, to their future roles in the

domestic sphere. Social attitudes towards schooling for girls often still echoed Egerton Ryerson's patriarchal ideas in 1851. He believed education to be designed to "Improve women's chance to marry well and their ability to perform their future roles as wives and mothers".⁵ In addition, by the mid-20th century, most girls grew up expecting to enter a relatively low-paid and sex-segregated labour market in which they would work until they achieved their ultimate goal of marriage and motherhood. Families, groups and schools reinforced these assumptions during childhood years by such images as "little mother" girl guide badges, or advertisements for baby dolls, relentlessly directing girls towards their "destiny" in the private sphere of the home.⁶

Sociologist Susan McDaniel (1988) says, "Understanding the family . . . is fundamental to understanding the position of women in Canada in the present, in the past, and in the future", but points out that the family is both ideologized and idealized.⁷ As we know, happy functional families were far from omnipresent in the past. A study of women's memories shows that only my own, and those of the women I call Pat, Nell and Erica, depict so-called "normal" childhoods in intact, emotionally-rewarding, bread-winner families. The other women, Nance, Yvette, Corrie, Micky, Pamela and Mary⁸ described illegitimacy, desertion, separation or divorce, a move to Canada as an evacuee from Great Britain during World War Two and a move from one violent family setting to another, hardly expressive of "ideal" families. Their childhoods provided no store of happy memories nor strong fortifications against a turbulent world. Family difficulties perhaps inspired and almost always exacerbated individual feelings of powerlessness and insecurity: these made it all the harder to struggle against beliefs in women's inferiority.⁹

Women's recollections also reflect how the close inter-relation between class and gender inequality fostered in the family continued in the school during the 1920s and

1930s. The life histories confirm that, as historian Strong-Boag says about this period, "In good times and bad, chances for schooling remained firmly tied to the rhythms of the family economy".¹⁰ The majority of the women came from lower middle-class or working-class families. Most left school early, took low-paid jobs in the public labour force, then married. With a middle-class family background in Great Britain, I was ready for university attendance, but the Depression made it financially impossible. Micky, in Germany, similarly hoped to attend university and become a doctor. A father who considered education unnecessary for girls, her parents' divorce, together with the Russian occupation of Germany during World War Two, extinguished her hopes. Only Erica's academic, middle-class father was prepared, if not entirely willing, to provide a university education for his daughter as well as his sons in Ireland.

In Canada during the 1930s and 1940s when the women in this study were attending school, girls with similar middle-class family backgrounds faced the "restrictions of their socialization and the hostility of misogynist male preserves".¹¹ Should they be successful in entering university the sex-segregated market open to them after graduation further constrained enrollment mainly to Arts. This provided preparation for teaching, social or clerical work, with the ultimate destiny of marriage and motherhood always in view. Though women from working-class backgrounds may have dreamt of higher learning, such education was publicly unthought of, just as it was for the vast majority of boys of their class.

However, the continuing expansion of compulsory school-leaving age from the 1920s onwards brought opportunity for secondary education for students of all classes, with increasing numbers of working-class children attending high schools and collegiates. The proliferation of commercial programmes for learning shorthand, typing and

bookkeeping, enrolled large numbers of girls. This ensured a steady supply of cheap labour in the continually growing sex-segregated market of offices, stores and banks.¹² The majority of the women here, like their contemporaries, left school when they were fifteen or sixteen years old, and immediately took low-paid jobs often in the clerical sector of the public labour force.¹³

As analysis of the interviews and answers to the questionnaire unfolds, the remarkable diversities and complexities of the recollections become apparent. Aside from major patterns of class and gender inequality running through their lives, the women's memories reveal tremendous variation. Life experiences were informed by two world wars, the aftermath of hostilities, and the Great Depression years. Women approached these events from different directions, and with different viewpoints. In their own way, women's lives reveal much about the political, economic and social changes of the last fifty years.

During the 1920s following World War One Canada as a nation weathered the turbulent transition from a wartime to a peacetime economy. Smaller families, the extension of compulsory school attendance, and reinforcement of married women's roles as mothers and consumers in the home rather than in the public labour force, brought an increasing reliance on male bread-winners. However, with the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 few families could rely on one male wage earner. Both girls and boys then learned early, as historian Joy Parr says, that their lives were "entwined in the political, social and economic relations of which family relations are a part".¹⁴ During these women's childhoods industries closed down, wheat prices collapsed, and hundreds and thousands of Canadians became unemployed.¹⁵ It was not until 1939 when Canada entered World War Two that economic conditions improved. In western Europe and

Britain, developments were similar and often more desperate, especially in Germany. The wars were certainly more devastating.

Analysis of the memories of the women here reflect the effect of political, social and economic events, outside their control. Of the women in Canada, only Nance, born in 1919 and the oldest of the women interviewed, was immediately affected by World War One. Her conception and birth occurred while her mother's husband, serving in the Canadian army, was wounded and still hospitalized overseas. Upon his later return to Canada, Nance, an infant, was put into a foster home. The arrival between 1922 and 1930 of Yvette, Corrie, Pat, Nell and Pamela, was seemingly less traumatic. However, they too recall the impact of the Great Depression and World War Two, and the economic improvement at the end of hostilities.

Three of the women interviewed, and I, did not arrive in Canada until later. Mary, born in England in 1931, the youngest of the women interviewed, was sent to Canada in 1941 as an evacuee from the blitz. Micky, born in Germany in 1925, emigrated from war-torn Europe in 1954 with her husband and son. Born in Great Britain in 1914, I emigrated with my husband in 1952 while Erica, born in Ireland in 1928, came to British Columbia via Great Britain and the United States, in 1966. She was already established as a specialist in internal medicine; Micky, Mary and myself struggled, as emigrants, to establish ourselves in Canada.

The following section examines women's own words as they recall family and school. Analysis of these diverse life histories illustrates the close interweaving of women's personal experiences of class and gender inequality, with events in the larger public sphere. I will commence with Nance, the eldest of the women interviewed, born in 1919

and put into a foster home as an infant. Her mother was Scottish by birth. Nance

suspected that her father was Metis, although as she said:

. . . there were some other candidates that . . . (laugh). But anyway, my mother lived in a little one-room log cabin forty miles from Winnipegosis in northern Manitoba, and her husband was away for five years in the war . . . She was alone, and people used to call there, you know, and they over-laid . . . and she was a good hostess . . . But all her friends were Metis. And then her husband survived his ordeals blind and crippled . . . and he came home, and he wasn't very pleased about finding a little daughter here, so I was farmed out.

Fostered from fifteen months old and, as she said, never finding "a real father", Nance loved her foster mother. This woman, who nursed her through a serious illness, "was a good and wonderful mother". When I asked her if she ever felt the loss of her birth-family, Nance replied:

Yes, I felt very lonely . . . in my foster home I had a brother but . . . I had [birth] brothers and sisters, but I try not to talk too much about them because I'm an embarrassment to my family . . . one daughter-in-law said, "I thought when people got adopted, they stayed adopted" (laugh) but I didn't know anything about my sanguinary family at all not until I was rearing kids of my own.

While in the foster home she went to "a lot of schools" in Winnipeg and South Saskatchewan, and was "a very good student". When she was nine she recalled that her foster mother:

. . . made a life with another man, and a couple of years later I went out on my own. The Children's Aid Society thought that they could do better for me than my foster mother could and I had to work for my keep. They paid for my books and tuition and whatever. And it was very lonely for me . . . I kept in touch with my foster mother.

In the care of the Children's Aid Society at eleven she worked for her board, and became "just a plain scrub-maid". And she added:

I was Cinders. I had to mind the children and scrub the floors and do the washing and ironing, cooking, and doing the dishes and a real cleaning on Saturdays, and often a tidy-up in the mornings, and always on weekends.

Her thoughts that it was "rather difficult" being a girl echoed feelings of insecurity

expressed by the other women also from disrupted families in this thesis:

. . . you know, it's hard to say how you feel because you have to draw a comparison. I mean, you feel sorry for yourself, well, there was a mystery about myself. Who was I? Where did I . . . maybe somebody would come and identify me as theirs (laugh).

Despite these difficulties, she continued being a "good student" and later stood first in her senior high school class in Winnipeg. She said:

. . . and then I had a dilemma because . . . two of my teachers wanted to put me through first year university in Normal School, but it was very hard to get a school in those days, because they didn't have the experience . . . and the salary at that time was twenty dollars a month, if you did get a school with a salary. So instead I went to business college, because I felt I would get a better chance .

Compared to work available to many of the other women here, the clerical field was considered good employment in the 1930s. The choice of business training eventually brought Nance firstly to marriage and work beside her husband, and later to McMaster University and the beginning of her university studies.

Nance's troubled family history was not unique. Yvette, the next oldest woman interviewed, was born in Vancouver in 1922 and remembered that her father "left us when I was about six. I lived with my grandmother":

Barbara: Not with your mother?

Yvette: After a while. I went to live with my mother when I was twelve, when my grandmother died.

Barbara: So you didn't have a family?

Yvette: No, I never had a family . . . and I guess in many ways you don't realize it, that it affects you, you know, how you grow up and that. But you don't realize it. I now don't know how different I would have been if I had had a family. What would I be like, and what would I have done? . . . I have always had a feeling that I would have done well in life, if I had somebody that would have

backed me up. I was very good in school, what I did do when I was in. I was an A student in school .

Barbara: And do you have any brothers and sisters?

Yvette: No. none . . I'm an only one . . . I think its terrible and I hate it (laugh) . . . it seems like you don't belong . . . I never felt that I belonged anywhere because, well I could not say, "Oh, yes, yes, that's my brother, or that's my sister, or I've got aunts and uncles coming...

In asking the question, "So you didn't have a family?", I, as interviewer, fell into the trap of assuming that a "family" naturally consisted of the traditional social group of grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, now known as an "extended family". Such assumption was based on my own experience of such a family when I was a child in Great Britain during the 1920s. In her reply Yvette appeared to share this assumption. With her mother and grandmother she, of course, had a family. She only sensed the loss of what she believed was a preferred family with a father and siblings. From disrupted families, Nance and Yvette missed the potential support of the extended families enjoyed by many of their peers. They shared similar childhood memories of insecurity, of "not belonging".

Yvette attended King Edward High School in Vancouver and especially liked English. Despite knowing she was a good student, that she "had it", she found no encouragement either at home or at school. Little of what she called "psychology" or counseling was available. She said that teachers would point out what was expected of girls, and what work was available for them. The alternatives were either the office or factory, or domestic service. Echoing the recurring marginalization which characterizes so many of the women in this study, she felt she did not "fit in", that she did not "amount to much". As her home life "wasn't too good", she found she did not get on with people in general, remembering that all her girl friends had boy friends before she did:

. . . they [boys] didn't like me too well (laugh) I was always on the defensive and so I was pretty sharp-tongued then, and they didn't like that. They liked somebody a little more amenable.

Yvette, like me, especially felt the harsh impact of the Great Depression. When asked why she left high school at sixteen after completing grade 10 she said, "Well it was during the Depression, and things weren't too good and so I got a job instead . . .". This A student who knew she "had it" got a job in a fish packing plant up the British Columbia coast where she worked for three years for "two-bits an hour".¹⁶ This dichotomy of knowledge of, and inability to profit from, talent echoes throughout the memories of these women.

Family disruption also occurred in the early history of Corrie, the next eldest woman here. Born in Winnipeg in 1924, like Nance she was adopted in infancy. Her birth parents were young Welsh immigrants who, because they could not find work in Canada, returned to Great Britain. They left her behind for adoption by a Latvian couple. Corrie bore her birth parents no bitterness. She echoed Yvette's preference for an "extended" family when she said that she had since visited Wales and found them all, "in fact I was over this spring still meeting uncles and aunts, it's a fascinating procedure". Corrie also expressed sympathy for her adoptive parents:

. . . there really weren't any relatives around, just the two of them, and they're lost when they come like that, and they were anxious to have a family . . .

Apparently Corrie's adoptive mother died before she went to school. Her adoptive father remarried and his second wife brought Corrie up. Corrie did not mention Latvian brothers and sisters but, living in a Latvian community in Winnipeg, picked up some of that culture. She went right through to high school, liked attending, found it "very interesting", and was in the choirs and festivals. When asked whether there was any difference in the treatment of girls and boys in the school, Corrie did not mention the sex-

segregation experienced by other women. Instead, she echoed historians Light and Pierson (who point out that young girls were capable in their play and imagination of mounting resistance "to the feminizing messages from the world of school and adulthood").¹⁷ As

Corrie recalled:

When we were small we were fighting with the boys. . . You know what it's like, you know, the boys say "We'll get yer". . . but the girls, I mean, it's sort of like two armies . . . then when you get older, you get interested in boys, and it's different . . . They put them on the dunce's chair, you know, in our Elementary school there was a dunce chair, they had this big stool . . . and this bad boy would have to sit on it with a dunce cap on - - right - - you never saw any girls sitting on the dunce stool . . .

Barbara: This is in the thirties . . .?

Corrie: Yes - yes, and the teachers didn't like boys as well as girls, and they'd yell "You'll end up in jail". . . you know . . .

Barbara: . . . they were all women teachers were they?

Corrie: Women teachers, could not get married. If they got married they lost their jobs . . . very discriminatory for the teachers . . . And, of course, the boys caused more trouble because the girls wanted to be good, you know, because you were told that was the thing to do, to be a monitor (laugh) and the boys just caused trouble, so they were always being yelled at, so I don't think they got better treatment no, no.

Of the women interviewed, Corrie was the only one who mentioned the negative attitude of teachers towards the boys. Other women felt that boys got the preferential treatment.

When asked how she did at school, Corrie replied:

Well I didn't do that well . . . you know I think I was kind of flighty. But I did all right, you know, I passed everything, . . . but I think I should have applied myself more (laugh) . . .

Later in the interview she repeated that she liked to learn, wished she had done more when at school, but realized that the lean years of the Depression had interfered with her schooling:

Isn't it a fact how you waste those school years? It was better when I got to high school. But somehow [earlier] maybe it was the whole situation, my mother dying, and something, but I remember I didn't really settle down . . . but then, you know, my dad lost his job and they started a laundry, during the Depression when

I was at high school . . . and when I got home from school, I was ironing clothes . . . and there was a mangle there, and then I had to do my home work, and I was falling asleep, it was too hard, so that wasn't good for me, but I sure did learn to iron well (laugh). But a shirt, you have got to get it done in seven minutes, all ironed and folded. I got very good at it (laugh). But it didn't help my studies, because you're doing that at the very end of the day, by the time you've been standing at that mangle and standing at that ironing board (laugh) . . .

As to any expectations for further learning after she left high school, Corrie explained that when her adoptive father died she had to find a job and live on something:

. . . and I didn't have time to go to school . . . I had to keep myself, there was nobody to keep me . . . I always wish I could have done it sooner, really it would have been so useful to have it while you're younger and working and trying to set up a standard for getting there. But anyway, it just wasn't possible to earn a living and do it.

Almost as an afterthought, she told of her hopeless dream of going to university:

You know, I took Latin for a while. I started working and I went to this lady, it was in her house, and it was one of those houses you could hear the clock ticking, a little tiny woman, and we sat around the table and studied Latin. Now, what did I do that for? I really wanted to learn something. I wanted to get a B.A. or something. You see, I must have been thinking, you have to have Latin or French to get into university, and I had not done very well on the French, so I thought I would try the Latin, and I did better with that . . . (laugh). . . so I used to go to Miss Tuddle's house (laugh) . . . isn't that something? And she was just this little old lady . . . it was just like out of a movie, and this clock just kept ticking. A lot of them said, "Well, why are you going to university at all? Who is going to pay the tuition? You have to work. . . you have to go to an office and work." You couldn't go, there was nobody to pay for it . . . So I couldn't get on, and I got married instead, you know.

I have quoted Corrie at length because her memories vividly captured the "thoughts and feelings"¹⁸ of the young girl whose desire for a university degree was so strong that, even realizing its impracticability, she attempted to comply with the requirements for university entrance by taking lessons in Latin. Work in the public labour force and as wife and mother in the home meant that she had to wait until she was in her late fifties before she could make any further attempts to attain higher learning.

The three oldest women interviewed faced considerable family disruption, but the next two in terms of age, Pat born in 1925 and Nell in 1928, began lives rather differently. Both grew up in the 1920s in small farming communities. Each came from large families, and each seemed proud of her heritage. Pat told stories of Icelandic grandparents' pioneering activities: Nell mentioned that her ancestors were of German stock and part of a migration to Russia during Catherine the Great's reign. Pat, one of seven children, was born in Winyard, Saskatchewan. Although her childhood occurred during the Depression, and she came from a working-class family, she was not so adversely affected as other women. As she said in her interview:

. . . as a child I wasn't that much aware of the Depression. My father was always employed, but some people weren't you know. We weren't wealthy though . . . my father was a sheet-metal worker, he made wind-mills and things like that that were used on farms.

Her relative privilege was reflected in her education. In Pat's words, the Winyard school which she attended until she was sixteen, "had very high standards". Whether girls or boys, students had to take up to university entrance, including Latin. She said, "you had to pass everything or - - 'Sorry, you don't graduate'". She remembered that the only lessons outside the general curriculum were on farming activities such as the care of chickens and cows, or studies in good nutrition, given to both girls and boys. In 1941 Pat's father moved the family to Vancouver. It was war-time and he took advantage of the economic upswing to work as a steel worker in the ship-yards.

Pat completed her schooling at Britannia High School in Vancouver, where she encountered for the first time what she now identifies as discrimination. She felt that the "boys got the education", that they were considered "more clever" and the girls "not as clever". She credited teachers at Britannia as paying more attention to the boys in their essay writing, never pressuring them and permitting more disruptive behaviour. She also

remembered sewing classes for girls and woodworking classes for boys, a division which captured the different roles intended for each group. Students who could afford to continue their education had the advantage of taking Grade 13, equivalent to first year university, for which payment had to be made. Other students, however, had the option at Grade 10 for girls to transfer to Fairmount College for business training, shorthand and typing, or for boys to transfer to Vancouver Technical College to learn a manual trade such as carpentry or electronics. No payment was required for this option. Although there were no formal impediments to the entry of boys to Fairmount, the different roles for girls and boys in the labour market were firmly established. Pat remembered only one boy attending, to the disapproval, and certain amusement, of the female teachers and students.

When asked why she did not take the option to graduate from Britannia and go on to university, Pat replied:

I would have liked to, yes I would have liked to. And my brother did, but there were seven of us children.

Barbara: There was no thought that you would go?

Pat: I think not (laugh) it was a financial consideration too . . . I didn't have that much confidence. I didn't think I was very smart . . . People weren't encouraged I think at that stage. They were all going to get married anyway. And women if they were married often didn't work before that time. War-time changed that, but before . . .

Barbara: Did you feel all through your life you would have liked a degree? Did it ever occur to you?

Pat: I would have liked a higher education of some sort, teacher's degree or a nurse's degree, or something like that . . . I often felt that even my extended family are much better educated than I . . . and I think if you're already a little inferior already. . in that way, although nobody would think of suggesting that to you, you've got that in the back of your mind. I think my sisters - - a couple of them - - were valedictorian in their high school years, although they did not go on to much higher learning either. But I think that's what gave me the feeling that I wasn't that clever, because I didn't reach their scholastic standards . . . I was just that kind of a person, shy and retiring, and uncomfortable.

She still remembered feeling inferior as a girl. When Pat left high school it was still wartime. Many boys were also leaving to go into the army or jobs in the thriving shipping business. Her younger brother put himself through university by working during the summer as a riveter, earning over 60 cents an hour. As will be seen in the next chapter, Pat's only option with completion of Grade 12 was a factory job at 30 cents an hour. By war's end, however, she worked in an office as a file clerk. She did this for a short time until she married.

Pat's memories of the difference in attitudes towards girls' and boys' schooling in rural Winyard and urban Vancouver in the 1940's, reflect sociologist Wendy Luttrell's findings when she studied women's memories of rural and urban schools in the United States from the 1940's to the early 1960's. In "'The Teachers, They All Had Their Pets': Concepts of Gender, Knowledge, and Power" (1993), Luttrell describes women's versions of the "twisted relations of gender, knowledge, and power"¹⁹ engendered in school organization. She terms these versions as "rural-community" and "urban-comprehensive", and posits that the "progressive" school reforms in the 1920's [in both the United States and Canada], focused curricula in large, bureaucratic, urban schools on the "so-called needs of boys and girls" in preparation for adult occupation in industry: the school replicated for students the sexual division of labour they would find as adults. On the other hand, as Pat found here, boundaries were more fluid in rural communities, where age and cognitive proficiency organized school instruction. Students in rural schools, were perhaps more lucky, "part of a seamless web of community contexts, each interwoven with and legitimating the other".²⁰

Turning now to Nell, the youngest of five girls, she was born three years later than Pat in Hay Lakes a small Alberta town. Although this was also a farming community her family, like Pat's, did not farm. Nell's father was a harness-maker and shoe repairman, her mother a dressmaker. Nell wrote that her parents were financially "very poor" but they read widely and valued education. She remembered that her mother was somewhat ahead of her time on "views about women's liberation" and that she resented that "men had the best of everything". Her parents were open-minded regarding girls' upbringing:

There were no restrictions as to what was allowed for girls. . . I know that my parents' liberal views influenced me greatly, especially in regards to critical thinking - - like them, I have always been a critical thinker, and curious about almost everything.

With such support she attended a two-room school in Hay Lakes for ten years, skipping Grade 1 shortly after school started, eventually completing grade 11. While she could not recall any significant differences between treatment towards boys and girls, the school she attended was very small with no counseling or career preparation. She echoed Hansot and Tyack's concept of the "seamless web of community"²¹ when she remembered that the close inter-relation between family and school determined the future lives of many of her school-mates. Whether boys or girls, they were headed for a life on the farm.

Unlike Pat, Nell did not complete Grade 12. Although she did well at school, she felt that she was "too shy and scared to go to the city for Gr.12", which was not taught in small rural schools at this time. She said that her "extreme shyness and athletic deficiencies" interfered with her happiness. Therefore, upon completion of Grade 11 in Hay Lakes, she joined four of her older sisters then working in Edmonton. Eight years younger than her sisters Nell was treated as a family "pet", and felt safe in the city under their care. She obtained work and also took typing at night school for about three months, but "didn't like the tedium of typing, so dropped out". However, she wrote that:

I was fascinated with universities even though I had no expectation of ever being able to attend one, so I got a job working in the lab; washing test-tubes etc., in the medical lab at the University of Alberta. I enjoyed the atmosphere, but the work was pretty dull.

In her own words, Nell came from a "very poor" working-class family. Despite being a good scholar, her parents' supportive attitude towards education, and her own dreams of attending university, higher learning was never a realistic alternative. Instead, for the next thirty years she would work either in sex-segregated job ghettos in order to survive, or as a wife and mother of six children. She was over fifty years of age before she had the opportunity to continue her educational activities when she "got hooked on learning".

Both Pat and Nell grew up in what can be described as "stable" working-class family backgrounds. However, Pamela the next oldest of the women interviewed, like Nance, Yvette and Corrie, experienced a disrupted family. She was born in Toronto in 1930, the youngest of three children. Her parents, Scottish immigrants, legally separated during World War Two. Her father, who had worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway, joined the Canadian army in 1942. Her mother worked as a postal worker during the war. Pamela got on very well with her father, who was a "very introverted man" and very well with her sister. Her brother was unreliable, "sometimes kind to me, sometimes unkind". Her mother was worse, as she remembered:

. . . a difficult person to live with (correction very difficult). She didn't get along with any of us. I felt I was my father's favorite child although he did not demonstrate this. I think he especially loved me because I was a girl.

Pamela attended three Catholic elementary schools in Toronto, where she did "very well, despite ill health due to rheumatic fever". Again there is the feeling of low self-esteem, exacerbated by her mother's insistence on her daughter's rapid self-sufficiency:

Here I go again on my mother! But one of my problems at school was that my mother started me at age four, and said I was five. So, I was always younger, smaller and socially immature. No confidence. I was afraid of nuns, lay-teachers, principals, other kids, just school in general . . . I was never happy at school. It was never fun for me. I dreaded the end of school vacation each year.

When she was twelve Pamela attended Commercial/Technical High School for four years. Despite her lack of confidence, she again did well, was "recommended in all subjects", and did not have to take final examinations. During her last two years in school she lived with her sister and her husband, her mother having gone to California. Pamela remembered that her mother told her many times that she only stayed in the marriage until "I reached the age of being able to support myself", and then added:

I had hoped to attend a matriculation high school, but my mother realized a commercial school would hasten my self-support. It did! I was working full-time by age sixteen.

She was to work in offices for the next six years until her marriage in 1962.

Other women shared Pamela's feeling of insecurity, coupled with acknowledgment of self-worth. Most admitted doing well at school: Yvette especially expressed a strong sense of self assurance. I sensed a vitality throughout the interviews. These women clung to a strong sense of themselves. They knew their own worth and never gave up despite the many difficulties they faced.

I turn now to the remaining women interviewed who were born outside Canada. Educated in Europe, Micky, Erica and I emigrated as adults to Canada after World War Two from Germany and Great Britain respectively. On the other hand, Mary was sent as a child evacuee from England during the war. We all came from essentially middle-class family backgrounds (one form of the immigration experience to Canada),²² but Micky and Mary experienced significant family disruptions.

Micky was born in 1925 in Leipzig, Germany, the eldest of three daughters. Her father was an engineer and worked as a civil servant for the German Telegraph and Radio, *Deutsche Post*. Her mother, the product of a girls' finishing school, worked for the *Post* until marriage. Her parents were divorced in the early 1940s. She pointed out that at this time divorce was "a stigma", making social and economic difficulties for her mother raising her children. Micky wrote:

We lost most of our friends, all of father's side of the family, and lived a rather isolated life. Busy to survive . . . Both [my sisters] were harder hit by father leaving - - middle committed suicide at age 39.

After the divorce her mother returned to the *Post* to support her three daughters until the Russian occupation of Germany in World War Two, when she became a common labourer. The four women fled back to West Germany at the end of the war, where her mother worked as a home-care nurse until her death at the age of seventy-eight.

Micky matriculated from school in Leipzig during the war, and explained why she had "to earn bursaries for paying the fees":

We were three girls. I remember my father's disappointment that I was a girl - - in his 2nd marriage two more girls! His opinion - - girls are less than boys - - money (education) for them is waste of resource since they will marry. He had some very queer ideas about females: stupid, useless, a burden. I tried to please him (long into my older life) which was, of course useless.

She said that her mother was allowed no will of her own: she had been "socialized to be the perfect housewife who did everything to please everybody", including quietly helping her daughters with school work, without telling anybody. Micky said that she liked school, "I guess it was such a difference to home. It had order, meaning, new horizons." As she attended a girls' school she had little contact with boys and, therefore, no way of comparing teachers' treatment of girls and boys. She had intended to study medicine after leaving school, but when she and her mother and sisters returned to West Germany at the

end of hostilities the universities had closed. Therefore, she ". . . got married and got involved in . . . [her] husband's trade", as a furrier. Micky's early life was molded dramatically by "the historical moment of a society"²³ as she, her mother and sisters, became victims of events of the European conflict. Furthermore, her father's contempt for women, and his desertion, nourished feelings of insecurity and uselessness.

Micky's situation can be contrasted to Erica's. Despite certain paternal reservations on the importance of higher education for women, Erica was given the opportunity to attend university and became a doctor. Born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1928 she had three brothers. Her father, an academic, was a lawyer by profession. Before marriage her mother had attended the Cordon Bleu School in London, and acted as vice-president of the Norland Institute for training nannies until she became, as Erica explained, "a full-time wife and mother". After returning from an appointment in Egypt, her father "had to start again, so there were all of us living in the country . . . on very little". Erica was, as she put it, "schooled at home a long time, [by correspondence courses] . . . finances were sort of short". Matters improved, however. After attending high school in Dublin for two years and a boarding school for a year, Erica was able to attend Trinity University, Dublin. In 1950, at twenty-two years of age, she graduated as a medical doctor.

When asked whether she had experienced any opposition from her father about attending university, Erica recalled that:

. . . he could see that I probably was more academic than my brothers in ways . . . I don't think he was quite appreciative that a woman's career was as important as men's careers, but anyway he encouraged me to do that.

She was silent about her mother's opinion. While not a wealthy family, Erica's father's middle-class, academic background encouraged him to provide his daughter with the same educational opportunity as her brothers.²⁴

Mary was the youngest of the women under review.

Her childhood, like Micky's, was dramatically influenced by World War Two. At ten years of age during the "Blitz" in Great Britain, she was sent to Canada as an "evacuee" and settled with her grandmother and an aunt in Vancouver. She was born in Manchester, England in 1931, and throughout the interview referred to her "violent" family:

I came from an erratic . . . well we're all rather erratic in my family. I have a very violent family, I am the daughter of first cousins and wasn't supposed to have been born . . . and I came [to Vancouver] with an aunt, and that was when I first noticed she went, she used to go berserk, and then I went with grandma, and she was so-called illiterate. I say so-called, because she just didn't have a chance. . . born in a work-house, put into domestic service and then marriage, you know, when she was sixteen or so . . . I'm telling you this because we stayed with all sorts of people, thieves and confidence people and then society people and all sorts . . . and so I went from family to family, sometimes when she went violent she put me into a family - -

Barbara: . . . so you didn't have a proper home?

Mary: No I didn't, no . I sort of lived in the twilight zone of many people's lives and they said things that weren't true, and I plunged in like a fish.

Mary attended many schools in the West End of Vancouver, and thought the first was "Lord Roberts". She remembered once being left alone in the house:

and I was still going to school, and the food was getting low and I didn't know what to do. So I phoned the Radio Station because I've always loved the radio trying to educate myself through the radio or something - -

Barbara: How old are you now?

Mary: . . . I was about eleven. It was before Trudeau came in, and I told the receptionist and she was very good in that she took notes, and I could have been an eccentric, and I told her I love going to school and I have no money and the food is getting low, what should I do? And she sent the police and they brought the Salvation Army and then the Mounties came . . .

Barbara: Well, what happened then, you were put into a foster home?

Mary: Well, the nice thing about Mrs. Burton [the woman with whom her aunt lived] is that one day . . . [she] hugs me and says, "You're a very deep little girl and I'll make you this promise that some day you're going to a safe place", in that

she had arranged for me to go into St. Anne's Academy in Victoria, which is quite a historic place, and I went there.

She liked being in residence, did well, and "became a sort of scholar again", translating what the French-speaking nuns were "trying to teach to the Indians". However, she said that she was "so-called expelled there in disgrace":

Mother Superior came in and she said, "You've got to get out of here immediately", and I was wondering what had happened, and I was out on the street with my suitcase in a few minutes. . . What I had done I had been so impressed by the nuns that I had written to England and praised them, and I think my parents thought I was going to be a nun. I think the Pope would have had to come, because I'm not even Catholic. You see a child sort of like *Anne of Green Gables*...romanticizes . . . The next place I was in was an Anglican school. . . I was a ward of the Canadian Government. I had my teeth done by the Government and things like that . . . I don't know whether the government stipend ran out . . . but I was put in a public school.

When Mary's parents eventually came to Canada:

. . . there was *murder*...It was terrible, because my relations are all funny . . . Barbara:. . . and how did you cope with going from being a ward back to a family?

Mary: I know I found . . . *nasty*, and I don't think I'm a nasty person, but my family are really, really weird . . . eccentric. If you've seen a play like *The Homecoming* by Pinter, something like that, you know the passion that can be within families.

She then went to high school in West Vancouver, "and I don't think my father ever wanted me to graduate, 'What for?' he was saying and things like that". She then mentioned two bullies at school who always had to have their sidekicks:

They made fun of my mouth, and my laughter and, oh! when you're growing up you're very self-conscious of everybody and everything . . . because you think maybe you deserve it, or have to put up with it as part of life, and it's all wrong.

She was asked later why she put up with it:

. . . well, it was hell at home. It was just like being in an air raid. It was banging and crashing and exploding, so you just survive and go from place to place . . . and I just forged ahead.

During the interview Mary repeated several times the allegation that before she came to Canada her mother had beaten her:

I was beaten to a pulp you know when I was little, taken away to the infirmary in England and everything . . . but she would be brushing my hair or something, because I was dressed like a little princess . . . and then all of a sudden when no one was looking, she would look around and get the handle and go - -BANG, but she was just like a little girl herself, she was only about in her late teens, early twenties, and I felt for her, but I was frightened.

She also told me that as a child, soon after her arrival in Vancouver, she was raped in Stanley Park. She had apparently obliterated the incident from her memory until, as an adult, she disclosed it while under the influence of a truth serum. Despite the violent emotional and physical background of childhood, Mary always had "this ambition to learn, oh! I love learning, so exciting. I love newness and things like that". It was during her high school years that she became aware of distance education, and started taking courses such as Geography or English from the Department of Education in Victoria, "just for the joy of it". But, after graduating from high school, she immediately followed the pattern set out for her, and got a job with the Telephone Company.

In some ways, the confusion of Mary's life, as she remembered it, seems characteristic of violent relations. In the final chapter of historian Linda Gordon's detailed study of family violence she posits that:

. . . even in the worst of times, there were many family-violence victims attempting to become the heroes of their own lives, as Charles Dickens put it . . . attempting to replace with creativity and stubbornness what they lacked in resources, they manipulated every device at their disposal to free themselves from abuse.²⁵

Mary's life history reflects Gordon's conclusion. In childhood, Mary appears to have used her creativity as a defence against physical and emotional abuse. As an adult she continued to use learning as a defence against fears of inferiority. The result is not easy to understand, but the pain is nonetheless clear. None of the other women mentioned physical

violence in their families. However, emotional trauma can be sensed in Micky's memories of her father's desertion of the family. Nance's uncertainty about her birth, and Yvette and Pamela's lack of family support led to feelings of helplessness.

I find reflections of my own experiences of family and school in the life histories of the women here. Like Erica and Micky, I came from a reasonably affluent middle-class family, my father originally a music publisher, my mother the owner of a music store bequeathed to her by her previous employer. Upon marriage, however, unlike Erica's mother mine did not become a "full-time wife and mother". I grew up in a matriarchal family: a maid and nannie undertook house and child care while my mother, assisted by my father, expanded their businesses. Although my parents cherished me when they were home, as an only child I was shy, and at times lonely. However, as the youngest of a large extended family of nearby grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, like Nell, I felt sheltered and safe. I attended an exclusive private girls' school when I was six, was happy there and did well. Like Micky's school, this was for girls only, so I felt no differentiation between the treatment of girls and boys. Like most of my schoolmates at that time, I just thought I would finish school, go to university, meet a "nice young man", marry and have children. I wrote the "Oxford" in 1930 when I was sixteen, and received third class honours. I was then ready to enter what was known as the Sixth Form the next term, to be prepared to attend university the following year. However, sudden financial losses caused by the Depression ended these plans, and I was sent to a secretarial college to learn shorthand and typing. Like other women here, with little parental support I now had to earn my keep. For the next fifty years I worked in secretarial-type jobs, and it was then that I realized the loss of higher education. Micky spoke of the stigma of divorce, with social and economic hardship. My sudden removal from familiar surroundings of house

and school, brought feelings of shame and helplessness. Furthermore, my upbringing had not prepared me for the less-affluent sex-segregated "working-class" environment I was about to enter.

My experiences, with others, reveal the difficulties, and complexities, of defining class. On the periphery of middle-class society my parents depended entirely on their income from commerce. Like Nell's parents they were well-read, but had minimal schooling and neither had attended university. The occupation of "shop-keeper" held no professional status, and my mother's full-time involvement in the business, rather than looking after her husband and child, was frowned on in some circles. Solely their affluence, where they lived, their car, clothing and other possessions, brought them into the "middle class", and me into an exclusive school. The removal of that affluence meant loss of many "necessities" of middle-class life. My mother's approach towards education contrasts with that of Erica's father. Despite my grandfather's plea for me to be sent to a council school like my cousins, as a "nouveau-riche" my mother misguidedly determined to give me "the best that money could buy", with no thought of the consequences of financial loss. On the other hand, Erica's father's acceptance into a middle-class society focused more on his university education and profession as a lawyer and academic, than his income. Erica said that finances were short in her family, but even without wealth her father ensured his daughter the same advantage as his sons: she attended university and became a doctor.

The remaining women in this study, like others coming from lower-class poorer families, had no real expectations of attaining higher education. Ideologies of women's place in society, channeling in the schools, and lack of alternatives led to sex-segregated jobs in teaching, clerical work, nursing, domestic work or waitressing. As the next chapter

will show, the majority of these women entered the paid work force during or shortly after World War Two. Despite public heralding of the importance of their contribution towards the war effort (with a partial relaxation of the pattern of "men's work" and "women's work"), at the end of hostilities they had few options. Public pressure soon returned them as wives and mothers to the home, still imbued with images of their inferiority. Many clung to dreams of academic study, but low-paid jobs in the outside labour force made university attendance financially impossible: work in the home as unpaid wives and mothers left them no time.

END NOTES

1. Neil Sutherland, "When You Listen to the Winds of Childhood, How Much Can You Believe?", p. 243.
2. Adlet and Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research*, p. 86
3. McLaren, *Ambitions and Realizations, Women in Adult Education*, p. 25.
4. For a useful bibliography on education in Canada see Neil Sutherland and Jean Barman, "Out of the shadows: retrieving the history of urban education and urban childhood in Canada", *The City and Education in Four Nations* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1992).
5. Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters, Education and Social Class Mid-nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1982, pp. 108-109.
6. Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, pp. 12-13.
7. McDaniel, *Changing Patterns*, p. 103.
8. In order to preserve the anonymity of the women interviewed I have used pseudonyms throughout this study,
9. In *Families in Canada Today* (pp. 15-16) Eichler discussed the prevalence of disrupted families in this century. United States figures show that, despite marital disruption actually decreasing, at its lowest point still a quarter of the children in the United States experienced family disruption.
10. Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, p. 17.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 21
13. Graham S. Lowe "Women, Work and the Office: the Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada, 1901-1931", *Rethinking Canada*, p. 107.
14. *Childhood and Family in Canadian History*, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc. 1990), p. 10.
15. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*, p. 213.
16. See Gillian Mary Stainsby " 'It's the Smell of Money': Women Shoreworkers of British Columbia", unpublished M.A. Thesis, Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University, April, 1991.

17. In *No Easy Road*, p. 22, Light and Pierson point to girls' resistance to feminizing messages from the world of school and adulthood, at least in play and imaginations.
18. See Sutherland's "When You Listen to the Winds of Childhood", p. 249. When interviewing older persons about childhood experiences he says, "...open-ended, relatively unstructured interviews often lead people, eventually, to talk about those things that really mattered to them".
19. Wendy Luttrell, " 'The Teachers, They All Had Their Pets': Concepts of Gender, Knowledge and Power", *Signs*, 1993. Vol. 18, no. 3, p. 505.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 533.
21. Elizabeth Hansot and David Tyack. "Gender in American Public Schools Thinking Institutionally", 1988, *Signs*, 13 (4): pp. 741-60.
22. Anthony B.H. Richmond in *Post-War Immigrants in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), found in the February 1961 survey of immigration patterns in Canada between 1948 and 1965 (the women concerned here entered Canada in the early 1950's), that:
 - (a) 26.6 per cent of immigrants (like Erica and me) came from Great Britain and Northern Ireland and 13.2 per cent (like Micky) from German-speaking countries, East and West Germany, Switzerland and Austria (p. 30).
 - (b) Immigrants from the United Kingdom were of a higher social and occupational status than the majority of immigrants from other countries (p. 124),
 - (c) Approximately a fifth of the immigrants from the United Kingdom and of those from Germany and that a desire for adventure was their main reason for emigrating to Canada. (p. 32).
23. McLaren, in *Ambitions and Realizations* p. 16, points to her aim to show the important links between the life of an individual and the historical moment of a society.
24. In *The New Day Recalled*, p. 23, Strong-Boag discusses the privileged few women who attended private schools and universities in Canada during the 1920s and 1930s. Schools tended to guarantee their fortunate position in the class hierarchy. Universities concentrated women in the Arts, ensuring their future job as teachers and social workers.
25. Gordon, *Heroes of Their own Lives*, p. 290.

CHAPTER THREE

"Women in Those Days Just Did Their Jobs and Then got Married": Paid and Unpaid Work Places.

This chapter examines women's recollections of the sex-stratification of the public and private work fields. Women carried the experiences of gender and class inequality they had encountered in the family and school during the 1920's and 1930's into the work place in the 1940's and 1950's. Whether in the public sphere of the paid labour force, or the private sphere of the unpaid work place of the home they, together with the majority of Canadian women, now faced inequality in the hierarchical division of labour. As sociologists Pat and Hugh Armstrong said in 1986, "In Canada today, there is still women's work and men's work; furthermore, women's work has changed little over the last forty years".¹

The childhoods of the majority of the women under review, born between 1919 and 1931, spanned two World Wars and the Great Depression. They grew up in a Canada which following World War One appeared to offer new experiences, but at the same time retained strong resistance to any significant change in sex roles.² Although by 1920 women had gained the right to vote in all but three provinces, they still faced patriarchal traditions that insisted they were "naturally" destined to become wives and mothers.³ Between leaving school and marriage, paid labour in domestic service or the factory was considered appropriate for working-class girls, nursing, teaching or clerical work for girls from middle-class families. Primarily, for economic reasons, and also because of the expectations and utility of higher education, university attendance for working-class girls and many of their more comfortably off sisters was practically unattainable.

World War Two ended the Great Depression, and saw a few women move into men's traditional jobs. Cessation of hostilities brought a return to low-paid job ghettos for most female wage-earners, and public exhortation for early marriage and motherhood. The majority of the women found that working in the public sphere, in the private sphere as wives and mothers, or juggling the responsibilities of duties in both spheres, made any dreams of higher learning even more remote. With the exception of Micky, Erica and me, educated in Germany and Great Britain, the women interviewed in Canada left school between the ages of fifteen and seventeen to enter the public labour force. Nance and Yvette took paid employment in 1935 and 1937 respectively, before the beginning of hostilities. The remaining women entered the public work force during and after the war, between 1941 and 1947. The life histories reflect changes that war and post-war environments brought in political, economic and social attitudes towards Canadian women's place in the work force during this time, both outside and inside the home.

At the commencement of hostilities in 1939, Canada was not yet out of the Depression. While the rolls of unemployed men largely met the initial needs for military recruitment and wartime production, by 1942 the exhaustion of this source of labour meant that "womanpower" had to be considered along with "manpower" in the work place.⁴ Escalation of the war effort brought patriotic exhortations by government and military: women were asked to serve their country beside their men. They should replace men in the paid labour force or, if eligible, enroll in the armed forces. Women were trained, admitted, and at times moved to other locations to work in occupations in heavy industry normally reserved for men. At war's end 50,000 women had served in the Women's Divisions of the Canadian Armed Forces, over 1,000,000 were working full-time in the labour force, over 800,000 were labouring on farms, and many more were employed

part-time in a variety of locations.⁵ It might have seemed that women had at last overcome the hierarchical division of labour and they could now enjoy equal status with men in the work place. The end of hostilities, however, dissipated this hope.

By late 1945 80,000 women in the war industry had been laid off and thousands of service women discharged.⁶ Servicemen returned to civilian life and reclaimed the jobs being performed by women. Promises previously made for retraining to continue women's upward mobility in the labour force came to naught. Instead, retraining programmes perpetuated traditional "women's" jobs such as domestic service, nursing, teaching and clerical work. Public policy, through the mass media, increasingly stressed that woman's work place was in the home as a wife and mother. Consequently, the immediate post-war years brought a sharp decrease in women's participation in the paid work force, which reached its nadir of 23.6 percent in 1954, not to climb back to its 1945 level of 33.5 percent until 1966. At the same time post-war studies revealed that more women were marrying, and at a younger age.⁷ During the war effort women faced political, economic, and social manipulation of their "womanpower" in the public work sphere. In the post-war period they were encouraged by mass persuasion to forget equality in the work place and return as speedily as possible to the private work sphere of the home.

Analysis of the recollections of the women here reveal the degree to which the political, economic and social consequences of depression, war-time and ensuing peace-time environments informed Canadian women's working lives, in both public and private spheres. Life histories show that two women in Canada, and myself in Britain, experienced the economic hardships of the Depression. During the war three women entered the traditional male workplace to do war-work, another served in the armed

services. At the end of hostilities all faced the job ghettos they had been conditioned during childhood to expect, quickly followed by early marriage and motherhood. As the authors of *Canadian Women*⁸ point out, after the war marriage rates soared especially among younger women, while at the same time more married women entered the public labour force. Between 1944 and 1952, after short spells in low-paid jobs in the public work force, the majority of the women under review (now ranging from nineteen to twenty-four years of age), became full-time wives and mothers raising, and at times supporting, families including from three to six children.

Recollections convey women's general acceptance at this time of working in the labour force in places, as Armstrong and Armstrong point out, usually "toward the bottom of the labour heap".⁹ Public policy continued to reinforce the assumptions they had learned during childhood in family and school. Despite acceptance during the war years of women's work in traditional men's occupations, little had changed: post-war attitudes still leaned towards a sex-segregated work ghetto for women.

The following section listens to these women's voices. It first explores this sex-segregated work ghetto, and the effects of the Depression, the war and post-war years, on women's experiences in the paid public labour force. Secondly it examines memories of domestic labour and the existence of the "double day" of work in both the public and private spheres. Life histories show that Yvette in Canada (and myself in Great Britain) experienced the economic hardships of the Depression. During the war Corrie, Pat and Yvette entered the traditional male workplace to do war-work: Yvette also served in the armed services. At the end of hostilities most faced the job ghettos they had been conditioned during childhood to expect, quickly followed by early marriage and motherhood.

I turn first to Yvette, whose memories of work in the public labour force were influenced by both the Depression, and World War Two. She was sixteen in 1938 when she left high school after completing Grade 10. Her father had left the home, the grandmother with whom she had been living had died and she was again living with her mother, ". . . well, it was during the Depression, and things weren't too good so I got a job instead". She worked for about three years at a B.C. Packers' fish cannery up the coast:

Barbara: . . . and it was pretty grim?

Yvette: Well, two bits an hour - - twenty-five cents an hour, and a lot of work - - hard, hard work.

Barbara: And you lived up there did you?

Yvette: Well they had bunk-houses up there, and we had - they had a woman in there who looked after us, cooked for us and that . . .

Barbara: And that was free was it?

Yvette: Well, they took a certain amount off for board and that yes. Well I came out with . . . a hundred and fifty dollars and bought my mother silver-ware and that was the end of my hundred and fifty, because I spent a little bit all along on clothes, like, you know - - just a company town, eh?. . . In a company town you don't come out with much. . . They give it with one hand, and take it, it comes out with the other.

In "'It's the Smell of Money': Women Shoreworkers of British Columbia" (1991),¹⁰

Stainsby confirms how hard life in a fish plant was on women, such as Yvette.

Yvette worked up the British Columbia coast until she returned to Vancouver in 1941 and took "little odd jobs":

. . . and then the war came along and I worked in a war plant for a while, and I joined the R.C. [Royal Canadian] . . . the Air Force [Women's Division] . . . and I became a Wireless Operator and I served in Saskatoon until they got rid of me. .

Barbara: You stayed right through the war?

Yvette: Yes it was coming to an end when they started to demobilize. . . I wanted desperately to go to England- -

Barbara: You didn't go overseas at all?

Yvette: No, I wanted to go overseas. I worked so hard, and got high marks thinking they would send me over for that reason, and they didn't. . . I didn't like the Air Force but I liked what I was doing . . .

After demobilization, she did office work for a short time at the Restmore Mattress Company. In 1946 (at twenty-four years of age) she married and became a full-time wife and mother. Her experience in the Women's Division was shared by many women in all branches of the armed services. Like Yvette, some enlisted hoping to have the adventure of an overseas posting but, with the exception of the nursing sisters, only one in nine service women served outside Canada. Military and government campaigns ensured that the war did not alter attitudes towards gender roles in the work place. Women in the armed services found themselves working in the job ghettos they had left in civilian life as cooks, laundresses or clerks. Although women's work in the labour or armed forces was necessary in the emergency of war, it did not "constitute any real threat to existing gender roles".¹¹

Corrie, like Yvette, remembered particularly the sex-segregated work place, and the impact of the war on her work. She left school on completion of Grade 10 when she was sixteen, and had to provide for herself. Her adoptive father had died, she was staying with friends, and as she said:

I had to find a job and live on something . . . and I didn't have time to go to school. . . I had to keep myself, there was nobody to keep me . . . You know my first job actually was in a garment factory, and I had to work in the office typing up the invoices, and when I got caught up I was supposed to go out in the stock room and pick threads off the pants. . . but anyway that was my job, typing, and then rush out there and pick threads, all the loose threads - -

Barbara: What kind of wages did you get?

Corrie: Started out at seven dollars a week. And I didn't have a winter coat. The owner, he was Jewish, you know, he took me upstairs to a coat factory and I got, you know, I tried on coats, and he bought the coat and then I was supposed to pay him back, and he was kind of trying, but then when I asked him for a raise (laughs) I got this long, long, lecture (laugh) and finally he got to giving me a dollar more. But, you know, I had to listen to a lot before he gave me that.

Corrie was unable to pay much for her board, her friends kept "nudging" her to get a better job, so she found work in the office of the Wheat Board. Her dream, however, was to get out of the job-ghetto, to "get with a newspaper". She felt that although "it wasn't as good money maybe", it was more to her liking:

I used to go up every week to the *Free Press* and ask for a job, and they never had one. And then . . . that first summer I went to the *Tribune* which is the other paper, and I asked if I could spend my holiday there . . . and the managing editor was a Roman Catholic, and he thought it was just terrible that a woman should go into this kind of thing, you know, find out all the terrible things of life, and he was really out (laugh) but he finally agreed. . . you know, it was a really good training programme, because they didn't have to pay me anything, I was just happy to be there. I wanted to learn how to do it. . . And then finally one day I went up to the *Free Press*, and you know, the men were going off to war . . . and somebody else had just left and he said "When can you start?" So the next day I was working (laugh). . . the war gave me a break and right away, you know, I wasn't society news, it was right away into work, real reporting, because these men were gone, and they had to put up with these women. . . they didn't waste time buttering you up if you were making mistakes, you had got to learn. . . (laugh) it was very good. I really enjoyed that, it was like my second home, the *Free Press*.

The editor's attitude towards Corrie taking a male reporter's job reflects the discrimination which Pierson found overwhelmingly prevalent in these years.¹² Unlike many wives, however, Corrie continued working as a reporter at the *Free Press* after her marriage in 1945. Journalism provided her with the opportunity for personal fulfillment of upward mobility in the work force. Her duties as housewife and mother of three children, which included moves with her husband to different jobs, nevertheless hampered her full enjoyment of such opportunity.

Canada was still at war in 1942 when Pat, at nearly seventeen years of age, left high school. As expected, she went into a war-production factory, only being able to get a job making part of a lighting device to be used on navy life-belts at thirty cents an hour. The job terminated at war's end and she worked for a short time in an office as a file

clerk, ". . . all pretty boring". She was twenty-one in 1946, and had been working for four years, when she married a steel-worker, the same occupation as her father. First a full-time housewife and mother of four children, she became in time a full-time wage-earner in 1969 when she was forty-four.

The war was over in 1946 when Nell was sixteen and left school after completing Grade 11. Her working life conforms to the general post-war pattern of low-paid job-ghettos for women, followed by early marriage. For a woman with an adventurous spirit and a longing for higher education, her answers to the questionnaire vividly portray the tedium of her work, and feelings of low self-esteem generated by the unsuccessful search for personal fulfillment. After finishing Grade 11 in Hay River, northern Alberta, her "thoughts of being a nurse" were discouraged by her mother. Then, like Corrie, she dreamed of a future in journalism. Instead, however, she went to Edmonton, and for a few months took the job washing test-tubes in the university laboratory. She enjoyed the atmosphere, but found the work "pretty dull". While in Edmonton she attended night school for about three months to learn typing, but "didn't like the tedium of typing, so dropped out". Instead as she said, she:

. . . spent nearly a year working as a maid in Toronto, back to Edmonton where I worked for less than a year at the G.W.G. factory, then for a couple of years at the Hudson's Bay in Edmonton where I hated clerking, but enjoyed cashier work. It was all pretty poor pay, but I was frugal by nature and simply didn't have any expectations of anything better in these years. These were the forties, and I really wasn't politically aware enough to think about whether things were fair or not. I think that the G.W.G. was unionized but I did not participate in any activities. . . . I wasn't particularly satisfied with anything I was doing and had a yen for adventure so I persuaded my sister and three other friends to go to the Okanagan to work in the orchards. That was great fun even though it was physically hard. After the second summer I got a job with the telephone company and really enjoyed being an operator. I quit to follow my boy friend to Terrace - - he was a logger, and I worked as a waitress there - - in a company camp.

Her work in low-paid menial jobs in the public labour force ended in 1952 at age twenty-four when she married her logger boy friend in the company camp. She followed him as he moved jobs between Alberta and British Columbia and raised six children. She did not re-enter the public work field until 1974 when she was forty-six and her youngest child had entered kindergarten.

Like Nell, Pamela also entered the paid work force in 1946. She was sixteen when she left the Commercial/Technical High School. She worked for one year in a small real estate/mortgage office, then for four years in a large insurance office in downtown Toronto. She wrote that:

I was satisfied enough with my work, and became a Department Head. I didn't really ever think about options - - perhaps I didn't think I had any. . . I got along very well with my employers and fellow workers, the office became very central to my life during those years. I very much enjoyed the social aspects. Dated regularly with guys in the office, and made close friends with three or more females. No serious problems - - women in those days just did their jobs and then got married. We had good working conditions, good hours – no union.

She did clerical work until her marriage in 1952 when she was twenty-two years old, continuing with several stenographic jobs until the birth of her first child in 1954. The remainder of her working life was in the home as wife and mother of three children, and subsequently, from 1967, as her husband's partner in a family business.

Nance also worked for a time beside her husband. Unlike others, however, she did not enter female job ghettos after leaving school. In 1936, when seventeen, she graduated from high school, declined her teachers' offer of assistance towards a university education, and attended a business college which qualified her for "all kinds of jobs". However, she turned down this opportunity and joined a theatre stock company. Nance, like Nell, seems to have had an adventurous spirit. She was, as she said:

. . . acting, touring all over. . . plays in one town, and move on to the next. . . So I did that for a year and then met a very nice young man and was drawn to him, and four years later we were married and had three sons . . . that was in nineteen thirty-nine that I was married.

Her husband was a traveler, and before and after the marriage Nance worked beside him as his personal secretary:

. . . meeting people, and know when he was going to call on them so I could give them notices, and then we had conventions which, you know, I would help, and see all his clients.

Divorce ended the marriage after eight years and Nance had to support herself and her three children.

Like other women, Mary experienced work in a sex-segregated office. She came as a child evacuee during the war, and was educated in Canada. She left school in 1947 when she was seventeen, and immediately got as she said, a "respectable feminine" job with the Telephone Company in Vancouver: "and that was quite "the" thing to do . . . it was sort of typing things and cards - - gosh - - it was brainless and it was terrible". I remember the aura of "respectability" surrounding low-paid secretarial work for middle-class girls. Historian Strong-Boag calls these "pink-collar" jobs, where women's dress, demeanor and language compensated for lack of formal qualifications.¹³ In the 1930's respectability extended to my having to wear a hat, and gloves, when entering and leaving the office.

Mary went on to say, "and then I heard about people taking shorthand and how you got a better job, and. . . I saved up and went to a Business College". She tackled learning shorthand with pleasure and became an expert. By the mid-1950s she was first working as a secretary with the British Columbia Telephone Company, with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with two engineering contractors working on the Arrow Lakes Dam, and finally with City Hall in Vancouver, a job she still held in 1991 at the age of sixty-one.

Relatively low wage jobs exacerbated the problems of a violent family background to inform the whole of her working life:

I went to work, and then I came a cropper at work because of the men (laugh) . .
"Men" I put in quotation marks - oh - I was scared of them, and I am scared of them. . .

On the other hand, she was happy with her boss at the C.B.C.:

I really know he appreciated me, so it's not as if I react to every man that I meet that way. But they do have power over you, in business, and things like that. And I have met some horrors - I have been very frightened.

Despite her active mind and excellent technical skills, she was not able to obtain better work.

The other women under review were born and educated outside Canada, Erica came in 1966, and Micky in 1954. I came in 1952. We each had already entered work forces in Austria and Great Britain. Erica was one of the more fortunate women in the Canadian work force at that time, she had already practiced medicine for eight years in university hospitals in Ireland and England before coming to the United States in 1963 as a Fellow at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. As work in her specialist field of internal medicine and endocrinology was not available there, she came to Canada in 1966. She pointed out that:

You have to qualify when you come to Canada, and also I had to get a specialist exam if I wanted to practice as a specialist. So I had to do those the first year I was here, and then I was able to take on specialist work in Victoria, and I have been here ever since.

As a middle-class woman, she benefited from a university education. Notwithstanding gender inequality in the work force, childlessness and a single state brought the opportunity to pursue a satisfying male-dominated professional career. She found little bias towards her as a woman in her professional life. As she said:

I mean, it's hard to say whether bias to one as a woman or as opposed to - - some people who have more skills in a particular area. Nothing to do with sex, but just that you in a role - - that you have a different role from somebody else and people may not like that. Of course, your background and the presence, or absence, of an old-boy network will make a difference, which again is not because you're a woman *per se*, but it's because of the cultural aspect of one's life. I don't particularly go out of my way to buddy up with women.

An academic, middle-class family background had given her the opportunity to step out of women's traditional work pattern, to become a doctor, and be accepted in a predominately middle-class male profession. These opportunities set her apart from the vast majority of her contemporaries.¹⁴

Turning now to Micky's memories, she wrote that her ambition had been to study medicine, but in 1944 she married a pilot in the Austrian Air Force. A furrier in civilian life, he "returned to his trade and "made his 'masterpiece' and exams" in Austria at the end of hostilities. Micky also trained for three years as a furrier, got her journeyman's papers and, like Nance, worked beside her husband in an endeavour to establish their own business. When she emigrated to Canada she:

. . . had a weird experience in Montreal 1954, must join fur workers' union - - then was forbidden to work as a fur cutter because I was female. Worked in a sweat-shop for less than minimum wages. I learned English, the ways of the game; we took our own contract work and quit the union. I became the only woman cutting fur (a novelty!). In Calgary we started our own business.

They were among the over five million immigrants, including myself and my husband, attracted by job opportunities created by the post-war growth of resource-based industries, who came to Canada during the forty years between 1947 and 1987. At first migration was primarily from Great Britain and the United States, but by 1950 many such as Micky and her family arrived from war-torn Europe.¹⁵ Unlike the majority of women in this thesis, Micky came from a German, originally middle-class background, was educated to university standards, and had already learned a trade. She and her husband

were well equipped to learn the language and "ways of the game" of their adopted country, and eventually to establish a business of their own. However, she found that working with her husband and raising her son meant that she had to wait until she was in her late fifties before having the time to get the university education she had missed as a girl in Germany.

I can equate many of these women's experiences with my own. Recollection of work in an office in pre-war Great Britain, after I left school in 1930, echoes Pamela's memories of post-war Canada in 1946. Six months after leaving school I had learned typing and shorthand and was working, at the lowest level, in the engineering department of a large public utility company in Birmingham. For most girls in the 1930s (and still, as Pamela points out, in the mid-1940s) nothing prompted us to think of other options. Work was in non-unionized offices. For myself, neither the British Broadcasting Company's transmission of the daily news, nor my father's conservative newspaper which was delivered to the house regularly, told me anything about class and gender inequality. Like Pamela, I enjoyed the work and made friends. Hours and working conditions were good, and I eventually became secretary to the Chief Engineer. While initially shocked by the sudden disruption of family finances, I cannot remember at that time appreciating the extent of my loss of higher education. Although my mother was a "career woman" rather than a full-time house and child care-giver, I believed that society and my family expected, as Pamela said, that I would just do my job and then get married.

At the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 my work being in a "reserved occupation", I did not serve in the armed forces like Yvette. After-work fire warden duty, serving troops at a railway station canteen, or sitting in a shelter at home typing details of company equipment damaged the previous night, while raids overhead created further

damage, had to suffice. During the war in Great Britain I had not, like Micky, suffered the trauma of forced labour during my country's occupation, but had survived two bombings in the Blitz and other disruptive experiences.

My marriage in 1944 to a Jewish refugee from the Nazi holocaust, warrants a repetition of Light and Pierson's concept of the complexity, and "ever-changing flux of relationships, work demands, impulses and constraining influences" in a woman's life.¹⁶ Initially, as a woman, I had to assume my husband's nationality, became an "enemy alien", lost my British passport, and had to report to the police. After legal procedures and a court appearance, a few months later I regained a passport designating me as a "British born enemy alien". I was released from my employment in Birmingham and moved to London. My husband, an artist, found work as displayman in department stores. I worked in an office for six days a week, and juggled the responsibilities of the double-day, exacerbated by wartime shortages, and the constant fear of being targets for rocket weapons.

Discouraged by the continuing bleakness of life in Great Britain, although the war was over,¹⁷ in 1952 we emigrated to Canada. Unlike Micky and her husband on their arrival here, we already "knew the language". However, instead of settling down immediately, we followed Nance and Nell's adventuresome spirit and worked our way across the country. During this year's journey I learned the uncertainties, and at times humiliation, of being a "working-class" woman, whether native born or immigrant, in the female job-ghettos. Our passage and purchase of a small car had exhausted our funds, my husband found he had not the strength for hard labouring jobs, so survival depended largely on what I could earn. For a short time I worked with hundreds of other women, for very little pay, sorting out mail catalogue forms at the Sears-Roebuck company in

Toronto. Credit had just been restored in Canada after the war, and the company was inundated with orders. We dish-washed in a children's camp in northern Ontario, I did domestic work while my husband helped with combining in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and I cooked at the Ross cattle ranch in southern Alberta. In British Columbia I was cook for the whole winter at the Woodward's Douglas Lake cattle ranch. Here I had precedence, with my husband designated as assistant bull-cook. In the spring he had a "disagreement" (influenced by class and cultural differences) with one of the ranch hands: my seniority ended as we were both fired. I understand this was done with some reluctance as I had "lasted longer" than other cooks, and war-time experiences of austerity made me the most economical one they had ever had. I cannot complain about these experiences. As Nell said of her own trials, they may have been hard physically, but they were fun.

When we came to Vancouver I worked for some months in the offices of consultants for MacMillan and Bloedel, and learned the meaning of the reserve army of labour. Together with over a hundred colleagues, both women and men, I was fired at the termination of their current contract. I then knew the trauma of a bread-winner's failure to find work. I was forty, and knew that at nearly sixty years of age my husband had neither the ability (nor the inclination) to enter the labour force again. The employment exchange informed me it was impossible to find a job for a woman of my age. But I was lucky. The Provincial Court in Burnaby wanted a "mature" court reporter. I worked in the courts there from 1954 until my retirement in 1979. Things have now changed, but in the early 1950's court reporting was considered a man's job. Male court officials still asked me to type letters and make coffee. I attempted to get work in Vancouver's more prestigious higher courts, but at that time the chief reporter was loath to admit women.

This gender inequality extended into my private life. While other women under review had to abandon educational hopes because of their husbands' moves to other jobs, my husband's unwillingness to move destroyed my dream of attending university. In the 1950's the University of British Columbia offered an apprenticeship programme of tutoring in under-graduate studies for those, with five years' experience in law offices or courts, who wished to enter the Law Faculty. This permitted continuance of work until graduation. Although my schooling and my work in the courts entitled me to enter this programme, my husband would not agree. It would have been necessary to move nearer to Vancouver: he wished to finish the house and garden he had designed and was helping to create. I continued in my double role as career-woman in Burnaby, and housewife at home, and although his health deteriorated over the years, he lived until he was ninety-two.

It was while I worked in the courts during the 1960's and 1970's, with increasing numbers of women judges and lawyers, that I felt more acutely the loss of a university education. Despite responsibility and skill, I was still a stenographer.

To return to analysis of other life histories, the women here shared with many Canadian women the immediate post-war trend towards soaring marriage rates, earlier marriages and more children, and more married women entering the paid labour force.¹⁹ Only Erica and Mary remained single. With the exception of Nance, who married in 1939, other women married between 1944 and 1952, from ages twenty-one to twenty-four years, and all raised families of one to six children. I was nearly thirty when I married in 1944, and had no children. With the exception of Corrie, who continued her journalistic work while she was raising her children, other women left the labour force when they became

pregnant. Several later found it necessary to enter the double-ghetto of work in both the public and private spheres.

The authors of *Canadian Women* point to the public policy which, through the mass media, continued to reinforce post-war conservatism towards sex-segregation in the workplace: women's place was in the home.²⁰ Memories of the women here confirm that although a few men helped more with housework, especially if wives took paid employment, sex-segregation of labour in the home also remained largely unchanged.²¹ Technical development, mechanized household appliances and improved public utilities might have eased the labour-intensive housework, but housework was still burdensome and time-consuming, and required skill.²² Nor for that matter could many families afford mass-produced goods. Many tasks like laundry and cleaning remained demanding.

Women's recollections also confirm what Oakley and Luxton found in their studies of housewives and housework. The dichotomy of satisfaction with child-caring, coupled with frustration over monotonous and often thankless housework, echoes throughout the life histories. These women generally accepted their destinies. They expected to hold their jobs for a short time, and then assume full-time responsibility for home and child-care.

Of the women who married in Canada, Corrie was the first to do so in the immediate post-war years. She was twenty-one in 1945 when she married a teacher. Although Corrie had to leave her "second home", the *Free Press*, she continued free-lance reporting. She explained:

. . . we went up north. My husband was teaching up north . . . we ran out of money . . . and then in 1950 we went to the States. We lived down there until '56, my husband taught down there. . . and I worked on a morning newspaper in North Dakota, it was quite interesting.

Barbara: . . . so you took your work while you were married?

Corrie: Oh yes - yes-

She moved with her husband from job to job, going from Winnipeg to northern Manitoba, then to North Dakota and back to Winnipeg. Eventually he retrained as a social worker with the Children's Aid Society. In 1967 they moved to British Columbia where he worked at the Vancouver General Hospital until his retirement in 1988, and she continued her free-lance reporting. When asked whether she had any children, she replied:

Oh yes, well, when we had our first son we came home, [to Canada] and we had two little boys, [and later a girl] and I'm telling you, I can appreciate the working mother's life (laugh), because you've got - - you depend on sitters and just the day you're going to have an important interview or something at work, your sitter doesn't turn up. . . oh, it's just maddening, I mean, you get all the quirks of the children, and the day care, [of which her husband was a director]. . . and everything. . . He [her husband] says it was a very good place, very well-supervised, [but] one son didn't like it. He kept moaning, "I want to sleep in my own bed, I want to stay in my own house". And this kind of thing starts working on your mind, you feel so guilty, "What am I doing chasing my son out of his own bed". (laugh) . . . he said, "Mothers belong at home, especially in the kitchen". Oh my God (laugh) he was so conservative. . . I was working part-time then . . . Susan was in Elementary, and I was working for about three-quarter days with the Registered Nurses [editing a magazine]. But that wasn't good enough, he [her son] wanted me - oh - all the time, he never liked to go anywhere, he liked home. And now he has a woman who doesn't cook . . . I have to laugh when I think of it. You see, my husband took leave and he was back at school and, you know, I had to work. . . somehow we got through it all (laugh) . . . but I don't know what it did for the children.

Her recollections echo feelings of strain and guilt so many women experienced as they juggled the double-day of child-care and work outside the home. In his "Women Paid/Unpaid Work", And Stress, *New Directions for Research*", Lowe points to the interaction between home and the work place that may lead to conflicting roles, responsibilities and expectations. He says that for women, ". . . the role conflicts experienced while trying to juggle competing demands on these different fronts can be very stressful".²³ These recollections confirm that stress.

Yvette also shared with other women feelings of lack of personal fulfillment associated with domestic work. She was twenty-four in 1946 when she married a veteran

of the Canadian Armed Forces. They soon had two sons and one daughter. She confessed that she did not like housework, which she felt was "never-ending", and was always happy to find something else to do. She said:

. . . once we had a family I didn't work. Well, I did odd things sometimes, you know, just for the fun of it . . . I cooked for Meals on Wheels, just little stuff, you know, nothing that I would say, "Gee. I did this".

It is because of her continued dissatisfaction with being tied to the home that her husband later persuaded her to "go back to school", which set her on the path of study with the Open University.

Pat also married in 1946. At the age of twenty-one she became a full-time housewife and mother, bearing three children between 1947 and 1956 and adopting one son. She acknowledged that her husband "helped quite a bit with the children. . . he could bath a baby . . . he loved his children". She recalled with typically mixed feelings both the satisfaction with child-caring and the monotony and isolation of housekeeping:

I didn't work after that. In those days some of us didn't you know. I've often felt it spoilt my whole life. Looking after the needs of others, and not considering what I would even care for . . . I was very satisfied to be a mother . . . look after the children. It is quite a challenge I must say (laugh) . . .

Although her husband's attendance at night school brought his Number 1 Gas Fitter's ticket, which commanded better pay and ensured steady employment, Pat said that:

. . . he seemed to be more free to do that somehow than I did (laugh). . . I stayed in with the children (laugh). . . But I really love education and learning, and you never really stop learning.

In 1969, when Pat was forty-four her husband became a paraplegic, the victim of an industrial accident. Like Corrie, Pat experienced the double work day, as she explained:

. . . he was not capable of going out to work, he really tried, but it was just impossible . . . and so I went to work after the children were a bit older and he was left dependent. . . I think I was too busy to think, you know, I used to get up early and get out the door, and shop on the way home, and make supper, and clean up after supper, and do the laundry - - you know.

She worked in the Vancouver General Post Office sorting mail. She described how this job has become increasingly frustrating:

I started before they put the machines in. But then we worked on the machines afterwards . . . Well, of course, they cut back on staff and that's why we don't get good delivery now. But presently they're trying to change everybody to part-time. You know, just like the stores, everybody's part-time, hired when they're wanted. Well, there's not that much commitment if they're only there when they're called. They really aren't in a steady job, thinking ahead, getting something better. . . they just don't have the same security. If you've always worked at the Post Office and you have a point of pride to clear everything that came in . . . it was a challenge, and it was your responsibility. That's my job to do eh? . . . But if you move people about as they seem to do now, they wanted everybody capable of doing everything so that they could move their work staff around at will in order to be flexible, and to have fewer people. . . I disliked things I wasn't capable of doing well. You could stand there and put your time in, and you still got paid, but you don't do your best unless you've had time to learn it. I think we have all found that. . . We had orders from Ottawa telling us what to do on those machines . . . and they were silly suggestions . . . and they didn't even ask for opinions from the line supervisor. . . it worked out on paper, but not in practice.

Despite her length of service, Pat was initially denied time to look after her husband, now blind and recovering from an operation:

. . . they said. . . "Hire someone to look after him". Well, after forty years of marriage you don't do that. Well I couldn't have afforded it on my pay. The person I would have been hiring would have cost more than I earned, because they were more skilled. . . I was so frustrated and finally my doctor made such a fuss that . . . they had to permit me to have the time off.

Pat's experiences confirm how automation came to the Vancouver Post Office after little consultation with the union, with little understanding of its effects on people. The result was job de-skilling and fragmentation. Part-timers brought into the postal service caused animosity amongst full-timers who felt the use of cheap labour decreased the strength of full-timers. Pat's difficulties in getting leave illustrate the vulnerability, as

noted by Pollock, in the post office as elsewhere, of relatively unskilled female workers.²⁴ Such difficulties also reveal the insensitivity toward the feelings of women who have lived in a long-term marriage. Pat's cry of ". . . after forty years you don't do that. . .", was my answer to the doctor who suggested I leave my aging husband, after he knew that I had experienced a particularly trying time with him.

Thoughts of separation also inform Nell's memories. She was twenty-four in 1952 when she married her boy friend. Six children were born in 1956, 1958, 1960, 1963, 1966 and 1969. During these years the family moved continually between Alberta and British Columbia. Her husband became addicted to alcohol and, as she remembered:

. . . there were many other problems. He didn't help much. . . but then I didn't ask him to, since I was a full-time home-maker for most of our married years. He would help, if requested, but was often drunk in those years, and wasn't much help.

Like other women she recalled the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of child and house-care when she wrote:

I enjoyed my home-making and child-caring years, but when my youngest was in kindergarten and it appeared my husband might never quit drinking, I began to think how I was going to approach my life. I had often thought of leaving him, but where is an uneducated, unskilled woman, with 6 kids going to go, or do? That was when I began to feel frustrated.

In 1974, when her youngest son was in kindergarten, at forty-six years of age, Nell again entered the public work force, taking first a part-time job as a night auditor at a hotel, then as a secretary at the Northern Lights College. Following separation from her husband, and still with two teen-agers to support, she began the university study she had waited for all her adult life.

Twenty-two year-old Pamela also married in 1952. She continued stenographic work until the birth of her first child in 1954, then became a full-time housewife. Her other four children were born in 1956 (twins), 1960 and 1962. She wrote that:

I did not feel I reached my potential at school, but I did enjoy my job at Mutual. After I married I learned to be a good home-maker (although I did not like to cook and, therefore, am not a really good cook). As a child-carer I felt fulfilled and I know excelled. . . I didn't really feel disadvantaged as compared to men. (I don't think there was a strong sense of that in my era), but many times I felt life was unfair. My lifestyle was a daily grind of work without present-day conveniences, and there seemed to be no material or social rewards. But all my female friends were in the same boat. I don't think we ever discussed (until years later) that we all shared the feeling of not accounting for much.

Her recollections echo other women's sense of satisfaction with child-care, but dissatisfaction with the monotony and often drudgery of home-care.

Circumstances could, however, change. Nance was initially able to enjoy a successful combination of a marital and business partnership: after eight years she faced divorce. As she explained:

. . . my husband decided that he preferred another woman's company and . . . that kind of ended the marriage. And then I had to work full time.

In 1947, in order to avoid contact with her ex-husband, she moved with her young children to join a female friend in Hamilton, Ontario. The divorce agreement to provide subsistence for the children was not honoured, and she assumed full responsibility for herself and three sons. This did not work out. She recalled:

. . . the only way I could keep - manage - because I was so concerned about the two little ones, was to let him have the two younger ones back. And he immediately gave one away, and kept the other one. . . then I only had the eldest one, David stayed with me. . . I really became almost like two people. I was so busy, working . . . trying to keep my emotional interests together, trying to learn and improve myself.

She supported herself and her remaining son by secretarial work first at the Hamilton Visitor and Convention Board, then the Hamilton Touring Fund. She remarried in 1952, her "boss" at the Touring fund, and continued her work outside the home. In 1966 she changed jobs, first becoming secretary to the Librarian, and later to the Dean of Social

Science Studies at McMaster University. Her work at McMaster gave Nance a second chance to obtain a university education.

In 1968, when she was forty-eight, she was allowed time off work to take courses:

. . . and that's when I really got into my degree studies. I qualified - took the university entrance exam. . . and I never felt that I was qualified until I took that university entrance.

She commenced studying sociology and anthropology, hoping to gain knowledge of relationships among different ethnic groups. She had been disturbed about the fate of Native Indian children in British Columbia, when she heard that at that time many were being taken from isolated villages and put into residential schools, or boarding homes that "were sometimes not very suitable". When her second husband died in 1971 Nance once again abandoned a university education. She put aside her courses at McMaster, sold the house in Hamilton, moved to Campbell River on Vancouver Island, to open a boarding home for Native children. It was a rewarding change:

I found after about five years that every one of these little guys that came into my home grew into my heart, and every time they left, it was like a part of my heart.

Now over seventy years of age, in addition to her studies with the Open University, Nance devotes her life to the North Vancouver Island Native people. Living on the Reserve, under the care of her last "boarder", she has worked with the Saanichton School Board as Council Component Coordinator, Research Trainer, Secretary and Treasurer, at the Campbell River Historical Society Museum, or with the British Columbia Non-status Indians and the women on the Reserve. Although physically not strong she has retained her individual spirit. To be able to put together a dialogue between Indians and non-Indians, based on her life-long experiences, forms the motive for her present studies for a degree from the Open University.

Micky, who married in 1944 and had one son born "shortly after W.W.II in Germany on the long trek to Austria", also remembered the double day. She wrote: "I worked every waking minute of my life, either helping raise my sisters - or working with my husband". On the other hand, working in a family business and raising a family, left her feeling fulfilled, challenged, accepted in her own right. She maintained good relations with co-workers and later her own employees, some of whom are still friends.

Neither Erica nor Mary married. When asked whether she regretted not marrying and having a family, Erica said:

. . . well, it's hard to answer that . . . one takes one's academic, work-related sort of line. One makes one's choices, and if that's the way it turns out . . . if Mr. Right had happened to come along and was available and so on, things might have been different.

Mary was more direct in her reply:

. . . they wanted me to be "fruitful and multiply" always nagging me to marry. . . and I don't want to marry for the sake of it, nor do I believe in great passion necessarily. . . I do feel guilty about it, but I wasn't that noble. But I think they're very noble, [married women] and I think they've been taken along for a ride, I really do . . . And I think marriage is for the benefit of the man . . . oh, they get so much out of marriage.

Although single, with the economic advantage of her lifetime career as an internal medicine specialist, Erica was able to retire in 1988 at fifty-five. Trapped in a job-ghetto, Mary still worked in an office when she was sixty, finding increasing difficulties in coping with administrative and technological changes. As I approached my fifties and sixties, I had to contend with similar difficulties in the court system.

The women of this thesis are strong women. From differing family backgrounds they coped with, and overcame, the disadvantages and limited opportunities they faced, as women, first in family and school during their childhood years, and then in their work both outside and inside the home. It can be argued that Corrie, Erica, and I individually

realized lifetime fulfillment in our paid work, as did Micky, Pamela, and for a limited time Nance, when they worked beside their husbands. It can also be argued that the majority of those who married found personal satisfaction particularly in caring for their children. However, notwithstanding such gratification, these women's recollections generally reflect the tedium of menial, low-paid jobs, followed by the monotony and isolation of house and child-care, or juggling the responsibilities of the double day, faced by many Canadian women at this time. As Oakley and Luxton found in their studies of housewives and housework, the dichotomy of satisfaction with child-caring coupled with frustration over monotonous and often thankless housework, echoed throughout the memories of the women here. Their destinies were governed by the premise that men's work and women's work are distinct. As women rightfully belong in the private, unpaid, workplace of the home, in the public labour force, opportunity and payment for men's work take precedence over women's work. Such inequality followed these women into their marriages. They found that the needs or wishes of husbands, as family supporters, took precedence over their own. Even when supporting family dependents they still faced the responsibilities of the double working day in both the public and private work places. Lack of finances, opportunity, and lack of time now generally precluded any hopes of university education. The next chapter explores how distance learning brought them nearer to the fulfillment of life-long hopes.

END NOTES

1. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto, Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work*. Revised Ed. p. 201.
2. Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, p. 7.
3. Light and Pierson, *No Easy Road, Women in Canada 1920's to 1960s*, p. 24.
4. Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, p. 23.
5. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*, p. 303.
6. *Ibid*, p. 311.
7. Pierson, "They're Still Women After All", p. 215.
8. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*, p. 311.
9. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, p. 22.
10. Stainsby, "It's the Smell of Money': Women Shoreworkers of British Columbia", p. 90.
11. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*, p. 302.
12. Pierson, "They're Still Women After All".
13. Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, p. 53.
14. As the authors of *Canadian Women* point out (pp. 324-325), a study as late as 1965 showed that parents considered "nursing, teaching and social work to be the best occupations for their daughters...medicine, engineering, science, architecture, the law, and business for their sons".
15. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*. p. 290.
16. Light and Pierson, *No Easy Road*, p. 19.
17. See R.K. Webb, *Modern England, Second Edition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 583.
18. Prentice et al, *Canadian Women*, p. 311.
19. *Ibid*, p. 314.

20. *Ibid*, pp. 307-309.
21. *The Double Ghetto*, p. 66.
22. See Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love* and *Oakley Women's Work. The Housewife Past and Present*.
23. Graham S. Lowe, *Background Paper, "Women Paid/Unpaid Work, And Stress, New Directions for Research"* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, March, 1989), p. 11.
24. See Pollock, "Sorting the Mail", *Hard Earned Wages, Women Fighting for Better Work*, p. 95.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Still 'In The Middle of Life', Where It's Going On, Not Left Behind." Finally Getting The Degree By Distance Learning.

This chapter examines the actual words of the women as they recalled their life-time educational aspiration and unsuccessful early attempts to attain higher education. Doubts about their ability to "go to school again" as older persons helps explain enrollment with the British Columbia Open University. Analysis of the life-histories reveals the satisfactions, as well as certain dissatisfactions, with isolated study at home as compared to a class-room environment. Finally a sense of joy and self-fulfillment becomes clear as this small group of women at last discover they have the power to realize their potential. At over sixty years of age they have found through distance learning the opportunity for the university degree they had thought was beyond their reach.¹

Of the women here, Erica was the only one to have the early opportunity to attend university, where she became a doctor. Mary spent most of her adult life taking random courses, at first as she said for "therapy", and only later with any degree in view. Other women when they were over forty or fifty years old also made sporadic, and unsuccessful, attempts to complete university or college education prior to enrolling with the Open University. Nance, for example, commenced studies at McMaster University in Ontario before she moved to British Columbia. Yvette attended Malaspina College on Vancouver Island, Pamela briefly took courses at Dalhousie University, and Micky at the University of Calgary. Nell took advantage of her job at Northern Lights College and studied there as well as the University of Victoria in British Columbia, both on campus and by distance. However, attempts were generally hampered by family ties, economic factors, and

difficulties of access. Only Pat, Corrie and I were without any prior attempts at higher learning when we enrolled in the degree programme of the Open University when we were over sixty.²

Reasons for finally seeking a degree through distance learning seem plain enough. Nance, Micky, and Erica had already experienced study in a university setting. They now wished to put into perspective a life-time accumulation of knowledge and experience. Corrie, Yvette, Pat, Pamela and I had found the time and opportunity to fulfill, in their own homes, girlhood dreams of higher learning. Nell and Mary seem to have stumbled on the Open University degree programme in their search for courses through other institutions, and have now completed their degrees. For whatever reason, however, in seeking a degree each woman found fulfillment and personal satisfaction. Analysis of the life histories will commence with the women who took courses before they enrolled with the Open University, and the reasons why they did not attain their goals. Recollections reveal older women's hesitations on embarking on studies at university level, their motives for enrollment in the degree programme, and their surprise at success. Finally, an examination will be made of the advantages, and certain disadvantages, of studying at home by distance compared to in a campus setting.

Of the women who had attempted higher education over the years after leaving school, Nance had already taken many non-credit courses, "you know, certificate things where you go for a week, or a day, or a month", including such unrelated studies as 'Community Councils', 'Fine Arts and the Recreation Movement', a 'Newspaper Institute' course, and Psychology. Like others she stressed the importance of learning in her life:

. . .there never has been a time that I haven't been studying something. Or if there has, it's been a matter of a few months . . . like when my children were small, or when I was really very, very ill or something traumatic had happened. When people say, "Oh, you're too old, what are you doing this for?" I don't even think about it. Learning has been part of my being, my daily routine. . . something that you just do .

She had initially given up studying sociology and anthropology at McMaster in 1971 when she moved to British Columbia to devote herself to the North Vancouver Island native people. Between 1983 and 1986 she absorbed herself entirely in independent study, primarily as "a kind of preliminary to doing deeper university work", on the origins of folk law. She said that she read widely, and "then they gave a break to seniors", and she enrolled in the Open University in 1986. Despite a stroke, and suffering from spinal arthritis, at sixty-five she still exhibited the independent spirit of childhood, although motivations for studying had changed from her teen-age years when she had to graduate from school and enter the work force. As she said:

. . .my motivation is to try and finish what I've started. I know a lot. . . values that I see in a way that have not been written down anywhere. . . in Indian relations. . . it seems to me that I should be getting some of this down and sharing with non-native people. In the native tradition the elders are highly respected, the women as well as the men . . . you don't go to them, you know, and say they're old. They are the people that you go to for answers. . . wisdom. . . the older native women are encyclopedias of information and experience and knowledge . . . so this is reflected in some of my attitudes.

Nance stressed the fallacy of the myth of being too old to learn:³

. . .as you grow older your interests go deeper and you are more confident . . . this is a very important point for the older student . . . you already have a lot on the shelf of your mind that you don't have to sit down and dig out of a book, the way the younger student does. . . and you know, if anybody says "Old people are stupid and they're slow", I think statistics would make it a little difficult for them to prove that, you go to the heart of the matter . . . you're not worried about, "How am I going to feel, or how are people going to react to it, is my mother going to be disappointed?". You are your own judge. . . all the extraneous things you just put them out of the way . . . and I think that may be one of the advantages of the older person.

After leaving school Nance continued study activities during most of her adult life.

On the other hand, it never occurred to Yvette when she was younger to go to night classes:

I probably didn't know I could. . . at that age I wasn't thinking along those lines, you know . . . you just thought about making some money, you didn't think so much about getting ahead.

However, her husband had always been supportive and in 1979, when she was fifty-seven, he saw that she was still restless and suggested that she enroll at Malaspina College, close to where they lived on Vancouver Island:

I guess I was feeling kind of antsy [sic] you know the feeling, you feel like you should be doing something, you feel like you can do something. . . he knew I was interested in taking courses.

At Malaspina she again experienced the class-room environment she had not known since a child. As she said:

. . .my [youngest] daughter was through school at the time and she stayed home and did everything while I went to school . . . and, oh, I was scared because I had no idea what I could do . . . and the first day they give you a placement test on English and Socials and that and, of course, all these High School students, finished high school, were sitting there and I took this test and I came out with ninety-five percent, and I guess I could do it. . . well, you know how long it was since I had been to school . . . I hadn't finished school . . . when I saw the list of courses at the college, it was just like being at a banquet. I really loaded my plate.

Yvette echoed Nance's discovery of the fallacy of "being too old" to learn when she said:

. . .I thought the students were wonderful. They never, never, made me feel that I was different from them. It wasn't until I went and looked in the mirror and realized that I was an old person . . . and that's why I always told anybody who thought about going, for goodness sakes, don't feel that they're going to make you feel different, because they don't.

Based on my own experience on campus at Simon Fraser University in preparation for this thesis, I can sympathize with Yvette's trepidation at attending classes with younger

students. I had never studied on campus, and had not been in a class-room setting for over sixty years. I too was scared but, like Yvette, my fears were unfounded.

To return to Yvette's memories, after attending Malaspina College until 1985, she received a certificate equivalent to two years of university, with majors in Psychology and Business Administration. To obtain a degree, however, required university attendance, so she said:

I went to U.Vic. [University of Victoria] once and one of the professors. . . said "We would love you to come down, but you should really come in person and stay down here and enroll". . . And at that time I would have to find a place to live down there and that would be expensive. You know, I don't know anybody anymore. I did at one time - to pay sort of room and board to.

She therefore transferred her college credits to the Open University degree programme, enrolling in 1985 at the age of sixty-three.

When asked what her friends thought of her study activities, Yvette shared other women's reluctance to discuss their learning activities with acquaintances. She said that one of her friends felt that she should definitely finish, ". . . if I ever tell her that I haven't really done anything with my life, she says, "yes you have"". On the other hand, Yvette added:

My other friend (laugh) she kids me all the time. She says, "You tell me this, you know everything". (laugh) I never, never discuss any serious thing with them. Even if I sit and answer the questions on *Jeopardy*, they'll look at me (laugh).

I can understand, but not entirely explain, this reluctance to discuss study activities which recurs throughout the recollections of the women interviewed. When I enrolled in the Open University degree programme, like other women here, I found invaluable support from most friends and relatives (except from my husband). However, among a few older friends and casual acquaintances, I sensed an unspoken feeling that I was "bragging", or a "smart-aleck". Maybe there was envy that they had not brushed aside the

myth of declining mental capabilities in old age, as I had. Perhaps a vestige remained of the old class barrier between the so-called "educated" middle class, and "uneducated" working class. I do not know.

Micky may supply one answer to this question. She was, of course, born and educated in Germany. The exigencies of war had deprived her of university study, and while there she was fully occupied in surviving. After coming to Canada she was a wife and mother until 1967 when, at forty-two years of age, an interest in the use of meditation for stress release in elderly or long-term ill patients, prompted her to enroll at the University of Calgary with a view to a degree in Psychology. Like Nance and Erica, Micky wished to broaden and update her life-time's knowledge. However, six years later her plans for furthering her education became fruitless. Her husband moved the family business from Alberta to British Columbia. Micky reflected that she was:

. . . very lost without any such involvement. Did community work . . . and found O.L.I. [Open Learning Institute] in 1983. I have never really stopped learning something or other. I started before and shelved at times for family reasons. This time I am not to be deterred. I think I have learned so much from a very busy and practical life I want to put a few things into academic perspective for myself and for some of my students [at her private courses on stress] who are mostly health professionals.

This was not always easy. Her description of the attitude of some of her family and friends towards her learning so late in life, provides one answer to my question:

My son thinks it's ridiculous to do something. He is so glad to have finished. My daughter-in-law thinks I am plain crazy . . . my single friends (mostly retired) admire me. Those on the "self-developing" circuit don't comment much, but allow me my path. The married couples snigger and think I want to "be better" or prove something - maybe to my father - maybe because I'm an immigrant - and maybe they are right, but I'm happy.

Whatever others thought of her endeavours, however, Micky persevered. She successfully finished her course work and will receive her Bachelor of Arts degree from the Open University in the spring of 1995.

Like Nance and Micky, Mary also had struggled to learn throughout her adult life. She called herself "an education nut", and had relied on taking random university and college courses, mainly by distance. As she described her experience:

. . . there was something that disciplined me, channeled my mind towards that. . . Liberal Arts. . . I call them useless things, in other words you can't make a living on it, but the things did really mean a lot to me . . . always taking courses, when other people were out in the sunshine getting tanned and having nice weekends, I was scratching away with pen, taking course after course from Victoria . . . I took Pelmanism of all things, to exert the memory, from England . . . I used to say that I was greedy for knowledge. . .

Like other women, she was conscious of others' negative feelings towards her learning activities. As she said:

I am a loner, but I do live in a cognitive vacuum. . . when at work sometimes I just comment on something, and they don't know what on earth I'm talking about. I am not better than them. It's just that . . . it makes me feel a bit odd when I mention words, or terms or concepts to them .

Despite such reservations in 1986, at fifty-five, as a result of these random courses from colleges and universities, Mary received a Bachelor of General Studies degree from Simon Fraser University. She described her experience:

. . . in my navy-blue and white things. . . and they had one piper . . . and then they had the pipe band and everything else. But, oh, I am so proud.

After receiving this degree she continued her studies by enrolling with the Open University, and took several credit courses. In 1991, when she was sixty, she was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree.

Nell also had studied on campus before enrolling with the Open University. She waited until she was forty-eight years of age and separated from her husband before she commenced work as a secretary at the Northern Lights College. There she enrolled in a psychology course which was, as she wrote:

. . . purely for interest. But I got hooked on learning and kept taking university transfer courses at N.L.C. [Northern Lights College] until I had my first two years, and then went to Univ. of Victoria summer school for two summers. When I was taking summer school at U. Vic. in 1983 & 1984, my goal was a B.A., in sociology. Unfortunately, they required attendance at University for the 4th year and, newly separated with two teenagers to support this was beyond my means. At that time Open University was getting under way and I enrolled for a U. B. C. [University of British Columbia] correspondence course through the Open University. It was a course in their (U.B.C.) Diploma in Adult Education, and I would be able to take 6 of the courses by Distance Education, so it seemed like a good thing to do. It was basically the only option I had. At that time Open U. still had a requirement for a thesis-type course in order to get a degree (by this time I had enough credits) and I had just started on that, a Directed Study in Family Life Education, when they discontinued that requirement, and notified me that I had received the degree.

Unlike other women, Nell found a positive attitude towards her studies. She wrote that her children "were/are proud of me - friends and acquaintances have felt inspired by my struggle to educate myself". Indeed, the degree from the Open University resulted in Nell being accepted into the University of Victoria's Master of Education in School Counseling programme:

. . . a two-summers on campus, with directed study via off campus learning between the summers, which I completed last year [1990] . . . I have just finished the 10th and last course (via. correspondence) in the U.B.C. diploma program which I had put on hold when I entered the M.Ed.

Nell successfully completed this programme. She now enjoys her job as counselor at Northern Lights College.

Nell approached her university studies when she was forty-eight "purely for interest". On the other hand, like Nance and Micky, Erica had a definite motive for entering the Open University degree programme. She enrolled in 1988, when she was sixty, with a view to updating her knowledge of psychology and sociology. As a member of the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security in Ottawa, now disbanded, and the Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, she wanted to "get into peace

issues" to find how people and societies responded to conflict. She explained that she wished to explore:

. . . how important cultural aspects are, and all these kinds of aspects. I missed an awful lot of that because it wasn't taught when I was going through university. I have picked up bits and pieces about Freud or Jung . . . but I have no structured basic knowledge of psychology, so I thought I'll study these things and then I'll be able to relate what I'm finding out to what's already known . . . and I have found that I can put a different perspective on some of the discussions of the Ottawa Board because of my immediate contact with these basic subjects, as opposed to having had them twenty years ago and forgotten . . . some of these basic concepts are very central to the issues we're discussing.

I have always been, of course, being a specialist . . . at all times reading, keeping up to date, so that one never stops being academic to a degree, if you're a specialist, one is developing all the time.

When asked if she had felt the trauma of suddenly going back to "learning and doing exams", she replied:

. . . the difference was I was doing it for credits so I made sure I learned it. The reading I had been doing on my own, of course, looking up a case or something . . . just relative enough to know well enough from my own point of view, but I wasn't trying to pass an exam on it . . . I bashed it into the old head. I did get A's so that's all right.

There is no doubt that her previous academic and professional accomplishments gave Erica good resources of confidence when it came to tackling new courses.

Things were not so easy for Pamela who, at fifty years of age, made an effort to study French. She took a course at Dalhousie, but finally gave up "after many wasted hours". In 1989, however, at fifty-nine, she decided to take a history correspondence course. She and her husband had traveled extensively in Europe, both for business and pleasure, and as she wrote:

. . . my only regret during these wonderful trips is that I didn't have a better knowledge of the history around me. The nuns in elementary school taught me to spell accurately, to have good penmanship, and to recite a lot of catechism, but teaching history entailed a lot of memorizing of dates and marking of explorer's routes on maps. It was so boring . . . I have always felt I had huge gaps in my understanding of history . . . I went to the library for information, and discovered the world of Open Learning available to me from B.C. I realized that I

could work towards a degree in the kind of setting that would be comfortable to me. I could set my own hours, take books when I traveled and give myself an exciting new interest. I started out with English 100 in order to learn to write a formal essay.

Halifax has five universities, and I have lived the past twenty years adjacent to two of the campuses. Why didn't I avail myself of these? Other things got in the way, children, our business, my pursuit of a clean and tidy house, travel. Mostly, it was my old fear of the class-room situation.

Until she got a B result on her first course, she was reluctant to tell her children that she had started "working towards a degree so late in life". Such worries proved needless.

Family members are giving her encouragement:

They are pleased that, so far, I have had good grades. . . . My husband has always encouraged me in doing whatever I have done. He believes in me and would be happy to have me meet my goals. I have still not told any of my friends. I'll wait till I get much further along to tell them. It's just not something I want to be constantly asked about.

Notwithstanding this early reluctance to share her experiences with her friends, like the other women here, she persevered.

Other women had been on campus to study, but until entering the Open University degree programme neither Corrie, Pat, nor I, had taken either college or university courses. Corrie enrolled in 1982 when she was fifty-eight. As she said:

I was free-lancing and I heard about O.L.I. and I thought that if it was possible that I could get ahead, and actually I've done pretty well . . . at my age, and I've found it very interesting. Not honours or anything, but I've got A's and B's and C's.

She also faced criticism from her family for starting studies so late in life:

. . . they said, "Why don't you just relax and enjoy life?" (laugh). . . they just couldn't see why I would want to. "What are you going to do with it Mom?" . . . I mean, it's true you're not going to get a career out of it, but I've learned a lot since taking courses that I wouldn't have.⁴

Although her life no longer centered round the care of and at times the financial support of the family, it was still governed by her husband's activities. She put it this way:

Now, since my husband retired my schedules got all mixed up, with two or three courses a year, like in the fall and the spring, and then we'd go to our cabin in Manitoba . . . now that he's retired we go there for two or three months and it's impossible to take courses, you know. . . you've got to get assignments done and exams on time. I used to take my stuff with me when we just went for three weeks, and I'd do my studying there. And my grandson is not doing well at school, very low motivation, "What are you studying for Grandma?" (laugh). . . but it worked out fine. . . and then it got all mixed up the last few years . . . and now I'm afraid I'll never finish . . . I've got a long way to go.

Her fears of not finishing were confirmed when she had to take chemotherapy treatments.

When I talked to her in the summer of 1991 she said "I could not sign up for September because I'd got treatments . . . and I was so disappointed." Her husband told me later that she had intended to enroll with the Open University for the 1992 Spring semester.

Unhappily Corrie suddenly collapsed and died in early January 1992. Her husband then echoed her earlier observations, "She would have finished, you know", he said, "if we had not spent so much time at the cottage in the summer months since my retirement".

Like Corrie, Pat had not attended college or university since leaving school.

However, she enrolled in the Open University degree programme in 1980 when she was fifty-five, and still working at the Post Office. She took one course at a time and from one to three a year, depending on the state of her husband's health. She was particularly interested in sociology and history:

. . . it filled a space for me because I wasn't able to go out too much anymore, after he was handicapped . . . I've got seventy credits, so I have come two years, but it's taken me ten years (laugh). . . I liked it because it's physical work at the Post Office, you don't just sit on a chair, you know . . . and when I got home I didn't want to go out again . . . you could go to the high school, or anywhere, and take night courses, but I didn't want to go out again. . . it suited my needs. . . at that time.

When asked about the attitude of other people towards her study activities she replied:

. . . the people at work knew I was doing it. . . they thought I was a bit strange (laugh) because . . . I would sit in a corner with my books and eat a sandwich rather than go up to the lunch room . . . And many people said, "Well, what are

you taking and what are you going to . . .", they thought a career change, you know, and at my age that wasn't . . . I'd be fifty-five, nowadays that's retirement age isn't it? . . . and when I said. . . I was just learning it because I wanted to learn it, they think you're dotty (laugh) . . . why would anybody go through all this for nothing, you know.

Despite such reactions, like the other women here, she still persevered.

Whatever their feelings about the opinions of friends and relatives, these women were fortunate to have their partners' support. While family moves caused by husbands' job changes may have interrupted some study patterns, no physical opposition occurred. However, sociologist Faith (1988)⁵ points out that this was not the case for all women striving to improve their education by distance learning. Extreme cases of spousal opposition can occur to sabotage educational ambitions, such as damaging study materials and assignments, or refusing needs for quiet study time. I found that after enrolling with the Open University here, my husband's increasing sickness, and increasing opposition to my studies, brought mounting disruption of my learning activities. Constant verbal abuse and throwing books about are not conducive to quiet study.

Notwithstanding obstacles in their path, all the women of this study continued to struggle. Corrie, of course, was not ultimately able to get her degree, but when I interviewed Nell and Mary they had already graduated from the Open University. Micky has achieved her goal, while Nance, Pat and Erica continued taking one or two courses a year. Because of part-time work Yvette missed two semesters, but planned to continue. Pamela still had not overcome her fear of the class-room but wrote later that, "When I work up the courage. . . I do plan on getting the lecture-room experience at some point, perhaps this spring".

When these women were asked about their reflections on distance education, many echoed those of older students enrolled in the Open University in Great Britain.⁶ I can join

the Canadians here in saying that the major advantages of study at home were the convenience and flexibility of time to take courses, and the saving of time and expenditure in attending campus. It is also significant to note that those women who had previously attended a university or college, even for a short period, although succeeding in home study still missed the sociability of a campus setting.

In describing the advantages to her of learning at home, Pat particularly appreciated the alternate starting dates offered by the British Columbia Open University, rather than three fixed semesters:

. . . because the Post Office was so busy at Christmas, and if you've got your test, and preparing for Christmas, and you're working in this high-pressure, over-time (laugh) sort of thing I always felt the Christmas rush was too much . . . to have your exam just two weeks before Christmas. I feel that Open Learning, even if there's a . . . course that you're going to need and it isn't there this semester, it will roll around and come up before, you know . . . it's too late. I had this idea that you had to do 100 and then 101. . . and the Sociology of the Family interested me, but that was a 400 level . . . but [one of my tutors in sociology] said, "Go for it . . . I'll recommend that you be allowed to take it . . . because I know you can do it" . . . he really encouraged me . . . I took 400 and did fine, got an A.

Although she had never attended a college or university with a campus, Pat realized distance education could not replace campus instruction in all ways when she said:

. . . I think that a person who learns well from reading anyway, some people do better with lectures and that sort of thing, but I like the reading. I can pick up from reading . . . I know I'm not a joiner. . . I think you should make yourself do some of it, you know, but I am . . . perfectly happy all alone . . . I don't feel upset. And then there's a bit of confusion in the class room, and they run over things . . . that's what you miss in the Open Learning setting where you're sitting at home, you don't get the feed-back. But I had a friend at work . . . could have been my daughter . . . taking courses at U.B.C. . . . open night classes . . . and we would discuss the course I was taking, and she would tell me about her course, and when you . . . say it to someone, I think it sort of reinforces it in your mind, especially if they ask you a question and you have to think back (laugh).

Nell, who had experienced campus study, agreed with Pat. She wrote that she:

. . . enjoyed the correspondence courses and the convenience of them, although I did miss the class context. Because I only took a few correspondence courses, it was fine, but I think it would be rather lonely to take all of your re-education that way. Instructors often have much personal experience to offer, so distance education might be a bit more, shall I say "confining", or just not so broad as that provided in an interaction setting.

Micky and Yvette reiterated the potential disadvantage of isolated home study.

Micky felt that:

O.L.I. has definitely filled a vacuum in my life. . .it allowed me to further my plans towards a goal. . . . At times I want O.L.I. and study at my desk at my own time. Other times I am glad to have the stimulation of the campus here. So I guess O.L.I. serves an important part but is not necessarily the only choice I would take (or make). . . I like to work (cogitate) by myself but also find personal lectures here a great stimulation. I miss most of all fellow students to chat, compare, etc.

Furthermore, Yvette found certain courses difficult to do at home:

The last course I took from U.B.C. on the brain, I found it awfully hard to do by myself . . . it was just too hard, that's all. I just felt that I needed a bit more reinforcement on it . . . just reading it, you need to hear things too. To have somebody there telling you, you know, to clarify it. I could not quite get it. . . why I took the brain because there were six credits (laugh). I thought. . . I'll get those six credits and then I'll be well ahead, but it didn't work out like that.

As this reflection indicates, achieving the one hundred and twenty credits required for a degree proved a challenge for most of the women here.

Other factors also helped explain educational preferences. For example, Nance appreciated the convenience of home study because of her "physical limitations":

. . . by the time I would travel to the University of Victoria, and trek across the campus, climb steps to classes, I would be half worn out and ready to fall asleep or just groaning with discomfort, so that the physical transporting of my person to the class-room is not too feasible right now. . . you can develop more individuality in studying at home. . . you could go way off tangent, but usually your tutor will draw you back. If you're in a class . . . you have a tendency to follow. . . their lead and when you are learning in isolation you have the tendency to follow your own curiosity. . . creativeness.

Nance had not lost the need to express her individuality which had governed her life.

Of the women here, Nance best reflected my satisfaction, as an older woman, with learning at home. When I ultimately attended campus for graduate studies, I found that, without a car, access was either time-consuming by public transport, or costly by taxi. Hearing and sight problems limited full advantage of lectures and seminar discussions. After struggling through ten years of home study, I had become attuned to "learning" in isolation, from printed rather than oral lectures, and from reading. Although I appreciated social contact and support from other students, class-room participation often seemed to me to be distracting.

Although several women missed the stimulation of the class-room setting they, with few exceptions, appreciated the telephone services offered by the Open University, such as tutors and the use of the library facilities at Simon Fraser University. I share Nance's positive evaluation of the Open University's telephone tutorial service. She compared this to her experience when she took correspondence courses from the Western University of Ontario. Then she could write, "and they would give me information, but it was correspondence only, you couldn't phone them up and discuss . . .". She felt, however, that students must be specific about the answers they want from their tutors:

. . . get down to specifics and make sure that you have the page number . . . and if you want to run on a small conversation with the tutors, you are using that tutor's time and yours, but you still want to have a sense of warmth and friendship . . . oh . . . I would have loved to have met all my tutors and had them in for tea, and I'm sorry when courses are over, that's the way I feel about all the tutors.

Nance appreciated that she was treated "like everyone else". She said:

You're not put down as "old Mrs. Dilletante" - elderly diletante taking a course. You are a full legitimate student, studying biology or whatever.

With certain reservations, Pat agreed that she also had excellent tutors:

I really think the tutors make a big difference. Most of them are people that love to teach, especially love to teach people that are isolated, or trying to do something on their own, you know, not just the kid out of high school that has to go there in order to get a job, but people that want to learn . . . I could sense in the tutors that they found pleasure in that. . . My first assignment, I don't think I got that good a mark, by my present standards, maybe seventy-five, or seventy-nine . . . I thought - wow - I was really expecting something a lot worse . . . that first English course I took was excellent for me, because my tutor taught me to write an essay . . . very nicely, and with lots of encouragement . . . that's what gave me good marks on other courses, her training in the essay writing.

However, she disagreed with Nance's opinion of equal treatment by all tutors when she said:

. . . well I felt that some of the tutors, that they thought. "Oh yes, this little old lady", you know (laugh) "Trying to get a degree", and they were sort of tolerant. But I just felt something, although they were never directly discouraging . . . in my imagination, you know, there is that little thing . . . funny old woman, you know, with old fashioned weird ideas. . .

Pat's opinion is supported by comments Kelly received during his studies of older learners in the Open University programme in Great Britain. He found no downright ageism, but the feeling by some older students that they were not taken seriously by younger tutors, "for reasons which - rightly or wrongly - they believed were age-related".⁷

Other women had reservations about specific tutors. Corrie liked all except one. I think I may have had the same one, as she echoed my opinion when she said:

. . . he was so picky and making so sarcastic remarks and what not, so in the end on my last assignment I gave him a sarcastic remark (laugh) I thought, "What a nut case". So I'm glad I never got him again, but most of them I liked them and they're very helpful on the phone.

Although Pamela had not yet had a lot of "tutor-experience", she also had one tutor who did not "do a good job on marking assignments (not enough comments good or bad)".

Micky was guarded when she wrote that "tutors are different, but most are very helpful, some go out of their way".

Several women preferred to use local college libraries, once they had mastered the computer systems, rather than the facilities through the Open University from Simon Fraser University. On the other hand, I share Nance and Pat's appreciation of this service, especially the helpfulness of the librarian at Simon Fraser who forwarded the materials to Open University students. As Pat said:

. . . the person that I really appreciated was Barbara Webb . . . oh, I was going to start a Barbara Webb fan club there. I'm sure it would get lots of members in a minute. She was so helpful wasn't she?

Nance echoed this feeling:

. . . oh yes, my treasure. . . oh everybody's I'm sure . . . if it's there, she'll get it for you . . . and if there are print-outs that you want, she will allow you to keep them if you're going to use them for a future paper.

Like older students at the Open University in Great Britain, the Canadians, including myself, relied on good essay writing to offset difficulty in taking examinations.⁸ I still remember my terror on opening the first examination paper here in 1980: I had not seen one since I wrote the Oxford in Great Britain. in 1930. However, I agree with Pamela, who wrote that although she also found that the examinations still made her "quite nervous":

. . . once I have read them over and have made a start, they have all gone quite well. I have better results from my essays. I just completed American History 231, and had six straight A's on the assignments. . . My next exam will be written at Armbrae Academy, a private school. One of the pupils is my six-year-old granddaughter. The principal is delighted to arrange this for me. He feels I am a good role model!

Corrie also found the examinations "very stressful". She said that:

I don't remember everything as well- - at least I don't remember where I put things yesterday . . . and sometimes I think, "I knew that, now why didn't I put that down?" Yet your mind goes sort of blank . . . You see, what I rely on is good marks on essays, and then it makes an insurance if you forget things on the exam . . . so that I don't fail.

On the other hand, Micky considered examinations unnecessary. Although she thought they were "fair", she felt that three hours were too long. She wrote that on "senior courses":

. . . students should be known . . . by consistent performance during the term and not pulled through long finals. . . [O.L.I.] has thoroughly trained me to write essays (I am helpless in multiple choice and do poorly in them).

Fears of examinations may also be voiced by younger students, but nerves, physical disabilities, or shorter memory span may prove greater anxieties for older entrants such as the women here.

Several of the women shared my pleasure in looking forward to receiving and working on new courses, and the satisfaction in the broader view of life now opening with the studies.⁹ As Yvette said:

I just love to see all those books and things coming, don't you? You can hardly wait to get into them . . . in fact when it didn't come I phoned Vancouver, "Where is it?" . . . oh yes it's better than Christmas, the thing goes on, and on and on.

She added that she had gained self-confidence:

You can't afford to fluff off, it has to be done on a regular basis . . . once you get your brain right into it, you have to do it . . . I hate the phone ringing . . . and time slips by so fast. Suddenly you realize you haven't even made supper or anything like that . . . this is the thing. You don't know until you start looking, and when you start it just rolls on and on, and then you know it's all out there, and you sit there and think, "I don't know anything", you know, and there it all is, why don't I know it?"

Pamela shared Yvette's pleasure at receiving the course material. She wrote:

It's funny you should ask about the impact of the arrival of these packages has on me, I just can't wait to get them open and take a look - - more exciting than Christmas. . . My self-esteem has been enhanced, somehow I always knew I could understand these things if I tried, and I'm pleased with myself that I am finally doing it. . . Already the whole historical picture is beginning to fall in place in my mind. I have also found studying psychology has broadened my interest in understanding and reading about this discipline, and studying philosophy has made me think a lot differently about the ethics involved in everyday moral questions.

I have been struck by how much longer it takes me to read a newspaper - - something concerning my studies keeps jumping out at me. Everything seems to connect to something else, like a big jigsaw puzzle I'm very much enjoying. . .

When my children were going to University, I was never jealous of them. But every year as Dalhousie and St. Mary's Universities opened for a new year . . . when I would see the students crossing the campuses laden with their books, I used to feel a real pang of "something missed or lost". I won't ever feel that emotion again as long as I keep going!

Pat was asked if studying for a degree had done anything for her, and agreed with the other women when she said that:

. . . for one thing it gave me a bit of confidence. I always thought I was sort of dumb (laugh) and when I got good marks that was an encouragement, you know. . I don't have any grandiose opinions about myself, I'm not saying that I feel that brilliant, but I don't feel sub-standard, let's say. It's good for you . . . it takes a lot of effort . . but you do it for pleasure.

Micky also found pleasure and enhanced self-esteem in her studies. She wrote that:

I realize the personal satisfaction I get on A's and B's here and there. It shows me I'm ambitious. That's a surprise at my age, but without it I would be a social parrot . . . To have to make a decision, to keep up with a discipline, to know there are choices and I must discriminate is the personal growth aspect.

The new, and continuously upgraded material, in the courses helps me feel I am still in the "middle of life" where it's going on, not left behind. No time for depression, even when I have little aches and pains, the work makes me forget them. No feeling of isolation or loneliness, the world is still there. No fear about my mind getting "old" even though its slowing down a bit, but not lost, and that is good to know and have proof of!

Her summary capsulates the general sense of self-fulfillment expressed by other women with their realization of dreams of higher learning.

When the majority of these women, including myself, enrolled with the Open University it was too late for a degree to bring economic advantage. Most studies on adult education focus on women between twenty-five and fifty years of age, primarily interested in job enhancement. As older women, the primary motive was to experience the challenge of obtaining the degree we had missed when younger. Choice of courses with the Open

Open University generally centered on the Arts, graphically described by Mary as "useless things", not specifically designed for making a living. Like British students, in getting a degree we wished to continue personal development, to stretch ourselves, to intellectually keep an active mind, and to make up for missed opportunities.¹¹ Despite feelings of isolation the studies brought purpose and discipline into our lives. When I listened to reminiscences in a face-to-face interview or read the answers to the questionnaire, I could share the pride of achievement and enhanced self-esteem which shines through. The next chapter explores the general lack of research into academic study for older women such as those here who seek self-fulfillment rather than job enhancement, looks at the opportunities available for such study, and makes suggestions for further research.

END NOTES

1. Patrick Kelly, in "Supporting and Developing Adult Learning. Older Students in Education". *Adults Learning*: Volume 1, Number 1, September 1989, p. 13 says that in a survey of Open University students in Great Britain, ages ranging from 60-90, "two-thirds reported they were studying to make up for lost chances in their youth and many said that their education had not been completed because their family could not afford to send them to university or because their studies had been interrupted by the Second World War".
2. Kelly also found that the generation of students that grew up in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s retained a very positive attitude toward education. Almost all surveyed (98%) had been involved in some form of education or work-related training after leaving school. *Distance Education*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1989, p. 64.
3. Psychologist Marion Perimutter in "Cognitive Potential Throughout Life", and educator Tony Buzan in *Use Your Head*, explode the myth of being too old to learn (see also "Older Women and Education:", *Women's Education des Femmes*). In "The Support Needs for Older Students in Distance Education", *Papers for the Second International Workshop on Counselling in Distance Education*, 15th-17th September 1987, U.K. p. 77, Patrick Kelly found that in older Open University students, "personal satisfaction and enjoyment of study was matched by a solid academic performance. . . (which) compares favourably with all other OU students. . . there is virtually no difference in the overall pass rate, between older students and the rest of the student body". In "Older Students in Education", *Adults Learning*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1989, p. 15, Kelly says, "The notion that a particular body of students, who happen to be older, are capable of benefitting from a broad range of educational provision up to and including undergraduate level would be unremarkable but for the prevalence of images of older people as confused, forgetful, rigid in their thinking and uninterested in the world around them".
4. The Older Students Research Group in Great Britain also found that the motive for most older students embarking on studies was not related to careers, but to "continue their own personal development and to stretch themselves". "Distance education and the older student", International Council for Distance Education, Ohio 1988.
5. Karlene Faith, "Toward New Horizons for Women in Distance Education *International Perspectives*, p. 11.
6. In "Research into Older Students: a progress report from the Older Students Research Group": *Research in Distance Education*. October 1989, pp. 2-3, Patrick Kelly says that the Open University in Great Britain offers a "convenient home-based system of study which allows students to fit their learning into their other interests and activities". He stresses the flexibility of work structure, course-selection, etc.

7. In "Teaching the Older Learner", *Adults Learning*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1989, p. 16, Barbara Bilston discussed British students' comments on tutors' skills, which coincide with the satisfactions and dissatisfactions expressed by the Canadians. Bilston stresses the importance of tutors being able to identify sensitively with their students' needs, the importance of critical written comments, and the desirability of tutors and students getting together to discuss their mutual expectations at an early stage in the course. She feels that with a good tutor/student relationship, "the results can be very fruitful".
8. Studies at the Open University in Great Britain found that students over sixty "score higher on their assignments submitted during the year, but lower in the end of year written examinations. However, there is no difference in the overall course pass rate where continuous assessment and examination scores are combined". Patrick Kelly, "Older Students in Education", *Adults Learning*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 1989, p. 15.
9. The attractiveness of course material was also appreciated by British older students. This was "praised time and time again and described as an enhancement to the pleasure of studying". Nigel Cutress and others, "The Older Open University Student", *Teaching at a Distance*, #23, Summer, 1983, p. 32.
10. For example the women studied by McLaren in *Ambitions and Realizations* varied in age from twenty-one to fifty, primarily interested in occupational achievements. (See also McLaren's "Ambitions and Accounts: A Study of Working-Class Women in Adult Education". *Psychiatry*, Vol. 45, August 1982, p. 235). Section "Part Four: Beyond Schooling: Adult Education and Training", in Gaskell and McLaren's *Women and Education*, also focuses on younger women.
11. Cutress, p. 30.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion: "There it all is. Why don't I know it?"

The literature is clear that inequality and traumatic historical events shaped the lives of the majority of Canadian women born between the two World Wars. The literature rarely shows, however, the cumulative effects of such experiences on women's educational prospects. The life histories of the women of this thesis help to close this gap. These women survived a society that taught them to accept their role in domestic labour and their inferior position in paid employment. Although they had to wait until later years, through studying by distance they successfully challenged the myth of being too old to learn. They aimed high for a university degree, and in so doing gained the self-esteem - the feeling of power in educational endeavours—that was beyond their reach in younger days.

All over sixty years of age when interviewed, the women here came from middle and working-class backgrounds, with varying experiences of family, schooling, and work. Most married and had children, some did not. Growing up in the 1930s and 1940s most faced, and accepted, the subservient role society designed for them. As women, their rightful place was often assumed to be in a low-paid labour market, or in the home as wife and mother. The compliance of the majority with this role left neither opportunity, time nor resources for completion of higher education.

There is much discussion in the literature of the continuing reproduction of structures oppressive to women in family, school and workplace. Sociologist Oakley (1974)¹ argues that such oppression cannot be defeated until women repudiate housework's

oppressive history. She goes so far as to blame mothers for teaching their daughters the subjugation and oppression of domesticity. Other authors such as Luxton (1980),² Armstrong and Armstrong (1986)³ and Connolly (1978)⁴ emphasize the linkages between women's inferior status as an unpaid worker in the home, and their allocation to low-paid work in the labour force, pointing out how women's "double-day" serves capitalistic interests. Both Porter (1965)⁵ and Bowles (1976)⁶ ignore the importance of women's double-day, but show how educational structures encourage the continuation of both class and gender inequality.

More recently, however, sociologists Gillian Pascall and Roger Cox, in "Education and Domesticity" (1993)⁷ challenge the rigidity of this theoretical view of the reproduction of domesticity, especially within the education system. They argue that educational structures can lead women away from traditional roles. Their findings are based on life histories taken from interviews in the mid-1980s with forty-three women students enrolled in a local university and polytechnic in Great Britain. Pascall and Cox point to the difference between "schooling" and "education".⁸ They conclude that adult women returning to higher learning have more control than schoolgirls, "more freedom to take what they can use out of education and leave the rest". In other words the authors see returning to higher education institutions as a means for women to follow Oakley's advice. Higher education enables them to "untie the knot" of bondage to domesticity and poor opportunities in paid work engendered by their previous schooling.⁹

The women of both McLaren's *Ambitions and Realizations* and the Pascall and Cox studies were, of course, younger than those examined here. The authors limited their detailed studies to mature women, aged no more than forty or fifty years, returning to higher learning in a campus setting. The women of this thesis are now in their sixties and

seventies, and studied by distance through an open university. Women in the McLaren and Pascall and Cox studies were young enough still to have prospects for enhanced employment opportunities through higher education. Some still had children to support. Fears of marriage breakdown prompted others to look for better jobs in order to satisfy the economic need to sustain themselves and their families. Being younger, they also found fewer difficulties in attending campus.

In contrast, most of the women here looked at higher education through different eyes. With no longer the necessity to improve jobs or support children, rather than focusing their interest on new technologies or economics, they chose the liberal arts. Distance study gave them the opportunity, and the convenience, to stretch their minds and meet the educational challenge they had missed during their lifetime.

Of course, some experiences are common to both younger and older learners. Both feel joy at successfully meeting the challenge, the sense of personal development, and the pride in receiving a degree from an institution of higher learning. This joy prompted my initial enquiry into the experiences of other older women with similar aspirations. I shared with these women satisfactions, and some dissatisfactions, of learning by distance. Furthermore, as the life histories unfolded, the discovery of the common thread of inequality running through each life which had delayed such satisfactions until later years, led to the further questions then the basis of this thesis.

Yet if all adults returning to higher learning institutions face a challenge, that faced by the women here was far greater. Sociological and psychological literature now demonstrates that the myth of declining mental capacities with age has been challenged. Older persons should now be assured of their continuing capacity to learn. Unhappily, as many of the women found here, such reassurance was not always forthcoming from

others. It takes courage to overcome a barrier of doubts, both in one's own and others' minds. Questions about the futility of seeking a degree which "leads nowhere", the accusation of wasting time, or the ridiculing of capabilities of succeeding can undermine the strongest resolutions.

Notwithstanding such discouragement, the women here persisted. While the striving, course by course, to earn credits for a degree took patience, most found that the surprise (and at times great pleasure), at receiving good grades was more than rewarding. The characteristics educator Buzan found in the over-seventies he studied in Great Britain included optimism, humour, physical strength, persistence, enthusiasm, mischievousness, and interest.¹¹ Such attributes can be found throughout the life histories of the women here. There was a great deal of laughter during the interviews. This may have come at times from embarrassment at boasting of success, but mostly it reflected self-assurance. The self-gratification of a growing feeling of power at realizing one's own strength and persistence, can prove good grounds for laughing at doubters.

All the women here strove towards their degree. Some, who had already studied in a campus setting, admitted missing the more personal atmosphere of lectures and seminars, and the company of other students. However, notwithstanding the isolation of home study, they still persevered and found satisfaction in successful results. Others appreciated more the convenience of distance learning. Campus inaccessibility, physical disabilities or ill health, made studying for a degree at home more attractive. For them lack of personal contact was amply compensated for by the library and tutorial services available through the telephone.

These women generally sought courses in the arts and humanities. Recent literature on higher learning for the elderly stresses the importance of continuing opportunities for such studies. It is apparent, however, that arts and humanities are increasingly treated as leisure-time activities, overshadowed by the necessity for more technological and economic knowledge required for the occupational needs of younger "mature" students, such as those of previous studies. Sociologist Peter Jarvis in "Learning, Ageing and Education in the Risk Society" (1994),¹² admits that older students' preference for the arts and humanities may be because of the elderly's difficulty in adapting to contemporary technological society. On the other hand, he decries the possibility of a liberal education being reduced to a leisure-time pursuit for the older person. He suggests that as education tends to become the "handmaiden of industry"¹³ it might be short-sighted to invest all educational resources in scientific and technological subjects (even though they are very important), aimed at the younger student.

In seeking self-fulfillment older students have time to study the enriching arts and humanities and acquire a more profound understanding of humanity. This could lead to older students offering a critical wisdom as useful to contemporary society "as was the former one to previous generations".¹⁴ The editors of *Education and Ageing*, the Journal of the Association of Educational Gerontology (1994) agree. They remind us that universities should be places where wisdom is valued. Older members of society, in most analyses, are the "repositories and communicators of wisdom".¹⁵ Reminiscence and personal life review can help to reintegrate the remembered past as part of making sense of life as lived.¹⁶

In her critique of recent writings on education for the elderly, "Toward a Philosophy of Educational Gerontology: The Unfinished Debate" (1992), Alexandra Withnall cites American educationalist H. R. Moody (1990) as suggesting that the education of older people must be based on an acceptance of the limitations of time, and the responsibility for the well-being of future generations. Such education must be one that is:

...liberating, that discloses other cultures, other historical epochs, other values, in such a way that we discover the 'other', our very own selves¹⁷,

in other words the arts and humanities sought by the women here.

It is apparent that increasing numbers of older persons are interested in the arts and humanities. A recent survey, conducted by the Open Learning Agency's Knowledge Network television service, estimated that the Arts telecourses attracted over thirty thousand viewers, with fifty-three percent over the age of sixty. Such programmes, of course, were not necessarily being used for credit purposes.¹⁸ On the other hand, compared to the nine women over the age of sixty enrolled in the Agency's Arts university degree programme in 1991 (now the subject of this thesis), thirty such women have enrolled in similar courses for the 1994 Fall semester.¹⁹

Will elderly women continue to find satisfaction in their studies as experienced by the women here? As Jarvis (1994)²⁰ points out academic institutions, such as the Open Learning Agency, now take advantage of many technological advances. In their 1994 - 1995 *Course Offerings*²¹ the Agency shows degree programme course packages increasingly augmented by telecourses through the Knowledge Network television service. Limited telephone communication between student and tutor, can be extended to both verbal and visual communication through teleconferencing. On-line courses, involving tutor and a number of students, can be taken by way of a computer.²² Although all the women here

proved their ability successfully to "return to school" in their later years without electronically guided learning, such technology may be the answer to those who found isolated home study uncomfortable. Once they have mastered the technology, other older women may find the personal contact and peer support others previously missed while learning in isolation by distance.

Notwithstanding such advances, however, questions remain to be asked, especially as to who will meet the cost of continuing higher education for the elderly. With the present political, economic and social pressure on academic institutions to focus on vocational and professional education, will the liberal arts route preferred by many older students still be deemed practicable, or indeed necessary? Sociologists Janice Newson and Howard Buchbinder are pessimistic. In *The University Means Business, Universities, Corporations and Academic Work* (1988)²³ they point to the past three decades when educational institutions have been increasingly driven by the market. The authors argue that society is witnessing "an unfolding drama with few critics and perhaps no audience".²⁴ In an emerging "high-tech" social order, as educational funding from government tax dollars decreases, support from corporate dollars escalates. With the "marriage between the ivory tower and the marketplace"²⁵ it is now difficult to distinguish between the university and the corporate president. Like Jarvis, the authors regret university curricula delegating humanities and social sciences to a minor position, to be treated more as leisure-time pursuits.²⁶ Even such bodies as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Social Science Council (SSC), in their allocation of government funds, now give priority to research projects to aid private-sector development and technological innovation.²⁷

Evidence of this trend can be found in a comparison of the Open Learning Agency's degree programme course offerings in 1989 and 1990²⁸ with their 1994 - 1995 calendar.²⁹ Development and presentation of new course offerings tend to concentrate on "applied programmes". As an example, the Agency now offers three additional upper-level courses in business administration, with four more under development; four new courses on business management, three on communication skills, with four under development; two advanced computer courses, a series of eight new courses on data processing, four in economics focusing on business management, and three new upper-level courses in mathematics and calculus. Although courses under development augment existing offerings in the social sciences, including Canadian culture and social structure, criminology and education, psychology and linguistics, the literature section shows only one new course on Shakespeare, and history "Knowledge and Power", a new course on the relation of science to society. Fellman's *History of Women in North America* (1985),³⁰ which introduced me to studies of women's subservient place in society, and the *Introduction to Women's Studies* (1989)³¹ both offered in 1990, no longer appear in the Agency's current calendar. The Simon Fraser University Centre for Distance Education still offers the latter course, but anyone applying directly to the Agency for course offerings will remain uninformed of the availability of such studies by distance.

Despite such an omission in course offering, in reviewing the overall advantage to older women of learning by distance, I agree with Jarvis that mind enhancement and personal development are of equal importance to job training and should not be considered as "luxuries". New technology can bring students and tutor together in a simulated class-room setting and help overcome the problems of studying in

isolation. Future telecourses and on-line computer technology may make the familiar course package obsolete, however much looked forward to and enjoyed when opened, but plans must continue for the offering and development of studies in the arts and humanities.

As an old woman who has experienced the personal empowerment of such studies, I can look back at the young schoolgirl to whom the university was the magical "ivory tower". In addition to the social kudos of an academic degree, at that time university was to me the key to an exciting life away from parental control, and better marriage prospects. In retrospect I see that my teachers, all women and Oxford graduates, directed me to the humanities in the hope that I would join the increasing number of young upper and middle-class women at that time claiming a place in the universities. Although the academic and social benefits of academe were not for me, social niceties ensured that I knew my role in life. Then I saw no alternative but to follow my duty as a daughter. I stayed at home, gave my parents the little I was able to earn, and hopefully waited for marriage to rescue me. As I grew older the academic and social loss of higher education, buried by family troubles in my younger years, haunted me. I became occupied in surviving in a busy, and at times exciting and eventful life, but lack of a degree brought feelings of inferiority, socially and in the business world.

Although widely read, worldwide political and socio-economic changes seemed outside my narrow, personal orbit, until in old age I refound the "ivory tower" of my youth. Studying at home brought into perspective the changed world I was living in. The importance of a degree for an older person - just a piece of paper - may be questioned,³² but the earning of that piece of paper gave me a sense of power. I can now see the world through others' eyes. I can offer the young a "critical wisdom about society" - the wisdom

of the elders. I am sure the other women of this study join me in hoping that regardless of technological advances, and the path learning by distance takes in the future, older women will continue to have the opportunity to experience the enlightenment and fulfillment they missed in their youth. The path of future research must be to ensure that the question is never asked, "Why bother with the older student?".

END NOTES

1. Oakley, *Women's Work, The Housewife Past and Present*, p. 241.
2. Luxton, *More Than a Labour of Love*, p. 210.
3. Armstrong and Armstrong, *The Double Ghetto*, p. 203.
4. Connolly, *Last Hired, First Fired*, p. 33.
5. Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic*, p. 165.
6. Bowles, "Unequal education and the reproduction of the social division of labor", *Schooling and Capitalism: A Sociological Reader*, pp. 32-42.
7. Gilliam Pascall & Roger Cox, "Education and Domesticity", *Gender and Education*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1993, p. 17.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
10. McLaren, *Ambitions and Realizations*.
11. Buzan, *Use Your Head*, p. 142.
12. Peter Jarvis, "Learning, Ageing and Education in the Risk Society", *Education and Ageing*, April, 1994, Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 14.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
15. Editorial, *Education and Ageing*, November, 1994, Vol. 9.2, p. 69.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
17. Alexandra Withnall, "Towards a Philosophy of Educational Gerontology: The Unfinished Debate", *Journal of Educational Gerontology*, Vol/Iss.: 7/1, 1992, p. 22.
18. *Annual Report, 1993-1994*, Burnaby: Open Learning Agency.
19. Records, Research Department, Burnaby: Open Learning Agency.
20. Jarvis, p. 17.
21. *Course Offerings, 1994*, Burnaby: Open Learning Agency.

22. *Open Campus*, University Courses via Computer, Burnaby, Open Learning Agency, 1995.
23. Janice Newson, Howard Buchbinder, *The University Means Business, Universities, Corporations and Academic Work*, (Toronto: Garamound Press, 1988).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
28. *Open University Calendar*, 1989-1990, Richmond: Open Learning Institute.
29. *Calendar, 1994-1995*, Burnaby, Open Learning Agency.
30. Anita Clair Fellman, *History of Women in North America, 1830 to the Present*, (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1985).
31. Anita Clair Fellman, *Perspectives on Women: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 1985).
32. *Education and Ageing.*, p. 68.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Research Proposal: Older women obtaining degrees by distance learning.
Investigator: Barbara Guttman-Gee,
M.A. candidate, Simon Fraser University.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE NUMBER:

1. **Where and when were you born?**
2. **If applicable, when did you come to Canada, and where did you live?**
3. **if you have moved during your life, when, and where did you go?**
4. **Where did your parents come from? Did they both work, and what did they do? Did their marriage last, or was there a separation?**
5. **Did you have any brothers and sisters - if so, how many, and when were they born?**
6. **Where did you go to school, and for how long? How did you do at school? Were you satisfied with your schooling? Did you feel you reached any expected goals, or just drifted? Did you feel you received the same treatment at school as your brothers and other boys in the class? If you went to a "girls only" school, did you feel you received the same education as in a "boys only" school?**
7. **What was your relationship in the family between your parents and your brothers and sisters? Did you feel any difference in their attitudes because you were a girl? Was there any difference between the attitude of your father and your mother toward your upbringing, and your education?**
8. **If your parents have separated and remarried during your childhood and early adulthood, did you find any difference in the relationships in your family?**
9. **What was your relationship, as a girl, between your teachers and fellow students at school? Did you find any difference in the treatment of the girls and the boys? Were you happy during your school days, or did you feel that something was missing?**

10. Did you continue your educational activities - go to high school, business or technical training college, university? If so, when, where and for what time? Was your further education fulfilling to you - did you achieve the goals you set out for, or was there something missing?
11. Did you go to work after leaving school, college, or university? If so, where, when and in what capacity? Were you satisfied with your work, did it fulfill your aims, or were you frustrated? What were your relationships with your employers, and fellow workers? Did you find any difficulties because you were a girl or woman? Were you satisfied with your working conditions, hours of employment and pay? Did you participate in any union activities during your work period? Did you feel satisfied with the union's handling of the workers' problems?
12. Who did you marry, and when? What did your partner do? Where did you live? If there have been other partners, what did they do, and where did you live? If you had children, how many, and where and when were they born?
13. Did you continue to work after your marriage?
14. Did you continue any educational activities after your marriage? If so, when and with what institution?
15. What was the attitude of your partner(s) towards your working and furthering your education during your marriage? Was it supportive, or obstructive? Did your partner(s) help you with household management, and child care, if necessary, during your partnership?
16. When did you decide to embark on distance learning with the Open University? What prompted you to enroll? Why did you leave it until this time in your life to continue higher education?
17. What have been the attitudes of partners, family, children, friends, or colleagues, toward your undertaking distance education? Has there been questioning of your ability to continue learning, or the necessity of so doing? Has there been support, or obstruction, from your immediate circle?
18. During your days at school, in the work-place, as a home-maker and child-carer, have you felt that, as a woman, you have been able to reach your full potential? Did you find any changes in yourself when you left school and entered the work-place or marriage? Did you feel satisfied with your role, as a woman, or did you feel that you were disadvantaged, as compared to men, in attaining the achievements you wished for? Did you ever feel that possibly your lack of education was a disadvantage to you? Did you ever find barriers to your attaining your desired achievements, because you were a woman?

19. **Finally, I want you to tell me something about your experiences with distance learning. Personally, have you felt any change in yourself after completing some courses? Has your self-esteem been enhanced? Has the arrival of packages had any impact on you personally? Have you been satisfied with the course offerings, and the delivery of courses? Are you satisfied with the handling of assignments and arrangements for examinations? Are you satisfied with the student services - advisors, tutors and library facilities? How are you handling the isolation of distance learning? Do you miss the class-room environment, or do you prefer to study alone? Are you satisfied with your achievements on assignments and examinations? Has it been a surprise to you that you are able to cope, and to succeed, in this undertaking?**

There may be some aspects of your personal background, or your present experiences, that I have not covered. Please do not hesitate to tell me about them. Some detail may seem insignificant, but may be of great importance in considering the whole picture of what I am trying to convey. And, please, also be assured that your identity will not be revealed concerning any personal information you have given me.

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