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# Democratic Women's Forum of San Francisco

♥Jan/Feb 2010

"There is no doubt in my mind that women work differently than men, and they will put a different emphasis on certain issues. If women really understand the issues, they will probably talk more effectively to their neighbors than any of the men, especially if the issues are such that they affect their doily lives."

-♥Eleanor Roosevelt – *My Day* – December 7, 1955

## ♥Sixty Seconds WithThe President

Happy New Year; may 2010 hold many 'golden moments' for you and the Forum. I hope that in this issue you will enjoy something relevant and interesting!

Please feel free to forward to me any 'writings' you'd enjoy sharing – we'd love hearing from you.

Bestest,

Joan Simmons, President

## *My Inspiration*♥

My sister-in-law Jane is the most interesting woman I ever met. She was a crazy, eccentric artist who constantly challenged, and usually changed, my assumptions. If it were someone else, this would be annoying. Jane, on the other hand, did so with great humor. She was amazingly funny, a natural comic.

Jane was self-employed. She had trouble working for others, mainly because employers didn't always admire her tendency to challenge assumptions. She supported herself and two children by selling artwork, art consultations, art classes, furniture repair, earthquake preparedness and home inspections. Hers was a 24/7 workweek. There was hardly a weekend when she didn't fill a booth with her jewelry, pottery and whimsical sculptures at some street fair or farmer's market. She also regularly cruised antique shops and attended flea markets in Oakland and San Jose to find broken-down treasures that she could repair. Whenever I accompanied her, I always ended up with some piece of junk that she'd talked me into because it had some potential that only she could see.

She bought and restored a tired little Victorian house in a seedy section of Oakland (the very heart of the drug trade, she would announce with pride). It was quite a dangerous neighborhood, but that didn't stop her from calling the police to report

what she saw. She was determined to do her part, despite the personal danger.

Jane's life was not easy but, with her constant humor, she made it seem fun. She saw interactions with angry bureaucrats or bill collectors as opportunities to make a new friend or client. Her food consisted of grains, root vegetables which she grew in her garden, eggs from the chickens that roamed her back yard despite Oakland's prohibition against livestock, soup bones and organ meats, supplemented with lots of brewer's yeast and wheat germ. Fortunately, she was a wonderful cook. She even convinced her children that there was some religious basis their deliciously unusual diet.

In my mind, Jane will always be an inspiration. She died on Easter Day and I hardly know how to get along without her.

♥Contributed by Cynthia Travis, DWF Treasurer

## ***Not Making Enough Money? Pretend You are a Man!***

We've all experienced our issues with the glass ceiling, but few of us have taken the most logical next step: just pretend you are a man.

However, thanks to remote workspace, consulting and online communities, that may be a bigger possibility, especially once more people read the story of James Chartrand. Thought to be a respected male online personality, "James" unmasked himself recently as \*gasp\* a woman!

Previously a struggling single mother trying to make ends meet, James claimed she worked at a variety of online and work from home situations. It was only once she began working under an assumed male identity, though, that the real money started coming in.

"Taking a man's name, opened up a new world. It helped me earn double and triple the income of my

true name, with the same work and service. No hassles. Higher acceptance. And gratifying respect for my talents and round-the-clock work ethic. Business opportunities fell into my lap. People asked for my advice, and they thanked me for it, too. Did I quit promoting my own name? Hell, yeah."

We can get up at arms about the pay gap, or whether or not this is a blow for or against gender discrimination. But, in the end, what makes me saddest is that if this story is true, the woman is still afraid to give out her real name for the safety of her family. "I have kids," she says. "I'm not interested in making myself vulnerable in that way." **That's the biggest crime.**

(Equality Standard, Jan 2010 Edition)

♥ ***"Speak Out" for Change (most influential person)***

They say children learn by example. I know that's true, because I learned from my mother how to care about others and to do what I can to make life a better place for my fellow humans. I knew my mom was a woman of courage from an early age, although I didn't understand it at the time. Her first courageous act was to steal my dad's car keys while he slept and to drive off in our car with my brother and me in the back seat, to teach herself to drive. My father was one of those uninvolved men, in the early 50s, who didn't believe women should work or drive, since they would be spending all their time at home tending to the kids and the "man of the house." I've long ago forgiven him for this attitude as he was raised in a coal-mining family, and that's all he knew: he was the 20<sup>th</sup> child in a family of four surviving siblings, premature when born, and spoiled like his brother by his mother.

After she mastered the car, my mom sat in it all morning until my father came out to the car and told him she would be driving him to work that day. She subsequently found work at the Pentagon and the marriage ended a few years later. She waited to divorce my father until my brother and I were a bit older, so that we could fend for ourselves, which is what kids did in the 50s. We had a maid, who came daily to clean and get us off to school. We considered her part of the family, and we even spent weekends at her house in Washington, D.C., when mom had to go out of town for work-related conferences (she sold Stanley home products on the side for extra money).

One Friday, when a hurricane was threatening the Eastern seaboard, mom told Carrie that she should wait until mom got home from work and she would drive Carrie home instead of having to ride the local bus to D.C. We made it across one of the bridges in pouring rain and winds. Mom had me looking out the passenger side window, but I couldn't see a thing. A Highway Patrol officer pulled us over and told us we had to get off the road until the rain stopped. Luckily, we were parked near a pizza restaurant we had been to often, so we headed inside.

Inside the door, we looked for a table and mom lead us to one near the register. We sat for a long while without anyone coming to the table. Mom went to the owner, who was behind the counter and asked if they were going to take our order. The owner said, "You know we can't serve coloreds in here." My mom said, "You know me and we were sent off the road by the police. So, if someone doesn't come over and take our order soon, I'm coming behind that counter and I'll make our food." Needless to say, a waitress came over and sullenly took our order. Unfortunately, Carrie was so embarrassed, she didn't really want to eat, but she ordered a tuna sandwich that sat in front of her during the meal and I guess we took it with us when we left.

You realize that I was too young to have appreciated this scene as it happened. To my brother and me it was an adventure; we didn't know we were in danger. But in the retelling of this story, and the experience of my mother's ire whenever she saw someone being harmed or denied, I learned that you need to speak up when things aren't right.

I'll never forget the sight of my mom on the picket lines during the Farm workers' Grape Strike, her shouts and cries of "Boycott Grapes," our confrontation with the Teamsters in Sacramento when the Farm worker legislation was being voted on, and her work with her own SEIU union when she worked for the City. I know there had to be times when she was scared, unsure what the outcome of a certain action would be. Nevertheless, she moved forward fearlessly. That fierceness makes me smile with joy and admiration for the most influential woman in my life. I doubt I will surpass her courage, but I hope that I can continue to emulate her for what remains of my life.

♥Contributed by Cheryl Willis, Recording Sec'y

## **California Constitutional Reform**

The California State Constitution was finally ratified in 1879 and is one of oldest State Constitutions still in use. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> longest in the world and is 8 times longer than the US Constitution. It has 512 amendments vs the US Constitution, which only has 17 amendments in addition to the Bill of Rights.

On May 14, 2009, there was an article in "The Economist" calling for a new constitution for California. It was in reaction to the failure of the budget initiatives that were on the ballot. Most calls for revising the Constitution come at times of budget crises and disappear when the crisis has passed. The call is coming from Jim Wunderman, who is president and CEO of the Bay Area Council and serves on the Repair California ballot measure committee. California Forward is also pushing for revisions. Most people will agree that the California Constitution is deeply flawed by structural problems and desperately needs revision. In October 2009, the Field Poll found that 52% of Californians wanted to reform the Constitution. But if you look back in history, you find most of the attempts at revisions were either defeated by the voters or the work was neglected after the crisis had passed.

In 1911 California adopted direct democracy through the ballot initiative. By 1930, the California constitution had grown to over 65,000 words (by comparison, the Constitution of the United States has about 4,500 words). The increasingly unwieldy nature of the document led to wholesale revision efforts, and on separate occasions in 1898, 1914, 1928, 1929, 1935, 1947, 1964 and 1996.

A ballot measure has been submitted to the Attorney General to qualify for the Nov 2010 ballot calling for a constitutional convention. Will reform come or will it just be another attempt that will fall by the wayside?

By ♥Michelle Aldrich, Legislative Co-Chair

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**Happy New Year!** From Marie Angell♥, Legislation Chair.

My practice at a year's ending has been to.....

Make corrections. In the last issue, some computer (a relative of Hal? A reincarnation?) decided to remove from the last sentence of the third paragraph the words, "legislators have been highly critical of the" and interjected them into the third sentence of the third paragraph, making it appear that legislators were critical of undergraduates. Actually, the Board of Regents and the University administration are the objects of some legislator's disapprobation. Both affected sentences then make a lot more sense.

Recognize something overlooked.

Occasionally, I have run across articles, including a couple in this newsletter, pointing out that women had won the right to vote in several states prior to the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920. California was one of those states but was not mentioned in those articles. Mae Silver, a former member of the Forum, now living in Florida, describes in her sparkling little book, *The Sixth Star*, how the women's movement spearheaded the successful campaign. The people of California, in a statewide election, voted for women's suffrage in 1911, California thus becoming the sixth state to do so. The proponents lost the first attempts, partially due to the vote of San Francisco voters (male, of course), whose minds associated the Suffrage movement with the Temperance advocates. (Have another drink, fellas?) Clearly, the proponents needed a new strategy and they came up with one. In the winning campaign they totally ignored San Francisco and concentrated their efforts in other parts of the state. The women of California had the vote nine years before passage of the U.S. constitutional amendment.

Take a peek at what might be just over the hill. Alas, this article is being written before the Governor sends his proposed budget over to the Legislature. Predictably, the Republicans will not want to vote for any tax, while the Democrats will be loath to cut social, health, and safety net programs. The governor has outlined his recommendations

in broad terms. Some are already sparking debate. For example, he is suggesting the privatization of the prison system, an end to education cuts, and substantial changes in the tax structure. However, the specifics, including what to do with the deficit, come later. In the meantime, the wild card in the mix appears to be the student movements, going way beyond campus concerns, rising costs and program cuts, and encompassing university governance, state tax structures, and budgetary processes. And they have enlisted the valuable support of some faculty members. As a veteran of student movements of the 60s, I think this is going to be one very interesting Spring and Summer.

#### REMINDER ♥

- March is Women's History Month.
- February is Black History Month.

Darkness cannot drive out  
darkness; only light can do that.  
Hate cannot drive out hate; only  
♥love can do that.  
[Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)

♥[Democratic Women's Forum](#)  
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#### *President Obama speaking about the struggles of the civil rights movement, and Martin Luther King's hard-won victories.*

"We enjoy the fruits of prejudice and bigotry being lifted - slowly, sometimes, in fits and starts, but irrevocably - from human hearts. It's that progress that made it possible for me to be here today, for the good people of this country to elect an African-American the 44th President of the United States of America."

President Obama looked out at the congregation at Vermont Avenue Baptist Church, founded in 1866 by former slaves, and remarked on the lessons of history. He said Americans now facing grave problems need to work together, tap their inner resolve, and seek progress one step at a time.

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