7. Feminist Straws in the Wind

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7 Feminist Straws in the Wind

Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* came out in 1963. Her message was that women are trapped as housewives and are unhappy, but no one pays attention. By sheer coincidence that year, for a few days in May, I kept track of what I did beyond my usual routine household work:

May 22. Wednesday  
Made salad for [LDS] stake dinner  
Made angel food cake, frosted, for Burgoynes  
Wrote six family letters [same letter to all, using carbons]  
Set water going on the lawn  
Studied  
Read in two books, took notes, read *NY Times*

May 23. Thursday  
Went to mortuary for Lucile Burgoyne  
Attended graduation of Jr. High  
Read Carmen Fredrickson’s paper

May 24. Friday  
Wrote notes to Charlene Cardon, Ila McAllister on origami  
Attended Lucile Burgoyne’s funeral  
Typed notes on Jahoda’s mental health book  
Visited Carmen and talked  
Went to H.S. graduation  
Chauffered Wynne from college

May 25. Saturday  
Moved Lance’s possessions to sleeping porch, first step in upstairs spring cleaning  
Studied  
Gave Sandra a permanent

May 26. Sunday  
Prepared and taught adult Sunday School class  
Went with Wynne to Ogden to visit his mother  
Attended discussion group [Thoughtless Thinkers] on existentialism
May 27. Monday
Did extra big washing and ironing
Gave permanent to Avril
Typed article, and studied

It was a busy life, not entirely domestic, and I doubted that I was suffering from what Friedan called “the problem with no name.” I disagreed with her belief that every woman needs a no-nonsense nine-to-five job, but I continued to wish for a steady faculty position teaching a class or two.

A couple of years earlier, Wynne expressed his view of my life when we appeared with several family life faculty on a television program called “Women and Education,” in the USU series “Man and His World.” None of us questioned the appropriateness of generic man in the series title. Yet the 1960s would prove to be a decade that asked hard questions about females and educational opportunities, questions that would help generate the new wave of feminism. Wynne and I introduced the television program with a dialogue, for which I still have his handwritten notes.

Wynne: My place on this program was attained through marriage and living with Alison for 24 years. I never know what I will find when I come home. Taffy, telegraph wires . . . projects take precedent over a neat house.

Alison: I don’t believe in being a perfect housekeeper.

Wynne: Projects. Astronomy. Ideas are adventure. Learning belongs to everyone.

Alison: I gave up a career of teaching consumer economics, taught myself philosophy. It’s real nice to be married to a man who doesn’t object to how much I spend on typewriter ribbons, paper, and books.

Wynne: Your professors at Iowa State chided me for taking you away from a promising career. Talents in public service and with family gave rewards? But I have felt that you have had just as stimulating and full a life with your family, writing, and community service. You have been able to lead in worthy causes that you could not have done with a full time job.

Alison: Without mothers as leaders, certain community activities would fold right up: Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H and PTA. Then there are organizations for women, regardless of profession. Work together for better government. Women’s Legislative Council. I think right now the community work I enjoy most is serving on the Logan Board of Education.

Wynne: I’ll bet I’m the only man in the state of Utah who wears shirts ironed by a school board president.
Wynne was right, about his shirts and about my varied career. Yet it was disconcerting that, because I was a homemaker living in the state of Utah, many males treated me as though I were under my husband’s thumb. William Bennett, director of the USU Extension Service and also high in the LDS Church hierarchy, asked Wynne if it would be all right if the extension service invited me to speak to the Emery County Teachers’ Institute. Afterwards Wynne told me that he replied by saying, “You don’t need to ask me. It’s up to her. They’ll be lucky to get her because she’s the best speaker in the State of Utah.”

Ten years later when I was temporarily teaching an elementary economics class, and there was heavy statewide argument over the Equal Rights Amendment, word leaked to my class that I would be debating on television, in Salt Lake City, in favor of the ERA. A young man on the front row asked, seriously, “Do you have your husband’s permission to do this?” Again, the assumption in Utah, particularly among Mormons, was that men led and their women followed.

In the early 1960s, when the campus was gradually fumbling its way toward a women’s movement, the Associated Women Students organized a Women’s Week assembly honoring various women, including Evelyn Rothwell, renowned oboe player, who appeared in the evening with the university band. Jaqueline Kennedy and Esther Peterson were also honored, in absentia. I was one of several local women honored, along with Edna Baker of the Utah State Board of Education, whose husband was USU basketball coach; and Alice Chase, wife of the university president. Although she had enjoyed her own career in teaching school, Mrs. Chase was honored as “the woman behind the man.”

Afterwards Alice said to me, “I may be the woman behind the man, but you were the only woman with a man behind you.” I was quite startled because, in the dimly lighted auditorium, I had not seen that Wynne was there. Yet this was wholly in character. As I recall the boyfriends of my college years, he was the only one who went out of his way to attend any occasion on which I was honored. When the State School Boards Association awarded me their Distinguished Service Award—a complete surprise to me—Wynne was there. I thought he was in Chicago attending professional meetings, but Superintendent Sherman Eyre alerted him, and he flew back early.

In 1963 Dean Phyllis Snow of the College of Family Life very much wanted me on her faculty, and Milt Merrill, academic vice president and also a member of the Logan School Board, was amenable. But President Chase upheld the anti-nepotism ruling. I wrote my family that if I
couldn’t get onto the USU faculty, I would apply to the University of Utah.  

Dean Snow wanted a new research project in her college and suggested that I develop one with Don Carter, head of the Department of Family and Child Development. We were to write a proposal to send to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), using my ideas on women’s style of commitment to homemaking. We reasoned that if federal money paid my salary, the anti-nepotism ruling could be circumvented. I would need an academic title to give credibility to our proposal. My contract with the university, approved by the board of trustees, listed my title as assistant professor and associate in research. The contract also stipulated “No salary.”

After months of work, during which our colleagues teased us about our “black market research,” our proposal was ready to send to NIH. Because Wynne directed University Research, he signed off on it, but the proposal never left the campus. The vice president for business stopped it cold with a letter saying that, even if federal money were obtained, I could not receive any of it. He sent the letter to Wynne, not to me, and a nasty letter it was. He sent the proposal back to Don Carter.

Carter’s reaction was to say to me, “Even though you can’t do research because of your husband’s position, you can teach for me any time, and be paid for it. Teaching does not come under Wynne.” So, in March 1965, I began teaching a new course that I designed and called, “Family in Its Social Setting.” I never knew why President Chase relented on the issue of anti-nepotism, but the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did contain Title VII prohibiting discrimination against women in employment.

As soon as the university began paying me, my title dropped from assistant professor to lecturer. I didn’t think to ask why. Vice President Milt Merrill, with no precedent for paying a part-time woman with a Ph.D., set my pay at what retired faculty men received when they taught an occasional class. It was very low. When I took on the additional course, “Rural Community Organization,” in sociology, my teaching still did not amount to half time during any one year, so I was ineligible for tenure. I would remain a lecturer for more than twenty years.

Today one can ask feminist questions of our proposal on commitment to homemaking. We assumed that women were the primary homemakers, and we looked at a great many studies of how families used their time. I wrestled with classifications; in fact that’s why I kept track of my own activities during those six days in May 1963. Categories of domestic activity, such as “work,” “nonwork,” and “leisure,” may each
contain caring relationships and self-fulfilling activities, but exactly what fits where? Feminist economists are asking these questions today.9

Don Carter’s work on the proposal was not wasted. He presented a Faculty Honor Lecture, “Commitments in Marriage,” lifting the concept of commitment from our proposal but developing it differently. Although he had a section on women as human beings, and quoted from Simone de Beauvoir, Ibsen’s The Doll House, Betty Friedan, and Alice Rossi, his was not a feminist approach.10

Feminist Glimmerings in Higher Education

By 1960 some universities and colleges offered continuing education “plans” for women who wanted to renew their education. The University of Minnesota, Radcliffe, and Sarah Lawrence were among the earliest to do this. Programs for “rusty ladies” these were sometimes irreverently called, but they did point to institutional barriers to women’s higher education and led to the rescue of much real talent.

University conferences on changing roles of women, with invitations to women of many walks of life, were another straw in the wind. Initially fueled by 1960 census figures that showed a great increase in employment of women, these conferences also included other aspects of women’s lives. The University of Utah held its first women’s conference in September 1962, and other annual conferences followed. Esther Landa, director of women’s programs in the Division of Continuing Education, was chief architect of these women’s conferences. I already knew her because she was on the Salt Lake City Board of Education. Esther invited several of us from USU, as well as other women from across the state, to help plan these conferences.

On one occasion Virginia Harder, director of our program in home economics education, drove her car. Dean Phyllis Snow and I were with her. While we were gone, Virginia’s son, John, sprained his shoulder in an accident at Logan High School. A desperate attempt was made to reach Virginia, and someone remembered she had gone to a meeting at the U. of U. with Alison Thorne. A quick phone call to Wynne brought forth this remark, “Oh, they’ve gone to one of those meetings about women, the poor things.” The high school seemed to know what he meant because they reached Virginia through a call to Esther Landa’s office.11

Land grant colleges are no strangers to women’s conferences. After all, their Cooperative Extension Service held annual women’s leadership meetings for fifty years. Although such meetings were not overtly
feminist, they should be analyzed for clues to the gender consciousness which was a prelude to explicit feminism.

The USU Women’s Annual Leadership Conference of October 1961 was especially illuminating. It dealt with the “outlook for women’s employment” as well as more traditional topics of spiritual values and gracious living. Bessie Lemon, our county extension home economist, and I each spoke on our lives as “working mothers.” We carefully explained this was not a debate. I said I was a working mother even though not paid, and told of my domestic and community work. Bessie Lemon told how she managed to hold her full-time paid position because her children and husband helped at home, and he helped the children with their extracurricular activities. Because of poor health, he was unemployed.

The keynote speaker was Esther Peterson who, under President Kennedy, was assistant secretary of labor and head of the Women’s Bureau. At that time she held the highest position of any woman in the federal government. The daughter of a school superintendent, she grew up in Provo, Utah. After marrying Oliver A. Peterson she worked with labor unions, and then went with him to Sweden where he was with the United States Embassy. They had a long-time housekeeper who helped with their four children and made it possible for Esther to combine family and career. Her talk at our extension conference held only one reference to feminism. “I sort of myself don’t feel like a feminist. I think we are persons.” In reality, she always remained a strong advocate of women.

The Woman Question in the Media

That was October 1961. Two months later, on December first, Kennedy announced appointment of a President’s Commission on the Status of Women, with Eleanor Roosevelt as honorary chairman, and Esther Peterson as executive vice-chairman. Historians now recognize that one of several purposes of this commission was to counteract forces favoring the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which stated that equality of rights under the law should not be denied because of sex. There was fear that the ERA would undermine the protective legislation for employed women that women’s groups had fought so hard to secure. But that was only one aspect of the commission’s work, and a hidden one at that. The commission gathered information on women’s education, civil and political rights, social insurance and taxes, employment opportunities, volunteer work, and the way women were portrayed in the media.
In a special consultation on images of women in the mass media done for the president’s commission, cartoonist Al Capp strongly defended as an ideal the kind of woman shown in advertising. But author and columnist Marya Mannes saw the unpardonable degree to which the media neglected “the full-time working wife, the wife who supports the family, the single working woman, the career woman with a husband and family, the professional intellectual, and the Negro woman . . .”

As the 1960s wore on, the media gave increasing attention to women’s interests because women were voicing dissatisfaction with their lives. Yet the image of woman as sex object persisted. The October 1962 and July 1965 issues of Harper’s contained some serious articles, but across the top of the initial page was a woman lying on her side, looking out at the reader. In 1962 this reclining figure had curves more exaggerated than those of Mae West, and instead of a dress she wore across her body the words, “The American Female.” She had a very young face, and a large bow ribbon in her hair. In 1965 the same figure again appeared, except that her curves had smoothed down a bit, and she wore a yellow dress with no wording. The face was the same, but the ribbon was gone, and she wore spectacles. A sure sign of intelligence, I presume. But if she was so intelligent, why was she still lying down in public?

Yet in that inimitable way of American media, the seriousness of some of the articles belied the sex pot. The 1962 issue had a large section of several articles, which the editors introduced by saying that women were re-examining their roles as wives, mothers, earners, and members of the human race. “However, it is happening so privately, and with such an unmilitant air, that one must look to the statistics [on employed women] for perspective . . . Crypto-feminism, it would appear, is a mass movement.” The fourteen authors with essays in this section ranged from Bruno Bettelheim to Anne Sexton. Beneath Sexton’s poem is an editor’s note: “Last year, she was one of the pioneer group of twenty-two women scholars at Radcliffe College’s new Institute for Independent Study.”

Marion K. Sanders, one of Harper’s editors, showed in a satire how difficult it was for women to secure high rank in federal employment, saying the administration wanted only beautiful, young women. Sanders paid tribute to the Very Important Wife with white gloves and mentioned Very Important Wives who were Eminent Economists and Accomplished Painters.

Three years later Sanders wrote the lead article of in the July 1965 issue of Harper’s, entitled “The New American Female: Demi-Feminism
Takes Over.” This title was emblazoned on the deep pink front cover, below the toned-down sex pot who had gained eyeglasses. Sanders paid tribute to women’s volunteer civic work, especially Project Head Start. She noted that some women combined career and family, but were careful not to compete with their husbands and readily consented to move if his career took him elsewhere. Sanders still saw no militancy, but noted a contrast between Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* and Phyllis McGinley’s *Sixpence in Her Shoe*, a warm-hearted description of the home-keeping wife. A footnote observed that Friedan’s book sold 650,000 copies and McGinley’s not quite 100,000. A feminist straw in the wind?

The Governor’s Committee on the Status of Women in Utah

Although the President’s Commission on the Status of Women was quietly anti-ERA, it provided a framework for bringing women together, ultimately leading to overt feminism. Upon release of the commission report, *American Women*, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women met in Washington D.C., and urged their state presidents to put pressure on governors to create similar state commissions.

Utah’s BPW president was Edith Shaw, associate professor of education at USU. I first knew her when she taught at the Whittier school and then became the principal. Edith took seriously the matter of forming a Utah commission on the status of women. She also attended the Rose Garden meeting called by President Lyndon Johnson to urge creation of Head Start programs across the country. Edith, along with Esther Landa, who was also at the Rose Garden meeting, made Head Start a reality in Utah.

Republican Governor Clyde was not enthusiastic about establishing a Commission on the Status of Women in Utah. In the first place, only the legislature could create commissions. Well then, it could be a governor’s committee, Edith said. He wasn’t enthusiastic about that either, but he was under pressure from twenty-five organizations, most of them women’s groups carrying on a tradition of civic interest. In January 1964 Clyde appointed an all-women Governor’s Committee on the Status of Women in Utah, with Edith Shaw as chairman. As one of six members, I was assigned to the subject of women’s employment. Although Edith and the governor were Republicans and I was a Democrat, I was chosen because they both knew me and appreciated my Ph.D. in economics.
At the end of the year we were ready to give Governor Clyde a mimeographed progress report dated December 16, 1964. We made an appointment to present it to him, expecting to get good newspaper coverage. Unfortunately the worst snowstorm of the season struck, and Edith Shaw, after sliding down my street, left her car in a snow bank, and we walked to the bus station. The bus was delayed in Idaho, and when it finally came and we reached Salt Lake, the streets were unplowed, and no one was at the Capitol. Fortunately our Salt Lake City members had made the presentation without us. Yet the press gave our report just a few lines. Nobody, but nobody, it seemed, cared about the status of women in Utah in 1964. The following month, January, Democrat Calvin Rampton became governor and reappointed us. He asked for a report in 1966, after which he would consider our work finished and would dissolve the committee.

The Governor’s Committee on Status of Women had no budget. We used money out of our own pockets for travel to meetings. I kept minutes, typing them with numerous carbons, and mailing them out at my own expense. I took my car when we held a hearing in Price for employed women. We fought our way out of the Salt Lake Valley toward Soldier Summit in a thick brown dust storm, as night fell and tumbleweeds hurtled toward us.

We appointed subcommittees to help us gather material for our final report. When it was completed, Edith arranged for it to be printed in Logan. The six hundred dollars raised by BPW clubs across the state was not enough to cover the cost of our thousand copies, so Edith and I went to Milt Merrill and asked if USU would put up an additional four hundred dollars. He agreed. We mailed copies to high school and college libraries in Utah, to women’s groups, to Commissions on Status of Women of other states, and to the Women’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. The President’s Commission report had a slick white cover with a design in black and red. So we also gave our report a slick white cover, but with our own design in black and red. Our title page read Utah Women, Opportunities, Responsibilities, Report of the Governor’s Committee on the Status of Women in Utah, June 15, 1966. I wrote the sections on employment of women and on poverty.

Upon receiving our report, Rampton dissolved us, as promised. But pressure from the original women’s groups, plus others, led him to create a new committee of twelve women of diverse backgrounds, with me (a Democrat) as chair. I suggested a different name because I had found that very conservative women in the state did not like the term “status of
women.” To placate them, I suggested the Governor’s Advisory Committee on Women’s Programs, and this became our name for one year. I now think this was too conciliatory.

The governor’s secretary, Pat King, became our secretary, too, and the governor gave us some of his own funds. We met monthly in the governor’s board room of the Capitol. We studied state and federal labor laws as they affected women and supported several proposed state laws, most of which failed. The Fair Housing Bill, the Human Rights Commission, and the Therapeutic Abortion Bill did not pass. Ten of our twelve members favored the abortion bill; our two Catholic members abstained from voting.

It was a time of increasing concern about the adverse effects of overpopulation, a concern felt on our campus and nationally. I recall standing at the back of the Sunburst Lounge of the USU Student Union, listening to a panel of six faculty men discuss overpopulation. In the question period, I asked why no woman was on the panel. After all, women are the people who give birth. It had never crossed their minds to invite a woman, and they promptly suggested I join them, but I was on my way to another appointment. I did stay long enough to tell the audience that the Governor’s Committee on Women had voted overwhelmingly in favor of therapeutic abortion. Four years later, in 1973, the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion with Roe v. Wade, but ever since, the Utah legislature has tried to limit women’s rights to legal abortion.

In the summer of 1969, after a year with the Governor’s Committee, I decided to resign because of other obligations. Barbara Burnett, sister of Esther Landa and active in League of Women Voters, took over the chair and restored the Status of Women title. She provided excellent leadership, and the committee had strong members. In 1973 the Utah Legislature made the committee into a commission with an appropriation.

Conferences in Washington D. C.

From time to time, the Women’s Bureau of the Department of Labor held conferences for state Commissions on the Status of Women. I attended two of these, both held in Washington, D.C. Looking back, I can see that the conference of July 28–30, 1965 laid the groundwork of my conversion to the women’s movement in two ways. First, I heard what was probably the final debate between proponents of protective legislation for women in employment, and proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA had the strongest arguments. Second, I
heard Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, indicate a lukewarm approach to enforcing Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. I was appalled. Had his mother been alive, I believe she would have been appalled too, but Eleanor Roosevelt died in 1962.

Betty Friedan attended that conference, arriving in Washington to find “a seething underground of women in the government, the press, and the labor unions who felt powerless to stop the sabotage of this law. Several women gathered around her luncheon table to form an organization to support enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation, and Friedan wrote the letters NOW on her paper napkin, standing for National Organization for Women.”21 I was completely unaware that this was happening, even though I was at the same luncheon, but it was a very large room with lots of tables.

In 1968 I again attended a conference of status of women commissions, held June 20–22. It was a time of much turmoil in Washington, D.C., as described in my family letter:

I stayed with Gertrude Gronbech in Washington, out on the edge of George Washington University, not far from Washington circle, and could walk to and from the Washington Hilton where the meetings were held. There were people at the meetings from almost every state in the union. Many important people spoke; one evening it was Mrs. Martin Luther King (fragile looking, with great dignity, and yet wistfulness), the mayor of D.C. who is named Washington and is Negro, and his wife who is head of all the girls’ Job Corps in the country. Eight Negro girls from the Charleston Job Corps sang for us; it was a moving experience. The Negro woman who is head of WICS [Women, Infant, Children Services] was there. At luncheons and dinners we sat at large round tables and I met remarkable women, including one 80 who is still in government work; she was the first person in the 1920’s to set up classes for girls from factories; they came to Bryn Mawr in the summer and learned economics and English . . . Hilda Smith, now 80, was dean of women at Bryn Mawr; and then during the depression she continued working with the education of people, especially the unemployed. I became acquainted with the Negro head of the medical service at Howard University, a woman with a degree from Tufts. And the one who really took me under her wing when I first arrived, late, and saw her on the elevator, and was lost in the vast hotel—was a Negro woman from Indiana, whose way is paid by the Department of Labor every year; she has
children, and a job in a factory, and went to college when she could find time and money, and graduated from college. She had arrived this time in Washington in a bus load of men representing labor, from Indiana, to take part on Solidarity Day, and after that had come on to the hotel for this conference in blue jeans and muddy shoes (because she was one who waded through the Reflecting Pool in front of Lincoln Monument).

We saw Resurrection City, from a bus, but did not go into it. There seems to be an air of uneasiness at night in Washington; I found myself locked out of Gertrude’s apartment house when I was a few minutes after 11, getting home; I was in a taxi. It took considerable talking over a telephone, to convince the front desk they ought to open the door (an electric lock of some kind) and let me in.22

My View of Women and Higher Education

Daryl Chase retired as president of USU in 1968, and was succeeded by Glen L. Taggart. Both Taggart and his wife, Phyllis Paulsen Taggert, grew up in Cache Valley, but had lived elsewhere for years. They came here from Michigan State University. At a reception for the Taggarts, held in the Sunburst Lounge, I met Phyllis’ s brother, F. Robert Paulsen, dean of education at the University of Arizona. He told me he was editing a book on higher education, but realized there was nothing in it specifically about women. Would I be willing to write a chapter on women and higher education? I would, and I did, and I was the only woman author among twelve.

A chief difference between my chapter and the others was that I used down-to-earth examples from women’s lives, and had the audacity to describe women from behind the scenes, and who were considered marginal in college classrooms. I wrote:

Each June, part of the commencement ritual at Utah State University is the PHT (Putting Hubby Through) ceremony. If the graduating man wants his wife to receive this certificate, he fills in the proper form at the Dean of Students’ office. The afternoon before commencement, the ceremony of PHT takes place in the auditorium of Old Main, with the center section filled with the women candidates, and the outer section and balcony overflowing with husbands, babies, small children, and parents of the candidates. Each recipient walks over the stand to receive her certificate. Some are far gone in pregnancy, but each walks with dignity.
They are a courageous lot. They have lived on a shoestring, typed their husbands’ papers, and shushed the children while their husbands studied. They have sometimes earned money by typing for others, tending babies for others, working in stores downtown, waiting tables, nursing at night in the hospital, and in countless other ways. Their wages have been low, unless they already had their own college degree and are nursing or teaching. But night nursing is tiring, and some of these would settle for part-time nursing with less pay and more sleep. There are not enough teaching jobs to go around, and some holders of teaching certificates end up in unskilled jobs. There are so many student wives seeking employment that the law of supply and demand operates to keep the wage structure low.

There is something else about the PHT ceremony that should be mentioned. There are a few, but growing number of young women who walk over the stand to receive the PHT, who appear the next morning capped and gowned in the commencement line to receive in their own right an earned bachelor’s degree. ‘In their own right’ is a phrase that speaks volumes about the nature of marriage in our society.\textsuperscript{23}

I also wrote about the kinds of women I had in my own classes, telling of mothers in their twenties or thirties, widowed or divorced, trying to get a teaching certificate so they can fend for themselves; the women who look tired and worn, often with no help with their children, yet they are impelled to take a heavy class load so they can get out quickly and start supporting themselves and their children.

Before I went into my down-to-earth approach, I gave facts showing that in the United States women’s educational status, relative to men’s, declined between 1930 and 1965. Only 32 percent of master’s degrees went to women in 1965, compared with 40 percent in 1930. Only 11 percent of doctoral and equivalent degrees went to women in 1965 compared with 15 percent in 1930. A National Academy of Sciences report showed women to be slower than men in achieving full professorships, taking two to five years longer in the biological sciences, and as much as a decade in the social sciences. Three percent of lawyers, 1 percent of engineers, and 6.7 percent of physicians were women.\textsuperscript{24}

I quoted from an NIH study that urged more women in biomedical areas, and recommended ways of enabling women to combine the rigors of graduate study with home and family responsibilities. The NIH study urged changes in employment practices so women could work on a part-time basis during the years of pressing family responsibilities.
The final recommendation suggested attitudinal reasons for women’s poor showing in numbers in professional fields:

Action programs should be initiated to dispel the ‘inferiority myth,’ and the concept that women must make a choice between career and domesticity. A fourth of the women in the study said being a research scientist and physician would restrict chance for marriage. A third said parents discourage daughters from training in such fields. It was suggested there be greater recognition of women successful in these fields, and programs to foster career aspirations.25

In today’s terms, this was a call for role models and mentoring. But the NIH study didn’t say outright there was discrimination against women as they sought education and employment in the professions. It did not mention sexism and male domination, arguments that a vigorous women’s movement would soon make. From the 1940s to 1972 there was unconscious as well as overt discrimination in the sciences and other professions, and not until the data were accumulated and women banded together to name the problems and take action would there be a change.26

Concern Over Women’s Low Pay

Our subcommittee on employment, within the Governor’s Committee on Status of Women, knew that fear was the real reason that working women in Logan’s downtown did not come to our hearings. They were afraid of losing their jobs if they showed even a breath of militancy. The hearings in Logan and in Price (which had a better attendance) were held with help from Carlyle Gronning of the State Industrial Commission, who explained the state labor laws.27 Later we had another ally in Elizabeth Vance who headed the state Anti-discrimination Office under Governor Rampton. She was a Democratic national committeewoman, and had managed, somehow, to get nurses’ salaries raised in Utah.

When the Neighborhood Youth Corps for high school students was paying the federal minimum wage of $1.25 an hour, their mothers who cooked in restaurants downtown were getting only eighty cents. We shrugged off employers’ criticism by saying that students had to attend one hour of counseling for every three hours worked, making their pay ninety-four cents. But this was still more than women cooks made, and we saw little prospect of change. For some occupations, union membership might have been feasible. When Pat Woodruff, on our Status of
Women Subcommittee, tried to find out how many Utah women belonged to unions, the male members of the union she belonged to dumped the contents of her office desk drawers onto the floor. However, with time, some unions became more hospitable toward women.

When the State Industrial Commission appointed me to the advisory council of the State Department of Employment Security (Work Force Services), I hoped to have some influence. The advisory council was formed in the 1940s to monitor and write appropriate state legislation for the unemployment insurance fund. In 1965 when I joined, the state office had also taken on responsibility with regard to some Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) programs. In fact, Theodore Maughan of the state office was one of the four men who helped me write the proposal that brought in our first Northern Utah Community Action Program funding. At advisory council meetings, six union men sat on one side of the table and six corporation officials sat on the other. Three public representatives sat at the ends and had no vote. I was one of these and, of course, was the only woman. The council promptly made me vice chairman. Ogden attorney Dave Holther had been chairman from the time that the council was first formed. When he became terminally ill, I succeeded him.

From the very first, I let the advisory council know that I was concerned about women’s low pay. When restaurant owners came to ask exemption from including waitress’s tips in their pay, for purposes of calculating unemployment insurance payments, both sides of the table acted as one in refusing exemption; and when the owners left, council members spoke out against the disgracefully low wages of waitresses. But of course we had no real influence on those wages.

One day, while waiting for council meeting to begin, two of the union men said to me that they thought unions could get women’s wages up. This indicated a softening. However, the Utah legislature continued its strong support of the right-to-work law, and the Mormon Church maintained a constant anti-union stance, as well as an insistent view that women belonged in the home, not out in the labor force. Utah was and is a conservative state.

Our Daughters and the Women’s Movement

Barrie, Sandra, and Avril arrived at the women’s movement on paths different from mine. Barrie was a graduate student in sociology at Brandeis University and lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After she
came home for a visit the summer of 1966, she went to Washington D.C., to attend the wedding of Margy McNamara and Barry Carter, friends from Stanford University days. Barrie took along my white gloves, the ones I occasionally wore to Faculty Women’s League. I was awestruck that my gloves were going to the wedding of the daughter of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. In her letter home, Barrie wrote that after the wedding, held in the Washington Cathedral,

. . . We walked out past rows of tourists, who had noted that above the entrance was carved in stone, ‘The Way of Peace’ (a little irony for the Sec. of Defense).

Walking towards the car, we passed the Kennedy brothers who were chatting with Alice Roosevelt Longworth (in her eternal broad-brimmed black hat). We followed the rows of chauffeured limousines from the church to the McNamara’s home in Georgetown . . . Handshake with LBJ (who was warm and fatherly and looked like a slightly shabby Rotarian in dress and manner—while at the same time appearing kingly and slightly formidable); Conversation with Fulbright (who stood alone more than once in the chess game—I walked up, introduced myself, and said I appreciated his courage and position on the Vietnam issue; he seemed to appreciate my comment, and replied ‘Thank you; we need all the help we can get’) . . .

I’m mailing back your gloves, Mom, under separate cover. Any minor stains on them (will wash out) are the finest champagne. So don’t complain. As it turned out, only about half the women wore hats to the wedding—I joined the hat-less lot, as did Mrs. McNamara.  

In May 1967 Barrie wrote of Vietnam Summer, a Cambridge project against the Vietnam war. She belonged to two different draft resistance groups and did draft counseling. A year later she wrote that she had met Dr. Benjamin Spock. Barrie attended Resist, the adult support organization for draft resistance that raised money for the legal defense fund for the indicted Boston Five, which included Spock. Her letter of January 19, 1969, told of civil rights protests at Brandeis. She was still in the draft resistance movement. She ended her letter by saying: “Also enclosed is a bibliography on women from my women’s liberation study group. Will write more later about this new activity. Tally ho.” She wrote a long letter in May telling of the Female Liberation Conference, which was organized in part by Bread and Roses.

Bread and Roses was formed when a number of separate consciousness-raising groups, some out of SDS (Students for a Democratic
Society) and others out of the anti-war movement joined together in early 1969. The regional Female Liberation Conference that I wrote about in May 1969 was partly sponsored by Bread and Roses [which] took its name from the famous 1911 strike of women textile workers in Lawrence, Mass.; they sang a song about ‘give us bread, but give us roses too.’ We had a sense of ourselves as socialist-feminists, though we used the term ‘women’s liberation,’ not ‘feminism.’ There was another radical women’s liberation group in Boston, Cell 16, which was explicitly radical feminist (though I wonder if they used the term feminism—I don’t think that term became widespread until the mid 1970s when we became more aware of women’s history of protest.) Bread and Roses was quite large at its peak—certainly at least 1000 members. Among the many activities: a women’s health group that developed Our Bodies, Ourselves; zap actions—we pasted little signs that said ‘this offends women’ over sexist ads; rape education work; a speakers’ bureau (Donna Hulse and I went to various churches and school groups, including a sociology class at Harvard, to explain ‘women’s liberation’).33

Boston was hot and sticky the weekend of Labor Day 1969, and I was visiting Barrie before flying to Austria to meet Ione Bennion and proceed on a round-the-world trip of six weeks, during which Ione and I would meet Wynne briefly in India and in Tokyo. Sandra was holding fort in Logan, and Barrie wrote to her on September 16, telling what was going on in Cambridge.

The Women’s Liberation movement is big stuff around these parts. Is there any wind of it in Utah?

When Mother was here en route to Europe she met a lot of my friends, who told me afterwards, ‘She’s got quite a woman’s lib rap herself’ (an ultimate kind of compliment) . . .

I noticed in a big compendium of educational statistics for the U.S. that in 1965–66 only 3 women got BA’s in forestry, nationwide (I think there were over 300 men, maybe more). I circled that figure and thought proudly of you.34

Sandra was the only one of our offspring to attend Utah State University, and was one of four women students in the College of Natural Resources.35 Forestry students were required to attend a six weeks’ summer camp up Logan canyon, and she would have gone except it would have required daily driving back and forth from Logan because there were no “facilities” for women. Male students were housed at camp. She chose not to attend under those conditions.
Women’s facilities were made available the following summer, but by then Sandra had essentially completed her bachelor’s degree.

During the summer of 1969, Sandra worked as a United States Forest Service research technician in the Uintah Primitive Area. She worked alone in the mountains, traveling about in a tiny Volkswagen Bug. If the roads were muddy, she rode a horse provided by a private wilderness outfitter. Before she departed Logan to take up this job, her boyfriend Robert Brown gave her a two-bladed axe for chopping wood and for protection. But that particular axe sent mixed signals because he painted its handle pink and inserted rhinestones just above the blade. Today I wonder if that axe could be called androgynous, but more likely it suffered a case of split personality.

The Forest Service’s only uniform for women was a gabardine skirt and jacket, and Sandra, wearing knee high socks with the skirt, was often mistaken for a Girl Scout. When she received Barrie’s September 16 letter asking if there was any wind of women’s liberation in Utah, Sandra was living her own version by entering a male-dominated field and demanding equal opportunity.

Avril, in the meantime, had entered the University of Utah in 1967 and by 1969 was majoring in sociology. That spring she attended Christian Albrechts University in Kiel, Germany, on the Baltic. In this exchange program she learned German well enough to get credit in political science and philosophy. Back at the U. of U. that fall, she helped develop a drug referral center on campus. She wrote in October:

> It looks like our suicide, school freak-outer, drug referral center on campus is really getting going. Dean [Virginia] Frobes is really hot on the idea and Ballif Hall has given us a room in the basement. I’m the official secretary and am trying to maneuver my time schedule to avoid flunking a few classes. Lance is also helping with this.

Lance had entered the U. of U. as a freshman that fall. Avril wrote her October letter on the letterhead of “Channing Club, Affiliated with Student Religious Liberals, 318 Union Building.” In February 1970, Avril’s letter home said that she and Joni were going to start a “women’s liberation thing” in the dorm, and that a Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) conference was being held that weekend in Los Angeles. They planned to go, and she added, “Barrie wants a report on women’s lib from the coast.”

Things were hopping everywhere, and the women’s movement was only one of several movements of the 1970s.