

# Career Day at C.P.H.S.: Women Should Opt Out, Not Cop Out

Wendy Helfenbaum

*Pendant une journée consacrée aux carrières professionnelles qui eut lieu dans une école secondaire de Laval, Québec, Judy Erola, Ministre responsable du statut de la femme fit un discours aux étudiants. Trente autres femmes participaient à des débats et à des ateliers. L'auteure, une étudiante de cette école, apprécia surtout le commentaire de Judy Erola que "personne ne peut, sans votre consentement, vous faire sentir inférieure", et son conseil est de "ne jamais accorder ce consentement".*

"We whose hands have rocked the cradle now use our heads to rock the boat," announced Judy Erola, the keynote speaker for Career Day at Chomedey Polyvalent High in Laval, Quebec, on March 16, 1983. "Women work because they have to. We are breadwinners and must be recognized as such."

Today's young women face an uncertain working future. Although we have made incredible advances in the last few decades, it is still the case that most Canadian women will marry, have children, and stay home because it is expected of them. Even in today's economic recession, for many of these women, a career, especially a non-traditional one, is out of the question. The problem may very well lie in the attitudes of young women as they go through school, being led to believe that science is "a man's field," and that ladies simply do not become mathematicians. Many of these attitudes were permanently changed, however, as the Career Day, entitled "Young Women:

Where Do We Go from Here?" focussed its ideas on issues such as "Women Engineering the Future" and "The Status of Women in Quebec."

The Honourable Ms. Erola, who is the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, paved the way for thirty other career women who spoke to the female students of various Laval high schools about their respective fields. The day consisted of speakers, small workshops, and a feature film, "Things Your Mother Never Taught You." A panel of speakers, whose topics ranged from "Your Job Future: Calamity or Opportunity - It's Your Choice" to "The New Girls' Network," emphasized that career women of the future should opt for non-traditional fields such as engineering.

"That science is a masculine field is most definitely a myth," stated Erola. Judy Erola's speech was quite inspiring as she recounted her career to over 100 fascinated students. She has been in the work force for twenty-seven years and says she does not regret a day of it. "I had to fight to get into non-traditional work, but I built a network for myself. Recent censuses show that today's women are actually more educated than men, yet the work force is still considered a masculine institution. We must demasculinize it."

After the panel of guest speakers, the students were dismissed to gather in smaller groups in twenty-eight classrooms around the school, where they were given the opportunity to learn more about the speakers they were most interested in. There were three twenty-minute "workshop" sessions where students could speak with such women as Maureen Lofthouse, an engineer; Pat Rusted, mayor of the town of Beaconsfield; and many others. These workshops were my favourite part of the day, as I got the chance to speak to Kathy Keefler, a television broadcaster for CBC's "Newswatch."

"Broadcasting is not a nine-to-five job," said Keefler. "All journalists must be extremely flexible and prepared to give up a lot of free time." Each guest was assigned a student hostess, to make her feel more comfortable at C.P.H.S. I had the added pleasure of being Kathy Keefler's hostess, and I found her to be very interesting and helpful. As I hope someday to become a journalist, Kathy Keefler's advice on journalism programs offered in Canada

and how to approach a career in broadcasting was greatly appreciated. Kathy's classroom was full to capacity for each session, as was Constable Diane Kilrea's.

Constable Kilrea is an RCMP narcotics officer. She provided many exciting and humorous anecdotes about her career but also had some strong advice for women who planned to work in Quebec. "One thing is indisputable. If a woman wants to work in this province, she must be two things: bilingual and gutsy."

Guts, however, are not all that are needed to succeed as a career woman in Canada. Approximately 20 per cent of women workers in Canada are unionized, in contrast to 32 per cent of men. Obviously, this does not minimize the difficulties we are having in the male-oriented work force. But, according to the thirty talented women who represented the female portion of the workforce, things can only improve. Because of organized events like the C.P.H.S. Career Day, the attitudes of young women are changing, and they are changing for the better.

Most of the students attending the Career Day were enthusiastic and full of intelligent, thought-provoking questions. Many of the guests remarked on how well-organized the day was. Nita Farmer, a consultant psychologist for the Laurenval School Board, deserves most of the credit as the co-ordinator of this truly innovative and inspiring day.

Perhaps the only drawback to the otherwise full and exciting day was the fact that Laval's male population was not permitted to participate. They probably would have greatly benefited from many of the speakers, like Erola, who stressed that chauvinism in the workforce still exists.

"I've been told, 'I like you, Judy. You think like a man,'" said Erola. "That's ridiculous and wrong. No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." She went on to say that if a woman is determined to succeed, she will do so.

"Oh, and about your consent," she concluded, "don't give it."

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*Wendy Helfenbaum, a student at Chomedey Polyvalent High School in Laval, Quebec, attended Career Day in 1983. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism.*