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FROM: MOLLY



(feel free to
comment, edit,
advise, etc.)

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The First Wave

As you will probably know from other contributions to this issue, Dixie Ehrenreich and I co-edited *Women in Forestry* from 1983 to 1985. I know I'll repeat a common theme when I say that much has changed between then and now. My problem is distinguishing between changes that are real for women in natural resources in general and changes that have occurred in my own life and those of my closest women friends. Perhaps, in this case, the personal and the professional are truly similar.

Jane Difley's smiling face on the cover of the latest issue of WIF/wiNR suggests how far we have come. Women have moved into much more influential positions in resource-related professions. In 1983, virtually all the women we could identify as readers and contributors to the journal were in entry-level or near entry-level professions--assistant professors, technicians, interpreters, GS 4s or 5s, and so on. Now Jane Difley is president of the SAF, there are women USFS station directors, senior scientists, and forest supervisors, more women full professors in academia, more women in top management, and many other women in senior leadership positions in the natural resources across the country.

As these changes have occurred, the special contributions of women have begun to be given higher value. In the 60s, 70s, and early 80s, women who entered the workforce and succeeded did so largely by mimicking a model of behavior established almost entirely by the men who went before us. The name of the game was hard work, productivity, long hours, fierce competition, and downplaying, as much as we could, concerns about family, children, or "outside" interests. If we had problems, it was because (as Betty Harragan told us in her book, *Games Mother Never Taught You*) we hadn't learned the rules in early training based on competitive sports and the strategies of war.

On a recent camping trip I commented, in jest, that the only thing that men can do better than women is pee on target--which is convenient but not really important in the greater scheme of things. My companion set me straight. You don't understand, he said. That ability is the whole basis for human civilization. If you can do that, you can move other things toward targets-- footballs, fast vehicles, bullets, missiles, large corporations, big budgets, and so on. You may start, he said, by just drowning an ant; but later on it's leveraged buyouts and war.

This seems an apt metaphor for how the world worked and what women were up against ten and more years ago. Women were measured against what were perceived as fundamentally superior attributes of men--singlemindedness, loyalty to the team, and ability to beat the competition. Many women's careers fell by the wayside, not from lack of education or skill, but because they really didn't know the rules--or couldn't or wouldn't follow those rules--as well as the men they worked with did. And if some of those who succeeded

became Queen Bees, denying any feminist inclinations and strenuously avoiding giving a helping hand to other women, it is perhaps understandable given what they had to endure.

The difficulties for the first women in natural resources, the women now over 45 or so, may seem far-fetched or exaggerated to the new generation of women entering the workforce, but they were both real and very daunting. Most never had a woman teacher of science or math in high school or of almost any technical subject in college. We had never met a woman Ph.D. Jobs, internships, and assistantships were given openly and preferentially to men. Sometimes they were overtly off limits to women for the lamest of reasons. We had no women role models or mentors to emulate. We did not know or see successful professional women who also seemed successful and happy at marriage and motherhood. So we did the best we could, winging it much of the time and failing at least sporadically and, too often, terminally. We had no clear view of what the future held for us.

Behind the [now] smiling faces of successful, accomplished, middle-aged women leaders in the natural resource professions are some pretty grisly stories of discrimination, not being taken seriously, rejection or ostracism from the professional herd, and difficulties created by men in more powerful positions who felt threatened by up-and-coming women or who simply and unapologetically felt that these women were stepping out of their much more appropriate traditional roles. These same stories also include admittance of our own naivety, poor strategies, and compounded difficulties created by 1) not knowing the ropes and 2) having no one to show us the ropes. These stories are not ones we tell very often, even to each other, partly because we want to believe that they are ancient history, and partly because we need to forget them to be able to function effectively and optimistically in our work environments today.

Another model for success--the Superwoman--followed close upon the heels of the act-as-much-like-a-man-as-you-can model. Superwoman, also called the Type E woman, set unrealistically and unnecessarily high standards for performance in both her professional and personal life. These standards are behind other war stories that older women professionals are somewhat more willing to share: lack of child care, lack of sleep, lots of guilt, and general lack of support for the multiple demands then--and in many cases still today--placed largely upon professional women who are also wives and mothers. It is not simply by chance that many of the most successful older women that I know are either divorced or have male partners who are unusually caring, participatory in the relationship, and supportive of our equality, independence, and efforts to make a mark upon our professions.

In my more discouraged moments, I have thought of these women--my peers--as the "first wave." In, for example, the movie Gallipoli, waves of young men were sent out to be shot by the enemy in hopes that a few would get through enemy lines, and also so the

enemy would run out of ammunition and allow more of those in later waves to get through. In our case, an awful lot of women in the first wave derailed or gave up in exhaustion, but a few got through, and more of the second wave have a chance for success.

In working to create each issue of the journal, we wanted to help more women get through. We tried to find those that seemed to be having some success and highlight their work and ideas in the journal, to provide some sense of hope for the others. Throughout the 80s, the journal gave a lot of support to women in the first wave. It provided a link to others that we desperately needed in our individual isolation. It encouraged us to keep trying, to persevere, and provided us with role models that were both competent and very human.

As the 90s unfold, I see the competitive model of the professions changing to something more holistic, cooperative, and nurturing. These attributes are no longer seen--at least not entirely--as weaknesses. I don't think it is overly simplistic to say that the "new" forestry, which tries to balance concerns about timber production with concerns for the environment and long-term sustainability, is an outgrowth of this changing view. As they evolve, new forestry and other integrated fields will provide a broader base of opportunity for the diverse views and talents that men and women together bring to their work.

In its early days, *Women in Forestry* was fueled our collective need to know more about how women were doing in jobs like ours, what problems they faced, and what particular points of view or strategies they found useful. We thought that the journal could help tide us over until there were more women around that we could actually talk to and work with and share ideas with. I still believe--indeed, I hope--that we will grow beyond the need for a separate journal for women in natural resources, but that time has not yet come. We need the journal to study new models of success as the profession and as working relationships between men and women adapt to changing times. In many ways, we need the journal now more than ever.