

Women's History from Forty Years Ago



Participants in Job's Daughters Rock-A-Thon left to right, Susan Aker, Maureen Biobel and Diana Czar show high spirits as they rock away the hours in Pfeifer Ford-Mercury showrooms last Saturday and Sunday.

Friday, March 8 is

International Women's Day. So I took a wander through the newspapers from 1979 to see what some local women were up to forty years ago. Here's what I found. It's kind of a random collection, but interesting reading nonetheless – and I hope it brings back some memories for you!

Mrs. Karen Nicklassen was the proud mother of Creston's 1979 New Year's baby. She (and her baby son) received gifts from the Creston Valley Kinettes – the women's side of the Kinsmen Club – that were presented by Kinette members Betty Fritz and Marlys Joy.

Speaking of women's organizations, there were a lot of those, all busily active with any variety of fundraisers to benefit the community and beyond: the Catholic Women's League, Ladies' Auxiliaries to the Eagles, the Legion, all the churches, and the Creston Valley Hospital to name a few.

There were at least four different Women's Institutes at the time: Creston, Wynndel, Lister-Huscroft, and the Creston Young Women. They supported sick children's hospitals, donated supplies to the local hospital, adopted children in Brazil, sent cards and letters to the sick and bereaved. In an interesting juxtaposition of causes, the Lister-Huscroft WI advocated for the establishment of an airport in Creston, while the Creston group learned about the health benefits of bananas.

Irene Labelle made her fiftieth Christmas-day visit to patients in the Creston Valley Hospital. And while we're at the hospital, let us note the *Creston Review's* comment that "something new has been added to Creston Valley Hospital with the appointment of Miss Jemma Jacino, RN; Mrs. Dorothy Allen, RN; Miss McKay, RN as head nurses, each nurse in charge of a rotating shift."

Olga Weber was the Grand Aggregate winner of the 1979 Creston Valley Fall Fair.

Marion Hernandez was valedictorian of the 1979 PCSS graduating class. Lori Dobko was named Blossom Festival queen, and Janet Ringheim (1978's queen) and Karen Wigen went to Grand Forks to compete for the Miss Interior title and the chance to represent the area in the Miss Canada pageant.

Juanita Hardy and Valerie Jones, both students at PCSS, won honourable mentions in a Canadian national short story contest sponsored by the Permanent company (an insurance firm, according to the newspapers). The contest, which carried

a \$1,000 top prize, was open to all high school students across Canada – so the girls' honourable mentions were quite an achievement.

Sonia Saar, age eighteen, won a \$1,000 department of education scholarship and planned to use it either for photography or business school. Theresa Mitchell Banks, an undergrad student at Simon Fraser University, won a graduate open scholarship. This was, to use the newspaper's terms, a major award, with only a limited number being given, and Theresa was the first student in the criminology department to receive one; most of them went to science students. "Further," continued the newspaper, "they are usually awarded to people actually doing masters or doctoral work. Theresa, although accepted by the university for the masters program, is still only an undergraduate and will not graduate from the university until the beginning of July."

Several other local children also (presumably) benefited from a financial windfall: Mrs. M. Denko won a million dollars in the provincial lottery and planned to use part of her winnings to help her seven grandchildren through university.

In sports, the Creston Barons won the ladies softball league championship, and Judith Stead won the third annual Kootenay Kup endurance ride with her eight-year-old Arabian gelding Saihad. This was a fifty-five mile race from the Wycliffe showgrounds, to Ta Ta Creek, McNair Lake, Kimberley, and back to Wycliffe. This was Judy and Saihad's second victory. They completed the course in four hours and twenty-two minutes, fifty-nine minutes better than their previous time. The story in the newspaper made it sound like endurance riding was kind of a new thing in the region.

While we're on the topic of new things in equestrian matters, the first meeting for a proposed regional equestrian council for the Kootenays was held in June 1979. This council would be a member of the Equestrian Federation of BC to "represent all horse owners and their wide variety of interests to the provincial government, the federal government, and the Canadian Equestrian Federation, with the intention of maintaining a grass-roots level of interchange and decision making." Creston's Betty Roper was elected secretary-treasurer.

In politics, Meta Beduz was elected to Town Council and former alder[wo]man Lela Irvine was appointed to a three-year term on the board of variance. Margaret Murray was elected for a second term as chairman of the school board, in a year not entirely free of controversy: in April, Crawford Bay trustee L.A. Ludlow resigned from the school board, saying that, as no one else seemed to take seriously a proposal he had made that would "increase the quality of education our children receive by 50% to 100% at very little cost to the taxpayers," he really had nothing more to offer the district as a trustee. Unfortunately, the newspapers don't give any clue as to what that proposal was!

Helena White retired as president of the Creston Chamber of Commerce; Mae Scott was elected president of the Nelson-Creston NDP constituency, and Sandra McGregor was elected the 1979 East and West Kootenay Justice Council representative. The regional Justice Council, which I believe worked to improve the quality of judicial services, was responsible to the BC provincial association of Justice Councils. Sandra has already been active in these matters; she was a member of the original Creston Family Court Committee and, as president of the local Justice Council her committee had recommended alterations and renovations to the Creston Court House that were being carried out at the time of her election as the Kootenay representative. The newspaper termed this "a signal honour."

I admit, when I grabbed that volume of 1979 newspapers, I was hoping to see a few bold headlines about the innovation or adventurousness of local women – something about them fearlessly leading the way into new roles and new fields. The 1970s were, after all, a time of great social change for women; that's the generation that set the standard for my generation and all those who follow. But even without the headlines, these stories do illustrate that movement: women taking on leadership roles, participating fully in every aspect of the community, going ahead and doing things even though – or perhaps because – they were new. And maybe the lack of bold headlines is an indicator that these activities were perceived as being as normal and expected for women as they were for men.