

SUBURBAN LIFE

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THURSDAY, JULY 21, 1994



VIRGINIA NICOLL

Women must demand pay equity

You're worth 70¢ on the dollar to men, You're two-thirds as good as your brother. The ratio prevails since heaven knows when, A female, you've never known other. No matter your bright, a worker to boot, For your charm, your grace they will hail you. But money, promotions! The subject's not moot, You were born with the wrong genital!

In a nutshell, that describes the situation of women with respect to wages; a simple anatomical difference, present at birth, mandates that they will go through life earning less than their male counterparts. 70 cents on the dollar at present, less, if they are part-time or seasonal workers.

As college graduates, they will earn less, on average, than male high school grads, and because their wages are lower, their pension and social security benefits will be lower in retirement, their incomes will sink to 55 percent of that of men.

The low wages of women are a principal cause of the feminization of poverty in America today.

"Equal pay for equal work" legislation, on the books for decades, has failed to remedy the situation, since women remain clustered in sales, service, and clerical jobs in which salaries are low and fringe benefits, such as pensions are non-existent.

An influx of women into traditionally male-dominated fields has not helped; rather wages for men and women alike have declined in such fields. The work women do, both inside and outside the home, is undervalued, simply because it is done by women.

■ Most work because they need the money. Without a leveling of the wage field, many of them will meet the fate of their mothers: poverty in old age.

Big loss

According to recent U. S. Labor Department figures, the average American woman loses \$420,000 in earnings over her lifetime due to wage discrimination. It is no accident that the bulk of the elderly poor are women, since low wages during the working years translate directly into low income in retirement.

Social security and pension plans are sex-neutral in structure, but they discriminate against women, too, rewarding male work patterns of long, unbroken service at relatively high wages.

Women leave the work force to bear and rear children, to care for the elderly disabled, and move when their husbands are transferred.

Each re-entry into the labor force may mean a fresh start at lower wages. The majority of American women between the ages of 18 and 64 are in the paid work force, including more than half of those with infants under one year.

Dismal fate

Most work because they need the money. Without a leveling of the wage field, many of them will meet the fate of their mothers: poverty in old age.

As long as they have access to the income of a husband or other male, they may escape that fate; without that, poverty, they name is Woman!

The Michigan Pay Equity Network (PEN), a coalition of more than 70 groups, is committed to ending wage discrimination against women and other disadvantaged persons.

A member of a national alliance, PEN includes labor unions, women's and civil rights organizations, religious, educational, and professional associations, and others. Pay Equity, also known as Comparable Worth, would dictate compensation for workers based on the skill, education, training, degree of responsibility, and working conditions of a particular job.

It would eliminate sex or any other personal characteristics of the job holder as the basis of the wage determinant. The poverty of any individual or group is a concern for all of us.

It robs people of their dignity, swells the welfare rolls, and burdens the taxpayers. It is especially deplorable when it results from a genetic characteristic one cannot control.

We should all be demanding Pay Equity legislation from our representatives in Washington and in Lansing.

Virginia Nicoll is president of the Older Women's League of Michigan. A feminist poet, she has lived in Farmington for 11 years.

Signs of change



STAFF PHOTO BY ADRI TILLEY

Pioneer: Greg Frohriep has begun a nonprofit company to solicit donations from foundations to pay for captioning of live local news.

Breaking the silence

Captioning local news will open doors

Gregory Frohriep recently started a nonprofit business, Caption Works of the Deaf, with the hopes of bringing captions to local television news. Currently, most deaf people forgo the broadcasts, because they can't understand most of what is being said, Frohriep said.

BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Imagine watching the local news without the volume and having no means to hear or understand what the people are saying.

That's what most deaf people in Michigan face. Gregory Frohriep wants to change that by bringing full live captioning to local news. Currently Channel 4 has a limited system, but much of the live coverage is omitted, said Frohriep, adding that he hopes to change that by bringing the program to channels 2, 4 and 7.

Captioning provides typewritten text of what is being said at the bottom of the screen, similar to foreign movie captions.

A lot of people think most deaf people can understand almost everything that's being said by reading lips.

"Only a skilled lip reader can read about 30 percent of what is being said, and that's with a person in person," Frohriep said in sign language to Deborah Ripple, who works at his company, Communication Works of the Deaf in Farmington Hills.

Lofty goal

Frohriep also established a non-

profit company, Caption Works of the Deaf Inc., earlier this year to provide closed-captioning program. Most of his time has been devoted to writing and looking for grants that will take on the cost. And since most foundation representatives aren't familiar with captioning and life as a deaf person, Frohriep has to explain every detail.

Like the fact that television sets built since July 1992 must be equipped with decoders.

And the fact that Michigan has 600,000 deaf or hard-of-hearing people, the fourth-largest population in the country. In the Detroit area there are 280,000 hard-of-hearing and deaf people and in the United States there are 26 million, according to the Division of Deafness, an entity of the Department of Labor in Lansing.

Frohriep stresses that deaf people do not call themselves hearing-impaired, because the word impaired implies a problem and most deaf people do not perceive themselves as having a problem. Most deaf people prefer to be referred to as "Deaf" with a capital D, Frohriep said. The capital letter is used because deaf people want to be viewed as a minority group, similar

to Spanish-speaking Americans.

Deafness changed path

In fact, Frohriep said he sees his deafness as a God-given blessing. Growing up in White Pigeon, a small southwestern Michigan town, he was 6 years old when he had a high fever and was injected with a serum that would bring his body temperature down. The doctors told his parents it was either that or he would die. He didn't die, but the medicine killed nerves that affected his hearing, and he today he is 100 percent deaf.

"I believe God wanted me to help in the deaf community," Frohriep said. "It's very wonderful. I'm very happy."

He attended college at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y. in the college of National Technological Institute for the Deaf and earned a degree in media production.

"When I graduated I looked for a job, and it was really tough," he said. "I wanted to set up some kind of business and help people understand the deaf community and improve access to deaf people."

Subtle approach

Rather than force the laws on people, Frohriep prefers to "educate" people of the laws that offer deaf people certain rights, like auxiliary aids in businesses, organizations, schools, governmental entities and hospitals.

He worked with the Division of Deafness and provided captioning for town-hall meetings explaining

rights to deaf people. He also recently sold captioning decoders to five Mr. B's restaurants, allowing captioning on their large screens.

"Hearing people like it, too, because it's so loud in there that they can't hear sometimes," Frohriep said. "We want to encourage other restaurants to do that, too."

His company has provided live captioned coverage of the Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Catholic TV Network of Detroit.

Accepting deafness

A lot of times, the biggest obstacle is getting people to accept that loved ones are deaf and to offer them everything that's available. Frohriep tells a story about a woman who didn't know anything about sign language when she gave birth to a son who was deaf. The doctor told her the boy should learn to lip read. The mother always held out hope he would one day hear.

"The problem is this medical perspective to fix problems," Frohriep said. "In the real world he's deaf. If children don't learn a language in the third or fourth year of life, their cognitive skills are behind."

Frohriep invited the mother to attend a sign-language class.

"Now it's wonderful to see this woman start to open up to the deaf community," he said. "Ninety percent of deaf children come from hearing parents, and many parents don't want to learn sign language. They think it's a hearing world."

In fact, Frohriep said, his own parents haven't learned to sign.

A happy half century of teaching ballet

BY ETHEL SIMMONS
STAFF WRITER

After 50 years of teaching dance in Michigan, Rose Marie Gregor has a lot of memories.

But past, present and future are all intertwined, for Gregor doesn't plan to call it quits or even slow down. She continues to teach dance at The Community House in Birmingham, where she has held classes since 1963.

Her students came from all over the country for The Community House's recent 50th anniversary party honoring Gregor, a Farmington resident. Among the guests was Barbara Hanahan of Birmingham, whose daughter, 23-year-old actress Sheila Hanahan, studied with Gregor for many years.

"Sheila loved her," Barbara Hanahan said. "I think the discipline and the stick-to-it-iveness she taught them is why Sheila is where she is." A successful Hollywood actress, Sheila is appearing in "Judicial Consent," a murder mystery with Bonnie Bedelia to be released in the fall.

Although Sheila couldn't attend the anniversary party, she did send along a photo. "We couldn't get a wonderful friend," Barbara Hanahan said of the longtime dance teacher.

Some of Gregor's students from her very first class at The Community House showed up at the party. Part of what provides the glue is that Gregor takes a real personal interest in all her students, keeping in touch with them through the years. "They think of me as their mother," she said.

Looks over clippings

In the Ruth Snyder Room, downstairs at The Community House, where the Birmingham Ballet & Jazz School has its dance studio, Gregor spread a table with clippings of newspaper articles about her classes and her students' careers.

This lively woman showed pictures of her stu-

dents who went on to become professional dancers. She also pointed out, "We have so many girls who became doctors - you know, the discipline of dance."

A student once called to say she was studying law at Wayne State University. "That sounds tough," Gregor told her. "Not as tough as what you put us through," the student remarked.

Gregor said that her students, who study dance six to eight hours a week, are often quickly accepted by the college of their choice because, "Here's a youngster who can commit to something." She noted, "The kids of dance are really with it. There's no such thing as a dumb dancer."

Started ballet company

The teacher had her own dance studio in Detroit before coming to The Community House, where the dance program had been a recreational one. "When I started, I made it into a classical ballet company," she said.

First called the Birmingham Ballet Company, the troupe later became the Performing Arts Group of Birmingham. Gregor expanded this to three companies by adding a junior company and an apprentice company. (The companies are now disbanded.) At the same time, the school changed its name from The Community House Dance School to the Birmingham Ballet & Jazz School.

From the nucleus of that ballet, many youngsters went into the career of dance. I tell them to use your dance for life skills. Get a career, just dance as an avocation. But many were burning to dance," she said.

Gregor estimates she has touched the lives of more than 5,000 students. "I've gone to weddings everywhere," she said. "I'm always the first to know if they're having a baby." When a student

See BALLET, 2C



JOHN STORMER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Getting it right: Rose Marie Gregor works with ballet student Laura Navarro, 14, who has been studying with her for seven years.