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**CREATING GENDER EQUITY IN THE NEWSROOM: A FRONT PAGE
CHALLENGE FOR THE SOUTHAM TASK FORCE ON WOMEN'S
OPPORTUNITIES**

By

Susan Korah, B.A. Hons., B.Ed.

(Queen's University)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Journalism

School of Journalism and Communication
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

August 24, 2001

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Thesis Supervisor

Director, School of Journalism and Communication

Carleton University

September 24, 2001

ABSTRACT

The Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities, released internally in April 1990, was the first of its kind in the history of Canadian print journalism. It described some special challenges that female journalists encountered at almost every stage of their careers, and made ten recommendations designed to improve women's opportunities.

As an instrument of long-term change, however, the task force has had only limited success. Many other issues took precedence on the corporate agenda. After the Hollinger take-over of Southam in 1996, it was not even formally revisited. However, the situation of women in newsrooms has improved in some respects during the last few years. This thesis argues that the task force itself played little part in these changes beyond giving official approval to equity policies for a limited period. The more lasting changes were effected by a combination of market forces and gradually changing social attitudes towards women's roles in the workplace and in the home.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother,
Mrs. Acca (Rebecca) Joseph, a pathbreaking educator
who has opened doors for many women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank a number of people who have inspired, guided and supported the writing of this thesis. My advisor Dr. Barbara Freeman deserves a standing ovation for introducing me to the fascinating world of women in 19th century journalism; and Shirley Sharzer for providing that flash of inspiration and a wealth of suggestions regarding sources of information. I also sincerely appreciate all those journalists and executives of Southam, Hollinger and CanWest Global Corporation who generously shared their time, insights and experiences with me, and made the history of the task force come alive for me. To them I would like to say that it was a pleasure talking to them in person or on the telephone. I would also like to acknowledge my family and friends scattered throughout the world, for their moral support and extremely positive attitude towards my efforts. Their faith in me and their hopes for my success sustained me through the long months of study, research and writing.

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INTRODUCTION

The Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities began its fact-finding mission in 1988 and culminated in a prescriptive report presented to the publishers of the company's 17 newspapers in April 1990. Composed of 15 women and three men, the task force was set up to "probe barriers to the advancement of women in the Southam Newspaper Group."¹ The task force initially set out to examine barriers that prevented women from moving into senior management positions. As its work progressed, its mandate widened to cover all policies and practices that hindered women at every stage of their careers from recruitment to retirement. Its report was no feminist manifesto, and did not suddenly transform newspaper journalism into a perfectly gender balanced profession. Rather, it was one media corporation's response to a changing social, cultural and economic environment, and was driven by a combination of journalistic idealism and market imperatives.

Nevertheless it represented an important milestone in the history of Canadian print journalism. For one fleeting moment it put the spotlight on the professional and

¹ Shirley Sharzer and Susan Riley, "Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities," unpublished report prepared for SNG publishers, April 1990, 3.

personal dilemmas encountered by female journalists in a manner that had never been done before or since.

The only other media industry in Canada that had conducted a study on women's employment issues was the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The CBC had established an internal task force on the status of women in 1974. Headed by Kay MacIver, the task force had led to the creation of an equal opportunity office at the CBC the following year.² But the CBC is a crown corporation, subject to government employment policies. Earlier, the 1970 Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women Report had identified the federal public service as one of the leading culprits in the treatment of women as inferior members of the work force. The Commission report had stated that crown corporations had an abysmal record in this regard.³

In the print media, no official finger-pointing regarding discrimination against women journalists had ever been done. Except for a brief reference in the Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media of 1970,

² Women in the CBC: Report of the CBC Task Force on the Status of Women (Toronto: CBC, 1975), 12.

³ Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970).

gender discrimination had gone generally unrecognized at the corporate level.⁴

The daily newspaper had become established as an indispensable institution of Canadian political and social life long before women had gained even the most basic political right--the right to vote. Thus, a task force report documenting the status of women newspaper employees and making recommendations aimed at achieving gender parity was a watershed document. In the words of one task force member, "At the time, the whole thing was considered quite radical and Southam was considered to be a forward-thinking company."⁵

My interest in the subject of Canadian women in print journalism is both academic and intensely personal. Having worked on a small-town Ontario daily for several years, I reluctantly left the journalistic work force shortly after the birth of my second child. The guilt and the stress had been unbearable. At those crucial times of the day when I should have been tending to the needs of the children, I was always away from home, furiously scribbling notes, animatedly interviewing news sources, and filing stories

⁴ Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970).

⁵ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

from city council meetings, board of education meetings and arts council events. Like most women, I had been socialized to believe that putting the children to bed was somehow more my responsibility than putting the newspaper to bed.

I have worked at several professional positions since then, including high school teaching and writing important reports for high-profile organizations. But nothing gave me the pulse-quickenning thrill, the great sense of daily adventure and the never-ending variety of experiences that journalism seemed to provide. To those who are in love with words and ideas, and thrive on the excitement and stimulation of following and recording the public issues of the day, there is something hopelessly addictive about journalism. And yet, as Peter Desbarats has noted:

Women face even greater obstacles than their male colleagues in fashioning long-term careers that provide sufficient advances in salary and responsibility. Despite the often liberal attitudes of their editorial writers and commentators media industries are surprisingly conservative in their hiring and promotion practices.⁶

While getting hired was not a problem for me, staying on certainly was. Part time work, paid maternity leave and other options that were available to my friends in the more traditional female professions such as teaching and nursing

⁶ Peter Desbarats, Guide to the Canadian News Media (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990), 97.

were simply not available to me. At the time, I did not attribute it to the "conservative practices of the media industries," but to the fundamental conflict between the "nature" of womanhood and the "nature" of journalism. And yet, a little voice that refused to be stifled told me that it need not be inevitable. Why should women journalists let their talents wither and die because their employers did not make some kind of arrangements to accommodate their biology? Why should the employers lose the talents of their female journalists because no effort had been made to retain them and to create a work environment in which they could grow and blossom? I wondered if other women journalists who loved their jobs (and their families) faced similar dilemmas. During the years that I was away from journalism, I always dreamed of returning to my chosen field. I decided to go back to school and carve out a re-entry path for myself.

As a Master of Journalism student at Carleton University, I made what to me was an extremely important and intriguing discovery. This was the fact that the marriage of women's studies and journalism history has barely reached the courtship stage in Canada. As with an adolescent couple at a school dance, there appears to be some mutual attraction, but they stare uneasily at each

other across the floor, until one of them takes the first tentative step towards the other. The literature on Canadian women as practising journalists is at this stage. A few research studies have tracked their progress in terms of access to the profession, parity with men in pay scales and working conditions, presence in management positions and in the more prestigious areas of news coverage such as politics, international affairs and business.⁷ Their virtual exclusion from traditional journalism history and contemporary media studies is glaringly conspicuous.⁸

Aside from a minuscule number of books on the history of women in Canadian journalism⁹--a few biographies of individual Canadian female journalists,¹⁰ and some journalistic pieces in the *Ryerson Review of Journalism* on the contemporary situation of women in journalism--the field is virtually untrodden territory.

This exclusion is astonishing, especially in view of the fact that Canadian women have participated in the

⁷ Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian News Media: Progress Since the 1970s" (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1997) is one of these.

⁸ Paul Rutherford, Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late 19th Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) for example, makes only passing references to female journalists.

⁹ Marjory Lang, Women Who Made the News: Female Journalists in Canada 1880-1945 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) is the fullest treatment of the subject.

¹⁰ Barbara M. Freeman, Kit's Kingdom: The Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989), and Jill Downie, A Passionate Pen: The Life and Times of Faith Fenton (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996) are examples of biographies of Canadian female journalists.

production of "hard" news and "soft" feature stories almost from the beginning of journalism in Canada. The Canadian Women's Press Club, founded in 1904, is one of the oldest institutions of its kind in the world.¹¹ Compared to the number of studies of male and female journalists in the United States,¹² profiles of Canadian journalists, especially female journalists, are few and far between.

My search for Canadian material was also hampered by the fact that my focus was on female journalists as workers and on their workplace issues rather than on the representation of women on the pages of newspapers. MediaWatch, a feminist media monitoring organization, has produced some materials on this aspect of the topic.¹³ There are several academic studies¹⁴ on this subject as well, but the portrayal of women as subjects and sources of news in newspaper columns is outside the scope of my study.

The scarcity of information on Canadian women journalists was daunting, but also became the *raison d'être*

¹¹ Kay Rex, No Daughter of Mine: the History of the Canadian Women's Press Club 1904-1971 (Toronto: Cedar Cave Books, 1995).

¹² J.W.C. Johnston and Edward J. Slawski, The News People: A Sociological Portrait of American Journalists and Their Work (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976); also David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, The American Journalist in the 1990s (Arlington, Va: The Freedom Forum, 1992).

¹³ "Women Strike Out" is a content analysis study of the under-representation of women as professionals and news sources in leading Canadian newspapers ([http:// www. mediawatch.ca/research](http://www.mediawatch.ca/research)).

¹⁴ Shari Graydon, "The Portrayal of Women in the Media," in Benjamin Singer, ed., Communications in Canadian Society (Toronto: Nelson, 1995), 143-147.

for this study. To add to existing knowledge of a relatively untapped field would be a great adventure in exploring untrodden paths.

In my search for a take-off point for my own study, I did strike gold of a sort. I had the good fortune of being introduced to Shirley Sharzer, one of the co-authors of the Southam Task Force Report on Women's Opportunities, and the driving force behind much of the supporting research. Sharzer, winner of the Order of Canada in February 2000, was one of my heroines. An intrepid trailblazer for Canadian women journalists, she had been the first female deputy managing editor of the *Globe and Mail* in the late 1980s.

When Sharzer was introduced as guest speaker in Prof. Barbara Freeman's "Gender and the Journalist" class on January 20, 2000, I listened, intensely interested, as the retired journalist described her career, which began in 1948. When she mentioned the Report of the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities which she had co-written with Susan Riley, a national affairs columnist, I was immediately intrigued. When I inquired where I could find the report, Sharzer, in her kind and gracious way, immediately offered to make me a copy.

The moment of inspiration came when I read "Whither the Revolution?" the "sidebar" as Sharzer called it, to the report she had written on professional training in Southam newsrooms. She wrote this in August 1989, a few months before she and Riley wrote the women's task force report. The report on professional training in Southam newsrooms was an assessment of professional training needs and aspirations among Southam newsroom staff members.¹⁵ Sharzer had written it for the management development committee headed by Clark Davey, then publisher of *The Gazette*, in Montreal. The mandate of this committee was to find ways of forestalling a potential leadership vacuum when the current generation of top newspaper executives retired *en masse*.

While the newsrooms Sharzer visited to gather information for her training survey were not exactly ticking time bombs of feminist frustration, there were murmurs of discontent among the women staffers.¹⁶ A new generation of women journalists had matured and blossomed in the 1980s, and they were no longer willing to pretend the emperor was resplendent in the full regalia of state. There was gender discrimination in the system, and now,

¹⁵ Shirley Sharzer, "Professional Training in Southam Newsrooms: A Survey," unpublished report prepared for the management development committee of the Southam Newspaper Group, August 1989.

¹⁶ Sharzer, "Professional Training in Southam Newsrooms," 35, 43-50.

with the safety and strength afforded by increasing numbers of women in the newsroom, it was no longer the height of indiscretion to talk about it. Unlike an earlier generation who were breathless with excitement at the novelty of their profession, and were as grateful to be a part of it as pre-adolescent girls allowed to stay up for a debutante ball,¹⁷ these women were no shrinking violets. They only needed a little gentle prodding and an assurance of anonymity to voice their concerns and articulate their issues.

"Whither the Revolution?" the "sidebar" or section that Sharzer attached to her report on training and development needs in Southam newsrooms, focused specifically on women's issues and concerns. It was based on her conversations with women working at 17 newspapers across the country.

The end result of Sharzer's fact-finding mission and the deliberations of the women's task force was a separate 76-page task force report including ten recommendations, and several appendices. The release of the task force report in April 1990 and its generally warm reception by most of the publishers of the Southam Newspaper Group were greeted with great excitement by the women and men of the

¹⁷ Kay Rex, 153. Joan Fraser made a similar comment about women being too dazzled by the novelty of their calling to complain about it (personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 Feb. 2001).

task force. The mood was ecstatic, and Sharzer and her colleagues celebrated with champagne.¹⁸

Ten years have passed since then, and I thought this would be a good time to re-examine it. Did this document herald a bright new era for women journalists? Did it remove obstacles to their career paths and propel some of them to the ranks of newsroom management? Or is the party over and have the champagne bubbles fizzled out?

These are the questions that the following pages set out to answer.

The theoretical approach underlying this study is derived from a feminist cultural studies perspective.¹⁹ This kind of analysis does not treat the media and other cultural institutions as isolated entities and allows for a discussion of these within the context of an entire cultural fabric.²⁰ The philosophy of public/private sphere dichotomy that underpinned cultural assumptions about women's social roles best explains the systemic barriers that the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities identified. The report and its recommendations were an

¹⁸ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

¹⁹ Liesbet van Zoonen, Feminist Media Studies (London: Sage, 1994).

²⁰ Barbara Freeman, The Satellite Sex: The Media and Women's Issues in English Canada 1966-1971 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001), 7.

attempt to change the culture of journalism and make it more woman-friendly. My position is that the culture in the newsroom and the gender-segregated nature of the profession were a reflection of the cultural baggage of the wider society, and needed to be dismantled before task force recommendations could become fully effective.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony that influenced the work of Canadian sociologists Wallace Clement²¹ and John Porter,²² holds that the media and other "ideological institutions" in society such as the church and the education system are instruments of control used by the ruling (male-dominated) elite to dominate the masses.²³ This control is exercised with the consent of the masses. The masses, of course, would theoretically include the majority of women who were not members of the corporate-political elite. This idea has the potential to become distorted into a sinister male conspiracy theory, which does not fit the story of relations between the Southam Newspaper Group and its female newsroom employees. A feminist cultural studies perspective is a more appropriate model for my study.

²¹ Wallace Clement, The Canadian Corporate Elite (Toronto: McClelland, 1975).

²² John Porter, The Vertical Mosaic (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1965).

²³ Robert Hackett, Richard Pinet, and Myles Ruggles, "News for Whom? Hegemony and Monopoly versus Democracy in Canadian Media," in Helen Holmes and David Taras, eds., Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1996), 259.

Chapter I is a historical and theoretical overview of the social, political and cultural context of women's entry into mainstream Canadian journalism in the last quarter of the 19th century. I have analyzed the historical origins of the "cultural barriers" that the Southam Task Force Report later identified as impediments to the progress of women as full and equal participants in journalism even in the late 1980s. The Victorian ideal of "separate spheres" for men and women was firmly embedded in all institutions of Canadian society and proved to be a formidable barrier to women's entry into journalism.

In Chapter II, the focus narrows to the Southam success story, which began when William Southam purchased *The Hamilton Spectator* in 1877, and sowed the seeds of Canada's first major newspaper group. The one published history of the Southam company, Charles Bruce's 1968 book *News and the Southams*, follows the norms of traditional historical narratives. A tale of acquisitions, buy-outs and business deals, and the rising fortunes of a family oligarchy, it has little to say about the role of women, even as bit players.²⁴ I have endeavored to fill this gap,

²⁴ Charles Bruce, News and the Southams (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968).

and to trace the growing influence of women in this saga, constrained as they were by the separate spheres ideology.

Chapter III focuses on the world of women in journalism, particularly in Southam newsrooms, at the end of the 1980s and in the early years of the 1990s--a period of relatively intense consciousness-raising discussions and activism on the part of women journalists to improve their status.

Chapter IV focuses on the report of the task force itself and analyzes its ten recommendations. Chapter V discusses early attempts at implementation and "keeping the heat on" in the immediate aftermath of its generally positive reception by Southam publishers. Chapter VI follows the story through the Hollinger take-over and a period of declining interest in women's issues. Using a case study approach, I have focused mostly though not entirely, on the five major dailies of the Southam Newspaper Group, *The Gazette* (Montreal), the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Calgary Herald*, and the *Vancouver Sun*.

With the CanWest Global purchase of Hollinger properties having been finalized in the fall of 2000, the media industry in Canada has undergone yet another upheaval. Izzy Asper, chairman of CanWest Global

Communications Corporation, is now at the helm rather than Conrad Black. I have not endeavored to analyze the period after the CanWest takeover because it is premature to record changes, even if there are any, in the status of women journalists. The senior executives and publishers with whom I discussed the subject included Don Babick, a veteran of the Southam company whom Leonard Asper, president of CanWest Global Communications Corporation appointed president and chief executive officer of Southam Inc. in March 2001.²⁵ Babick and other senior officials informed me that the transition has been seamless and there was no discernible change in terms of women's opportunities.²⁶ Women journalists whom I interviewed on the subject stated that it was too early to make any assessment of the new regime.

The sources I have used for this study are a combination of academic studies on media and feminist theory; other materials including histories and biographies; some records of the Canadian Women's Press Club stored in the National Archives of Canada; also key Southam documents including the Task Force Report and the report on training and development with its sidebar,

²⁵ Financial Post, 15 March 2001.

²⁶ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

"Whither the Revolution?" Last but not least, I conducted in-depth personal and telephone interviews with about 26 "actors" in the story, ranging from task force members and senior executives to rank and file female journalists who were affected in some way by the task force.

It is my earnest hope that this study will help fill, at least in a small way, the vacuum that exists in literature on Canadian women's roles in journalism and that it will inspire and encourage more work in this field. Equally importantly, I hope it has produced a highly interesting and readable work that will shed light on the subject for all those who share my passion for newspapers.

CHAPTER 1

SEPARATE SPHERES: THE HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN JOURNALISM

Like democracy in the Greek city-states, journalism in the newly industrialized countries of the Western world was originally created by and for men. Women were no more welcome in 19th century newsrooms than they were in military barracks, on sports teams, or in that ultimate symbol of male privilege, the Houses of Parliament, where decisions affecting the lives of the entire populace were made. Long before the genesis of any existing media organization, and well over a century before the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities began its inquiry into the status of female journalists within its newspapers, the culture of Canadian journalism had crystallized around social mores that segregated men and women into "separate spheres."

The Report of the Southam Newspaper Group task force, established by the company in 1988 to "probe barriers to the advancement of women" within its own newsrooms, documented the existence of "significant cultural barriers"¹

¹ Shirley Sharzer and Susan Riley, "Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities," unpublished report prepared for Southam management, April 1990, 28.

to women's full and equal participation in the work of producing newspapers.

These cultural barriers have had a long evolution within the wider society of Canada,² as well as specifically within the newspaper industry in which the Southam group was a major player in the 1980s. All of the barriers to women's full participation in journalism, which the Task Force Report of 1990 identified, can be classified in two categories. Women encountered cultural barriers based on socially imposed restrictions that limited the sphere of their activity to the domestic arena; and also structural barriers that reproduced social power relations within newspaper establishments.

The Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities identified several other roadblocks to women's advancement. These too could be traced to the early days of women's participation in journalism. A major factor was the stratified and gender-segregated nature of the profession itself, with women being clustered in the low-status and less remunerative beats. Other barriers were the lack of accommodation for women's double load of workplace and maternal obligations,

² Alison Prentice, Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1996).

and the proverbial glass ceiling that limited their upward mobility to the more prestigious news beats and to management positions. The last-named obstacle was in itself the result of being excluded from formal and informal male networks where mentor relationships were forged and information was exchanged on the availability of such positions.³

All of these barriers were embedded in the wider culture and were reflected in all social institutions such as the education system, the church, and the new institution--the mass circulation newspaper--that was emerging in the middle of the 19th century. Increasing industrialization and the development of transportation and communications technology gave rise to this print phenomenon, which was soon to establish itself as an indispensable tool in the daily lives of Canadians.

Canadian journalism historian Paul Rutherford calls the 60 years between Confederation and the economic Depression of the 1930s, the "golden age of the newspaper press in Canada."⁴ This was not, however, a golden age for women in journalism, although the intrepid women who toiled

³ Shirley Sharzer, "Whither the Revolution?" in "Professional Training in Southam Newsrooms," unpublished report prepared for the management development committee of the Southam Newspaper Group, 38.

⁴Paul Rutherford, The Making of the Canadian Media (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), 11.

in such a hostile environment deserve gold stars for their pioneering efforts. Except for a few outstanding female journalists such as Kit (Kathleen Blake) Coleman of *The Mail and Empire*, Cora Hind of the *Winnipeg Free Press* and Sara Jeanette Duncan of the *Montreal Star*, women in this "golden age" were second-class citizens in the newsrooms of the nation.⁵

Rutherford describes newspapers as the "prime mythmaker" that shaped Victorian Canada's view of itself. He says that in a nation that was "very much a bourgeois domain." These myths included the notion of "separate spheres" for men and women, with middle-class males having the exclusive right to engage in debate on public or civic affairs. Women, according to this *weltanschauung*, were to be confined exclusively to the humdrum minutiae of hearth and home.⁶ Thus, finance was a man's domain while romance was the centre of gravity of a woman's life.

But newspapers did not create these myths any more than they invented the creation myth. As prime vehicles of mass communication, they merely reproduced and legitimized

⁵ Barbara M. Freeman, *Kit's Kingdom: The Journalism of Kathleen Blake Coleman* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1989); Susan Crean, *Newsworthy: The Lives of Media Women* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968); Marjory Lang, *Women Who Make the News: Female Journalists in Canada 1880-1945* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

⁶ Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority*, 156.

relations of exclusion and inclusion by popularizing myths and stereotypes about the "true" nature of respectable womanhood. These ideals of femininity, inherited from mainstream Canada's European roots, were firmly anchored in intellectual, philosophical and literary traditions that formed the superstructure of a bourgeois society and a capitalist industrial economy. Indeed, images of the fragile maiden, the demure debutante, the helpless damsel in distress, the blushing bride and, of course, the devoted wife and doting mother were the stuff of poetry, song and novels long before the advent of the popular press.

The early exclusion of women from journalism and the gender imbalance in the newsroom, which have persisted up to the present time, are complex issues and require analysis from many different perspectives. Some scholars such as Helen Safa⁷ and Agnes Calliste⁸ have argued that in capitalist and patriarchal societies, sexism and racism are used to maximize profits in several ways. One is through segregated labour markets in which women and racial minorities are concentrated in low-status and low-paying

⁷ Helen Safa, "Women, Production and Reproduction in Industrial Capitalism," in June Nash and M. P. Fernandez-Kelly, eds., Women, Men and the International Division of Labour. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

⁸ Agnes Calliste, "Canadian Immigration Policy and Domesticity from the Caribbean," in Mitchinson, Bourne, Prentice, Brandt, Light and Black, eds., Canadian Women: A Reader (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, Canada, 1996).

jobs. Another is through a segregated labor market where women and minorities are paid less than men for doing the same or similar work.

This however, is inadequate for explaining gender relations in newsrooms for two reasons. One is that it assumes too much conscious, analytical thinking underpinning the situation and borders on the idea of a deliberate male conspiracy. The other is that journalism in the second half of the 19th century had a curiously ambivalent status. While linked to power politics and therefore to prestige, it was also notoriously ill paid. Many of the men who were engaged in it in the early stages had a bohemian reputation and lived in the world of the demimonde, in a style of life associated with actors, artists and other "fringe" members of middle-class society.⁹ Therefore it is difficult to link the early working journalist, if not the newspaper proprietor-publisher, with a high degree of social status.

Gender relations within journalism have to be understood in the context of the "separate spheres" theory that characterized every aspect of middle-class Victorian culture, as well as in the context of the evolution of

⁹ Lang, 55.

journalism as the direct offshoot of fractious party politics. The gender segregation which characterized women's earliest experiences in journalism can be seen with greater clarity in the context of a theoretical framework that focuses on the gradual transformation of the newspaper from party propaganda machines to factories churning out news and popular features as consumer products.

Early feminist theorists, especially in the post World War II period, asserted that the subordination of women is universal and a function of their biological role in reproduction.¹⁰ More recent analysts such as Liesbet van Zoonen have challenged the conceptualization of gender as having a universal and transcendent meaning, and have pointed to the historical and cultural specificity of the idea that men are political and rational, while women are personal, emotional, and inclined to nurture. Joan Landes, a feminist historian holds that origins of the cultural practice of excluding women from the most remunerative and prestigious occupations can be traced to the advent of the industrial revolution. This was when the site of production shifted away from the home and the farm to those forbidding edifices of industrial capitalism where middle-class women

¹⁰ Simone de Beavoir, The Second Sex (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1953).

and children were definitely not welcome.¹¹ The separation of home and workplace became almost as sacred a tenet of Western industrial society as the separation of church and state.

Landes locates the origins of these ideas in the work of Rousseau, Montesquieu and other philosophers of the French Revolution, who inspired republicans to banish women to the home and called men to their supposedly natural fulfillment in the world of politics.¹² Wendy Mitchinson evaluated the role of industrialization in determining women's status in society and commented that on the whole it exacerbated the segregation of women and sealed their second class status.¹³ Liesbet van Zoonen has underscored the importance of analyzing "how and why particular constructions of masculinity and femininity arise in specific historical contexts, how and why certain constructions predominate in particular times and places and how dominant constructions affect the lived realities

¹¹ Helen Safa, "Women, Production and Reproduction in Industrial Capitalism," in J. Nash and M. P. Fernandez-Kelly, eds., Women, Men and the International Division of Labour (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

¹² Joan Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

¹³ Wendy Mitchinson, "Women's History," in Douglas Owsram, ed., Canadian History: A Reader's Guide, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 214.

of men and women"¹⁴. Thus gender is not merely a natural consequence of biological differences but is an analytic category within which human beings think about and organize their activity in society. Its meaning is thus never static or universal, but varies according to specific material circumstances and historical settings.¹⁵ Gender was one factor that determined men's and women's status in society. In Victorian Canada it limited a middle class woman's activity to the domestic sphere where her labour and her emotional support were needed to minister to the needs of husbands, young children and elderly, dependent relatives.

Giving a degree of credence to the theory that constructions of gender arise from historically specific circumstances are certain 19th century examples of women in Canadian journalism. An interesting paradox occurred here. On the one hand, for women such as Sara Jeannette Duncan who lived in the more industrialized regions of eastern Canada, news reporting for a daily paper was a "social departure" or a departure from the conventions that constrained middle class women.¹⁶ On the other hand, in the

¹⁴ Liesbet van Zoonen, "Feminist Perspectives on the Media", chapter 2 in J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, eds., Mass Media and Society (London: Edward Arnold, 1996), 39.

¹⁵ van Zoonen, 43.

¹⁶ A Social Departure was the title of a book by Sara Jeannette Duncan. She crashed the "inner temple" of political journalism and became the parliamentary reporter for the Montreal Star in 1888 (Lang, 210).

Prairie provinces where the agricultural economic base was more or less still intact, women played a more direct role in the economy and sustained a strong tradition of sturdy independence. Given the circumstances of their material lives, their participation in a "male" domain such as journalism was a little less of an aberration. The independent, pro-feminist journalism of a number of pioneer female journalists such as Cora Hind, Emily Murphy and Gertrude Balmer Watt who worked in the prairie provinces bear testimony to this.¹⁷

Gertrude Robinson has argued that gender is a principle of social organization that systematically structures all human interactions and power relations. She says that every aspect of a woman's life and career, as well as the representation of women by the Canadian media, are therefore affected by gender.¹⁸ In other words, women's opportunities for achievement and upward mobility within journalism and other professions associated with power, prestige and greater financial rewards are severely hampered by the ascribed characteristic of gender. Harding has pointed out however, that "in virtually all cultures,

¹⁷ Susan Jackel, "First Days, Fighting Days: Prairie Presswomen and Suffrage Activism 1906-1916," in Mary Kinnear, ed., Women in Manitoba History (Winnipeg: University of Regina, 1987).

¹⁸ Gertrude J. Robinson, "Women and the Media in Canada", in Helen Holmes and David Taras, eds., Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1996), 260.

whatever is thought of as manly is more highly valued than whatever is thought of as womanly."¹⁹

A phenomenon of the late 19th century was the increasing entry of women into factory work and other paid employment, as well as the arena of social reform such as the Temperance movement, itself loosely linked to an agitation for women's rights, particularly the right to vote. It was also at this time that women began to break into journalism. It was a rare editor of the day who approached the "Women's Question" with an open mind. Most believed God had given the sexes different natures and different spheres of activity suited to these natures. With the air of a Sermon on the Mount on the subject of women's position in society, the *Toronto Mail* proclaimed:

Scripture does map out a woman's sphere of life. That it makes her an inferior being by its assertion that she shall be subject to her husband and shall shine in the domestic circle cannot be pretended. On the contrary, it confers upon her a sacred place in which, through her exclusion from the hurly-burly of contention, she can easily exercise a gentle sway over the sterner sex, and an ennobling influence upon the race. (*Toronto Mail*, 12 May, 1893)²⁰

Further, the fact that in the early 19th century, newspapers were unapologetic propaganda vehicles for a

¹⁹ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 18.

²⁰ Rutherford, *Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late 19th Century Canada*, 177.

specific political party or position²¹ were serious impediments to women even entering their precincts before the late 19th century. Their fiercely confrontational editorials aimed at demolishing the enemy made them verbal battle zones.²² Women had no more business in the Houses of Parliament than in newspapers, the other forum for debating public affairs. The fact that newspapers were linked to politics is borne out in the origin of the expression "the Fourth Estate", commonly used to describe the mass communication media even in one of its earliest forms, the newspaper. An estate was defined as a class in society sharing in the government of a country. In medieval Europe there were usually three estates--nobles, clergy and commons. The French Revolution added a "Fourth Estate", a phrase used to describe the growing power of the pen when the writings of Voltaire and other philosophers, disseminated through the popular press, provided the ideological base of the new order.²³

In Canada, too, women were excluded from the "estates", including the Fourth Estate in the 19th century.

²¹ Wilfrid Kesterton, A History of Journalism in Canada (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1978), 15.

²² Rutherford, The Making of the Canadian Media.

²³ Neville Williams, The Ancient Regime in Europe: Government and Society in the Major States, 1648-1789 (London: The Bodley Head, 1970).

Indeed, women did not have even that fundamental political right, the right to vote in federal elections until 1918. It was only in April 1916 that women's suffrage came to Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It came to British Columbia and Ontario the following year.²⁴ Not until July 1919 did women win the right to stand for election to the House of Commons. It took another ten years for the British Privy Council, the highest court of appeal for Canadians at the time, to come to the portentous conclusion that women were indeed "persons", eligible to sit in the Senate²⁵ and not the "goods and chattels" of their husbands. Small wonder then that the political views of unenfranchised women were neither sought nor valued by newspapers. To the mainstream Victorian mind it was simply unthinkable for women to share the privilege of covering political news or participating in political discussion in such a public forum.²⁶

Given the fact that newspapers were so closely linked to politics, and politics with power and privilege, journalism, along with law, was one of the last occupations to accept women in relatively large numbers. To admit women

²⁴ Kay Rex, No Daughter of Mine: The Women and History of the Canadian Women's Press Club (Toronto: Cedar Cave Books, 1995), 13.

²⁵ Alison Prentice, Canadian Women: A History.

into other paid professions--teaching, nursing, stenography or even medicine--somehow seemed less of a violation of the "natural" order of things. The tasks associated with these professions were at least an extension into the public realm of women's nurturing and supporting role in the home. The care of the sick and the elderly, the molding of young minds and the handmaiden role to the husband or male boss were not incompatible with the "good works" and the white-gloved "Lady Bountiful" image.

Women gained a foothold in journalism because the convergence of certain social and economic forces encouraged these early newspapers to abandon overt political partisanship. By the late 19th century their hellfire-and-brimstone editorials and exclusively political content gradually gave way to lighter and more politically neutral fare. For the first time, newspaper production held out the tantalizing prospect of reaping much higher than marginal profits. Increasing literacy, urbanization, more leisure time and rising consumerism created opportunities for mass circulation newspapers.

With the new imperative to survive and thrive as commercial enterprises, newspapers had to appeal to the widest possible base of readers. This resulted in the

²⁶ Lang, 32.

broadening of their content from matters pertaining exclusively to the "public sphere" and supplementing these with articles of interest to women who presided over the "private" realm.

The newly literate masses of housewives, who also wielded considerable consumer power by the late 19th century, would boost circulation figures and provide incentive for advertisers. Indeed circulation and advertising departments started to become the champions of women journalists because, by this time, they had begun to recognize the clout that women wielded in the marketplace.²⁷ "Most journals have come to recognize that the paper that gets into the house . . . must be one that will in some department win the favour of women," said journalist Faith Fenton (Alice Freeman) of the *Toronto Empire*²⁸. Thus women's power as consumers was recognized and harnessed for maximizing profits well before it was acknowledged that they had even fundamental rights as citizens of the body politic.

A few early women journalists such as Kit (Kathleen Blake) Coleman and Faith Fenton (Alice Freeman) enjoyed a

²⁷ Lang, 142-150.

²⁸ Jill Downie, A Passionate Pen: The Life and Times of Faith Fenton (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996), 161.

degree of editorial autonomy and commanded fame and popularity through their columns, but they were exceptions rather than the rule. Even Kit Coleman, the most admired columnist of her day, stepped warily into the political realm.²⁹ Most women journalists were not expected to understand, let alone participate in political debate, and most confined themselves to "women's" topics.

The creation of a separate "women's department" within the newspaper was an innovation of late 19th century journalism. For women it opened up a whole new avenue of career possibilities in journalism because newspapers broke out of the narrow boundaries of political and commercial news and held out a whole new potpourri of offerings.

Women's pages, Saturday specials on churches and charities, popular science features, reviews of musical and dramatic performances, children's pages, and fiction and humour formed part of the new smorgasbord. A regular item was the coverage of high society, with gushing descriptions of ball gowns and decorations written in the awestruck tones of a Cinderella at a Prince's Ball. This was a tribute to the growing influence of female readers.³⁰

²⁹ Lang, 32.

³⁰ Lang, 189-215.

"The newspaper today is the greatest of all feeders of social gossip," wrote W. D. LeSueur, one of the contributors to a collection of essays called *Journalism and the University* sponsored by the editors Queen's University Quarterly in 1903. "Today, thousands who totally ignore the editorial columns greedily devour the social gossip. . . ." Commenting on that other novelty, the sports section, he wrote: "Sport is to the young man what the social columns are to the lady reader. Much of the reading matter might be light, with no obvious redeeming social value- indeed the avid interest in sports depressed the appetite for politics."³¹

Women journalists were suddenly welcome in the newspapers--but on terms defined by the rigid social mores and the "separate spheres" notion of the time. It was indeed a brave new world and a social departure for many of them. When women entered this milieu in any significant number, their professional mandate was to whip up soufflé-light confections of food and fashion features, homemaking hints, consumer and personal advice. Chronicling the balls and soirées and other social activities of the cream of society, with suitable deference to rank and protocol, were also part of the duties of these "lady" journalists.

³¹ Rutherford, A Victorian Authority, 74.

The women's page was intended to be the "good news" section of the paper, to be wholesome and uplifting and to provide light, if not comic relief from the stories of conflict, power politics, vice and crime that filled the rest of the paper. Scathingly referred to as the "pink tea"³² circuit by male journalists, and even the few women who managed to avoid it and plunge into "hard" news, the women's section was nevertheless a foot in the door for many women journalists. Women eagerly seized the opportunity to enter a profession that was hitherto barred to them. In the 1901 official census, there were 52 women in the total journalistic workforce of 1,306. By 1931 the number had increased to 464 out of a total of 3,344.³³

Some women journalists used the women's section as a forum for advancing women's rights. Transforming their columns into personal pulpits from which to preach the gospel of suffrage, some notable, and perhaps notorious female journalists such as Flora MacDonald Denison of Toronto's *Sunday World*,³⁴ Emily Murphy who wrote for the *Edmonton Journal* and Violet McNaughton of the *Western*

³² Rex, 118.

³³ Lang, 6.

³⁴ Deborah Gorham, "Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist" in L. Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s (Toronto : Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1979).

Producer in Saskatchewan, rallied thousands of women to the cause.³⁵

Thus the women's section in many newspapers became something of a Trojan horse for women's enfranchisement, an outcome that had probably not been anticipated by editors. They had, after all, hired women writers mainly for the purpose of luring advertisers, but their "lady journalists'" unconventional views were not suppressed as long as they kept the circulation figures up. It was ironic that expanding capitalism and the consequent commercialization of the press afforded them this opportunity to advance their rights as citizens.³⁶

The creation of the women's pages, however, was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it was a window of opportunity for many women who would have otherwise been barred completely from working in newspaper offices. On the other, it gave rise to the "hard" and "soft" news distinction, and the gender-segregated, two-tiered structure of the journalistic profession which proved to be serious obstacles to the career paths of women journalists right up to the day of the Southam task force report.

³⁵ Susan Jackel, "First Days, Fighting Days: Prairie Women and Suffrage Activism," in Mary Kinnear, ed., Women in Manitoba History 1906-1916 (Winnipeg: University of Regina Press, 1987).

³⁶ Lang, 219-227.

Another issue that the task force addressed was the generally sexist culture of the newsroom. The "locker room mentality," jock talk and the extremely sexist environment described by some female journalists interviewed in the late 1980s for the Southam task force report,³⁷ were features of the newsroom right from the early days of women's entry into the field. The newspaper environment was not a particularly comfortable one for women, because of the macho air of male camaraderie that pervaded it.³⁸

Journalism became inextricably linked in popular culture with such hard living, hard-drinking men as editor Walter Burns and star reporter Hildy Johnson. These fictitious journalists were two of the principal characters in *The Front Page*, an American newsroom drama that enjoyed great popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, and was even resurrected in a movie version in 1974.³⁹ Tales of itinerant journalists whose brilliant prose was whipped up between drinking sprees were part of the lore of newspaper life and sustained this image. As Lotta Dempsey, a journalist who

³⁷ Shirley Sharzer, "Whither the Revolution?" in "Professional Training in Southam Newsrooms: A Survey," unpublished report prepared for the Management Development Committee of Southam Newspaper Group, 38.

³⁸ Heather Robertson, "The Last of the Terrible Men," in Walter Stewart, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story, 130.

³⁹ Lang, 250.

worked for the *Edmonton Journal* in the 1920s, said, it was "no life for a lady."⁴⁰

Two other issues identified by the Southam task force also had historical precedents. They were the problems of unequal wages and the double load of family and career responsibilities that fell to the lot of women.

Journalism, as has been noted already, was notoriously ill-paid work for newspapermen as well as women. Even so, women's salaries were, on average, lower than men's because it was assumed that women's department work was easier, with more regular hours and without the stress caused by the unpredictable nature of breaking news. As Freeman has pointed out, unequal wages were also legacy of Victorian notions of "family wage" and "living wage." Nineteenth century social attitudes maintained the myth that men needed a "family wage" to support their dependents, while women, regardless of their real circumstances, only needed pin money to pay for little luxuries and frivolities, or at most a "living wage" to support themselves.⁴¹

Wages were far from uniform within the field but most women were at the lower ends of the pay scale. While men and women might start out at fairly similar salaries, the speed at which men advanced in their careers left the women

⁴⁰ Lotta Dempsey, No Life for a Lady (Don Mills: Musson Books, 1976).

far behind. Edith MacInnes began as women's editor with the *Regina Post* in 1927 shortly after her graduation from the University of Toronto. Wilfrid Eggleston was hired as a "cub" reporter by the *Toronto Star* in 1926 after leaving Queen's University just short of his B. A. Both MacInnes and Eggleston began at \$25 a week but within a year, Eggleston was earning \$55 a week as Assistant City Editor. By 1929 he was the *Star's* correspondent in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, where he worked until 1933 making \$75 a week. MacInnes had reached her peak salary and had also hit what a much later generation would dub the "glass ceiling". As woman's editor of the *Calgary Albertan*, she made \$35 a week and reached the highest position that most women could aspire to in the newspaper hierarchy.⁴²

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, it became increasingly harder to earn a living. Many people were in dire straits and employers took advantage of their desperation to slash wages and increase workloads. This was when the American Newspaper Guild began to make inroads into the United States and, a decade later, into Canada.⁴³

⁴¹ Freeman, *The Satellite Sex*, 106.

⁴² Lang, 111.

⁴³ Lang, 101.

But even during the 1930s, the subject of unions and whether they were compatible with lofty purpose and high-minded ideals of journalism was a hot issue, just as issues of employment equity and editorial autonomy for women in the media were *au courant* in the late 1980s and early 90s. Among female as well as male journalists the subject was highly controversial and was apt to ignite the most heated debates. A few women journalists had endorsed collective principles as early as World War I. Mrs. Claude Bowker wrote a paper called "Trade Unionism and the Woman Journalist." She took the stand that trade unionism meant for her "equal pay for equal work." But others were implacably opposed to the whole notion.⁴⁴

Individual members entered the fray, but the Canadian Women's Press Club steered clear of the union battles that were being waged in the various regions of Canada. Many members had ambivalent feelings about sullyng their "professional status" with union activity, which they associated with blue-collar trades. This attitude appears to have undermined any prospects of decisive action on that front.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Lang, 99.

⁴⁵ Lang, 310.

Some sociologists such as Anne Marie Henshel have suggested that this timidity about asserting their rights in the workplace may be derived from cultural assumptions that the primary, domestic role of women should take precedence over any other role.⁴⁶

For years after the first Guild chapters were formed in Canada, doubts remained whether an organization that included both men and women in its membership was as sensitive to the needs and rhythms of a female journalist's life as the Canadian Women's Press Club, an all-women's organization was expected to be. While there was little the Guild could do to stop women from getting lower or no merit pay,⁴⁷ there was also little question that the expansion of the Guild across Canada did much to counter the glaring unevenness of working conditions and salaries among journalists.⁴⁸ Even so, as the task force report revealed, complete pay equity for women had not been achieved at the end of 1980s.

"Motherhood" issues were also a major concern of the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities. In North America (and elsewhere in the world) the societal roles of

⁴⁶ Anne Marie Henshel, Sex Structure (Don Mills: Longman Canada, 1973), chapter 3.

⁴⁷ Pat Bell, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 24 July 2001.

⁴⁸ Lang, 103.

both men and women have been generally viewed along one dimension. Women were traditionally seen as wives and mothers, taking care of the family's myriad needs and obliged to rear their children while they were young. Female journalists had faced this dilemma right from the time of their earliest forays into the field. Writing in 1902, journalist Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon poignantly described the tension between maternal responsibilities and career aspirations.

I suppose the story of every woman worker in the world is the same. We never are able to get away from the intimate anxieties of family life, which the average man worker has been taught to throw aside from the beginning of his career. The more I have to do with women the more I realize the dual struggle which wears them out. I have the chance of stepping into a very interesting world here, and getting at the very root of really great movements, social and political, if only it were not for the constant care and anxiety.⁴⁹

It is clear then, that the "cultural barriers" and the gender stereotypes that stood in the way of even talented women in journalism were older than newspapers themselves. Limited access to the profession, a sexist newsroom atmosphere, virtually no opportunities for upward mobility, unequal pay, and the double burden of career and family responsibilities were long standing issues for women journalists.

⁴⁹ Lang, 105.

The Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities of 1988-1990 was an attempt to address all these issues and to change the entire culture of journalism. Its philosophy was not a radical one, and it proposed to accomplish its mission through an "educational process to encourage and develop changing attitudes."⁵⁰

The task force had indeed undertaken a monumental task. Without causing a volcanic eruption, it proposed to melt down rock-hard attitudes that had solidified over the centuries. Patriarchy and the segregation of the sexes into "separate spheres" had comprised the very foundations of our entire society, and of the culture of journalism within it.

⁵⁰ Clark Davey, internal memo to all publishers, 28 October 1988.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOUTHAM EMPIRE: NOT A WOMAN'S WORLD

On July 12, 1937, a fairly unusual message was broadcast over Canadian airwaves. With Churchillian eloquence, and the solemnity of a military commander rallying his troops, W. L. MacTavish, editor of *The Winnipeg Tribune*,¹ told his audience that gathering and publishing the daily news--that elusive, volatile stock-in-trade of the newspaper world--was a daily adventure which brought out the best of the men *and women* (italics added) who were engaged in it.² We do not know if any of his listeners picked up on the irony of his statement or reacted to it in any way, but his choice of words was commendable in an age when those engaged in the pursuit, publication and dissemination of news were called "newspapermen."

Organizations are microcosms of the societies and cultures that produce them, and Southam Publishing was no different. Women neither shared in the day-to-day tasks of running a newsroom nor decided the fate of those who did.

¹ Wilfrid Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 99.

² Charles Bruce, *News and the Southams* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1968), 372.

Generally speaking, they did not set foot in the inner temples of corporate power. Women did not have much power or influence in the business world of 1877 when William Southam, a printer by trade and the son of British immigrant parents, teamed up with a partner William Carey and scraped together \$6000 to buy the failing *Hamilton Spectator*. This was the beginning of the first modern newspaper group in Canada.

It was clear right from the beginning that William Southam had bet on a winning horse. By the end of the 1890s, the *Spectator* was earning more than \$10,000 a year for its owners. In 1897, two of William Southam's sons, backed by their father, bought the financially troubled *Ottawa Citizen* and quickly turned it around. Fired by ambition and the lure of virgin newspaper territory in the Western provinces, the Southams acquired the *Calgary Herald* in 1908. The *Calgary Herald* was founded in 1883. When it became part of the Southam family of newspapers, Calgary was less than a generation old; an outgrowth of a log fort set up by the Northwest Mounted Police in 1875. The Canadian Pacific Railway arrived eight years later and the population rose to 500. The Southam family, excited by the prospect of owning a newspaper in Western Canada, in a city

that was reported to hold good prospects for profits in the future, bought the paper for \$30,000.³

The Southams acquired the *Edmonton Journal* in 1912. By 1923, the company had acquired a controlling share in *The Province* in Vancouver. *The Gazette* in Montreal was added to the stable in 1968, but the east to west conquest was not completed until 1980 when it acquired the *Vancouver Sun*.⁴ The story, a rags-to-riches saga in the best tradition of success stories, is by no means unique in the annals of Canadian business. The House of Southam is in fact, a text book illustration of how the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant work ethic, closely melded with the mindset of patriarchy, formed the bedrock of corporate structures which were formed by the industrial revolution and the westward expansion of Canada.⁵

As recounted by Charles Bruce, the corporate historian, the Southam story is a traditional family saga of strong, enterprising, competitive males who went out into the world and made their fortunes. Women make only cameo appearances as fiancées, brides, mothers and mothers-

³ Bruce, 112, 113.

⁴ Bruce, chapter 2.

⁵ Minko Sotiron, From Politics to Profits: The Commercialization of Canadian Daily Newspapers 1890-1920 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press).

in-law and are nowhere in the centre of the action.

Canada, during the formative period of the Southam empire, was still largely frontier country, and the acquisitions and mergers, moves and counter-moves involved in corporate construction and expansion were like an elaborate game of poker played in some frontier tavern. This of course was an unlikely setting for respectable ladies. Given the rigid social roles that constrained middle class white women during Victorian and Edwardian times,, their exclusion from these places and activities was, of course, to be expected.⁶

Marijane Terry, an industrial psychologist consulted by the Southam News Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities in 1988, observed that:

Southam News Group is a traditional company with a long-established history and a definite culture. As it is with all cultures, it is the informal side which has the most power. Given the nature of the traditional environment, there is likely to be a strong underlying sentiment that change should come slowly, not be too dramatic or occur outside previous pathways. Applying this construct to women, it is likely that because women have not had significant positions of power in the past, there will be some reluctance to give it to them now, being a radical departure from traditional norms.⁷

Following the story of the business dynasty and its fluctuating fortunes over the course of a century would

⁶ Bruce, News and the Southams.

⁷ Sharzer and Riley, 75.

make it abundantly clear that women with direct access to power were in no way a part of the "traditional norms" for most of the time the company has been in existence. Yet women did play a supporting role within the boundaries permitted by the "separate spheres" cultural attitude described in the last chapter.

Women connected to the Southam family by birth or marriage had certain privileges, illustrating once again that gender disadvantages can be offset by class advantages. There is no record of a Southam equivalent of an Iphigene Sulzberger, daughter of Adolph Ochs, publisher of the *New York Times* in the late 19th century, who challenged her arch-conservative father to improve the lot of female journalists;⁸ or of a Ruth Atkinson Hindmarsh of the *Toronto Star* dynasty.⁹ Yet Southam women were not completely excluded from company affairs and a few had shareholder status, even though from 1920, the company was known as William Southam and Sons.¹⁰

Shareholder privilege was of course bestowed on the women by the menfolk as a way of providing for vulnerable

⁸ Nan Robertson, *The Girls in the Balcony: Men, Women and the New York Times* (New York: Random House, 1992).

⁹ Lang, 34.

¹⁰ Bruce, 20.

wives, daughters and mothers who had no real property rights at the time. In the early years of the 20th century, Wilson Southam, one of the sons of William Southam, raised the question of an arrangement that would preserve both family and business relationships. He had been reading about the Rothschilds, the celebrated German Jewish family of international bankers who dominated European finance in the 19th century. He noted with admiration their progress from generation to generation. "The idea occurred to me," he wrote to his relative, Philip Fisher, "that the Southam family should pattern itself after the Rothschilds and stick together as a family."¹¹

In March 1904, Southam Limited was chartered as a Dominion company. Its authorized capital was \$1,000,000 and its shareholders, all of whom were family members, included two women, Wilson¹² Southam, wife of William, and their daughter Ethel. Each of the sons received 315 shares, while Mrs. Southam was given 800 shares, and Ethel, 700. Later William transferred another additional 800 to Ethel, reasoning that women who did not take an active part in investment decisions should be protected from the risk-

¹¹ Bruce, 30.

¹² Wilson was used as a female as well as male name in the Southam family.

taking and speculative tendencies of her brothers. This in itself was fairly liberal thinking at the time, because William argued that those who had no say in investment decisions should not at least be made to suffer the consequences of ill-conceived moves. This was the first stage in the establishment of a family business oligarchy. Eventually it would evolve, through growth and change over half a century, into a public company of far wider scope. The family element, however, and the sense of pride in the family tradition would remain woven into the fabric of its corporate culture. This would have far-reaching implications for the future of the company and the fate of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities of 1988.

Much later, a Southam woman played a more direct role as a journalistic path-breaker and attained a position of power and high visibility that was inaccessible to most women except the exceptionally privileged and the exceptionally brilliant. This was Lisa Balfour Bowen, great-granddaughter of the founder of the company, who in the 1950s, became the first female anglophone journalist

ever to cover the Quebec National Assembly, which she did for Southam News Service.¹³

In the 1920s, however, women had virtually no voice in the business and editorial affairs of the newspapers. However, it is reasonable to surmise that in accordance with the accepted norms of Edwardian society, women of the family at least had some behind-the-scenes influence on the business and editorial decisions of their husbands and fathers. Two women are mentioned in the Bruce history-- Janet, daughter of H.S. Southam, and Dorothy, daughter of F.N. Southam, whose husbands were elected to the Board of Directors in the 1940s.¹⁴

It was only in 1927 that male Southam employees from outside the family became shareholders and members of the board. In 1945, it became a publicly traded company. Stock was offered to the public and listed on the stock exchanges of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.¹⁵ It took another 42 years before female shareholder power had grown to the point that women who had put their money into the business

¹³ Lisa Balfour Bowen, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 7 April 2001.

¹⁴ Bruce, 373.

¹⁵ Bruce, 6.

could influence Gordon Fisher to nominate a woman, Marnie Paikin, to the Board of Directors.¹⁶

During most of Southam's history, women in general were far more likely to serve other functions in the newspaper than to control the levers of power at Board meetings or shareholders' meetings. Close competition between newspapers, particularly in the same city, was apt to highlight the worth of women journalists as circulation boosters. Southam newspapers were as quick as any other to cash in on the value of women as marketing tools. They did this by hiring them as women's page writers and by courting them as readers.

As Canadian newspapers attempted to reach a family audience, they needed female reporters who could provide them with stories on community affairs and human-interest features. Contemporary estimates of women writers created and perpetuated the stereotype of a female journalist who was better at observing the small details of day-to-day life and elucidating the fine points of personal relationships rather than understanding and analyzing the grand themes of political and economic affairs.

¹⁶ Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

J. H. (Bert) Woods, editor and managing director of the *Calgary Herald*, a Southam paper since 1908, was invited to address the first regional meeting of the Canadian Women's Press Club, held in Edmonton in 1920. When asked how women journalists stacked up beside their male colleagues, he replied somewhat patronizingly that the women were "good fellows," but that they were not as accurate as men and "in the matter of industry" were not as dependable. He suggested that this was because women were not as physically strong. He went on to say that women were not as sloppy in their use of English as men, but they had not learned the value of exactitude. In their anxiety to make a good story, "facts were sometimes submerged," he explained. There is no record of whether any of the Canadian Women's Press Club members challenged his opinion.¹⁷

Attitudes such as that of Woods did not detract from the value of women journalists in the estimation of marketing and advertising managers. Long before Southam acquired the controlling interest in the *Vancouver Province* in 1923, its advertising manager stated succinctly that "woman is the pivot of trade turning."¹⁸ His views were

¹⁷ Cited in Rex, 163.

confirmed in the early 1930s, when a then little-known Professor Gallup proved the profitability of women's pages through a rigorously documented survey of newspaper readers' habits. In his conclusions he made the trenchant comment that "editors don't appreciate the fact that the women's page is read more thoroughly than the front page."¹⁹

Armed with the irrefutable logic of the marketplace, Southam newspapers hired their share of women writers who greased the wheels of trade. Sometimes their writings straddled a fine line between puff journalism and pure commercialism; at other times they contributed to the marketplace of more substantial ideas and engaged in lively debates on the suffrage movement, temperance and pay equity.

Opportunities for women in "pure" journalism at this time were few and far between. Most of the women who went into journalism, either by happenstance or by deliberate choice frequently held quasi-journalistic positions in the name of attracting advertisers and readers. Alixe Carson Carter, the daughter of a prominent Calgary lawyer, was one of these. Carter claimed to have imported the shopping

¹⁸ Lang, 148.

¹⁹ Lang, 149.

column to Calgary in the 1930s. When she lost her job in the "morgue" (library) of the *Calgary Herald*, she immediately marched down to the advertising department with an idea for a freelance feature, "Round the Shops with Alixe." She bustled around town, persuading merchants to buy space, which she filled with glowing accounts of their merchandise.²⁰ Her experience opened her eyes to the fundamentally commercial nature of the newspaper and women's role within it. "I no longer believed the high-blown rhetoric of publishers about their public service," she noted in her book, *Stop the Press! I Made a Little Error*.²¹

Charles King, who worked for the *Citizen* from 1967 to 1977, wrote an essay called "The Profits of Parochialism." In it he reminisced about his time at the newspaper. He commented that by a purely commercial standard, the *Ottawa Citizen* had been a roaring success.²² Throughout the history of the paper women had contributed directly to that commercial success. Mary Barker, who eventually became one of Canada's more successful copywriters, was the first

²⁰ Lang, 173.

²¹ Cited in Lang, 174.

²² Charles King, "The Profits of Parochialism," in Walter Steward, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 95.

female copywriter ever employed by the *Ottawa Citizen*. Beginning in 1918, immediately after World War I, she pioneered the "feature" form of advertising, in which she concocted little anecdotes to add interest to shopping expeditions. Her colleagues at the Ottawa branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club praised her efforts in lush prose of their own. "She converts the business of selling goods into a high and romantic adventure, as if a trip to the shops of Sparks Street were a golden journey to Samarkand," they gushed.²³

Writing about food, fashions and passions fell to the lot of women journalists, whether employed on a full time basis or as freelance columnists. The fine line between women's journalism and fashion show commentating was apparent in the detailed descriptions of gowns and accessories that social reporters were expected to provide. Describing every gown worn at the Governor General's ball was a particularly onerous and burdensome task. The women's editor was apt to be sharply reprimanded by some furious society matron if her reporter had got some detail wrong. Newspapers, however, insisted on this kind of copy, because it was highly expedient, in the interests of attracting

²³ Lang, 173.

advertising support, to flatter the egos of the city's elite. Bleary-eyed social reporters such as Mrs. Alexander McIntyre, who wrote a column called "Frills" for the *Citizen* at the turn of the century, would scribble away until 3 or 4 A.M. when the festivities ended, and then file their copy by 7.30 A.M.²⁴ To the great relief of its women staffers, the *Ottawa Citizen* decided, in 1939, to limit costume descriptions to those in the Governor General's retinue and to debutantes at these annual balls.²⁵

Women's page editors and writers however, could sometimes use their positions and the space they were allowed in the paper to nurture the spirit of public service or community building which Carson found so lacking in publishers.

Edna Kells, women's editor of the *Edmonton Journal* in the second and third decades of the 20th century, was an outstanding example of a women's page editor who used her page to write about matters that were of far greater consequence to most women than society gossip. A woman of journalistic talent as well as business acumen, she spent virtually all her career life advising the women of Edmonton how to run their homes. Her life as a journalist

²⁴ Lang, 210.

was typical of the career paths of female journalists of the time, both within and outside Southam Press. Without any planning on her part, she "drifted" into newspaper work. She joined the staff of the *Journal* as a handywoman and secretary to Mr. Jennings, the managing director, and stenographer to everyone else. After 18 months she was transferred to the women's department and remained there for the rest of her career. Many years after she became well established as a women's editor, she recalled what an unheard-of idea it was for a woman to aspire to a journalistic career. An old family friend had suggested in 1907 that she try her hand at journalism, but she thought the idea was so startling that she did not take it seriously. She never thought of it again until many years later, when, surrounded by the din of telephones, she was actually churning out copy for the women's page.²⁶

When Southam Press bought the financially ailing *Edmonton Journal* in 1912, Edmonton was a rough, frontier city with a history of more than 100 years as a fur trading post.²⁷ By 1913, the city had all the youthful optimism and

²⁵ Lang, 195.

²⁶ Lang, 108.

²⁷ Bruce, 135, 137.

large ambitions of a budding prairie metropolis. Having amalgamated with neighbouring Strathcona in 1912, it had a combined population of just over 30,000 and was served by two other dailies--the *Bulletin* and the *Capital*--besides the *Journal*.²⁸

When Kells was hired by the *Journal*, she described the challenge of "making a newspaper in the frontier city of a new country." Her readers, according to her, came from every "corner of the earth" and her job consisted of "reaching out into distant homes on lonely homesteads, trying to make strangers feel that they as individuals belonged, and that their joys and sorrows were appreciated. It was a "hard, happy task." ²⁹

In the process of carrying out her hard, happy task, her column evolved into a history of Alberta, according to Kenneth Haig, a journalist from Winnipeg who was elected president of the Canadian Women's Press Club in 1923.³⁰ Haig wrote a preface to a booklet on women journalists called the *Pathfinders* written by Miriam Geen Ellis. In her preface, she pays tribute to Kells' efforts to expand the

²⁸ Susan Jackel, "First Days, Fighting Days: Prairie Press Women and Suffrage Activism," Mary Kinnear, ed., *Women in Manitoba Press History* (Winnipeg: University of Regina, 1987), 59.

²⁹ Cited in Lang, 159.

³⁰ Rex, 254.

women's page beyond the bounds of food, fashion and furnishings.³¹

During World War II years, the Canadian Women's Press Club lobbied the Canadian Press to demand that the wire service hire a women's editor to distribute women's news items across the country. They argued that "the power of women's pages to increase both circulation and advertising should be more generally recognized." Ultimately, it was Kells' behind-the-scenes influence that won the day and secured a women's department in Canadian Press.³²

Nellie McClung was another prominent Canadian woman who wrote for the *Edmonton Journal*.³³ Unlike Kells, McClung did not value women's journalism for its power to boost circulation and add advertising revenue to her employers' coffers. She saw it instead as a valuable opportunity to advance the cause of suffrage through the columns of every newspaper.

Charlotte Whitton, a former mayor of Ottawa and columnist with the *Ottawa Citizen* in the 1940s,³⁴ had a highly idealistic vision of the female journalist's role.

³¹ Vol. 11, file no. 28 of the Canadian Women's Press Club, National Archives of Canada.

³² Lang, 149.

³³ Vol. 9, file no. 8 of the Canadian Women's Press Club, National Archives of Canada.

³⁴ National Archives of Canada, vol. II, file no. 58.

Astutely aware of the power of the press, she enunciated her mission statement for female journalists:

The press woman today becomes not only the recorder of woman, her efforts and aspirations, her achievements or failures, her strengths or feminine frailties, in her public and private life, but she may, if she will but realize her high vocation, become the interpreter of public affairs and social developments to the hundreds of thousands of Canadian women, who rely on the printed word for their primary contact with life and affairs.³⁵

But invariably and almost inevitably the female journalist's opportunities to "become the interpreter of public affairs and social developments" was limited by the circumstances of her employment.

Some enterprising, ambitious women used their "women's page" experience as launching pads to more remunerative positions. During World War II, the Canadian government began to recruit journalists for propaganda work in government publicity departments. The Canadian Women's Press Club was hard pressed to ensure that women were identified as journalists and were given a fair chance at these new opportunities that began to open up. Their lobbying efforts eventually paid off, and one woman at least, Maud Ferguson, former women's editor of the *Calgary*

³⁵ Charlotte Whitton, cited in Lang, 140.

Herald appointed women's editor of the news and features section of Public Information in Ottawa.

At least one woman journalist associated with the *Calgary Herald* broke out of the mold of puff journalism and stormed her way to more plum assignments and prestigious achievements. This was Geneviève Lipsett-Skinner, who breached the all-male bastion of the parliamentary press gallery in 1921. She was extremely well-qualified for the job, having been the first married woman to earn a law degree in Manitoba, and had graduated with honours. She had also run (unsuccessfully) in the Manitoba election of 1920.³⁶ But she was not officially admitted to the parliamentary press gallery because she was a woman. This did not stop her from pursuing her goal. Her brother, Robert Lipsett, a member of the parliamentary press gallery, was a valuable ally. Using his desk every morning, she sent articles to the most important papers in Canada's major cities. *The Calgary Herald* became one of her regular customers, although the paper did not go so far as to employ her as its official parliamentary correspondent. That daring step was left to the *Vancouver Sun* where the

³⁶ Lang, 265

liberal-minded publisher Robert Cromie agreed to send her as his paper's accredited journalist.

Isabel Armstrong, another *Ottawa Citizen* journalist in the 1930s, was closer to Whitton's ideal and similar to the strong, capable women with leadership attributes who eventually motivated Paddy Sherman, president of Southam Newspaper Group, to establish a task force on women's opportunities. Elected president of the Canadian Women's Press Club in 1935, she had a reputable 20-year career with the *Ottawa Citizen* as music and drama critic and editor of children's features.³⁷ She was also well-versed in women's political issues, having once served as president of the London, Ontario branch of the Women's Canadian Club, a club that had been formed for the express purpose of widening women's horizons and drawing them into debate about public affairs.³⁸ She was also alert to the issues of women journalists in a male-dominated field. She successfully lobbied the Canadian section of the Empire Press Union to use more inclusive language when it advertised an intra-Empire exchange for newspapermen. She insisted that they add the words "and newspaper women" in the interests of

³⁷ Rex, 123.

³⁸ Lang, 238.

educating editors and publishers about the existence of such women.³⁹

The Gazette, the *grande dame* of newspapers in Montreal, did not become a Southam property until 1968. Originally founded as a bilingual newspaper in 1778 by Fleury Mesplet, a young printer from Lyons, by 1826 it had become the voice of Montreal's English-speaking community. By the time of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec it had become a power with very well-defined interests. It was anti-Catholic and anti-labour. Montreal Jews found it hard to get their birth, wedding and death announcements published there, let alone news of their community. At the same time, there was an unspoken rule that *Gazette* reporters could not be critical of the Bronfmans, the Ritz Carlton hotel, Eatons, or the Royal Bank. French Canadian nationalists were invariably denigrated in its editorials.⁴⁰

Given this political orientation and culture of pandering to the business community, it was unlikely that serious women journalists could flourish there until the 1960s. Like every other paper in the country, it placed barriers in the path of female journalists who wished to

³⁹ Rex, 182.

⁴⁰ Glen Allen, "Following the Followers," in Walter Steward, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 74.

break out of the ghetto of the women's department. But many women journalists were, almost by definition, strong, individualistic people with a well-developed sense of gender equity. Rosa Shaw, the *Gazette's* women's editor just before World War II, was one of these.

Shaw discovered in the late 1930s that women's eligibility for financial journalism was simply not accepted. Shaw noticed, while on a cross-Canada tour she undertook for *The Gazette*, that whenever one of her stories was printed on the financial page, her byline was missing.⁴¹ "Why?" she asked in *Newspacket*, the Canadian Women's Press Club newsletter. "Perhaps the feeble female intellect isn't supposed to be able to grapple with stories about wheat and mining, even if it does succeed in turning them out and getting good-sized headlines on them."⁴²

Joan Fraser broke new ground by becoming a business reporter at *The Gazette* in the 1960s,⁴³ and much later became its first female editor. She also played a key role in the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities of 1988-90. She would be thankful she did not live in Shaw's time.

⁴¹ *Newspacket*, vol. 5, no. 3, May 1939, 3.

⁴² Lang, 264.

⁴³ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

Although the *Vancouver Sun* did not come under Southam control until 1980, the paper had an interesting roll call of outstanding female journalists. Among them was Myrtle Patterson Gregory, star reporter in the 1920s, who was reputed to be the highest-paid female journalist in Canada; Doris Milligan, a versatile general reporter who escaped the women's-page ghetto and covered murders and bank robberies with the most intrepid male reporters. She eventually became the *Sun's* assistant city editor, the first woman in Canada ever to occupy that position.⁴⁴ During World War II, Milligan breached yet another all-male bastion, the city editor's position, after proving her mettle as beat reporter.

Mamie Moloney Boggs, with the support of her publisher Robert Cromie, combined motherhood and journalism in a way that was absolutely unheard of in the 1930s. She continued to write her column from the maternity ward of the Vancouver General Hospital after the birth of her second son. Two months later she covered the organizational meetings of the United Nations in San Francisco.⁴⁵ Ella Johnson was marine and financial editor of the *Sun* after

⁴⁴ Lang, 254.

⁴⁵ Lang, 125.

World War I when even going to the battlefield was an easier proposition than financial specialization for women in journalism.⁴⁶ Then, in the 1950s, there was Simma Holt. Her reporting skills won the awe-struck admiration of Tom Ardies, a colleague whose article on life at the *Sun* had more to say about women's physical charms than their journalistic capabilities.⁴⁷

The newsrooms in which Kells, Carter, Milligan, Shaw and other women journalists of the time carved out their journalistic careers was typical of newsrooms right up until the eve of the women's movement in the 1970s. They did not accommodate themselves easily to the presence of women. When Dempsey first walked in through the doors of the *Edmonton Journal*, she noticed that there were no women's washrooms there. It was assumed that the only newspaper woman employed there would be the social editor and she would be away at teas and kaffeeklatches all day.⁴⁸

A stereotypically bohemian and almost exclusively male atmosphere pervaded all these newsrooms. As late as the 1970s, when Ross Munro became publisher, the *Edmonton*

⁴⁶ Lang, 257.

⁴⁷ Tom Ardies, "Cast of Characters," in Walter Stewart, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 175, 177.

⁴⁸ Lang, 147.

Journal was described as a haunt of eccentric and off-the-wall "characters" who comprised its mostly male journalistic staff. In an article sprinkled with amusing anecdotes, such as that of a former bank robber who ended up as a *Journal* reporter, and another incident that involved a male reporter who disappeared with a comely *Playboy* playmate he had been sent to interview, Harry Midgely waxes nostalgic about his time at the *Edmonton Journal*.

The news staff of the *Journal* had that ample share of eccentrics, sceptics, heavy drinkers, iconoclasts and natural insubordinates that had made journalism seem so attractive and suitable to me. . . . There were of course, many temperate and conventional people on the staff, but fortunately not so many as to render the place devoid of interest and colour.⁴⁹

The newsroom of the *Montreal Gazette* was no different. One of its staff members, Glen Allen, describes it in the 1960s around the time that its publisher Charles Peters sold it to Southam Press.

The people who wrote and edited the paper were figures out of *The Front Page*: wild men and wilder boozers who lived life on its outer edge, subsisting splendidly on their petty salaries, credit and "gifts" from politicians and businessmen. . . . Reporters and editors often partied until dawn on beer and oysters in those days. Dewar's Scotch and ale were their

⁴⁹ Harry Midgely, "Soothing Along with Southam," Walter Stewart, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 160.

drinks and Mother Martin's and the New Carleton Hotel were the points of their compass.⁵⁰

Young women who considered themselves daring and adventurous were also attracted to this milieu. An essay by Heather Robertson, who worked at the Winnipeg *Tribune*, another Southam paper, captures the newsroom atmosphere best.

Robertson, who embarked on her journalistic career in the late 1950s hoping for a life of excitement and unconventionality, was not disappointed. As soon as she entered this world, she was hooked on the heady cocktail made up of newsprint and ink, hot lead, cold coffee, stale sweat, stale sandwiches, cigars, cheap whiskey and dirt. To a young woman weaned on a steady diet of *Front Page* images and the exploits of Lois Lane, another fictional journalistic heroine popularized by comic strips, this was the smell of news.

Everything important at the *Tribune* happened at the press club, a cosy dark watering hole in the basement of the old Marlborough Hotel, where a perpetual poker game ran in the backroom and the bullshit flowed as fast as the booze. We girls, as we were called then, weren't allowed to join the press club, but we were welcome guests and the men were generous with the rounds: it helped make up for the fact they were paid more. . . . The *Tribune* floated on beer. It was pickled in Scotch. . . . It had been customary to measure the talent of female staff members at the

⁵⁰ Glen Allen, 75.

Tribune by the size of their bra cups; the Women's Editor was a statuesque 38D, columnist Ann Henry a stunning 36 Triple C.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Robertson, who describes herself and her peers as the "first generation of formidable feminists" and "refugees from the tedious female professions of school teaching and social work," not only survived but thrived on the endless excitement of headlines and deadlines. She was "blissed out,"⁵² as she put it, by the fact that each day brought new adventures, new places and new people, which together formed the very stuff of news. This was the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, which had lured women as well as men to this field.

By the 1970s, however, changes were taking place in the wider society. The women's movement had changed the thinking of many women and some men, and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women of 1967-1971 had put pressure on the government to formulate more equitable hiring policies. Some of those changes eventually began to be reflected in newsrooms across the country. In 1974, the total female journalistic workforce of all Canadian

⁵¹ Heather Robertson, "The Last of the Terrible Men," in Walter Stewart, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 131, 132.

⁵² Heather Robertson, 132.

newspapers was 21 per cent.⁵³ Although women were still a minority, at least there were sufficient numbers to end the isolation of the one or two who staffed the women's department. By the end of the decade, a new generation of female journalists, many of whom identified with the ideals of the women's movement, had come of age. The *Front Page* scenario was changing a little, and journalism was beginning to take on some of the attributes of the more standardized and regulated professions such as teaching and law. The days of semi-intoxicated editors, ex-convicts-turned-reporters, and women whose physical endowments were valued more than their journalistic talents, seemed to be fading from memory.

Despite some movement on the gender parity front, however, the Southam Newspaper Group discovered that there was still much work to be done in making employment equity a reality for women as well as men. The challenge before the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was formidable. It was nothing less than to produce a workable plan to change *The Front Page* environment of newsrooms, to make room at the top for women

⁵³ Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian Media: Progress Since the 1970s" (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1997), 4.

in the highest levels of management and to create gender equity right across the board. Whether Southam Newspaper Group completed its journey towards gender parity or whether the motor stalled somewhere along the way, will be the subject of the rest of this study.

CHAPTER 3

A WORLD IN TRANSITION: SOUTHAM NEWSPAPERS ON THE EVE OF THE TASK FORCE ON WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES

One day in 1978, the tap-tap of a woman's high-heeled shoes echoed through the corridors of Southam's head office in Toronto. It was no insignificant sound. The footsteps were those of Marnie Paikin, the very first female director of Southam Inc., and she was walking into her first meeting of the Southam Board of Directors. It was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the company. Paikin had entered an inner sanctum where no woman had ever trodden before.

Prior to her Southam appointment, Paikin had a distinguished record of service on several volunteer boards. She had been elected chair of the Governing Council of the University of Toronto in 1976. This was when Southam president Gordon Fisher, who was also a member of the Governing Council of the University, approached her and asked if she would accept a nomination to the Southam Board of Directors. She had never served on a corporate Board before, but she accepted the challenge.

After an initial nervousness, Paikin adapted herself quickly to Board work, and her male colleagues soon got

used to her presence and her voice at their meetings.¹ But a recurring theme in this story is that organizational cultures are notoriously slow to change. Repeated patterns of behaviour and long-held habits of mind form the routines of many peoples' lives. Some people within Southam Inc. did not wake up immediately to the new reality of a woman in the boardroom.

Paikin chuckles as she recounts an amusing incident in the very first year after her election. "Just before my first annual meeting, they sent out notices to everybody saying the following events were for directors and the following were for their wives," she said. "And I wrote back and said, 'Sorry, my wife can't come.' And thereafter they used the word 'spouses.'"²

Ten years after Paikin's election to the Board of Directors, there was a sign that the workplace issues of female employees in the company had come to the attention of another level of the hierarchy. This was when Paddy Sherman, President of the Southam Newspaper Group, just one step below the Board of Directors on the corporate ladder, initiated the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities. The one hundred years of solitude between the men who

¹ Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

² Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

occupied the rarefied upper echelons of senior management, and the women who laboured in the pink collar ghettos of clerical work and generally speaking, in the less prestigious reporting positions of journalism³, was about to dissolve, albeit gradually.

The Board of Directors generally supported Sherman's initiative, but Paikin's presence on the Board was something of a bonus for the task force when it started its work. Although Paikin did not initiate the task force on women's opportunities, she turned out to be a valuable source of support and encouragement to members as they went through the steps of documenting barriers to women's progress and then working out recommendations for change. As part of her duties as Board member, she served on the Southam committee on human resources, from which vantage point she took "more than a passing interest in developing women journalists," as Paddy Sherman puts it.⁴ Task force members considered Paikin an "easy sell" because, after all, she could be expected to empathize with the aspirations of women who might wish to emulate her success. They also found her something of a kindred spirit in the

³ Gertrude Robinson, and Armande Saint Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian News Media: Progress Since the 1970s (Monreal: McGill University, 1997), 7. This paper says that women's exclusion from two-thirds of all beats constituted a formidable barrier to professional advancement.

⁴ Paddy Sherman, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 16 February, 2001.

presence of so many males, even if some of the male directors were of a progressive turn of mind and sympathetic to their concerns.⁵

Paikin is quick to point out that such men did exist on the Board during her term. One of them Wilson Southam, stands out in her mind.⁶ "Be assured that there were other people on the Board who despite the fact that they were men, were very interested in the functioning of the task force," said Paikin. "I recall discussions at the Board, and they were always on the look-out for talent, and they didn't want to exclude women from that opportunity. Wilson Southam, who was a member of the Board at the time, had done a lot of research and practical work in his own career about workplace issues and how teams interact in the workplace."⁷ Paikin's position was one of influence rather than power, which was not a radical departure from the culture and traditions of the company.

The Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was established in the wake of economic and social changes that were set in motion in the 1970s.

⁵ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

⁶ Wilson, coincidentally, inherited a name which has been used by females as well as males in the Southam family. He was named after the matriarch of the Southam clan, Wilson Southam, wife of the company founder William Southam and one of the original female shareholders of the company.

⁷ Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the face of the workforce had changed dramatically, with more women than ever before having staked out a permanent place in it for themselves. The changes were felt in newsrooms across the country, not as a gale force that toppled existing structures, but a breath of fresh air that the upper echelons could not ignore. The Rip Van Winkles of the media establishment were stirring awake, but the Southam Newspaper Group was the first to hear the shrill sound of the alarm clock.

The Task force on Women's Opportunities, established in 1988, was a top-down initiative.⁸ Patricia Bell, then chair of the Canadian Region of the Newspaper Guild, who was with the *Ottawa Citizen* in the late '80s, says that The Newspaper Guild did not play a direct or indirect role in initiating the task force. "There was no coordinated union effort in the mid to late '80s that prompted the setting up of the task force," she says. "I've been a strong feminist since the '70s, and most of the women on the executive of the union at the local level, the Canadian District Council level and the international level were strong in terms of looking out for the advancement of women. But in this

⁸ Susan Riley, personal interview with Susan Korah, 12, February, 2001. Riley confirmed that it was a management initiative.

particular instance, it was not our initiative."⁹ Explaining that the Guild was too busy at the time with pay equity work, Bell gave full credit to Southam management for the task force. "It was the trend of the times," she recalled. Another reason why the Guild was not involved was that initially the task force was created to look at issues regarding the promotion of women in middle management to senior management positions, and managers were not members of the union, she explained.

Canadian women journalists in general have not been a militant group. In terms of organized activism, they have generally not taken the same route as the female journalists of the *New York Times* who in 1974 filed a lawsuit against management for discriminatory practices.¹⁰ Neither have they followed the example of the Dutch feminist journalists who campaigned successfully for affirmative action policies, increased part time job opportunities, parental leave and childcare facilities at newspaper offices.¹¹ In general, Canadian press women have preferred to use non-confrontational methods. With a few

⁹ Patricia Bell, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 24 July 2001.

¹⁰ Nan Robertson, *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men and the New York Times* (New York: Random House, 1992).

¹¹ Liesbet van Zoonen, "Feminist Perspectives on the Media," in J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, eds., *Mass Media and Society* (London: Edwin Arnold, 1996), 37.

exceptions, quiet lobbying, diligent gathering of facts and figures and respectful presentations to those in authority had been more their style. Individual Canadian women journalists have engaged in litigation against their employers. In 1989, for example, Barbara Yaffe, now with the *Vancouver Sun*, filed a million-dollar suit against the *Globe and Mail* over an alleged breach of a hiring commitment.¹² But Canadian women journalists in general, have not banded together to solve labour issues. A brief presented by the Canadian Women's Press Club to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1968 only touched on salary discrepancies between men and women in the media. It did not emphasize the relative scarcity of women employed as journalists in media industries. Only the Toronto branch brief referred to the fact that women hit a plateau after a few steps up the corporate ladder, pointing out that neither the CBC nor newspapers gave top jobs to women.¹³

An interesting forerunner to the Southam task force was the 1964 Canadian Women's Press Club survey of press women's working conditions. The stated goals of the survey were surprisingly close to the aims of the Southam

¹² Allan Fotheringham, "Newspaper People Tuning in to St. John's," The Financial Post, 17 April 1989, 17.

¹³ Kay Rex, No Daughter of Mine: The Women and History of the Canadian Women's Press Club 1904-1971 (Toronto: Cedar Cave Books, 1995).

Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities. The intention of the survey, according to CWPC's statement, was to determine whether working conditions on the whole were favourable to press women in Canada and whether existing obstacles, if any, could be eliminated to encourage advancement in their chosen profession.¹⁴ The report summarized some interesting findings. Among other things, it stated that there was great disparity in male and female earnings; that 36 per cent of survey respondents were anxious for promotion; also that two out of five of the latter group felt that advancement was precluded because they were women. The report was sent to all regional directors of the CWPC. But there, however, the matter ended, because the women did not have sufficient clout within their workplaces to act upon it. As the report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities noted:

Many academic studies, as well as practical experience in other organizations, demonstrate that policies to redress imbalance or inequities are gravely handicapped if they are not strongly supported right at the top of the organization.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jubilee Survey of Press Women's Working Conditions, 1964, in vol. 22, file no. 32 of the CWPC, National Archives of Canada.

¹⁵ Sharzer and Riley, 22.

For this Southam initiative to materialize however, the conditions had to be right. "It's often the case that a company will not budge (no matter who's running it), until they have to," observed Joan Fraser, currently a Liberal Senator from Quebec, former editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, and co-chair of the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities. "There's usually some force pushing it, saying it must change, whether it's the market or government or the company's shareholders."¹⁶

In retrospect, a combination of market forces and a professional interest in promoting journalists of talent, whether male or female, contributed to the birth of the idea in Sherman's mind. "There are a myriad things a president has to do to run a company, and first and foremost it's to make sure business is growing and expanding," said Tim Peters, then Director of Personnel and currently Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Southam Inc.¹⁷

One of those "myriad things" on Paddy Sherman's agenda in the late 1980s happened to be succession planning--a key and inevitable element of human resources strategy. Most succession programs tend to identify a cadre of high flyers

¹⁶ Senator Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

¹⁷ Tim Peters, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

and groom them so that they can step into a top management position when the time comes. With several impending retirements within the upper echelons, this was exactly what was on Sherman's mind. It occurred to him that among those with potential for leadership were at least a few women who had proven themselves to be strong, capable, talented and resilient over the years. Women such as Linda Hughes who was then managing editor of the *Edmonton Journal*, Joan Fraser, editorial page editor of the *The Gazette* in Montreal, Gillian Steward, managing editor at the *Calgary Herald*, and Sharon Burnside, night news editor at the *Ottawa Citizen*.

A management development committee was formed under the leadership of Clark Davey, then publisher of the *Gazette*, Montreal. "We were told to come up with a plan to fill the leadership vacuum that would arise when a number of publishers and senior executives retired *en masse*," said Davey. "Paddy noticed that there weren't enough women in the list of potentials we were coming up with, and not enough women in senior management."¹⁸

Out of this situation arose the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities. Sherman began the process of setting up a special task force to report on women employees'

issues. Initially, the women's task force was a sub committee of the Davey management development committee. "We were seeing potential problems for women journalists who were already in (middle) management," said Sherman. "I was interested in seeing that a good committee was set up to deal with this. We had to clear the decks for them and make sure they didn't hit the glass ceiling. But some members of the task force wanted a more broad-based approach."¹⁹

Sherman had been aware of the glass ceiling for years. Women sensed a certain openness in him, and were not afraid to make their concerns known.²⁰ Stevie Cameron for example, who worked as the food editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* in the early 1980s, approached Paddy Sherman, then publisher of the *Citizen*, when she felt she had struck the glass ceiling. Said Cameron at a Women in Media conference organized in November 1990 by women members of the Canadian Association of Journalists:

I was the only woman in management at the *Citizen* for four years...because I did hit a glass ceiling there. I did ask for other management jobs and was told I had to stay in what what was known at the *Ottawa Citizen*

¹⁸ Clark Davey, personal interview with Susan Korah, 23 January 2001.

¹⁹ Paddy Sherman, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 16 February 2001.

²⁰ Susan Riley, personal interview with Susan Korah, 12 February 2001. Riley commented that there was a certain openness within Southam at this time, and that the opinions of at least some women who had risen to positions of relative power and influence were taken into account.

at that time as "Rapes and Recipes.... I want you to know I loved working in Rapes and Recipes. I liked those soft things. I liked being food editor, I liked those issues. I liked those pages.... But it was time for a change...I must tell you, the two men who helped me make a lateral move were Paddy Sherman and Nick Hills, who ran Southam News Service at the time.... Nick supported me right down to the wire, so did Paddy, they brought me in and put me in the SWAT team at the *Citizen*, and I didn't have to go back to Rapes and Recipes."²¹

The broad-based approach Sherman referred to was a comprehensive survey and recommendations pertaining to all aspects of gender equity, from recruitment practices and "motherhood" issues to removing barriers to upward mobility. What the task force members wanted was a blueprint for spring cleaning the long-established culture of news rooms and newspapers, with the goal of making them more congenial and fulfilling workplaces for all women, not just a plan to remove obstacles for women who were already in management stream.²²

Linda Hughes, a member of the task force and publisher since 1991 of the *Edmonton Journal*, does not recall any lobbying on the part of any women.²³ But lobbying or no lobbying, it was to Southam's credit that the president of its newspaper group was alert to social

²¹ Stevie Cameron, "Ten Hints on How to Lobby," in *CAJ Bulletin*, Winter 1990, 7.

²² Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

changes and changes in the newsroom, and had taken the first step towards institutionalizing them.

Demographics in the newsroom had changed since the days when almost the only female inhabitants were the cloistered women's editor and her despised social reporter. Hard data about Canadian women in the journalistic work force are difficult to come by. However, a groundbreaking survey by Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean shows a slight upward curve in the gender ratio in the profession from 1974 to 1994. The Robinson-Saint-Jean table, summarized here, reflects an increase in the number of female journalists since 1974, but the increase in no way indicated that the historical male-female imbalance had been redressed.

Out of a total of 2,450 Canadians working as full time journalists in daily newspapers in 1974, 21 per cent or 504 were women, while 79 per cent or 1,946 were men. The percentage of women in journalism was considerably lower than the percentage of women in the general workforce, which was 34 per cent. By comparison, men comprised 66 per cent of the general work force. By 1994, the total number of men and women in daily newspaper journalism had increased to 3,451, with women representing 28 per cent or

²³ Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 18 May 2001.

962 and men, 72 per cent or 2,489. Again, the percentage of women in journalism was well below 44 per cent, which was the percentage of women in the general work force.

By this time, the percentage gap between men and women in the general workforce had closed a little, with men now constituting 56 per cent of the general labour force.²⁴ The change in the journalistic workforce in the 20-year span has also to be viewed in another light. Since the academic year 1984-85, when women comprised 64 per cent of women graduates in Canadian schools of journalism, there have been more female than male journalism graduates in the country.²⁵ This is still not reflected in newsrooms across the country.

The Robinson-Saint-Jean survey provides a snapshot of the Canadian daily newspaper scene in general. But another set of figures, collected by Shirley Sharzer in an informal survey in May-July 1989, gives an overview of women journalists' employment at Southam newspapers. Only the statistics for the five dailies emphasized in this study will be reproduced here.²⁶

²⁴ Robinson and Saint-Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian News Media: Progress Since the 1970s," 4.

²⁵ Lynn Douris, "Upwardly Immobile," Ryerson Review of Journalism, Spring 1988, 40.

²⁶ Statistics courtesy of Shirley Sharzer. "All of the above statistics are subject to correction since they are based totally on my subjective analysis of the staff lists provided on my May-July 1989 tour of Southam divisions and news service," she said in a note.

The following statistics were based on Sharzer's subjective analysis of the staff lists provided on her May-July 1989 tour of Southam newsrooms.

Name of Paper	Percentage of Women	Women in Management
<i>Vancouver Sun</i>	21	1 life editor 1 features editor
<i>Calgary Herald</i>	21	1 managing editor 1 associate editor
<i>Edmonton Journal</i>	20	1 editor 1 city editor 1 fashion editor 1 food editor 1 writing coach/copy editor
<i>The Gazette, Montreal</i>	22	1 editorial page editor 1 magazine editor
<i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	25	1 news editor 1 business editor

Perhaps because of the visibility of some female news anchors on television, there was a vague perception among the general public that journalism was becoming a "woman's profession."²⁷ (In fact only 37 per cent of Canadian television journalistic staff were female in 1994).²⁸ Says

²⁷ Jean Southworth, former journalist and archivist of the Media Club of Ottawa, conversation with Susan Korah, 3 May 2001.

²⁸ Robinson and Saint-Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian Media: Progress Since the 1970s," 15. They did not include statistics for female radio journalists.

Linda Hughes, publisher of the *Edmonton Journal*, still the only female publisher of a major daily in the whole country, "I recall that people thought that in the newsroom in general, though not in management, there was roughly 50-50 (male and female). But when we actually did the numbers, it wasn't really 50-50. There were still a lot more men than women."²⁹

Still, it was a far cry from the days when many Canadian Women's Press Club members were the only female staffers on their newspapers. Not only were there greater safety and strength in numbers, but a new wave of feminist journalists had crashed into the male preserves of political and general hard news reporting.

In the past, women reporters such as Doris Milligan of the *Vancouver Sun*, who were unruffled by murder and mayhem, were few and far between, and were considered oddities, slightly out of step even with some of the more assertive members of the Canadian Women's Press Club. But now, women such as Joan Fraser, recruited to the *Montreal Gazette* in 1966, Frances Bula who joined the staff of the *Vancouver Sun* in 1987, Daphne Bramham whose journalistic career began in 1977, and Gillian Steward who went to work for the *Calgary Herald* in 1972 refused to be confined to the frilly, lace-

²⁹ Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 18 May 2001.

edged world of "lifestyle" pages, even though the frills and flounces were giving way to more weighty issues.

"When I first started at the *Gazette*, there was a quota there...just one woman on city side," says Fraser, who eventually became the editor of the *Gazette*. "There was another woman who'd been promised that, so I was put in the women's section. I lasted there about six months. It was maddeningly frustrating. I went to the managing editor and asked for a change. He put me in the business section. I had to learn the job from scratch, because I didn't even know the difference between a stock and a bond. But they were good to me and I learned."³⁰

Frances Bula recounts a similar story of resistance to being pigeonholed in the lifestyles pages. "I came in at the tail end of a generation of fairly aggressive women reporters," Bula recalled. "I really came with the sense that anything I went after was mine. And those of us who thought of ourselves as serious reporters really resisted going to the women's pages."³¹ Then there was Kim Bolan, who graduated with her Master of Journalism from the University of Western Ontario (a program that Shirley Sharzer helped set up in 1983), and was hired by the *Vancouver Sun* in

³⁰ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February, 2001.

³¹ Frances Bula, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

1984.³² A tiny woman whose appearance belies her courage and determination to get the story at all costs, she even put her life on the line in order to track the story of the Air India bombing of 1985. The Vancouver-based Sikh suspects in the case were also suspected of being embroiled in separatist activities against the government of India. As Bula points out, these feats of journalistic derring-do by female colleagues serve as examples that embolden other women and help to open men's eyes to just what women journalists are capable of.

"When you have someone like Kim in your newsroom, with two toddlers, who get death threats for doing her job, and then comes in every day looking for more, it really solidifies the impression in the newsroom that these gals can go out and do anything."³³

Gillian Steward was covering the Alberta legislature for the *Calgary Herald* in the 1970s. By that time, there were women in the *Herald's* sports department, which until a few years before had been virtually unheard of, according to Steward. She left the *Herald* in May 1990, after three years there as managing editor. "By the mid '80s, there were women doing police, politics, business," she says.

³² Kim Bolan, personal interview with Susan Korah, 3 May 2000.

³³ Frances Bula, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

"Certainly, more women were moving into these fields all the time."³⁴

But for all the achievements of female reporters, women around the editorial table were still a rare breed. But here, too, the Southam Newspaper Group was ahead of other newspaper companies at the time. The *Ryerson Review of Journalism* in the spring of 1988 revealed that only two women outside Toronto held senior management positions in newspapers. Both of these were Southam women--Gillian Steward, managing editor of the *Calgary Herald*, and Linda Hughes, editor-in-chief of the *Edmonton Journal*.

"I was made assistant managing editor in 1985, and was certainly the first woman to achieve that kind of position," says Steward. "I would say that, in general, from about 1985 to 1990 there was a movement on the part of Southam to get more women into management. They were more proactive about getting more women into management."³⁵

When city editors were included in Ryerson's 1988 newspaper management survey, Southam still came out ahead of other companies. There were 11 managers at its 15 dailies. By comparison, Thomson's 29 papers had only 11 women who had advanced to that level. Tim Peters, who was

³⁴ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

³⁵ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

then personnel director of Southam, told a Ryerson interviewer that his company had been working at advancing women. "We're making sure that training and development programs had are available to all potential managers and that women avail themselves of these programs," he said.³⁶

Training and development had become more of a priority at Southam since about the 1980s and by now, women were pressing for a slice of the training and development pie. "When I first started (in 1972), there was no training whatsoever," says Steward, who came to the *Calgary Herald* with a degree in political science from an American university. After doing a stint as journalist, she went temporarily to advertising and public relations with another daily, *The Albertan*, following the birth of her child. "But I think by the '80s, there was a general shift in awareness at Southam of what needed to be done for people's professional development," continued Steward. "People were given the opportunity to go to courses, and people were brought into the newsroom to give workshops and seminars."³⁷

There were other factors at work that indicated to Sherman and other top brass at Southam that the time was

³⁶ Lynn Douris, "Upwardly Immobile," Ryerson Review of Journalism, Spring 1988, 40.

³⁷ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

indeed ripe for a women's task force. Employment equity and gender politics in the workplace were hot issues and were becoming part of the lexicon of mainstream Canada. The debate, initially spearheaded by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women of 1967-1971, was widely covered by the media.³⁸

By the 1980s, the debate had intensified considerably. The 1980s became the decade of studies, task forces and commissions on the subject. Ontario family court Judge Rosalie Abella headed a federal government task force on employment opportunities in crown corporations in 1983 and discovered that the state of gender equity was still appalling in those prestigious organizations.³⁹

The Abella Commission was set up to explore the most efficient, effective and equitable means of promoting equality in employment for women, native people, disabled persons and visible minorities in 11 designated crown corporations. This Commission gave us a new definition of equality, and analyzed the politics of the workplace in race and gender terms. The commission, which was set up by Pierre Trudeau's Liberals, did its work during the short tenure of John Turner and delivered its final report to

³⁸ Freeman, The Satellite Sex.

³⁹ Crean, 120.

Brian Mulroney's Conservatives in September 1984. The new employment and immigration minister Flora MacDonald ensured that this report did not gather dust on a library shelf. It spawned the 1986 Federal Employment Equity Act.

This Act covered all federally regulated companies with 100 or more permanent employees, about 5 per cent of the Canadian labour force.⁴⁰ It required companies that were under federal regulation to file reports annually on the number of women, Aboriginals and visible minorities they hired. Most broadcasting industries fell into this category because they were regulated by the CRTC. While it did not affect the print media, nevertheless, this was a sign of the times. A *Toronto Star* editorial in May 1982 warned that:

It is becoming increasingly apparent that if employers want to avoid legislation requiring them to institute affirmative action programs, they are going to have to do much better on a voluntary basis at hiring and promoting women into higher paying jobs.... And employers should stop assuming that women can't do non-traditional jobs: if they have the skills needed, hire them. As well, employers should start looking at their entire work force, not just at the young men, as potential management material.⁴¹

But in the intervening six years, the *Star* had

⁴⁰ Sandra Martin, "The New Face of Inequality," *Toronto Star*, 4 November 1995.

⁴¹ Lynn Douris, "Upwardly Immobile," *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Spring 1988, 40.

apparently ignored its own advice. While women made up 24 per cent of its editorial employees, only one woman was in senior management: Mary Deanne Shears, assistant managing editor, and coordinator of training.⁴² Newspapers were not the first to practice what they preached to others. This prompted Dona Harvey, one-time managing editor of *The Province* in Vancouver, to comment that the Southam Task Force on Women's opportunities sparked a "glimmer of hope" in Canadian news rooms which had not been shining lights in the firmament of women's advancement and rights.⁴³

Pat Carney, at present Conservative Senator from British Columbia but then Minister Responsible for the Asia-Pacific Initiative in the Mulroney government, initiated a task force to probe barriers to women in the public service. This task force produced its report *Beneath the Veneer* in 1990.⁴⁴ As Clair Balfour, one of the three male members of the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities remembers it, "equal opportunity employment" was the buzz phrase of the time.⁴⁵

⁴² Lynne Douris, 40.

⁴³ Shirley Sharzer, "Professional Training and Development in Southam Newsrooms," unpublished report prepared for Southam Newspaper Group, August 1989, 36.

⁴⁴ Senator Pat Carney, conversation with Susan Korah, 23 April 2001.

⁴⁵ Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

The legislative environment, too, was changing to keep up with changing social realities. The report of the Southam Newspaper Group's Task Force on Women's Opportunities commented that: "Today's work world relies to a substantial degree on the work of women. It is simply unfair as well as bad business and social policy, to make them carry the full financial and career burden of bearing children. Some provinces have already recognized this and moved to legislate relatively generous maternity leave. Quebec is the strongest example."⁴⁶ It also cautioned that: "Ontario has already passed pay equity legislation: other provinces are likely to follow suit particularly if employers do not act on their own initiative."⁴⁷

The newspaper world itself was a world in transition. By the late 1970s, women's pages had evolved into lifestyle sections, with more substantial feature articles on health and other "soft" news issues instead of social slush pandering to the vanity of the rich and the would-be famous. Women were no longer quite the aliens in newsrooms that they had been in Lotta Dempsey's time. The fallout from the women's movement of the 1960s and early '70s had finally caught up with the newspaper world.

⁴⁶ Sharzer and Riley, 45, 46.

⁴⁷ Sharzer and Riley, 58.

Generations of male editors and publishers had never seen woman in any professional situation except at the lowest rungs of the journalistic hierarchy. By the late 1970s and '80s this was beginning to change a little. People such as Paddy Sherman, president of Southam News Group and Clark Davey, then publisher of the *Montreal Gazette* say that they had developed a healthy respect for women's capabilities in the upper levels of the profession. Sherman boasts that he was one of the first editors to promote women. "I was way ahead of the Eastern newspapers", said Sherman. "I didn't see what the fuss was all about. Back in the 1970s, I appointed Olivia Ward and another woman to the editorial board of the Province."⁴⁸ Davey, publisher of the *Ottawa Citizen* in the late 1980s, had worked as a close associate of Shirley Sharzer when he was managing editor of the *Globe and Mail* from 1973 to 1978. He had followed Sharzer's career and had seen her rise to the position of deputy managing editor of the *Globe* in 1987.

Mark Harrison was another man in the Southam management who was praised for making changes that smoothed

⁴⁸ Paddy Sherman, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 16 February 2001. This was corroborated in an e-mail I received from Olivia Ward dated 27 February 2001. Ward wrote: "Paddy Sherman was certainly a pioneer in promoting women."

the path of talented women.⁴⁹ He was editor of the *Montreal Gazette* when Joan Fraser worked there as editor of the editorial page. Don Babick, a member of the task force who became publisher of the *Edmonton Journal* in April 1990 worked alongside Linda Hughes, who was then editor of the paper. He says he set a new tone for management, making sure everyone understood that Linda served as an equal executive on the operations committee, and didn't just occupy a token position.⁵⁰

Although some of the publishers and other top executives retained their "Neanderthal attitudes", as some women described it, other members of Southam's top brass were becoming increasingly sensitive to gender issues in the newsroom. Babick, Clark Davey, publisher of the *Montreal Gazette* in the late 1980s and later of the *Ottawa Citizen*, and Patrick O'Callaghan, publisher of the *Calgary Herald*, were among those who paid more than lip service to gender equity. "We had some fairly progressive leadership at Southam," reminisced Shirley Sharzer.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001. She complimented Davey and Harrison for insisting on change at the *Gazette*.

⁵⁰ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

⁵¹ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

There were factors beyond an altruistic desire to promote talented women to decision-making positions that moved the Southam management to establish a task force. "It was also a business drive," admits Clair Balfour, one of the three male members of the task force and great grandson of the founder of the company.⁵²

Indeed, the entire industry was going through hard times. Once considered a bottomless source of fat profits, newspapers suddenly found themselves the poor cousins of television. Advertising revenues collapsed and circulation plummeted, sending even the biggest newspaper chains such as the American Gannett Inc. scuttling to management consultants and readership task forces in search of solutions. "I remember talking to a human resources director at *USA Today* (a Gannett newspaper) and they were experimenting with the whole idea of making the paper more representative of the whole community," says Balfour. "They had aggressively embarked on involving women and minorities in the whole production process of the newspaper."⁵³ That the Gannett model influenced the thinking of the Southam brass is evident in Balfour's comments as well as in the

⁵² Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

⁵³ Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

final report of the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities.

The atmosphere in the newsroom was changing too. "There was a little bit of a cowboy environment left over from an earlier era, but I think with the change of management (in the '80s) that sort of thing probably disappeared. I worked hard at breaking down what would be considered an old boys' club at the *Edmonton Journal* ...yes, very much of an old boys' club," said Don Babick. "I guess I started the change of tone at the *Journal* that said we wouldn't operate in that fashion any more."⁵⁴ Babick set the tone by example, as well as by precept. Not only did he set aside a room in the *Journal's* new building for a relatively first class daycare operation, "probably superior to anything you would have found externally," he claims today. He also made sure managers received training to sensitize them to sexual and other forms of harassment.

The *Edmonton Journal* was not, however, the first newspaper in North America to establish on-site day care. That distinction belongs to the *Calgary Herald*, where publisher Patrick O'Callaghan made sure the little "Herald angels" as he called them, were within easy reach of their parents when he opened an on-site daycare centre in

September 1987. It was housed in a spacious room that was originally intended for use as an auditorium when the newspaper moved into an opulent new building in the fall of 1981.

O'Callaghan was acutely aware of the changing face of the workplace. Calgary by that time had the largest percentage of working women of any city in Canada. So many *Herald* staff members were tending babies and toddlers that Gillian Steward, then managing editor, remarked humorously to Callaghan that: "I don't know what you need a daycare centre for. We already have one. It's called a newsroom and I have to change their diapers every day."⁵⁵

Steward, who was the first single mother ever to work for the *Herald* when she started there in 1972, did other things to make the news room more woman-friendly. "I remember in the 80s, a lot of women were having babies—women in their 30s," says Steward. "They'd delayed childbearing for a long time. They were always having showers for each other, and because I was in management, I made sure I went to a lot of these showers. I think even that plain acceptance that this is a normal part of life,

⁵⁴ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

⁵⁵ Patriek O' Callaghan, "Hark the Herald Angels," *CAJ Bulletin*, Winter 1990, 19.

and life can go on after the birth of a baby, was very important."⁵⁶

Steward remembers the beginning of the end of the "bar culture" which was prevalent at the *Calgary Herald* where she started in 1972. That was when her daughter was three years old. "There was a tavern right across the street from the paper. The paper was out by noon and most of the people would go down to the bar. Having said that, women were free to go. But if you didn't want to go and you didn't want to network that way, you were left out. In my case, I could go, but I had to go home and look after my daughter. I couldn't stay there all night."

Describing the changes that began to unfold during the 1980s as newsrooms began to adapt to the times, Steward said:

The bar culture began to change. For one thing, the *Herald* moved to another building, and there was no tavern across the street. We were now on the outskirts of the town. Another reason was that there were more women in the newsroom, and we didn't want to do that. Also, in the 80s, there was more of a health consciousness. The younger reporters weren't drinking like that. It was the older guys who were heavy drinkers. A lot of them had died, and others had serious problems, so by the mid 80s, the drinking thing had changed a lot for a number of reasons. And also, management was better. They began to recognize that this was not a good way to conduct a business.

⁵⁶ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

You had to have certain rules around that kind of stuff.⁵⁷

The days when newspapers "floated on beer" and journalists were "pickled in Scotch"⁵⁸ were coming to a close. The newsroom environment was changing in other ways too, although as Linda Hughes points out, the situation for women varied considerably in different newsrooms. Since Southam believed firmly in local autonomy, the newsroom environment depended on the attitude of individual publishers and editors. On the whole, however, the blatant sexism and unapologetic inequality, which the world of journalism had more or less accepted as the norm for over a century, were becoming things of the past.

In spite of these changes, the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities was a breakthrough because it was the first project of its kind in the history of Canadian print journalism. The report it produced was a watershed document. No private enterprise media conglomerate, largely untouched by federal government labour legislation, had ventured to scrutinize its own employment practices with regard to the recruitment, retention and advancement of women.

⁵⁷ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

⁵⁸ Heather Robertson, "The Last of the Terrible Men," in Walter Stewart, ed., Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1980), 131.

Southam Newspaper Group's timing was impeccable in one sense. It was certainly marching to the music of the women's movement of the 1970s, which by now had swelled to a crescendo, and had reached even newsrooms, not always the first to hear that particular tune.

But the timing of the task force was unfortunate for another reason. The late 1980s and early '90s were tumultuous times for the company. Its top executives, a closely knit family group of Southams, Balfours, Fishers and their close associates, bound by kinship ties and a long history of steering the corporate ship together, were fighting a losing battle for the very survival of the company as they knew it. It was a company that was dear to their hearts for emotional as well as financial reasons.

"In May 1987, Southam's first newspaper hit the streets," blared a full-page advertisement in the *Ryerson Review of Journalism* of spring 1990. "One hundred and thirteen years later, we are the largest daily newspaper group in all of Canada. We reach 2.8 million readers every single day! So, get results. Come into the fold."⁵⁹

In hindsight, there was a note of desperation in the enticement to advertisers. In about six more years, the last act of that particularly suspenseful drama would end

and the curtain ring down on the company as it had existed for over a century. The crown would pass on to a new media baron, Conrad Black of Hollinger, and the Southam clan, Canada's first media dynasty, would no longer be at the helm of corporate affairs.

An article by Jennifer Wells, published shortly after the Hollinger take-over of Southam's major assets, recalled that turbulent chapter in the firm's history:

Southam had been in a mess since the mid 80s. The Company lost its leadership keel when Gordon Fisher died of cancer in 1985 after running the Southam shop for a decade. Southam quickly sold a near-quarter share of the company to Torstar, publisher of *The Toronto Star*, a defensive manoeuvre by the Southam board, which spied such corporate intruders as Conrad Black waiting to swoop in on the vulnerable paper empire.

The subsequent years were torturous. The recession brought collapsing advertising revenue.... Newspapers were once a business of immovably fat profit margins. They were no longer. In 1991, Southam lost \$153 million.⁶⁰

Peter Desbarats paints a similarly dismal financial picture in his 1990 book *Guide to the Canadian Media*. He says that in 1989, Thomson Newspapers, Southam's rival, showed a 33.85 per cent profit margin, while Southam's was only 18.98 per cent.⁶¹ As early as 1985, rumours of a

⁵⁹ Ryerson Review of Journalism, Spring 1990, last page.

⁶⁰ Jennifer Wells, "Conrad Black, Editorial Storm Trooper," in Maclean's, 11 November 1996, 56.

⁶¹ Peter Desbarats, Guide to the Canadian News Media (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1990), 58.

hostile takeover spread like a forest fire throughout media and business circles. Among the pirates, who the industry grapevine said were waiting to swoop down on the sinking Southam ship, were Conrad Black of Hollinger Inc. and two non-media financiers, George Mann of Unicorp Canada Corp. and Galen Weston of George Weston Ltd.

In 1980, Gordon Fisher, then president of Southam, told the Royal Commission on Newspapers that "one of our goals is to publish the best newspapers that we can, generally within the normal economic restraints." In its report, the commission contrasted this attitude with the Thomson philosophy, which was reflected in Ken Thomson's blunt comment to the commission. "Look, we are running a business organization. They happen to be newspapers." The commission had concluded that Southam's objective was "not solely profit maximization."⁶²

But by the mid 1980s, Southam was forced to borrow a leaf from Thomson's book. "Southam to Purge Another 400 Jobs", crowed a *Globe and Mail* headline on January 27, 1988. In 1988-89, Southam eliminated 900 full and part time jobs, according to *The Globe and Mail*.⁶³

⁶² Desbarats, 55.

⁶³ "Southam to Purge Another 400 Jobs," Globe and Mail, 27 January 1988, B1.

The editorial and administrative cost cutting were seen as part of a desperate survival strategy on the part of Southam. There was more at stake than a business organization, important though that was, from the owners' point of view. There was also a family tradition and a proud legacy that the clan was not about to relinquish easily. The company was at a cross-roads and the corporate culture was in a state of flux, caught between the idealism of the earlier generations of Southams and the financial pressures that now preoccupied its upper echelons.

Joan Fraser vividly recalls those years. Her statements about the loss of heart following Gordon Fisher's death corroborate Wells' article in Maclean's.

In one respect, the task force came at an awkward time. Southam had launched into a long, long struggle to maintain its identity and independence. It had been a family company, though publicly owned, and had always been run by the Southams, Balfours and Fishers. There was substantial pride in that. They didn't want to be taken over by anyone else. And there were, starting through the 1980s, from the time of Gordon Fisher's death, unending rumours, reports about people trying to do hostile take-overs. And that became the absolute focus. When Gordon (Fisher) died very unexpectedly, the company wasn't prepared for that. And John Fisher, Gordon's brother had been brought in when Gordon died. He was a true gentleman. A really, really fine human being. But his heart and soul were not in the newspaper business the way it had been for example, with St. Clair Balfour (another former president of the company.) Anyway, the higher

levels of the company were basically focused on survival.⁶⁴

Despite the predicament in which Southam found itself, change was called for and the task force went ahead with its data gathering activities and its deliberations over a period of approximately two years. In the final analysis, the task force was the product of a shrewd mixture of commercial motivation and equity values. It also happened to tap into the spirit of the times when employment equity was in the forefront of public consciousness.

In any event, it was time for the newspaper world to catch up with changing social reality and to include women as equals in the business of gathering and publishing the daily news. The Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was a small step in that direction.

⁶⁴ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

CHAPTER 4

A LANDMARK REPORT, BUT NOT A MARXIST-LENINIST FEMINIST MANIFESTO

Marjorie Nichols, the *Ottawa Citizen's* hard-hitting national affairs columnist in the 1980s, was noted for her controversial views and her apparent determination to swim upstream against the current of popular opinion. In 1991, when her friends and admirers invited her to address the women in the media conference organized by the women's caucus of the Canadian Association of Journalists, Nichols objected furiously to the concept of a women-only conference and vented her feelings to Jane O'Hara, her friend, colleague and co-author of her memoirs. Nichols fumed that a conference "run by Marxist-Leninist feminists" would do more harm than good for women journalists.¹ Nichols has left no record of her views on the Southam Task Force Report on Women's Opportunities. But even such an outspoken critic of trendy causes as this controversial journalist² would have been hard pressed to label it a Marxist-Leninist-feminist manifesto.

¹ Jane O'Hara, "The Marjorie Mystique: A Tribute," Women in the Media, a special edition of the CAJ Bulletin, no. 47, May 1992, 31.

² Marjorie Nichols with Jane O'Hara, Mark My Words: The Memoirs of a Very Political Reporter (New York: Bantam Books, 1994).

Hailed as a "landmark report" and celebrated with champagne and a bright burst of optimism by task force members and many women journalists, both within and outside the Southam Newspaper Group, it was not the work of "wild and woolly radicals" or of "leftist feminist crackpots".³ It did not even remotely touch on feminist theory, socialist or otherwise. It certainly did not draw on the feminist argument that gender is a major organizing feature of power relations in society⁴ and that the media are principal agents for constructing and disseminating that ideology. Nor did it share with socialist feminists the theory of surplus value of domestic labour. This theory maintains that the nurturing, moral, educational and domestic work women do in the home are indispensable for the maintenance of the large profit margins of capitalistic enterprises.⁵ The reformist or liberal feminist claim to equal rights for women is not explicitly stated anywhere in the report, although it does prescribe some liberal feminist solutions to the workplace problems of women in Southam newsrooms. These include implementing the general principle of

³ Joan Fraser and Clair Balfour, personal interviews with Susan Korah.

⁴ Gertrude Robinson, "Women and the Media in Canada: A Progress Report," in Helen Holmes and David Taras, eds, Seeing Ourselves: Media Power and Policy in Canada (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 260.

⁵ Liesbet van Zoonen, "Feminist Perspectives on the Media" in J. Curran and M. Gurevitch, eds., Mass Media and Society (London: Edwin Arnold 1996), 30.

employment equity and gradually changing the culture of newsrooms through a long process of education. The phrase "affirmative action" was deliberately avoided because of its connotations of preferential treatment.⁶ Using a strictly practical business approach and backed by research from schools of business administration and human resource experts, its essential argument was that barriers to women in the workplace are not merely "women's issues" but were of tremendous importance to business.

Maureen Sabia, chair of the Advisory Committee to the Women in Management program pioneered in 1986 at the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario, defined the issues that blocked women's career paths. "These issues are not merely women's issues but are business issues relating to productivity and efficiency in the workplace, issues of human resource utilization- all of which are of concern to managers striving to make their businesses more competitive in the global economy", she said.⁷ The Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities, co-

⁶ Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

⁷ Shirley Sharzer and Susan Riley, "Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities," unpublished report prepared for the publishers of Southam Newspaper Group, April 1990, 2.

authored by Shirley Sharzer and Susan Riley, quotes Sabia in its introduction, and uses it as the rationale behind its recommendations. Although there are a few muted references to "rights" as a moral principle,⁸ in general, the strongest argument in the report is that an improved work environment for women makes sound business sense for everybody. After a few anecdotes illustrating the work-family responsibilities conflict and the glass ceiling experienced by women, the report's introduction goes on summarize the malaise of the newspaper industry:

Consider also the fact that the female population in Canada, from 1978 to 1988, rose from 11.5 million to 13.1 million, or from about 50.2 per cent to almost 51 per cent of the total. Yet in Southam newspapers as in others, men in the main, determine what is news and how to sell it to the public: men hold down the top jobs. If the medium is the message, the message comes through a male filter.

Meanwhile, stagnant circulation figures are widespread cause for concern in the newspaper industry. In Canada and the United States, newspapers are developing strategy plans. Think tanks have sprung up to explore New Directions for News.⁹

The report was essentially a prescription for an ailing business. In April 1990, exactly 113 years after the two business partners William Southam and William Carey

⁸ Sharzer and Riley, Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities, references on pages 62, 62, and 64 to application forms and interview questions that contravene human rights legislation.

⁹ Sharzer and Riley, 2.

bought the financially troubled *Hamilton Spectator* and reversed its fortunes, Southam Newspaper Group released its own internal report on how to breathe new life and energy into the beleaguered company. Supporting and nurturing the talents of its women journalists was one way of providing the coverage the public now demanded. This included news and information that affected women, families and the workplace.¹⁰

Yet it would be less than fair to assert that the task force was driven entirely by business principles, untouched by any ethical considerations or that it was a completely cynical, circulation-boosting manoeuvre. "For people on the task force and the people from whom they drew inspiration, there was a standard that was higher than strictly business", says Clair Balfour. "There were considerations of fairness and democracy. There's a parallel to me in the environmental movement. Business sees it in business terms, but increasingly, we see that the moral principle and the business aspect go together."¹¹ A letter from John Fisher, president of Southam, to all employees stated that while equal opportunity was the basic right of every employee, it

¹⁰ Christine du Haime, "The Drive for Quality at Thomson Newspapers," Ryerson Review of Journalism, April 1992, 40.

¹¹ Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

made good business sense as well.¹² Joan Fraser agrees that ethical considerations were not totally submerged by more materialistic motives. "We were trying to appeal to the values of the Southam we had known, the old line Southam where integrity and decency mattered", she says.¹³

Commercial values and equity principles were to be played as a harmonious duet to enhance and reinforce each other, a theme that echoed throughout the proceedings and in the final report of the task force.

In any event, the task force set a precedent for the Canadian industry. "It was a leadership activity within the (Canadian) industry", says Balfour.¹⁴ Elizabeth Thompson, then a junior reporter with *The Gazette* in Montreal supports Balfour's claim. "When the task force report was first released, it had repercussions in newspapers and other media outlets that had nothing to do with Southam", she says. "A precedent was set, and women in other newsrooms could point to what *The Gazette* and other Southam newspapers were doing and say, 'why can't we do the same thing here?'"¹⁵ Even Michele Landsberg, the *Toronto*

¹² Letter from John Fisher, Appendix A-3, "Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities."

¹³ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

¹⁴ Clair Balfour, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Thompson, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 12 April 2001.

Star's feminist columnist, who was initially extremely sceptical,¹⁶ was impressed. In a column dated June 8, 1990, she wrote: "A brand-new report from the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities takes an unflinching look at the status of women at 16 Southam newspapers across the country, including *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Ottawa Citizen*. But what has astonished everyone in the newspaper business is the report's enthusiastic reception by Southam's top brass."¹⁷

The task force consisted of 15 women and three men. "It was basically a committee of fairly senior female executives in the company from a bunch of different disciplines-human resources, editorial, advertising, business," said Don Babick, then publisher of the *Edmonton Journal* and currently president and CEO of Southam Publishing under the new owners, CanWest Global Communications Corporation. "They represented most of the papers across the country."¹⁸

"We picked for the task force, or encouraged the task force to pick for themselves, the strongest and most able

¹⁶ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000. Sharzer related how, at a farewell party for *The Globe and Mail's* June Callwood in Toronto, Landsberg had said, "Shirley, is it really going to work?"

¹⁷ Michele Landsberg, "Some Editors Fight Sexism in Newsrooms," *Toronto Star*, 8 June 1990, B1.

¹⁸ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

women we had in the company," said Tim Peters, then director of personnel at Southam Newspaper Group.¹⁹

The list of names was indeed impressive, and some of the most dynamic members of the committee were journalists, as Clark Davey commented in a letter to Paddy Sherman.²⁰ It was initially co-chaired by Jude Gravelle of the *Financial Post* and Judi Harvey, manager of office and building services of Pacific Press, the subsidiary that ran both *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*. The task force had to replace Gravelle when she left the company. In October 1989, Joan Fraser, then editorial page editor of the *Montreal Gazette*, became the new co-chair.²¹

Besides Joan Fraser, members who represented the editorial side of the operations were Shirley Sharzer, coordinator of training and development for the entire Southam Newspaper Group; Susan Riley, editorial writer at the *Ottawa Citizen*, who eventually co-wrote the task force report with Sharzer; Linda Hughes, then editor of *The Edmonton Journal*; Gillian Steward, managing editor of *The Calgary Herald*; Susan Johnston, Lifestyles editor of the

¹⁹ Tim Peters, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

²⁰ Clark Davey to Paddy Sherman, letter dated 12 September 1988.

²¹ Judi Harvey to all task force members, memo dated 3 October 1989.

Brantford Expositor; and Marilyn Storie, staff reporter, *Prince George Citizen*.

The "token" males, as Balfour jokingly describes the trio, also had impeccable credentials within the corporation. They were Balfour himself, who was then project director of *The Gazette* in Montreal, Don Babick, then publisher of *The Edmonton Journal*, and Stuart Noble, President and Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Press.

Sharzer, who played a key role in the hands-on research and the data gathering in the second year of the proceedings, and later co-wrote the report, was not a long-standing employee of Southam Newspaper Group. She had been hired in May 1989 as a consultant to the Davey management development committee. A distinguished journalist, she had 30 years of journalism and journalism training experience under her belt when she was hired by Southam head office. After she completed her initial mission, which was to conduct in-depth interviews with newsroom employees across the country, she was appointed coordinator of training and development and was also given an official berth on the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities.

Sharzer was a natural in both her roles--as training coordinator and as a member of the task force. She was able

to combine two dimensions of her expertise, training and journalism, as well as her own unique experience as a path-breaking woman in journalism, to reinforce one another and to contribute enormously to the work of the task force.

A warm, friendly woman with a kindly manner that belies her inner strength, Sharzer had been the first woman ever to crack the editorial glass ceiling at *The Globe and Mail* and had risen to the rank of deputy managing editor. From 1974 to 1978 she was the Assistant Dean at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Western Ontario, and had helped Dean Gordon MacFarlane set up the department. She had also worked for *The Toronto Star* (features editor), *The Toronto Telegram* (national editor), and before that at *The Winnipeg Free Press* and *The Winnipeg Citizen*. A native of Winnipeg, she had begun her career in 1948 with the British United Press wire service in that city. Circumventing the women's department, almost the only entry point for women journalists of her generation, she had plunged straight into the deep end of news reporting and became day editor at the age of 18.

Sharzer unearthed a gold mine of information for the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities. Her original assignment, which was to conduct a survey of training needs in Southam newspapers across the country, stemmed from the

work of the Davey management development committee.

Training and development had been Sharzer's metier ever since her days at the graduate school of journalism at the University of Western Ontario. When she left *The Globe* in 1989, Southam was in the middle of a drive to revitalize its training programs which had fallen by the wayside in a period of financial restraint. The reports of two commissions on newspapers had commented on the appalling lack of professional development programs within the industry in general, and its astonishingly cavalier attitude to recruiting people of talent. These were the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media of 1970 (Senator Keith Davey Commission), and the Royal Commission on Newspapers of 1981 (Kent Commission). Again, Southam Newspaper Group had been slightly ahead of the pack in this regard. In 1961, they had come up with a plan that was new in Canada. This was to establish fellowships at the University of Toronto for five working newspapermen and women to spend an academic year at the University of Toronto's Massey College each year. This did not solve the problems of professional training for all journalists, or even a substantial number of them, but it was at least a recognition of the value of academic training, which

newspaper culture until then had fiercely resisted, claiming that journalists were born and not made.²²

But now, Paddy Sherman asked Clark Davey's management development committee to evaluate and recommend changes in editorial training programs for Southam employees. In addition to sending out a questionnaire prepared by Angus Reid Associates to each editorial employee, the committee commissioned Sharzer to go on a cross-country trip, visit each of the 16 newspapers as well as Southam News, and conduct extensive interviews with editorial staff. "We want her to put some anecdotal flesh and blood on the statistics the survey will produce for us," said a memo from chairman Davey.²³

Joan Fraser had a brilliant idea for killing two birds with one stone--that is, using Sharzer's newsroom visits to serve the needs of the task force on women's opportunities at the same time that she was carrying out the mandate of the management development committee. There was some awareness that women were being left out of training programs simply because they did not belong to the "old boys' network" where informal mentor-protégé relationships

²² Bruce, 413, and Desbarats, 97.

²³ Clark Davey to Paddy Sherman, memo dated 18 April 1989.

were forged and information was exchanged, often in the locker room after a game of squash or on the golf course.

Sharzer recalls that she started her training needs survey at the Gazette in Montreal, where Fraser was then editorial page editor. "Joan said to me, 'since you're going to make the trip anyway, and talk to people in newsrooms, why don't you do a sidebar on the situation of women?'"²⁴ Sharzer agreed, and while it was not her main mandate, management raised no objections. As she conducted extensive interviews on training needs with 309 newsroom employees across the country, she gathered a wealth of information, including a number of confidential personal anecdotes and some informal statistical data on women's roles in Southam newsrooms. Three months later, when she turned in her "Professional Training in Southam Newsrooms" report to the management development committee, it included a further report called *Whither the Revolution?* on the situation of women in Southam newspapers. "It was not a scientific survey; nor did I pretend to be a professional pollster," says Sharzer.²⁵ But one of Sharzer's abiding strengths is her wonderful rapport with people, and her innate ability to win the confidence of a wide variety of

²⁴ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

²⁵ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

people. Women journalists in particular identified with her as someone they could relate to, so she was able to uncover some real newsroom stories to which management may not otherwise have had access.

But valuable as Sharzer's contribution was, the task force was the work of the whole committee rather than an individual effort. It had met several times and completed a tremendous volume of work even before Sharzer's arrival. The nucleus of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was a committee of senior women and men managers, who began work almost a year before Sharzer was hired. They had held several informal meetings in the spring of 1988 to look at how the company dealt with female promotions. "It is a project that has my keen interest and support and I would like to be sure that, without re-inventing the wheel, we deal with the situation positively and well," said Sherman in a letter to Clark Davey, then vice president and publisher of *The Gazette*, Montreal.²⁶

The committee, chaired by Jude Gravelle of the *Financial Post*, met in Toronto on May 31 and June 1, 1988, to hammer out their own terms of reference. Two non-members, Tim Peters, director of personnel at Southam head

²⁶ Paddy Sherman to Clark Davey, letter dated 28 June 1988.

office, and Bill Mann, another Vice President of the company attended the June 1 meeting at the invitation of the committee. Besides management development for women, which was one of Sherman's priorities at the time, they discussed a range of issues based on research that members did informally in their own newspapers. These included benefits, maternity leave, childcare and harassment experienced by women employees. Gillian Steward recalls the collegiality and generally smooth working relationships among the members, and the camaraderie that until this point had characterized task force proceedings. "There was such an easy consensus," she said. "Basically, we were women who didn't know each other that well, but when we sat around the table, it was very interesting how much we agreed."²⁷

It was at this meeting that Bill Mann, one of the Vice Presidents of Southam Inc., suggested that the committee consider the situation of visible minorities and "the handicapped" in conjunction with that of women in general. The task force rejected the suggestion²⁸ at this

²⁷ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

²⁸ Minutes of the meeting, from a Southam file.

meeting and later reconfirmed its decision in a discussion with the Davey management development committee.²⁹

Years later, Joan Fraser, co-chair of the task force and one of its original members, explained that particular decision. "It was almost more than we could do to look at the situation of women, and to broaden that to other minorities would make it huge. Also, we were afraid the situation of women would be drowned if we spread ourselves too thin. And this was an opportunity for women that just hadn't come along before. So we thought, 'let's just focus on women. Let's focus on minorities some other time.'" ³⁰

Susan Riley, another original member of the task force, attributed it to the fact that there was nobody at the table to represent other "designated employment equity groups" (Judge Rosalie Abella's term)³¹ and to look after their interests. "The problem was...I don't think there were any visible minorities on the task force", said Riley. "And then, it doesn't have the same impact. You know, you can be sympathetic, but if it's not your life, it doesn't burn in you." ³²

²⁹ Clark Davey to all SNG publishers, letter dated 28 October 1988.

³⁰ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

³¹ Sharzer and Riley, 20.

³² Susan Riley, personal interview with Susan Korah, 12 February 2001.

On June 1, the committee (the terms committee and task force were used interchangeably at this time) presented an interim report to President Sherman. Based on preliminary consultations with employees at each member's newspaper, the committee concluded that there were multiple areas of concern. It wanted to undertake a complete overhaul of corporate culture and to propose a policy statement for Southam News Group on the status of women within the organization. Among the areas it proposed to examine were:

- Recruitment and promotion practices
- Training and career development programs
- Training programs aimed at combating sexist attitudes
- Support for employees struggling with the double load of career and family responsibilities. This included flexible work hours, job sharing, part time employment and other options.
- Day care
- Career advancement
- Maternity leave

Paddy Sherman was taken aback. The cautious, one-step-at-a-time plan he had envisioned had suddenly expanded into a complex, multi-faceted project. "I think Paddy

thought he had opened a Pandora's box," joked Gillian Steward, as she described her recollections of that particular meeting. "But this is speculation on my part."³³

Sherman did have a narrower focus in mind. "We (publishers) were seeing potential problems for women in management," said Sherman. "I was interested in seeing that a good committee was set up to deal with this. We had to clear the decks for women who were already in middle management and make sure they didn't hit the glass ceiling on their way to senior management. But some members of the task force wanted a more broad based approach."³⁴ What the task force members wanted was nothing less than to formulate a comprehensive policy statement for Southam Newspaper Group on the status of women within the organization. In short, they wanted to clear newspapers of the last vestiges of a sexist culture, not merely clear the decks for upwardly mobile, management stream women. "The task force members believed it was both unfair and unsound to examine only the situation of senior women," recapitulated the final report. "Practically speaking, to integrate women into the senior levels of the company, it

³³ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

³⁴ Paddy Sherman, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 16 February 2001.

makes sense that Southam Newspaper Group recruit, hire, develop, promote and retain women at all levels.³⁵

In hindsight, at least one task force member, Gillian Steward, feels that Sherman perhaps had a more practical approach to the issue. "Paddy had in mind a short-term strategy of appointing a few capable women to senior management, but for us, it was all about advancing the position of women in general," she says today. "But now, having been in management, and seeing it from that perspective, maybe Paddy had it right. It may have been the smart thing to do. Changing a whole culture is incredibly difficult."³⁶

Anyway, the differences at the time were ironed out and harmony was soon restored. Sherman assured the task force that they had his continuing support. Over the next 18 months, the task force continued to work on its own self-chosen expanded mandate. The Davey management development committee took on a three-way liaison function between the task force and the Southam Newspaper Group publishers, between the task force and the Southam Board of Directors and between the task force and Sherman. By September 1988, the membership of the task force had

³⁵ Sharzer and Riley, 3.

³⁶ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

expanded to 18, including representatives of small papers and non-editorial departments. Subcommittees of two or three members were formed to deal with specific issues that were now officially considered the purview of the task force. Judi Harvey led a sub committee on recruitment policies and practices, with particular attention to the recruitment of women and encouragement of women to seek advancement. Career development, training and promotion policy and practice with particular reference to women fell under the direction of Jude Gravelle, while Susan Riley was put in charge of family issues such as day care, maternity leave and sick leave to care for family members. Barbara Jacobszen, a new member, had the onerous challenge of "identifying and seeking to change chauvinist attitudes of existing managers." The teams were to report their findings to the steering committee, consisting of all team leaders, by the first week of February 1989.³⁷

The task force and its subcommittees became beehives of activity. Information and statistics were gathered on the number and distribution of women employed by Southam Newspaper Group. More meetings were held. Questionnaires probing such touchy issues as the number of male and female

³⁷ Clark Davey to all publishers of Southam Newspaper Group, letter dated 28 October 1988.

employees, number of male and female managers, pay equity, access to information on training courses, and merit pay for men and women were distributed to all publishers. Given the history of the company and its century-old corporate culture, many of these steps were innovative or even radical departures from tradition. "We decided we needed to do a whole lot of systematic research, and there was some resistance to that," recalls Joan Fraser. "There was a long tradition of individual divisional autonomy at Southam, and some managers didn't like the precedent of someone coming in and doing a company-wide survey."³⁸

But the task force had the blessing of the highest level of the corporate hierarchy. John Fisher, president of Southam Inc. (the whole corporation as opposed to one division such as Southam Newspaper Group), sent a letter of support to all division presidents, emphasizing the need to better utilize female potential. "My writing to employees is an unusual occurrence," said his letter. "However, I am doing so to confirm the company's and my commitment to the concept of employment equity. While the company has had a

³⁸ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

long unspoken commitment to this principle, it is time that we say it clearly and in print." ³⁹

The Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was ready for presentation to the publishers in April 1990, approximately two years after Sherman had ordered a plan to "ensure that competent females have the same opportunities as competent males."⁴⁰ Co-written by Shirley Sharzer and Susan Riley, the 77-page document (excluding its 18 appendices) was edited by Joan Fraser. "It was the first time I had been edited by someone else," recalled Sharzer, who had spent much of her own life wielding the editor's blue pencil. "But it worked out very well."⁴¹

Its ten recommendations, each one supported by extensive research documents, can be divided into four basic categories, although there is some overlap among them. They are:

- Those that directly called for publishers to take action.
- Those that addressed the "glass ceiling" and the related issues of training and development.

³⁹ Letter from John Fisher to all company employees, Appendix A-3, "Report of the Southam Newspaper Group on Women's Opportunities."

⁴⁰ Paddy Sherman to Clark Davey, letter dated 28 June 1988.

⁴¹ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

- Those that addressed "motherhood issues".
- Those that tackled the newsroom environment in general, and attempted to create a more congenial workplace for women.

Of these issues, women employees themselves perceived the proverbial glass ceiling and juggling the double demands of career and family as the two biggest barriers that blocked their opportunities in the work force, particularly in the journalistic work force.⁴² The "glass ceiling" referred to a barrier so subtle as to be almost imperceptible, but which nevertheless prevents women and other disadvantaged minorities from moving beyond a certain plateau to the uppermost levels of the corporate hierarchy. "The principal cause of the glass ceiling is an antiquated system of management selection that grows from and reinforces an extremely tightly knit management culture," wrote David Leighton, a member of the faculty in the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario. He was also the founder of its women in management program in 1987. "It is not a conspiracy, and most male managers would be hurt if accused of chauvinism. Indeed, the selection process also leads to the exclusion

⁴² Sharzer and Riley, 18.

of qualified people from ethnic or religious minorities. The process is one of a well-educated, socially homogenous group of white males picking people they know and trust who have a similar background--who are 'like them'. Few stop to question whether this should continue."⁴³

The task force report emphasized that the two issues that caused the most concern were the lack of accommodation to employees' family responsibilities, and the glass ceiling that hindered women.

Finally, we must report that all our attitudinal surveys have shown that women in SNG, while generally believing this is a fine company, think the deck is strongly stacked against them in terms of advancement and of juggling home and career. At one SNG paper, for example, 33 per cent of women responding to a survey believed women they were not given equal opportunity for advancement. The data collected by this task force suggested that in reaching this conclusion, the women concerned have simply observed the reality of their workplace and drawn the natural conclusions.⁴⁴

Three of the recommendations, numbered 2, 3 and 7 address the blocks to upward career mobility and the related issue of lack of access to training and development. Recommendation 2 calls for "every effort" to be made to "ensure that each short list for promotion and

⁴³ David Leighton, "How Can Women Access Boards? Still the Key Question," Women in Management, newsletter of the Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario, vol. 10, no. 1, November 1999, 4.

⁴⁴ Sharzer and Riley, 18.

recruitment to a senior position includes the name of one woman". It suggests that managers cast their nets wider and if necessary, should search of potential women candidates outside the division (newspaper) or outside SNG.

The report pointed out that while policies that favoured promotion from within could be a morale booster and encourage loyalty to the company, the down side was that they tended to perpetuate existing patterns, including the under-representation of women at senior levels.⁴⁵ Sharzer had written in her *Whither the Revolution?* sidebar to her survey on training and development that the numbers (in management) were not impressive, despite the fact that Southam led the way among Canadian newspapers by virtue of such appointments as Linda Hughes, editor of the *Edmonton Journal*; Gillian Steward, managing editor of the *Calgary Herald*; Catherine Ford, editor of the editorial page at the *Calgary Herald*, and Joan Fraser, editor of the editorial page at *The Gazette* in Montreal. The task force report argued that while recruiting for these positions, managers tended to rely on word of mouth, a method that worked to the disadvantage of women since they were not part of the inner circle. Years later, Russell Mills, who succeeded

⁴⁵ Sharzer and Riley, 1990, 29.

Paddy Sherman as president of SNG, admitted that this was a legitimate concern.⁴⁶ "Lots of men's careers had moved forward because of mentors and women didn't have as many opportunities to establish mentor relationships", said Mills.⁴⁷

While calling for a formal, proactive recruitment and hiring policy, and for attempts at (gender) balance in the workplace, the argument supporting recommendation 2 referred again to the bottom line.

It must be emphasized that the bottom line for SNG, as for other employers, is that equal opportunity is a business issue... Companies with effective programs will enjoy a competitive advantage. It is as simple as that.⁴⁸

A strong attempt was also made to allay male fears and to forestall a backlash. As former Southam Board member Marnie Paikin commented, "I think I remember clearly that the approach taken by the task force was really one of 'let's make sure there are no barriers in the way of competent women' and not one of 'let's find some women and try and push them through.'"⁴⁹ This is certainly confirmed by the report. "It is vital, of course, that the women on

⁴⁶ Russell Mills, personal interview with Susan Korah, 13 February 2001.

⁴⁷ Russell Mills, personal interview with Susan Korah, 13 February 2001.

⁴⁸ Sharzer and Riley, 30.

⁴⁹ Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

short lists be real candidates, people who genuinely merit consideration for the job in question, not tokens."⁵⁰

This recommendation makes the connection between upward mobility and training and development, advising management that if a woman didn't get the promotion she applied for, she should receive an explanation, and where applicable, a training plan to plug holes in her experience or skills.⁵¹ However, recommendation 7, which specifically calls for information on training and development to be widely disseminated, develops this point in depth. Citing the report on training that Shirley Sharzer had filed earlier, and also the company-wide Angus Reid poll, the notes on this recommendation emphasize that there was a crying need for training programs. It summarized the widely held perception of many women that "management training was for a handpicked, elite group," and described at some length that aspect of corporate culture popularly known as the "old boys' network."⁵² Another disadvantage that this part of the report mentions is that women were often ineligible even for the training programs and education reimbursement schemes that existed because these schemes

⁵⁰ Sharzer and Riley, 31.

⁵¹ Sharzer and Riley, 32.

⁵² Sharzer and Riley, 50.

were for full-time employees, and more women than men were part-time workers. Recommendation 7 also suggested the incorporation of some training programs, such as assertiveness training, that would be substantially more relevant to women because of the difference in male-female socialization.

The report refers constantly to the importance of senior management's commitment to changing the old boys' network and other aspects of corporate culture that limited women's opportunities. Under recommendation 7 it states that the initiative to recruit women for training programs and to encourage women to construct well thought-out career plans should come down the chain of command from publishers to senior managers. "Management interest and commitment were the key elements," it says.⁵³

Three recommendations, 4, 5 and 6, are devoted to "family issues," which were perceived by women as the other major stumbling block to career maintenance and progress. A few feminists challenged the assumption that family responsibilities were "women's issues." Daphne Bramham, for example, who was then a national affairs editor with *The Vancouver Sun*, still says she has always argued it should

⁵³ Sharzer and Riley, 50.

be an issue for everybody. "As soon as it becomes a women's issue, men don't have to think about it any more," she says. "I found that it was deflecting it. It was balkanizing."⁵⁴ But women like Bramham were few and far between. Even outspoken feminists lived with the reality of domestic arrangements that allocated to them the major share of childcare responsibility. The irony of the situation was that while challenging unequal gender relations in the public sphere, many women were involved in private relations in the home that were less than egalitarian.

The task force assembled an impressive body of evidence to prove that this was indeed the case, and cited a Conference Board of Canada report of 1988, by Helene Paris, on the corporate response to workers with family responsibilities. Despite the gender-neutral title, Paris used Statistics Canada figures to support the contention that childcare was still regarded primarily as the responsibility of women in Canadian society.

Paris' arguments concurred with the general theme of the task force report that what was good for women employees was good for efficiency and productivity. And what was good for efficiency and productivity would only

⁵⁴ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

improve the bottom line, which in turn was good for everybody. Paris surmises that women's potential withdrawal from the workforce because of difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities may have serious cost implications for organizations in terms of losing valuable employees.⁵⁵

While the Southam task force report did not, in the main, depart from the conventional wisdom of the day that women bore the brunt of parental responsibilities, there were some attempts to include men in the recommendations that addressed family issues. Recommendation 4, for example, calls for senior managers to be open to the concept of part-time work, flextime, four-day weeks and job sharing. It enumerates the many advantages of flexible working arrangements for employees with small children, "especially, but not only female employees." It also points out that: "Some flexibility in hours and shifts can also give a father a larger role in child-rearing, something increasing numbers of young fathers want or need (if their spouse also works) to have." Again, it refers briefly to the needs of older family members and says, "It should be noted that increasing numbers of people, men and women,

⁵⁵ Helene Paris, "Corporate Response to Workers with Family Responsibilities," Appendix G-1, "Southam Task Force Report on Women's Opportunities."

face similar stresses in connection with older dependents."⁵⁶ Recommendation 5 dealt specifically with company-supported child care arrangements, making the general point that some form of assistance with day care is a major asset in attracting and retaining good staff. On-site day care centres, such as the one already in place at the *Calgary Herald*, were described as the Cadillac model among such arrangements. But it also emphasized that where this was not feasible employers should explore alternatives, and provided a list of suggestions including, at the very least, helping employees to find outside day care. Recommendation 6 called for all SNG newspapers to adopt supportive policies on maternity, paternity, adoption and sick leave; again, pointing out that it was a good idea to establish paternity leave. "Many young couples today take it for granted that the father will and should take part in caring for the children," said the report.⁵⁷ It dwelt at some length on the point that taking maternity leave should not automatically leave a woman trapped in a career cul de sac. The last point is made somewhat forcefully, suggesting that this indeed was a problem for many women.

⁵⁶ Sharzer and Riley, 34, 35.

Today, in many divisions of SNG as in many other companies, women are led explicitly or indirectly to believe that if/when they take maternity leave, their male supervisors consign them to the "Mommy track", the dead-end jobs for unambitious people. Some women prefer relatively unchallenging jobs after having children....That of course is their right: indeed, some men feel the same way. But our discussions and surveys show clearly that most women, like most men, continue to take their jobs very seriously indeed. They are no more likely than men to want, or to be happy or productive in, dead-end jobs.⁵⁸

Recommendation 8 sought to change the negative aspects of a male-dominated work environment and make it more comfortable and congenial for women. Despite the fact that the report generally recognized the autonomy of individual newspapers and their publishers, recommendation 8 called for head office to develop a policy on sexual harassment at work to serve as a model for all divisions. It is fairly obvious that it was relatively easy to generate consensus on this particular initiative and that most publishers were already supportive of it. "To some extent this recommendation is preaching to the converted since SNG has already drafted a proposed sexual harassment policy," said the report.⁵⁹ It noted that four newspapers had already adopted policies aimed at ending sexual and other forms of

⁵⁷ Sharzer and Riley, 46.

⁵⁸ Sharzer and Riley, 47.

harassment, and complimented senior managers at some divisions on their efforts to change old patterns and treat harassment complaints in a serious, even-handed way.⁶⁰

Recommendation 10 was an ambitious plan to remove systemic barriers to women throughout their career paths, beginning with the recruitment stage. All application forms, interview processes, job descriptions, performance appraisals, job postings, evaluations, and collective agreements were to be reviewed with a view to removing gender bias in the wording. To do the research for this recommendation, Southam hired the consulting firm William Mercer Ltd., specialists in employment equity. This company reviewed all Southam application forms for compliance with human rights legislation. They recommended, for example, that a question regarding the use of Mrs. or Ms. should be eliminated. Eliciting information on marital status was prohibited by law in many jurisdictions.

Regarding interviews, the task force report suggested that interview teams consisting of women and men lessened the chance of individual bias and subjectivity and tended to create more of a level playing field for women applicants. It also proposed that all newspapers provide

⁵⁹ Sharzer and Riley, 55, 56.

⁶⁰ Sharzer and Riley, 55, 56.

formal training in interviewing and selection including human rights and equal opportunities issues.⁶¹

Recommendation 10 also called for a gender-neutral job evaluation plan to be used for employment and pay equity purposes. The report noted that Ontario had already passed pay equity legislation, and that other jurisdictions were likely to follow suit, particularly if employers did not act on their own initiative.⁶² The task force also recommended that all Southam newspapers should table gender-neutral language for collective agreements and should review adoption leave provisions to ensure legal compliance. They also specified that such leave should be equally available to men and women.⁶³

Recommendation 9 called for a practical step to oversee the implementation of equity policies. It suggested the appointment of a full-time equal opportunity coordinator.

Recommendations 1 and 2 were specifically aimed at senior management, since the success of employment equity measures was completely dependent on individual publishers. In the first recommendation, the president of the company

⁶¹ Sharzer and Riley, 64, 65.

⁶² Sharzer and Riley, 66.

⁶³ Sharzer and Riley, 69.

was requested to circulate a letter to all divisions, clearly stating that the organization is committed to complete equity for women. The second one proposed that the annual performance assessment of each publisher should include an evaluation of the extent to which he or she had recruited, promoted and developed women employees. It also recommended that this was to be a factor in determining their annual bonuses.

In leading the list of recommendations with these two, the task recognized two important aspects of Southam history and culture--the autonomy of individual publishers and their power to make or break the entire program of gender equity. Southam, since its very beginning had nurtured a tradition of autonomy for local publishers.⁶⁴

Clark Davey is one who has personally experienced this aspect of the corporate culture. "Within the culture of Southam, individual publishers enjoyed incredible autonomy," he says. "They didn't have to clear a lot of things with head office. Basically, they were responsible for the bottom line, that was it. Given that, orders from head office regarding employment equity and women's opportunities would have caused a lot of resistance."⁶⁵ The key role of individual publishers

⁶⁴ Bruce, 187.

⁶⁵ Clark Davey, telephone conversation with Susan Korah, 24 January 2001.

in the future success of this initiative was underlined by Joan Fraser. "One of the things I learned in connection with the task force was that the best report in the world will make no difference at all unless the chief executive says 'we will change' and drives change."⁶⁶

But the task force was determined to give the publishers some tools for change. Finally, in April 1990, the 78-page report--backed by a formidable battery of statistics, surveys, research papers and, to lighten the tone, a collection of cartoons lampooning the chauvinist attitudes of some men--was ready for presentation to the publishers of SNG. The women and men on the task force had done their homework and presented their case. Now the ball was in the publishers' court.

⁶⁶ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

CHAPTER 5

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM: THE FRONT PAGE CHALLENGE

The scene in the boardroom of the Southam Newspaper Group at its Toronto headquarters was a little unusual that day in April 1990. The publishers, all 17 of them, sat at a horseshoe-shaped table, chatting amiably with one another before the meeting was called to order. At one end of the room, a group of women sat on chairs, balancing books and file folders on their laps.¹ Trying to look as composed as possible, they waited with bated breath for the publishers to react to a report which they, as members of the task force had submitted to them, well in advance of the meeting. It was the Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities as the document was officially titled.

"I remember the fear and trepidation before we went into that meeting," says Joan Fraser.² Shirley Sharzer has similar memories. "We went in, in fear and trembling, really not knowing what to expect," she says.³

¹ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

² Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

³ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

But the women need not have feared. Taking their cue from supporters such as Don Babick, Clark Davey and Russell Mills, who by this time had succeeded Paddy Sherman as president of SNG, even the more recalcitrant publishers endorsed the report. "It was such a good session", recalls Sharzer. "We felt we had won the day, and we came out celebrating."⁴

The women were ecstatic. At a party after the "summit" meeting, champagne corks popped. Would they crack the glass ceiling? Would the publishers be as good as their word? Would the ten recommendations change the gender balance of the newsroom? Would the entire culture of the newsroom be gradually transformed, turning them into more woman-friendly, family-friendly places and less of an old boys' club? These were the next questions, but for now, the mood was optimistic, the outlook very positive.

Sharzer and her friends had good reason to be hopeful. "We're thrilled with the report," Tim Peters, Southam vice president of human resources told Michele Landsberg, *The Toronto Star's* feminist columnist. "All Southam publishers have given it their blessing.... It won't be easy; we're

⁴ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

going to pay for years of neglect (of training and promoting women). But we intend to keep the heat on."⁵

Some concrete steps were taken, and each publisher appointed his own employment equity coordinator at the local level. Mary Jane Handy, one of the task force members was made manager of employment equity for Southam Newspaper Group.⁶ Sharzer became coordinator of editorial training and development for the whole company. "There was a lot of emphasis at this time on employment equity and on training and development, and they were raring to go on both fronts," said Sharzer.⁷

But the fate of the recommendations was not entirely in the hands of Mary Jane Handy and her implementation committee of local employment equity coordinators. Publishers were the key elements in keeping the heat on; they could be the plan's greatest allies or its greatest stumbling blocks. And Southam publishers were a strong-minded, independent group of individuals, each used to running his own show. As diverse in their personalities as any group of 17, they represented a range of attitudes from

⁵ Michele Landsberg, "Some Editors Fight Sexism in Newsrooms," Toronto Star, 8 June 1990, B1.

⁶ Mary Jane Handy, "Women's Task Force Report--Two Years Later," in Moving Up, an internal newsletter of SNG, April 1992, 14, 15.

⁷ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

extremely progressive to "Neanderthal," as one task force member put it. While outnumbered at the task force acceptance meeting, the Neanderthal element did exist and could muddy the waters. They were not only out of date, they were still living in the world of *The Front Page*. As Clark Davey said at the time, some of them needed a brain transplant in order to shake loose their implacable attitudes towards women. "As I say to some people who are resisting change, 'It's lobotomy time, kids!'"⁸

Given the autonomy enjoyed by Southam publishers throughout the history of the company, the only other way, short of lobotomy, was to entice publishers with a reward for compliance. Of the report's ten recommendations, the second one generated more discussion and resistance than all the other nine put together. Promptly dubbed the "bucks for broads" recommendation or the "hit 'em in the pocketbook" recommendation, it called for publishers' annual bonuses to be determined in part by the degree to which they have recruited, developed and promoted women. The actual wording of this recommendation was: "To give force to the commitment to equal opportunity, we recommend that the annual performance assessments of all publishers

⁸ Michele Landsberg, "Some Editors Fight Sexism in Newsrooms," Toronto Star, 8 June 1990, B1.

and senior managers be influenced by the degree to which they have recruited, developed and promoted women. This should be part of each manager's yearly objectives and a factor in determining compensation."⁹

"We didn't think this was revolutionary," explained Joan Fraser. "Senior managers set their own yearly objectives in consultation with the publisher. We thought it was a reasonable way to go, to ask the manager to include the training of women as part of each manager's yearly objectives. And bonuses were calculated on how well you met your yearly objectives. So presumably you wouldn't set any objective that you didn't believe you could meet."¹⁰

Some publishers implemented this; others fiercely resisted it. Russell Mills, who had succeeded Clark Davey as publisher of *The Ottawa Citizen* when Davey retired in 1993, made sure that efforts to train and develop women were included in the overall performance assessment of senior managers who reported to him. David Perks, then publisher of *The Gazette* in Montreal, and Don Babick, who had moved from the *Edmonton Journal* to Pacific Press (the

⁹ Sharzer and Riley, 6.

¹⁰ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

division of Southam that ran *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*) as publisher, gave it their blessings.

At the *Calgary Herald*, an interesting reaction to recommendation 2 surfaced two years after the release of the task force report. By 1990, Gillian Steward, who had been managing editor of the *Herald* as well as a task force member, had left. "We had an interesting discussion internally about this recommendation," reported publisher Kevin Peterson in 1992. "Our own editorial women's task force didn't think it was appropriate. They felt that it raised the possibility of women thinking that they were promoted only so a boss could have the bonus. Their suggestion, which I would accept, is that the wording to the recommendation end with "yearly objectives, period."¹¹ In other words, *Herald* women supported the idea of making the nurturing of women's careers an item on the senior manager's annual report card, but stopped short of giving him a cash prize.

The Edmonton Journal benefited from the fact that two of its senior executives, Don Babick, who became its publisher in January 1990, and Linda Hughes who was editor in-chief, were members of the task force. "Certainly, it

¹¹ Mary Jane Handy, "Women's Task Force Report--Two Years Later," in Moving Up, the internal newsletter of Southam's editorial training division, April 1992, 14.

was a contentious recommendation," says Babick of recommendation 2. "But I was on the task force and sanctioned it, and if both of us (Hughes and himself) were authors of the recommendations, it followed that we should practice what we preached had to be done in the company."¹² *The Vancouver Sun* was in a similar position because for a short time one of its publishers, Stuart Noble, was on the task force and later, in April 1990, Babick became its publisher.

Some cracks were made in the glass ceiling as the task force proposed a specific strategy for promoting more women. Recommendation 3 said:

We recommend that every effort be made to ensure that each short list for promotion and recruitment to a senior position within SNG or its divisions includes the name of at least one woman. If necessary, managers should search for potential women candidates outside the division or outside SNG.¹³

Senior managers were thus expected to make an extra effort to find women candidates and to cast their nets as wide as possible.

Although this did not change things overnight, a few more women were admitted to heights that no woman had ever scaled before. Linda Hughes became the first woman ever to

¹² Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

¹³ Sharzer and Riley, 6.

occupy the highest perch in the hierarchy of a major Canadian newspaper when she succeeded Babick as publisher of the *Edmonton Journal* in 1992.¹⁴ Sharon Burnside was appointed managing editor of the *Ottawa Citizen* and Joan Fraser became the editor-in-chief of *The Gazette*.

The women themselves are understandably reluctant to link their promotions to the task force because notions persisted in some quarters that the task force gave an unfair advantage to women, including women whose qualifications did not match those of their male peers. The report writers had anticipated this and had made it a point to assure publishers that:

We emphasize that decisions, which result in the right person getting the job or opportunity, do not necessarily discriminate against men. Equal opportunity is not a never-never land, it is a realistic goal. If we serve our employees well, we serve our company and our communities better.¹⁵

But of course, long-held attitudes throughout the ranks are not easily eroded. Senior executives who approved these promotions are quick to point out that they were based on merit and not due to any over-anxiety to compensate for the omissions of the past.

¹⁴ Canadian Press, "Canadian Press Asks Members for Cash," *Toronto Star*, 20 April 1994, E3.

¹⁵ Sharzer and Riley, 5.

Clark Davey, for example, says, "Sharon Burnside.... She's a perfect example of how this program operated. The people who appointed her (managing editor of *The Ottawa Citizen*), that's the people who came to me with the recommendation, were prepared to raise their right hand and swear that she was the best person for the job." Davey also had unqualified faith in Fraser's journalistic and leadership capabilities. "Joan was a natural," he says. "She was just one step below the top editor and the other people were nowhere near her ball park in terms of talent."¹⁶

Despite the efforts on the part of some publishers, progress on this front was slow. From six out of 120 women editors in 1989, there were eight out of 120 by November 1991 when the Canadian Association of Journalists' annual women in the media conference was held in Vancouver. There was still a serious shortage of women who selected stories, news agency copy and hired staff. "We haven't made a great deal of progress," admitted Russell Mills at the conference. Mills had succeeded Paddy Sherman as president of SNG and was perceived by many women to be a supporter of the task force. Mills also told the women at the conference that he expected more women to be promoted to executive

¹⁶ Clark Davey, personal interview with Susan Korah, 23 January 2001.

positions in the near future. One of the problems with implementing this particular recommendation was the relative scarcity of women in the "feeder" group for senior executives, those who were already in the middle levels of management. "Changes have not been made in management because there were not huge numbers of women one and two steps down the rung to draw upon," explained Linda Hughes.¹⁷

"At a level down from the executive level, we are building up an excellent pool of people who are obviously going to move up eventually in the organization," said Mills. Like every other Southam publisher who supported this trend, Mills was emphatic that the women were not promoted simply because of a new-found eagerness to change the gender statistics in the newsroom. "In every case, each person (promoted) was the best person for the job," he said. "But in some cases they are people who might not have been sought out or come forward without this deliberate policy of trying to look at women whenever possible for job opportunities."¹⁸

But some men and even a few women did not get this point. In fact, "male backlash" and "recession chill"

¹⁷ Salan Pazurik, "Will the Tortoise Win this Race?" CAJ Bulletin, no. 47, May 1992, 13.

¹⁸ Salan Pazurik, "Will the Tortoise Win this Race?" CAJ Bulletin, no. 47, May 1992, 12, 13.

became two more phrases that were much in use in the early '90s, and were seen as major hindrances to the progress of women's status in the newsroom. The backlash did not come entirely from men; some women were upset by what they perceived to be a "radical" position on the part of the task force.

Wendy McLellan, a graduate of the journalism program at Langara College, Vancouver, was an intern at *The Vancouver Sun* in the summer of '89. "The idea of pushing women ahead and having women short listed for every promotion was upsetting to a lot of men, and some women too," she says. "Also, about management being given financial incentives for hiring women. That was also quite controversial, I remember."¹⁹

Although the situation of women varied greatly in different newspapers, newly promoted women in general had a difficult time during the transitional phase. "It was difficult for most publishers to see resentment and backlash from below," said Clark Davey. "For example, when we appointed a woman to a senior position at *The Citizen*, there was . . . resentment) I know, because I had contacts in the newsroom. Many people said the only reason why this

¹⁹ Wendy McLellan, personal interview with Susan Korah, 3 March 2001.

girl got the job was because she's female. That made her job doubly difficult."²⁰

A journalist with the *Calgary Herald* told a "women in the media" conference in November 1991 that she had recently covered a group of senior human resource officers who dealt with the problem of backlash from younger men. "Their theory conclusively was that younger men feel more threatened because they have reason to feel more threatened," she said. "Younger men have had to compete with females since they were children, and now they fear women will be promoted at their expense." The human resource officers had noticed a trend for older men, who were secure and well established in their careers, to mentor women and promote a handful. This made younger men feel even more threatened, she reported.²¹

Frances Bula, a reporter with *The Vancouver Sun*, remembers the early days of the backlash. "After the task force report was disseminated or whatever, they made this one women business editor, and there was a lot of conflict about that," she said. "The business reporters resented her and thought she'd been put in because she was a woman. She

²⁰ Clark Davey, personal interview with Susan Korah, 23 January 2001.

²¹ Salan Pazurik, "Slow Progress in Promoting Women," *CAJ Bulletin*, no. 47, May 1992, 12.

had young children and she'd do things like leave the office at four o'clock because she had a birthday party to go to, or whatever. Something they (reporters) had never heard before in their lives. It was kind of a warning sign to all of us in the newsroom that this could happen to you if you went into management. You'll have to deal with this kind of hostility and resistance especially if you have a family and you're trying to deal with that."²²

The problem could not be solved by a simple decree, transforming the report's ten recommendations into ten commandments from above. Southam publishers had enjoyed a long tradition of autonomy and were highly resistant to centralized control. Indeed, Paddy Sherman had stated right at the beginning of task force proceedings that it was a "ticklish question" and required a delicate balance. "It is also one in which a Head Office edict could raise as many difficulties as it solves."²³ In a memo to Clark Davey, then vice president and publisher of *The Gazette*, he continued on the same theme. "Edicts from Bloor Street would cheer the converted, and perhaps harden the unconverted in their ways."²⁴

²² Frances Bula, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

²³ Paddy Sherman, memo to all publishers, dated 29 June 1988.

²⁴ Paddy Sherman, memo to Clark Davey, 28 June 1988.

The furthest that Southam Newspaper Group presidents could go without violating the norms of corporate culture was to implement recommendation one. This called for a clear message from the president that the organization was committed to full equity for women and that it was serious about redressing the gender imbalance.

We recommend that the president of SNG circulate to all divisions a policy statement to the effect that that organization is committed to full equity for women, including the recruitment and promotion of women to redress a serious imbalance within our organization and at our division.²⁵

On May 1, 1990, shortly after the task force report was approved in principle by the publishers, the new president Russell Mills sent a memo to all employees stating that his objective and the objective of all the publishers was to "ensure that complete fairness without discrimination exists in the workplace for all employees at all levels." Mary Jane Handy, the employment equity coordinator who worked out of head office reported two years later that no further specific policy statement had been issued.²⁶

²⁵ Sharzer and Riley, 6.

²⁶ Mary Jane Handy, "Women's Task Force Report--two years later," in Moving Up, internal newsletter of SNG Training and Development, April 1992, 14.

Increasing the number of women in management was only one of the issues addressed by the task force. Several members had held out for the removal of barriers for women at all levels of the hierarchy, not just those that blocked the paths of women who were already several rungs up the ladder. They had insisted that promoting women went beyond naming women to senior executive positions, and had developed a blueprint for creating a work environment that was supportive of women, and addressed their personal concerns, particularly the work-family conflicts that stood in the way of satisfying, long-term careers.

In general, the push towards gender equity spearheaded by the task force produced "mixed results," according to Tim Peters, then director of human resources at Southam. "In some cases, they (results) were quite satisfactory, or even beyond expectations; in others rather disappointing."²⁷

The recommendations that Peters and other supporters considered the most successful were those that addressed issues of work and family conflict; also the one that dealt with sexual harassment. The "family issues" recommendations were numbered 4, 5 and 6. "Motherhood" issues by now were becoming parental issues, at least with some younger

²⁷ Tim Peters, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

couples, so even if women still bore the brunt of these pressure, some younger men were also beginning to feel their impact. The legislative environment was also supportive of these measures. In November 1990, for example, the federal unemployment insurance branch added ten more weeks of paid parental leave to the original 17-week period. This leave was available to either parent. A month later, a provision was added to the Ontario *Employment Standards Act* to allow 18 weeks of unpaid parental leave for the mother, plus 18 weeks of unpaid parental leave for the father, excluding the existing 17 week maternity leave.

Elizabeth Thompson, currently parliamentary press gallery reporter for *The Gazette*, clearly remembers benefiting from the new environment created by the task force report, particularly from its maternity leave recommendations. "In 1994, *The Gazette* sent me to the Quebec City bureau," she says. "It was a very demanding job, with very long hours. Just two days before I started the job, I discovered (after five years of trying) that I was pregnant. In fact, there were three of us who were pregnant on the seven-member national staff. I was the third one to tell the national editor. In the climate that the task force created, all he did was just gasp just a

little. He congratulated me and was very supportive all through my pregnancy. *The Gazette* broke new ground. In 1994, I was the first pregnant woman to cover a Quebec election campaign in the 125-year history of the Quebec press gallery. When our Quebec City researcher and I went on maternity leave, they replaced us during that period at considerable cost to the paper, but we were the first women to my knowledge who came back from maternity leave to find our jobs intact."²⁸

Some newspapers were already well on the way to easing the problem of carrying the double load of work and family responsibilities, but the task force recommendations had the effect of keeping these issues in the forefront. By 1992, alternate work arrangements were in place at *The Gazette*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald*, and *The Vancouver Sun*. *The Gazette*, for example, had a formal policy on alternate work arrangements which included reduced work days or weeks and job sharing options.²⁹ "Before that measure was put in place, if you wanted three days a week, you lost your seniority," says Thompson. "The way the newspaper Guild contract was structured, when there were layoffs, part-time people were

²⁸ Elizabeth Thompson, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 12 April 2001.

the first out the door. But with this new measure that David Perks (publisher) introduced, people could reduce their work week and still protect their seniority."³⁰

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave provisions also improved at several newspapers since the release of the task force report. *The Gazette* and *The Ottawa Citizen* added 'top up' benefits to existing maternity benefits. The top up benefit was a payment in addition to the unemployment insurance benefits, to 95 per cent of the employee's insurable earnings. They also extended the leave period to the 15 weeks covered by unemployment insurance benefits. *The Vancouver Sun* provided a percentage payment during the two-week "penalty" period. Requests for job sharing and other alternative work arrangements were favourably received by their publishers. "*The Citizen* was a hotbed of pregnancies in those days," says Clark Davey, then publisher. "The editor or managing editor would come to me and say someone is pregnant and before she goes on maternity leave, she's found someone to job-share with. And I'd say 'yes.'"³¹

²⁹ Tema Frank, Canada's Best Employers for Women: A Guide for Job Hunters, Employees and Employers (Toronto: Frank Communications, 1994), 191.

³⁰ Elizabeth Thompson, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 12 April 2001.

³¹ Clark Davey, personal interview with Susan Korah, 23 January 2001.

Although the implementation of task force recommendations was largely in the hands of publishers, women journalists themselves tried their best to maintain the momentum by networking and lobbying. "Every Southam newsroom was in an uproar", says Frances Bula of the early days since the task force report was released. "Suddenly there was a lot of discussion of what was happening with women in newspapers, both in terms of coverage of women's issues and how women journalists were being treated. I was involved in organizing three of the Canadian Association of Journalists' women in the media conferences (in the early '90s.) There was a spontaneous upswelling of a sense of camaraderie or something like that. The conferences were great. The Southam and CBC women were the most interested. They were well funded and things were happening in their newsrooms."³² Wendy McLellan, now a reporter with *The Province*, Vancouver, had just begun her career in journalism in 1989 as a reporter with *The Vancouver Sun*. She remembers the period between 1989 and 1991 as particularly busy in terms of activism around women's issues in the newsroom.³³ At the 1992 conference of women in the media held in Ottawa, the 400 female journalists tossed

³² Frances Bula, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

³³ Wendy McLellan, personal interview with Susan Korah, 3 March 2001.

around plans and ideas to consolidate their resources and solve workplace issues. "It is clear that women in the media need an umbrella group, a steering house, a clearing house, whatever you want to call it," said Kim Pemberton, a reporter with the *Vancouver Sun*. "It should be comparable to the NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women) of women journalists."³⁴ One woman suggested a toll-free number for women who had sexual harassment problems in their newsrooms. Others vowed to continue the battle to have women appointed in the upper echelons of the profession.³⁵ It was as if the feminist wave of the 1970s had finally broken on the distant shores of the newspaper world.

National gatherings of media women were only one end of a continuum. At the other, there was a flurry of activity and interest in newsrooms about the concerns and viewpoints of women, and of their representation in newspapers. Female networking and bonding, and a sense of professional solidarity based on gender, reached a peak such as the newspaper world had never seen since the early days of the Canadian Women's Press Club.

³⁴ Tim Harper, "Women Journalists Target Sexual Harassment," *Toronto Star*, 16 November 1992.

³⁵ Tim Harper, "Women Journalists Target Sexual Harassment," *Toronto Star*, 16 November 1992, A3.

Southam women felt particularly empowered by the task force and its report, and a new sense of confidence surged through newsrooms. "Women journalists are getting together not simply out of friendship or to complete tasks, but for an additional and unique purpose. We are getting together solely on the basis of our gender, to examine together our common problems, and help each other solve them," wrote Patricia Graham, a Southam journalist, who in 1990 received the MediaWatch award for positive portrayal of women. She also won a Southam president's award for a series of editorials on sexual violence and the law.³⁶

At *The Province* in Vancouver where Graham was then editorial page editor, women participated in a task force on sex discrimination in the newsroom, a committee to monitor sexist content, a women's synergy session, a female editors' review of sexism in the newspaper (there were four women editors there at this time), and two women's dinners. At *The Vancouver Sun* there were subcommittees on various women's issues that met in peoples' homes. "Between 1989 and 1990 we women made demands," said Kim Bolan, another award-winning journalist with the *Sun*. "Shirley Sharzer's report empowered us. We wanted a women's issues beat and a

³⁶ Patricia Graham, "Let's Talk," in Moving Up, an internal newsletter of Southam's Training and Development, July 1991, 7.

feminist column. We re-wrote the style guide and made it gender neutral. I was on the committee for the style guide. Our demands were met. The *Sun* ran a feminist column by Shari Graydon, the president of MediaWatch, and I became the first women's issues reporter."³⁷

At *The Edmonton Journal*, where Linda Hughes was editor at the time of the task force, Sheila Pratt, then city editor, headed up a committee in the newsroom on female readership. "Linda commissioned me to do this, and it was a very important internal exercise that spun off from the task force", says Pratt. " And out of that came a lot of suggestions for content and awareness and changes in language--for example, change businessman to businessperson. It made us aware of ratios in the newsroom."³⁸

While women journalists were in an effervescent mood and enthusiasm was bubbling like champagne, trouble was brewing in another quarter. While the women were confident that these activities received corporate benediction, at least from a strong core group of highly placed male executives, Southam's financial fortunes were plunging to

³⁷ Kim Bolan, personal interview with Susan Korah, 3 May 2000.

³⁸ Sheila Pratt, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 8 May 2001.

an all-time low and the same executives had retreated to a survival position.

Michele Landsberg was not a Southam journalist, although she had connections with at least one senior Southam manager and was well aware of the developments concerning the task force. Clark Davey had been her mentor during her time at *The Globe and Mail*, and Shirley Sharzer was also a friend and former colleague. While not specifically about Southam women journalists, Landsberg's *Toronto Star* column of 17 November 1992, on the third annual women in the media conference, captures the mood of excitement, tinged with a little apprehension at the sight of a cloud on the horizon.

It was said to be the largest gathering of journalists in Canada's history--450 women in the media, to be exact, who met in Ottawa on the weekend.

The mood hummed with cognitive dissonance. So much progress, so many gains for women in the past two decades, but so far to go before real equity is achieved. The buzz in the halls and small discussion groups was dominated by "recession chill"--the fear of undertaking any feminist activism when the economy is spiralling downward.³⁹

Southam women had reason to fear the recession. The spurt of activity--both at the corporate and newsroom levels--to improve their opportunities in the newsroom

³⁹ Michele Landsberg, "Media Women Must Work to Be Force for Change," *Toronto Star*, 17 November 1992, D1.

would slowly grind to a halt. The task force and its recommendations would be lost in the shuffle of corporate priorities, which now became geared towards simple economic survival.

In 1991, Southam lost \$153 million. The company named Bill Ardell its chief executive officer. This did not bode well for the task force because Southam had always been seen as a defender of editorial quality, and Ardell had no particular feel for newspapers and their content. Torstar, which by this time was part owner, was pressing for better returns on its investment, but when Southam showed such a huge loss, it sold its bit to Hollinger.

Three months after Hollinger gained a foothold, Ardell announced a three-year plan for Southam staff reductions of 1,550.⁴⁰ "My sense was that things kind of unravelled from here (in terms of support for task force recommendations)," said Clark Davey. "With the dip in the economy, the emphasis was on the bottom line. I don't think the task force got the same kind of push from the top as from Sherman and Mills."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jennifer Wells, "Conrad Black , Editorial Storm Trooper," Maclean's, 11 November 1996, 56.

⁴¹ Clark Davey, personal interview with Susan Korah, 23 January 2001.

Profits continued to plummet, despite Ardell's cost cutting measures. In 1992, Southam announced a record loss of \$262.9 million, prompting more layoffs at the newspaper division. Pacific Press, the operator of *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Province*, suffered operating losses of \$4.5 million by November 1992, and more than \$6.5 million in 1991. It continued to lose money right through 1993 and made only a small profit in 1994. Egged on by part owners Conrad Black and Paul Desmarais, Pacific Press management was under heavy pressure to reverse the losses. Restoring the profit margins of the two Vancouver newspapers became a major focus of Ardell's efforts to revitalize the flagging fortunes of Canada's biggest media company.

Many of the tough business decisions had to be made by Don Babick who took over as president and publisher of Pacific Press in 1992. The Southam subsidiary eliminated 112 jobs, which comprised 7 per cent of the work force of the two Vancouver newspapers. Out of these, 16 people who lost their jobs were from promotions, business staff and the two newsrooms. Speaking for management, Daphne Gray-Grant, manager of strategic planning of Pacific Press, told a *Toronto Star* interviewer that the company hoped the layoffs would restore economic stability, but there was no guarantee against more job cuts. Unions at the newspapers

rejected a management request to postpone for another year a 5 per cent wage increase scheduled for December 1. The company said a wage deferral would have saved \$7 million. "We are taking this action (the layoffs) because a great many more jobs are in jeopardy," said publisher Babick in a memo to the staff. "We are experiencing losses in spite of some determined measures to control costs."⁴² From a peak of 1,698 employees in 1991, it had shed 577 through buyouts, attrition and retirements by October 1995.⁴³ Meanwhile, in early 1992, employees at *The Gazette*, Montreal, gave up a planned wage increase to prevent the layoff of 50 editorial employees.⁴⁴ Mike Bocking, president of the Vancouver Newspaper Guild, which represented about 1,000 employees of both the city's newspapers, said he was concerned about Southam's "obsessive approach to the bottom line."⁴⁵

Southam's "obsessive approach to the bottom line" was not only an attempt to stay afloat in the recession, it was also a last-ditch effort at saving the company from a

⁴² Richard Sikios, "Pac Press Unions Reject Pay Freeze: Vancouver Jobs in Jeopardy," The Financial Post, 4 November 1992, 16.

⁴³ "The Cruickshank Redemption: Can the New Editor-in-Chief of the Vancouver Sun Save the Paper From Mediocrity," (no byline), B. C. Business Magazine, December 1995.

⁴⁴ Richard Sikios, op. cit., 16.

⁴⁵ Daniel Girard, "Ailing Southam Cuts 112 Jobs at Pacific Press in Vancouver," Toronto Star, 10 March 1993, D6.

complete take-over by Hollinger. "It wasn't just the recession, although it certainly added to the trouble," says Joan Fraser. "It was the drive to increase profits and to stave off a complete take-over, or at least increase the purchase price in the event of a take-over. Newsprint prices were on the upswing in the early 90s, so there was terrible pressure on all the papers to slash costs. Bill Ardell, so far as I could tell, had absolutely no interest in women's issues."⁴⁶ Fraser vividly remembers the pull and tug of economic forces operating against the currents of gender parity set in motion by the task force.

I remember hearing two managers saying to each other that they wanted for a certain job someone who was willing to work six or seven days a week without complaining. I knew what was driving them. I was facing some of the same pressures myself (as editor of *The Gazette*, Montreal). We all were. But at the level of the job they were talking about, it had to be someone with experience, not someone very young. Most women with that kind of experience were at the family stage, and wouldn't have been able to take that job. So it had to be someone willing to drop all the rest of his life and do this job. You saw more and more of this sort of thing starting to happen. Certainly, there was no more interest at all in involving any of that touchy-feely stuff in yearly objectives.⁴⁷

Newsprint prices added to the list of publishers' problems. Newsprint, like other commodities, is priced in the US dollar. Between 1994 and 1995, publishers were hit

⁴⁶ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

⁴⁷ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

with as many as five increases in newsprint prices. Over the same period, the Canadian dollar had fallen nearly five cents against its American counterpart, making products priced in US dollars even more expensive for Canadian buyers. Soaring newsprint costs in turn meant higher expenditures for each newspaper. Babick, for example, estimated that the cost of operating Pacific Press went up by 35 to 37 percent. "We're certainly going to have to eat most of those costs and try to find ways to reduce costs in other area," he said.⁴⁸

Southam's top brass were under heavy siege, and the task force and women's issues began to sink lower and lower on their list of priorities. The weak economy was blamed for unemployment in every industry right across the country, but some women wondered if the recession affected men and women equally. Indeed, it appeared to be redrawing the lines of gender discrimination.

Susan Ruttan is an example of a woman journalist who directly felt the impact of the hiring and promotion freezes. Currently editorial page editor of *The Edmonton Journal*, she was lifestyles editor of *The Calgary Herald* in the late '80s and remembers the difficulties of changing a

⁴⁸ Canadian Press, no byline, "Publishers Frustrated by Higher Newsprint Costs," Canadian Business and Current Affairs, 9 January 1995.

system that ranked employees according to the length of their service. The problem was compounded by the slash and save cash measures in effect during economically hard times.

The Herald didn't have many women editors. There were just the two of us--me and another woman called Susan Scott. And later, Kevin Peterson (publisher) brought in Gillian Steward as managing editor. I bumped into the glass ceiling when my career in management basically ended in 1990 or '91. There was a more senior manager. His job sort of disappeared, and they gave my job to him, because they needed a job for him. I chose to leave management and become a writer again, rather than go to a more junior management position. It was an issue, but it was a hard thing to cure, because the men managers had been there a very long time.⁴⁹

"When we started the task force, the times were good, and so there was not only emphasis on the women's task force, but on training and development too," says Sharzer. "But then, hard times hit. There were hiring freezes and some papers were not inclined to put money into training and development. There was no special effort put into the training of women in particular. By 1993, all my optimism faded." Somewhat bluntly for her, Sharzer observed that the economy was always an excuse not to do anything.⁵⁰

Gillian Steward becomes thoughtful and philosophical as she muses on the task force that kindled such great

⁴⁹ Susan Ruttan, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 7 May 2001.

⁵⁰ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

expectations, raised such high hopes and then faded quietly into the sunset. "It makes me realize how often an opportunity comes up, and at the time, you don't even realize how important it is," she says. "It's a shame it gets pushed to the back burner. Mind you, it's so true of so many things in the history of women."⁵¹

The recession and the backlash all but derailed the ambitious new program of the Southam Newspaper Group to remove obstacles that curtailed the opportunities of talented women within the group. As Shirley Sharzer said in her address to the 1993 conference of women in the media: "We women have become the incredible shrinking resource factor. We must amass the data and keep making our case to argue over and over again for equality. We cannot depend on the kindly patriarchal system to do that for us." Sharzer, who by this time had retired from Southam, called repeatedly on the audience to develop tactics for advancement. "It's four years now. Where is our strategy?" she challenged the women.⁵² Brave new words, but they were not a magic wand that transformed the entrenched newsroom culture of a century and created an instant brave new world of gender equity.

⁵¹ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

⁵² Lynne Stefanchuk, "Fighting the Backlash," CAJ Bulletin no. 54, January 1994, 28.

CHAPTER 6

AFTER THE HOLLINGER TAKE-OVER: MORE WOMEN'S NAMES ON THE MASTHEAD, BUT EQUITY NO LONGER IN FOCUS

By the summer of 1996, it was over. The titanic power struggle had ended, and the Southam-Fisher-Balfour dynasty lost control of the media empire that their ancestor William Southam had founded in 1877. At a special board meeting in Toronto in the last week of July 1996, Hollinger Inc. formally took charge of the largest newspaper group in the country.¹ After increasing its stake in the company, Hollinger replaced six of the eight independent directors on the Southam board.² The crown had passed to Conrad Black, Canada's newest media baron, and to David Radler, Black's partner and right hand man. Black now controlled 59 daily newspapers coast to coast including the Southam's large market dailies, *The Gazette*, Montreal, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Calgary Herald* and *The Vancouver Sun*. On November 28, 1996, in a move that aced the best cards of Southam Inc., Black purchased a further 20 million shares of Southam, at a price of \$160 million.³ This pushed

¹ David Estok, "Trash Talk at Southam Inc.," Macleans, 5 August, 1996, 40.

² Brenda Dalglish, "Hollinger Pays \$160M to gain Majority Control at Southam," The Financial Post, 29 November 1996, 16.

³ Brenda Dalglish, "Hollinger Pays \$160 M to Gain Control at Southam," The Financial Post, 29 November 1996, 16.

Hollinger's stake from 41 per cent to 50.7 per cent mark and made Black "ten feet tall and bulletproof" as one media commentator put it.⁴

Indeed, the invincible nature of the giant soon became apparent. Late in 1996, the Federal Court rejected an appeal by the left-wing Council of Canadians to review and overturn a decision of the federal Competition Bureau. The bureau had approved Hollinger's takeover of Southam. The Council appealed this decision on the grounds that this unprecedented degree of corporate concentration in the media was incompatible with a healthy democracy. It had also retained the services of the renowned lawyer Clayton Ruby. "Newspapers are not widgets", said Ruby. "They cannot be assessed on a purely economic basis. *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms* requires that editorial diversity be taken into account when determining whether a merger in the newspaper industry should be approved." Ruby's arguments failed to convince Federal Court Justice Bud Cullen.⁵

Politically, the entire country took a rightward swing. Women's rights, and the rights of minority ethnic and religious groups--emotional touchstones of the '60s, '70 and '80s--were no longer part of the dominant discourse.

⁴ Jennifer Wells, "Conrad Black, Editorial Storm Trooper," Maclean's, 11 November 1996, 56.

⁵ <http://www.canadians.org>.

The days of diversity, like the age of chivalry after the French revolution, appeared to be dead.⁶ If cracks had appeared before in doors that had been tightly shut against women and ethnic/religious minorities, they began to be sealed again. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was disbanded in 1995. A revamped *Employment Insurance Act* of 1996 made it harder for many women to qualify for benefits because, as part time workers, they found it more difficult to accumulate the required number of hours. The North American Free Trade Agreement was now a reality and globalization, privatization and increasing corporatization were the new buzzwords. The political pendulum had swung to the right, with right wing think tanks such as the Donner and Fraser Institutes dominating social policy once more. A few irrepressible feminist and left of centre journalists such as Linda Goyette of *The Edmonton Journal*, Catherine Ford of the *Calgary Herald*, and Susan Riley of *The Ottawa Citizen*, were still writing their pieces in their newspapers. But the women's movement was no longer the *cause celebre* that it had been.

⁶ Edmund Burke. "Reflections on the French Revolution," in Justus Buchler, William Kapp, and Robert Lopez, eds., Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 97.

Right wing pundits celebrated its apparent demise and welcomed the resurgence of true conservatism. In a jointly authored piece in *The Next City* magazine, Calgary MP Stephen Harper, one of the founding members of the Reform Party, and Tom Flanagan, a former Reform Party director of research, hailed the new presence of Conrad Black. Black had "recently assumed control of the Southam chain of newspapers, including most of Canada's large metropolitan dailies," they wrote in the article. "Those papers, monolithically liberal and feminist under previous management, are quickly becoming more pluralistic, with a strong representation of conservative voices."⁷

Peter Stockland, the new conservative columnist brought on board the *Calgary Herald* after the Hollinger takeover, was another writer who took the stand that the right wing was finally gaining a voice in Southam newspapers. "They've added some balance, but there are a lot of people very far to the left, as well as people who are moderate, and at long last, some from the conservative perspective," he wrote.⁸

⁷ Dalton Camp, "Politics, Journalism of New Right Fueled by Money," *Toronto Star*, 5 February 1997, A19.

⁸ No byline, "A Lesson in Left Wing Financial Clout: The Teachers' Union Wants Friendlier Coverage," *Canadian Business and Current Affairs*, British Columbia Report, 16 September 1996.

In 1998, a combined study by the media watchdog NewsWatch and the School of Communications at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C. compared the content of the *Vancouver Sun* before and after the Hollinger take-over of 1996. The report compared business and labour coverage in 1987 and 1997 and found that the ratio of business stories had increased significantly—from 2 to 1 in 1987 to 3 to 1 in 1997. The report concluded that not only had business stories increased in number, but that business received much more positive coverage than labour (30 per cent vs. 6 per cent). The rightward swing was also noted in the greater quantity of coverage given by the *Sun* to the right-wing Fraser Institute compared to the left-wing Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.⁹

The Council of Canadians raised the alarm about media monopoly. Maude Barlow, its feminist chairperson, bombarded the public and the Canadian government with dire warnings about the anti-democratic, content-controlling tendencies of the new colossus who stood astride the Canadian newspaper landscape from coast to coast.

Concentration of ownership in the newspaper business has reached an all-time high. The three biggest chains now control 72 per cent of daily circulation, up from 57 per cent in 1980. At the pinnacle of this ownership triangle is Conrad Black. After a year-long spree of

⁹ <http://canadians.org>

buyouts and takeovers, Black's Hollinger Corporation now owns over half of Canada's daily newspapers. Given the influence of newspapers in our daily lives, any single owner with this much power is troubling. The fact that Conrad Black is the owner is downright scary. . . .

For the most part, Black's "opinion" on the editorial direction of these papers isn't hard to discern. Since its take-over, right wing pundits such as Andrew Coyne and Barbara Amiel (Black's wife) have become regular fixtures on the pages of newspapers. But in case their message alone isn't strong enough, Black himself has also been known to take over on occasion, commandeering space for his own views on Southam's editorial pages.

After a long-time Southam columnist Chris Young wrote an editorial denouncing Black's position on Quebec separation and a possible alliance with the US, Black took one-quarter of *The Gazette's* editorial page to publish a rebuttal. . . . Shortly afterwards, Young's column was discontinued by Southam newspapers.¹⁰

Young's column was not the only casualty after the Hollinger take-over. Joan Fraser, *Gazette* editor, co-chair of the Task Force on Women's Opportunities and editor of its report, now found herself unemployed. "I was Black's first target outside head office," says Fraser. "He and I didn't agree. I'm a small 'l' liberal; he's not. I'm a feminist; he's not. Need I go on?"¹¹

Shari Graydon was not a staff journalist with *The Vancouver Sun*, but her feminist column became a fixture of the paper in the wake of feminist consciousness raising in

¹⁰ <http://www.canadians.org>, "Who's Afraid of Conrad Black?"

¹¹ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

the newsroom after the Montreal massacre of 1989. In 1996, the column was discontinued because of her criticism of sexist content in newspapers. "I was relieved of my duties at *The Vancouver Sun*, because the new management didn't like what I wrote, especially what I wrote on the subject of making newspaper content less sexist," says Graydon, who was then president of MediaWatch.¹²

Barlow charged that staff were being eliminated from such crucial beats as labour, minority issues, women's issues and education, and that the holes were being filled with right wing columnists such as Barbara Amiel and Andrew Coyne.¹³ Sharon Burnside, then managing editor of *The Ottawa Citizen*, resigned. By her own admission, she took this step because she did not approve of the new management's high handed treatment of two of her male colleagues, whom she described as "two of the best journalists in the country."¹⁴ Marnie Paikin, the only woman on the Southam Board of Directors from 1978 to 1996, was not re-elected at the next shareholders' meeting.¹⁵

¹² Shari Graydon, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 14 March 2000.

¹³ Jennifer Wells, "Conrad Black, Editorial Storm Trooper," *Maclean's*, 11 November 1996, 56.

¹⁴ Sharon Burnside, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 24 April 2001.

¹⁵ Marnie Paikin, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 28 May 2001.

If Black and his wife Barbara Amiel, newly appointed vice president of editorial for Hollinger Corp., were the man and woman of the hour, their voices reflected the mood of the times. Shortly after his acquisition of the Southam group, Black announced his intentions to publish its newspapers to the highest standards possible. "And that means separating news from comment, assuring a reasonable variety of comment, and not just the overwhelming avalanche of soft, left, bland, envious mediocre pap which has poured like sludge through the centre pages of most of the Southam papers for some time."¹⁶

Amiel, a high-profile journalist with columns in several of Hollinger's newly acquired newspapers as well as *Maclean's* magazine, had never been a friend of feminism. Rejecting the historical and philosophical analyses of feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, she also dismissed the notion of government or other kinds of intervention on behalf of women and other disadvantaged groups. She predicted that "the power of the dollar and the power of success will break down the doors of the board room more than any government can."¹⁷ In a chapter entitled

¹⁶ Allan Fotheringham, "One Day, Conrad Will Buy Me--and Fire Me," *Maclean's*, 25 November 1996, 132.

¹⁷ Cited in Crean, 76.

"Cows Sacred and Liberated" in her book, *Confessions*, she dismissed the women's movement as an agency of thought control. She portrayed feminists as women who would have "the CBC cast female hunchbacks in lead roles instead of white males, and would make it illegal to show happy housewives washing dishes in films."¹⁸

Just in case anyone laboured under the delusion that the intervening years had softened her stance, Amiel told the Canadian Association of Journalists' women in the media conference of 1996 that she had never been particularly concerned about women in the media. "It would be hypocritical of me to pretend that it was ever something I thought much about," she said. "It's not particularly tactful of me to start off by dismissing the theme of this conference but I do it because I feel there are far more overriding problems we have to face as journalists- not as women, not as any group, but as journalists."¹⁹

The year 1996 was described as a tumultuous, shocking year for Canadian journalism, a year of corporate upheaval, job cuts, reduced resources and chronic uncertainty. Headlines such as "Editor Quits Gazette, Cites Differences

¹⁸ Crean, 77.

¹⁹ CP, no byline, "Black No Traitor to Canada, Columnist-Wife Tells Media," Toronto Star, 28 October 1996, A10.

with Hollinger," and "Government Won't Probe Concentration of Newspaper Ownership" contributed to the uncertainty.²⁰

This was hardly fertile ground in which grass roots activism or even top-down initiatives to advance the status of women in newsrooms could flourish. The issues of women in journalism, which had exploded on the scene with fanfare and fireworks in the late 1980s, were no longer *au courant*, and, like yesterday's fashions, were consigned to storage boxes in the basement. As a blueprint for policy, the Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities, that much-heralded document, began to gather dust on office bookshelves and to be archived in peoples' memories.

Yet it would be simplistic to cast the story in simple terms of feminists versus non-feminists or right wing versus left. Black was above all a businessman and kept his eye unblinkingly on the bottom line. Rising profit margins invariably served to neutralize ideological considerations. The autonomy of certain writers and publishers was left intact as long as circulation figures were kept up. The *Edmonton Journal* was a case in point. The paper, jokingly referred to as the "Ladies' Home Journal",

²⁰ Chris Cobb, "1996 May Be a Year Journalists Will Never Forget," Canadian Business and Current Affairs, Winter 1997, 8-9. Cobb quotes these headlines.

retained its liberal tendencies, which some people attributed to the direct influence of publisher Linda Hughes. But Hughes told a *Ryerson Review of Journalism* writer in the spring of 1999 that it was something the *Journal* never had to worry about. "Our circulation and our financial results spoke for themselves," she said.²¹

For a variety of reasons, a few feminist writers were allowed to retain their editorial autonomy as well. Susan Riley was one of these. Despite the libertarian views of the *Ottawa Citizen's* new editor, Neil Reynolds, her column continued to reflect a feminist and left-of-centre perspective. "He (Reynolds) left me alone, which is what I like more than anything else," she said. "I was never told to tone things down or change my tune or anything else."²²

It would also be less than fair to portray Black and Amiel as the single wrecking crew that demolished democracy, fairness, and all other humane and progressive values that Southam had stood for. The realities of the newspaper world are far more complex than that. The dual nature of newspapers and the uneasy, almost irreconcilable tensions between their profit-making imperative and their

²¹ Lisa Hepfner, "Black Ties," *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Spring 1999, 65.

²² Susan Riley, personal interview with Susan Korah, 12 February 2001.

role as guardians of the public interest in a liberal democracy had bedeviled the Southam regime as much as the Hollinger. Balancing the demands of owners and shareholders with the rights and needs of employees, or in this case, the needs of female employees had always been a dilemma for publishers. Competing interests had vied for spot on the corporate agenda from the very beginning of commercialized newspapers. As the last chapter amply demonstrated, the relegation of the task force and its recommendations to the back burner had begun almost as soon as the Southam publishers had given it their blessing in April 1990. The publishers were too preoccupied with the dip in the economy to ensure anything more than piecemeal implementation.

Russell Mills, publisher of *The Ottawa Citizen*, and Linda Hughes, publisher of *The Edmonton Journal*, admitted that the task force has not been formally revisited during the years since 1996. Both, however, pointed out that its declining importance had not begun with Hollinger. "I don't particularly hear it as an issue any more," said Hughes. "I guess people don't seem to be focused on that. I think one issue is that the newspapers even before Hollinger bought the company went through a lot of management changes. It was a family-owned company until 1990, and then that changed. Power (Corporation) and Hollinger were partners,

and then Hollinger had control, now it's CanWest Global. The newspaper industry has gone through such turmoil and change. The impact of the internet, then convergence, all these issues have taken precedence, so it (the Women's Task Force) hasn't been the focus. So really, I don't hear it talked about."²³

Summing up the status of the task force over the years, Mills said, "To be honest, it wasn't one of the more important things that were going on, because they (management) were more concerned with ownership and things like that, not with the operation of things like the task force."²⁴

Indeed, the task force had been doomed from the very beginning to be overshadowed by other issues that sapped the time and energies of the uppermost echelons. First it was the economic recession and the struggle to ward off a hostile takeover; now the priority was making good the financial losses of the last few years.

Turning the business around financially was the first order of business for Conrad Black and his chief executive officer David Radler. Southam, with its stable of publishers with journalistic backgrounds, was always

²³ Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 18 May 2001.

²⁴ Russell Mills, personal interview with Susan Korah, 13 February 2001.

perceived as an ardent defender of editorial quality,²⁵ but Tim Peters, vice president of human resources of Hollinger Inc. admitted that at the time of the take-over the company had been badly mismanaged fiscally. Many of the human resources and sales and distribution initiatives that had been going on the company were snuffed out, he commented.²⁶ While he did not specifically include the task force on women's opportunities on the list of snuffed out initiatives, it was clear that given the corporate agenda of the day, that would have been considered an unnecessary frill. Bill Ardell was appointed president and chief executive officer of Southam in January 1992 before the Hollinger take-over. Ardell had immediately embarked on an economy drive, but after the Hollinger take-over he lost his position because Black thought his cost cutting had not gone far enough.²⁷

Does this mean that women had lost the ground they had gained during the heyday of the task force? Like Peters and Hughes, Patricia Graham, managing editor of *The Vancouver Sun*, admits that the task force as a blueprint for policy has not survived the upheavals of the last ten

²⁵ Jonathan Ferguson, "Southam Chief Axed after Black Takes Over," Toronto Star, 9 August 1996, E1.

²⁶ Tim Peters, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

²⁷ Jonathan Ferguson, "Southam Chief Axed as Black Takes Over," Toronto Star, 9 August 1996, E1.

years. So does Don Babick, President and chief executive officer of Southam Publications under the new owners, CanWest Global Communications Corporation which bought the company from Hollinger in November 2000. All of these individuals were in senior management under Southam and Hollinger and are still among the most senior executives under the new CanWest Global regime. They all contend that the goal of equity for women is not so far off as it used to be. Graham and Babick suggest that formal mechanisms, such as the task force recommendations being incorporated into policy, are no longer necessary. "I don't know the degree to which the task force recommendations per se survived the corporate changes of ownership we have undergone," said Graham. "Frankly, I think we are committed to equity but it is a process and women's issues are not so current today as they were back in the '70s and '80s. And despite some of the challenges we still face, I don't think they need to be. Things were incredibly bad for us back then; now they're just a little bad."²⁸

Babick argues that the task force has accomplished at least one of its goals--that of promoting more women to senior management positions. "It's true the task force has not been revisited," he says. "But I think the task force

²⁸ Patricia Graham, e-mail to Susan Korah, 21 March 2001.

had moved the company along dramatically as to the level of awareness on these particular things. I think if you went through the company overall now, you'd find a number of senior female executives. All what we call the operating committees of our large market papers--which are basically the senior executives from all the departments--have female representatives at fairly senior levels. The newsrooms have very good representation on these committees. At *The Edmonton Journal* the publisher is female."²⁹

Susan Riley agrees that in some ways the position of women has improved. "Conrad Black and the whole Hollinger chain were implacably opposed to any kind of affirmative action," says Riley. "They're ideologically opposed to it. But what's interesting and ironic is that the position of women is probably no worse than before. In fact, you could argue that it's better. There are more women in prominent positions after the Hollinger takeover."³⁰

If names on mastheads are a yardstick of progress, the gains were considerable. At *The Ottawa Citizen*, two out of the five names representing the editorial side on the masthead are female--those of Lynn McAuley, managing editor,

²⁹ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

³⁰ Susan Riley, personal interview with Susan Korah, 12 February 2001.

and Christina Spencer, editorial pages editor. The masthead of the *Vancouver Sun* has more women's names than that of any other paper included in this study. Just below the name of the editor-in-chief, Neil Reynolds, are the names of three senior female editors--Patricia Graham, managing editor, Shelley Fralic, executive editor and Noreen Rasbach, deputy managing editor. The *Edmonton Journal*, the first major Canadian newspaper where a woman has risen to the rank of publisher, has no other female names on its list of senior executives. Heather Boyd, however, is the city editor, Kathy Kerr is the business editor and Barb Wilkinson edits the 'living' section.

"Hollinger has never been afraid to appoint women managers," says Daphne Bramham of *The Vancouver Sun*. "I was appointed associate managing editor when the Hollinger take-over was in the works. Women have got very good positions."³¹

The fact that a number of women have been appointed to management positions is one thing; whether a sufficient number of them manage to retain them over the years is another. Do women in newspaper management still encounter some vestige of the age-old dilemma of being a woman and a

³¹ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

successful journalist? The answer seems to be that while many of the barriers have been removed, newspaper careers still present challenges in terms of carrying the gruelling load of job and outside responsibilities. While some men are now facing some of the challenges that used to fall to the lot of women alone, it appears that for women careers in pure journalism, and upward mobility within it, are still a little more elusive than for men.

Patricia Graham, managing editor of the *Vancouver Sun* was candid in her comments on the pros and cons of being a woman in newspaper management.

I think there are a lot of advantages to being me, and my gender is a part of what I am. I am very interested in bringing along young people in the business, so I hope that I am a good role model. And I also believe I have a special sense of some of the different challenges that women face in their careers. But someone in my position is both a role model and an anti-role model if I can put it that way. Some women might watch what I do and aspire to have the job that I have; others would watch and decide it's the last thing they'd want. Either way I figure I'm being useful.

I do believe that there are special problems being a woman in management, but I suspect there are special problems being a man in management too. They're just different. As a woman I can still make a suggestion in a meeting and then a couple of minutes later one of the men will make the same suggestion and everyone will say "What a great idea!" It's as if I never spoke. This is one of the strange things that hasn't changed in all these years. Women's family responsibilities are definitely a problem that most male managers do not have to contend with, although I have to qualify that by saying "contend with to the

same degree." Because there is no question that when it comes to parenting, our expectations of men have changed over the last quarter century and the demands on them have increased.

The hours in journalism make it hard for people to have time with their families. Management requires certain choices and sacrifices that not everyone is prepared to make. It involves long hours away from your family.... It involves confronting difficult situations and taking on a lot more responsibilities, which especially early on, can be quite stressful. While I personally find it very rewarding I don't believe its is a lifestyle choice that suits most people.³²

Bramham said that while she did not feel there was discrimination against women in management or in the newsroom generally, women are still bending over backwards to prove themselves, and that this was taking its toll. "I'd say that male managers have recognized that if you give a woman a job to do, she'll probably work harder and be more dedicated than many men. My concern for women is that when we finally do get these jobs, we're so thrilled to have them because some of it is still ground breaking. We work way too hard and lose balance. Our newsroom is littered with women who've been in management, who are now back to being reporters, largely for that reason."³³

³² Patricia Graham, e-mail to Susan Korah, 21 March 2001.

³³ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

"At the most senior levels, as in all businesses, we (women) remain under-represented, but that is changing slowly," says Graham. "It's easy recruiting women for just about any job in the newsroom. The crunch still seems to come around the time women have young children. I think that's the hardest time to "do it all" and it's a time when women can be inclined to feel guilty or inadequate."³⁴

Linda Hughes, publisher of *The Edmonton Journal*, agreed that it can be difficult to retain women in management positions. "It's certainly true that many women leave management positions," she said. "I think that while there's literally no discrimination, and we have talented women managers in our newsrooms, the balance still seems to be in favour of men. When I think of the women I know in management and where they are, and the ones who have left, it always seems for different reasons. It isn't necessarily leaving the business or wanting to stay home with family. And it isn't all for negative reasons. They seem to have lots of options. And lots of women aren't necessarily interested in management. I guess lots of men aren't either."³⁵

³⁴ Patricia Graham, e-mail to Susan Korah, 21 March 2001.

³⁵ Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 18 May 2001.

Recent statistics are not available on female reporters. This is not to say that there have been no changes, and that the changes have not worked to the advantage of women in journalism. Whatever the stated opinions of Conrad Black and Barbara Amiel might be on feminism, and on anything that smacked of preferential treatment for women or any other group, the two individuals could not turn back the dual tide of social change and market forces any more than King Canute could command the ocean.

One change has resulted in increased job opportunities for women in the newsroom. During the last few years, publishers have recognized the importance of lifestyles stories and feature articles for increased circulation. This had worked to the advantage of women, and at least partly accounts for the opportunities available to women journalists. "After working as a hard news reporter for five years, I went into lifestyles because that's where the market is," says Lucy Hyslop, lifestyles editor of *The Vancouver Sun*.³⁶

Susan Ruttan, editorial pages editor of *The Edmonton Journal*, echoes a similar thought. "It's a change that you'll see in TV news and also in newspapers. It comes

from the realization by corporations that run these news outlets that women readers (and viewers) are crucial. They need to have more women-friendly copy. More health stories, that kind of thing. The best way to do that is to hire more women. I think the power of women as consumers and readers has hit head offices very hard, so now they value women journalists more, because they are more interested in issues that attract women readers. It also legitimizes what a lot of women journalists are interested in and puts their stories on the front page."³⁷

Daphne Bramham would agree with that. According to her the change was spearheaded by *The National Post* (a new Toronto paper established in 1999 by Conrad Black). She observed:

A lot of stories that used to be considered soft news, are now considered "real" news. What's really interesting is, now I can write my column about what I want. Some of the stories I choose now are stories I might not have chosen ten years ago because they would have been seen as women's stories and not worthy of consideration. When I was the Asia-Pacific reporter, I used to do all the stories that I knew the men (it was mostly men who approved these trips to Asia) would want. Like policy stories and--I was a business reporter at the time--the ones about the economy. I'd write stories about women and children, stories that dealt with the "softer things" on my own time. I'd put

³⁶ Lucy Hyslop, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

³⁷ Susan Ruttan, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 7 May 2001.

the big policy stories on my story list and then I'd do the other stories while I was there.

Shirley Sharzer offers a slightly different perspective. While she would welcome the type of long feature stories that Bramham was referring to, she noted that this new trend developed in the name of attracting more women readers has resulted in a proliferation of fashion, food and other traditional 'women's page' material. "It's Barbara Amiel's influence--and she's no feminist. She's the driving force behind bringing food, fashion, and all that stuff back into newspapers that we in newspapers thought we had got rid of. But it seems like she's pushed the right button."³⁸

The "right button" Sharzer referred to was stimulating greater interest among readers and increasing circulation. Both trends--the increased importance of the lifestyle sections and the blurring of the hard news--soft news distinction that Bramham described--have been the forces behind the new job opportunities for women journalists.

Bramham points out that the increased value of "soft" feature articles and their likelihood of being placed on the front page has boosted the self-esteem of female journalists. "The glory beat, the prestige beat used to be

³⁸ Shirley Sharzer, personal interview with Susan Korah, 30 November 2000.

politics, when you think of the hierarchy in the news room. But politics is no longer the glamour beat. They (political writers) used to be seen as the best writers in the newsroom. And women who wrote those great long features were stuck in the women's section or the lifestyle section. But now their stories are getting great play and their value has risen in the newsroom. I think that's a real positive thing. It's good for how we feel about ourselves."³⁹

Two other questions remain to be examined. One is whether the increased numbers of female managers and the higher value placed on "soft news" can be directly attributed to the task force or whether they happened serendipitously as a result of changing social attitudes and norms. The second and perhaps more important question is whether even an increased number of women in positions of high visibility and power have effected anything more than cosmetic changes- in other words if their voices count equally at the editorial desk and in the board room. Have women in senior positions in newspaper management achieved a level of comfort, and an equal status as decision-makers? In other words, is the process of integration complete, or

³⁹ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

is there a lingering perception that women in the highest ranks are there by invitation and not by right?

Peter Desbarats had observed in his 1990 book that "women (in journalism) face even greater obstacles than their male colleagues in fashioning long-term careers that provide sufficient advances in salary and responsibility."⁴⁰ Has the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities removed all or at least some of the barriers that stood in the way of talented women journalists realizing their career aspirations at these newspapers? Has it improved their opportunities to sustain long-term careers and to achieve upward mobility if they so desire? Has it been a catalyst for change? Or have the changes that have occurred in women's status in the newsroom taken place for reasons other than this intervention on the part of the Southam management?

While it is extremely difficult to separate the role of the task force from the role of social changes in improving opportunities for women journalists, the consensus among the people interviewed for this study was that while changing social realities exerted their influence, the task force gave them a boost. Tim Peters,

⁴⁰ Peter Desbarats, Guide to the Canadian Media, 97.

Russell Mills and Linda Hughes are cautious about giving full credit to the task force for the positive changes that have taken place. "Overall, I'm absolutely sure the task force made a big difference by exposing and airing and getting the company's endorsement to something that had been lying dormant for a long time," says Peters. "Putting the light of day to a problem. But I also have to say that though we can pat ourselves on the back, society was also changing at a fair pace at the same time that we were acting internally. As I look at where we are today, it is hard to say how much is as a result of this catalyst work and how much would have happened by social pressures and progress anyway."⁴¹ Hughes expressed very similar sentiments. "It's a bit hard to distinguish whether it was the trend of the times or whether it was the task force that caused the changes," she says.⁴²

Finally, despite the fact that "women's stories" are receiving greater prominence in newspapers, it is still open to question whether more women in management have made any fundamental change in the value system of newspapers. In many ways, news can be perceived as defining "what's

⁴¹ Tim Peters, personal interview with Susan Korah, 29 January 2001.

⁴² Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 18 May 2001.

important." Have more women in management made more than a slight difference to what newspapers consider important?

"I think the whole focus, this is a problem, I think, of the last ten years, is that too much focus has been put on the visibility of women and not enough on change," wrote Francine Pelletier in the CAJ Bulletin of winter 1990. "And as a result, everyone can say things are changing and we're doing our bit by simply allowing more women to come in. But what those women are saying or what we're allowing them to say is another matter."⁴³

Three years later, Glenda Simms, president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, threw down the gauntlet for female journalists. "I expect you to change the world," she said. "There are enough of you."⁴⁴ Pelletier's comment and Simms' challenge remain as relevant to women in journalism today as it was ten years ago. The debate on whether female journalists can "change the world," speak with an equal voice in the newsrooms of the nation and command equal respect for women's perspectives in the content of newspapers, has not been resolved even at the beginning of the 21st century.

⁴³ Francine Pelletier, "Limited Space Getting Smaller," CAJ Bulletin: Special Edition on Women in the Media, no. 42, Winter 1990, 19.

⁴⁴ Linda Deger, "Straight Shooting Simms," CAJ Bulletin, no. 54, January 1994, 26.

The correlation between male domination of newspapers and male-oriented themes and patriarchal values running through their content offers strong *prima facie* evidence for the view that greater occupational equality would make a difference to content. Liesbet van Zoonen argues, however, that a more fundamental approach to the construction of gender is needed. She points to basic inconsistencies in the assumption that having more women in the newsroom would change the nature of news. She says that available evidence does not give empirical support for this assumption. There have been increases in female participation in the work force without any fundamental changes in the "nature of news."⁴⁵

Daphne Bramham, former editorial pages editor of *The Vancouver Sun*, is on van Zoonen's side in the debate. "You can have a position and not be heard," she says. "There's still a tendency in newspapers to follow traditional lines and to follow models that were set by men. We tend to judge news on the basis of what men like. It's slowly breaking down but I think women are sometimes put in these (management) positions, but are not listened to. The appeals they bring to the table are not valued the same way

⁴⁵ Cited in Denis McQuail, Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 204.

men's are."⁴⁶ Insightfully analyzing the nature of the changes in the last ten years, Bramham went on to say, "We're way past the stage of 'you can't do this because you're a woman.' Now it's much more subtle than that. For example, we put far more resources into 'men's' sections-sports and business as opposed to travel and the arts, which women are more interested in."⁴⁷

Some studies, however, support the view that women in decision-making positions can and do make a difference. After their groundbreaking survey of women's participation in the Canadian media, Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean concluded that the increased presence of women in the profession has had an influence on the way the work is done and professionalism is defined.⁴⁸ Joan Fraser, former editor of *The Gazette*, Montreal, agrees. "I can't think of a single woman who's reached a senior level at any newspaper that I know of, who went in there with a 'women's agenda,'" she says. "But you bring your own experiences and all that you know about life to the job. Everybody does, and that's why you need as broad a range of people as

⁴⁶ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

⁴⁷ Daphne Bramham, personal interview with Susan Korah, 2 March 2001.

⁴⁸ Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean, "Women's Participation in the Canadian News Media: Progress Since the 1970s," McGill University Graduate Program in Communications, May 1997, 37.

possible in the newsroom." She cited the example of the stories about toxic shock syndrome, which tended to get better play in newspapers where there were women on the news desk just because the women recognized it as a story that would have massive resonance for thousands of readers.⁴⁹ Patricia Graham agreed that women do make a difference to the selection of news, although she did not elaborate on that comment.⁵⁰

Taking the comments of Graham, Fraser and other female journalists into consideration, it would appear that women in gatekeeping positions and positions of editorial autonomy can and do have a limited degree of influence on content as long as they keep within the boundaries of commercial logic.

Yet fundamental inequalities remain. Journalists are mediators in the democratic process and are instrumental in shaping our awareness of ourselves and our place in society. The stories and images they create are part of the total package of myths, symbols and stereotypes, which become an integral part of our culture and our worldview. Out of these images and messages are forged our very

⁴⁹ Joan Fraser, personal interview with Susan Korah, 1 February 2001.

⁵⁰ Patricia Graham, e-mail to Susan Korah, 21 March 2001.

identities, our sense of selfhood, our notions of gender, ethnicity, race and citizenship--who is included and who is excluded from fully exercising our rights of citizenship.

From sifting the evidence that was available for this study, it would appear that female journalists are still not in a position to fully eliminate sexist messages and stereotypes from the daily news, even if they considered it their responsibility to do so. Neither do they have a completely equal role in defining "what's important." While newsrooms and newspapers offer new job opportunities for women, it would be unrealistic to expect a few women in senior management to change an entire male-dominated culture and an entire system of patriarchal values.

Persisting inequalities stem from two sources. Patriarchally defined roles of male and female in the home are still an impediment to women. So is the fact that corporations have not yet fully recognized that they need women's talents on a par with those of men, and that women readers' interests are as important as those of men. The first obstacle places disproportionate work obligations on women, and the second prevents companies from acknowledging the need to implement supportive policies that fully integrate women in the workplace. Media organizations still

do not allocate the same resources to news and information that is important to women, as noted by Daphne Bramham.

Nellie McClung, the enduring symbol of Canadian feminism, had dreamed of the day when "women will be no longer news."⁵¹ The presence of increased numbers of women around the editorial table and in several avenues of journalism including political column writing and foreign correspondence, is no longer surreal. But McClung had also envisioned a utopia where women would be so thoroughly integrated into public life that it would be no longer remarkable for women to be newspaper publishers, media company presidents, politicians or prime ministers.⁵²

That dream has yet to be fully realized.

⁵¹ Lang, 140.

⁵² Lang, 140.

CONCLUSION

Like Shirley Sharzer, one of its two co-writers, the Report of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities was a pioneer in the field of Canadian print journalism. It recognized women journalists as a separate constituency within the profession, with different challenges to face simply because they are women in a traditionally gender-segregated field. It identified a number of structural and social barriers to women journalists' career paths, made some very brave admissions about inequities within the system, and raised awareness of women's issues within the newsroom.

As an instrument of change however, it had limited success. Despite some positive changes that have taken place over the years, including an increased number of women in newsroom management, the task force was hardly a force for revolutionary change. As has been demonstrated already, some changes in the situation of women journalists were set in motion in some newsrooms as a direct result of the task force. Others have taken place because of some degree of change in social attitudes and practices including a more equitable division of childcare responsibilities between some couples. The fact that a

critical mass of women has been built up in newsrooms and many women have proven themselves in journalism is also bound to have had a positive effect. The Hollinger regime no longer recognized gender equity as a principle. CanWest Global Communications Corporation, the current owner is preoccupied with other issues such as convergence.⁵³ In spite of all this, women journalists' opportunities are nowhere near as constrained by gender as in the years before the task force.

If the Southam Task Force on Women's Opportunities played only a small role in these changes, does it mean that it was an exercise in futility, a waste of corporate time, money and energy? Was it, as Shakespeare would have said, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing?"⁵⁴

The answer is that it was not a wasted effort. It is true that even in conjunction with social forces, it has not succeeded in creating the widest possible comfort zone for women in newsrooms, as well as equal opportunities for women to define news values and control the content of newspapers.

⁵³ Linda Hughes, telephone interview with Susan Korah.

⁵⁴ Macbeth, Act 5, scene 5, lines 26-28.

The task force, however, was an empowering exercise, a two-year project that legitimized the concerns of women employed at Southam newspapers. It rippled through Southam newsrooms and beyond, raising awareness of these issues, giving the seal of official approval to what might otherwise have remained an undercurrent of whispered comments, discreetly exchanged in the privacy of the powder room or among groups of female colleagues at private social gatherings. Opinion on the consciousness raising value and the empowering aspects of the Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities is almost unanimous.

"The task force report was great because it signalled that the company cared about some of the issues facing its female employees and was willing to improve opportunities for us," says Graham. There was a corporate direction that couldn't be ignored."⁵⁵ Gillian Steward former managing editor of the *Calgary Herald* mused thoughtfully on the role of the task force in the changed situation of women journalists. "I think it was a catalyst for change at the beginning," she said. "There were lots of women in the newsroom who were happy to see it. It confirmed many of the things they aspired to and wanted to do, and gave their

⁵⁵ Patricia Graham, e-mail correspondence with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

aspirations a legitimacy.... But I don't think that lasted. There were too many other things that got in the way. But while its overall results were mixed, I think it did accomplish something in terms of raising awareness and putting women's issues on the agenda. In the private sector media it was a new thing."⁵⁶

While the changes in the newsroom reflected the changes in society generally, it seems reasonable to conclude that the task force accelerated some of these changes. Babick, Hughes and Graham agreed that this was as fair an assessment of the task force as any. "Things might not have progressed as quickly or as far as they did without the task force," said Graham.⁵⁷ "The people who set up the task force and the people who sanctioned it may not have been ready for all the recommendations, but they tabled them anyway," said Babick. "And I think the tabling of the report brought a high level of focus to it. So maybe it got us moving more quickly along the path as the work environment was beginning to change anyway."⁵⁸

The Southam Newspaper Group Task Force on Women's Opportunities did not make fundamental changes to an entire social culture, or even to the culture of journalism. But

⁵⁶ Gillian Steward, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 22 March 2001.

⁵⁷ Patricia Graham, e-mail correspondence with Susan Korah, 21 March 2001.

for a brief period of time, it created a stir within the industry and put the spotlight firmly on the issues of women in the newsroom. It generated a short-lived surge of enthusiasm among the women themselves. In its time, it also managed to remove some barriers for at least some women journalists in Southam newspapers. These women might not otherwise have had the same opportunity as their male counterparts to develop their talents and advance their careers.

In the final analysis, however, it was an episode in the life of a newspaper company rather than a powerful tool for systemic change.

⁵⁸ Don Babick, telephone interview with Susan Korah, 27 March 2001.

APPENDIX

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SOUTHAM TASK FORCE ON WOMEN'S OPPORTUNITIES

1. We recommend that the president of SNG circulate to all divisions a policy statement to the effect that the organization is committed to full equity for women, including the recruitment and promotion of women to redress a serious imbalance within our organization and at our division.
2. To give force to the commitment to equal opportunity, we recommend that the annual performance assessments of all publishers and senior managers be influenced by the degree to which they have recruited, promoted and developed women. This should be part of each manager's yearly objectives, and a factor in determining compensation.
3. We recommend that every effort be made to ensure that each short list for promotion and recruitment to a senior position within SNG or its divisions includes the name if at least one woman. If necessary, managers should search for potential woman candidates outside the division or outside SNG.
4. We recommend that publishers encourage their senior management to be open to the concept of part-time work, flextime, four-day weeks and job sharing. All requests for such alternative working arrangements should be reported to the publisher.
5. We recommend that, where possible, SNG divisions establish or support the provision of child care centres on or near the grounds. When a new plant is being built, SNG and the division should explore child care possibilities and, where economically feasible, either assume or share capital costs for a child care facility.
6. We recommend SNG and all divisions adopt supportive policies on maternity, paternity, adoption and dependent sick leave.
7. We recommend that information on training and

development programs be made widely available at all divisions. Further, senior managers should be required by publishers to recruit women for such programs and to encourage woman employees in planning career paths.

8. We recommend that SNG develop a policy on harassment at work to serve as a model for all divisions. All SNG employees should be made aware that the company will not tolerate harassment of any kind in the workplace.
9. To assist in implementing and monitoring these recommendations, we recommend that SNG appoint a full-time equal opportunity coordinator reporting to the president.
10. We recommend that SNG and all divisions review and revise all application forms, the job interview process, the wording of job descriptions, performance appraisals, job postings and evaluations to remove any gender bias. Collective agreements should be reviewed with an eye to equal opportunity.

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