

W **INSPIRING**
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**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE
IN MANITOBA**

March 2008

*I*t is my pleasure as Minister responsible for the Status of Women to introduce this publication. One of the joys of public life is the incredible people you meet on this journey. Wherever I go in our province I am always struck by women's stories of determination, perseverance and commitment to the issues that affect their lives. The women profiled in these pages are but a few of the many, many inspiring women in Manitoba.

The women who contributed to this publication are leaders in many different areas – their communities, business, the labour movement, and as elected leaders. It is my hope that their thoughtful insights will, in turn, inspire others to become leaders. We know that many policy decisions affect women directly. We need women to bring their knowledge, experiences and talents to the decision-making process. Hearing from these many, diverse voices will help us continue to make our province a better place for all who live here.

Manitoba is proud to have the highest percentage of provincially elected women in Canada. Elected women are now so well-accepted in our province that it is easy to forget that women in Manitoba did not have the right to vote or run for office until 1916! We must not be complacent and take our success for granted. There is much more to do. We need more women in all levels of elected office – on school boards, municipal councils, in the provincial legislature and federally, in the House of Commons.

I sincerely hope this publication encourages girls and women across Manitoba to see the leadership potential that exists within them all.



I want to leave something behind when I go, some small legacy of truth, some word that will shine in a dark place.

Nellie McClung from Clearing In The West (1935). McClung was one of Manitoba's leading campaigners for women's right to vote, and one of Canada's Famous Five who initiated and won the Persons Case, to have women become recognized as persons under Canadian law in 1929.

*Honourable Nancy Allan
Minister responsible for the Status of Women*

MANITOBA WOMEN'S ELECTORAL FIRSTS

January 1916

After a long campaign, Manitoba women became the first in Canada to win the right to vote and hold provincial office. Aboriginal women and some immigrant women were still excluded.

May 1918

Canadian women became eligible to vote and run for office federally. Aboriginal women were still excluded.

June 1920

Edith Rogers (Liberal) became the first woman elected to the Manitoba Legislature. She served until 1932.

1947

Chinese and Indo-Canadian women and men became eligible to vote and hold office federally.

1948

Japanese Canadian women and men became eligible to vote and hold office federally.

1952

Manitoba Aboriginal women and men became eligible to vote and hold office provincially.

1960

Aboriginal women and men became eligible to vote and hold office federally, without having to give up their treaty rights.

January 1960

Olive Irvine (Progressive Conservative) was the first woman from Manitoba to be appointed senator.

February 1963

Thelma Forbes (Progressive Conservative) was the first woman to be appointed speaker of the Manitoba Legislature. She served until 1966.

April 1963

Margaret Konantz (Liberal) was the first Manitoba woman elected to the House of Commons, where she served until 1965. She was the daughter of Edith Rogers, the first woman elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 1920.



Edith Rogers
Photo courtesy of the
Provincial Archives of
Manitoba



Thelma Forbes



Margaret Konantz
Photo courtesy of the Margaret Konantz
Archives, University of Manitoba



Muriel Smith

July 1966

Thelma Forbes became the first female cabinet minister in Manitoba. She held the positions of Minister of Urban Development, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Public Works.

November 1979

Muriel Smith (New Democrat) became the first woman in Manitoba to run for the leadership of a provincial political party.

November 1981

Muriel Smith became the first female Deputy Premier of Manitoba.

March 1984

Sharon Carstairs (Liberal) became the first woman in Manitoba to lead a provincial political party.



Sharon Carstairs

March 1988

Sharon Carstairs became the first female leader of the Official Opposition in Manitoba.

January 2006

Tina Keeper (Liberal) became the first Aboriginal woman in Manitoba to be elected to the House of Commons.

June 2007

A record number of 18 women (32 per cent) were elected to the Manitoba Legislature, including 13 New Democrats and five Progressive Conservatives. Flor Marcelino (New Democrat) became the first visible-minority woman elected to the Legislature. A record number of six women (33 per cent) were appointed to cabinet.



Flor Marcelino



Start with your own life experience, the things that are difficult in your own life, the strengths that you have, and move out from there. Try to make a difference where you are.

*Darlene Birch, R.M.,
Aboriginal midwife and educator*

GETTING STARTED – FIND YOUR PASSION

Women have always been active in community and political affairs; even so, leadership positions tend to be dominated by men. That has begun to change, but we've still got a long way to go. You can help. Find something you are passionate about and go from there.

Although Manitoba is the leader in pay equity, compared to other jurisdictions in Canada, women's full-time earnings are still only 91 per cent of men's¹. Women experience more severe spousal violence than men, and are more likely to be sexually assaulted, than men². Women are more likely to live in poverty² and to live without proper housing³ than men. Women are still more likely to be primarily responsible for the care of their children than men. They are also more likely to provide informal, unpaid caregiving to adult family members and friends,⁴ and to volunteer⁵. Therefore, it's not surprising that women are more likely than men to experience severe time-stress in their lives⁶. Aboriginal women, visible-minority women, those with disabilities and other vulnerable women experience additional discrimination in their lives. We need women's voices at the decision-making tables to address these issues and many others.

What are you passionate about? Whether it is access to health services, school nutrition, accessible buildings, or pollution prevention, most women leaders have been motivated by an issue they care deeply about.

Women are often motivated to become leaders because of their experiences as mothers, or as daughters. Grace Ivey became actively involved in reproductive health issues in 1972, when her daughter's friend, then in high school, became pregnant.

It follows, then, that women often draw their inspiration from their mothers, daughters or other women they admire. Female leaders are valuable role models for young women. When these young women see a woman in a leadership position, it is easier for them to believe in their own potential.

The recent inspiration in my life is my daughter, but what determined my directions, kept me going, has been my mother and my grandfather's legacy of involvement – no matter how terrible the situation or circumstances they endured, they persevered and succeeded in their lives. They are a living inspiration. You draw from where you come from, and need a base to keep you grounded and focused.



Lorena Fontaine, Aboriginal lawyer and educator

No matter who you are...you can change the world for the better if you find your

passion...Don't let anyone get in your way. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't. I believe in my heart that kindness and caring can change the world!



Hannah Taylor, student and founder, Ladybug Foundation
www.ladybugfoundation.ca

I was quite horrified to think that a girl in high school wouldn't know how to prevent pregnancy. I phoned Planned Parenthood to find out what sort of work they did in high schools... and they invited me on to the Board. You ask one question and the next thing you know, you're on the Board. I realized that there was more to be done to prevent teenage pregnancy. Young women today seem unaware that before 1969 you could get sent to jail for even discussing contraception.

Grace Ivey, retired community activist and leader



TAKE TIME TO LEARN AND TO FORGE NETWORKS

There are so many things that aren't right and you don't know where to begin. There is so much that needs to be



addressed – pick your focus... look for other people who are similarly situated. That is the most rewarding

thing – to have colleagues who care about the same things.

Ainley Bridgeman, advocate for equality and universal design

Whatever your passion, it's important to begin by understanding the issues. Be prepared to take the time to learn. Women who are already active and involved are usually happy to share their knowledge.

Volunteering is a great way to meet people who share your concerns, values and beliefs. It's also an excellent way to learn more about issues that concern you. Experienced volunteers can help by giving you insight into the history of these issues. By volunteering, you are contributing your very valuable time and energy to an issue you care about. And you may bring a new point of view to the discussions.

You'll also need to learn which organization or level of government is responsible for your issue. It may involve municipal, provincial or federal governments, school boards, regional health authorities, quasi-judicial bodies (government boards and commissions), businesses or non-profit organizations. Don't be intimidated. Community leaders play a key role in getting different levels of government to work together to solve a problem.

Volunteer! I would recommend picking an organization that has some, even if remote, connection to your interests, not necessarily a direct link. You will meet people, make contacts and these people will become your network in the future. You can call on this network for help and support – that has kept me going, and also leads to reciprocal requests from others.

Lorena Fontaine, Aboriginal lawyer and educator

There was no place for women who suffered from family violence, other than Osborne House. Because of my own experiences with violence, I wanted a resource centre where moms could come and get resources, support and counselling. I was totally, absolutely unaware of who the funders were. It was a huge learning curve, very challenging and exciting. At first, in 1985, we just got project funding, through the Core Area Initiative Agreement among the three levels of government. We didn't know if the centre would be around or not from year to year. The struggle was to find long term funding. Now we have that.



Chriss Tetlock, teacher, founding executive director, North End Women's Centre

HAVE A LONG TERM PLAN AND PERSONAL SUPPORT

Becoming a leader also means understanding that important changes rarely happen quickly. You need a strategy for the mid and long term. Expect adversity and have a plan for dealing with it.

Remember, you don't have to have all the answers yourself. It's wise to find both a mentor (to help you with strategic advice) and a support group. Consider involving other women who understand what you're going through.

Never underestimate your own knowledge and experience, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

There are some negatives at times. Having to go back and forth, back and forth to funders – drumming it into their heads that it's our vision and we can do it!...I wouldn't take no for an answer. I would go through all the right steps, and then do it all over again. We went to our MLA, to our MP, to the City, to the Winnipeg Foundation, to cabinet ministers, to Neighbourhoods Alive! We succeeded. We created many partnerships, and worked with five funders. We have a day care, and a women's centre in North Point Douglas. Now we're starting a crack-free zone.

Sandy Dzedzora, chair, SISTARS

I learned just to ask the question. I never ran into a situation where people were not really quite happy to listen to questions. Many of the men present would have exactly the same question in mind as I did, but they wouldn't stand up and ask. This was no impediment to me, since as a woman I was not expected to know the answer...Go a step outside your comfort zone; otherwise, you will never get involved. Women need to understand they have skills that are useful around the board table, skills from everyday life. They should realize that and take confidence from that.

Linda MacNair, farmer, chair of the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council



There is discipline required. Making a difference may be 80 per cent inspiration, but it's also discipline and courage. People will misunderstand you... You can't go ahead based on others' perceptions of you. You have to know who you are inside yourself.

Darlene Birch, R.M., Aboriginal midwife and educator

I still love it...working with other women, learning from other women, sharing with other women. I mean women from all levels – from women in government right down to women at community level... they've been willing and open to share their experiences. I've been able to learn, to support and to receive support.

Chriss Tetlock, teacher, founding executive director, North End Women's Centre

The first time I walked in, all guys, they all looked at me like "Who does she think she is? No one is going to take her seriously!" One of the best things was proving to them that I did know what I was talking about and that I wasn't going to back down, that I dealt with their issues seriously and with respect. By the time I left, a lot of them thanked me for my hard work.



Marie Buchan, union representative and winner of the 2003 Manitoba Federation of Labour Youth Achievement Award

Are you sometimes afraid to speak out on an issue? It can be hard for women who may feel they're not the experts to speak up and speak out – to feel confident in their own abilities. As well, young women may feel intimidated by older, more experienced men and women.

Working in male-dominated professions or organizations can feel uncomfortable – although women today are much less likely to be the first woman or the only woman in a position of leadership.

Women who are newcomers to our country, or those who don't speak English or French as a first language, may encounter additional barriers. The support of immigrant women's groups can be important to their success.

Often, I was the only woman in the boardroom in a male-oriented occupation. Women just weren't there. Women were a novelty. Now I think women are regarded more as competition and less as a novelty.

Dorothy Dobbie, publisher, former Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament and first woman president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.



I have been here in Thompson, Manitoba for 32 years. One of the reasons I am active is to support and enhance the profile of immigrant women. That was the motivation for me.

Ana Rodriguez, founding member, Immigrant Women's Association of Manitoba, ESL instructor and retired school trustee

WOMEN IN POLITICAL OFFICE

*M*anitoba has the highest percentage of female Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), of all provincial legislatures. This is a substantial improvement over Edith Rogers' 12 years as Manitoba's only female MLA. However, women are still under-represented at all levels of political life in Canada^{7,8,9}. We need women's insights and expertise at all levels of government.

Electoral politics may seem far removed from everyday community life – but they're not. In fact, many elected women who ran for office began working on issues at the community level, then realized they wanted to work for legislative change.

Elected Women in Canada 2007

Manitoba Legislature	32%
All Provincial Legislatures	22%
Federal House of Commons	21%
Manitoba City/Municipal Councilors	15%
All Canadian City/Municipal Councillors	31%
Manitoba Mayors	6%
All Canadian Mayors	16%

Canada is a progressive country and a world leader in many things. Unfortunately, women's participation in political life is not one of them. Our goal is to reduce the real democratic deficit, the one that sees half of our population underrepresented in our political institutions.

Ann MacLean, past president, Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Mayor of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia⁹

The political process is important to everyone in their everyday lives, because what governments and other organizations do impacts people on a day to day basis. If you are affected and you care about it, you should get involved and have a say. No one ever expects they will be involved at an electoral level when they get involved in an issue, but that is the level at which it starts, and it develops as they become involved in issues and organizations. Basically, everyone can do it.



Becky Barrett, Former NDP MLA and cabinet minister

Many women who've held elected office have one piece of advice in common, for other women who aspire to run for election: Just Do It !

It seems like women have 20 reasons why they can't run, and men have 20 reasons why they should run.



Avis Gray, former Liberal MLA

Just go for it! Get involved where your heart is, where your passion is, because you care about something. Your passion will carry you along and help you to be a success.

Dorothy Dobbie, publisher, former Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament and first woman president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.



Never underestimate your ability to have an impact or make a change. In all of my political work, that's what surprised me - if you have an idea or a passion, you can have an impact. When you are thinking, "What can I do?" you would be amazed! Just stepping up to the plate can make a real difference. You help others understand they can have a voice, which is immensely empowering to other women.

Pam Jackson, councillor, Town of Winnipeg Beach

If you're interested in running for office, it's important to find out how elections are conducted at the level of government that interests you and the requirements for candidacy.

Decide if you wish to run as a party candidate or independently. If you are not a member of a political party, find out which party's policies fit you, your values and beliefs. To learn about the electoral process, volunteer in the election campaign of a woman you admire and support. If you want to run as a candidate for a political party, learn about the nomination process for that party. Women who are nominated in winnable constituencies and ridings are as likely to be elected as men¹⁰.

Talk to an elected woman you respect about your aspirations. The non-partisan national organization Equal Voice (see www.equalvoice.ca) and the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women's Votes for Women: A Political Guidebook (see www.women.gov.ns.ca/pubs2004_05/Votes_for_Women.pdf) are good sources of information about women and the political process. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities has information available for women interested in municipal politics at www.fcm.ca/english/policy/women.html.

Women who've been elected to political office find there are many rewards - both while elected, and in their lives afterwards.

I spent nine years in opposition and four years in government. The rewards from being the elected representative, in the opposition, lay in working with the people in the constituency, meeting different people, talking about different issues and people's perspectives, providing help to individuals and families. In government, the satisfactions and rewards came from being able to work on specific legislation to make changes. Being an MLA, either in government or opposition, you can impact people's lives in positive ways...

When you have figured out your strengths and weaknesses in relation to what you want, then try to identify a woman that you think has succeeded. Start there. Any woman would be thrilled to share her experiences with others.

Becky Barrett, former NDP MLA and cabinet minister

Being elected opened up lots of opportunities for me to meet and spend time with Manitobans from other parts of the province, so I had a lot of contacts, networking, met a lot of new people. After being an MLA, when I was involved in national party activities encouraging women to run for office, I was able to meet people from across the whole country. So that was a very positive outcome of political involvement and it was very enriching. I think that is a common reward regardless of which party you are involved with.

Avis Gray, former Liberal MLA

Women have to make some difficult choices, and not all women are willing to do that and I don't blame them. It is all-consuming – you are never not at work, always on display. Also, at the federal level, for many women, it is very lonely. You are often alone in Ottawa without your family (50 to 60 per cent of the time), and there is a lot of travel, and long days, even if your family is with you.

Dorothy Dobbie, publisher, former Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament and first woman president of the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce.



Being elected helps keep me engaged in the community, with people I would otherwise not have met, having conversations about things I never thought of before. It is a fabulous thing to be able to do.

Pam Jackson, councillor, Town of Winnipeg Beach

While there are many rewards to electoral life, there are also sacrifices. Take a realistic look at the pros and cons for you personally.

The inspiring women who have contributed to political life in Manitoba have led the way for you and other Manitoba women.

Where do you want to make your voice heard?
Think about it and then...just do it!

MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR OTHERS – AND FOR YOURSELF

*H*owever and wherever you choose to become involved, you can make a difference. We asked women leaders about how their experiences made a difference for themselves individually, for their families, for their communities, and for society as a whole.

Here are some of the things they said.

It took women's energies and commitment to equality to get me into political office. While there, we were able to make some progress on women's concerns. None of that would have been possible without the advocacy groups working on the outside, as well as those of us working on the inside. So much more remains to be done.

Muriel Smith, former NDP MLA and Deputy Premier of Manitoba, Officer of the Order of Canada, and recipient of the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case.



Remember when Margaret Mitchell raised the

issue of violence against women in the House of Commons in 1982? They laughed at her. I don't think that they would laugh now.

Jen Woolston, retired community activist and leader

Your perspective gets broadened. Where it seemed to be black and white before, when you get involved, you become aware of other points of view and realize that there is little that is black and white. If you are not involved, you tend to see things more in terms of black and white. A good part of what I have learned is that active involvement in agricultural policy is what counts - not what "somebody" should do, but what "you" do.

Linda MacNair, farmer; chair, Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council.



If there is an injustice, you have to speak up and try to do something about it. Even if you are told "don't stir the pot, keep quiet, you're always causing trouble..." Don't be afraid. Say "What can I do?" No one person can change the world alone. Everyone has some kind of gift or skill that they can offer and share.

Joëlle Saltel-Allard, executive director, Réseau action femmes Manitoba

By doing things together – artwork, child care – when they got to know each other, their voices became strong. It was over coffee at the women's centre that women talked about the vicious cycle of poverty. The women got to know each other and didn't feel alone. It's been fantastic – a complete difference in participation. I walk down the street and I know just about everybody. It never ceases to amaze me what can come out of a group of volunteers working together. We accomplished our biggest dreams.

Sandy Dzedzora, chair, SISTARS

Grandpa was very proud of the company he founded in 1936. He would say to me, "When you grow up, you can be my secretary." Now we own the business.



Trudy Heal and sister Margaret Hughes, owners/operators of Best Cooking Pulses

The women in the North End Women's Centre (NEWC) Drumming Group are committed to taking the virtues, the seven teachings, quite seriously. They work on them in their own lives and in the lives of their children. There are teenagers, young women, in this group, who are leading, coming into their own through this group. It's so heart-warming and hopeful.

Jaki Skye, former co-ordinator, NEWC Drumming Group

My mom told me that sometimes when you worry and feel sad about things, if you do something to change the problem, your heart won't feel so sad. She was right. I don't worry so much anymore because I know I can help and so can you.

Hannah Taylor, student and founder, Ladybug Foundation

A long time ago, I made a complaint to the Canadian Human Rights Commission about access to tax materials. It took 6½ years, but I won. After a long mediation process, they now provide everything in an accessible format. Technology has made everything easier. Still, there is so much technology that is not accessible... Design and access issues have not gone away.

Ainley Bridgeman, advocate for equality and universal design

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The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council
would like to thank all of those who generously gave
their time to be interviewed for this project.

For further information or comments regarding this publication,
call 204-945-6281 or visit: www.mwac.mb.ca.