

# Unencumbered by Delusions

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NICOLE MORGAN

*L'auteure partage ses souvenirs lors de déjeuners avec Doris à Ottawa ou à Toronto et raconte le moment où elle a demandé à Doris d'être la marraine de son enfant.*

At the end of 1980, I joined the ranks of the remarkable research team assembled by Doris for the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. I left it less than three months later, carried away by the wave of resignations that followed Doris's departure. I learned that same day that I was pregnant, and it occurred to me that in the right order of things, Doris should be the child's godmother. She graciously agreed, and although the assignment was a purely symbolic gesture, it established a link which endured.

When our schedules permitted—a rare treat—we would meet for lunch in some Ottawa or Toronto restaurant. We had plenty to talk about, but somehow avoided political analysis, bureaucratic intrigues or other power games that made our daily life difficult. We talked about “men” just like any other two women having lunch together ... but not quite. As a real *alpha*, Doris analyzed men with none of the tears, regrets, complaints, angers, anxieties, or delusions that make many such lunches an emotional drain.

I don't mean that she disdained

men and cried alone in the evenings. Doris was a whole woman and was variously a wife, lover, mother of three sons, and a solid friend of men who respected and loved her. She was nonetheless fully aware of the immense difficulties women confront in negotiating for an elusive share of power, always a challenge, always difficult to keep. But she seemed totally fearless and managed the masculine species just like she managed her office: efficiently, with humour, and with some degree of annoyance for the propensity of human beings to drown in a glass of water they have filled for themselves.

She found most of the men she encountered to be incompetent, not by lack of intelligence but by a blind thirst for power that cannot be slaked. Deplorable to be sure, but a fact of life we have to cope with as my wise grandmother said. Doris was patient with them, or rather incredibly resilient. She loved the company of some of those powerful crazies who drank hard, made her laugh, and dreamed of elusive futures for humanity. But she knew all too well the price of their company and managed pragmatically to pay it in her private and public life. She didn't forget for a second that the freedom to do so was conditional on the financial independence that she maintained throughout her life.

Not encumbered by delusions about men, she understood them beautifully and did not seem to suffer from the blows she received when she stepped on their territories. She had mastered the rules of the game and described them to me in her inimitable voice and with the sense of humour that made all of those luncheons a pleasure and a treasure.

*Nicole Morgan (Schwartz-Morgan) is Professor, Department of Politics and Economics, Royal Military College of Canada. In 1981 she delivered (along with her son) the first book of her trilogy on the federal public service. In 1988, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women published The Equality Game, which focused on the role of women within the federal bureaucracy. Her subsequent books, articles, and conference presentations reflect the trends of our times but the issue of power has been a constant. In the most recent, Le Manuel de recrutement d'Al-Qaida (Seuil, Paris, 2007), Doris was present in thought while Nicole analyzed the hallucinating “Epistle to Women” which is the cornerstone of the book.*

## Woman's Work Is Never Done

Doris Anderson  
*Today*, c. 1983

Recently one of those dependable, compatible men – the kind you think you can count on – shocked me profoundly. I was particularly distressed because I had believed him to be sympathetic to women. He had painfully worked his way out of the wreck of an early marriage. He had taken the trouble to identify his share of the responsibility for all the anguish. He was now enjoying a close relationship with a wise and liberated woman. Then suddenly in the middle of Sunday brunch, he asked: “Tell me, do you think the women’s movement is finally over?”

While travelling back and forth across the country as president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I heard other voices speaking out against the women’s movement that would never have been heard five years ago. “No, I’m not involved in the women’s movement,” a young feature writer in Edmonton informed me. “I’m living with a man. We don’t want children. We are caught up in our careers.”

This cool young woman had achieved, without too much trouble, a fairly high-level, well paying job on a newspaper. She believed she had done it all on her own. Apparently she had no memory of the sit-ins that were staged in the 1960s in the offices of magazines and newspapers so that women might write and edit instead of being relegated to do the digging while men got the bylines.

According to my enlightened man (and quite a few others), the women’s movement by rights should be over. There are still some unsolved problems, to be sure – some antique laws to clear away, a few barriers to come down. But overall, the women’s movement can disperse because its objectives have been met.

Certainly, some of the élan of the movement in the early 1970s seems to have dissipated. Many of the early feminists are still active but concentrating on projects like an interval house or a women’s studies program. And some are just plain tired. However, anyone who thinks that the women’s movement has served its purpose and that feminism can pack up its banner and disappear because it is no longer needed should have been cured of this delusion by the shoddy, offhand treatment that women were given by both the federal and provincial governments in the recent constitutional negotiations. Both levels of government made it clear that women, along with native people, were not a priority.

...In the end women’s equality has been written into the Charter of Rights. But even now women must be vigilant to monitor legislation that might continue to discriminate, federally or provincially, against them under clause 33. A strengthened Charter of Rights is just a tool to test legislation in the courts. It’s not going to wipe away discrimination overnight.

It’s not time, then, to relax. It is gratifying to see the numbers of brilliant young women flocking into traditionally male professions such as medicine, law ... and engineering. But underneath the brave networking, the tiny band of female achievers trying to scale the Mount Everest of male tradition, lies a bedrock of evidence that all this has happened before. There have been other eras when women made quite a spectacular – but short-lived – progress. The slim gains of the women’s movement may not be as permanent as those who announced the end of the movement appear to believe.

In the United States, a government has been elected that is dedicated to pushing back social reform through measures that are particularly hard on women.... [A]bortion may become more difficult to obtain even when the woman’s life is in danger or pregnancy results from a rape; federal aid to battered wives will be cut back, and textbooks portraying the sexes in their traditional roles reintroduced into the classrooms of the nation.

According to experts speaking at a recent conference ... large numbers of women might be unemployed by the end of the 1980s. Microchip technology will make obsolete many of the traditional jobs now performed by women – in factories, in offices, on switchboards and in shops....

There is no doubt that the awareness of our culture’s sex-linked prejudices has greatly increased among women and most thinking men in the last 20 years. But increased awareness is not enough to wipe away the inequities of centuries. Most women are still unprotected against poverty in their old age. Less than 32% are enrolled in any kind of private pension scheme, compared to 52% of men, and homemakers can’t even benefit from the Canada Pension Plan. And although women make up 40% of the workforce, a woman still earns 61 cents for each dollar earned by men. Daycare, after-school programs, and other support systems for working women are still not adequate.

...That is why the women’s movement must not be over. In fact, it should only have begun.