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Separate Lives and Shared Legacies: Privilege and Hardships in the Lives of Twenty Women who Made a Difference

BY MARY CLEARY

Mary Cleary is a Senior at Bridgewater State College who is majoring in history with a minor in secondary education. She first became interested in this project in Professor Maragart Lowe's fall "Women who Made a Difference" course. She received a grant from the Adrian Tinsley Program that allowed her to research the women in the study, with Professor Lowe as her mentor. This report is the result of that study. She hopes to teach high school history and attend graduate school where she would like to further investigate the women in the study.

Dr. Nancy Larrick is not well known, but she should be. She is one of the most influential people who shaped children's literature during the latter half of the twentieth century. She edited fourteen poetry anthologies for children, wrote *A Parent's Guide to Children's Reading*, founded the International Reading Association which surveys students of all ages to determine reading preferences, and in 1965 published an influential article, "The All White World of Children's Literature," that was highly critical of the publishing industry of the day. She lamented the fact that "integration might be the law of the land, but most of the books children see are all white."¹ Changes in society such as the introduction of more diverse children's books are often taken for granted and the individuals that worked to make those transformations possible are often forgotten. In fact, Dr. Larrick's work came to my attention in an unexpected manner.

Students in Professor Margaret Lowe's fall 2004 women's history course offered at Bridgewater State College were given a seemingly simple task: locate an obituary in the *New York Times* of a woman who died within the last two years and "made a difference" in American history. [Appendix A] Students then had to write an essay about her and present their findings to the class. The students responded enthusiastically and were soon asking if they could choose a woman who they had read about in other newspapers, or saying that they wanted to reserve a certain woman even if their presentation was not scheduled for another month. Questions arose about the similarities and differences among the women, including their educational level, age at death, participation in sports and whether they married or had children. With the assistance of the Adrian Tinsley Research Program for Undergraduate Research, I have been able to discover a great deal about these women. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the students' reports has revealed two distinct patterns in the women's lives:

one group consisted of women who came from privileged backgrounds where they received a great deal of support and encouragement; the other consisted of women who endured economic and social hardships. An examination of two of the women's lives illustrates the two distinct patterns.

Dr. Nancy Larrick and Gloria Anzaldúa came from two very different walks of life. Larrick, born in 1910 to a lawyer and his homemaker wife, remembered her hometown of Winchester, Virginia as a place where everybody, including children, were treated with respect. She remembered a man who required a megaphone to hear, but still took the time to have lengthy conversations with her. Winchester was a tolerant place where snacks were served at the local jail, and the Civil War was not referred to in the common southern parlance as The War of Northern Aggression, but simply as "The War."² Her 1978 poetry anthology *Crazy to be Alive in such a Strange and Wonderful World* was dedicated "In memory of my father Herbert S. Larrick who led me to appreciate the diversity and the beauty of human nature."³ If Larrick's description of her early years contradicts many common assumptions about a socially stratified southern town where children were encouraged to remain quiet, Anzaldúa's harrowing account of her experience as the oldest daughter of Texas migrant workers fits our standard view of the hardships and oppression that one normally associates with such a life.

Anzaldúa remembered her past in her 1987 book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Her mother gave birth to her when she was sixteen, her father died at age thirty eight, and as a result she harvested vegetables in the fields from the time she was four and into her college years. This passage from *Borderlands/La Frontera* describes her feelings about her childhood.

Some of my pain was cultural in origin—you know about being Mexican—some of it was because of my gender, so about being a girl who wasn't supposed to be as important as my brothers, even though I was

older. Part of this suffering was related to the fact that I was in pain most of the time because I was born with a hormonal imbalance, which meant that that I went into puberty very early on. I remember I was always made to feel ashamed because I was having a period and had breasts when I was six years old. Then I was this freak who was very sensitive. My way of dealing with the world was to read, to escape through reading.⁴

Her medical condition was made worse by a lack of medical care or privacy. Despite the harsh conditions in which she lived, her love of books did propel her to become the first one in her neighborhood to attend college.

The adult lives of both women were as divergent as their early years. Larrick became the ultimate insider. After graduating from Goucher College at nineteen, she returned to her hometown to teach English. She returned to school twice: she received a graduate degree from Columbia in 1936 and a Ph.D. from New York University in 1955 at the age of forty five. She was hired by Random House, where she was not pleased with the quality of workbooks for children. This set her on a mission to survey children about their reading preferences. In her 1964 poetry anthology, *Piping Down the River Wild*, she advised parents that "today's children are not interested in poems about farms,"⁵ and instead recommended authors such as Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. She attributed her ability to develop new research methods to her own childhood. She said in *Crazy to be Alive in Such a Strange and Wonderful World*: "Now I look back and marvel at the respect given to me when I was a child. I just thought it was natural then."⁶ The fact that her book, *A Parent's Guide to Children's Literature*, was reprinted six times reveals the extent of her popularity. Anzaldúa's education and career did not progress quite as smoothly.

In contrast to Larrick, Anzaldúa became the ultimate outsider. In addition to being Mexican and poor, she also

had a debilitating type of diabetes. Though she was admitted to the Ph.D. program at the University of Texas in 1977, she left the program after "the advisor told me that Chicana literature was not a legitimate discipline, that it didn't exist, and that women's studies was not something I should do— And so, in a lot of those classes, I felt silenced."⁷ This was in spite of the fact that the number of women's studies courses offered in colleges had grown exponentially during that time, from 600 courses in 1972 to 3,000 by 1982.⁸ When she moved to California she was dismayed to learn that her fellow feminist activists thought she should "not have a culture."⁹ While continuing to work as an activists she wrote poetry and prose books such as *a Bridge Called my*

Back that were published by small independent presses. Anzaldua returned to graduate school to again pursue her Ph.D. at the University of Santa Cruz. Unfortunately, she died as a result of complications of diabetes just as she was about to finish her dissertation.

This sample of twenty women who "made a difference" is small, but also quite diverse. Five of them were women of color, including Elma Lewis, the daughter of West Indian immigrants, who worked as an advocate for children's art education in Boston, and Patsy Mink, an Asian American congresswoman who wrote the groundbreaking Title IX legislation. Their economic and social backgrounds varied considerably. The cookbook author and television personality Julia Child came from a wealthy family and had ancestors who had come to America on the Mayflower, Mink's father was an engineer, and the tennis champion Althea Gibson's parents were unskilled laborers.

It is difficult to sort out exactly why the sample is so diverse. Perhaps it attests to the fact that newspapers now give a wider range of women recognition for their accomplishments. Or it could be due to the fact that the students who selected the women were aware that people from all walks of life have made contributions to society and recognized that in their work. The background of the

class could also play a part. Most Bridgewater State College students are from the surrounding area of small towns and mid- size cities, and the working or middle class. If the same assignment were given to students at either a state college in a large city or at a private institution the make up of the individuals chosen might change considerably. In any event, the women selected by the students provide a more varied view of twentieth-century women than a more homogenous group would, and their similarities and differences are well worth exploring.

The majority of the women had long life spans that enabled them to accomplish a great deal. Anzaldua died at 64, and Jenifer Estess, who founded Project ALS and succumbed to the disease at the age of 44, were the only two who did not achieve the biblical full life standard of three score and ten. Gertrude Dunn, a member of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League and the United States Women's Field Hockey Team, was the only woman who died as a result of an accident when she perished because her single engine plane crashed when she sought a pilot's license at the age of 71. Still, nine out of twenty of the women lived to be at least ninety. This allowed them to have quite long careers, even though some of them chose to take time off to attend to loved ones. For example, Katharine Hepburn accepted very little work for seven years during the 1960's because Spencer Tracy, her long term lover, was seriously ill, but she still had a film career that spanned an incredible sixty two years from 1932's *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932) to *Love Affair* (1994).

Obtaining an education was also a very important factor for most of these women, but a few faced barriers that made pursuing a higher education nearly impossible. Rose Gacioch, a member of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League, often missed high school to care for her cancer stricken mother who died when Gacioch was sixteen. Her father had died in a coal mining accident before she was born, and so she moved in with her sister and took a job in a factory. The aviatrix, Margaret Thomas Warren also left

high school after the apartment her widowed father rented in rural Texas burned down and the family members were dispersed. She described the aftermath of the incident in her autobiography *Taking Off*.

After mother had been dead for several years, I thought how fortunate she was to have died when she did; now she was free. But I always remembered that plane flying overhead.¹⁰

She often referred to this airplane that she had seen flying overhead when she was in first grade. The memory sustained her through a difficult childhood. Margaret Kelly, the dance troop leader, who was abandoned in an orphanage as an infant also left school early.

Some of the other woman did manage to attend college despite hardships. They employed different strategies in order to reach their educational goals. Althea Gibson managed to attend Florida A & M University because the school made the then unusual decision to offer a woman an athletic scholarship. Similarly, Gertrude Dunn rode her athletic talent to college by using the money she earned playing with the league between 1950 and 1954 to finance her education. Anzaldua and Estess relied on student loans and financial aid.

One fascinating aspect of the privileged women's academic lives is that so many of them attended the same colleges. Four of them found their way to Columbia including both Gretchen Schuyler, a captain in the United States Lacrosse Team, and Nancy Larrick, who attended graduate school there. Rosemary Park was the president of Barnard, the women's college affiliated with Columbia, from 1962 until 1967. Frederica de Laguna, an anthropologist and author of sixteen books completed post graduate work at Columbia University after receiving her undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr. Katharine Hepburn also received an undergraduate degree from Bryn Mawr, and Mildred Jeffrey, a union and civil rights activist, earned a graduate degree

there. The cookbook author and television personality Julia Child received an undergraduate degree from Smith College, and the sports historian and Olympic Committee member Joanna Davenport attended graduate school there.

It is not a mere coincidence that these "women who made a difference" attended these schools. They not only provided a first rate education, but their faculties stressed their belief in the intellectual capacities of women. Bryn Mawr, established in 1885, set a new standard for academic excellence under the leadership of M. Carey Thomas, who was the first woman in the world to earn a Ph.D. She was a fierce advocate for women's rights. William Chafe describes her impassioned response to those who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment in his book *The American Woman*:

It is strangely unsympathetic for opponents of an Equal Rights Amendment to suggest removing the thousands of inequalities and injustices by slow and piecemeal work...while women are being born, living their lives and dying without the justice which they have been waiting for since the time of the cave man.¹¹

Smith College, established in 1875, also maintained high academic standards. Additionally, the college decided not to allow any sororities on campus, so that wealthy students such as Julia Child were not socially insulated. Barnard College was established in 1889, and more women earned Ph.D's from Columbia between 1920 and 1974 than at any other university in the country.¹² The institution was also far ahead of the curve on gender studies. Glenda Riley indicates in *Inventing the American Woman* that Leta Hollingsworth confirmed that "male and female intellectual capacities were similar" while doing graduate studies at Columbia in the 1890's, and Barnard Dean Emily Putnum, analyzed women's roles throughout history in studies such as her 1910 work "The Lady: Studies of Certain Significant Phases in Her History."¹³

Another very intriguing aspect of these women's lives is that at least five of them had mothers who received at least an undergraduate degree. These were Hepburn, Park, de Laguna, Child, and Jeffrey. Even though women made inroads in higher education by the late 1800's, their children were a very exclusive group. The first generation of college women married in very small numbers, and focused on their relationships with other women and on improving society. For example, just 45% of Bryn Mawr graduates prior to 1900 married.¹⁴ As a result, very few girls who were born in the United States in the early twentieth century had mothers who had a college degree.

It is impressive that this small cohort produced women who made important impacts in such diverse fields as entertainment, civil rights, and anthropology. It would be well worth exploring the lives of a larger group of women whose mothers received college degrees in the late nineteenth or early twentieth to discover if a pattern of high achievement is revealed.

Many of the women in the sample also pursued careers in higher education and challenged gender assumptions. In an era when full professorships were unusual for women, Fredericka de Laguna founded the anthropology department at Bryn Mawr. Her parents both taught at the school and her father, Theodore De Laguna, supported academic freedom at the institution by being amongst the professors at the college who sought greater classroom autonomy in 1916.¹⁵ The fact that she was very well respected as evidenced by the fact that her archeology expeditions attracted both male and female students from as far away as the University of Southern California. She also donated numerous artifacts to the school's museum. Rosemary Park was an innovative leader who questioned the value of rote memorization while teaching at Connecticut College and reduced the course load from five each semester to four in order to encourage "this strange kind of process we call thinking."¹⁶ When she was president of Barnard she insisted that the college obtain

its own science laboratories rather than use Columbia's lest it "send a signal that it did not believe in science for women."¹⁷

Gretchen Schuyler and Johanna Davenport both advocated on behalf of women athletes. Schuyler was proper enough to be hired as a teacher and athletic director at the prestigious Chapin School in Manhattan where she "had the fun of teaching a young Jackie Kennedy."¹⁸ Yet, she still pushed young women to excel in sports when she worked at Boston University. Ann Coakley, a professor emeritus at Bridgewater State College who followed Schuyler to the Lacrosse Hall of Fame said of Schuyler that "She led us to bigger and better things."¹⁹ Boston University awards the Gretchen Schuyler Award to its top female athlete and scholar each year. Davenport proved the value of the Title IX legislation by working as the women's athletic director at Auburn University from 1976 until 1987. She ended the practice of female and male athletes eating in separate dining halls, and was the first visiting professor of physical education at West Point. She also delved into sports history and published articles such as "The Normal Schools: Exploring our Heritage" that discussed the education of gym teachers in the early twentieth century.

While some women in the sample utilized their connections with elite universities to effect change, Elma Lewis created opportunities for others because of lingering anger over her own early struggles. The *Boston Globe* reported that after Lewis was dismayed to find her nursery school records that described her "as an exceptional 3 year old whose mental development as measured by IQ is probably, as is usual with members of her race, at a higher peak now than it will be when she grows older."²⁰ She started a performing arts school in Boston, and was instrumental in starting the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American artists in Boston. She developed a reputation for anger but had a ready answer for critics: "If you are black and you are not angry, you belong in a mental institution."²¹

She forged ahead with the arts programs even when money was scarce, and was one of the women in the sample who never married or had children.

The martial and romantic lives of the women varied considerably. Eight never married, nine were either widowed or were survived by their husbands, and three of them were divorced. The tennis champion Althea Gibson was the only one to be divorced twice, but Margaret Thomas Warren and Jean Hay, who was a disc jockey during World War II, both divorced their first husbands but had lasting second marriages. In some cases the women chose between career and marriage. de Laguna and Gacioch both broken engagements because their prospective husbands did not expect them to pursue their careers after the wedding. Julia Child found a more supportive spouse in her husband Paul who collaborated on her television and speaking tours and described himself and Julia as “twinnings in our reactions and tastes.”²² The only disappointment she faced in her marriage was her inability to have children.

Infertility is only one possible explanation as to why fourteen out of the twenty women in the sample did not have children. Birth control devices were widely available in the United States by the early twentieth century. Katharine Hepburn greatly admired her mother’s activism to promote birth control and decided not to have children. Estess had a “diaphragm in her purse”²³ when it was needed thanks to the assistance of an older sister. Her plans to eventually have children were shattered when she was diagnosed with ALS at the age of thirty five. Anzaldua was a lesbian and other women in the sample might have been as well. Due to social constraints, lesbians rarely openly had children with their partners until the 1980s, when most of these women were well past their child bearing years.

Still, having children did not prevent six of the women from “making a difference” in public life. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, physician and author of the groundbreaking book *On Death and Dying*, had two children. With children in tow,

she criss-crossed the nation on book selling tours. Perhaps, she felt determined to make a name for herself to overcome the fact that she had been a triplet whose unique qualities had ended up being buried. As she lamented in her book *Life Lessons*:

In those days triplets were dressed alike, given the same toys, enrolled in the same activities and so on. People even responded to you not as individuals, but as a set. No matter how good we were in school, I quickly learned whether I tried or not, I would always get C’s. One of us earned A’s and another F’s. Teachers always confused us, so it was safer to give us all C’s. Sometimes I would sit on my father’s lap. I know he did not know which one I was. Can you imagine what that does to our identity?²⁴

Jean Hay, who had three children, was more closely nurtured by her mother who traveled with her while she worked as a disc jockey and model. Hay later earned the designation of one of the nation’s “Thousand Points of Light” by George Bush the elder for her work with the charitable organization Direct Relief International.

The personal lives of the women sampled only provide a partial answer to the question of how they were able to “make a difference.” As a group they married less and had fewer children than the average American women of this particular time period. However, several of them did have long term relationships or marriages, and a few had children. Therefore, a review of the historical forces that shaped their lives, and how they responded to them is indicated. During the Great Depression, the gulf between the experiences of the better off group of women in the sample, and the less fortunate was extremely wide.

Despite the fact that unemployment was rampant and the standard of living for most Americans fell precipitously, some of the women were scarcely affected by the Great Depression. Hepburn and Child continued to receive allowances from

their families. Child used her ties with fellow Smith graduates to prosper during those years. She shared an apartment with two of them, and conducted business with a few others who worked as buyers for large department stores in her job at an advertising agency. de Laguna began her pioneering studies in Alaska, in 1930, and managed to sustain her studies throughout this tumultuous decade. Schuyler played on the United States Women's Lacrosse Team in 1935, and Mildred Jeffrey obtained her graduate degree from Bryn Mawr that same year. Jeffrey, whose mother was the first female pharmacist in Iowa, was one of the first African Americans to graduate from that college that admitted its first African American student in 1931. She used her education to "make a difference" by working as a recruiter for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America at a time when unskilled or semiskilled workers faced reduced wages and harsh working conditions.

In contrast, several of the women in the sample faced formidable challenges during the Great Depression. Althea Gibson developed the tough skin that would serve her well when she faced resistance to her attempts at integrating tennis and golf at the national level. The Harlem that her family fled to when they could not survive as farmers, was particularly effected by the economic downturn. She also endured her father's frequent beatings, but as Francis Gray explains in her book *Born to Win, The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson*, Althea reacted stoically.

No matter how hard he whipped her Althea always refused to cry. Even when he punched her that time, she pulled herself off the floor, socked him in the jaw, and made use of all the boxing lessons he had given her by fighting him as if she really were the boy he wanted for his first born.

When her plans to be a "lady boxer"²⁶ were foiled because the trend died down, she relied on "lifting ice cream, fruit or potatoes for roasting"²⁷ for sustenance. Sometimes she rode subway cars "like a zombie"²⁸ when she could not find a place to sleep.

Margaret Thomas Warren endured unbearable hardship while living in New York during this period. A series of misfortunes nearly led to a tragedy after she lost her job selling airplanes. She was unable to pay the rent even in a cockroach infested room and reluctantly moved in with friends. She fell into despair and took an overdose of sleeping pills. Fortunately, she was saved when her friend woke up in the middle of the night and noticed something awry. Desperate for relief from her pain, she made a second suicide attempt by jumping out of a car that was transferring her to Islip State Hospital.

It was there that she turned things around. Warren was dismayed to see patients who were force fed, talked to themselves or received no visitors. A volunteer, Teresa Smyth, really listened to her and provided constant encouragement. The experience prompted Warren to help found the first Samaritan Group in the United States. Clearly, motivated by her traumatic experience, she explained the purpose of the group as "providing a friend to people who were contemplating suicide."²⁹ Warren joined many other people throughout the world who have used personal tragedy as an impetuous to help others.

Rose Gacioch also experienced a set back in the 1930's. First the success: She performed so well in her companies sponsored softball league that the plant manager arranged for her to audition with the Ranger Girls, one of the Bloomer league teams. The Bloomer leagues had started in the late nineteenth century, and were staffed by working class girls whose attire and mannerism did not conform to gender ideals of the era. The bloomer leagues arguably offered the first opportunity for women in the United States to obtain recognition for and earn a living by playing sports. When the leagues closed down due to the financial pressures of the Great Depression, Gacioch had no choice but to return home to eek out a living as a production worker. She did this for several years, until World War II changed her life, along with that of legions of other women.

Gacioch's luck changed when she responded to a newspaper article about the American Girls Professional Baseball League and decided to try out. Her less than supportive co-workers told her she was "full of s-, she was twenty eight years old."³⁰

However, she had withstood beatings and punishments such as kneeling on rice by her mother who detested her love for baseball. She learned to withstand any amount of criticism, and wasn't deterred when she was fired from the South Bend team because she "used poor English."³¹ One of her teammates later said that the "loss of Gacioch was felt for years to come."³² She performed quite well on the Rockford Peaches after being traded and had her best year in 1950. The sociologist Susan Johnson called Gacioch an "important link between the Bloomer Leagues and the AAGPBL." This is vital point as otherwise the younger players on the team might not have realized that women's baseball did in fact have a rich history, even if some were promoting it as a temporary war measure.

The All American Girls Baseball League, which tried to distance itself from the bloomer leagues, functioned on the home front during World War II in several ways. In order to appease those who objected to what they perceived as 'masculine' behavior in the bloomer leagues the AAGPBL required linen skirted uniforms, make-up lessons, and mandatory charm school classes. The AAGPBL games were very popular and were generally played in minor league parks. This worked out well for the public that had money due to booming war time employment, but could not travel to major league parks due to gas rationing. The notion that the leagues were seen solely as entertainment is called into question by this statement made by Art. Mayeroff. The AAGPBL has "produced more sandlot activity among boys and girls than any influence of the last 25 years."³³ The players also profited financially earning \$50.00 to \$125.00 a week when the average female factory worker earned \$10.00 a week.³⁴

Gacioch furthered both the nation's and her own interest during World War II. This type of symbiotic relationship where both the nations and the women's goals were furthered was quite common during the conflict. Emily Yellin summarized the effects of women's participation in the war in her book *Our Mother's War: Women at Home and on the Front During World War II*.

Throughout the twentieth century women made strides as never before. When World War II broke out in the middle of the century, women already pioneering in fields such as politics, journalism, law, medicine, and science found career opportunities that during peacetime they may never have dreamed possible. In the same way that industry and the military opened up for women during the war, women with professional aspirations also made gains while the men were away at war.³⁵ The urgent need for workers expanded recruitment efforts. For example, Lillian Faderman cites a Fleischman's yeast advertisement in her book, *Odd Girls and Twilight*

Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America that featured a woman on a motorcycle who said "this is no time to be frail the dainty days are gone for the duration."³⁶ One third of American women were either employed on the home front or enlisted in the military during World War II.³⁷ However, of the twelve women in this sample a statistically astounding number of 8 out of 12 who were born before 1930, or seventy five percent, participated.

Margaret Thomas Warren's experience as a flyer made her an excellent candidate for war work, but she still had to overcome obstacles to make her contribution. As she explained in her book *Taking Off* that as aviation became more complicated and cost more money, opportunities for women decreased. This was not because of lack of interest but because "men did not welcome the competition."³⁸ Women who wanted to join the WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) also faced resistance. The physical requirements were unduly strenuous and 50% of women who took the

test failed.³⁹ When this happened to Warren, she took a job inspecting planes. She faced much less resistance in this endeavor, as 40% of the workers in aircraft factories during the war were women.⁴⁰

Mildred Jeffrey looked out for the interest of these women in her job as head of the Women's Bureau Branch of the United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America. African Americans like her faced the double bind of racial and gender bias which Pauli Murray aptly called "Jane Crow."⁴¹ African American worked at good paying factory jobs for the first time during the war. Before that unskilled African American women had been mostly relegated to domestic work or the lowest paying and most undesirable industrial jobs in tobacco plants or steam laundries. Jeffrey not only joined the NAACP during the war, but also organized the first UAW women's conference that dealt with the plight of women who lost their jobs to returning veterans.

The women who Katharine Hepburn portrayed on screen during the war had little in common, at least on the surface, with those who toiled in war industries. The phenomenal success of the 1939 movie, *A Philadelphia Story*, which the playwright Phillip Barry based on Hepburn and her family, revived Hepburn's uneven career. Beginning in 1941 with *Women of the Year*, Hepburn starred in a series of 1940s movies that featured strong women characters like the powerhouse journalist she played in that film. In case anyone missed the point being made by fictional characters, more overt tactics were employed. Emily Yellin indicates that the actress played herself in the 1943 film *Stage Door Canteen*. In the film, she tells young women, Eileen, who is despondent because her fiancé had to ship out unexpectedly that she must keep working in the canteen for his sake.

We're in a war and we've got to win. And we're going to win. And that's why the boy you love is going overseas. And isn't that why you're going to go back in there and get on the job?⁴²

Hepburn's advice to the fictional Eileen to remain working at a canteen to help the war effort soundly supported the government's efforts to draw women into war work.

The United States military sought highly educated women to fill its relatively small quota of women. This was a quite severe restriction at the time, as in 1940 only 5% of American women held undergraduate degrees.⁴³ One possible explanation is that because the United States had a pressing need for women to work in munitions factories, there was no impetuosity to recruit them to enlist as soldiers. WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services) trained at Hunter College in New York and were recruited by Professor Elizabeth Raynard at Barnard.

The war was a major turning point for Julia Child who joined the OSS (Office of Strategic Services). This was an opportunity that was only available to women "from wealthy families and did not need the money. Hence, they were not bribable,"⁴⁴ according to Noel Fitch Riley. Her duties in China included devising an elaborate coding system for files, and also handing over brown opium filled envelopes to contacts. On a personal note, this is when she met her husband Paul. They began to sample the local Chinese food that they preferred to the cafeteria fare of jello and instant potatoes, even though it was fertilized with "night soil" or human wastes.⁴⁵ The couple married after the war, moved to France due to Paul's career, and she began her career with cooking lessons at the Cordon Bleu.⁴⁶

Gretchen Schuyler's background qualified her for her work in the Red Cross. Applicants were required to be at least twenty-five and to have a college degree. Her experience as a coach paid off when she served as a captain in charge of thirty-two volunteers. Red Cross workers had the highest casualty rates of any women in World War II⁴⁷ due to their proximity to the frontline. Schuyler's experience reflected this hazard: she served in Normandy, and won a bronze star by ferrying out mail from Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

Margaret Kelly also performed heroically in the face of war. A dancer who founded the dance troupe dance troupe the Blue Belles, Kelly was no stranger to adversity when World War II broke out. When her parents did not retrieve her from the orphanage where they had left her, she was raised by a nurse, Mary Murphy who Kelly later said "always made sure I had enough jam butties to eat."⁴⁸ She began dancing lessons, with money earned from odd jobs, at the age of twelve to correct problems with her legs. Still, nothing could have prepared her for what happened next. She was imprisoned by the Vichy government in France with her Jewish husband Marcel Leibovici. The couple risked an escape from France, possibly because she was expecting her first child born just before they were apprehended. The Irish Ambassador was able to win her release because she was a citizen of Ireland, and her husband escaped. She hid him in a hotel room in Paris for the next few years. During that time they had to survive on the meager rations for one adult, and bribe the women who ran the hotel so she would not turn her husband over to the authorities.

Another women's war related death had a profound effect on two of the

women in this study. Jean Hay was considering quitting her "Reveille with Beverly" radio show, when she heard that the actress Carole Lombard perished in an airplane crash while selling war bonds. After the death of her favorite actress Hay indicates that "I had pretty much decided I had to stick to my microphone."⁴⁹ Her show, which was broadcast from Colorado, was later moved to California to air first nationally and later internationally. She would not even consider leaving the job to take the role in the movie version of her show because the soldiers enjoyed the broadcast. One recalled that she "had a sense of humor as strong as jail house coffee,"⁵⁰ and Captain Francis Fleet, the attache to George Patton stated "I remember when the war first started ...the guys had only a few things in common....the uniform, the lousy chow and Beverly."⁵¹

The 1939 Wimbledon tennis champion, Alice Marble, was also devastated by her friend Lombard's death and decided to take action. At the Stage Door Canteen in New York City she sang and played table tennis with soldiers. She also met and married Army Captain Joseph Crowley who was an intelligence officer. Sadly, she suffered a miscarriage when her car was hit by a drunk driver when she was on her way home from entertaining troops. A few days later she received a Christmas Eve telegram informing her that Crowley had been killed in action. The Intelligence Service asked the widow to obtain information from Hans Steinmetz, a former boyfriend. She complied, but narrowly escaped being discovered and killed. She received some satisfaction when some of the men who were listed in a ledger she had stolen were later charged with war crimes. However, her heroic days were by no means over. When Gibson's attempts to play at Forest Hills were rebuffed, it was Marble who shook the tennis world with this stinging rebuke:

I think it is time we faced a few facts. If tennis is a game for ladies and gentlemen, it's also time we acted more like gentle persons and less like sanctimonious hypocrites.⁵²

The plea for tolerance from the war widow, heroine, and tennis champ was just the break that Gibson and her backers needed. Members of the Cosmopolitan Club, a group of wealthy and influential African Americans, sponsored Gibson in the hope that she would be the one who would finally integrate the tennis world. Cosmopolitan Club members were part of the Sugar Hill elite of wealthy Harlem residents whose ideals sometimes clashed with Gibson, who sometimes resented their middle class ideals. She recalled:

The Cosmopolitan members were the highest class of people and they had set ideas about what was socially acceptable behavior. They were probably stricter than most white people of similar position. But, I wasn't exactly ready to start studying how to be a fine lady.⁵³

She accepted their admonitions when she realized she was still able to "fight like a tiger."⁵⁴ While her supporters picked

up Marble's call and wrote letters that appealed to the ladies and gentlemen of the tennis world, Althea remained focused on winning. As Rosemary Durben said: "Althea was like a horse with blinders on. She kept her eye on the ball."⁵⁵

Gibson's ability to concentrate on her goals despite the controversy raging around her paid off handsomely. She made it to Forest Hills in 1950 and continued to hone her skills. She described the success of her efforts in Francis Gray's book *Born to Win: The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson*:

After 56 nobody could beat me. I had the best serve in tennis, I had the best overhead in women's tennis, and I had the most killing volley in women's tennis.⁵⁶

The proof of this statement was found in her 1957 and 1958 victories in what is now called the United States Open. However, her crowning achievement was her historic victory at Wimbledon in 1957. She noted that "shaking hands with the Queen of England was a long way from being forced to sit in the colored section."⁵⁷ Gibson's jubilation was shared by many. The Associated Negro Press quipped that "If the negro can be Gibson hearted in his fight for his rights his triumph is only a matter of time."⁵⁸

Gibson's experience is not the only one that contradicts the traditional image of the 1950's as a placid time. Certainly some continued to prescribe a subservient role for women even in the face of atomic warfare. Elaine Tyler May describes civil defense plans in her book *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*.

A major goal of civil defense strategies was to infuse the traditional role of women with new meaning and importance, which would help fortify that home as a place of security amid the cold war. Even in the ultimate chaos of an atomic attack, appropriate gender roles would need to prevail. A 1950 civil defense plan put men in charge of such duties as fire fighting, rescue work, street clearing, and rebuilding, while women were to attend to child care, hospital work,

social work, and emergency feeding.⁵⁹ However, there were others that challenged such gender specific limitations. de Laguna researched Tlingit Native American culture in the 1950's and when tribal members asked who she was she told them "I was a teacher from "back east" who wanted to learn to teach about the Indians, so my students and others would learn to respect them."⁶⁰ She described Tlingit efforts to secure civil rights:

The most important developments of recent years have been the extension to the Alaska natives of full citizenship and the legislation abolishing certain discriminatory practices. These have been won largely through the Tlingits own efforts, especially by the Alaska Native Brotherhood and its affiliated sisterhood⁶¹

Other women in this sample also rejected the common expectation of the 1950's that women's employment only served to supplement their families income, and had no intrinsic value. Larrick earned her Ph.D. in 1955, was hired by Random House, and published her book *Reading in Action* in 1957. Julia Child tested recipes for her cookbook throughout the decade.

Child had a much too close look at the worse abuses of the 1950's anti-communism when her husband Paul was investigated for communist sympathies and homosexuality. She had taken a firm stand against unwarranted suspicion when Smith College sent a letter to its alumnae explaining that some of its teachers were being investigated for communist sympathies. Child's blistering reply to the letter is recounted in her authorized biography:

According to proper democratic methods, charges of this grave nature should first be brought to the Board of Trustees. You have assumed a responsibility for which you were not appointed. It is clear that you do not trust elected officials and that you do not have confidence in democratic procedures. ...In Russia today, as a method of getting rid of opposition,

an unsubstantiated implication of treason, such as yours, is often used. But it should never be used in the United States.⁶²

The issue hit close to home when investigators focused on Paul. After a grueling interrogation, in which he was asked to lower his pants, he was cleared of being either a communist or homosexual. Julia was questioned about her longstanding friendship with Jane Foster, who had also served in the OSS, and told them curtly "I don't think somebody that disorganized could be a spy."⁶³

Although not every woman was as directly challenged by the excesses of the decade as Child, many of them shared her resolve to prevail. In Joyce Follet's film *Step by Step: Building a Feminist Movement 1941-1977* union leader Addie Wyatt states: "When I speak to young women about the road we have traveled they have no idea."⁶⁴ As an example she explains that in one plant women were paid fourteen cents less an hour than men and "most of the women thought that was OK."⁶⁵ Women like Wyatt supported the election of John F. Kennedy in record numbers both as campaigners and as voters. But, when he failed to deliver on a campaign promise to hire a woman cabinet member, he was confronted at a news conference and admitted: "I probably haven't done enough."⁶⁶ He subsequently appointed the Commission on the status of Women that was headed by Eleanor Roosevelt and called for "equality for women at all levels."⁶⁷

This was a lofty goal that would require many years of hard work to accomplish. Women fought for inclusion in the 1964 Civil Rights Act which President Lyndon Johnson said would "eliminate the last vestiges of inequality in our beloved country."⁶⁸ However, many women found that enforcing Title VII of the act was more difficult. The Equal Opportunity Commission, focused on racial equality and would not offer assistance even with flagrant violations of the law such as sex segregated employment ads in newspapers. These and other abuses led to the formation of the National Organization for Women in 1966. NOW initially had a broader membership

than one might suspect. One quarter of the charter members were union working class women who sought reforms such as a higher minimum wage.⁶⁹

The pursuit of equality was complicated by disagreements on just what it meant. Betty Friedan's 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* discussed the dilemma of the housewife who needed a career to find personal fulfillment. Many women were inspired by Friedan's message but some took exception. Shelia Rowbotham describes some of the women who did not wholeheartedly embrace Friedan's message in her book *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and in the United States*:

There was real substance to the thwarted unhappiness that Friedan uncovered and her book was to have a formative effect on 1960's radicalism. On the other hand, Betty Friedan missed the nuances of suburban middle class life which did not fit so neatly into the case she was making; she thus crystallized an experience which was only part of the truth and did not bother with contrary material. There were plenty of women who were extremely busy and active outside the home even though they were not in paid employment, while others preferred time at home when the children were young and paid work as they grew older.⁷⁰

If women disagreed sometimes on just what feminism meant, and this sometimes led to unproductive infighting amongst them, the ability to have a dialogue on contested issues was beneficial in the long run. The only alternative would have been to replace the 1950's ideal of the homemaker with a new model of a career women that every woman was expected to abide by regardless of her inclination.

The women in this sample made inroads on several fronts in the ensuing decades. Marge Schott used inherited money to finance her battle to be the first woman allowed to own a General Motors dealership in a major metropolitan area. Patsy Mink became the first non-white women elected

to Congress in 1965. The first woman to graduate from the University of Chicago law school in 1951, she was dismayed to be turned away from the House gym, and wrote the Title IX legislation. She also detested the stereotypes about Asian Americans such as they were “inscrutable”⁷¹ and railed against the Vietnam War. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross published *On Death and Dying* in 1969 and followed this up with several other books that questioned the way the medical community dealt with death.⁷² Her books made a lasting impression on society, and almost thirty years later Jenifer Estess received a copy of *On Death and Dying* after she was diagnosed with ALS.

Estess was not interested in stoically accepting her fate. Her family life had been thrown into a tailspin when she was a teenager and her father left the family and in her words “acted like he was in the witness protection program”⁷³ and was never seen again. Their mother “went to bed for two years”⁷⁴ and she and her sisters Valerie and Meredith supported each other financially and otherwise. Meredith states in the documentary film “Three Sisters in Search of a Cure” that they knew from that experience that “work was the way to solve problems”⁷⁵ when Jennifer became ill. They founded Project ALS, an organization that the actor Richard Kind described as a “twenty million dollar company started with an Ikea and two milk crates.”⁷⁶ The unique aspect of the organization is that it encourages doctors working on the disease to network with each other. This avoids the situation where in Meredith’s words “we have a smart guy here and a smart gal there but nobody is talking to each other.”⁷⁷ Estess condition deteriorated quite markedly soon after Project ALS was founded, and she realized that a cure would not come in time for her. Her resolve to find a cure was not dampened and her sisters continued to work for the foundation after her death in December of 2003.

Estess was one of several women in the sample whose ability to “make a difference” can be traced to their having overcome serious obstacles. She lacked parental guidance at

a very young age as did Warren, Kelly and Gacioch. They needed to support themselves financially, and developed the self reliance needed to survive in trying conditions. When they later had to cope with serious difficulties they had the skills necessary to triumph. The ability to deal with adversity can be critical to success in trying circumstances.

Gibson might not have been able to integrate tennis and golf on a national level, if she had not dealt with the consequences of racism and poverty. Dr. Robert Coles studied students who were placed in southern schools during the first years of school desegregation in the late 1950’s. It was not uncommon for students who had been “handpicked” as the first student to enter a school on criteria such as being “polite and neatly dressed” to be unable to withstand the stress. On the other hand he found that some children who came from tougher backgrounds: “draw in tough times upon a sense of humor or a relaxed disposition which might not be ingratiating to others, but may be quite resilient and enduring.”⁷⁸

On the other end of the spectrum Fredericka de Laguna is an example of somebody who was able to thrive because she was insulated from cultural norms about gender. With her parents and her own career at Bryn Mawr she was nearly always in an environment where female achievement was respected. Additionally, the anthropology field was open to women before many other disciplines were. As a result de Laguna had several female colleagues, such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, when she began her work in the 1930’s. Similarly, Katharine Hepburn’s mother campaigned against prostitution and for birth control, but her father also addressed the consequences of unchecked male sexuality in his efforts to educate the public about the dangers of venereal disease. She was not exposed to a double standard of behavior and grew up to be an independent woman herself, as well as to support the emancipation of other women.

Considering the strides that women continue to make, it is inevitable that some day a woman will be elected president

of the United States. When that day comes, surely there will be many people who will look back on this woman's early life. Most likely what they will find is that she started out with a lot of advantages and received a great deal of help along

the way. However, the experience of the women in the study suggest another possibility. It is feasible that our first female chief executive will be motivated to assist others because she understands the plight of the disadvantaged only too well.

(Endnotes)

- ¹ Nancy Larrick, "The All White World of Children's Books", Larrick Private Website, <http://www.library.unt.edu/classes/slis/-private/larrick.htm>
- ² Nancy Larrick, *Crazy to be alive in such a Strange World: Poems about People* (New York:Lippincott, 1977), V.
- ³ Ibid.,
- ⁴ Gloria Anzaldua, *Boderlands/La Fontera* (San Fransisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 238.
- ⁵ Nancy Larrick, *Piping Down the Rivers Wild a Merry Mix of Poems for all Ages* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), VIII.
- ⁶ Nancy Larrick, *Crazy to be* , VI.
- ⁷ Gloria Anzaldua, *Boderlands*, 230.
- ⁸ Glenda Riley, *Inventing the American Woman: an Inclusive History* _ (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1995), 322.
- ⁹ Gloria Anzaldua, *Boderlands* , 231.
- ¹⁰ Margaret Thomas Warren, *Taking Off* (Worcestershire,England : Images Publishing, 1993), 41.
- ¹¹ William H. Chafe, *The American Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 122.
- ¹² Sheri Whitley, "How Women at Columbia Changed the World," Columbia Website, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/news/05/03/rosalindrosenberg.html>
- ¹³ Glenda Riley, *Inventing the American* , 185.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 184.
- ¹⁵ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *The Power and the Passion of M. Carey Thomas* (New York, Alfred Knopf,1994), 272.
- ¹⁶ Connecticut College, "Rosemary Park," Connecticut College Website, <http://www.conncoll.edu/people/park/>
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Bridgewater State College, "Gretchen Schuyler," Bridgewater State College Website, <http://www.bridgew.edu>
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Joseph P. Kahn, "Arts Leader Elmer Lewis Dead at 82," *Boston Globe*, January 02,2004, http://www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2004/01/02arts_leader.
- ²¹ Ibid.
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- ²³ Valerie Estess,Jenifer Estess, *Tales from the Bed: on Living,Dying and Having it all* (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 206.
- ²⁴ Kubler-Ross,Elizabeth, *Life Lessons: Two Experts on Death and Dying Teach us about the Mysteries of Death and Dying* (New York: Scribner,2000),27.
- ²⁵ Francis Gray,Yarnick Rice Lamb , *The Authorized Biography of Althea Gibson*. (New York: Wiley John & Sons Incorporated, 2004), 1.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 21.
- ²⁷ Ibid.,2.
- ²⁸ Ibid.,23.
- ²⁹ Margaret Thomas Warren, *Taking Off* , 146.
- ³⁰ Johnson,Susan., *When Women Played Hardball* (Washington: Seal Press, 1994),210.
- ³¹ Ibid.,211.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.,41.
- ³⁴ Ibid.,34.
- ³⁵ Emily Yellin, *Our Mother's War: Women at Home and on the Front during World War* (New York: Free Press,2004), 82.
- ³⁶ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 119.
- ³⁷ Ibid.,120.
- ³⁸ Margaret Thomas Warren, *Taking Off* ,178.
- ³⁹ Emily Yellin, *Mother's War*, 152.
- ⁴⁰ Emily Yellin, *Mother's War* , 49.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.,201.
- ⁴² Ibid.,212.
- ⁴³ Noel Fitch Riley, *Appetite for Life*, 9.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 84.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., 91.
- ⁴⁶ Some sources indicate that Julia Child developed a shark repellent to protect sailors during World War II. Since this is not included in Neol Fitch Riley's exhaustive

biography of Child, I have doubts as to its credibility. It is more likely that her work in the "fish squeezing unit" in which new OSS recruits tried to determine how long stranded sailors could survive on water that they sucked out of fish was simply exaggerated over the years. Riley relates a similar incident in which Julia dropped a perch and picked it up while filming her television show. Over the years stories circulated that it had been a chicken, leg of lamb or side of beef.

⁴⁷ Emily Yellin, *Mother's War*, 175.

⁴⁸ News Telegraph, "Margaret Kelly," *News Telegraph*, September 15, 2004, <http://www.news.telegraph.com.uk/news/main.jhtml?&xml=/news/2004/09/15/db1501.xml>.

⁴⁹ Emily Yellin, *Mother's War*, 76.

⁵⁰ Beyette, Beverly, "A jumpin' Jivin' Weapon...During World War II,"

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⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Francis Gray, Yarnick Rice Lamb Yarnick, *Born to Win*, 53.

⁵³ Ibid., 30-31.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34

⁵⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 97.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (United States: Harper Collins, 1993), 105.

⁶⁰ Frederica De Laguna, *The Story of the Tlingit Community: A Problem in the Relationship Between Archeological, Ethological, and Historic Methods* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office,

1960), 12.

⁶¹ Ibid., 8.

⁶² Noel Fitch Riley: *Appetite for Life*, 204.

⁶³ Ibid., 226.

⁶⁴ Joyce Follet., "Step by Step: Building A Feminist Movement 1941-1977 "

(Worthington, Ma.: Board of Regents University of Wisconsin, 1998).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shelia Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain in the United States* (London: Viking Press, 1997), 367.

⁷¹ Deborah Gillan Straub, *Asian American Voices* (Detroit: UXL, 1997), 166.

⁷² There are conflicting accounts concerning why Dr Kubler-Ross decided to become a psychiatrist One source indicates it was because she saw death first hand while working at in a death camp after WWII, and another that she was denied an internship as a pediatrician because she was pregnant.

⁷³ Valerie Estess, Jenifer Estess *Tales from the Bed*, 41.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Joseph Lovett, "Three Sisters in Search of a Cure" (New York: Home Box Office, 2004).

⁷⁶ Valerie Estess, Jenifer Estess, *Tales from the Bed*, 173.

⁷⁷ Joseph Lovett, "Three Sisters".

⁷⁸ Robert Coles, *The Desegregation of Southern Schools: a Psychiatric Study* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1963), 5.

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Appendix A

List of Women

Anzuldua, Gloria: (1942-2004)
Prize winning poet and prose author who explored issues of race, economic conditions and sexual orientation

Child, Julia: (1912-2004)
Espionage worker during World War II, cookbook author and television personality

Davenport, Joanna: (1933-2004)

Sports historian , coach and advocate for women athletes

De Laguna, Frederica: (1906-2004)

Anthropologist and educator noted for her work on Alaskan Indians, and for founding the anthropology department at Bryn Mawr

Dunn, Gerturde: (1933-2004)

All American Girls Professional Baseball League member, United States field hockey team member, teacher and business women who sold field hockey uniforms to colleges.

Estess, Jenifer: (1957-2003)

Produces and ALS victim who founder Project ALS, a charitable and advocacy organization for persons with ALS and related conditions

Gacioch, Rose M. (1915-2004)

Member of the all American Girls Professional Baseball League, and Bloomer League player

Gibson, Althea: (1927-2004)

Tennis champion and golfer who integrated both sports at the national level

Hay, Jean: (1917-2004)

World War II disc jockey and spokesperson for Direct Relief International

Hepburn, Katharine: (1907-2003)

Academy ward winning actress who was noted for her portrayal of strong women

Jeffrey, Mildred: (1911-2004)

Civil rights advocate and union organizer

Kelly, Margaret: (1910-2004)

Dancer and dance troop leader

Kubler-ross, Elizabeth; (1926-2004)

Psychiatrist and author who dealt with issues of terminal illness and death when they were not generally openly discussed

Larrick, Nancy: (1910-2004)

Children's book editor who advocated for diversity and quality in children's literature

Lewis Elma, (1922-2003)

Advocate for the education of African Americans and founder of the Elma Lewis school for the performing arts

Mink, Patsy: (1927-2002)

First Asian American congresswomen and strong proponent of civil liberties who drafted the Title IX legislation

Park, Rosemary: (1907-2004)

Educator and president of Barnard who worked for better educational opportunities for women and teacher candidates

Schott, Marge: (1928-2004)

Businesswoman who owned the Cincinnati Reds, was the first woman to run a GM dealership and donated to numerous charities

Schulyer, Gretchen : (1911-2002)

Captain of the first United States Olympic Lacrosse team and captian of the Red Cross in World War II, coach and educator

Warren Thomas Margaret: (1912-2004)

Aviator and inspector of airplane plants during World War II, co-founder of the first Samaritan organization in the United States