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EDUCATION: A SECOND CAREER

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SUMMARY

Education provides women with the freedom to choose their destiny and forge a life for themselves if desired or necessary. Many women are denied the opportunity of education while growing up and must attempt to achieve such schooling later in life. For most women the decision to pursue this education can represent a very traumatic moment in their lives. Having faced the dilemma and decided to proceed results in a very satisfying feeling when success has been achieved.

Throughout human history, the male has been recognized as the provider and the female has been relegated to the task of caring for the home and the family. Women have been conditioned, over the years, to place responsibility for the economic well being of the household in the hands of the man. Recent history has shown a trend away from male domination in the economic foray as more women prepare themselves for meaningful careers by attending colleges or obtaining vocational training, but there are still many women who are deprived of the opportunity for such career preparation. This lack of opportunity, while institutionalized by societies in the past for all but the elite, need not arise from open denial or exclusion of women. It can result, rather, from a failure of family, teachers and friends to encourage the pursuit of further education by young women. Peer pressure to participate in the social activities which are so much a part of today's secondary school system can also lead to premature termination of further education. Many of these women who have been denied access to career preparation often find themselves suddenly faced with the predicament of becoming single heads of households. As such, they are ill prepared to seek employment which will provide an income which is adequate to provide a comfortable life for themselves and their families.

It is not as bleak as it may seem. There are many positions available in industry which are open to any qualified candidate. These positions can be capably filled by either a woman or a man but generally, the more educationally prepared candidate will be chosen. This leads to exclusion from consideration of women lacking adequate education or career training. Without a college education or other career training, it is extremely difficult to find employment which provides an income which is adequate to support a family. It is even more difficult for a woman to find such employment and this burden is further complicated if there are young children involved. In order to qualify for meaningful careers, such women must obtain the necessary education or skill training and the reality of returning to school in mid-life is difficult to face. These women must continue to struggle to provide the economic support for the family while finding the time to attend classes and study. However, for those women willing to endure these tribulations to continue her education, there is a reward.

It is not impossible to obtain the education and career training necessary to qualify for these positions if the woman is willing and able to attend school. By returning to school, or continuing her

education or career training by attending college, a woman not only learns the skills necessary to qualify for more rewarding positions but also gains self confidence and self esteem. After completing her education, the woman is better prepared to enter the job market and pursue a meaningful career.

Many women faced with the sudden need to support themselves and their families after having been reliant on someone else for a number of years choose not to consider returning to the school environment because of age considerations. The predominant feeling is that it is too late in life to think of beginning a new career or to establish new goals. A hasty review of the educational and training opportunities available to women will rapidly dispel this misconception. In fact, many of the programs being offered by colleges, universities and vocational schools are specifically directed toward the older woman. These programs are available to all interested women irrespective of age. In addition, many four year universities offer fully funded scholarships for degree candidates who wish to apply.

An alarming number of the programs offered are underutilized and scholarships remain unclaimed because of lack of awareness among those women who could benefit the most. In addition, not all programs are offered in the geographical area in which the most good could be provided. This would suggest a need within the educational system for a network through which information about the various programs being offered can be disseminated. Expansion of this concept might include the offering of such programs by correspondence or alternatively, using current technology, video transmission of sessions. Such a program should embrace not only local areas but should extend state-wide and even nationwide.

In support of women who wish to establish a new career for themselves, irrespective of motivation, encouragement should be provided even for the consideration of nontraditional fields of endeavor typically dominated by men. Many women have the ability to perform and also excel in such nontraditional fields but have been historically discouraged from attempting such careers and thus have never realized their full potential. Experience has shown that women who expend the effort and strive for excellence in such nontraditional career fields receive the full support and encouragement of her coworkers. Women who honestly attempt to achieve in such an environment will find that coworkers willingly remove all obstacles in her path toward task accomplishment.

For many years after moving to the United States from Korea with my husband, I remained in the home caring for the household and rearing my children, instilling moral values, providing a role model and attempting to develop in them self confidence and character. With the death of my husband in 1981, I found myself facing the dilemma described above. I had no skills other than those learned as a youth and young adult in Korea, skills totally unmarketable at the time and place. Employment opportunities which were pursued included daycare attendant, restaurant work, bartending and janitorial service. None of these jobs offered financial security or held any promise for future advancement. After a great amount of thought and soul searching, a decision was arrived at that led me to return to school to open new career opportunities for my life.

A friend encouraged me to enroll in a Machine Technology Program offered at San Jose City College. Being one of those career fields traditionally dominated by men, the move was taken with more than a small amount of trepidation. Having completed a short basic course in Machine Tool

Technology, I realized that I had identified a challenging and rewarding new career field. Armed with a Certificate of Program Completion from San Jose City College, I set my goal on becoming a Machine Tool Technologist and, possibly, even a Computer Numerical Control Programmer. At this time, I learned of the De Anza/Foothill College-NASA Ames Coop Internship Program and enrolled as a participant.

Having enrolled in the program, I found that I was receiving a tremendous amount of support and encouragement from the program coordinator, practicing apprentices and journeyman machinists. These people, through their encouragement, made me feel comfortable with my objectives and instilled self confidence in my ability to achieve my goals. I was continually assured that my objectives were not unreasonable and were well within my capability. I have now completed the Internship Program and am currently striving to qualify for a State Journeyman Machinist's Certificate.

The De Anza/Foothill College-NASA Ames Co-op Internship Program represents a large portion of the formal education that I have received in my lifetime. My eventual goal is to obtain an Associate Degree from De Anza College that will qualify me to pursue a career in the field of Machine Tool Technology. Having returned to school after seeing all of my children graduate first has demonstrated to me that the time is never too late to establish new personal goals for oneself.

I am extremely grateful that the American educational system has provided me this opportunity to learn new skills and expand my knowledge. I earnestly hope that the various educational programs available will be of benefit to others in the future in the same manner in which this one has provided me with an opportunity to embark on a new and rewarding career.

BIOGRAPHY

Kong Cha Authement:

I was born in Inchon City, Korea, in 1941. With the outbreak of the Korean conflict in the 1950s, my family was forced to evacuate our homestead and flee in many directions. With the arrival of the United States military, I was able to find secure employment as an attendant at the various facilities established by the government to supply the service men and women with goods and services. In this environment, I was able to learn the rudiments of the food preparation and serving business as well as bar and club operation management. I was married to a noncommissioned officer doing a tour of duty in Korea and subsequently returned with him to the United States at the conclusion of his assignment.

I was a contented homemaker until 1981 when my husband passed away. Faced with the grim reality of financially caring for my family of growing children after so many years with limited skills, I sought employment in fields similar to those in which I had previously worked. I found employment alternately as a child daycare attendant, restaurant waitress and manager, and bartender but found no reward in such work. I then sought formal training in the field of Machine Tool Technology and am now employed as an Apprentice Machinist while pursuing an Associate of Arts degree at De Anza College.