

# Kindness is a password in

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## Viewpoint

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Margaret Zoeller, both a former FWIO president and editor of the *Home & Country*, was the guest speaker at the evening banquet of the London Area Convention in October. The audience listened intently to Margaret's speech and several suggested that all *Home & Country* readers would find some valuable messages in her comments. Here is Margaret's speech on "The Therapy of Kindness":

Every year or two we seem to have a year designated for a definite purpose. Two years ago, all the Branches in the Province participated in the International Year of the Disabled. This year I note your Area is honouring The Senior Citizen.

Your theme could easily apply to both of those events. We know the WI took a real interest in the IYDP and because of your interest we probably could say it was good therapy for us. As a result of the various projects we became interested in, it broadened our knowledge of life as lived by a disabled person.

Women's Institute was founded because of a need — the need to tell the women of Wentworth County about the dangers of contaminated milk and doubtless, kindness, was a very real part of the meeting as the story unfolded about the death of a child.

Sympathy, understanding, the act of being kind, would indeed take precedence at that early meeting.

Kindness has been a password over the years with the WI. We are known as a caring, sharing group of women.

There is no way you can be as concerned as our organization is for the good of humanity without projecting kindness.

Over the years the WI have done things in the community for the people in the community, as well as for its members and family — things that no other groups would do.

Our WI has built its reputation as community builders, and one of its attributes has been caring and kindness.

You commenced your meeting this morning with The Mary Stewart Collection — ending with "Let Us Not Forget to be Kind."

We've often heard it said "it's good therapy for a wife and mother to get out of the home and attend meetings."

Attending meetings has taught us to mix, mingle, speak up, suggest, promote, and to learn from the experiences of others.

For the next few minutes, I'm going to turn the tables and ask if it would be a kindness if each WI member turned their thoughts and focused on the WI organization that has given so much pleasure and conveyed so much meaning into our lives.

Would it be a kindness if we concentrated on ourselves as WI members?

Would it be a kindness if we asked ourselves —

- 1) What am I getting out of the Branch meetings?
- 2) What am I contributing to the Branch meetings?
- 3) What do I expect from the meeting?

If we can answer these questions, clarify our reasoning, and come up with some answers, we will have come a long way toward decision-making and direction-taking.

Before we give this further thought, we readily acknowledge the contributions made to life in rural Ontario by the pioneers and founding members in each Branch.

However, it was never meant to be that we continue to walk in their footsteps forever. Those footsteps would sink down too deep over the years and make it impossible to step forward. No, we must make our own paths, at our own pace, in the direction we wish to take.

We must let go of the past, acknowledging the contributions of the pioneers, having gained from their experience and appreciating past contributions. But we have an organizational life to live in 1983

and we must realize it can never remain the same.

Back to an earlier question:

**What am I getting out of the meetings?**

An afternoon out? Fellowship? Good conversation during the tea hour? Learning from the roll call? Was it worth the 10 minutes spent? Or was it a bore, and secretly you wondered why that roll call was chosen for that particular meeting? How did the business part of the meeting go? Had the President and Secretary done their homework? Did it go smoothly or drag? How was the program? If you had a speaker, did it have anything to do with the topic on the printed program? Was the program so rushed — because the business took so long? Did you pass the penny-jar — at an appropriate time — or was it forgotten and during the tea hour suddenly someone remembered? Were members leaving during the tea hour because the meeting ran so late?

Let us ask:

**What am I contributing to the meeting?**

Did you answer the roll call — or did you forget all about it, until the Secretary called your name? If the business part seemed to drag — did you do anything to speed it up? OR did you just sit there like the rest and make no effort to assist the President and the Secretary. If the Penny-jar was forgotten, did you speak up and remind those in charge, or were you one that said, "I knew it was forgotten, but I didn't want to interfere." Were you the one whose main contribution seemed to be telling all present how busy you are — until the members wondered why you bothered to come at all?

**What do I expect from the meetings?**

I expect the meeting to start on time. I expect the printed program to reflect the theme throughout the meeting. I expect the members to speak up during the business and discussion, not in the car on the way