
Into the next 90 years

The following speech was given by Geraldine Campbell at the Elgin West District Annual in May 1987. Mrs. Campbell is the president of Elgin West and Public Relations Officer for London Area. The theme of the district annual meeting was The Next 90 Years.

The past and the future of the Women's Institute is a bit like these two dolls. One is 85 years-old and still dressed in its original clothes, was loved and cared for and was the latest and most fashionable in its time. The other is my daughter's Barbie Doll, dressed in its exercise outfit. It is also loved and cared for. Both dolls serve the same purpose for their generation yet the outward appearance is oh so different. The Women's Institute is like that. When it was founded 90 years ago it was founded as an organization to educate the rural women and promote change in the rural community. That remains the same today and will remain the same in the future. The big push 90 years ago was pasteurization of milk — something we take for granted now.

Guest Editorial

Geraldine Campbell



For the Women's Institute to survive the next 90 years, we must look at our roots. WI members should not adopt the thinking that because something was done 10, 20 or 30 years ago that it is standard Women's Institute policy now. To quote the Past President of Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (FWIO) Charlotte Johnson, "No constitution is carved in stone." FWIO looks at its constitution at least every three years. Sometimes the changes made are minor and sometimes major, as we are experiencing at the moment. Not only must we look at structure and methods at the top but we must also look at each level. This year we hope to have a major by-law change in Elgin West. In the term of each district president, the by-laws should be looked at, as well as all the activities of the district. Is the timing of our meetings and events meeting the needs of the branches and members? Are the district

functions actually fulfilling the purpose of a district? Some branches are not taking part in the district activities at the moment. Why not?

Women's Institute has tremendous talents within its own membership, however we often ignore them. I was in a local craft store the other day. It has high quality merchandise, a wide range of workshops, and welcomes organizations who want to hold their meetings there. They have one problem. They have support from across Ontario, except for the immediate, local area. This applies to WI in Elgin West. We have people within our own branches who can and will speak on a wide range of subjects. We have people who have successfully organized provincial, national and international conferences. Their talents are recognized outside Elgin West, but are sometimes ignored within the district. In the next 90 years we must recognize the talents of our own members.

The next 90 years will be one of challenge, change, hope and continual work for the ideals established 90 years ago. We all know that Women's Institute has been built on a strong foundation and we will continue to work for Home and Country.

Some thoughts on life memberships

I have missed sending a message in several of the last issues of **Home & Country** so it is time to greet you all again.

I have had the pleasure of attending two of the nearby district annuals and speaking at one. What splendid occasions they are for socializing, for sharing the activities of the past year and for perhaps getting new ideas for the next!

There have been several anniversaries in the local branches too, and a special feature of most have been the granting of life memberships. I have some thoughts about life memberships that I would like to share with you. Why do we give these? Isn't it because we particularly want to recognize the contribution of a member to her branch. Then, we are to assume that

Bernice Noblitt



she, having been over many years an active member, will continue to be very interested in WI. However, in many instances that member is elderly and not able to go to the meetings herself. In appreciation for all she has done then, do the other members of the branch make an earnest effort to take her to the meetings? If she is not ambulatory, do we send her WI material from the branch meeting with a short, interesting account of what happened at the meeting? Or do

we phone, tell her we missed her and keep her up-to-date with the WI news? These are only a few ways in which we can show her we **really** appreciated her contribution to the branch while she was able to do so.

Another thought in this regard — do give life memberships as soon as a member qualifies. One of the saddest remarks I heard from an elderly lady who had come from a nursing home to be given her life membership was, "This is lovely, but why didn't they give it to me years ago when I could have had time to enjoy it."

I hope to see many of you at the 90th Anniversary Convention in July.

Bernice Noblitt
FWIC Past President