

Women '75: growing and sharing

This is International Women's Year.

In the first of a series of articles discussing the life styles of women in the community, Anne Fowler, The Liberal's Maple correspondent, interviews Barbara Phillips and Eleanor Stoddart.

Barbara and Eleanor are experienced and capable group leaders who have started an exciting program called "Individual Growth and Awareness of Self."

This series of programs is available to conventions, schools or any interested group.

As many of us are aware, today's woman is thirsty for knowledge, eager to discuss the sometimes overpowering problems encountered in family life and in the search for her own identity.

Anne: Before we talk about your actual program content, perhaps you can each give me a little background information on yourselves?

Barbara: I was raised in Toronto where before marriage I was an insurance company secretary. My husband Bill and I have four boys ages 9 to 23 and have lived in Maple for 17 years.

Eleanor: Toronto is also my "home". I taught in the North York school system as a principal's assistant teaching Grade 8. We have two children: a son 12 and a daughter 15.

Anne: What encouraged you to start this type of work?

Return to school

Eleanor: Barbara and I both went through the conventional schooling of our time — planned short-term careers because we knew we would get married and live happily ever after (and we did). The next 15 years were spent in raising our children.

Although involved in volunteer work, we were basically where we wanted to be: in the home.

But about five years ago, I realized that the children required less of my time. Being a creature of habit, I felt the need to work with people but I neither Barbara nor I wanted to return to our former professions.

So we turned to the field of social work.

There, we found that if we wanted to do more than volunteer work, our training needed updating. We returned to school which is where Barbara and I met. Enrolled in a two-year Marriage and Family Life education course at Seneca College — we were two women trying to fit into the "jeans and T-shirt set".

A little rusty

And we were attempting to finish essays while the family kept asking, "Isn't dinner ready yet?" It wasn't easy, keeping up with reading assignments and the laundry at the same time. And finding out that Dr. Spock had been replaced by Dr. Ellis.

"Do your own thing" had taken the place of the behavior mode of our school days. But we survived!

We had a real sense of accomplishment. Our abilities had not vanished as we had previously suspected, they had merely become a little rusty from atrophy of disuse. We saw that we could and did learn from a generation younger than ourselves and that they in turn wanted to learn from us.

Barbara: Prior to enrolling at Seneca, I was doing volunteer work one afternoon a week in the office at the Family Life Centre in Richmond Hill.

Eleanor: My volunteer work consisted of work

with York County Hospital and Brampton General. Also, I was involved with the Children's Aid Society helping to establish a volunteer program to assist social workers.

Put ideas to work

Anne: During your courses at Seneca, were you putting any of the ideas that you were learning into practice within the community?

Barbara: Yes, we found that we were truly enjoying it and we both worked on a volunteer basis at the Family Life Centre in Richmond Hill, in the Education Department.

Pass test

Eleanor: Let me backtrack for a moment. Before entering the Family Life Program as a counselor, we had to pass a selection review board composed of psychologists, and various board members. I became part of the Intern Training program which is sponsored by the Centre and was initiated by Dr. Frank Fidler. This is a "lay" counseling course (Marriage and Family Life), which lasts three years. The first year was spent at Georgina, the second at Richmond Hill and this year I am at Markham. Barbara was chosen to work in education and leadership.

Barbara: In this field, our work has been evolving and carrying out educational programs for the community as well as for specific groups such as schools, young couples and women's groups — varying in size from 10 to a hundred. The work is also largely a preventative type, so people can become aware of "problems" before a crisis situation develops.

Continue studies

Anne: This must have been very time-consuming. I should think



(Photo by Hogg)

A new kind of openness

Counselors Eleanor Stoddart, left, and Barbara Phillips find that women are eager to discuss new roles, new challenges and the problems they are encountering in their search for self-fulfillment.

that your own need for a continuing education must be great as well as vital to the program?

Barbara: Definitely. We are presently enrolled at York University continuing our studies.

Anne: What exactly does your program, which has been running for two years now, consist of?

Eleanor: I think to give an accurate answer, we'd have to break the question down. We work with different types of groups. For example: a women's or couple's group may be interested in various types of topics ranging from parenting to some of the problems we face today raising children.

In the schools, films and discussions on "values" and child development are often

presented (yes, the boys are interested too).

A popular program for a women's group is one involving talking about things that are important to "us", awareness of what is happening and how to cope.

The film "Sylvia, Fran and Joy" shows how three women feel about the domestic role of housekeeper, wife and mother. Three different women, three different life styles.

Film workshops

Barbara: Eleanor and I both work a great deal with films. We find that films are able to carry their subjects through the screen to meet the viewer in a very personal way.

In the past, films have focused mainly on human tragedies, whereas today, filmmakers seem to have moved towards reflecting human strengths, human innovation.

Films are one way to get people communicating. Films by themselves are incomplete. We intend them to be completed by the viewers in discussion with each other.

But if the only input is a film — and you come — you see — you go away — then we have not been successful with our workshop.

The people in these films are not concerned with having us evaluate their lives. They contribute by helping us to look at our own. In a workshop, you can expand your perceptions of yourself and other people.

You become more open to the people around you and to what the film is saying. If we are wise, we not only learn about other people, we learn from them. Part of what we're all about in these groups is to try to open ourselves to understand how other people feel.

Anne: What stimulated you to actually put this program "on the market"?

Eleanor: We were becoming so busy as volunteers and the time involved in course preparation; continuing our own education, it was preventing us from doing justice to the sessions we were leading. Both of us feel very indebted to Dr. Fidler for giving us the opportunity to develop our skills in this field.

Discuss

communication

Anne: I know that last August you were involved in a large convention at the Royal York Hotel: the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. I believe that you undertook a full day's program on "Communications" for the wives of the attending reeves and mayors. What did you do and how successful were you?

Barbara: The content was: How do we communicate? — How do we not communicate? — good and bad types of communication.

There were approximately 125 women present, seated at tables of eight. We spent a great deal of time on introductions. You cannot expect people to share their thoughts and feeling with others that they don't know. So we use specific exercises to bring about a closeness and a comfortable atmosphere.

A film entitled "Tell Me Where It Hurts?" was shown in two parts; the day being divided into two 2½ hour sessions with a lunch break. The movie is about "real" people and what women's lib is really all about — not bra-burning and man-hating, but women discovering a need for self-fulfillment as individuals.

We gave each table a list of prepared questions, only as a guideline, which they could discuss and answer among themselves. After the small groups' discussions, we asked if there were any who would like to share their findings with the group as a whole.

After lunch, we showed by role playing and discussion four types of communication: blaming, avoiding, conniving and placating.

The audience participated in these quite freely.

We finished up by looking at some good forms of communication: where you listen and really hear what the other person has to say; saying what you have to say directly and openly; expressing your feelings; being heard and the acknowledgement of this and checking out both the statement and the feeling.

Audience

participates

We again used audience participation in role playing and discussion of these forms. Then we continued the last half of the film. We asked the audience to be aware of both the good and negative forms of communication in the film — as we had previously discussed.

Anne: What kind of success rating would you give that particular day?

Barbara: I felt from the sincerity of the women, that the program was well received. They seemed to feel that the time had come for conventions to give more thought to incorporating a women's program of this type into the agenda. These women made it clear that they were tired of the usual "Bill of fare" offered to women at conventions.

Eleanor: I personally gained a tremendous amount of good feelings and knowledge. I felt it was a really positive learning experience.

Anne: What do you feel each of you are deriving personally from these groups?

Yelled at and valued

Eleanor: Marriage counseling and education was a great experience although none of my "psych" courses had prepared me for the impact of human suffering I have seen as a counselor. I've been cried on, yelled at, threatened, pleaded with and ignored — and felt warm, helpful, valued and really good about myself — which is, I guess, what it's all about.

Barbara: The greatest lesson I have learned from being involved in this program is that we have so much to learn from each other. I tend now to reach toward other women in other situations with a different kind of openness than I had been able to manage before.

Anne: What are you both hoping to accomplish in the future?

Barbara: We hope to bring more women's programs to conventions, more work in the schools on family education, and of course, to continue our work with women's groups in the community.

Anne: As a matter of interest, how would a group of women get a program started?

Barbara: Well, here in Maple for example, we could hold a 10-week discussion series for anywhere from 15 to 30 interested women. It would likely be held in a central spot such as the library.

Anne: What would the cost be?

Barbara: The cost per person would be \$2.00 a week for 10 weeks. The time would be flexible as to morning, afternoon or evening. If anyone is interested they could contact me or you.

I really feel it is a big need not only in Maple but in other communities — for women of all ages who can bring their varying experiences and maturity to a group discussion.

Plant bulbs now for colorful spring

In Ontario, fall is the season when garden enthusiasts plant bulbs to ensure a colorful spring garden.

"Many retail outlets carry a wide variety of spring-flowering bulbs," says Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food

horticulturist, J.K. Hughes.

"Tulips, daffodils, crocus and narcissus are perhaps the most common types, and they come in many colors and shades."

The horticulturist recommends that bulbs

be planted as soon as possible. This gives them time to establish a root system before freeze-up.

If you are late in planting your bulbs, cover the soil with a layer of straw or grass clippings to prevent excessive frost damage.

"It's a good idea," says Mr. Hughes, "to allow at least a month after the blooms fade before cutting off about one-half of the leaves. This is because they are needed to replenish energy in the bulbs."



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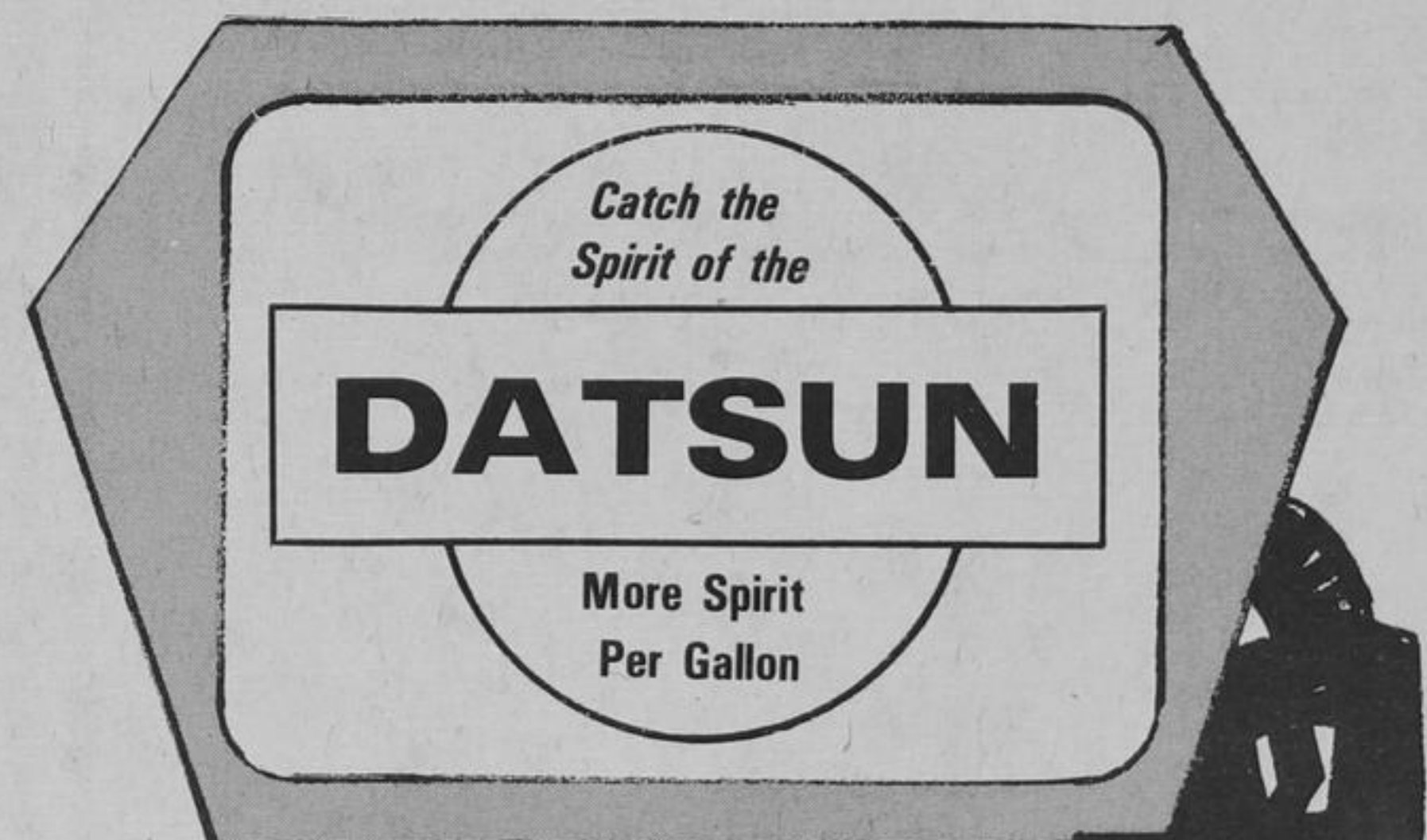
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