

Columns/Letters

Today's women need a new deal from men



**NORTHERN
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



Debra Dubeau is a 37-year-old married Thunder Bay woman with three children. She's a feminist who has chosen to be a stay-at-home mom. At a conference in Thunder Bay on child care in June, I heard Debra read an eloquent essay she'd written on the conflicting pressures facing a North American woman who chooses to stay at home with her children.

Irina Darbanova is a 30-year-old Siberian woman, divorced, with no children. She works at a technical institute in Ullan-Ude, a city at the south end of Lake Baikal, monitoring pollution levels in the Lake. Irina made her first trip to North America this summer, as the only woman on the Russian team participating in the Superior - Baikal kayak expedition around Lake Superior. I met her in Rossport at the end of July and had a brief chance to interview her, through an interpreter.

Both women face the quandries of making choices in changing societies. Both seek the right to make real choices, not limiting options forced on them by societal pressures. But as realists, they also both face pragmatic choices while surviving in tough times. Neither woman has met the other, but as a white male trying to figure out life in the 1990's, they have both given me a lot to think about.

Part of Siberian elite

From Irina's perspective, Debra's problems and difficult choices seem trivial. As a divorced working woman, Irina is, in the Siberian context, part of the elite. She works at what for Siberia is a highly-paid job in a technical institute, making enough to support herself, living alone. She and her co-workers have received 20 per cent pay increases in the last 12 months, but that does not compensate them adequately for inflation for some commodities (like food) in excess of 200 per cent.

She says she has decided not to have children, and that "fewer children are being born" because Siberian women realize they can't afford necessities for children "like food and shoes." She says women in Russia have long experienced workplace equality because of the policies of the former Soviet government, but "women still do most of the work in the home."

Debra shares that perspective on men. "Husbands may be showing attitudinal changes," she says, "but there is no sign of behavioral change." In her presentation, she quoted Rosemary Cousins, an employment assistance counsellor in Toronto, who "is counselling more mothers of young children tortured by trying to do the best at both a job and parenting. Yet, she sees very few men. Some women in the workforce are having second thoughts about working, since their unpaid work at home still awaits them."

Debra pointed out to the child care conference that "there is a hidden war between women who remain at home and women who are employed in the workforce. It seems to be mothers against mothers. This conflict comes from frustration, insecurity, jealousy and guilt.

Frustration, insecurity and guilt

"In a recent gathering of 30 mothers who are members of the support group, FEMALE, which means 'Formerly Employed Mothers At Loose Ends', common ground was found. Most of the at-home moms said that they would work if they could find decent professional part-time jobs, flexible schedules and acceptable day care.

All the working moms said they would be home at least part time if they could afford it, but both groups agreed that they just definitely needed more options."

Irina lives in a society where such problems are remote. "Women have to work," she said, "because one income is not enough for a family to live on." She says Russian women have equal access to all jobs, including those involving heavy physical labour, but she wishes "they didn't have to work at jobs like that. They shouldn't have to, to live."

Making ends meet in a society where, regardless of income, you line up for hours trying to buy a loaf of bread that might not be there when you get into the store, forces you to make difficult daily choices based more on pragmatism than philosophy. She was clearly envious of the North American women she met on her tour around Lake Superior, because "they have so much to make their lives **continued on page 12**

Letters to the editor

When will people learn?

Thursday night of last week, two young men checked into our motel (The Coach House) after a 1,200 km trip from Toronto. We chatted, and they told us that they would be attending a wedding the next day in Thunder Bay, and that they would be heading right back to Toronto afterwards. They loved our scenic setting and enjoyed a piece of fresh lemon pie, and the next morning (Friday) they came down for coffee and they discussed making a reservation for that night. Since it would be very late, I said I would put the key of the same unit they had stayed in (number 5) into the flower box in front of their room. It was as simple as that.

On Saturday morning around 8 am I noticed the key was still there among the flowers, so I assumed they had stayed overnight in Thunder Bay and that the wedding had kept them there.

On Monday evening I read the Thunder Bay paper and the caption "Toronto man killed after attending local wedding" immediately caught my eye. I knew it had to be the good-looking blond young man that stayed in our motel. When I checked the registration card, my heart skipped a beat. There it was, "Peter Curtis, 11 O'Connor Drive, East York, Ont."

They attempted to drive another 1,500 km through the night without rest. The police wondered why the driver crossed the centre line and hit a transport truck almost head on near Thessalon at 7:24 am. I can tell them *why*. Peter Curtis, the driver, was killed instantly and his passenger was seriously injured.

Perhaps the reason for their speedy return was to spare the expense of another day of their rental car and another night in a motel room.

Death has a different face when you know the people involved, especially when they are so young; I found that out on Monday.

It will be a long, long time before I forget these two men—perhaps I never will. When will people learn?

Charlotte Kneipp,
Jackfish

Should we have to guard the clothesline?

Living in a small community used to mean that you could leave your car unlocked, as well as your house and even leave your clothes on the line without worries of someone helping themselves.

Time they are a changing.

Recently two beautiful scarves that had sentimental value as well were stolen from the washline! I was amazed to find out that we are not the only ones who have lost articles from the clothesline.

What is this world coming to when you have to sit outside guarding the clothes on washday so they don't walk away?

Alice Scott,
Schreiber

Make your voice heard

The Terrace Bay Schreiber News welcomes letters to the editor on any subject.

Letters must be signed and have the phone number and address of the author for verification. We will not knowingly print false libelous or anonymous comments. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Letters to the Editor are important to community newspapers. They serve to reflect opinions of members of the community we serve. However, we must insist on these rules to ensure that this very important forum is used responsibly.

Letters can be mailed to the News, Box 579, Terrace Bay, P0T 2W0, or dropped off at the News office, Hwy 17, at the Mill Road in Terrace Bay.