



## MENNONITE WOMEN USA

### Celebrating 100 Years

## What I'd Like to Share with Younger Women

by Berni Kaufman

What I'd like to share with younger women... My two nieces, Maria and Rashell, were the muse for this piece.

We stand on the shoulders of some strong women. We have been nurtured by women who weren't allowed much else than to be a wife and mother. Little more socialization than home, church and family. Yet in these confined restraints, they made a way. Forming groups of women who gathered to fellowship, work on mission projects, to pray and worship, to affirm one another. They declared themselves important in a patriarchal society that worked to silence them. They embraced their belovedness in God and could not be held back.

I remember the Midwives of Miracles. My mother who gave me birth and taught me so much. The mother and grandmother types who didn't attempt to define miracles but who assisted in the birthing of miracles and invited me to celebrate - in the home, in the Sunday School classroom, in the camp cabin, in the youth group, around the table. Who have been the midwives that celebrate the miracles that have become your life?

There were women and peers who became Patrons of Potential for me. These women accepted my quirkiness, my out-in-left field ideas. They politely smiled at my childlike creative attempts. In my adult life, these Patrons of Potential have nudged me to nurture the creativity, have even awakened potential in me that I was scared to acknowledge. They have proclaimed my potential and affirmed as I have shared it with the world. Who are the patrons who have nudged you to your potential? Who will proclaim your potential? For as long as we live, we have potential.

We live in a world of achievement. Where bigger is best. Where more is acclaimed. Where wealth is glorified. And that kind of achievement requires winners and losers - a battle for the fittest. I recall those Angels of Achievement who taught me to strive towards the best for the most. And sometimes that meant things didn't go my way. I gave up / even lost so that more could be blessed / could win. These angels urged me to step up when fear would have me run the other direction. To step back when determination would have me insist on my way. In my achievements, the angels speak

wisdom to my soul. "Hold humility and pride in balance." Who are the wise angels who guided you in your achievements?

We all enjoy music. Music comes in many forms, and we probably all have our favorite genre. Music evokes a variety of emotions. As Mennonites, many enjoy four-part harmony. In fact, we're known for harmonizing and even singing acapella. It's been said that the way Mennonite pray is through music. Praying for one another is one of the greatest forms of compassion.

I think of the Choristers of compassion who have impacted my life. Women who have gathered with me in the hum of silence. In the absence of words, you feel the power of presence. The power of a shoulder to lean on; arms to embrace; a hand to wipe tears. Or those choristers who joined me in an Hallelujah when a breakthrough is experienced. An hallelujah at a reunion of friends who have not seen one another for far too long. An hallelujah at an accomplishment hard fought and resulting in success. How have you joined in the choir? Who were the women who have sung with you in the ballad of life?

Many of the women to whom I refer are Mennonite women, as well as women of other faiths. As many as 100 years ago, women gathered in the name of Christ to birth miracles, to encourage potential, to applaud achievement and to gather to be with one another. In those gatherings, they recognized needs and responded. As women of faithfulness, they supported, learned and passed it on. Our lives are finite but God's need for faithful followers continues. In this world of uncertainty, brokenness and competition, the faithful must respond. Just as our foremothers responded years ago, we respond today. It will look different but will be authentic, just the same.

My dear, young friends, learn from the strong women who have shaped your life - whether it be stories you've heard of your foremothers or the women with whom you share this life. Learn from these midwives and patrons. Support one another when you gather as angels and choristers. And pass it on. Mennonite Women is 100 years old. Hmmm. A new chapter is beginning. Hallelujah.