

## Chapter 1

# Prologue

Since the first time I picked up a hammer, as the volunteer coordinator at the Vallican Whole Community Centre, I have loved construction work. And since the architect Al Luthmers gently and caringly taught five women on that site how to safely use a circular saw, I have collected and used a myriad of hand and power tools. Prior to that I repaired and reconstructed twelve years of Volkswagens, which I did more out of need than love. Along the way, I met other women who also love to use tools. As we told the stories of our lives to one another, the palpable quality of resistance, of walls and inordinate challenges emerged. When I joined the Carpenter's Union in 1980, after a year of struggling to be allowed to do so, I was shocked to realize that I was being welcomed as the first woman in the "United Brotherhood" in British Columbia. When I got my Interprovincial Qualification and Certificate of Apprenticeship in 1981, and was hailed as the first journeywoman in B.C.,<sup>1</sup> I was very surprised; many women had started training before I did. As a feminist, I was concerned about what had happened to them. It had required great tenacity to overcome the pain, resistance, and harassment I had experienced to achieve completion of my apprenticeship: the daily harassment of pornographic drawings on the blackboard with my name on them, at NLC pre-apprentice training in Dawson Creek; the crotch-shot posters of women on the back wall of the fourth-year classroom at BCIT; the twisted framing square with the C word in large print on my desk just before I went to take the Interprovincial Exam. What had it been like for the others, the ones who should have finished before me?

The stories told at the meetings of Vancouver Women in Trades, and the first national Women in Trades Conference in Winnipeg in 1980 began to answer my questions. Back then these were mostly stories of 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-year apprentices, and they could easily make you cry. Yet many of these women persevered because they loved their work, because they would not allow the system to grind them down. Briefs were presented to British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) and Pacific Vocational Institute (PVI) calling for non-sexist seminars for vocational and technical instructors, as well as other changes at vocational colleges.

Little was done by those with responsibility to undertake that work. In 1983, I asked the B.C. government's Women's Program when something was going to be done. They suggested that I had the right skills to put a project together and make it happen. So, in the spirit of "performing a head taller" (Newman & Holzman, 1993), I took their advice and gathered funding from

the B.C. Provincial Council of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, the Carpentry Apprenticeship Joint Board (employers and union reps), the B.C. Human Rights Commission, and federally from the Secretary of State Women's Program and Employment and Immigration Canada.

During the research phase of the seminar development, I travelled across Canada and to New York to interview those who by virtue of their other activities i.e., Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) courses, Affirmative Action consultants etc, might have developed a seminar we could just use. In Ontario, WITT instructors and the Ontario Women's Directorate said how much such a training session was needed, but had not yet been developed. In New York, one of the leading Affirmative Action consultants showed me his company's training materials, which had far more to do with how to avoid breaking the law than any kind of pro-active social change.

So I developed and conducted research that formed the basis of a seminar for a primarily male audience. I interviewed forty tradesmen, vocational instructors, employers, and Joint Board coordinators from the building trade unions about what they saw as the barriers to women in their trade.

The trades instructors were by far the most vehement about women not being able to do their specific trade, "maybe they can be a carpenter, but never an electrician," "maybe a welder, but never a mason." It was a very disheartening experience, but I kept my spirit up while discussing and challenging the most outrageous of their stereotypes, in what I hoped was a somewhat formative interview. If I and the other tradeswomen I knew could do it, why not anyone else?

I flew home to the Kootenays and cried for three hours on the shoulder of the woman who was my apprentice, at the resistance expressed by those men, all so sure that a woman could not possibly do their trade. Even if women had been successful in a similar trade, the men expounded upon some tiny portion of their trade they were sure was so difficult that "a woman could never handle it." The barrage of their voices almost silenced me. I almost quit the seminar development project after those interviews; the barriers were so deeply ingrained inside those men who were the gatekeepers.

But I had met a Mohawk woman ironworker from Ontario, and knew that many women were masons in Jamaica. I had met successful female electricians, and knew a woman avionics mechanic who worked on 747s. By then there were thirty-three women in the Carpenter's Union in British Columbia. My apprentice, Sally Mackenzie, reminded me of these things, and offered to help to develop the seminar; the task became less daunting, and "The Workplace in Transition: Integrating Women Effectively" seminar was born.

There were mini-lectures describing the facts and figures of Women in

the Labour Force, small group processes exploring myths and realities about women workers; a discussion of barriers and attractions for women going into trades described through the A/V production for the seminar, "What Happens to Women in Tradesland." The afternoon was spent exploring the roles of the participants in overcoming the barriers, and small group work focused in practical problem solving using real situations. We were ably assisted by Valerie Ward, the regional women's employment consultant for Employment and Immigration Canada, a truly gifted trainer (Braundy, Mackenzie, & Ward, 1983b).

The baseline was a somewhat naïve belief that the resistance was unconscious and unintentional. The men said that their doors were open, that they would welcome women, but their attitudes and behaviour created a different reality. Looking at all the men's responses, and the women's experiences, we created what we hoped would be transformative activities and exercises based on adult and cooperative learning techniques, and sensitivity-training practices.

The seminar's purpose was to assist people who did not know how to act in new and unfamiliar situations to enact appropriate and legally required behavioural change, and support the integration of women into trades and technology training and employment. The idea was that as the men experienced the feedback the new behaviours would invoke their attitudes might begin to shift. In the meantime, at least the women and men in their jurisdictions would be able to experience and react to the improved behaviours. In other words, "think what you like, but behave appropriately!" It was the first seminar of its kind in North America in 1983. Most training at the time was developed to help employers keep from contravening the Affirmative Action laws in the U.S., and was not particularly proactive.

After successfully piloting the seminar with the Provincial Council of Carpenters, the Joint Board Coordinators of most of the Building Trades Unions and Selkirk College vocational instructors, we took it on the road. During the 1980s and early 1990s, we delivered more than forty full-day sessions with technical instructors at most colleges in B.C., the Department of National Defence trainers and unions, Ontario Hydro staff trainers, apprenticeship and employment counsellors, various employers' groups, union stewards' and nine sessions delivered to instructional staff at BCIT.

There was always resistance. The majority of men, no matter how they were selected or whether they volunteered to attend, came in and sat with their arms folded across their chests, protecting themselves and pushing out their chests as if saying, "Teach me something I don't already know!"

I created a "train the trainers" session, which I delivered three times across Canada, teaching thirty-seven women about the seminar, the issues in delivering it and some "how to" for particular components. Of those thirty-

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seven women (educators, advocates, tradeswomen, and industry representatives), I would have entrusted only seven to deliver it effectively. There is an extremely fine line between educating and lecturing, between challenging rigid thought patterns and attacking an individual. The seminar dealt with some pretty difficult material and belief systems. With all that resistance, if an individual female facilitator had not worked through her own issues and resolved her own anger towards men, or the male power structure, there was always the potential for sparks to fly off the flint edge of those feelings.

Only once, towards the end of the series of deliveries, and at the request of BCIT, was a man involved as a co-facilitator. Bill Darnell, the Joint Board Coordinator for the Carpenters, was one of the few men at the time with the appropriate background (in the trades) trusted to share the role of facilitator and not allow the participants to get away with relating only to him. Modelling the kind of respect and communications expected from the group was of primary importance, and it would not have been useful to enact a competitive example. Bill did a great job of co-facilitating, and if he hadn't gone off to another life, we might have continued the partnership, as it was clear that having a skilled man and a skilled woman in those roles was useful.

I had done years of Gestalt and personal growth work, working through some of those difficult experiences in my own life. I was frank with the trainees about the need to be clear, and not loaded, ready not to be triggered by the first ignorant remark. Our job was to take people through the activities, help to clarify the issues, respond with information and encourage new ideas, not to get into fights with participants. We learned during the first pilot the importance of having tradeswomen and female technologists present to speak to their own real experience in training and on the job so that the facilitators could spend their energy facilitating communication, and not have to constantly represent all women. I developed and produced my first performative intervention, the slide/tape show, "What Happens to Women in Tradesland?" (Braundy, 1983a, based on a speech delivered by Kate Braid), so that another voice, another script, and almost-life-sized photos of women workers in many technical occupations, could present alternative ideas for reflection.

### Reflections

In this book, I speak girded with the voices of all the women I have met in my career and I create space for them to speak for themselves. A tradeswoman who had completed her apprenticeship in a large industrial setting attended a 1983 session of the seminar as one of four women among fourteen men who were union activists and training coordinators. She provided these reflections on the experience:

September 21, 1983

Dear Marcia,

...I left the seminar feeling depressed... with the attitudes of those men. They seemed very traditional, very defensive and closed to the fact that women do have extra problems in the male workplace. I don't really have any sense whether the seminar opened their minds — you certainly provided the information and role models to do so — or whether that caused them to stand their defensive ground more... I wondered whether we four tradeswomen dominated the discussion too much but on the other hand, we were constantly being provoked (by their statements) to tell our side of the story. We could never have sat back to let those things go unchallenged.

The first day on the job: either sex is nervous, eager to do well, facing lots to learn, meeting new people, being monitored by journeymen and/or foremen. Result is lots of stress. Extra stress for women: a) fellow workers come to look at her, her manner of working, to meet her, to give advice, to satisfy their curiosity about her motives; b) she has to learn about and adjust to a whole different society, form of communication, than exists in a women's workplace or mixed workplace; c) she must be constantly judging whether she is being treated in certain ways because she is new (apprentice) or because she is a woman (i.e., Is she not being given responsible jobs because she's inexperienced or because assumptions are being made about her capabilities?) I believe that if we attempt to prevent their defences from rising at the outset, they will be more open to hearing us.

Considering that they don't hear that sexual harassment is a problem: the seminar and personal experience give ample evidence of its existence... I think you must have instilled some doubt in their minds.

On the point that they don't hear us when we say we are treated differently because we are women even when we give them examples. [They say] the examples are exceptions and the reasons (like socialization) are an individual woman's problem. Is the answer to this going into more detail about women's socialization and men's?

Already the seminar is jam packed with too many time constraints. Even if we went off topic, I learned something from it — learned to understand their perceptions more. That's valuable in the sense of knowing thy enemy (the enemy being attitudes rather than sex). An example of one thing I learned: One man did not realize that women generally lack self-confidence. It could be discussed, explaining that it is due to our conditioning, our history in

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low-status work that causes many of us to doubt our own abilities deep down even as we struggle to overcome it, explaining that we have not learned to bluff (another extra skill that we must learn that most men have already mastered). (Handwritten letter, workshop binder, Braundy et al., 1983b).

### The Gatekeepers

This woman's suggestions and all the other verbal and written feedback we received were incorporated into the seminar. Even so, with all our careful preparation, the very worst, most recalcitrant groups were the vocational instructors. The most difficult of those were at BCIT during 1985–2000. Their administration bought nine sessions of the seminar over a five-year period under several different administrators. The last seminar was an “end of the fiscal year” event during the worst downsizing BCIT had experienced. No one had told the male instructors why they were assigned and required to attend and, though the importance of having women attend the session as participants had been made quite clear to the organizer, none were invited. The woman organizer did not show up.

It was a small group and, to save money, I had agreed to do it by myself. Previously the session had always been delivered by two people. Perhaps I had gotten “cocky” after years of experience in facilitating the seminar. I thought I could do it on my own. It was ugly. The men were in full attack mode, and I heard about all the “girls” who had made trouble for them in one way or another: by having a brush-cut hairdo; rips in their jeans, provocative clothing—nothing about their capability on the job, always about their appearance and the distractions they caused. These were classroom management issues that had turned into personal affronts, and I was going to pay for them! When the day was finally over, I left quite shaken. The wolf pack had tried their best.<sup>2</sup>

Several years later, I sat in a meeting with BCIT and Employment & Immigration Canada representatives discussing the requirements of the Industrial Adjustment Service (IAS) report of the Amalgamated Construction Association of BC (Goldberg, 1992). These studies were and are conducted to investigate solutions to labour market adjustment issues in particular industries. There has been a clear recognition since 1980 that skill shortages are becoming a significant issue for the construction industry as well as other sectors of the economy where skilled tradespeople are required. A male instructor who had been in that last BCIT session and the woman who had organized it lost their cool and screamed at the rest of us that BCIT would never have a women-only trades exploratory course. They gave no reasons, but their feelings were strong: “Over my dead body,” said the man, “will there ever be a women-only program at BCIT.” The Construction Association

would have to go elsewhere to implement one of the major recommendations of their very expensive Industrial Adjustment study. Sadly, that course was never implemented, though several years later, excellent women-only trades exploratory courses became available at BCIT under the leadership of that woman, and are a regular part of their programming today.

What underlies such resistance and impedance?<sup>23</sup>

Building the Vallican Whole Community Centre; at pre-apprenticeship training in Dawson Creek; in carpentry apprenticeship classes at Camosun College; Pacific Vocational Institute and BCIT; in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America; on construction sites and in seminars, I did my best to humour, cajole, beseech, challenge, and encourage men to make way, to find ways to welcome women as workers beside them. I listened and observed, and developed courses for women to help them meet the needed skill levels for effective entry into the technical world. I advocated with the men who controlled the apprenticeship programs in provinces and in Canada to open the doors a bit wider, to welcome the women who wanted to come in, instead of standing guard against them, resisting and impeding the systems. In each situation, the image of the men — students, instructors, union activists and fellow workers, apprenticeship and employment counsellors — standing or sitting with their arms folded across their chests in a stance of defiance or protection or challenge stays with me. Body language speaks volumes.

Yet, now and then, I would watch as they ever-so-slowly unwrapped their arms, sat up and leaned forward, in a willingness to engage. It gave me hope and the stamina to continue.

Looking back at the tradeswoman's follow-up letter, I can see how so many of the themes she addressed are reflected in the play that forms the centrepiece of this book, themes which came from an interview with tradesmen, struggling to come to terms with male resistance.

### Performing Intervention

Working with men and women who supported the integration of women in technical fields, I organized three national conferences (Braundy & WITT, 1989) where WITT women came together on the first two days and then were joined, for another two days, by employers, unions, government and educators: those who had a role to play in making changes to our technical workforce. Two-hundred-and-fifty people, 120 of them trades and technical women, came to the first conference in 1988, at Naramata, British Columbia. It was a watershed event. With Kootenay WITT, I produced the audio-taped, transcribed and edited proceedings into a book, ensuring the voices of women and initiatives of industry would have a continuing profile (1989). Thirty-five women continued to meet nationally, electing me their National Coordinator.

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At the founding conference of WITT National Network in Ottawa (1992), I was formally elected National Coordinator by 320 attendees. In Halifax, there were 374 participants at the conference. We worked in several areas: front line worker/manager education, national standards for WITT exploratory courses, integrating the apprenticeship system, political advocacy and grassroots development.

This organization was a national framework for interventions, in concert with minimal local and provincial interventions and federal employment equity legislation. Though we made small inroads the numbers of women training and working were still miniscule and their experiences not always improved. Despite the growing stack of reports and recommendations for increasing the participation of girls and women in trades and technology, few pro-active measures or actual implementations were undertaken by governments, apprenticeship boards, industry and community colleges. Rare pilots were frequently cancelled without evaluation or explanation.

Since the 1980s, when the first Women in Trades conference took place in Winnipeg and Employment and Immigration Minister Lloyd Axworthy gave his speech about the coming skill shortages and the need for women to fill them (1980), and Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella's research formed the basis for her recommendations of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984), and Canada's Employment Equity legislation (1995, 1985), advocates for interventions have worked to change the representation and opportunities for women in technical fields. Recommendations for exploratory courses in trades and technology for women in industry,<sup>4</sup> and in colleges abound.<sup>5</sup> Several course manuals were developed,<sup>6</sup> but infrequently used. The same has been the case for interventions at the junior, senior secondary and post-secondary levels<sup>7</sup> where any programs were implemented as "one of a kind" for brief periods when they were championed by someone either internal or external to the school. But these programs are not often integrated into regular programming. Efforts to increase equity in apprenticeship training have been consistent only enough to demonstrate their promise,<sup>8</sup> but never to achieve their long term viability.

Perhaps the fiercest resistance was, and is, from business, labour and governments: resistance to proactively move forward implementation of innovative programming to increase the participation of women in industry, or ensure the enforcement of equity legislation and guidelines related to women in technical fields.<sup>9</sup> The British Columbia government stopped making sex-disaggregated data available for technology-intensive courses in primary and secondary schools (Bryson et al., 2003) regardless of Canada's signature to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), which require such data for reporting purposes. B.C.



also compromised gender disaggregated data for apprenticeship training in all trades by adding a category for “unknown” (1999–2003), and then eliminated the legislation that required improvement in the participation of under-represented groups in apprenticeship (2003).

I have played a role in a great many of the interventions to improve the representation of women from all groups designated under the Employment Equity legislation. I have witnessed the subtle and overt walls of resistance. Lip service is paid and no action taken. If even some of the ideas presented in the reports and recommendations were embraced it is probable more significant change would have been noticed between annual reports to Parliament on employment equity in Canada (Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, 1988–2009), and we would not be again discussing immigration as the solution to skill shortage problems. While skilled workforce immigration may play some role, the many people already in Canada, often on our welfare roles, who would benefit from supported skills training and apprenticeship programs should not be denied. Many of these are women, and also from Aboriginal and multicultural communities across our land, communities that would benefit long term from the contributions of trained and skilled members, and should have been doing so since the issues were first addressed in the 1980’s.

An ethical practice of witnessing includes the obligation to bear witness — to re-testify, to somehow convey what one has heard and thinks important to remember. Communities of memory are locations in which such obligations can be worked out; they are locations in which one can work through the difficulties of responding to the challenging questions, which are elicited by testimonies of historical trauma, and decide which testimonies, and what aspects of them, should be retold to whom and in what ways (Simon & Eppert, 1997: 187). One such community of memory might be the audience of the play. It was fascinating to observe the responses to the play when I took it on the road to union halls and technical schools. The first response in *every* group was for someone to say, “That doesn’t happen here.” Then, after a pause, someone else might say, “Well, remember the situation with so and so?” And then describe a similar and equally challenging anecdote that would break open the discussion, and lead to other discussions and suggested solutions.

I am not assessing or engaging the women in trades and technology literature in any depth in this work. The identification of barriers has been multiple as the previous lists of references attest. As well, while I appreciate the vast literature on recommendations for integrating women and other designated groups into apprenticeship and technical training and work, it is the resistance to these initiatives that I am addressing here.