

MHR *Connections*

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Inspirational messages delivered at International Women's Day event

Beverley Goodwin and June Menzies have stood their ground and changed the lives of women in Manitoba and Canada.



Photograph by Tracey Goncalves, Government of Manitoba

Beverley Goodwin gives advice including, "If there is a problem, follow the money. Money, unfortunately, is power."

On March 8, 2010, at the Manitoba Legislature, Ms Goodwin and Ms Menzies spoke to over 500 women attending a reception in honour of International Women's Day. Ms Goodwin said that when asked to speak at this event, she revisited her dictionary for the word "feminist/feminism" and found the following definition: a doctrine or movement that advocates equal rights for women. "That makes me a feminist," she said.

It began almost fifty years ago when she wrote an article for the Winnipeg Free Press called *Dilemmas of the modern homemaker*. She described herself as a casualty of the system, having once been a deserted wife, with no income and no assets; just bill collectors and two small children. Ever since, Ms Goodwin has been involved in Family Law Reform and changes within the mental health system.



Photograph by Tracey Goncalves, Government of Manitoba

June Menzies says that restrictions on women's lives were lifted during the war years, but it has been a "long struggle to recapture that freedom and hold onto it."

She recalled meeting the second guest speaker, June Menzies, at a mother's auxiliary meeting at Balmoral Hall in the late sixties. She said that a mother in the audience requested that some meetings be held in the evening – to accommodate the needs of working mothers. She recounted that many women were aghast at the suggestion.

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The Rights Connection by Yvonne Peters - Vice-Chairperson

Whether or not it was an act of omission or simply, as put by a Government of Canada spokesperson, an effort to edit Canada's latest Citizenship guide so it did not become encyclopedic, discrimination based on sexual orientation should be included in this important publication for newcomers to Canada.

I recently wrote a letter to the Government of Canada on behalf of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission urging it to amend the 2010 edition of the citizenship study guide, "Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship", so as to inform applicants for citizenship that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited in Canada and that same-sex couples can legally marry in Canada.

The omission of this information concerns us for a number of reasons. Some immigrants to Canada are not aware of our equality values and protections and come from countries that persecute gays and lesbians. It is especially important that these applicants for Canadian citizenship be educated about the equality values that are secured by Canadian law, including equality of opportunity for gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians. This is essential both for the immigrant's successful integration into Canadian society and to ensure that the equality rights of gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians are given the same promotion and protection as other equality rights.

Failing to inform new immigrants that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited in Canada may result in some discrimination on that basis that would otherwise have been avoided. It may also cause new Canadians who are gay, lesbian or bisexual to accept discriminatory treatment based on their sexual orientation, unaware that they have a right to be free of such discrimination.

The recent edition of the guide states: "Canadian citizens enjoy many rights, but Canadians also have responsibilities. They must obey Canada's laws and respect the rights and freedoms of others." The Government of Canada should amend the citizenship guide to ensure that newcomers to Canada comply with our laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and respect the equality rights of gay, lesbian and bisexual Canadians.

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"I went up to this mother and congratulated her on the suggestion," she said adding, "My life was profoundly changed from that moment on. I had met June Menzies."

June Menzies has been fighting back since she was a child. Ms Menzies told the audience that when she was very young, she questioned her mother as to why she had not been invited to play golf with her father on her 10th birthday, as her brothers had been. Her mother replied that June had to understand that a man has a special relationship with his sons and her father would not be taking her golfing. At that early age she decided to prove herself to her father and brothers.



The International Women's Day Event also featured display booths. Patricia Knipe with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission looks on as Lily Rosenberg of the Canadian Commission shows posters to Fetheya Abdela. Fetheya played the Commission's Women's Day Quiz and was the winner of the draw for a gift certificate.

lived in Winnipeg, and admitted to working harder than she had ever worked in her life by being a full time homemaker and mother. Her advocacy didn't stop. She said she found herself with "The Minus Ones", a group of ten deserted mothers, calling out for help, and according to Ms Menzies, "putting a human face on the many injustices of discrimination, neglect, false premises and bad legislation."

Ms Menzies concluded her presentation by saying, "It doesn't matter how different the times or the issues. If something is wrong – don't complain, change it. Working together we can make it happen."

The International Women's Day event celebrated *Milestones in Women's Equality: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, acknowledging the 40th Anniversary of the release of the final report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, 1970.

International Women's day is celebrated worldwide in March. It honours the accomplishments of women and inspires work towards women's equality at home and across the globe.

At 21 years of age, she was translating captured Japanese documents and reading maps. She expected to be sent to Japan with her male team. She was told, however, that they didn't have the proper toilet facilities for women in Japan.

In 1951, when Ms Menzies was about to graduate with a Masters Degree in Economics and Political Science, she discovered that the job recruiters were not interviewing women. She did eventually find professional employment in Ottawa at the National Research Centre, which then hosted Canadian intelligence research.

By 1962
Ms Menzies



UNPAC, an organization of Manitoba women committed to women's equality and empowerment, delivered a C+ to the Manitoba Government in its 2010 Equality Report Card.

Canada ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

On March 11, 2010, the Government of Canada ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at United Nations headquarters in New York City. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is pleased that this comes with the unanimous support of all the provinces and territories.

"This ratification ensures that Canadian society recognizes the equal rights of persons with disabilities," says Yvonne Peters, Vice Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. "The Commission recognizes the critical role of Canada's community of persons with disabilities in achieving this important milestone. Their rallying motto 'Nothing About Us Without Us' continues to be heard as we move forward," says Ms Peters.

According to Ms Peters, the real work is about to begin. "In 2008, over 45% of formal complaints filed at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission were based on the grounds of mental or physical disability," she says.

Canada was one of the first countries to include disability rights in its Constitution. Canada completed ratification of the Convention just prior to the opening of the 2010 Paralympic Games in Vancouver.

This Convention is the first to require the designation of an independent organization to monitor implementation. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has indicated to the government that it would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the implementation monitoring process.



Yvonne Peters believes the ratification of the Convention will benefit the day to day lives of millions of Canadians who have disabilities.

Commission approves new guidelines

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission will publish two new guidelines this spring. The first, "Parents and pregnant women" will provide information on protections from discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and marital and family status in employment, housing and services under *The Human Rights Code* (Manitoba).

The second new guideline "Protections from discrimination based on gender identity; Your Rights, Your Obligations" identifies protections from discrimination on the basis of gender identity under *The Human Rights Code* (Manitoba) in employment, services and housing.

"Almost 12% of complaints filed with the Commission in 2009 alleged discrimination on the basis of pregnancy and/or marital status", says Dianna Scarth, Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission. With respect to the guidelines on discrimination based on gender identity, Ms Scarth noted that some employers and landlords may not be aware that discriminating against persons who are transsexual, without reasonable cause, contravenes the *Human Rights Code*.