

# A WOMAN'S PLACE

BY LESLEY WALSH '54, M.A. '69

When I first started at Cal, I didn't give any thought to the notion that I might be treated differently from anybody else simply because I am female. I had been raised in a family of strong-minded, self-sufficient aunts, and been mentored through high school by Emily Poppe Grinstead '16 and Dorothy Godward '24—neither of whom would have conceded the slightest superiority to any man in terms of academic achievement. So I was on campus for some time before I became aware of barriers here and there.

The first surprise came from my association with the *Daily Cal*. I was inclined to believe that being a green frosh was a bigger handicap than my gender. But when one of my roommates, Dorothy Mansur MacCormack, tried to join the sports staff (her expertise was in track and field), the gloves came off. She *did* get on, but over a number of dead male bodies, so to speak.

Every spring, the women of the *Daily Cal* were permitted to put out a single "women's day" issue of the paper in conjunction with such ladylike events as a fashion show in Faculty Glade. "Co-eds will Caper at County Fair," read a headline in the April 18, 1951 issue. I got my dander up at the big favor the *Daily Cal* men were doing us, and devised my own riposte. Does anyone recall that the masthead at that time was "The Daily Californian, Monarch of the College Dailies"? Well, on that April 18, it read, "The Daily Californian, Men are No Damn Good!"

Except for gym classes, I had only one woman instructor during lower division, but she was the well-known poet Josephine Miles. That remarkable individual certainly didn't foster any ideas of female inferiority. She also taught the most valuable class I had in my four undergraduate years: English 1A, emphasizing how to read and understand, and how to write and be understood.

Upper division, with smaller classes, exposed me more frequently to professorial notions of "a woman student's place." But I was somewhat protected by my gender-neutral first name. T.A.'s who hadn't met me couldn't know it was a woman's blue book they were reading. One interesting encounter resulted from this



ambiguity. I took Shakespeare from Professor Willard Durham at the end of his long, distinguished career. Fifteen plays in fifteen weeks—by the midterm, I dreamed in blank verse. I was inspired to wind up my blue book with a short poem in Shakespearean style, describing my fascination and my fatigue in attempting to survive this course. When my exam came back, I found a note from the T.A. asking me to see him, because Professor Durham liked my poem. When I located the T.A., his face fell a mile—he hadn't expected a woman student. He was so dismayed that he delivered Durham's praise in one snappy sentence, and didn't bother to invite me to meet the great professor.

I was a political science major with an unaccountable passion for reading constitutional documents, and this taste is so rare in either sex that it didn't strike anyone as being odd merely because

of my gender. However, as I approached graduation and started to think about employment, I hit the glass ceiling pretty fast—in my case, it was at about ankle level. In frustration I went to my major advisor, the late Eugene Burdick of *The Ugly American* fame. "What," I asked Mr. Burdick, "do female poli sci majors do with themselves?" He threw back his head with a loud laugh and said, "They get married!"

This pattern continued after I returned for graduate school in history in 1968. I got my M.A. with a rather condescending pat on the head for not exhibiting too much softening of the brain, considering that I was female, almost 40, and had spent so many years in the "anti-intellectual" business world. It was just as well that I wasn't interested in getting a doctorate, because it

was well-rumored that Ph.D. slots were reserved for deserving males who needed deferments to keep them out of Vietnam.

In 1974, I entered a career in publishing, where I have spent more than 20 years, relatively free from the assumptions that I am intellectually handicapped by my sex, or that there's something odd about a woman having brains and using them. ☺

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