

Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique*

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***Did it change my life? – Suzanne Smith, Peoria, Illinois***

I was a freshman in an all-girls Catholic school in 1963 when Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. When I was a senior in 1967, the school allowed LAY teachers. My SOCIAL STUDIES teacher – a man – implored us to read Betty's book.

He believed that we were in dire need of a KICK START TO OPEN UP OUR MINDS.

My dad wanted me to be an engineer, but in 1955, I would have been the only female in my classes. I wanted to be a rabbi, but women could not be ordained, so I became a teacher.

Betty Friedan gave a lecture at Bradley's Fieldhouse one evening at the same time I was teaching a class in English as a Foreign Language. I decided to take my class of 12 foreign students to hear the lecture. When we returned to the classroom following the lecture, I asked a young man from Kuwait what his impression was of the lecture. His reply was, "Mrs. Smith, I know why you Americans have problems with this Women's Lib. You educate women. That's a big mistake."

Betty Goldstein and I were both Peoria High School graduates. When we were there, a married teacher was not allowed to teach. She would be taking a job away from a man. They made an exception during World War II for a teacher whose husband was in military service. The policy ended after the war.

In the first chapter of her book, she said that the problem that has no name, through beliefs and institutions, undermined confidence in intellectual capacities and kept women at home. She interviewed many suburban housewives. 60 percent of them had dropped out of college to marry.

In my case, I had plenty of confidence in my intellectual capacity. I had graduated first in my class at the University of Illinois with a Spanish major, and Portuguese and French minors, and within a year of graduation had received a scholarship for a year of graduate study at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina. However, after marrying two years after returning from Argentina, my husband and I were raised by mothers who didn't work. If women of their generation worked, it was because they were widows or their husbands couldn't support them. He felt that if I earned money, people would think he couldn't support me. I stayed home the first ten years of our marriage with three daughters. When two of them were in school and the youngest was three, I was offered a job teaching Spanish at Bradley University. My husband was still opposed to my earning money, so I made him a deal. We would take my earnings and open a separate account in a different bank from the one we used. His earnings would support us and pay the mortgage and grocery bill. My earnings would be used for fun and games. He finally agreed to this, and my earnings paid for a trip

to Europe and a membership to Mt. Hawley Country Club. Our marriage was a very happy one in spite of his initial reluctance to have me earn money.

I loved Betty's final chapter, where she says, "Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves?" She felt that women don't need to love through their husbands and children and men don't need another's weakness to prove their own masculinity.

***Did it change my life? – Joan Gore Krupa, Peoria, Illinois***

Lunch with Betty? Not in my wildest imagination did I think she would accept my invitation to meet her at Jumer's to discuss a possible collaborative seminar with the Association of Junior Leagues. (I was Public Policy Chair for this international board from 1983-84.) During our brief meeting, I discovered Ms. Friedan to be highly intelligent, visionary, and yet easy to talk to. She did her best to make me comfortable, which I appreciated, even though today I am an old "Junior Leaguer." She broke the stereotype of "feminist" and made me a better educated woman.

***Did it change my life? – Martha Willi, MD, Peoria, Illinois***

I was in medical school in the 60's, which means that there was no time for anything but study and work. *The Feminine Mystique* was not on my reading list. It was not until the early 70's that I noticed that the women I came in contact with were being changed by the women's movement and the rise of consciousness that this book began.

I realized that my colleague's inability to find a job as a pediatrician was part of the problem that had no name. She could not find a position that would let her work part-time after her baby was born. As I progressed through residency and my first years in practice, the ideas and insights I got from the women's movement both in Peoria and nationally helped me to deal with the inevitable problems I encountered.

The women's movement introduced me to many wonderful women and men and a whole world of new ideas and concepts over the past 40 years. It has changed my life.

Thank you, Betty Friedan, for starting it all!

***Did it change my life? – Judith Koren Shanahan***

In roughly 1970, I went to a furniture store in Rockford to buy a small love-seat-sized sofa bed. I had worked full-time for 10 years, and my husband was unemployed (2 years). I signed papers to put down payment and agreed to pay the balance off in 90 days. (The entire cost was no more than \$250.) The following day, we got a phone call from the store saying that my husband had to come in and sign for this purchase, or it could not be made! I was livid. I told them that I was the breadwinner and my husband was unemployed, and unless they wanted me to show up with my lawyer, they would go through with my contract to buy and pay for this sofa. Plus, I told them that I would contact everyone I knew and discourage them from shopping there.

They quickly backed down, and I paid for and got my sofa bed. One of the reasons I bought it was so that when my father-in-law came from New Jersey for 2 weeks, he could sleep on it. Prior to this purchase, I gave up my side of the bed, and he slept with my husband and I had

the couch. Both men were 6'2" tall, and I felt sorry for my father-in-law having to squeeze onto a regular-size couch. He usually visited us each year for 2-3 weeks, and I had decided – NO MORE.

My husband and I marched for the ERA in the big Chicago march and rally (Somewhere I still have the button.)

I was taken for granted by the company who employed me and paid so little for full-time work. In 1980 I answered an ad that I saw in the Rockford paper for "Central Illinois Group of Department Stores seeks sales Promotion Manager". I was one of 35 replies they got, and I was hired, getting a 180% raise to take this job. (They never asked what I was earning, so I never lied.) Later though, I realized that if they had hired a man, they would have had to pay him a great deal more than what they got me for. In my work history I have had a long list of both good and horrible bosses – divided evenly between men and women. I never joined NOW, as I believed I was living the fight daily and did not want to be identified as a "man hater," as so many people were branded. (And I am not one.)

### ***Did it change my life? – Barb Drake, Peoria, Illinois***

I believe almost everyone has a story to tell in response to that question. I'll take mine back to 1963, the very year *The Feminine Mystique* was published. I was a Woodruff High School senior aspiring to a career in journalism. I knew that The Journal Star offered a newspaper career scholarship, and I thought I met all the criteria, especially the career ambitions – heck, I'd published a neighborhood newspaper when I was seven years old! So I called the Journal Star and asked for an application. And that's when I learned there was one significant, um, criterion I was missing. Only boys could apply, I was told, because it was a newspaper *career* scholarship and didn't I know, women didn't have newspaper *careers*?

No, I didn't know that, and I majored in journalism anyway. I guess I should have known, considering that at the time there were just two female news reporters in the Journal Star's then-humongous newsroom. Both had been hired during World War II, when the men were off to war, and hadn't had the simple courtesy to leave when the guys returned. Of course, there were no female editors. No matter how good a woman might be, that was not going to happen.

But even as I went through college, things were already changing. Approximately two years after *The Feminine Mystique* was published, The Journal Star hired its first female news reporter since the Great War. I was the second. I was also the first woman to become a news editor and the first to write editorials. As for that ban on *career* scholarships going to girls, I think it was lifted about the time I graduated and no longer needed the help. Would all this have happened without Betty Friedan and *The Feminine Mystique*? To be honest, I think so. These sorts of changes were just inevitable. But would things have changed in time to open the newspaper world to me? I harbor doubts.

I spent 40 wonderful years as a reporter, feature writer, city editor, associate editor and, the most challenging position, editorial page editor. I met three presidents and can uniquely

claim to have told the current president, Barack Obama, when he was a much younger Illinois state senator that, yeah, I'd give him twenty minutes of MY valuable time.

We are talking here about change, and one of the important functions of the editorial page is to encourage change for the good. In terms of "women's issues," I think I brought to two decades of editorial writing some sensitivities a man might not have had – an understanding, for example, that if we are to insist that women get off welfare and work at \$8-an-hour jobs, then we must be willing to subsidize their child care and their health care as well as a conviction that family-friendly laws and policies are very much in the nation's interest. By the way, Betty did not see these as "women's issues"; she told me she saw them as family issues, and she regretted that the nation had not yet reached the point where everyone saw things that way.

I suggested a minute or so ago that editorial pages try to promote change for the good. Most of the issues we grappled with on the Journal Star's editorial page were not gender-based; they were community-based – this community, Peoria, and how it might be made better. Opening a museum that would recognize Peoria's unique contributions to the world was one of our major causes, a crusade that lasted 14 years, long after I retired, and served as the subject of more than 160 editorials. That makes it especially fitting for me to be here tonight and declare, "Yes, It changed me!" Look at this marvelous museum. It changed all of us in many, many ways.

***Did it change my life? Excerpt from "The Book that Wasn't Written", Carole S. Ackerman  
June, 1979, Peoria, Illinois***

One of the first awakenings of my female spirit came through the eyes of our eight year old daughter, Anne, in 1972. My husband, Owen, was attempting to explain the chaos on TV called the Democratic National Convention. He carefully explained that it was the process by which a national party selected a man to run for president. Anne politely interrupted; "Or a woman, Daddy?"

Why didn't I say that? Why didn't I think that? Hooray for Anne! She had not succumbed to expecting to live in a male-dominated society. The male/female stereotype had not reached Anne, and she was seeing no barriers, real or self-imposed.

I had not even read Betty Friedans's *Feminine Mystique*, and she was from Peoria! I was too busy being a wife, mother, schedule organizer, Junior League board member, cook, laundress, seamstress, hostess, Sunday School teacher, neighbor, friend, school-room mother, car pooler, fund raiser, budget balancer, nurse, basketball spectator, and, of course, the nation's number one consumer: food, children's clothes, husband's clothes, gifts, household items. If it was for sale, I probably bought it. If it was on sale, I bought two of them.

By the time I was thirty-five years old, I had served as president of seven different organizations, including college sorority, a community newcomer's organization, a gifted children's school PTO Board, and the local Junior League. Why had I counted myself and the

other Carole Ackermans of my era out of *the* presidency? We were just as capable and as intelligent as the Lyndon Johnsons or Richard Nixons. Maybe more so.

Why had society's computer not programmed females into the mainstream of political life, corporate life, religious and professional life? Granted, there were a few who broke out of the computer tape, but they were just that, few. Who was the programmer?"