

WOMANIFESTO

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Letter from the Director's Chair
- A.L.I.C.E. Out of Wonderland
- Staff Bio's

INSIDE THE WOMANIFESTO

A.L.I.C.E. Out of Wonderland	2
Letter from the Director's Chair (Cont.)	3
Staff Bio's	3
Women's Center Information	4

Letter from the Director's Chair

By Betsy Danforth

The semester is quickly whizzing by, and the holidays are upon us once again. The wind is howling and there is no doubt that winter is here. We have had a terrific semester--made some new friends, "hired" a few new volunteers, and have been busy planning for a lot of terrific programs in the Spring!

First of all, I'd like to welcome our new volunteers: Hannah Arends, a wonderfully creative student in Sociology and Women's and Gender Studies; Kathleen Rauch, a single mom of teen-aged daughters and a student in the Family Constellations graduate program out of Seattle; and Abbie Bandstra, a senior in English Teaching. Thanks to each of you for sharing your time as well as your special talents and skills with the Women's Center!

Our Sack Lunch Seminars have been well attended, and have proven to be a very interesting mix of topics and discussions. "Drumming as a Lesbian Conspiracy" was a ruckus program featuring a bucket drumming lesson by two wonderful community women, Shaun Phoenix and Stormi Oshun, who had a group of 25 participating in a well orchestrated drumming corps in no time! Corky Bush and Diane Ehernberger discussed the fact that many Montana women who are employed are still struggling financially (see Kathleen Rauch's article about A.L.I.C.E.). Veronica

Maday presented her research about Native American Women as warriors and showed a clip from what promises to be an excellent documentary on her personal struggle as a soldier in the U.S. Army.

Last week's Sack Lunch Seminar about homeschooled children in Bozeman lead to a fascinating discussion of the benefits vs. the down sides of homeschooling. The seminar left me with a lot of food for thought around the topics of socialization, bullying, and self guided study. According to the children on the panel who had been homeschooled (ranging in ages from 13 to 19), their experiences were superior to those of children attending public schools. They uniformly treasured their unique experiences as homeschooled children and learners. They each commented on their flexible schedules, close relationship with their families, and the ability to direct the course of their studies to some degree. When the question of socialization came up, they talked about homeschool collectives (families of homeschoolers bringing their kids together for joint activities), volunteer projects, and neighborhoods. A few audience members remained skeptical about the level of socialization--how would a homeschooler deal with bullying, demanding schedules, and dating in the "real" world after leading what appears to be a rather sheltered life surrounded by a loving family? Is it realis-

tic to think that kids and young adults can be tough enough to deal with these issues without practice?

One young woman responded that if she doesn't have expectations, or even knowledge of things like bullying, can she actually rise above it--and by example, possibly even lead others to rise above the pettiness? It was a great point--does homeschooling have something to teach us about respect; about avoiding the pettiness and damaging behavior that is so often the result of negative peer pressure and bullying? And that leads to the question of whether or not a model of homeschooling (or schooling on a smaller, more intimate scale) could actually change the world for teenagers? Many would argue that kids need to get away from their parents, that they need to be toughened up by dealing with rejection, being ridiculed and succumbing to the ranks of the pecking order. Is this in fact the case?

We often forget that the vast majority of the world does not live like we citizens of the U.S. do. Most of the world is still living in villages, most teens do not have the luxury of attending school at all, and probably, most of the minimal reading, writing and math learning they do is taught by a parent or sibling. Most kids

(Continued on page 3)

A . L . I . C . E . O U T O F W O N D E R L A N D

By Kathleen Rauch

Although women have made great strides over the years in the realms of personal rights and finances, recent data presented by the Montana Women's Lobby at the November 2nd Sack Lunch Seminar indicates that women still have many challenges in moving towards equality with men in financial matters.

Diane Ehernberger, Treasurer, and Corky Bush, Vice President of Montana Women's Lobby (MWL) gave a powerful presentation on research dubbed A.L.I.C.E. A.L.I.C.E refers to women who are "Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed." The MWL is using this data to bring awareness to and address the serious financial challenges faced by many of today's working women in Montana, even those who have full time jobs.

In reviewing the data from the seminar, the information struck close to home for me. I am single mother with two teen-aged daughters. Through the course of the past two years, I have gone from the relative safety and security of a two-parent household and being a homeowner to being a single parent who is renting and working an assortment of part time jobs. I found the assessment of the challenges of working women to be relevant in my own life.

Who exactly is ALICE? According to the information provided by the MWL: ALICE lives in a household with an annual income between \$20,000 and \$40,000. ALICE can be any race, young or old, and she is working—sometimes more than one job. ALICE faces challenges due to less education, language barriers, physical or mental disabilities, or lack of transportation. ALICE is more likely to rent, and therefore, her housing situation is less than stable. ALICE is either working at one or more low-paying jobs or part-

time. ALICE has little or no opportunity to save money, has trouble getting by, and is definitely not getting ahead. What does it mean to be Asset Limited, Income Constrained and Employed?

ASSET LIMITED

"Asset poverty" is defined as access to financial resources insufficient to provide basic needs for three months. It is characterized by lack of home ownership, limited investments, limited savings, and reduced or non-existent pensions. Obstacles to accruing pensions contribute to the dismal asset picture. Asset poverty is a chronic state for most women. For example, based on net worth, only 20% of married parents are asset poor as opposed to 59% of single mothers. As a result of asset poverty, many women do not have accrued assets needed to ride out difficult economic times and maintain their standard of living. And many have limited or no investments to support themselves in retirement.

INCOME CONSTRAINED

Women's income is constrained by the "glass ceiling" and persistent cultural perceptions. In addition, women, on average, pay more for health insurance if they are eligible at all (it should be noted that this is not true in Montana-though the gender equity insurance laws are always under fire in the legislature). Clearly, a variety of factors constrain women's income.

Among MBA graduates, women consistently start out in lower ranking positions, with less responsibility and lower wages. Women in the corporate world account for 3% of Fortune 500 CEO's and make up less than 33% of law firm partners. Women are less likely to negotiate salaries and on average ask for 30% less than men. Women ask for raises 85% less often than their male counterparts. Health care costs also constrain women—they are less likely to be eligible for benefits, especially if they work part time. Health insurance riders to cover

pregnancy and maternity care often come with astronomical rates. Many states, unlike Montana, allow for "gender rating" systems in which women pay more for identical health care coverage, not including maternity care.

EMPLOYED

Women are most certainly employed, but are not receiving equal wages. Women make up 48% of the workforce in Montana, but earn 72% of the income of their male counterparts. Additionally, many women provide unpaid, informal care to family members in need. In 1996, 25% of the workforce provided informal care to family members or friends, and 60-70% of these caregivers were women.

As I discover the ways in which my experience is part of a larger collective experience of women in Montana and in the United States at large, I find myself asking, "What is the Call?" How do I step through this doorway of perceived limitation? How do I share my unique gifts in a way that builds upon the available resources and continue to be a valued member of the community while caring for my children and family, and simultaneously having my basic needs met? A.L.I.C.E is a familiar and distressing fact of life for many women.

Currently, the Montana Women's Lobby and the American Association of University Women are illuminating the myriad issues facing women in their financial lives. If you are interested in learning more, or becoming involved in the educational and legislative process, both the Bozeman branch of AAUW and the Montana Women's Lobby are accepting new members.

Letter from the Director's Chair (Continued)



(Continued from front page)

around the world do not go to school for an average of ten or twelve years, do not have their own bedroom, do not have phones, televisions, etc. We also forget that our system has failed us in many ways—we have multitudes of broken families, hundreds of thousands of people in therapy dealing with traumas from childhood, kids dropping out of school at frightening rates, a ridiculous spike in teen pregnancy, and shocking amounts of drug and alcohol abuse.

Having never been a huge proponent of homeschooling myself, I felt differently after last week's Sack Lunch Seminar. I'd now like to argue that there are clearly elements of this lifestyle that work; and, there are clearly lessons that we, as a society, can take from this model. The kids I met last week are all incredibly bright, are super eager to learn, have a wonderful sense of community, seem to have terrific senses of themselves,

are healthy and happy, and all plan to attend college and pursue fulfilling careers.

Recognizing that not all parents have the desire, the education, or the economic means to homeschool their children, it still seems the resurgence of this trend is worth serious consideration. Many psychologists strongly recommend that parents embrace their children and work towards intimate, involved relationships in their middle and high school years instead of thrusting them out into the world in the form of extracurricular activities and sports.

One terrific option presented at this Sack Lunch is a combination of homeschooling and public schooling. This model is more and more common, and the Bozeman school district in particular is renowned for its flexibility and willingness to work with homeschoolers. The National Association of School Psychologists embraces this model as a healthy way for

children to have the intimacy and flexibility of homeschooling while enjoying the social aspect and resources of public schools.

There can be no doubt that being a parent is a tough job, there are numerous decisions to make at every turn, and many that can dramatically affect a child's life and future. Being a child in school can be challenging, as can being a homeschooled child. Whatever choice a family makes in regards to education, it should ensure that plenty of family time is included. It stands to reason that a child who feels isolated, bullied, disconnected or ridiculed will likely be depressed and alienated. And many times in our fast-paced world, we are too busy shuttling our kids around from one activity to another in the hopes that they stay occupied and motivated. Often times, we forget that kids need love and attention, someone to listen to and engage with them in an intimate way—they need, like all of us, to feel that someone genuinely cares about them.

“Does homeschooling have something to teach us about respect; about avoiding the pettiness and damaging behavior that is so often the result of negative peer pressure and bullying?”

STAFF BIOS



Director

Betsy Danforth has been the director of the MSU Women's Center for nineteen years. She is originally from New York City, and studied Women's Studies and History at Pitzer College in Claremont, California. She has been a Bozeman resident for 25 years where yoga, reading, volunteering for local non-profits, hiking, playing volleyball, cook-

ing, and spending time with good friends and her partner are a few of her favorite activities.

Assistant

Krystal Fischer is a senior working on a double major in Business Management and Political Science, and a minor in the Entrepreneurship program. When her 3-year old son isn't keeping her busy, she likes reading biographies, watching

The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, and football.

Assistant

Kelsey Joronen is a Graduate Student studying Architecture here at MSU. She is originally from Livingston, Montana, and enjoys the great outdoors. Other hobbies include reading, spending time with friends, and being creative.

As we struggle with shopping lists and invitations, compounded by December's bad weather, it is good to be reminded that there are people in our lives who are worth this aggravation, and people to whom we are worth the same. - Donald E. Westlake



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**Open 9am to 4pm Monday–Friday during
the academic year.**

Mission Statement:

The MSU Women's Center is a department in the division of Student Success. We are open to all students, staff, faculty and community members, and work toward promoting greater responsiveness to the needs of MSU women. Our focus is to empower women and men to create a campus environment that is equitable and supportive.



Women's Center

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