

"Iona Campagnolo enters the room as if borne on an Egyptian chair," wrote Allan Fotheringham just after Campagnolo won the Federal Liberal party presidency in 1982.

He's right. The slim, soft-spoken 52 year old grandmother and party president glides across the room by sheer force of will, impeccably dressed in a business-like manner. When she enters a room, one might not notice that she walks on mortal feet.

Campagnolo's 19-year political history began, she says, in 1966 while her two daughters were in school. Unhappy with the education system in British Columbia and wanting to do something more than just complain or join the PTA, she ran for school board and won. Two years later she became chair of the Board, and then regional chair. Her career was just beginning to skyrocket upwards.

"And then I had a huge falling out with the British Columbia Minister of Education," she says. So she left education and became a city councillor working simultaneously at the CBC.

"But since women were so abysmally, badly paid," she says, "I didn't stay on air very long." Instead she worked in the advertising department where she could make more money earning sales commissions. Not surprisingly, she soon became advertising manager, directing a corps of advertising staff below her.

And yet, says Campagnolo, "It seemed that all the threads I was dealing with led either to Victoria or Ottawa," and when, in 1974, Liberal friends asked her to run in the NDP-held riding of Skeena, she did. She borrowed \$10,000 to run her campaign and the party gave her another \$5,000.

She won the election and "went into so-called public life on the national stage," with the portfolio of Fitness and Amateur Sport in the cabinet. Political defeat came in 1979 when she lost her seat. She left the "national stage" and returned to the CBC.

Down, but far from out, Campagnolo started up a small corporation specializing in small business opportunities and public relations. Two years later, in 1982, the opportunity to be president of the Liberal party of Canada came along, "So I put my little business into deep freeze and went back into the political arena," she says.

"Business people often say we politicians don't take risks—that they take risks," says Campagnolo. "And I often think of what very large risks politicians take with their lives, with their security, with everything about their whole being."

The bid for the presidency wasn't easy. Norman MacLeod, a Liberal fortress, had held it since 1980 but had begun to fall from grace within the party. Prime Minister Trudeau turned a cold shoulder to him and senior party members jumped onto Campagnolo's campaign wagon as soon as she expressed interest in the position. The "reign-maker", Senator Keith Davey, shifted support from MacLeod to Campagnolo in mid-campaign and MacLeod was ousted from the presidency in November 1982. The vote was 1197-507 in favour of Campagnolo.

"When I first ran for the position of president," recalls Campagnolo, "there was a great deal of soul-searching going on about can a woman be a president of a party and is she capable of administration. I think less than a year later no one even bothered thinking about it anymore.

"My whole approach to women's involvement in society," she says, "is that they make choices and be responsible for those choices whether it's for your livelihood or the way you raise your children."

But, although the choices may have been easy, following the guidelines set down by her male predecessors wasn't.



Illustration: Kimberley Whitchurch, Dal Gazette

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Speaking at Dalhousie on International Women's Day, Liberal party president Iona Campagnolo takes time out for an interview with the Gazette.

BY WENDY COOMBER

"I always say of politics—that it's a game in which all the rules are a mystery, and the team doesn't really want girls on it anyway," she says a little cynically, yet with the conviction of one who had accepted that ambiguity long ago.

Feb. 29, 1983 Pierre Elliot Trudeau resigned as Prime Minister and threw the doors open for the Liberal race to choose a successor. A number of candidates jumped at the chance, but Campagnolo held back. It wasn't because she hadn't been asked.

"There's a very seductive thing about having people tell you that you could be the leader of your nation," she says. "But I really thought the best thing I could do would be to show the Liberal party that I could run a first-rate convention, I could keep it fair and unbiased and let there be no misuse of the powers of the convention."

"There was a great campaign to draft me," she says rolling her eyes at the ceiling, a smile on her lips. "And for a while there I got a rose every hour for days. One of the things that had always been said previously was there would not be sufficient money for a woman to run a campaign—that they'd have to run a token campaign."

"Well, a group of people, without my permission, raised \$1,200,000 for me to run a campaign. The reason I didn't was more along this line—when I became president of the party I gave a promise of undertaking to the party that I would accomplish certain goals for them, and I really feel it is important that women prove, absolutely,

that they will do what they say they're going to do, that they carry it through. Because the stereotype of us is that we cannot, and I love to break stereotypes."

Campagnolo says there were other factors as well that made her avoid the leadership race.

"I didn't feel that my French was good enough," she says, "and I didn't think that I have suitable academic attainment to be Prime Minister. And I wouldn't run for leader unless I was going to run for the top job."

"I also thought there was an element of people wanting a woman Liberal to run just for the sake of having a woman," she adds, "to make it look good—image—which I abhor."

"There's been a Catch-22 also in power and women over many years," says Campagnolo. "And that is, when a woman finally achieves a role where power is vested, the power is moved. We saw that with Gerry Ferraro (U.S. vice presidential candidate) and the absolutely unprecedented scrutiny of her life."

Turner and Campagnolo's last election campaigns came under close scrutiny, but for a reason different than that of Ferraro's. If there were any other memorable events of John Turner's campaign for Prime Minister, they were quickly overshadowed by "the bum-patting incident" in which Turner patted Campagnolo on the behind in front of a televised conference. The incident gave rise to loud astonishment from women's groups, Turner "bum

protectors", and the dubbing of his private campaign jet as "the Derri-air".

"The minute he did that," she says, "I struck him back. I think that it was ... playfully done and I know that he did not mean it in any derogatory way. It was just an impulse."

"Those kinds of things—there is sexism inside politics that happens and we have to accept that there is an adjustment going on between men and women. It's very difficult for both sides in trying to relate to women as equals rather than as "the other". And we can't expect that it's all going to come easily and that there won't once in a while be a slip-up."

"I even had some members of the party come and tell me that they were shocked that I would have slapped him back. And I was shocked that they were shocked because they said I should have said nothing about it. I said, 'But I couldn't possibly do that.'"

Campagnolo sees a positive change occurring in Canadian politics in regards to women, with even more enlightenment to come.

"We have young women in the House now," she says, "who are divorced—once upon a time that would have been unthinkable. I expect a day will come not too long from now when some bright-eyed young lady will probably have a child in the front bench of the House of Commons—not literally, but pregnant throughout the period of time there—which would have been unthinkable."

Campagnolo ran for the Liberals in Vancouver Centre during last September's election but, like many other Liberals, lost to the Progressive Conservatives. She says she hadn't intended to participate in the election, but ...

"I had been one of those who had really pressured Mr. Turner to run in British Columbia," she admits. "I felt it was really essential for the good of the country and the party. So he said, 'Well, yes, but you've got to run too.' So I did."

There are three events which Campagnolo helped to accomplish during her "public life on the national stage" that she counts among the high points of her career.

"The first Niska land claim negotiations took place when I was a parliamentary secretary of Indian and Northern Affairs—an Indian land claim in British Columbia that had been pursued in the courts for generations"; Canada's first winning of the Commonwealth Games in 48 years while she was minister of sport; and stopping the Kitimat pipeline.

About the pipeline, she says, "I think I should have that put on my tombstone."

The Kitimat pipeline was one of the four potential Alaska oil pipeline routes under consideration by the U.S. and Canada. The \$850 million project was meant to bring oil by pipeline from Kitimat, about 500 miles north of Vancouver, down to the U.S.

Campagnolo says she met with U.S. Vice President Mondale and "questioned the morality of placing a pipeline with crude oil in Canada, which was not their country, with the possibility of crude oil spills which would destroy the salmon industry (in that area)."

Campagnolo doesn't think she'll be running in any more elections.

"I have a sense that the generations are changing in the party," she says, "and, albeit I'm not one of the old hacks, I'm one that came in the middle of the Trudeau years and I think there are a lot of us most anxious to pass on the torch to the next generation. I consider myself one of those."

"I am not one of those who's going to cling on and not allow the new generation to be born. I really want to see it born."