

Fifty-seven years of women's issues at the Gazette

A golden future for the human race

By Toby Sanger

Women have been students at Dalhousie and writing for the *Gazette* for just more than 100 years, but it has only been in the last 57 years that the student paper has had special issues for women.

The first "co-ed issue" appeared on November 8, 1929, edited and written chiefly by men. Its pages were filled mostly with sorority news and "Treatises on ladies" with little serious or enlightened content.

An editorial three years later summed up an attitude many men espoused at the time:

"The average co-ed comes to college because it happens to be the 'thing' to do...to get a man. Her conversation is light, trivial, vapid and devoid of thought.

True, she learns how to wear the latest clothes tastefully, to walk across the room with dignity, and to handle the perplexing impediments of the dining table with grace and skill.

Where the education of the average co-ed fails, is in what what be called the deeper things of the spirit. In her mind, no profound intellectual passion has been awakened, no habit of judgement formed. Her college years make little difference in her beliefs, opinions, or tastes. If she leaves with a meaningless degree under one arm and a man on the other, she is satisfied. But can she be called an educated woman?"

This comment was roundly criticized in a letter to the editor in the next issue, signed by "Faith, Hope and Charity".

The role of women at university continued to be a hot topic for debate during the 1930s, 50 years after the first women were admitted to Dalhousie.

Women wrote for the *Gazette* in the first few decades of this century, they were invariably listed as "Social Editors". Now they were challenged to be more like men. It was the age when cigarette ads with illustrations of elegant women started to appear and Irving Berlin's "Anything you can do, I can do better" battle of the sexes theme was popular.

The next co-ed issue appeared on Valentine's Day, 1936, with an all-women staff for the first time. The paper was a little different from the regular editions of the *Gazette*, only it was better. Women had made their mark in a man's world — at least at the *Dalhousie Gazette*.

It was so successful that another co-ed issue appeared later that year in November. The (male) editor of the *Gazette* obliquely congratulated editors Francis and Margaret Drummie and the staff on their work, stating "They proved that Dal co-eds are not mere social butterflies but are useful and intelligent as well as ornamental."

Still, women held few positions of power in university and student affairs except in organizing the ever-popular Glee Club.

An article in the 1937 co-ed issue documented the poor gains women had made in many universities. In the same paper, a jestful comment indicated that attitudes were slowly changing: "Women must be beautiful and dumb; beautiful so the men can stand them and dumb so they can stand the men."

With many young men in Europe fighting the war, a woman became editor-in-chief of the *Gazette* for the first time in 1940. Inez Smith went on to become president of the students' council the next year. She was replaced at the *Gazette* by the co-ed co-editorial team of Rowena Benson and Jacqueline Cahan.

But the liberated attitudes the paper was adopting slowly gave way to renewed pressure on women to become more dependent on men. The co-ed issue was replaced by a "Sadie Hawkins Day" issue in 1942. (Sadie Hawkins Day was the time women and men were supposed to reverse roles with the women paying for the date).

"A golden future lies for the human race if women bring their innate sensibilities into intro-human (sic) relations. Once freed of the mental shackles which are the heritage of years of subservience, the women who are becoming emancipated should be among our greatest democrats," a 1943 editorial affirmed.

But the emancipation was only to go so far. In 1944, the Delta Gamma sorority took over pro-

On The Outside Looking In - No Help Wanted!



HALIFAX, N. S., NOVEMBER 20th, 1936

—Drawn by Bob Chambers by special arrangement with The Halifax Chronicle.

Co-ed press gangs celebrate women's spirituality at the Gazette in the dirty thirties.

duction of the women's issue with a suitably patriotic and patriarchal interpretation of emancipation: "She is a better woman, this Sadie of '44. Beneath her laughter is a steadfast loyalty to her home, to her college, to her country."

The Delta Gammas ran the *Gazette* women's issues for the next six years, with the name changing to the "Hubba Hubba Herald" and to the "Dalhousie Gasette". Readers were treated to the detailed histories of the Delta Gamma sorority and its affairs each year.

Women were being pushed back into the home — or on to a pedestal. In 1955, the women's issue of the *Gazette* was replaced by a photo spread of the contestants for "Dalhousie Campus Queen". It became an annual event. The next time a woman became editor of the paper after the second world war wasn't until Judith Bell took over in 1958.

In the sixties and early seventies, women's issues didn't merit much coverage in the *Gazette*. The popular Campus Queen editions were gone but dreamy photo-collages of long-haired meaningful women adorned with peace signs filled the hazy void. Features on Che Guevara generally took up more space than women's issues.

After the United Nations sanctioned the International Year for

Women in 1975, an annual story about International Women's Day became part of the *Gazette*.

A two page spread on women's rights dealing with sexism in the media and equal rights in the labour force appeared in 1980.

The next women's supplement didn't appear until 1983. The emphasis since then has been on women's culture and alternative living, as well as sexism in society, rather than on equal rights.

WOMEN?
AT THE
GAZETTE!



if a woman
tropical and fruit-bearing
offered you a fresh banana
would you smile and take it
or
would you turn away, embarrassed?

if a child
sunny and blossoming
held out crushed petals
would you laugh and smell them
or
would you turn away, impatiently?

if a man
dark and shadowy
abused your battered body
would you cry and hate him
or
would you simply turn away...

Martha Hancock