

MARGARET FULTON

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BY WENDY COOMBER

The interview is over and the two women move to the door. "It makes the fight worth it to see young women like you who will carry on the fight," Dr. Margaret Fulton says, lightly punching the reporter in the shoulder and nodding approvingly. "And here you are doing a job that used to be considered a man's job." Fulton laughs and gives the reporter a heavy slap on the back.

At 63 the former Manitoba farm girl, now president of Mount St. Vincent University, may not sound like a likely candidate to lead the revolution. But never let white hair fool you.

Inside the bright, creaky office in Everestus Hall beats the heart of an activist. Fulton is a feminist, a humanist, a peace activist and an educator. Around her neck is a medallion imprinted with feminist symbols and doves and it reads: "Women are persons—'29-'79." It commemorates the year, 1979, when women were reclassified into their own category in Canadian legislation. Before that, she says, women were classified with "convicts and idiots."

"It's interesting, isn't it," she says, "that the three institutions that have a woman head are in the Maritimes (Dr. Roseanne Runta—Universite Sainte-Anne and Margaret Swan—Teachers' College in Truro). I think that's because the Mount has always had a Sister (Sisters of Charity) at the head of the institution. At one time, not only was a Sister president, but the Sisters did all the teaching.

"As their numbers (the Sisters) have been reduced, primarily because of age, the fact remains that in Nova Scotia there is a model of a woman being president in an institution. There's no similar model anywhere else in Canada, and the result is that there are no women presidents anywhere else in Canada."

Just over 10 years ago Pauline Jewett, now the NDP MP for New Westminster-Coquitlan, became the first woman president of a Canadian university when she was appointed president of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

"And I think I know why she crept back into politics," says Fulton. "You burn out. You're so totally within male structures. You wonder if you're crazy or if the world is totally out of balance."

Fulton fully enjoys working in a women's university (15 per cent of the 3,300 students are male), but when she goes fund-raising or to university conferences she feels patronized by the men who outnumber her.

"I think I feel similar to Alexa McDonough (only NDP and only woman in the N.S. legislature) in the House," says Fulton, "in the Legislative Chambers a year ago. She said she never knew whether a lot of the hostility projected was because she was an NDP or because she was a woman. She tended to think it was more because she was a woman that there was a resentment of the fact that she was there, and because she was a woman, she had to work twice as hard to be heard and to carry the whole question of women's position in society

and women's rights.

"When I go to AUCC meetings or presidents' meetings and I'm the only woman there, I feel the same thing. I feel as if I have an extra burden on me because I'm the only one there who can speak for women. And it's a responsibility.

"I was just thrilled when Roseanne Runta (became president three years ago) because now there's two of us!"

Fulton launched the Mount's first fund-raising drive after she became president in 1978. *Project One: Futures for Women* finally reached its \$3.5 million goal last summer. The money went towards building the Rosaria student centre, scholarships, the Distance University Education via Television (DUET) project (which broadcasts credit courses over cable television), and the expansion of a number of other programs.

In 1982, the Mount began another fund-raising campaign to raise \$1 million for research and scholarships for mature women students. Fulton and Ruth Goldbloom, former Board of Governors Chair at the Mount, decided to ask women to donate at least \$1 each. So far they've received about \$100,000 from women across Canada.

Government funding deals mainly with full-time students but 45 per cent of the Mount's students are part-time. This makes running the university more expensive than government money has allowed for.

When the Sisters of Charity established the Mount they worked for free. One hundred years later the government grants still reflect this.

"Our funding is the same percentage as other universities," says Fulton. "However, the way the funding formula works, we've always been behind in terms of equalization payments.

"The Sisters for so long assumed all the funding of the university. I think it's also been a mental thing in the sense that a women's university doesn't need that much money—we don't have to have big expensive football fields."

Fulton, who once headed a federal task force on microelectronics and employment, says "We had to battle with the Maritime Premiers Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) to get funding for a computer lab. As if you could educate women students for the future and not give them the same opportunities that students at other universities have. It blows my mind.

"We've had to fight some hard battles to get that (funding) evened up, but we've managed."

As she approaches her last year as president of the Mount, Fulton says she has no regrets. But if there was one thing she wishes could be different she says it would be funding. It wasn't sufficient, she says, to do all the things she wanted to.

However, she says, "Our number one achievement (as women) was of course forcing the government—at the time of the signing of the Charter of Human Rights women were going to be written out of it—that we got them in.

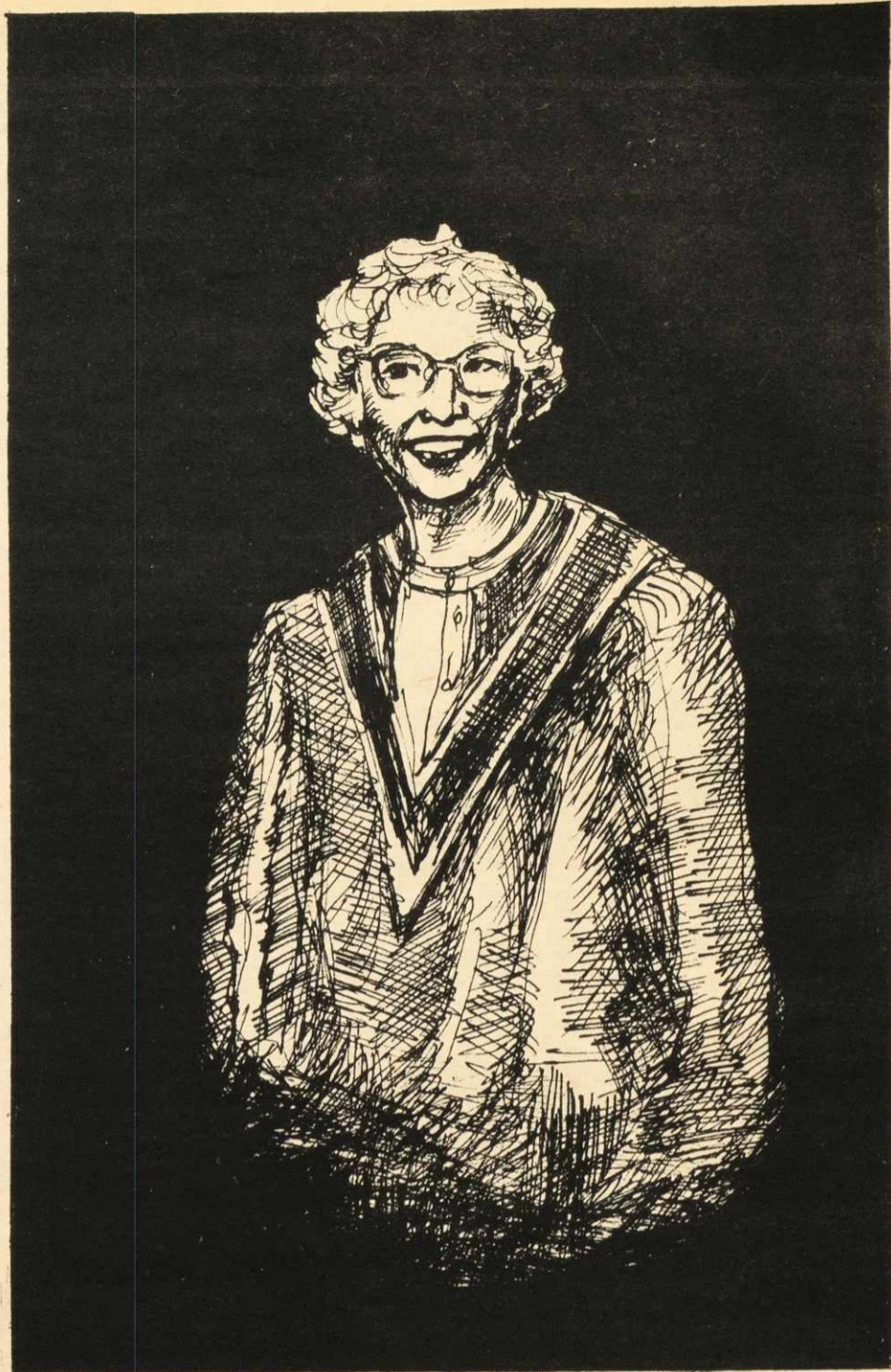


Illustration: Kimberley Whitchurch, Dal Gazette

"But, in any case, having gotten them in there we now have a sense that men are ready to say, 'well, you're taken care of in the legislation, now you've had your 10 years, now it's all over, so won't you please just fade away and let us get on with ...'" Fulton laughs so hard she can't finish her sentence.

"We have to renew ourselves," she continues, "and gear up and go on from here."

Besides her fight to secure better education for women, she is also active in the peace movement. A member of many peace groups, including the Voice of Women, Operation Dismantle, and the Group of 78, she was just appointed to the Board of the newly created Crown Corporation, the Canadian International Institute for Peace and Security.

Chaired by Geoffrey Pearson, former ambassador to Moscow and son of former prime minister Lester Pearson, the Institute was set up to do impartial research on peace and security and to disseminate information on conflict and defence resolutions.

"I belonged to that generation," says Fulton, "where most of the young men went off to fight in the second world war and really thought that it was a noble thing to do and that they were fighting a war to provide the rest of us with peace and security.

"The wars that have been fought to give us security really haven't given us security. There are fewer people who believe that you're going to make the world safe by dropping nuclear bombs.

"It's a contradiction. They (who believe in nuclear deterrent) have that reality and they believe that. Is that kind of peace worth it? You can't make the world safe and secure for the people that are dead."

Fulton says peace has by no means been taken over by the women's movement although she does see a satisfying irony in the women who do become involved in peace.

"Men have always left their homes to go fight wars. And now we're seeing women leave their homes to go form peace vigils. And the most stirring example is they have been able to maintain a steady group of women at Greenham Common."

Four years ago some British women decided to set up a peace camp around the U.S. air base at Greenham Common, one of 18 U.S. military bases in England. Women have camped outside the gates continuously since then, monitoring any movements of the cruise missiles inside the base.

"Here are the women," says Fulton, "who are supposedly the weaker and the helpless ones, surrounded by all this barbed wire and all these huge guns and all of these military people who are supposed to be protecting us. It goes absolutely against the whole idea of the strong protecting the poor."

And that's the point of everything Fulton has been trying to do at the Mount—crush the stereotypes and encourage freedom of expression.

"I hate people thinking that someone else has power over them and expecting someone to provide them with the answers and telling them what to do.

"Women won't have to stay home (in the future) and raise families; fathers and mothers will split the work week and their family responsibilities. There will be new economic structures, new definitions of work, new ways of counting our gross national product. We simply have to envision for ourselves a more viable society."