



Women's History Month

by Stephanie Thursday, March 20, 2008 at 11:17 AM

The following blog was written by Karen Mulhauser, a senior advisor to Women for Obama:

As I reflect on what Women's History Month means to me I find that I'd really like to talk with my mother – to ask her about the changes she observed in her lifetime and tell her about what has happened since she died.

My mother died 27 years ago – and yet I find I am still having imagined conversations with her. These conversations occur when I am gardening for we often gardened together as I was growing up, or whenever I bake a pie and I smile hearing her explain that you add enough shortening until it feels right. The best uninterrupted imagined discussions take place while I am sewing -- she taught me how to sew and to make patterns from a design idea. It is therapeutic -- it relaxes parts of my brain.

Mom, what would you do? Mom, did anything like this ever happen to you? And her answers always cause me to think a little deeper about choices I make.

Over the years, some of the best imagined conversations have been about the advancement of women. She was born in Arizona in 1905 before it was a state – and before women had the right to vote. Her father was the first US Marshal in Bisbee. Her mother was a homemaker. My mother's life was exceptional -- I find I am still awed by what she accomplished -- and I continue learning from her. She became a professor of botany at the University of Texas, and published articles about her work. According to the social standards of the 1930's, she was a trail blazer. She married late, at age 35 and was a decade older than my father, who was her student in graduate school. How remarkable her life seems even in these more liberated times – especially when I remember that she left the work force to have a family and then went back to work after her fifth child started going to school.

When she was alive and I was emerging as the CEO of national NARAL, I remember asking why she made the choices she did. Her life did not seem so remarkable to her. It was the depression, she said, and she couldn't get a job, so she just kept going to school.

Our imagined conversations cover myriad topics, but this past year as I have become a Senior Advisor and a Primetime Woman for Obama, I've thought a great deal about the role of women in society, in the home and in politics. I've reflected on what I have learned from my mother, about being a mother, about knowing oneself, about reaching one's potential, about the joys of good friendships and about being true to oneself. Her life story makes an amazing chapter in 20th century women's achievement as she charted her own

course and defined what was important for her – at every fork in the road. She was a fine model for her two daughters and three sons who have each charted different paths.

A little over a year ago, I assumed I would be immersed in the Clinton campaign, and I had one of those chats with Mom. She told me how as a young girl, she remembered the struggle for women to have the right to vote and now, a woman has a chance to be President of the United States! I pleaded with her to tell me more about the women's suffrage movement, but it was so long ago... In this imagined conversation, I asked what it felt like in the 1920s when she voted for the first time. And she asked me why I was supporting Hillary Clinton. We chatted about Senator Clinton's experience and achievements and we agreed it is indeed time for our fine democracy to allow a woman to crack this glass ceiling and become President.

And then months later as I began hosting events for Barack Obama, I imagined another conversation with my mother. She asked why I'd changed my mind. I told her I was impressed with Barack's ability to inspire so very many young people to get involved in politics and that I was convinced he is the candidate the rest of the world wants us to elect. I also said there are two signs of a mature women's movement. One is the recognition that young women will of course have a different perspective than their mothers about being women in today's world. Also, a mature women's movement is willing to welcome male candidates who share women's values and commitment to feminist policies. It was then that she told me of her years at the University of Texas when she met my father and they were both involved in efforts to lay the ground work for black students to be admitted. In the 1930s, the University of Texas had a terrific woman botany professor, but did not have even one African American student.

She looked at me with pride and the loving smile I remember so well as the sign that I've been a good girl. In these imagined series of conversations, she had been an Obama supporter since the day he announced and like so many real discussions we'd had decades ago, she did not tell me how to think – but waited for me to arrive at a position that was my own.



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