A Feminist Academic Life

by Anne Innis Dagg

I have always been a feminist by instinct, and for several decades was a feminist activist for women because of the personal discrimination I had faced. However, I consider myself primarily a biologist, and indeed have written an unpublished long essay on myself as a woman zoologist. This present essay will consider the part of my life devoted to myself as a woman, and to women in general.

I was lucky to grow up in a solid middle class home. My father was a professor at the University of Toronto who would later have a college named after him because of his scholarship on staple resources in Canada and his history of communication--his research laying the groundwork for that of Marshall McLuhan. Although we didn't have a car in the 1930s and 1940s, we did live in a large house and had, when my mother was busy with a writing project, a maid. While my mother, Mary Quayle Innis, was looking after her four young children, the oldest nine when I, the youngest, was born, her husband, Harold, asked her to write a book on the economic history of Canada so that he would have a textbook for one of his large courses. She had studied this subject at the University of Chicago where she was an undergraduate and my father a doctoral student, but she had not done graduate work herself. Even so, she rallied around and wrote

An Economic History of Canada (1936) which was well-reviewed and used as a class text for at least the next twenty years. After my father died in 1952, she revised several of his books and then became Dean of Women at University College until she retired. (I published an article on her economic work in 2000).

As I grew up it never occurred to me that girls and women were discriminated against in our family or in society, although I did wonder why weekly chores for my sister and me involved setting the table and washing the dishes, but taking out the garbage one day a week for my two brothers. There seemed to be a large bias there.

I remember that unlike my brothers I loved to learn new things from my mother and sister such as how to fold sheets (two of us standing apart holding each end and then coming together), sew my own clothes, knit scarves, bake and cook. My mother disliked cooking so beginning in high school I made most of the family's meals, rotating eight or so types of meat each week and cooking potatoes and, in winter, usually a root vegetable such as beets, carrots or turnip in our pressure cooker. We never had salad in winter when the ingredients were either unavailable at Longo's small fruit and vegetable store or too expensive. My mother walked to the Spadina Road "Village" above St Clair Avenue nearly every day, lugging home armfuls of supplies. I remember after the war the thrill of finding that carts had been added to the small baskets supplied in the local

grocery store. What a thrill to rush up and down the aisles pushing the carts! Even more exciting than the sliced bread which was introduced into stores about the same time.

My mother did enjoy baking to some extent and teaching me how; we produced cookies and squares each Saturday to be eaten the next day by graduate students and faculty invited to a tea party. My sister and I (not my brothers) served the food and then my younger brother and I stood in the hallway where we could see my father but not be seen by the guests. He would sometimes surreptitiously thumb his nose at us with one hand, disguising this gesture somehow from the others and sending us into fits of giggles.

My mother didn't like to do laundry, so I did that each week throughout my university years. Although our sheets and towels were sent out to a commercial company, the Monday laundry involved about four large loads sorted on the basement floor, beginning with white things and ending with dark socks and pants, which sequentially passed through the washing process. First the electric washing machine jounced each load about in hot soapy water, then it was fed piece by piece through the wringer (where it was essential I not allow my hands to be caught between the rollers) and dropped into the first rinse laundry tub full of hot water. The roller was then swung around between the first and second tubs so that after I had swished the clothes about there I could send them through the wringer a second

time into the second rinse tub water. After more swishing I swung the wringer between the second tub and a basket on the floor and fed the load through the rollers into the basket. Then I hung up the clothes with clothes pins either outdoors on long wire lines in the backyard or on lines in the basement if it was raining or wintertime. During this period the second load was thrashing about in the washing machine to be ready in turn for its own travels through the rinse waters. Later I ironed my blouses and my father's shirts.

During my early years I accepted willingly any number of domestic chores that my father and brothers would not have dreamed of doing. This was because I loved and admired my mother and wanted to help her as much as possible, knowing how busy she was and how much she preferred writing and reading to housework. My brothers were never affected by such notions. Only recently have I wondered how my brothers seemed to know, instinctively, not to become involved in domestic work in any way, lest it become eventually an unwanted chore.

My teen years were spent in an all-girl environment where I thrived. I was a Brownie, a Girl Guide and then a Packie, helping to run Brownie activities. For high school I attended a private girls' school, Bishop Strachan. It was only two blocks away from our house, so my best friend who lived next door and I could come home for lunch and stay for games each day after school. I loved everything about

the school--what we learned in class as well as basketball, badminton, swimming, hockey, tennis and lacrosse. In grade 12, as captain of one of the sports teams, I learned how to organize my group, Gamma, and help its members do their best in the various school competitions. It seemed to me that girls could do anything they wanted.

This notion was quickly disabused at the University of Toronto where I enrolled in the Honour Science course because my dream was to go to Africa to study the giraffe, an animal on which I had become imprinted at the Chicago Zoo when I was two years old. I enjoyed the social life at university and going out in groups and in couples with boys as well as girls, but the boys had a much better deal. Although we paid the same tuition, girls were barred from Hart House, the best building for recreation. When we did share facilities such as in hockey, the boys were allotted the best ice times while the girls practised either early in the morning (7 a.m.) or late in the afternoon. If we played a game at noon hour, groups of men came especially to watch and make fun of our efforts, their wisecracks and convulsive laughter floating to us across the ice. Only boys were hired to do biology field work in the summer holidays, so girls had to pick up other more poorly paying jobs where they could; I spent two summers cleaning mammal skulls in the basement of the Royal Ontario Museum. One fellow student asked why I wanted a degree when

obviously, given the shape of my body, I should be having babies.

By fourth year when I was expected to give biology presentations to our class, something I had easily done in high school, my confidence in my own ability had been completely undermined and I found it very difficult. However, I worked hard at my courses and was rewarded by coming first in the class and earning the gold medal.

My ambition now was to go to Africa, but although I wrote to many men teaching at African universities or involved with government departments of wildlife, none could recommend any way for me to study giraffe. Several indicated that being a woman didn't help my cause. With no leads, I decided to take a master's degree in the genetics of mice which involved feeding the same diet to different strains of mice pairs and weighing the babies of the various strains to see if they developed at different rates. They did, indicating that the strains thrived in different diets. This was one of the few graduate research projects that didn't involve hurting animals.

During this research, I continued to probe possible leads to the giraffe. Finally Jakes and Griff Ewer, the former professors of a white graduate student colleague of mine from Africa, then at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, heard about a farmer who might be willing to have a student do research on the his ranch where 95 giraffe mingled among the cattle. I wrote to the farmer immediately giving only my initials, and he wrote back, assuming that I was a

man, to say he would be willing to have me stay there.

Using my scholarship money, money earned demonstrating labs and at summer jobs, and money given to me by my mother, I immediately set sail first for Britain and then for South Africa where I stayed with the Ewers while trying, having admitted to being a "girl," to arrange to work at the giraffe ranch. At first the farmer, Mr. Matthew, wrote that this was impossible since his wife was away and it would be improper for me to live among men. Within a month, however, he gave in because I had already come so far to realize my dream.

After buying a second-hand car (there was almost no public transport in South Africa at the time), I drove the thousand miles to Fleur de Lys farm in two days. There Mr. Matthew kindly agreed that I could stay for four months to carry out my research; for my room and board I could do some typing for him and keep a record of the species of bushes and trees browsed by his huge herd of cattle. As well, he was happy to have me use his powerful binoculars and his 16 mm. movie camera to film the giraffe. I had indeed landed in paradise and will be always grateful to this man for his kindness.

At the end of the four months, I took a ship from Durban to Dar es Salaam in Tanganyika to see if there was a chance of studying giraffe in East Africa. While looking around and to earn some money I worked for two months as a typist in the Department of Labour. Next I decided to go inland to Arusha, the centre for wildlife safaris.

I did so by way of a visit to Zanzibar (an ultra-exotic place I didn't envision that I would ever have another chance to visit, not foreseeing the rapid development of airplane travel) and a climb up Mt. Kilimanjaro which I had long wanted to do.

From Arusha I visited several wildlife areas but found that there was no possibility of doing research on giraffe in the area. Next I travelled by bus to Nairobi and then on to Kisumu on Lake Victoria, neither of which place offered any possibility as a research base. I had a letter of introduction to Louis Leakey in Nairobi who, four years later, would settle Jane Goodall in her chimpanzee retreat at Gombi, but he was away so I did not meet him.

Mr. Matthew had said that I could return to Fleur de Lys again to do more work if nothing else turned up, so I decided to do that, journeying overland by trains, buses, cars, boats and ferries. I was travelling alone all of this time, but I never felt in any danger. All the countries I visited except South Africa were colonized by the British, so I received kindness and help everywhere because I was a young white english-speaking women. Nowadays such a trip would be impossibly dangerous.

Back at the giraffe farm I worked for several months before returning to Rhodes University in my small car and then to London by ship. There I married a fellow scientist and returned to Canada to settle down, first in Ottawa and then, in 1959, in Waterloo where

my husband became a professor of physics at the University of Waterloo. At this point I was a feminist, as I had always been, because I believed that women and men were equal. After all, I had been able to carry out my life's dream of going to Africa to study, even though I had had a few set-backs because I was a woman.

In Waterloo I began to appreciate the sexual discrimination that most women faced. I wanted to become an academic like my husband, so I arranged to teach a course each fall and winter (1962 to 1965) at Waterloo Lutheran University (now Wilfrid Laurier University). This worked so well, even though I was producing and raising three young children at the time, that I asked to teach two courses like the other two members (male) of the biology department were doing. Yes, the chairman agreed, that would be great. Then I would be full-time too, I said happily. Well no. The men were full-time, but I would remain part-time and poorly paid, even though I had the same teaching load and was doing more research (on facets of the giraffe such as their food preferences, subspeciation and distribution) than they were. Hmmm.

I decided to start my academic publishing career by sending the results from my MA research thesis to the Canadian Journal of Zoology. My paper was accepted, but the editor mentioned that I had used incorrect ways to present my data. I was so ashamed of my faux pas that I never returned the corrected paper to the journal and this

research was never published. Thinking back, my behavior indicates how difficult it was/is to become an academic. I was stymied even though my father and two brothers had been/ were academics; how much worse it must be for students coming cold into university life.

In 1965 I decided to stop teaching as a sessional and to earn a PhD in biology at the University of Waterloo to give myself maximum qualifications for being a professor. I did this by working mostly at home where I could keep an eye on my children while analyzing the slow and fast gaits of giraffe and species of antelope and deer using film footage I had taken in Africa or borrowed from various photographers. I read a great deal of the literature while nursing my daughter each day for an hour every four hours. My supervisor soon became bored with my research and asked my husband to oversee the structuring of my thesis, which he did. This was an incredibly busy time. I managed to complete the degree in two years, but the experience made me wonder if I was really highly competent, or if the department didn't really care about what a woman graduate student was doing.

When my research was almost complete, I agreed to teach several sessional courses at the University of Guelph. These went very well but finally, worn down and exhausted, I developed a kidney infection that dragged on for six months while on my husband's year-long sabbatical in Australia.

When we returned to Canada in 1968, I was thrilled to become an assistant professor of zoology at the University of Guelph. The children were in nursery school or real school for part of the day, then in the care of a baby sitter who arrived at about three o'clock and made dinner. I carried on with my research on gaits and on giraffe and taught a variety of courses-- mammalogy, wildlife management and large first year survey courses. I thought that everything was going along well until in 1972 I was turned down for tenure, which meant that I would lose my job. I was horrified. I had more research papers published (20) than most professors, and "good" to "very good" student evaluations for my teaching. What more could I do? I appealed the decision but my appeal was denied. Later, I realized that three women had been hired sequentially in the department to teach large first year courses and specialty courses, all of whom were denied tenure after teaching four or five years. It was a good way for the department to have stressful teaching done with no long term commitment to the teachers. It did not matter to the department that the teaching careers of these women were destroyed because they would have little chance of being hired as professors at other universities.

I decided to try for a job at the University of Waterloo, but when I talked to the dean of science, he told me that he would never give tenure to a married woman (and he never did) because she had

a husband to support her; without tenure, there was no possibility of having a permanent job.

The next years were troubling. I wrote several books of biology and continued to do research, although now without any grant money as I had no official affiliation. In 1974 I applied to Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) for two advertized positions for professors for which I had excellent credentials, but I was not even allowed an interview. The job instead went to personal friends of the faculty members. I complained to the Ontario Human Rights Commission but was given little attention; indeed the chair, Tom Symmons, was biased (but did not excuse himself) because he had an honourary degree from WLU. I asked for a judicial review of the Commission but lost my legal case after four years of anxiety.

In 1978 I was fortunate to be hired by students as a part-time Resource Person in the student-run Integrated Studies program (now Independent Studies) at the University of Waterloo. This was a part-time position, two days a week, in which I sat around making myself available to students who wanted to discuss whatever interested them. Each year there was a new hiring, so it was imperative to make myself useful to as many students as possible. [--an excellent way to keep educators in line, reminiscent of the Middle Ages when it was students who employed scholars to teach them.] In this way I was reelected seven consecutive times. In 1985, the

program imploded because of program irresponsibility and in 1986 I was made Academic Director (part-time) while the students' power was reduced. The program imploded again three years later, at which time I managed to hold on to a position as a part-time Academic Advisor and the students lost all their power. Today, as a sessional appointee, I am still at this amazing program which continues to serve students who are self-motivated and eager to decide for themselves what they will study.

After leaving the University of Guelph in 1972, the first and last full-time job I was able to find in my field, I continued (and continue) to spend my own money to do research and writing. By 1982, I had authored or co-authored nine books and 34 refereed papers in scientific journals, the topics all relating to biology. One book was on giraffe, two on camels (which I studied in the Sahara during two summers) and others on locomotion, Canadian wildlife, urban ecology, Waterloo area mammals and mammals of Ontario. Because I no longer had funding, much of my work was based on library research rather than on field studies which I would have preferred to do.

From the early 1980s on, because of my past personal experiences, I turned my attention to exposing discrimination, mostly against females (non-human and human). I published my book Harems and Other Horrors: Sexual Bias in Behavioral Biology (1983) myself, because no press wanted to take a chance on what appeared

to be a feminist polemic. It argued with extensive examples that field and laboratory biologists, (mostly men), in the past had been biased as observers of animal behavior because they assumed that males were always superior/ dominant to females, which is very often not the case. Since then, with more and more women becoming field biologists, this problem has become much less important.

I also campaigned against homophobia because of the number of my gay and lesbian students who had horrific stories to tell about their life experiences. For a ground-breaking article on homosexuality among non-human animals, I searched voluminously through books and articles on field behavior of animals and located over a hundred species in which homosexual behavior, or females mounting males, occurred (1984a). These data proved that it was wrong for anti-gay people to assert that homosexuality was against nature--obviously it was very much a part of animal nature. Not that anti-gays are willing even yet to accept this finding.

My next large project was a study of discrimination against women in the arts in Canada. This involved correlating statistics from Annual Reports of the Canada Council to show that far more money went to male than to female artists, writers, composers and other cultural artists, even if relatively more women than men applied for funding. I called it <u>The Fifty Percent Solution: Why Should Women Pay for Men's Culture?</u> (1986), again published by myself, to

emphasize that both women and men pay taxes, but that more money was coming back to men to carry on their cultural pursuits. The Canada Council was undoubtedly embarrassed by this exposé because before long women were receiving more money from it than they had in the past. Today, most grants seem to be given for merit.

Two years later, in 1988, an Independent Studies student, Patricia J. Thompson, and I, published MisEducation: Women and Canadian Universities (OISE Press), a book that pointed out the many ways in which universities continued to be biased against women students, staff and faculty. On the basis of this we were asked to speak to some universities on the subject of sexual discrimination. Fortunately, many of the problems that we described have now been largely addressed.

Along these same lines, in 1994 I produced a 76-page book called User-Friendly University: What Every Student Should Know. It elaborated not only how universities could be helpful to women, but also to other groups such as gays, lesbians, blacks, aboriginal peoples and working class students. As well, it discussed topics such as tenure, course offerings, power relations, hiring of professors, sexual assault, racism, classism and feminist studies. I printed a number of copies myself and expected university book stores to stock it. However, because I had set the price low ($4.00) so that students could afford it, the book stores would have little markup and none

ordered it.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, as well as a few other projects, I worked on a number of research papers involving academic women, a topic that included me and in which I was engrossed because of the discrimination I had faced:

* I collected and published information about how women with PhDs had fared in getting jobs (1985); I had been appalled to realize, in the 1970s, that I knew six women personally (and a few men) who had PhDs in biology but who were unable to obtain university positions. At the same time, biology departments in Ontario were urging young people to enrol for graduate degrees. A friend, Dr. Rita Wensler, and I, spent some time corresponding with under-/ un-employed PhDs across Canada to rally support for scholars such as ourselves.

* I did research, some with Shelly Beauchamp, on women in science--asking if they did science differently because they were women and/or because they were feminists. This work excited considerable interest when we gave talks about it in Canadian universities.

* In 1993 I published a paper analyzing in a case study at a Canadian university the presence of "inbreeding" whereby women were hired because their husbands were on faculty, and "anti-nepotism" whereby women were <u>not</u> hired because their husbands were on faculty, usually in the same department.

* In 1998, by which time there were many more women professors than there had been twenty years earlier, I published a chapter pointing out subtle problems that still remained for women faculty and would-be women faculty.

* As early as 1985 I had begun collecting information about women in Canada who had written non-fiction books before 1945, and women elsewhere who had written about Canada, expecting that there must be at least a few score of them. This project expanded until 1992 (1992a) when I published the material I had collected. I then decided to expand the information about these women (there were eventually 476 of them!) and the books they had written into a book, which was published in 2001 under the title The Feminine Gaze: A Canadian Compendium of Non-Fiction Women Authors and their Books, 1836-1945.

I had difficulty locating a publisher for this book, and was disappointed when I found that a feminist from the Maritimes had written a critique urging that it not be published, presumably because I was a scientist rather than an English academic and therefore encroaching on the territory of her and her colleagues. At least this is what the publisher who finally produced it thought.

By the late 1990s, therefore, I switched my activist attention from academic women, about whom I had written all I knew, to the rights and welfare of animals who obviously also needed people to fight for them. I continue to publish papers and speak in this field while never

abandoning my feminist sensibilities. In addition, I continue to produce articles and books related to biology, most recently "Love of Shopping" is Not a Gene: Problems with Evolutionary Biology (Black Rose Press, 2005) and Pursuing Giraffe: A 1950s Adventure (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, in press).

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Brief Biography

Anne Innis was born in Toronto, to academic parents, in 1933. She fell in love with giraffe when she saw them for the first time at two years of age. As she grew up, she decided she must go to Africa and observe giraffe there. To this end, she studied biology at the University of Toronto, earned a master's degree there, and went to Africa to follow her dream. When she returned to Canada in 1957, she married a fellow scientist, Ian Dagg, and moved with him from Ottawa to Waterloo, Ontario, where he became a professor. There she carried out further biological research on giraffe and other mammals, began a sessional teaching career at universities, earned her doctorate, and produced three children. She was never able to obtain a regular position as a professor, despite her good teaching evaluations and despite publishing over seventy academic books and refereed scientific papers, apparently because of her sex. Using her own money, she has researched and published many articles on discrimination against academic women; she also works against homophobia and violence toward animals. As she has since 1978, she continues to work part-time as an Academic Advisor in the Independent Studies program at the University of Waterloo.

Shawna Geissler, co-editor,
re Sojourners: Narratives by Canadian Women,
54 Massey Road,
Regina, SK S4S 4M9
April 26, 2005

Dear Shawna Geissler,

I enclose the autobiography I have written in response to your request for personal narratives of Canadian women. I hope you and Bonita Dolmage like it. I can send along a disc with the text on it, if you would like this.

Thank you for undertaking such a worthwhile project.

Sincerely,

Anne Innis Dagg, PhD
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