

# FEMININE SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

BY MICHAEL A. MILLER

The virtues of goodness have always been to me associated with the feminine side of human nature. So in an effort to start 1995 off on an optimistic note I sought a solidifying of the feminine through interviews with four politically active women in the North Coast community.

My first interview was with Kelly Hoffman. She is 16 and a senior at Astoria High School. She recently ran the Elizabeth Furse campaign for Clatsop County. She possesses the vibrant beauty of youth and is bright and independent. She is exactly the fruition our society espouses and contradictorally restrains. I expected an outpouring of hope, optimism and ambition from such an archetype of potential. However, much of what she said was of a different tone.

I asked Kelly when she thought we would have our first woman President. Her opinion is that it will not be for a very long time. She feels that most Americans view women in power with hostility and suspicion. She therefore no longer holds her childhood dream of being President as a possibility but still entertains the idea of an ambassadorship or perhaps even the Vice Presidency. She feels women are being treated equally in our society though she realizes they are paid less than their male counterparts, are frequent victims of discrimination and harassment, and crimes against women such as rape still receive light sentences.

Since Kelly is aware of society's gender discrimination I asked how she regarded the feminist movement. She surprised me by saying, "I'm not into that sort of thing." She doesn't care that she's a girl and she resents any and all limitations and expectations placed upon her because of her gender. She would much rather discover the boundaries of herself through her own experience.

Kelly also chimed the familiar rhetoric of the Democratic Party. She favored health care and could not understand why anyone would be against it. She doesn't understand how people raised on the principle of loving their neighbors as themselves don't feed, house or care for them when in need. Unfortunately, President Clinton's proposal for health care would essentially make the poor pay more than the wealthy for coverage and would allow a small number of huge insurance companies to monopolize health care, or more accurately health crisis because it is not prevention oriented. Kelly was unaware of these aspects of Clinton's health care. Nor do I believe she was aware that industry would like to pass their insurance costs on to the American public. After all, it was the auto companies that effectively started Canada's health care system for exactly that reason. Along with health care, she was also concerned about crime and is a proponent of gun control.

Kelly astutely recognized the problem of voting partisan. "It promotes ignorance of political candidates and issues. Too many people blindly support their party's agenda and candidates on the assumption that the party is promoting their welfare when even a small effort to know more would reveal areas of strong difference." She favors either abolishing all parties or having a true multiple party system. The two party system heavily polarizes our society and fosters intolerance toward diversity of opinion (as Joycelyn Elders has discovered). Along with these political reforms, Kelly would like to see Congressional terms lengthened to allow enough time for our representatives to accomplish something. Most importantly, she would like to see state and local government have more power than they do now. She does not believe that D.C. can micromanage an entire nation effectively. The people are more easily heard in state capitols and local town halls than in Washington.



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I asked her thoughts on the local drug problem. She felt she really couldn't answer this question with any assurance because she has only been exposed to marijuana, alcohol and cigarettes. She has never used marijuana which she thinks only makes a person passive and so does not really worry her. She was most angry at alcohol which she sees as a mindless form of entertainment that many youth obsessively preoccupy themselves with. The number of local teenage deaths due to alcohol has had very little impact on teenage drinking and this further infuriates Kelly. As for cigarettes, she didn't personally know any teenagers who smoke. It is adequate to say that there are a lot of them and since nicotine is the most addictive drug, there is little chance of them quitting this slow but certain death.

The most disturbing answers that Kelly gave me were in regard to my questions concerning the outlook of her generation. Kelly believes that most of her generation has an Armageddon complex. "We feel like everything is going to collapse and land on us just when we come to power," which she says is the main reason most of her generation has an apathetic attitude. "Why," she asks, "when those in power are destroying our future and we are powerless to do anything about it should we even care?" But it is evident that she does care and it is also evident she is right. The avaricious appetite of western culture threatens to devour everything, leaving only wastelands for future generations. If we cannot give our youth a sense of hope, purpose and direction, who will? Rush Limbaugh?

Kelly and her generation will live out most of their lives beyond 2000. Her generation may not feel optimistic but history shows that people will always rise again to advance their society as long as there are courageous, compassionate and creative women and men to lead the way. I believe Kelly is such a person and she will not be alone in her efforts.

My next interview was with Bunny Doar, a woman well known by our community but with whom I was unfamiliar. She is currently a member of the Women's Political Caucus and a board member of Clatsop Community College. She campaigned unsuccessfully for county commissioner last year. Bunny impressed me as a woman who has cultivated an independent personality through a life of study and social activity to achieve clarity of thought, a sound understanding of our society and a solid sense of self.

Bunny has a realistic and outspoken understanding of politics. She believes that politics is the art of the possible but that people today tend to associate politics with D.C. and their state capitols which fosters an attitude of hopelessness because they seem so distant and unapproachable. She would remind people of how many decisions are made by local governments that directly affect the shape and direction of the community. "One may appeal a decision of the court but the decisions of the local school board are final," she says.

Though Bunny has been a Democrat all her life she does not place blind faith in the party or its platform. She has her suspicions of Clinton's promotion of removing tariffs and other trade barriers. Bunny further recognizes the importance of third parties. "They often are the forerunners for ideas that are radical and eventually become mainstream," she says. A stark example of this is the 8 hour day that once was seen as a frightening idea that if implemented would ruin the nation's economy. The legalization of drugs is a radical idea in our time. Bunny believes the "get tough on crime" campaigns are misguided. "It is an increasing expense that the people cannot afford. For the price of locking up an addict we could give that person a year's supply of narcotics and pay him a substantial income."

Although legalizing drugs is a large part of the Libertarian Party's platform, Bunny feels this third party is promoting such broad sweeps of change that few are willing to take their notions seriously, even the more sound ones. "The two principle parties are too entrenched to lose their political fortitude," she says. "Instead of trying to launch a full scale war with nothing but idyllic hopes they should focus on a few key issues with a concentrated effort." She also sees little possibility of a comprehensive drug policy gaining ground in America. "We are violently influenced by the Puritan ethic, right through the witch burnings to the witch hunts. We have always been a society of very little tolerance."

The right's call to arms is not diminishing. Bunny believes many people are afraid of being cast adrift in these turbulent times. "The right is championing the return to family values. That is the patriarchal dictatorial system. In Oregon passage of Measure 16 (the so-called *Right to Die* initiative) has these people frothing out the mouth because it allows someone the right to make up his own mind about his life. These people

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