

**1998 Write Women Back Into History
Essay Contest Winners
Iowa Commission on the Status of Women**

First-place: 6-7th Grade Judging Category

Writing Women Back Into History

by Jessica Moser, grade 7

St. Mary School in Guttenberg

Sponsoring teacher: Peggy Rausch

Gertrude Mary Ertl was born September 28, 1905, in Cascade, Iowa. She is my great-grandmother. She was married to Fred Ertl, Sr., who was diagnosed with colon cancer in 1948. While my great-grandfather was ill my great-grandmother was with child.

My great-grandfather was hospitalized in Rochester, Minnesota at the Mayo Clinic and my great-grandmother went to and from Dubuque, Iowa, to Rochester, Minnesota, every other day while her husband was ill. At the same time she was raising five boys and a small baby at home in Dubuque.

My great-grandfather was the founder and president of The Ertl Company. The company was just a young company starting out. It was only three years old when he became ill. The Ertl Company began in the family basement in 1945 and by 1948 was located in a building on Asbury Road in Dubuque, Iowa.

My great-grandmother had helped out with the family business since it began, but now that her husband was ill she had to take on more responsibilities of the company. With her husband ill she had to manage and take complete control of the business. She did all the accounting and finances, helped make toys when needed, she hired employees and she met with customers such as John Deere and International Harvester.

While managing a business, she still had to take care of her children and home. All the children lived at home. They were Fred Jr., 18, Bob was 15, Joe was 13, Allan, 10, and John was 8 along with their sister Carol who was just a baby.

Gertrude was also training her older sons, Fred Jr., and Bob about the business. The younger kids helped out with whatever they could. That was not all. She also was helping and caring for her ill husband, and fulfilling her motherhood duties such as cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry, just to name a few. She was always there for her children if they needed anything. She did what any ordinary mother would do. She was always very busy.

I feel that Gertrude M. Ertl should be written into history because of all the duties and responsibilities she had. She was not just an ordinary mother, she was also a great business woman. I admire my great-grandmother for all that she has done. She had much to do and think about in her daily life. Her hard work and dedication have paid off. The Ertl Company, which started out in a basement is now a large toy manufacturer. I am very proud of my great-grandmother and all that she has achieved in her life. She has been a wonderful example and inspiration in many things that I do and that is why I truly

believe that she should be written into history. Gertrude Mary Ertl died May 18, 1990, at the age of 84.

Second Place: 6-7th Grade Judging Category

Naomi's Horticulture **by Sarah Maahs, grade 7** **Ames Middle School** **Teacher: Kristine Magel**

There are many famous people in the world, but do you know Naomi Griener Maahs? If you

know a lot about horticulture, you would know who she is, but those who do not I will explain to you. At first glance, you would not expect a quiet and gentle woman to be able to do all the things she does. Nevertheless, she is a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a daughter, and much more. The thing she loves the best is being involved in horticulture. This is why I think she should be written into history.

Naomi Clara Griener was born January 3, but everyone called her Naomi or Omi. Naomi grew up on a farm near the small town of Whittemore, Iowa. She lived with her father and mother and her two younger sisters Judy and Mary. Her mother and father grew many different kinds of horticulture plants. Both of her grandmothers grew exceptional gardens and vegetable patches. Therefore, when she was born she was introduced to horticulture. As a child she learned more and more about agriculture. Every year the little village had a miniature fair and Omi would compete in competitions such as flower arrangements and growing talents. As a child, men were mainly in charge, but now women and men are a part of horticulture.

In 1952, Naomi married a young man by the name of Eugene Maahs. Together they had five children. After all of her children had grown up, she went to college. She married, so she never had the chance to go to college as a young woman. At college she received a major in horticulture and graduated in 1980. She joined many horticultural groups like the Iowa Horticultural Society or the IHS. She really enjoyed being a part of all the different groups, but her dream was to have her own fruit and vegetable business, which she did about a year after college. She grew and sold fruits and vegetables for about 16 years. Next, she would like to go into growing herb and organic vegetables as a business. Lots of people ask for advice on how to grow horticulture plants because agricultural plants are mainly grown in Iowa.

In 1988, Naomi was elected president of the IHS. During that time there was a horrible drought that swept across Iowa. There was a major crisis going on, especially for farmers, so they went to talk to the different agriculture and horticulture groups. Together, including my grandmother, they went to Washington, D.C. to speak to the people in Congress about some financial assistance for help. Their plea was accepted, and for the first time in Iowa history the agriculture and horticulture problem was accepted. Afterwards, Omi became president of the Department of Agriculture from 1988 to 1992 and was president of the Iowa Fruit and Vegetable Growers Associations in 1993, 1994,

and 1996 in addition to still being on the board. She went to the Iowa Legislature to see if they can make some more laws for horticulture farmers and they accepted the idea. She has won many awards including the IHS Merit and Honor Awards and the ISU Alumni Award-Gamma Sigma Delta.

Naomi thinks that the future of horticulture will increase and become more important, especially in food production. She has made great improvements in horticulture and has made a great contribution to the state of Iowa. I think she should be written into the history of Iowa because she paved the way for other young women who love horticulture and may be inspired by Naomi Grienert Maahs.

Third Place: 6-7th Grade Judging Category

Lucie Saylor: A Volunteer in My Community

**by Andrea Roberts, grade 6
Parnell Elementary School
Sponsoring teacher: Judy Lillis**

Lucie Saylor is a prominent figure in my community. She was born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina. While living there, she joined the Junior League, a local volunteer group. This was her first formal volunteer project and she was involved for ten years. From 1980-1990 Lucie had a full-time career as catering director for a university in Raleigh. Lucie landed the job when a new chancellor arrived at the university and thought someone with southern style and charm would be helpful. He told her she did not need catering experience, just the know-how of planning a menu. Lucie taught three years of a program introducing nontraditional jobs for women.

Seven years ago Lucie moved to Williamsburg, Iowa. "People told me I couldn't moved to a small town in the Midwest and be happy," says Lucie. Evidently Lucie had other plans. She is a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, belongs to their altar guild, and helps out at Lutheran Interparish School. LOVE, "Lots of Very-Special Elves," Network is part of Lucie's holiday season. They help local families who are in need. Lucie has been involved for four out of the ten years this program has been going. Each Christmas LOVE gives these families gifts such as a turkey and ham, blankets or other basic needs, and all of the children in each family are given a new toy. LOVE buys winter garments for Williamsburg Elementary School. LOVE is sponsored through the local HACAP.

In 1996, Lucie's friends at HACAP nominated her to be an official Olympic torchbearer. When the notice came that she had been chosen to be one of 66 torchbearers in Iowa she was surprised. Her friends hadn't said anything about nominating her. Lucie carried the torch in Iowa City for a little less than a mile. At first Lucie didn't know if she was going to enjoy it but in the end she wanted to do it all over again.

Meals on Wheels is another volunteer group Lucie is involved with. She has been involved for seven years, and does most of her work in this group during the winter.

Lucie is in her second term as president of the library board in Williamsburg. Right now the board is working on a project to find a new site for the library because of the lack of space. Phase one of the plan has been passed. That was convincing people

there was a need for the new library. The next phase is hiring a consultant to help find a proper place for the library. Lucie works in the library once a week. Her work with the library started out with the Friends support group, another library sponsored program. Lucie's dedication to preserving and expanding the library is very important to me. I have gone to the library since I first learned to read in preschool. Reading is one of my favorites hobbies. Our community is growing rapidly and Lucie is accepting the challenge to help the library keep up with the needs of the community.

Weekly visits to Lucie's mother-in-law who lives in a nursing home are part of Lucie's schedule. In her spare time Lucie golfs, paints, and gardens. She also does a fair amount of traveling with her husband. Her main focus right now is getting the library moved. In the future, her main thrust of energy is to be with her grandchildren. As for volunteering, Lucie says, "It brings me a great deal of pleasure to bring sunshine into others' lives."

First Place: 8-9th Grade Judging Category

Dorothy Henry: Breaking Gender Barriers

by Elizabeth Reicks, grade 8

Turkey Valley Community School, Jackson Junction

Teacher: Patricia Lynch

Kelly Flinn has received credit and much publicity in recent years as the first woman jet pilot in the military, but those honors really belong to a WASP, Women's Airforce Service Pilot, who flew a jet in World War II. If my "great-aunt" had not been a WASP, I would not have known of their efforts because, sadly, their contributions are missing from our school history books.

Dorothy Henry of Clarion, Aunt Dot to me, was my great-uncle's sister. Dot was one of several Iowa women who served as a WASP. During the last few years of her life I had many opportunities to visit with her. Each time she thrilled me with stories of her life. After her death in 1994 I interviewed many of her fellow WASPs, as well as her brother, as part of my research for History Day.

The WASPs helped establish women's rights. They were the first women in the United States to fly for the military and they trained as equals with male pilots during World War II. What they did made a difference to all women's lives by breaking down gender barriers. It is important for all to know of the risks taken by the WASPs and the contributions they made to our country. Dorothy Henry, as well as the other women pilots during World War II, need to be written into history.

As a young girl Dot flew with her uncle, then saved her allowance to learn to fly. She told me when she heard about the WASPS she applied for an interview. She was not alone. Twenty-five thousand women applied for training; 1830 were accepted, and 1074 received their wings. Their washout rate was the same as the men's.

In 1943 Dot reported for duty at Avenger Field in Sweetwater, Texas. The WASP's training program included over 400 hours of ground school. Dot's class was the first to require over 210 hours of flight time. Their program compared in every way to

that of male cadets' except formation and aerobatics were not "officially" included. However, according to WASPs I interviewed, many women learned these also.

After Dot graduated, she was assigned to Pilots' Training in Kansas where she trained as a Combat First Pilot. Then she was assigned to Great Bend Army Base in Kansas where she towed targets for the men to shoot with live ammunition. She also ferried planes to many destinations.

Her service to our country was not without risks. Once the fuselage of her B-26 was shot as she towed targets. An engine went out on a plane which she was co-piloting. Another time she had to crash land when a rock jammed her landing gear.

I never saw Dot without the silver wings she received in 1944 when she graduated from military training. She had them made into a ring which she always wore. At a time when women were expected to stay home, certainly not fly, Dot became a pilot, then risked her life to serve her country as a select member of the WASPs. After the war she continued to break down gender barriers by becoming a teacher and then administrator for the Department of Defense in American schools overseas.

Dot always took the time to talk to and encourage me in my endeavors. Her tenacity and the accomplishments she achieved make me realize my opportunities have no bounds. The contributions of Dot and the WASPs should not be forgotten. Dorothy Henry is a special Iowan who needs to be written into history!

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Second Place: 8-9th Grade Judging Category

Untitled

**by Stephanie Gallegos, grade 8
IKM Middle School, Irwin
Sponsoring Teacher: Nancy Stammer**

My little sister admires everyone. She is afraid of big dogs. If she sees someone around a big dog, she admires that person because that is what she wants to be like.

I want my sister to grow up with stronger examples of bravery. We need to make sure that women like Elizabeth "Crazy Bet" Van Lew are written of in history books because they are excellent role models. Crazy Bet was brave, clever, and heroic. It is a coincidence my sister's name is also Elizabeth.

Raised in Philadelphia, Elizabeth developed passionate antislavery views. When Elizabeth's father died, her mother and she freed nine of their slaves. She became known as Crazy Bet because others felt she acted like a mad woman, trying to find the families of the slaves that she kept.

Crazy Bet was in her mid-forties when the Civil War broke out. Having moved to Richmond, Virginia, Crazy Bet went to Richmond's Libby Prison to talk to prisoners from the North. Using the excuse of carrying food to them, prisoners gave this clever lady valuable information hidden in borrowed books or medicine bottles.

As soon as the war started, she heroically turned her home into a hiding place. She had a secret room, reached only by a hidden staircase, that could hold up to 100 people. She used this passage to hide escaped prisoners from the Richmond Libby Prison.

Crazy Bet relied on the help of her hired black hands to carry coded messages out of town, either in the bottom of a shoe or in an empty eggshell hidden in a basket of food.

On one daring mission, she pretended to sell one of her black servants to President Jefferson Davis to pose as a slave. Mary Bowser was allowed to clean Davis' study, because he thought she couldn't read. He was wrong. Bowser got information on the South's troop size and their location, and gave it to Crazy Bet.

I think that it is sad that other kids don't get to learn about Crazy Bet and her accomplishments that have radically changed my way of thinking. Crazy Bet should be in all history books. Crazy Bet should be known as well as General Lee. Thankfully, I found the few books there are on Elizabeth Van Lew, for this gives me the chance to tell my friends and classmates about this valiant, sagacious woman. I think kids would enjoy hearing her story. It's exciting, serious, and inspirational.

Elizabeth is one of many people forgotten just because she was female. Her story needs to be told! When Elizabeth was called "Crazy" she didn't hide in a corner, afraid to come out again. She let people "think" she was crazy, preposterous, muddled, and frivolous, in order to help others. Betsy made the officials think the work she was doing with the war was a result of her madness, which made her an excellent spy for the North.

I will apply what I learned about this woman to my life in many ways. If I find myself in a situation where I need to come up with a solution, I will remember how Elizabeth outwitted the prison guards. If anyone tries to get me to do something stupid and against my beliefs, like smoking, I will remember how Elizabeth stood up against slavery. If someone puts me down, I'll remember Elizabeth was called Crazy and she didn't let them get her down.

Clever, valorous, heroic, and brave. These are the things that Elizabeth is remembered for. My wish is that my sister and I are remembered that way, too.

Third Place: 8-9th Grade Judging Category

The Lady Who Lived on Ladders

by Amanda Jo Miller, grade 9

Red Oak Community High School

Sponsoring teacher: Larry Brandstetter

As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Women's Rights Movement, I wish to share with you the saga of a woman whose life encompassed nearly two-thirds of this time span and whose talents gave us the Suffrage Memorial Panel in the State Capitol. I first learned of this sculptor by the alliteration, "The Lady Who Lived on Ladders." Curious to learn more about this artist born in my hometown, Red Oak, Iowa, I was drawn to a photo of her in an extraordinary hat and felt an immediate connection.

May I introduce, Miss Nellie Verne Walker, whose life began in Red Oak on December 8th, 1874. As a young girl, Nellie quickly despised the traditional female roles and responsibilities society assumed she would accept. Instead of housekeeping, she was allowed to learn stone cutting from her father, a gravestone maker. This apprenticeship opened the porthole to an amazing and successful career as a sculptor.

Nellie cultivated her skills as a sculptor and grew in talent, but not in stature. As her adult height was only four feet eleven inches, it was necessary for Nellie to use ladders to sculpt her works. Thus the nickname, "The Lady Who Lived On Ladders." Nellie had a resilient attitude and once said, "I've always been proud of my height. It is the same height as Queen Victoria!"

Nellie's career spans a lifetime. She created her first piece, a limestone bust of Lincoln, at only age seventeen. This bust, first displayed at the 1893 Colombian Exhibition, is now in the Garrett Memorial Library in Moulton, Iowa. Later she studied and taught at the Chicago Art Institute. Other noteworthy works include her 1913 Chief Keokuk, a huge figure overlooking the Mississippi river, around which both my mother and I played as children. A highlight of her career is the bronze bas relief honoring suffragettes of Iowa, formally dedicated in 1936. This moving memorial depicts a passing of the torch, symbolizing the women of Iowa working for suffrage, each with their own special gifts. Nellie's work reaches as far as Washington, DC where her commission of Senator James Harlan stands in the lower level of the Capitol. During our family's summer vacation to Washington, DC, as I viewed this statue, I could sense Nellie's zest for life and felt connected by our common Iowa roots.

With Nellie's eyesight fading, her official career ended in 1948, but she remained active into her final years. At age 91 she created a life size plaster cast of herself, entitled, "Courage." Her entire life is a strong statement about courage: courage to step outside the norm and pursue a nontraditional career, courage to adapt to her diminutive size, courage to continue her work in spite of failing eyesight, and courage to speak out strongly on political issues of her day.

Concerning marriage, Nellie remarked, "I avoided marriage, the cook stove, and a lot of other troubles." She referred to her Social Security check as her "alimony," as her work was her only true love throughout all 98 years.

Nellie is one of the few Iowa artists of her time to win recognition outside her native state. She sculpted, taught, traveled, consulted with such noted peers as August Rodin and Henry Fuller, received awards, entertained friends, cared for family, yet had time to feed the birds. Even though Nellie Verne Walker was inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 1987, as we gaze upon her Suffrage Memorial Panel, it seems fitting that we once again applaud the life and accomplishments of "The Lady (from Red Oak) Who Lived on Ladders"!

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Trip to Washington, D.C., June 1997
Stephanie Pratt, resources
Support and encouragement of Larry Branstetter, my teacher and mentor

Edith Rose Murphy Sackett Award--Best Essay on a Woman Volunteer

Donna Ginter
by **Craig Winger, grade 8**
Jefferson Jr. High School, Dubuque
Sponsoring Teacher: Art Miller

The woman you will be hearing about in this essay is Donna Ginter. I think she is very important and has changed many people’s lives.

Donna Ginter was employed at John Deere Dubuque Works, where she was very content. Hard times began with a strike held by union workers at the John Deere plant. This made her life and many others very hard for a couple of years. Donna then began to get into the bar/restaurant business. Knowing hard times herself, she decided to hold a free Thanksgiving Dinner for those in need. Donna and her husband invited about 12 lonely people from around town. This Thanksgiving was the start of Donna Ginter’s well-known “Turkey Dinner.” It consists of turkey, potatoes and gravy, dressing, green beans, sweet potatoes, cranberries, rolls, pumpkin pie, and 25-35 different salads. She continued her free meal with just her husband’s help the next few years.

Donna’s meal only drew small crowds at first. Her dinner was pretty quiet until the early 1980s. Then she had to move the dinner into the Knights of Columbus Hall, because her meal had grown to about 350 people. She even delivered the food to people who couldn’t make it to the dinner. With the growth of Donna’s crowd was the growth of need for volunteers. Even though donations were welcome she paid for most of the menu out of her own pocket. The event has consistently grown ever since she has started it. 1985 brought Donna’s response up to 670 people served. This was just the beginning of many records to be broken. The next year, 1986, Donna served about 1,000 grateful guests. Ginter also attracted about 160 helpful volunteers. She felt her increase in guests was directly related to the strike at John Deere, that year.

The next couple years brought in consistently about 1,000 guests. Volunteers suffered more than a loss of time, many got burned or backaches. The volunteers, however, felt the satisfaction themselves in helping to further Donna Ginter’s cause. According to the *Telegraph Herald*, many of the workers said, “It’s a good way to meet new people.” Some people were amazed to see how many needy people there are. You didn’t have to be homeless to get a free meal, it was open to anyone.

Donna’s husband died in 1972. His passing was really hard on Donna, but she decided to let the tradition live on. She said, “I will continue to provide the free dinner as long as my health doesn’t interfere.” The free meal has stayed around 1,200 guests the

last five years. She estimated that the total cost is almost \$4,000. Donna has seven children, but only five still live in town. The five of her children who are now adults gather every year to help Donna serve the food. Her daughter Ginney Ginter says, "Someday when Donna can't do this anymore I will." The dinner involves about three days of preparation and continues to be a much anticipated event by the Dubuque, Iowa area.

Donna Ginter is very important. She has earned respect from the community and earned a place in many people's hearts. She has contributed much love and time into her Thanksgiving Dinner. I know Donna will always be respected in Dubuque history, and I feel this is the type of person who deserves recognition in American history. Donna Ginter is a representative of the type of people who have established a standard for our country, for much caring and generosity to the less fortunate.

First Place: Women in Science and Engineering Judging Category

Untitled

by Melinda Padley, grade 9

Linn-Mar High School

Sponsoring teacher: Suanne Huffman

Gertrude Sunderlin, my great, great grandmother, was born in Delmar, Iowa on August 27, 1884. Probably no one would have guessed that she would turn out to do so much in her life.

She started school in 1899 and graduated in 1913 as valedictorian of Ames High School. After that, she entered Iowa State University. In college she belonged to Kappa Delta, the literary society, and was in a play too. Before she graduated from Iowa State she taught in Marathon, Iowa, and West Branch. In 1919, she graduated from Iowa State University, where she was the honor student of the college of Home Economics.

Gertrude received free tuition to go to any Iowa college as a prize for being Ames High School Valedictorian. Money was always a problem in her family, and she was very generous with the money she made from teaching. Because education was very important to their family, she even helped put her two sisters through college. Later, it is believed by the family, she provided funds anonymously for Gertrude Mae (her niece and my grandmother) to go to Iowa Wesleyan College when Gertrude Mae's Purdue scholarship was lost due to illness. Gertrude Mae has never known for sure who paid for her college, but it is believed that Aunt Gertrude provided the money.

In 1921, she went to Garrett Theological Institute but she got ill and couldn't continue her studies there. After recovering she taught at a college in Brooking, South Dakota. In 1926, she got a Master of Science degree in household bacteriology from Iowa State University. Then in 1928, she became the first woman to receive a Ph.D. in Bacteriology and Food and Nutrition from the College of Home Economics from Iowa State University. While getting her Ph.D., she received funding from the Ball Fruit Jar Company.

After that she taught at Louisiana State University from 1928 to 1931. In 1931, she went to teach at the Purdue College of Home Economics. She taught and experimented with foods while she was there.

In 1948, she and one of her students invented Master Mix. This was the first mix of this kind (it is a lot like Bisquick now). Her students and she published 1,500 copies of the Master Mix book and traveled around the world distributing the books and food made from Master Mix. This mix was the forerunner for all mixes. She didn't want to patent this idea, so Purdue University sold it to different food companies.

After the Master Mix, she worked on recipes for freezing jams, jellies, batters, and dough. In 1958, she was given the Centennial Citation from the Alumni Association of ISU. Another interesting fact about her is that one of her students invented Stove Top Stuffing.

Besides her teaching career, she also had hobbies. She was a master weaver, an excellent bridge player and enjoyed gardening as a few of her hobbies. Gertrude also was a respected public speaker. She was very active after retiring in 1954 and moved to Iowa City. She, also, quietly helped some young people financially to get through college.

These are big accomplishments for such a very small lady. She wasn't even five feet tall. I only met her once when I was one, but I have heard many times of her great accomplishments.

Second-place: Women in Science and Engineering Judging Category

A Woman Plus Math Equals Success

by Meghan Minner, grade 7

Roland-Story Middle School

Sponsoring teacher: Carol Carr

Who would have thought that a bright, mischievous young girl, who constantly corrected her fifth-grade math teacher (and even was sent to the principal's office), would be the one of the first women to graduate from Iowa State University (ISU) as a mechanical engineer? Well, not her math teacher, that's for sure, but surprisingly enough, not even herself!

That girl, Judy Vance, was born in LaCrosse, Wisconsin in 1955. A television show featuring peanut butter and the jar-filling machines interested young Judy. "I just like the way things work. Gears, levers, engines, and machines that move are interesting."

After graduating from Fort Dodge High School, Judy studied math at ISU in Ames, Iowa. She liked math but thought teaching was her only option. Undecided, she quit school after one year. She became a bank teller and sold Rubbermaid at night. Soon she was making more money selling Rubbermaid.

Judy's older sister suggested that Judy study mechanical engineering. Judy followed this advice. While her advisor arranged her schedule, she told him, "Don't forget to leave time for my parties!" Judy explained that she sold Rubbermaid in the evenings to pay for college. She sold Rubbermaid until she began to receive scholarships.

While in school, Judy married Bruce Vance and had two children. She worked at John Deere in Ankeny, Iowa as a “co-op” student. Judy, one of two women mechanical engineers, remembers her first day. After a tour of John Deere, she was at her desk when a man walked in, sat on her desk and said, “You know you’re taking a man’s job.” Judy was speechless!

In 1980, Judy received a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering from ISU. She accepted a job at John Deere until 1984 when Judy decided to continue studying mechanical engineering at ISU.

As the only woman among the faculty, Judy was discriminated against in subtle ways. She was ignored and not included in committees or meetings needed for promotions. A male colleague regularly walked into her office when the door was closed without knocking. She asked him to knock in the future. “I had to decide what battles to fight,” remembers Judy. “I can get along with someone if they respect me.”

In 1992, Judy was one of the first women to receive her doctorate in mechanical engineering from ISU, the first woman hired as an ISU mechanical engineering professor, and three years later, the first woman mechanical engineer to be tenured at ISU! Today, Judy is one of three women professors in mechanical engineering among 32 men! The national average is two percent.

As a mechanical engineer, Judy teaches, has seven graduate students, travels extensively, and is responsible for research. Mechanical engineering is “a way to use math to design and create machines that help people,” explains Judy intently. Her eyes light up as she explains, “You use math to predict how something behaves.”

Judy has received grants from John Deere, Boeing, and Procter and Gamble to support her research. She uses virtual reality to design machines that create disposable diapers. She describes how a diaper has parts labeled “chassis” and “core” just like cars!

Looking back, Judy is amazed that she is part of history. “Being the first woman faculty member in mechanical engineering is unbelievable!”

Judy has important advice for young girls planning their future. “There is nothing a woman can’t do that a man can... part of it is that women don’t look into the future enough. I only imagined myself as a math teacher, not as a mechanical engineer.”

Why Not Women? Award for the Best Essay on a Woman in a Nontraditional Career

A Nontraditional Woman

by Heidi Hanel, grade 8

Marion High School

Sponsoring teacher: Bonnie Dodge

Did you know that only 2% of electricians are women? Of that 2%, one of them is my Aunt Joyce.

She became an electrician so she could work anywhere she lived. She applied for classes at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids and was put on a waiting list for the Industrial Technology course. Within three months she was notified that a spot was open in the class, but she would have to catch up to the other students and complete

the class. In both segments she had a 94% average. Not only was she the oldest person in the class and the only woman, she was only the second woman to graduate from the course.

Immediately after her classes, she was hired at Johnson Controls and she was the only woman on the construction sites. She often encountered men on sites who thought she was married to someone on the crew.

Later she became involved in a program at the Cedar Rapids YWCA. The purpose of the program was to introduce women to nontraditional trades. She became part of a network of women that worked in various nontraditional fields. There were engineers, a general contractor, bricklayers, painters, other electricians, etc... Whoever they were, they were almost always the single woman in their fields in the early 1980s.

Attending some women's conferences, she gained insight on how to promote women in their trades and brought this back. She soon was hired at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City. A grant was given to UIHC by a woman named Susan Buckley to begin a program to introduce women to nontraditional trades. She became involved in this and began to teach other women what it's like to work in such fields.

In many places she has worked, she was the first woman and she has put up with much criticism. Whenever she talks to other women about this, she is often asked what it's like to have a man's job. She always tells them, "It's not a man's job, it's my job."

For these reasons, I believe my Aunt, Joyce Edmonson, should be written into Iowa History.

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