The First Director Looks Back

Was it really 40 years ago that the Ban Righ Foundation was established? Now that I try to recall my personal experiences of those early days, as Gamila has asked, some things seem to have happened a long time ago and others seemed to have happened week before last. I realize how different my current “take” is from the way I saw it back then.

It was 1974, International Women's Year, so what wasn't in flux? Nothing! It was a time when women began to see themselves differently--liberated from the constraints that were considered the norm. They thought they could do anything and everything. In some ways, society expected them to do anything and everything, though at that time they didn't realize that it was not humanly possible to have a job, care for a family and go to school all at the same time. Many certainly tried, and succeeded against all odds.

It was a time of life reshuffle for me too. I was flying solo after the death of my husband and I had three teen aged sons at home. I felt quite well acquainted with the scene at Queen's, but when I was asked if I would like to apply for the job as first director of the Ban Righ Foundation, I was stopped in my tracks. After all, no one had done this job before. There was no model to follow; no way of knowing whether success lay ahead or utter flop. Much would depend on me. I had had a fair bit of life experience but not much in the area of employment. Thank goodness for all the volunteer work I had been conned into. It all proved useful. I was hired.

So, ready or not, the Ban Righ Foundation opened her doors in September 1974. At first there were very few women tentatively inquiring what we had to offer and with as many questions about the risks as I had about the job I was launching.

The concept of fostering mature women either returning to studies or starting for the first time had been hatched by alumnae who had been students at Queen's in the 1940's and 1950's, Helen Anderson, Sylva Mackay, Lillian Slater, Wilda Parkinson, Bonnie Judge, Margaret Sterns, Shirley Brooks, Margaret Griffin, Margaret Gibson. Some of these women were active on the Ban Righ Board which managed the women's residences. They felt a zealous concern for the $359,000--the accumulated women's residence fund--and did not want it used for the soon to be built men's residences. So there was a mutually agreed plan, that the interest on these funds be used to underwrite a project for returning women students, the Ban Righ Foundation. The University would provide the house at 32 Queen's Crescent (now named Bader Lane), to be shared by the BRF and Student Counselling Services.

How was this new, curious entity to be received? Well, the women knew immediately what it was all about but there were some factions in the upper echelons of university administration which wondered what those women in the fine little brick house were up to. The Dean of Women, Evelyn Reid, who was very much involved in the planning and establishment of the Foundation spent much time and energy in interpreting the vision and efforts of the new enterprise to every quarter. The good effects from those efforts and the long range successes of the women students eventually proved what benefit there was for the individuals and for the total, collective program. After a number of years the work of the Foundation was widely accepted and lauded for the unique program it was.
The women students did very well—many surprising their instructors and other students with their capacity and insight. And apart from their academic achievements, the women built a community in the best sense, helping each other with the loads of transportation, child care, food sharing, etc., all through the comfortable house at 32 Queen's Crescent. The place became a model of cooperation, all in it together.

Frances Dexter, secretary and office manager, was in the scene from the beginning, serving both the BRF and Student Counselling, keeping us all cheerful with her efficiency. Eventually we were able to hire Janet Troughton who helped many students and whose infectious good humour invaded the whole place. Barbara Schlafer came on the scene eventually. She had a magic touch in finding and facilitating the weekly programs and became an integral part of the place, eventually Director.

Those of you who have been involved will know the story from then on, the remarkable successes, despite hardships and hurdles, of those women students who ran the risks and reached their goal.

What will the next 40 years bring? With the varied ways we approach education generally, there are bound to be changes. So, we take a deep breath and do the best we can—or not! When 40 years have passed, it will seem like week before last.

By Helen Mathers

Announcing the new Judith Brown Bursaries…

It is with enormous excitement that we announce that Drs. Alfred and Isabel Bader have recently established a bursary for Ban Righ Centre international women students and they’ve named the bursary in honour of Judith Brown, ArtsCr’76, MA’79, Associate Vice-Principal (Advancement), for her dedicated service. Together the Drs. Bader and Judith Brown have found a way to make the pursuit of education a little easier. Each year Judith Brown Bursaries will be available for students who demonstrate financial need. These students, their families, and their communities will all feel the positive effects of their achievements. The Ban Righ Centre offers warmest thanks to Drs. Alfred and Isabel Bader for their generosity, and to Judith Brown for her sensitivity to students in need and for the dedicated service which has inspired the gift in her name.

To Ban Righ Centre Champions, Founders and Friends…

As part of our 40th anniversary celebrations we will be hosting various events. If you require special assistance, please get in touch with us. Special assistance might involve a car ride, extra support for those with mobility issues, and / or assistance with accessing elevators, hearing aids, etc. Please also inform us of any other food restrictions or accommodation requests.
MEET STUDENT Danai Kapsokefalou

Unlike Sting, the *Englishman in New York*, Danai Kapsokefalou wasn’t even a “legal alien” when she came to Queen’s University from Greece, for a Kinesiology Masters degree. “My student visa was really delayed; in September I had no choice but to enter Canada as a tourist and wait, hoping that any day my student visa would arrive and I would be able to enroll at Queen’s and not miss the term,” says Danai, a single mom. As someone who had left academics years ago and who wanted to rebuild her life in Canada with her son, Oresti, her decision to come to Queen’s was already marked by anxiety about “making it”. “My son was just seven at the time. I was so worried about him adjusting because he didn’t know English. I was also dealing with practical things like buying grocery, cooking for him and doing all the house work.”

As a non-native English speaker, Danai was also struggling to cope with her studies and loneliness. “I was very much isolated. I often felt misunderstood or thought I was misinterpreting, or not getting the meaning behind words. I took longer to understand everything.” Since Danai had a town planning degree, she had been admitted to the Kinesiology course on the condition that she’d have to maintain a 4.0 GPA. Under tremendous psychological pressure about maintaining this standard and wracked with “existential doubt” about her life decisions, including her move to Canada, she would speak to her supervisor about her academic struggles and anxiety. Though her supervisor tried to steady her, Danai still felt unsure and insecure. So much was riding on her decision and her performance.

So when a financial crisis hit Danai, directly linked to her status as an international student, it was a breaking point. A bulk of Danai’s funding at Queen’s was to come in the form of a salary for working as a Teaching Assistant, but her delayed visa meant that Queen’s could not employ her. “I was in a very bad situation. I owed about CAD 9000 to Queen’s for tuition fees and because I couldn’t pay, I was charged additional fees as late charges, and then my phone bill came to 700 dollars due to the company's mistake!” she says.

It was at this point that she heard about Ban Righ Centre. “I was told that they gave bursaries and financial aid to mature students like me. But I was very reluctant, you see? It was stressful to think about exposing my personal stuff to get material support. I didn’t want to talk to strangers about my problems. But I had to,” says Danai, who had already, at this point, encountered other support services on campus.

At Ban Righ however, she didn’t find strangers. She found Lisa, a friendly advisor in whom she found the support she had been desperately seeking. “It was not impersonal or reserved, like I had been dreading. Lisa was emotionally supportive and she had practical solutions. She filled the role of family and friend. She immediately helped sort out my phone bill by talking to the phone company and then once I became eligible she encouraged me to apply for the General Bursary and later, a Spring Award,” she says.

The money, amounting to $1500, meant Danai was able to meet her immediate living expenses. “But more than that, she helped me find myself again, to be strong, confident, safe and closer to my academic goals. With her help, I could handle the other things: my visa, my relationship with my son who had begun to bite his nails because he was so anxious, with my supervisor, with classmates who were 10 years younger.”

Even now, even though she is over the worst of her problems, Danai frequently visits the Ban Righ Centre just to talk to Lisa. “It is the personal approach. The conversations provide me with the emotional relief and support I need so badly,” she says. For now, it is this feeling of familial support that keeps her going as she slowly makes inroads into an alien landscape.

By Smita Mitra

Memories of the Ban Righ Centre

The image of the Ban Righ Centre had become part of my mental landscape long before the Ban Righ Foundation for Continuing University Education came into being. My room in Chown North Three during my first year at Queen’s looked out not just on the newly emerging Physics Building but also on Dr. John Orr’s house.
Dr. Orr died near the end of my four years at Queen’s. His funeral was in Grant Hall and Beatrice Bryce, Dean of Women, attended. He left his house to Queen’s and it is the home of the Ban Righ Centre.

During my years at Queen’s (1962-66) I learned the story of Queen’s women graduates (during and after World War One) working to raise the money to build Ban Righ Hall and was proud of the fact that Queen’s Women’s Residences were still in the hands of Queen’s women. It seems appropriate that the Ban Righ Centre is the inheritor of that legacy.

My first contact with the Ban Righ Centre was in the mid 1980’s. I was in the midst of a ten year break in my teaching career and Marjorie Fair Graham a dear friend, and one of the women who had attended Queen’s during World War One, urged me to join the Canadian Federation of University Women. It was as their representative that I joined the Ban Righ Foundation Board.

The Centre was fairly new at that time, and shared its space with Queen’s Counseling Services. Helen Mathers was Director with staff members Janet Troughton and Barbara Schlaefer. Elspeth Baugh, Dean of Women was an ex officio and essential member of the Board. I won’t attempt to list the other Board members as I don’t want inadvertently to leave anyone out. I will say that I was delighted to be a part of that group. We covered a broad spectrum of ages, interests, backgrounds and occupations, and conviviality and a sense of purpose guided our meetings. That purpose was to support women. Our focus ranged from student bursaries and soup lunches through a wide range of issues pertinent to women’s success at Queen’s. Then as now, the remarkable successes, despite hardships and hurdles, of those women students who ran the risks and reached then on, the remarkable successes, despite hardships and hurdles, of those women students who ran the risks and reached

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I have been enriched by my association with the Ban Righ Centre - a place which maintains and supports the tradition of Queen’s women helping Queen’s women to achieve their goals. By Elva McGaughey (Arts ’66)

The Ban Righ Centre benefits from the help of many volunteers. This winter we are pleased to introduce Laurie O’Handley and Carol Hurtado Yuja.

Carol and Laurie are part of a team comprised of 9 Canadian women and 9 Bolivian women. Working three months in Bolivia and three months in Kingston, this group of Canada World Youth-Fundehus volunteers aim to contribute and support gender-based projects and women’s development in the larger community.

To learn more about this group of volunteers: http://cwy-jcm.com/logbook-boliviaontario/

The Ban Righ Foundation celebrates 40 years of supporting women’s continuing education with a

Spring Reunion Celebration

Saturday, May 3, 2014
3:00-5:30 p.m. in Grant Hall
Join women from the early days of the BRF, see Ban Righ’s new audio/visual history, and meet up with ‘old’ friends! Recognize student achievements. Enjoy music, refreshments and share stories.

Everyone welcome. Bring friends/bring family.

The Ban Righ Foundation would like to thank the Queen's University Alumni Association for financial support for our 40th Anniversary celebration.

Please rsvp to 533-2976 or kb@queensu.ca by April 1.

Open Mon—Fri 9:00—4:00 pm

Visit our website: http://banrighcentre.queensu.ca

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