

## **Degrees of Freedom: We've come a long way-- or have we?**

### **Retired women teacher's reflect on freedom**

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Women teachers have fought long and hard to assure themselves rights and freedoms to exercise their chosen profession. They have seen the marriage bars overturned, have gained the right to maternity leave, to achieve pay parity with their male colleagues, and to secure access to advancement in their profession. Those victories have resulted in unprecedented opportunities for women teachers. And yet challenges remain; minority women still find themselves marginalized, educational restructuring and policies to regulate the profession have sometimes worked against women teachers—indeed all teachers. Many teachers, now retired, look back longingly on the “good old days” when, from their perspective, they had real freedom to develop within their chosen profession.

This paper focuses on the stories of retired women teachers who began teaching in the mid-twentieth century, and explores their perceptions of “progress” in the profession. It includes accounts from women who taught in rural one-room schools, as well as in larger city elementary and secondary schools. The paper also includes, to provide a point of further comparison, a minority group of teachers in Ontario, Francophone teachers, who taught in French language schools within Anglophone Ontario. Their situation provided a particular set of circumstances that in some cases afforded them more freedom to operate, and in others created obstacles. The various stories of these women teachers illustrate that freedom to teach must be viewed as a matter of degree, depending on the context in which teaching is done.

When undertaking a project such as this to interview retired women teachers, especially those who had taught in the middle decades of the last century, one might expect to hear stories that would confirm the understanding supported by Prentice, Gaskell, and others, (see Works Cited) of the less than ideal circumstances in which the women worked and the moral restraints under which they had to operate. Indeed, one looks for evidence of that perception, for testimonials of improvement in conditions, rights and pay equality as the time passed. Some of the questions to the women were "How did working conditions for teachers change over the years of your career?" "Did the teaching careers of men and women differ?" "Did the day-to-day lives of men and women teachers differ and if so how?" The expectation was to hear that women were disadvantaged and more closely regulated than men. And indeed, many women could provide often humorous anecdotes of that nature. I heard repeated stories of the younger, less experienced male teachers who had early on been tapped for administration while the women were overlooked or openly rejected when they applied to be principals.

However, a sizable number of women, especially those who had taught in rural schools, isolated areas, or in the Ontario Francophone system, told a different tale. They had experienced a great deal of autonomy early in their teaching lives, and although financially, things had improved over the years, as far as teaching itself was concerned, growing regulation and control from central authorities had begun to curtail the freedom they had enjoyed so much in the past and their sense of being in control of their vocation to teach. (See Prentice and Priegert Coulter.) Most of the women interviewed for this study would not recommend teaching to their daughters today. Clearly, their experiences challenged assumptions about the lives of women teachers and the progress they had made.

The following section will deal with four issues that emerged from the life stories of rural teachers and Francophone teachers. These illustrate different extents of freedom the women experienced over the years in teaching. The issues of teacher education, marriage and pregnancy, supervision of teaching, and advancement into administration will be considered in particular. Pseudonyms and coded citations (ACPID000) have been used, at the request of the project's granting agency, to protect the privacy of the teachers interviewed.

## Teacher Education

Until 1973 in Ontario, elementary teachers would attend normal school for teacher preparation after they completed grade 12 or 13. Secondary teachers were expected to have a university degree and then would attend the Ontario College of Education to prepare for certification as teachers. In the seventies, teacher education was transferred to newly created Faculties of Education housed in universities around the province. However, it has always been difficult to find teachers for French-language schools, and consequently, the regulations covering teacher education were not observed as closely for those intending to teach in French language schools. Frequently promising young Francophone women were hired right out of high school to teach. One of my participants, Colette, who began teaching in 1954 at the age of 17, reported:

*I was at a private [French] boarding school. A friend of mine and I decided that the jobs were there. They were dying for teachers and we got the job. [Colette was hired to teach Grades 1 and 2 in a 4-room French language school.] There was an ad in the paper. They were looking for teachers and they were desperate and because we had just finished Grade 13, they hired us....The four that were hired did not have training. I think we did a good job. I'm not sure how we survived, but we did. I think when you're young, you take on the challenge (ACPID240).*

Colette subsequently went on to get her certification for both the French and English language systems elementary and secondary, but she could have taught indefinitely on a Letter of Permission without certification in a French-language school. Evidently, Ontario Francophone teachers were not subject to the regulations for teacher certification until the late 70s.

However, Francophone women teachers with certification for the French-language schools who wished to switch to teach French in the English system typically had to spend many summers gaining credits for the English high school graduation diploma and then taking the Ontario teacher education program over again to qualify to teach in the English language schools. Arlette (ACPID251), another of my narrators who had

certification from Quebec, and who was initially hired without difficulty to teach in French-language schools in Ontario, resented the years she had to spend re-qualifying when she decided to teach in English schools. The necessity was more irksome because she always taught French in those English schools.

Occasionally, English speaking teachers were also hired to teach in rural schools right out of high school. Mabel reported that she went directly from grade 12 to her first one-room school.

*I was finishing my high school and the inspector came to the school and interviewed some of us and said that teachers were needed for that fall, and so I had more or less planned to go to North Bay to Teachers' College in Grade 13, but as it turned out, when he said I could have a job that fall, I thought, "Oh well, let's go!" (ACPID056)*

Until the end of the 60s, it was possible to take six-week teacher education courses for three summers to receive initial certification, and many rural teachers in the English system received their qualifications that way.

For rural (English) teachers and teachers in French-language schools in Ontario up to the 1970s, official certification was not difficult, nor, in some cases, even a priority. The teachers were free to develop themselves in their profession as they saw fit, often seeking help from relatives with more teaching experience for specific areas of teaching such as preparing students for the Grade 8 provincial tests. Compare this to the elaborate system in place today where teachers complete degrees, at least one year of pre-service teacher education, and then continue to take in-service courses and additional qualifications for the rest of their careers. The previous (Conservative) government in Ontario mandated re-certification for teachers every five years. Under this policy teachers would have to take 14 courses in specified areas every five years to retain their certificate of teaching. The current (Liberal) government cancelled that policy but still expects ongoing professional development for teachers to be demonstrated through self-selected courses, professional portfolios and the like. Oral historian Petra Munro observed that regulating teachers and teacher education essentially devalued rural

women teachers' knowledge of their profession and resulted in de-skilling:

The increasing polarization of urban and rural schooling was solidified in part through a gendered discourse in which urban signified modern, industrial, expert, professional, public and thus male, whereas rural signified country, agrarian, community-centered, sentimental, private and thus female. ...The gendered nature of school reform discourse was so successful in establishing the ideology of professionalism that the facts of the successes of one-room schools were neglected. munro, (p.50)

### Effects of Marriage and Pregnancy on Women Teachers' Careers

Officially, there were marriage bars which, until the 1950s, required that when women teachers married, they were expected to resign or at least would lose their permanent contract. Pregnancy normally required women teachers to resign until well into the 1970s. That was widely understood to be the policy, but in our interviews with women who taught in rural areas, and with Francophone women teachers, shortages of teachers often resulted in local boards overlooking the policy. In urban areas, it was different. First let us consider two teachers who worked in English language rural schools in the fifties when they were having their families. When asked, "Why were you always changing schools?" Nell replied:

*The reason I was changing is that I got pregnant. So I'd resign. Well then somebody would come, after the baby was born or, you know, and want me to come to teach because they needed a teacher. [In 1952] they hired me [after a leave when she had 2 children] right straight to come and Jocelyn wasn't to be born until January but she came in December. So I took off the month of December and then went back to teach the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. Every time that I was off, I paid my supply teacher whatever was my salary for that month.... I nursed her up until she was 9 months old. My husband fed her cows milk at noon and they were good little kids, every single one. Never had any trouble. Never had a baby with colic.(ACPID057)*

Nell had 7 children and never took much time off nor was without a teaching job for long. Mabel continued teaching in the 1950s when she was having her family:

*I resigned when I got pregnant with Marilyn, that's my oldest daughter. I resigned. She was born in July. I resigned before Christmas. They couldn't get anybody, nobody to take my place. They advertised and everything and so I stayed right on until the first of June and then they got a supply teacher in and I marked all the exams and stuff at home and took them back and forth [between the school and my home.] (ACPID056)*

Clearly the shortage of teachers in rural areas meant that the principal was prepared to overlook the policy and continue to employ a good teacher if he could do so.

In the Ontario Catholic schools, the perception was that the policy would be much more strictly observed. One teacher, Ali, told me how her principal would be on the look-out for weight gain among his married women teachers, and if they looked pregnant, he would ask another woman teacher to do a "tummy check." Ali had to resign when she became pregnant with her first child in the 1970s and did not return to the Catholic system for some 12 years. (ACPID226) However, teachers in the French-language (Catholic) system had different experiences. Marielle (francophone teacher) speaks of teaching and pregnancy:

*I remember that when I was pregnant with my oldest daughter...and when it was very obvious that I was pregnant, they asked me to resign. [I did] but I returned right away the next autumn. I resigned in April and she was born in July and I started again in September. I was in a Catholic school. You did not have the right to use contraception. Therefore, you would get pregnant because [the rhythm method didn't work.] But when you got pregnant they kicked you out because you did not have the right to teach. They didn't want the children to realize that you were pregnant. It was ridiculous. It was delicate in those days (the 1950s). My second daughter was born in November and so I stopped teaching at the end of June but I returned to class in January. (translated from French) (ACPID256)*

Gisèle Lalonde, a francophone teacher, wrote her autobiography detailing her experiences as a francophone woman in Ontario. As a young teacher in the late 1950s, she actually wanted to resign and stay home with her children but was always persuaded to return to teaching. Gisèle's autobiography depicted maternity leave in the 1950s:

*My mother-in-law (who had raised 13 children) offered to look after Richard who was 15 months old. Without that I would not have returned to teaching....(My husband told me:) Gisèle, this is the last year you will teach. You will stay at home. Near tears, I felt so guilty!... I quit in June. However, I would return in September because (the principal) convinced my husband that he didn't have a replacement to teach grade 8. I would resign every year and the scenario would repeat itself—for 11 years! Guy was born August 14, 1961. ...Many times in August, ... (the principal) came to see if I had given birth because at all costs he wanted me back in school in September. There were no teachers for Grade 8. I had Guy baptized the Sunday after getting out of the hospital, and the beginning of September I was in class. (Lalonde, pp. 85, 93) (translated from French)*

In Gisèle's case, she sought leave from teaching to look after her children. Instead, she seemed to be thwarted. Instead, she was "freed" from the normal policies and went on teaching.

Compare Gisele to the case of Gigi, another francophone teacher who taught in an English-language school board. Her career was jeopardized because of pregnancy policies. She did not wish to interrupt her career for more than a few weeks when she had her family in the late sixties but she had to fight to keep her job. She did get her way, but it was a struggle.

*Well, I can say that in 1968... , [it was my second child] that one I had to fight for, and it was a direct fight with my principal and our small high school board. Our principal had a lot of power over the board members, so once I had tackled my principal on that issue, because he told me, "You have to*

*quit your job." I said, "No, I'm not quitting my job. I'm just going to be leaving to have a baby and I'll be back." I just wanted maybe 3 weeks. [He said,] "You can't deliver [and be back] in 3 weeks." I said, "Yes I can, the bottom line. And if I had a heart attack, you would give me 3 weeks off to recover." So we had a little squabble and ... I got what I wanted.*

*Well I actually delivered September 17<sup>th</sup> .... I came to teach, I think I taught 'til Friday, and then the baby was born Monday. And I had 3 weeks off.*

*There were some very stringent rules back when my mother was teaching. I mean, you could not teach when you were pregnant because it was just not done, and you were a poor role example to the students. [I was] very strongly opposed [to being forced to quit because I was pregnant]. I fought for it because I just believed in it so strongly. I thought, how can you not allow me to do this?(ACPID207)*

Although some generational change occurred in some locations, pregnant teachers' careers were routinely determined by the arbitrary decisions or the immediate needs of their superiors.

### **Supervision of Teaching and Personal Autonomy**

One theme that emerged very clearly was that of teacher autonomy, freedom to teach as one saw fit. With the growing regulation and control over the curriculum, and the de-skilling of teachers, this is one kind of freedom which has definitely suffered. The result seems to be a loss of self esteem and a reluctance to recommend teaching to others. As 85-year old Sally noted:

*Well, if I had to do it today [teach], no. But back then...the teacher was really ... in my first school, I could have been the queen, you know? I was really the important person in the village. I'd be invited to all the homes. The teacher was very important. (ACPID058)*



Laura voiced the same reservations when asked, "If you had to do it over again, would you still become a teacher?"

*In today's climate I would hesitate... I would hesitate to recommend anyone to go to Teacher's College. ... You have to be dedicated, and certainly, go into a profession where you are appreciated. (ACPID029)*

One retired teacher with a long career history noted how the pendulum had swung from a rather controlled curriculum to child-centered progressive education, and more recently, with standardized testing, back to a more rigid system. Maddie described how teaching changed over the years:

*I suppose we went from straight memorization to trying to think, over the many years. ... We went from very—"rigid" isn't the right word—but .... We went from a very prescriptive kind of teaching to very open-ended, and we went from what was written down in a book telling us what we were to do, to looking at children and trying to fathom what they could really do. ... And so, the learning in a classroom became not prescriptive but highly individualized. That's what made teaching exasperating for some people. I must say, that's why I kept staying in the Primary, because they didn't bug you when you did that there. And that was what I liked, trying to drag the maximum out of these little kids, and you found they could do wonderful things (ACPID001).*

Maddie mused on standardized testing introduced again in recent years:

*Well, I don't think you... You don't put all your apples in one basket, ever. I'm really very hooked on letting every child progress according to their ability and their will to learn, etc., and when it comes to testing, I think the valuable testing [takes place from] the things the teacher is discovering day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month. But if you have to have some check-up, I suppose you shouldn't do it too early. They're not doing it 'til, I guess the end of grade 3 but... I'm not a believer in standardized testing being the answer. I think the day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year is, has to be considered along with it. (ACPID001)*

Maddie sensed that her freedom to teach was greater when she could draw out any potential and encourage children in a variety of directions. The prescribed curriculum mentioned above by Maddie could still allow teachers to use creativity. As Gisèle [francophone teacher] commented in her autobiography, *Jusque' au bout!*:

For my first year of teaching, I had 42 pupils as cute as bugs...At that time, every teacher received a small "Grey Book" from the Ministry of Education in which you would find the year's program for your class. It was like my Bible. I followed it to the letter. ...

At Christmas I went down to the Teachers' room and I said to J.R. who was a teacher for grade 2: "J, I have finished my whole program. I have done everything I was supposed to do according to the Grey Book. What should I do now?"....I had even taught the 40 songs they recommended. I thought a bit and then I said to myself that I would have to be even more creative from now until the end of the year with projects, different methods.

Oh, I really loved my first year of teaching and I learned a lot. (p. 66, translated from French)

Personal initiative survived even visits from the inspector. The teachers interviewed did not seem to be bothered by such supervision. Often the isolated rural teachers looked forward to the yearly visit of the inspector and the help he could bring.

Some, like Mabel felt no stress from an inspector's visit. Her supervisors

*were very supportive of me and the program I was doing. You know, I was kind of off by myself down in my art room and I kind of had my own little kingdom which was wonderful, absolutely wonderful....*

*I always had a very good inspector. I never had any problems with them and I always found them very cooperative and great. That was in the elementary school and in the high school I don't think I ever saw what you would call a superintendent of education...except an odd one would come in and walked around and they'd say, "Oh that's great," and walk back out because I think they were very uncomfortable in the art situation. They didn't understand it (ACPID056).*

Spirited women teachers, especially if they taught in rural one-room schools, would not allow themselves to be cowed by an inspector who disapproved of married women teachers. Laura reports on an experience she had in the 50s with her inspector:

*[A]bout the first week I was there, along came the inspector, and he came in and said to me, "I have no use for married women teaching." I said, "That's fine. Tell you what you do. Tomorrow morning, you have another teacher here, and I'll gladly go home and look after my child." ... So off he went. But I knew he couldn't get a teacher there! So he came back in a couple of days and apologized to me, and he became a very good friend of mine; he was a wonderful person.... And so at the end of that year, he called me up and he said, "I have a position for you." I said, "Oh, where?" He said "In C., teaching Grade 1." I said, "Do you mean to say that you would allow a married woman to come and teach in C?" He said "Forget that, forget that." I said, "Well, I just had to remind you"(ACPID029).*

These confident, autonomous teachers knew how to outwit the inspector. Gisèle's autobiography explained how she managed to receive an excellent report from a new and demanding inspector.

[Two years later, I had a grade 5 with the same children I had taught in grade 3.] ... The new inspector visited the two other grade 5 classes before coming to see my class. The two other teachers reported that he was asking questions on Roman numerals which we hadn't yet taught this first term, and that he was looking at composition notebooks. As far as the notebooks were concerned, that was OK but the Roman numerals were something else. I got to school the following morning and we went up to class at 5 minutes to 9:00. I said to the pupils: "Listen, we only have 5 minutes to learn something new. I taught them the numerals 1-10 and then the multiples of 10 (XX, XXX, etc.) in Roman numerals. Also 100 (C); 500 (D), and 1000 (M). All of my brilliant little minds retained it.

The inspector arrived. I had just erased the blackboard. He started on Roman numerals and asked questions. To each question about 15 pupils, sometimes more, raised their hand. My best pupils answered. He complimented them. Then he asked if they had a composition notebook.... After his school visit, the inspector made his report to the school board.

My father was the chairman of the board and after the meeting told me: "I don't know what you did to this man, but he had only compliments for [you]: the best, etc."

(pp. 68-69, translated from French)

Teachers who have experienced the recent restructuring and the 1990s introduction of a new curriculum in Ontario have pointed out how the changes hamper a teacher's creativity and freedom in teaching. Consider the following comments from Rosette on changes in teaching over the past few decades.

*In L. school it was a new school and I had a chance to really do new and different things and change perhaps some of the approaches that I had developed before. I found myself seeking novel ideas, both in the teaching of literature and also in the teaching of writing.... I think perhaps the breakthrough came when I was asked if I would teach the gifted program, and that was new, and it was a nightmare because nobody had any idea of what this was supposed to be...and [I] began to explore everything and get all kinds of books from the States....Then I went through the transition years, and that ,too, was easy for me to do because I had been immersed in the gifted program which is individualized, very creative, tapping on all the energies and the talents that the kids had, and to me it was a piece of cake, and so in planning my lesson plans or my units, I developed a unit approach to every book....And I would take the same concept of teaching the gifted and apply it to my regular classes and boy, the kids learned it! They would come to my class and they'd say "This is the best class, we have the best discussions here," and it would really warm my heart.*

*So I left in '96, and that's just before the new curriculum had come in, but I was familiar with [it] because I was invited to be*

*the community representative. I'm not impressed with the way that it was applied. It is really unrealistic and unfair to dump a curriculum on teachers, and say "Here, you have to do this." And teachers were, of course, offended, angry, discouraged, disgusted, over-burdened, and that feeling still exists(ACPID 184).*

From the above comments, it is clear that teachers felt their freedom to be creative was severely curtailed in recent years because of the way the new curriculum was imposed, and because of standardized testing. Those who knew both old and new were certain that initiative and a sense of creative options rested with their earlier experiences.

### **Women Teachers and Administrative Positions**

In many interviews with retired women teachers, questions were asked about their aspirations to become principals. Many women as sole teachers in one-room schools had been de facto principals (without any extra pay for that responsibility), and had administered their multi-class school with ease. Still, they usually did not find it a problem or discriminatory when they moved to teach a single grade in a town school typically with a male principal and women teachers. Most declared that they never aspired to be principals anyway. Almost all commented on how easy it was for men to get an administrative position, whereas women were excluded from that role. Some, however, did think they could be principals, but usually they did not succeed. They rationalized that they were happy not to have gone that route. In that regard, Gigi's comments about the path to principalship are revealing:

*I was looking at all these other jokers that were going through this, and I thought they're gonna be principals and I'm gonna work for them? No! I don't think so. So I investigated. When I first heard about it and found out who the guys were that went that first summer, and X, he's got nothing upstairs and he's got his principalship? Better check into that. Can't be that difficult then. And I found out what a joke it was. [She described the principals' course:] It was putting in time. There was, depending on the speaker that came in, depending on the superintendent or the teacher that came in to give you the lectures. Half of it was useless.*

After completing the principals' course, Gigi applied for a position:

*I recall during the interview and one of them, ...who made quite a comment during the interview. "Why would you even think, you know, of becoming a vice-principal? Do you know that you have to put up with the discipline?" and blah, blah, blah, and all this kind of stuff. And I said, "Well, yes, that's an aspect of it." And I think that I was overwhelmed by these attacks on me all the time. With him it was a superiority of men issue, there's no question. But as it turned out, it was a blessing that it occurred that way, and I didn't get the job (ACPID207).*

Despite her conclusion that "it was a blessing" she did not get the job, her underlying bitterness and anger at the treatment she received came through clearly. Gigi's comments parallel those of a large number of women who, despite holding the qualifications, retired from teaching in the 1990s without ever having been a principal.

Margot, a former nun, had a different experience. She did become a principal, although she had not wished to take that step. She exercised her autonomy as a teacher ultimately by quitting and returning to the classroom. Margot was asked to become a principal because her Order needed her.

*It was a hard job. I found it hard with the little kids because I'd never taught anything below grade 5, so that was a challenge.*

*I didn't know anything about primary, so when there was a problem, I had to go to the teachers and say "Now what do we do?" because I didn't [know]. I was living in the Order with some others that were principals, so I could seek good advice there, and then I guess you relied on your own common sense and discussion with the teachers, to do the best you could....*

*What I found most difficult was to get support for some of the serious disciplinary problems. That's why I quit. Finally one day I said, "That's it. I quit...." We had one class in the school for emotionally disturbed kids, and there were 6 students in that class, and what bothered me the most was one student that*

*was supposed to be under psychiatric care and he refused that, and he was supposed to go to the hospital for special assessments. He refused that, and the Attendance Counselor kind of gave up on him. ... I called the Superintendent and I said "Now what do I do?" He said: "Let him be." I said, "I don't think you heard me right. He is disturbing the whole school, and using language that is not acceptable. What do I do? Whom do I call?" "Let him be." I said "You've been a great help," and I slammed the phone, which I never have done to anybody, and I said, "I'm not going to put up with this, so that's it. I don't want this job (ACPID183)*

Margot probably had the makings of a fine principal, collegial and supportive of her teachers. Yet she was not getting support from her superiors on the Board. Clear headed and determined, she quit.

Often throughout the interviews, francophone women teachers working in the French-language system were somewhat ambiguous as far as administrative positions were concerned. Marielle noted the usual case of young men teachers progressing through the ranks of administration with ease, but became a principal herself at a fairly young age and subsequently qualified as a superintendent and even became a highly placed civil servant in the Ministry of Education. Marielle explains how the careers of men and women differed:

*Well, if a man entered elementary education, for example, if I speak of the French language schools, he became automatically a principal.... My colleague, he was 23 years old, I think, and he became a principal. Simply because he was a man who wears the pants and he was named principal. He didn't have to be intelligent.*

She did not experience any difficulties in becoming a principal and felt it was because:

*I had shown that I was interested in all sorts of things. I tried everything and I was quite visible and so they said "Good."....They invited me. And then when I became the principal in H. in a school with 750 pupils, I was 33 or 34. But*

*they had come to ask me to do it and I hadn't even taken the [principal's] course. The same thing happened when I joined the Ministry of Education (ACPID256) (translated from French)*

Of course, Marielle is an exceptional teacher—talented, ambitious, intelligent, and she was in the right place when the opportunity for advancement presented itself. Admission into the administrative ranks for women teachers is a complex issue—most women who wished to become administrators faced systemic barriers. However, many women had no desire to leave the classroom where they felt they were practising their “vocation” in the best way by working with children and teaching. A few who sought advancement like Marielle went right to the top.

### Final Comments

The issues discussed above: teacher preparation, marriage and maternity leave for teachers, balancing autonomy in teaching with governance and supervision, and finally, advancement into educational administration, exemplify factors with which women teachers had to contend using varying degrees of freedom and control. Over the decades of the twentieth century, some of the situations improved for women teachers, while others remained problematic. It became clear that one cannot make easy assumptions about the reality of the teaching lives of women in the past. Although in the 1950s women teachers probably had to follow stricter personal guidelines than they do today, not all were forced out of the profession simply because they got married or had families. The restrictive little “Grey Book” that set out the curriculum to be taught was so sparing in detail that it allowed for creativity. Perhaps those young teachers had more freedom to teach at that time than today’s teachers, held accountable for their students’ success or failure, and forced into a limited curriculum focused on standardized tests. There were definite advantages to being one’s own boss in an isolated one-room school in a small community grateful to have someone to educate the children. Teachers at that time were, as Sally put it, like “the queen of the community”. It was difficult to teach in a French language school surrounded by a solid English speaking population, but those who did teach there were highly valued for their attempts to keep the French



culture alive. Although it is romantic and naïve to wax nostalgic about teaching in the “Good Old Days,” it is equally naïve to believe that progress is constant and that conditions can only improve for teachers. The stories of retired women teachers help us to gain a balanced view of realities of the teaching profession for all teachers. The women teachers who shared their opinions in this paper demonstrated their ability to navigate the system and find a balance that would satisfy their private and professional lives.

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