12/20/24

This, losing the recent presidential election and its projected outcomes, just breaks my heart. I know, we were this close! And for the second time. (Remember Hillary?) At first, I was crestfallen. But then, I began to reminisce on the advances to fundamental women's rights that had been made back in my day.

I came of age when the Women's Lib’s era made its mark on women's history. On the ground, this is what the women's movement in the ‘70s looked like: we didn't have to be married to buy birth control. (1972) We could get our own credit cards and loans. (1974) High school girls had the same opportunities to compete in sports as high school boys (1972). That one went far in promoting and empowering many young women, myself included, and in creating the changes that will carry us forth from here.

At my school, I competed in track the first year it was allowed (1976). I trained with the boy's team, as there were no distance coaches for girls yet. The Male coach never spoke directly to me or said my name. I just did what he told the boys to do, and I made sure to give them a run for their money.

Running in one coed race, I started my kick for the finish line. I could hear the people in the full bleachers cheering as I rounded the last curve of the mile. I set my sights on a male runner up ahead. As people saw what might happen next, they began to grow quiet, one by one. When I passed him, the stands were silent. Not a single cheer rose for me as I crossed the finish line way ahead of him. The girls’ coach did notice, though. That year she awarded me Mar Vista High School's female athlete of the year for 1976.

I believed from that, that the world would treat me fairly if I just stepped up. I learned a lot from running with the boys. I emulated their approach to life. I was brave and bold, and I usually got away with it, until three years later when I got married.

Then, I volunteeringly gave up my power to the ideas of love and religion. Some might say an admirable quality in a woman, but they would be wrong. What I was, was a sucker. My mistake was bargaining away my autonomy to show people how much I loved my husband and the Christian god, something said husband wasn't being socially pressured to do, not in the least. I now believe loving a man or following a god shouldn't cost you your seat at the table.

But first, a short slice of history on how I trained to automatically take second place requires taking a look at Mom's options in marriage. The men of her generation could do whatever they wanted and women could not, plain and simple. Most women had to do what a man, and just about any man, said, unless they were able to financially support themselves. Usually, men made the important decisions and women made dinner and babies. Men could be anything; women could be wives and mothers, or a derivative of those roles such as teachers, typists, nurses, and waitresses.

If a woman wanted to leave a bad husband, well the cops and courts were all men, too. It wasn't a welcoming world for single mothers out there.

Mom and Dad had seven daughters. She raised us in the Catholic Church and, there, we were indoctrinated that a good woman's calling was to be good wives and mothers. A good wife was submissive to her husband. A good mother's existence was validated by having children.

Even though my mom had a very intelligent mind of her own and a strong spirit, she still became a living example to me of a good submissive wife and mother to seven. It was her job that she did for free.

When I met my husband, I believed in the Bible, or I was afraid to not believe in what I was taught was God's word. I thought, surely there's some unseen benefits to letting my husband be the automatic boss. I was wrong. There's no up side.

By young adulthood, young men of my generation could go one of two ways. On one hand, they saw that girls were keeping up with them, that much was true. Some embraced inclusion and that has been a gain for us all. But they still got that toxic message: you do not let a girl tell you what to do. Many went for an easy power to acquire.

As for me, my husband was open-minded, at first. I worked, unless I had given birth or was injured, and brought home my paychecks. He did the banking and controlled the money.

Eventually, my husband became my boss and gave me a list of work to do, five days a week. I was his right hand woman. We scheduled my field time for the mornings while he had the kids. He made us lunch, and then we switched. He went out to work the business afternoons and I had the kids.

He did housework. Every Sunday, we cleaned the house together. He liked to throw parties. I would say yes to the party but I had one condition: he had to clean the whole house and fold the giant laundry pile in our bedroom. He'd get it done faster, hours compared to if ever for me, and would do a better job.

Partly because of that, I thought he was liberated and that my input mattered. I found out differently when I wrestled the checkbook away from him around our seventh year of marriage. I was trying to get some control over our worsening finances. Housework is one thing, but managing money is way more important. I found upon balancing the bank account that we were over $3000 in the red in our joint checking account, that's 1990’s dollars. But, still, what he decided about money went, and there wasn't anything I could do about it. He collected the checks and spent money. Even though I did the business spreadsheets, billing, banking, payroll, and taxes, my wisdom was disregarded.

My $2,400 salary was going to support the family, and that was great, and I was frugal in managing the household, but I had no say in how the money machine worked beyond that. He spent his money however he pleased, on cars and a brand new truck, clothes, and buying friends rounds of drinks. I held no sway.

I began to think about leaving around our tenth year thinking that I could do better financially. At that point, I could do it, but I decided to stick around for the kids. By our 17th year, we were done.

Not every husband is a spendthrift, but they all had the option to be. All around, I saw that this widespread double standard of men having the majority power in marriages has continued for ages and in the marriages of my peers. This cheap power grab has recently reared its ugly head in our current political era. The men of my generation haven't relinquished their strangling hold. I'm sorry to say, they are the largest group voting for Trump. They are the strength behind voting us backwards. (The largest voting block for Trump in 2024 was white men 45 years or older.)

But I don't despair. We women have carried on the good fight while raising the kids and working. We did this by flexing our financial power, often on our own. With more financial rights it became okay to voice our terms and advocate for ourselves. Mothers of my generation raised their sons to be way more supportive and respectful of their wives' endeavors and contributions. I see my daughter and daughter-in-laws as having autonomy in their relationships and careers.

I have granddaughters coming of age, one to be 18 soon. They are brave and bold. Their lives will be affected by our recent political losses, for sure, but the women that have carried on before her, that wrestled against stinky masculinity, that paid the dues and showed us how, they are pissed off. These women will keep on fighting for our seats to be at the table making the decisions.

I have hope. I believe that our progress, however slow, will continue to happen if we

keep speaking up, stepping up, and not despairing. We need to keep educating our daughters and sons in the wisdom of equality, but do it as the strong women who have done it before us: heads up, shoulders squared, and always, always, moving it forward.

Dates were found on History.com/Women’s History Milestones: Timeline.

Election demographics were found at:

https://apnews.com/article/election-harris-trump-women-latinos-black-voters-0f3fbda3362f3dcfe41aa6b858f22d12