

**Women's Fund Luncheon
April 2009**

Judy Goldsmith

I am Judy.
Great-granddaughter of Anna.
Granddaughter of Julia.
Daughter of Bernice.
Mother of Rachel.

I name the most significant women in my life to honor them. We live in a culture that names us by our male line of descent – we have our father's last name, then our husband's (though of course, a number of women who marry now choose to keep the last name they have grown up with). Our custom of naming is fine – there's no problem with that. All cultures develop a naming protocol. It's just that there's this little issue of full identity...who are we? Who do we come from? What is our heritage?

Many years ago, before I got involved in organized feminism, I had a part-time job one summer at a local radio station. Part of my job was to call the hospital and find out about the births that had occurred overnight. So the first day I asked, and the nurse on duty read me the names: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, a son to Mr. and Mrs. Bill Smith. After a couple days, that started to bother me, so the next time I asked for the birth announcements, and she began to respond in the usual way, I said, "Could you back up a minute? Could you give me the mother's name?" And she said, "Mrs. John Jones...Mrs. Bill Smith..." And I said, "Yes, but could I have their given names? Their first name?" The nurse "got it" right away and said, "Oh yes, of course," and she proceeded to tell me about the births to John and Sally Jones and to Bill and Alice Smith. I wanted the new mothers (and their friends and families) to hear their own names, the ones they'd grown up with, in connection with this momentous event in their lives.

What was interesting was when I went to the local newspaper and asked for the same change in the birth reporting custom. When I asked the editor, he asked me why I wanted that change, and I said, because the woman plays a pretty significant part in this process, and I thought she should be named, with her own given name. Nevertheless, he said, "No." I asked why, and he said, "Because it's the man who pays the bills." (I want to mention here that I have known and worked with many men who also "got it" and who were much more generous of spirit about accepting change than this editor...and we are endlessly appreciative of those men in our lives.)

So we are here today to talk about honoring the women in our personal lives and in the community we all share...and to talk about paying the bills.

As we are all aware, we do pay the bills in many, many ways. We pay the bills by actually working for a paycheck, and after this past year, we have to say that there is no longer any practical limit on the jobs that can be done by women. Most of us work now – and most of us have to. In addition, most of us want to...we can do work that is significant, we can make contributions to our communities and our world. The days of the sex-segregated employment want ads (help wanted male...help wanted female) that were the norm when I entered the workforce in the 1950s (and that lasted for almost 20 more years after that) are gone. Many

of us worked for paychecks then, too, but our options (and our paychecks) were far more limited than they are now. You pay the bills, too.

I specify “worked for paychecks” because historically there’s been this absurd notion that women who stay in the home and maintain the household and raise children somehow “don’t work.” What perfect idiocy.

Women work at home, even when they also work outside of the home for paychecks. Traditionally and commonly, they keep the house, cook (and I want that to include menu planning, shopping, actual food preparation, and cleaning up afterwards), they maintain the domestic infrastructure, make doctors appointments, organize the family’s social life, and that little thing...raising the children. Has anyone ever adequately characterized that job, that responsibility, that career, that challenge, that great joy? I don’t think so. Has anyone ever catalogued the areas of skill necessary to do the job? Nurse, teacher, psychologist, accountant, philosopher, career counselor, social planner, clothing consultant, communications director...the list is endless. The joys of raising these remarkable little creatures are endless, too, but it is nevertheless not easy. Oh yes, you pay the bills.

And women pay the bills as members of a community. Women, particularly mothers and those who work for paychecks, are more likely than men to serve as volunteers for programs to assist the elderly, tutor youth and provide support following disasters, according to a new study.

The study, by RTI International (the Research Triangle Institute) is the most significant assessment of volunteering conducted in America and the first to analyze volunteering habits by state and region. Data were based on a national survey from 2002 to 2005.

The report, "Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings," found that more than 65 million Americans, almost 29 percent, performed a volunteer service in 2005, an increase of nearly six million people since 2002.

In every state, females volunteered at significantly higher rates than did males. Nationally, more than 32 percent of women volunteered, compared with 25 percent of men.

"We also discovered that the busier people's lives are, the more likely they are to volunteer, be that through their workplace, church, community or children's school," said Nathan West, RTI researcher and lead author of the report.

More than 35 percent of volunteers said they volunteered as coaches, referees, tutors or mentors. About 35 percent of respondents said they volunteered primarily through religious organizations, with 26 percent of volunteers giving time to educational or youth-related organizations. (And you will be interested to know that Wisconsin ranked 10th among the 50 states in volunteering).

In every way, you pay the bills.

The international organization, Women & Philanthropy, asks “Why Women?” on their website and answers that women have a unique and pivotal role in the creation of a better society. They quote past UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who said, “When women are fully involved, the benefits can be seen immediately; families are healthier; they are better fed;

their income, savings and reinvestment go up. And what is true of families is true of communities, and eventually, of whole countries."

You may also have heard recently about Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*. In 1993, Mortenson was injured climbing K2 in Afghanistan, the second highest mountain in the world. Lost, he wandered into the village of Korphe, where the inhabitants cared for him and nursed him back to health. He wanted to do something for the people, and, having noticed the children being schooled in an uncomfortable outdoor setting, he promised to build them a school. He returned to this country and, with no fundraising skills, he raised the money. It took him three years, but he kept his promise. Now he is continuing his work in Afghanistan and Pakistan and has built 78 schools in that region for Muslim children.

Mortenson often quotes an African proverb that says, "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual, but if you educate a girl, you educate a community."

He believes educating girls should be a top global priority, and points to statistics showing that in countries where there is higher female literacy, the infant mortality significantly drops, population explosion curbs, and the overall quality of life and health is improved.

Mortenson says, "You can hand out condoms, you can build roads and put in electricity, or you could drop bombs, but until the girls are educated, a society won't change."

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We are here to talk about paying the bills. You have a lot of experience in that area, and you do it well. That's what the Women's Fund is all about.

Those of you in this room are what could – certainly on a global level – be called "comfortable," if not well to do. You have gotten here through some combination of good fortune and plain, determined hard work and your own personal gifts. You have achieved. You are accomplished. And you are here because you want to share what you have gained – whether wealth or wisdom – with girls and women whose path in life has been blocked by stubborn barriers of many different kinds. Many of us have been there, and we know what they're going through. It is a fine thing that you are doing.

You have invested in mentoring young women, sharing with them the benefits of your experience. You have given women short-term financial help, when they have struggled with unexpected challenges in their lives. You have provided support for education, the life blood of personal improvement.

And your strategic planning has now led you to focus on the areas of education, financial sustainability, and leadership – all critical areas for girls and women in need. There is no question that you're putting the emphasis exactly where it needs to be. I am especially gratified that you will include a focus on leadership, because if our planet has ever been in desperate need of leadership, of all kinds and at all levels, that time is now.

I thought about you recently when, during a church service, the speaker quoted someone (sorry – I forgot who) – who said, "How you spend your days is how you spend your life." I am no longer young, and I think a lot about the concept of "spending" my time. I want it to be well spent, because it is precious. I want it to be spent with people I enjoy, doing things that are important (and delightful – delightful is good) and, as much as possible, helpful to others, sharing the many advantages and insights and gifts life has so generously given me.

I thought about you, too, when I recently got one of those countless emails that “go around” the Internet, but I really liked it and the message it conveyed. Some of you undoubtedly saw it, too. It was called “The Daffodil Principle” about a woman who, over many years planted an astoundingly huge and beautiful field of daffodils, one bulb at a time. The woman who observed this phenomenon regretted that she hadn’t started something similarly wonderful 35 or 40 years earlier, and now that time was gone. Her daughter, to whom she said this, replied, “Start now.”

The way to make learning a lesson of celebration instead of a cause for regret is only to ask, "How can I put this to use today?" There are many who need our help.

Use the Daffodil Principle. Stop waiting...Until your car or home is paid off. Until you get a new car or home. Until your kids leave the house. Until you go back to school. Until you finish school. Until you clean the house. Until you organize the garage. Until you clean off your desk. Until you lose 10 pounds. Until you gain 10 pounds. Until you get married. Until you get a divorce. Until you have kids. Until the kids go to school. Until you retire. Until summer. Until spring. Until winter. Until fall. Until you die....

There is no better time than right now, to help those who need us.

I began my remarks by honoring the women in my life. I close by honoring you. Because you work for a paycheck, because you work to maintain your homes and families, because you volunteer in your communities to make them better places and help the many women who need help because of their special challenges. Because you pay the bills. Thank you.