

Nov-2000

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## Recommended Citation

Lander, Dorothy A. (2000). A Feminist Genealogy of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union: Re-membering Our Selves. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 2(1), 52-68.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol2/iss1/5>

## **A Feminist Genealogy of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union: Remembering Our Selves**

By Dorothy A. Lander<sup>1</sup>

*The key is in remembering, in what is chosen for the dream.  
In the silence of recovery we hold  
The rituals of the dawn  
now as then..*

-- Paula Gunn Allen (1986) "The Trick is Consciousness", p. 56

### **Starting with Our Selves**

In a graduate course in adult education that I teach, the work of The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) makes a fleeting appearance as a bibliographic footnote in the foundational text on adult education in Canada (Butterwick, 1998). When I first encountered this, the ceremony of my mother tying a white ribbon around the folds of my baby wrist flashed before me. My mother's signature on the Little White Ribboner's pledge card is a promise that she would not "give or allow [me] to take any Intoxicating Drinks" (August 6, 1947). The value statements on the certificate boldly collapse private and public spheres: "Nations are gathered out of Nurseries. The Hope of the Race is the Child." I was struck by the realization that the temperance work of Mum and Grandma and my aunts in the 1950s and 1960s *was* adult education, *was* feminist activism and this set in motion my memory work project. In 1999, I gathered together WCTU mothers – including my elderly mother and aunt – and Little White Ribboners of my generation, now aged 35 to 70, to re-member our experiences with the WCTU and the temperance movement.

The purpose of my memory work project and this article is to begin to create a "history of the present" (Dean, 1994) through collective remembering in Lipsitz's (1988) sense of "shared experiences and perceptions about the past that legitimate action in the present" (p. 288). I adapt Nasstrom's (1999) analysis of memory and narrative and women's activism to the memory work with my WCTU family, friends and neighbours in the farming community in Ontario where I grew up. We "become historical actors who intervene between the past and the present, continually reframing the movement" (p. 134).

### **Collective Re-membering**

Memory work as a social science methodology (Haug, 1987) shaped my invitation to my family, friends, and neighbours from my formative years to come

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together and re-member their experiences of the work of the WCTU. I adopt Tisdell's (2000) sense of *re-membering*, that is, "a reevaluation process of reworking and reshaping" memories. Re-membering submits our storytelling to more stringent analysis, as we seek "to rediscover a given situation—its smells, sounds, emotions, thoughts, attitudes. . .allowing us to experience once again the child—a stranger—whom we once were (Haug, 1987, p. 47). I was particularly interested in what stood out in memory for WCTU mothers and for us - the Little White Ribboners - 35 to 50 years later. I learned firsthand the dynamics of collective memory work that Haug (1987) favours, especially "implicit comparison, in which one experience was pitted against another" (p. 56). We were "attempting to produce compatible accounts. . .[and] at the same time demanding explanations, searching for an understanding of our own actions" (Haug, p. 56).

I conducted my research in August 1999 by assembling 37 people (spanning three generations of my friends, neighbors, and family) in the farming community in southern Ontario where I grew up and where my 89-year-old mother still lives. My sister June, my two brothers Howard and David, and myself (all in our 50's—I am the youngest) have not lived in this community for over 30 years but almost everyone else in the group continues to live and work in the area. For practical and moral reasons, I use first names to designate members of my immediate family, and I designate other participants in terms of their occupation. I can negotiate my interpretations with my family and remove dialogue that might be a breach of confidentiality or an invasion of privacy but I do not have the same opportunity to do this with other participants. For the same reason, I name Brenda, my closest girlhood friend. Brenda and her husband Neil hosted the gathering in their home. In our girlhood, Brenda lived two fields away on the next farm. We played piano duets; we spent Saturday overnights at each other's homes; we tied up the phone--party lines etched forever in memory as 8 R 4 and 17 R 2; we sat together on the school bus to highschool 10 miles away; and I was her attendant when she married Neil. Brenda did not grow up in a WCTU family although she and her brothers and sisters all participated in the temperance elocution medal contests, when their WCTU neighbour, my Aunt Ada, involved Brenda's mother in "the work." The religious discourse of the WCTU is a lasting trace-- I can still call up my fear as a teenager that my mother and father would find out that I had partaken communion wine when I attended the Anglican church with Brenda and her family. My family attended the United Church where grape juice was used for communion. I can also call up the transgressive thrill of knowing the secret that the armloads of rhubarb that Brenda's Dad collected from my mother's garden were not going for rhubarb sauce or pie - as my mother thought - but rather would be pressed into homemade wine.

This is the moral and religious background that I hoped would engage our re-membering of the meaning of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union as a "history of the present." In my invitation, I asked each person what the WCTU called to mind for them and how it resurfaced, if at all, in the here and now. I facilitated two sessions of dialogical narrative inquiry organized by generation. Group one included eight WCTU mothers (including my mother and my Aunt Dorothy) and two husbands. The second group of 24 from my generation consisted of my sister and two brothers, many cousins, classmates from elementary school onwards, along with three of the next generation, including my niece Marjorie. I inaugurated the narrative inquiry by asking what memory of the WCTU was triggered by my invitation. My few supplementary probes served to

guide the stories in terms of how the lived experience of the WCTU touched on their daily lives and practical decisions. At my invitation, this group also brought their WCTU artifacts; minutes of 1960s meetings, Little White Ribboners certificates, and elocution medals also served to unlock stories. According to Zussman (1996), "Memory is...not only located in the recesses of our minds but also generated by 'retrieval cues' that are themselves lodged in other people, in places, and in memorabilia" (p. 147).

### **Negotiating WCTU Past, Present, and Future**

The auto/biographies and biographies of early WCTU members and leaders add another layer to our memory work by providing comparative data to analyse the temperance talk of WCTU members of my mother's generation and my generation with 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century temperance rhetoric. In the late 19th century and early 20th century, both women and men in North America were influenced by the rhetoric of the WCTU. My memory work project expands on Mattingly's (1998) analysis of 19th century temperance rhetoric by tracing the impact of the WCTU in my own family and home community into the 21st century. Mattingly explicates the impact of rhetoric in the 19th century context:

By the hundreds of thousands, women came to hear temperance women's ideas because they could identify with and admire these speakers. Men came to accept women temperance speakers and their positions because, through their rhetoric, these women provided a way for men to see change as imminent and non-aggressive. Temperance women connected theory to practice, and made the connection both important and comprehensible to the general populace through speeches, fiction, and even dress. (p. 2)

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in 1874 in New York; the Dominion WCTU (later the Canadian WCTU) was established in 1888 and was active in Ontario well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, into the 1960s in the Ontario community where I grew up. Cook (1995) elaborates on the Ontario WCTU's evangelical feminists whose central task of reforming society was aimed at "home protection," a reconstituted family committed to Christian values, and to women's collective action against male vices constituted as sin. Artifacts and collective memory-work of four generations combine with my lived experience in a WCTU home and community to make moral meaning of temperance activism "now as then." The WCTU is part of the hidden history of female activism. The WCTU with its emphasis on "home protection" is a women's movement that pursues gender interests and takes political positions based on women's historically ascribed gender roles.

Frances Willard in the US and Letitia Youmans in Canada were temperance activists that used "home" rhetoric in their cross-country speaking campaigns. Letitia Youmans of Ontario, Canada first used "home protection" to approach the issue of women's suffrage and its relationship to the liquor traffic and Frances Willard took this up in the US (See Bordin, 1981, p. 100). "Were I asked to define in a sentence the thought and purpose of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union," said Willard, "I would reply: 'It is to make the whole world homelike'" (1905, p. 78). According to Levine (1980), "Home Protection" is just one example of the way Willard used "the

images and symbols of middle-class culture in order to agitate for women's rights. ...Willard's argument was the fullest exploitation of the ideological contradiction of assigning women as the home's protectors and then denying them access to political channels" (pp. 55-56). Youmans (1893) is equally explicit in the use of the strategy during her cross-Canada speaking campaigns:

Even the term prohibition, when applied to the liquor traffic, was obnoxious, so much so that I would announce my subject as "home 'protection'" assuring my audience that I had not come to advocate woman's rights, but to remonstrate against woman's wrongs; to claim for every wife the right to have a sober husband, and every mother to have a sober son, and a comfortable home for herself and children. (p. 207).

Home protection, women's property rights, and women's vote were themes of Nellie McClung's novels, novels that are part of my literary heritage. Nellie McClung is one of the "Famous Five" who successfully appealed to the Privy Council of Great Britain to declare Canadian women full legal "persons" in the Persons Case of 1929. In the 1921 edition of Nellie McClung's novel *Purple Springs*, I have written in my childlike scrawl "This book belongs to Dorothy Lander." Pearl Watson, the teenaged protagonist in *Purple Springs* stages a Mock Parliament in which she is the Premier. This is straight out of McClung's own experience; in 1914 Nellie took part in the "Women's Parliament" staged by the Political Equality League, a mock sitting of the Legislature in which women's rhetoric effected legislative change. McClung amplifies temperance rhetoric as political activism through Pearl's standpoint in *Purple Springs*:

She had been in the gallery [the Ladies' Gallery of the Provincial Legislature] the day that a great temperance delegation had come. . . .The case against the bar had been so well argued, that it seemed to Pearl that the law-makers must be moved to put it away forever. She did not know, of course, that the liquor interests of the province were the strong supporters of the Government. . . so she was not prepared for it when one of his Ministers stoutly defended the bar-room as a social gathering place where men might meet and enjoy an innocent and profitable hour" (pp. 78-79).

In 1999, the home protection theme is at the heart of my sister June's response to the Kindergarten Teacher's memory of her "class from hell," which she attributed to eight children having fetal alcohol syndrome. Notice how June moves her verb tenses from the past, to the present, to the future—and so creates a "history of the present":

*Well, a long time ago, I think the WCTU prevented some of that. They made it sound, it was not nice for women to drink and men shouldn't either because they're supposed to be supporting these women and families but as long as the women don't drink, something will go right [Group laughter]. And fetal alcohol syndrome is one thing that might go right or be prevented.*

## Re-Membering Motherwork and Homeplaces

The maternal feminism of first wave feminism in which the WCTU played such a large part was steeped in the discourse of religion. A retired farmer brought his 1938 pledge certificate for the Loyal Temperance Union to our 1999 memory work; my aunt's countersignature appeared next to his name and the 20 articles of the pledge, the first of which was "Drunkenness is a sin." A religious discourse is required for a sinner to exist. At the turn of the century, mothering and "motherwork" (see Doucet, 1998; Gouthro, 2000; Hall, 1998; Hart, 1995, 1997) replace "maternal feminism" and its implicit Christian discourse in the North American context but the politicized discourse of home and homeplaces remains. Do you hear the echo of Letitia Youmans' (1893) home protection strategy in Patti Gouthro's (2000) conception of a global civil society? "The common, global concerns that women and men also may share, in wanting their families to be safe, their homes free of violence, their children to have hope, resources, and opportunities for the future" (p. 69). The original slogan of the early WCTU in North America, "God and Home and Native Land" changed to "God and Home and Every Land" with the establishment of the World's WCTU in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Mothers and Sons Re-Membered

In 1999, a WCTU mother recited the humorous poem for the WCTU elocution contests that 30 years earlier she had rehearsed with her two eldest sons—she has three sons and three daughters. Her polished gestures and intonations spoke of many rehearsals. We laughed and applauded her performance. So many years later, many of us could remember laughing out loud at the exuberant performances of the staggering drunk that these boys played. It strikes me now as it did then that the "fun" of this poem worked against the aims of the WCTU. The "unsaid" of the formal memory work with the WCTU mothers became the joke in my generation's memory work—these boys, now aged 48 and 50, are not averse to taking a drink.

*One evening in October  
When I was far from sober,  
I was staggering down the street in drunken pride  
When my feet began to stutter  
So I lay down in the gutter  
And a pig came up and lay down by my side.  
As I lay they in the gutter  
My heart was all aflutter  
And a lady passing by was heard to say,  
"You can tell a man who boozes  
From the company he chooses."  
And the pig got up and slowly walked away.*

Brenda's memory of these rehearsals gives her father a more prominent role than might be expected on the basis of her mother's performance of "One evening in October":

**Dorothy:** *What do you remember?*

**Brenda:** *Just the medal contests* [**Dorothy:** *Yeah*] *And practising our pieces every night after supper. Dad would make us say them. [She laughs] You'd say a line wrong. "No, I told you last night at," you know, "Put the emphasis on this word" and. . .*

A dairy farmer from my generation told me that he had been musing about the temperance elocution medal contests, while ploughing, the week *before* I invited him to this 1999 WCTU reunion. He recited for all of us the temperance poem that he had orated some 35 years earlier, a tragic saga about drinking and driving. He clearly remembered his mother's work in helping him prepare for the contest: "Mother being inventive as she was, she got a Spic and Span can and we put a set of Meccano wheels on it. . . . And I can remember holding up this thing, it was to represent a car, it was an old tin can." We all laughed and applauded after the dairy farmer recited:

*It's nobody's business what I drink,  
I care not what my neighbours think,  
Or how many laws I choose to pass,  
I'll tell the world I'll have my glass.  
So I drank in spite of law or man,  
And got into my old tin can.  
I stepped on the gas and let her go,  
Down the highway to and fro.  
I took the curbs at fifty miles,  
With bleary eyes and drunken smiles.  
Not long till a car I tried to pass,  
Then a crash, a scream, and breaking glass.  
The other car was upside down,  
About 3 miles from the nearest town.  
The man was clear but his wife was caught  
And he needs the help of a drunken sot.  
Who sits in a maudlin, drunken daze  
Who hears the screams and sees the blaze.  
But too far gone to save a life,  
By helping the car from off the wife  
The car was burned and the mother dies,  
While husband weeps and a baby cries.  
And a drunk sits by and still some think  
It's nobody's business what I drink.*

The dairy farmer's tale of motherwork reminded me of my own mother's use of audio-visual rhetoric to accompany my brother David's recitation of "The Cider Mill." I can remember only the last line of this poem, which was "This is the best way to make cider!" at which point David bit into an apple with gusto. I remember that my mother insisted it must be a well-polished red MacIntosh for the visual effect and even more for its juicy sound effects. My mother has quite a different memory and as Engel (1998) tells us, these versions coexist and "the accuracy of the memory does not correspond to the

vividness of the memory” (p. 15). My mother vividly remembers going to the district speak off with David and there was another boy giving the exact same recitation but he had no apple at all!

These examples underscore a pattern to our selective re-membering of our shared past. One pattern for my generation is that we only obliquely name our WCTU mothers’ temperance work as education and activism. The vividness of small details and the forgetting of the larger history are common themes. Before the dairy farmer recited his poem, he said: “I don’t ever remember anything going along with those [speeches] to sort of say, . . . ‘This is why we advocate.’ I don’t remember that.” The dairy farmer in giving his recitation could have been a spokesperson for Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). It is ironic that he does not see the WCTU as an activist group and Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997) name MADD as an exemplar of civic activism. “MADD laid bare the astonishing, often counterintuitive, news that we had to be responsible for our own releases from responsibility” (p. 90). Is this not the same message as the dairy farmer’s ironic “It’s nobody’s business what I drink?” However, my sister June, who has a son in his 20s, challenged the dairy farmer’s position that the WCTU were not doing advocacy, when she said, “Well, maybe it was better without a long sermon, because those speeches had all the message right in them.”

I tried to trigger a memory for my classmate through grade school - now a School Bus Driver and farmer [male, age 54].

*My mother has a memory of the temperance [elocution] selections being handed out and that you got the draw of the one that was on tobacco and your mother [Bus Driver: I did?]. Yes, and that your mother was quite upset that you, everybody else’s recitations were about liquor and yours was about smoking. And your mother thought that was tough going because lots of people smoke and that wasn’t considered so bad back then. That was socially accepted. But you had to get up and do a thing on tobacco and that was going to be really tough. [School Bus Driver: I don’t remember.]*

My “retrieval cue” did not dredge up the memory but it did give pause to the Bus Driver as to why we remember and forget. “Don’t you think that the reason that we maybe don’t remember a lot of this was because we were more or less pushed into it and we didn’t understand what it was all about? But we did it because our parents made us really?” And my story caught Brenda’s attention. My mother had brought a few recent additions of the WCTU magazine, the *Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, which Brenda had leafed through. She spoke up, “There’s definitely new readings in the book about tobacco too.” The “meaningful omission” (Engel, 1998, p. 104) was that her son in his mid-20s had started to smoke in his teens and Brenda had told me a few times she was much more worried about this addiction and the potential for ill health – especially in a family with a history of heart disease - than she was about him taking a drink. In the year after this gathering, Brenda’s son tried the nicotine patch and stopped smoking.

Going back a generation, my sister June remembered as a small child, asking Grandma Lander why Uncle Fred smoked. Grandma Lander was widowed when my Dad was just 9 and my Uncle George was 2 years old. Grandma continued to farm and Uncle George and Dad had to leave school early to help her. Only Uncle Fred got a university



education and a job with the Canadian Armed Forces; he picked up the cigarette habit in the military. I can imagine June brimming over with curiosity in asking the question “Why does Uncle Fred smoke?” because smoking was not a habit she would have witnessed among any of her other close male relatives. June knew that Grandma was not happy about Uncle Fred smoking when Grandma’s clipped response was, “Because it tastes like more.”

Early on in our memory work, June told us that one minister took issue with the WCTU use of the word temperance, insisting that they were not advocating temperance or moderation at all but rather abstinence. My brother David spoke up: “I remember my mother having a discussion with me that temperance wasn’t quite good enough [Group laughter].” My first cousin, a radio station equipment Salesman [male, age 51] remembered his mother’s reaction to his attendance at a TOC ALPHA conference. The WCTU sponsored young people to attend this educational conference featuring “scientific temperance instruction” (see Wilson, 1998). The Salesman struggles with his memory:

*I went by myself and I’m just trying to recall the circumstances because, um, for a period of time Mum was involved with a committee. . . must have been the regional headquarters or something. I know she used to go out there quite a bit and have meetings and they sponsored me to go to this weekend at Guelph at the university. . . Anyway, she was pretty upset afterwards when I came home and told her that there wasn’t really a whole lot of discussion about abstinence or temperance. It was more evangelical and saving souls. So she was pretty upset about that.*  
[**Brenda:** They were off track. **Bus Driver:** She didn’t think your soul needed saving.]

I interpret Aunt Lucy’s WCTU priorities in terms of Nancy Fraser’s (1989) “dual aspect” activity of motherhood. “Not just nourishment and shelter *simpliciter* are produced but culturally elaborated forms of nourishment and shelter that have symbolically mediated social meanings” (p. 116). When both the social identities of her child and his biological survival were at stake, it seems that my Aunt Lucy was not prepared to sacrifice temperance and abstinence at the altar of evangelical religion. I asked my mother if there was any family history to explain the unrelenting temperance activism of my Grandma Lander, and her daughters, my Aunt Lucy and Aunt Ada. Mum said that Grandma never spoke of her family history of alcohol abuse but she remembered “a passing remark” that her father, a farmer and teetotaler, made when she was a young girl - “maybe 10 or 11”- and before she had any inkling of marrying my Dad. Her father said Richard (Grandma Lander’s father) and his son John drank “more than was good for them.” Spinosa, Flores, and Dreyfus (1997) contend “that all genuine political action associations are motivated by a . . . sense of disparity – not necessarily grief mixed with outrage [like MADD] but distress mixed with the sense that something important is not receiving recognition by the community” (p. 90). I will never know the whole story but I suppose that Grandma Lander wanted to protect her sons (including my Dad) from the problems that a drinking father and a drinking brother had created in her family.

Jumping generations, this same cousin, Aunt Lucy's son, told us of his approach to alcohol with his own two sons. He said that he made it a practice to have wine with meals when his sons were growing up and he connected this to his sons' current stance of "aggressively anti-substance abuse." In private conversation after the memory work, June and I could not help imagining Aunt Lucy's horror at this revelation and we were glad she was not alive to hear about it.

As a cue to remembering the influence on the next generation, I told the group how my nephew Richard [David's eldest son] revealed to me that he was upset at witnessing beer bottles on Grandma's kitchen table after she rented out the family farmhouse to tenants. My mother had a stroke in 1997 and could no longer manage the farmhouse where she had lived for almost 60 years. The **School Bus Driver** responded: "Well, I can understand his feeling of being upset about it." After the dialogue, he disclosed that he has conflicted feelings when he has a beer with his son on the patio of his home—within shouting distance of where his mother still lives. My niece **Marjorie** [age 29, a hospital nurse in neurology, June's daughter] said, "Angie [her sister] and I felt like that too when we went there." **David** got a big laugh when he said: "He was more upset about them than the ones in our garage." Then **Brenda** interpreted for us: "Oh yeah, because that was *Grandma's* kitchen."

### **Mothers and Daughters Re-Membered**

Two WCTU mothers, my Aunt Ada and my Aunt Lucy re-appeared in an e-mail that a public health nurse (female, age 52) asked her brother, the dairy farmer, to deliver to the gathering:

*Dear Dorothy: Thanks [sic] you so much for the invitaion [sic] to take part in your Research project....I thought I would jot down some of my memories of the W.C.T.U. 1) In my mind it was an "older" women's group....My grandmother, Ada Westington, Lucy Joice. 2) Mrs. Westington coming to me every year with a "piece" for me to say at the local speaking contest.... 3) I remember that some of the pieces were really funny. . . "You can tell a man who boozes by the company he chooses and the pig got up and slowly walked away". . . . 6) One time Mary Lou and I (I can't remember who else) won locally and went to a further competition. It was a long drive and I never thought that we would get there. 8) It was a time to get dressed up when you had to compete....got new shoes one time. . . 13) I remember feeling certain that these ladies were very committed to their cause and were very serious in their concern to get this point to the young people and of course older people as well. . . .It did teach some good lessons in getting up and feeling secure to speak in public. . . .I hope that these few thoughts. . .are helpful or at least jog someone else's memories. . . .Take care. . .Best Wishes.*

This nurse is just my age and her e-mail did "jog" my memory. I remembered about getting something new to wear for these contests too. It is noticeable that she includes her grandmother but not her own mother in the "older" women's group—yet her mother was clearly a WCTU leader, who you will remember helped her son - now a dairy farmer - with his recitation. The nurse's mother also brought the WCTU's Recording Secretary's Book for 1932-1937 and 1955-1961 to the gathering and I can find reference

to all three generations of this family in the minutes, including the nurse as a girl. Early indicators of this girl's leadership qualities show up in the minutes: "The Mission Band presented a nice program with the pres. [the nurse as a girl] announcing the numbers. Mrs. Joice [my Aunt Lucy] thanked the ladies for inviting the children to attend. The children then retired outside where games were planned." At another meeting where my Aunt Lucy assisted in making four infant children Little White Ribboners, the nurse's grandmother "read the aim of the Little White Ribboners and led in prayer. . . Mrs. King read "Blueprint to a better home." Mrs. H [the nurse's grandmother] gave "Why be a WCTU member?" . . . The meeting closed with the mizpah benediction." The recording of women's names in terms of their husbands' first names throughout the minutes is a reminder that the WCTU did not think of itself as a feminist organization—most women of this generation refer to themselves by their husband's name to this day, even when their husband is deceased. My father died in 1980 and it is only in recent years – the influence of her daughters perhaps? – that my mother records her return address as Mrs. Mary Lander rather than Mrs. Gerald Lander.

In the memory work session with the WCTU mothers, the nurse's mother also remembered making this same long drive to the competition and how it was such a big thing to take off on a long drive to a city that they had never been to before. The entire family, the mother, the nurse, and the dairy farmer do not frame their 1999 memories of the WCTU in religious discourse but rather in terms of public speaking. Her brother remembered the educational value of the WCTU in terms of the medal contests: "I think public speaking is always a valuable thing and I guess that was the positive thing that probably came out of it for me anyway. To have to get up in front and speak in front of people is something, that if you can do, you can always sort of do it and use it." Their mother reinforced this discourse when she said to me privately: "Your generation is much more able to speak out." I can remember that the nurse shone in these public speaking competitions. Today she is actively engaged in public speaking in her executive position with the Federation of Agriculture and she also is a team leader for a group that helps young new ministers not used to rural congregations to adapt and understand rural life.

In the WCTU mothers' memory work session, I heard audible sighs accompanying how alcohol had "become socially acceptable" and I felt that there was a reluctance to engage in remembering how their work had or had not influenced our generation. These are Engel's (1998) "meaningful omissions" and I sensed that what these mothers left out of their memory work was just as important as what they left in (p. 104). For the WCTU mothers, these meaningful omissions were not an attempt to leave the listeners with "an erroneous impression of what is true" (p. 104) but rather to side step painful and/or embarrassing memories of alcohol abuse that they knew about each other's families. This was true in my own case; many knew that alcohol was implicated in the break up of my first marriage but I did not enter this into the memory work nor did anyone else.

One WCTU mother (my sister June's mother-in-law) recited lines from her own gold-prize recitation of the 1940's entitled *The Two Armies* – an extended metaphor of the war against alcohol in terms of the second world war. And then she said, "I asked [my daughter] what she remembered about the WCTU and she said, 'The public speaking contests and I hated every moment'." It is my impression that war and warriors

metaphors did not carry on into the recitations that were favoured in the elocution contests during the 1960s.

*There are two armies abroad today,  
As in the age that has passed away,  
The makers and vendors and patrons and all  
Who aid in the traffic of Alcohol.  
These are the warriors, bold and strong,  
Who swell the ranks of the army of Wrong.  
And we are the soldiers, strong and brave,  
Who are striving with heart and hand to save  
The youth of our land from the deep, dark grave,  
That the foe is digging by night and day.*

My sister June participated in both groups and she would know the sensitivities around drinking in her mother-in-law's family and the reluctance to comment on the results of "striving with heart and hand to save the youth of our land." I appreciated her comments early on in my generation's memory work, which somewhat diffused an undercurrent of resignation in my mother's group: "I didn't hear too many of them say that the younger generation had completely gone to pot anyway, had they? [Group laughter]"

My sister June vividly re-remembered the moment of disbelief when she found out that her first teacher was a drinker. Her disbelief as a 6-year old was based in part in the knowledge that her teacher was Mum's first cousin. This dialogue lends support to collective memory work that engages us in "attempting to produce compatible accounts" (Haug, 1987, p. 56) and "using the past to shake up one another's self-presentations" (Engel, 1998, p. 39).

**Dorothy** [to June]: *Can you tell your schoolteacher story? First teacher?*

**June** (age 58, doctor's office receptionist): *Oh dear. Well, um, I remember my first teacher was Mrs. A\_\_\_\_ and I remember E\_\_\_\_\_ [girl cousin and neighbour] telling me that Mrs. A\_\_\_\_\_ had a drinking problem. And Mrs. A\_\_\_\_\_ taught me to read, she was my hero, and I told that to Mum, that couldn't be true, besides she was even related to Mum. [Group laughter] But she said, "I'm afraid she did."*

**Brenda** (my girlfriend, primary school teacher, age 50): *Oooh.*

**June**: *I only had her for 6 months, Mr. F\_\_\_\_\_ [the minister] apparently objected, I don't know just how they managed, how they managed to get her sent away or what.*

**Retired Military Wife** (age 61, cousin and neighbour): *Well, through the school board, don't you think? [June: Maybe] My Dad was on the school board. [June: I see] And I mean she came in drunk every Monday morning, I mean, a common occurrence, I mean. [Group laughter]*

**Brenda**: *I guess she wasn't a White Ribboner [Group laughter].*

**Retired Military Wife:** *That's true.*

**Retired Highschool Custodian** (cousin and neighbour, age 67, male): *She got me through grade school.*

**Retired Military Wife:** *She was the best teacher we ever had. Oh yes, she was one terrific teacher.*

**Retired Secretary, Investment Firm** (Age 55, wife of school bus driver): *Was she good at teaching? Like, she was sober or?*

**Retired Military Wife:** *She was a good teacher no matter what.*

**Dairy Farmer** (wife of dairy farmer, age 50): *She was relaxed, M\_\_\_\_\_.*  
[Group laughter]

**Brenda:** *Better when she was drinking.*

The retired military wife is the very cousin and neighbour that walked the 2 miles to and from school with June and told her that Mrs. A had a drinking problem. She was visibly startled by June's story – a story that she had most likely not had occasion to think of for over 50 years. The response that this story stirred in many of the listeners reveals something about the selectivity and durability of memory for cause celebres. Remarkably, everyone in the room who had had Mrs. A as a teacher seemed to be able to remember that Mrs. A got sent away, even if the details were fuzzy. Brenda and others of this younger age group had never heard of Mrs. A and could make a joke about her not being a "Little White Ribboner" but the retired military wife and her brother, the custodian, became intensely serious in re-remembering Mrs. A as their teacher. It was important to convey that Mrs. A was a whole person whom they still valued; she was not just a drinker.

Print text does not do justice to Brenda's "Oooh" in response to June's story but I interpreted her response as an outpouring of empathy. According to Johnson (1993), empathy "is the chief activity by which we are able to inhabit a more or less common world—a world of shared gestures, actions, perceptions, experiences, meanings, symbols, and narratives" (p. 201). Brenda has taught primary school for well over 30 years and she said to me privately after the formal memory work that she knew very well how attached children became to her as a teacher in their first year of school. Surely motherwork is part and parcel of being a primary school teacher.

The negotiation of our shared past continued beyond the shared inquiry. When I told Mum about June telling this story in our generation's remembrances about growing up WCTU, she at first laughed nervously about this public disclosure. But then she remembered and made a connection to the first generation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mum remembered that her uncle was an alcoholic and that her aunt and cousins [including Mrs. A] had a "pretty hard life...not enough money for clothing." He would come to Grandpa [referring to her own father] asking for money for seed corn and Grandpa was always generous. He could not say "No" to his own brother-in-law and a fellow farmer, even though he knew it would go for drink.

## **A History of the Present**

The response to June's story of her first teacher qualifies as memory work that creates a "history of the present" with its "focus on the problems presented by historical resources" (Dean, 1994, p. 22). This is a problem of the remembering self meeting the remembered self (Engel, 1998, p. 87). The context of remembering the religious and moral regulation of the WCTU from our childhood played on the adult speakers in the here and now. "The past we describe is often determined more by unconscious feelings that are real even when not located in the events we recount, and our need to justify a feeling, to convince someone of something" (Engel, 1998, p. 87). The retired military wife and the retired custodian do not provide any detailed evidence of Mrs. A's good teaching. It seems to me that the unconscious feeling that took over their description of the past was one that would convince their listeners that they were not passing judgement on Mrs. A.

I recognize this memory work around Mrs. A as Engel's (1998) description of particular reminiscences that act as a template, that is, "a stand-in for a set of unresolved feelings we cannot confront directly" (p. 88). The unresolved feelings of us Little White Ribboners as adults centered on the conflict between the moral regulation and moral purity (see Parker, 1997; Valverde, 1991, 1998; Wilson, 1998) that we grew up with in the 1940s through 1960s and the current climate of not passing judgement on others. Part of our template memory was dealing with the unresolved feelings around this regime of moral purity that included a double standard for men and women who drank. In fact, I was reminded to ask June to tell the story of her first teacher because we had just been talking about AL ANON, which the dairy farmer remembered as being a support group only for women 35 years ago. June insisted, "AL ANON isn't just for women, it's for partners of alcoholics or their families. There's AL TEEN too." My brother David then drew laughter from the group when he said ironically: "Well it was probably because it was only the men who were alcoholics." O'Malley (1996) claims that the harm reduction and risk management emphasis in contemporary alcohol education programs and addiction services constitutes "strategic re-moralization." The conflicted responses around June's story of her first teacher who "got sent away," and who was made responsible for her substance abuse in the late 1940s bear testimony to O'Malley's critique: "We do not see [or pass judgement on] any 'irresponsible' users" (p. 30). My first cousin's tale of serving wine with meals to introduce his sons to responsible drinking also supports O'Malley's critique.

My niece Marjorie [age 29, neurology nurse] was the only vocal participant of her generation, and cannot represent the moral positioning of a whole generation. However, I sensed that she was skipping her mother's generation and judging drunkenness as irresponsible, although not nuanced in Christian terms that named drunkenness a sin like the generation of her WCTU grandmother and great-grandmother. Marjorie attributes the spinal injuries that she observes on a daily basis to irresponsible drinking: "Pretty bad summer [at work], people drinking and diving into pools and breaking their necks. And car accidents. Falling downstairs. We have one right now." A little later, she continued in a similar tone: "I think one of the biggest shocks that I had was university, like going away to university... University is so focused on it [drinking]." June remembered that how to handle a drunk was part of her son John's training when he worked for one year as a university resident assistant. John told his mother that he had received three thank-

you notes from girls he had helped out when they were drunk. I had the sense that unlike Marjorie, John was not making a judgement on the girls as irresponsible.

The retired custodian's memory of the WCTU that follows is not a template memory but he illustrates memory as continuity and the "powerful drive to experience [our] selves as continuous across space and time" (Engel, 1998, p. 100). Listen for the remembered self "created through memories [who] is constantly interacting with the self one's memory creates" (Engel, p. 107). The retired custodian is talking here about "scientific temperance instruction," the National Temperance Study Courses that the Ontario Temperance Federation offered in the public schools. Listen how other speakers join in his comparison of "those days" and "these days" to create a "history of the present":

**Retired Custodian** (male, age 67): *Now there's one thing I remember was doing sheets that they sent from public school. And the only one I remember was concerning Syl Apps who was supposedly an abstainer who had given permission to use his name in these pamphlets we did questions on. And it's hard to imagine that a hockey player would be an abstainer in these days, but in those days they were I guess. I'm not sure even if Hap Day might have been an abstainer but I don't know for sure about that one.*

**Dorothy:** *I don't know the sports figures? Who is Syl Apps?*

**Custodian:** *Syl Apps was a star player for Toronto Maple Leafs in the late thirties, early forties.*

**David:** *He was the MP [Member of Parliament] for Kingston and the Islands when we were there [David and I were at Queen's University in the 1960s], I think. Yeah, he's the, Syl Apps reform school in Oakville at the moment.*

**June:** *Angie [her daughter] worked there for a while.*

**Dorothy:** *And who's the other one?*

**Custodian:** *Hap Day was coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs. Apparently Syl Apps' grandson is signed with the Maple Leafs for this year.*

**David:** *I remember doing lots of those things but I don't remember any of the stories involved.*

**Custodian:** *Well, that's the only story I remember. There's probably lots of other ones. . . I don't know, I used to follow Foster Hewitt on the radio.*

Not only the custodian, but the rest of us worked to craft the Syl Apps memory as a series of connected events. The "line of connections that reveal meaning about [the custodian's] life" (Engel, 1998, p. 100) are hockey connections, from listening to Foster Hewitt call out the hockey games on the radio in the late 1930s and 1940s, to Syl Apps' grandson being signed with the Maple Leafs "this year."

Re-memorizing our selves, supports a feminist genealogy of women's activism in a "history of the present." This begins the work of reworking and validating an early

social movement of women and mothers as activists so as to inform and legitimate action in the here and now. Rockhill (1993) draws on “Arlene Schenke’s (1991) ‘genealogy of memory-work [that] should offer strategies of commitment that are relational, provisional, deliberately ambivalent and continuously in process’ (p. 13)” (p. 362). By extension, I hope to create “an opening, ideally, to continuing reflection and critique, a story that never stops beginning or ending” (Rockhill, p. 362). I close this article with dialogue from our 1999 memory work that is an implicit invitation to me to create this opening and to provide the occasions to create a history of the present that includes women’s history of civility:

**David** (United Church minister, age 54 , my brother): *Well yes, I guess I think that even apart from the alcohol thing, I think the WCTU was encouraging civility* [**June** (doctor’s office receptionist, age 58, my sister): *Hmmm Hmm*]. *It wasn’t just alcohol, it was morals, civility, I guess, being a sensible person, contributing to society because that’s why they started up in the first place. There was a bunch of people that were not a contribution to society or to their families and these particular women were very concerned about that.*

**School Bus Driver** (age 54, my classmate in grade school): *I think you’ve really hit on something there, David. I think that there’s probably more influence on our lives than we would maybe realize, definitely didn’t realize at the time. Maybe more influence on our lives now and we wouldn’t have thought about it until Dorothy got us thinking about it.*

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