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A Breath of Spring Air

Marilyn L. Grady

The most promising sights of spring in Nebraska this year were two conferences for women. One event, sponsored by Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, was a Women's History Month Tea. The program featured a Native American woman who greeted the guests with a Native invocation. Dressed traditionally and speaking in a native language, her presentation was both provocative and beautiful. She was followed by a noted actress from Nebraska who presented brief glimpses of the lives of four women from various historic moments in U.S. history. As always, her characterizations are riveting. Participants were invited to eat the finger foods and try the various teas provided. As expected, the refreshments were suitably elegant. A keynote speaker highlighted the successes of a number of women leaders and pointed to the challenges women must continue to address. A student from the community college was showcased and honored for her accomplishments; and, she spoke of the factors that had facilitated her successes during her community college studies. The administrator from the college, who was the hostess of the event, introduced her mentors who were in attendance. Among her mentors was a woman who was celebrating her birthday that day. The nonagenarian was an impressive woman, a former Omaha school principal. The message of recognizing the mentors in the room was an important reminder to all present to acknowledge those who have assisted them in their life challenges and career direction. The program concluded with a closing benediction by the Native American woman. The comments of the assembled women as they departed were that "we should have invited our other friends" and "we are so happy we had this opportunity."

The hostess of the event had spearheaded the planning of the Tea. She told me that the college had hosted women's leadership gatherings many years ago but had discontinued the practice. She indicated that she saw a need for greater opportunities for women leaders to meet.

A second conference was the meeting of the Nebraska Women in Higher Education. This meeting is a vestige of the American Council on Education's Women's Network. The women who gathered for the meeting included individuals from community colleges, colleges, and universities in Nebraska. The attendees held a variety of positions including faculty, student affairs, and department chairs. Typically the meeting is hosted by a different campus each spring. The meeting began in the morning, concluded in the early afternoon, and featured both keynote addresses and several breakout sessions. The refreshment breaks and luncheon provided opportunities for the participants to visit.

The leadership of this meeting changes annually with representation from a variety of campuses. The attendance at the meetings varies. Location, weather, timing, and communication influence the attendance at the event.

Both events occurred on days marked by Nebraska weather when it is on its very best behavior. The events were marked by attendees who were enthused about being involved in the meetings.

There is an assumption that the issues of women's equity were resolved many years ago and the focus on women's issues has diminished. These two events suggest that there is a continuing interest in women's leadership development activities. Attendance at these events and the enthusiasm of the participants attest to their importance. Although brief interludes, they brought the best of spring with them.