



Fellowship Square

A Woman's Perspective – Judy La Porte

“You can’t go into the Pool Room.” Judy La Porte, a resident at Lake Ridge Fellowship House, recalled being barred from this particular hometown establishment during her childhood. This ‘Pool Room’ was also a sandwich shop that served really tasty food, but women were not allowed in. Women had to order food at the takeout window because only men were allowed inside the building. Remarkably, she never really thought much about this situation because “that was just the way it was back then.”

Today, Judy feels it is important to celebrate **International Women’s Day** because women should be recognized for the contributions they bring to the world and enjoy fair and equal access to the same opportunities and spaces that men have. Reflecting on the past, Judy recalls that when she grew up in the 50’s, 60’s, and 70’s, there were many female doctors, legal professionals, and many other accomplished women. However, she felt that often they did not get credit for their achievements. “It has always been known as a man’s world,” she said. It was difficult for women to break into roles held almost entirely by men.



When asked about her thoughts on equal opportunities for men and women, Judy thinks this is how things *should* be, but does not believe there ever *will* be complete opportunity equality between genders. She notes that although a man and a woman can perform the same job, many men get paid more for the same kind of work. Unfortunately, she feels there are a lot of women nowadays that won’t fight for this inequity because they are afraid of losing their jobs. Judy witnessed this first-hand at a place where she had worked during the 90’s. A man and a woman both held the same job, but the man was paid more. The woman filed a lawsuit against the company’s management and was fired on the spot. Thankfully, in this case, the company was faulted and had to pay the woman for the wage difference as well as all lost income as a result of being fired.

During her life, Judy’s biggest struggle as a woman was being a single mother. She was born and raised in North Carolina, and then moved to Virginia in 1983. She had to commute long distances to places like Fairfax, VA or Washington, DC, to hold jobs that paid reasonable wages so she could have a decent place to live, a car, and provide for her children. There were times when Judy had to work two or three jobs, pinch pennies, and figure out how to keep it all going.

The best advice Judy offers to younger female generations is for them to get an education in any way possible. Back when Judy graduated from high school, those who went to college were viewed as ‘wealthy’ because college was expensive, and the town she grew up in consisted of mainly industrial-class workers. Judy’s parents did not have higher-education degrees, so they had to find work wherever they could. There were four children in her family, and this placed a lot of pressure on her parents to provide basic needs and keep a roof over their heads.

Now that she is seventy, Judy volunteers in the community and tries to help wherever there is a need. She does a lot of volunteering at her church and reminds people about important women in the Bible, such as Esther, who was a strong woman and risked her life to save her people. Judy feels that more women need find their strength, like Esther, to speak up and highlight all of their accomplishments every day, not just on one day of the year.