



Region II: New York, New Jersey and Puerto Rico

Outstanding Women Leadership Series

Nassau Community College English Professor and Coordinator of Women's Studies Project Interviewed by ICCD for the AAWCC's *Outstanding Women Leadership Series*

Barbara Horn: *On Strength*

January 5, 2007

Dr. Barbara Horn, English professor and coordinator of the Women's Studies Project at Nassau Community college in Garden City, New York, has been selected by the American Association of Women in Community Colleges, Region II, to be interviewed by the Institute for Community College Development as part of their joint "Outstanding Women in Leadership" series. The AAWCC's Region II includes New York, New Jersey, and Puerto Rico. The series honors women who have made outstanding contributions to creating and broadening opportunities for women in community colleges.



Horn is honored for her passion and creativity in building connections between women of all ages in higher education. In addition to coordinating the Women's Studies Project at Nassau, Horn has also been a member of the editorial board of the *Women's Studies Quarterly*, an educational project of the Feminist Press at the City University of New York, and an avid writer on feminism.

As a leader Horn exhibits great depth and spirit. She attributes this to her passion for gardening. "Gardening is very therapeutic. You lose time and you lose yourself," beams Horn over the phone. "It gives me strength in many ways, by adding depth to my subject matter and my teaching, by giving me physical strength, emotional strength, and a way to be involved in my own world." A past marathon runner, Horn now rides her bike 40 minutes a day and gardens on summer weekends at her rural Long Island home.

Flowers have special meaning for Horn. "They define a moment for me," she says, "by symbolizing something that is bigger than myself. They connect me to a discovery I made early in my childhood, that even in my backyard I can have something beautiful that takes me away from my little place to something larger." She adds, "Perhaps what I like most about gardening is taking something very delicate and precious like a flower and giving it to someone I love to make that love even brighter."

As a little girl on the farm, Horn started to watch people and write down what she saw: the one-room school house, the struggling farmers, people suffering from lack of work. She began to sense "community." "One of the things I work on," Horn says, "is to be a very careful observer. I put myself in places where I am interested in what I see. I am

fascinated by New York City, for example: everything is very colorful, textured, and contrasting, unlike rural Missouri where I grew up.”

Horn lives through her work. “My work and my teaching inspire me,” she says. Her interest in women’s studies evolved from her passionate research about strong pioneer women. She read their stories, tracked their lives and presented what she learned at conferences across the country.

At Nassau, Horn was able to find a place for her passion in developing the Women’s Studies Project (WST). WST is a multidisciplinary project emphasizing diversity with courses examining women’s roles cross-culturally. Women’s Studies particularly attracts non-traditional students, especially returning women, women of color, and working class women—transforming their lives, making them see the world with a new lens and enabling them to develop strategies for more successful lives. Horn believes that there are significant similarities between pioneer women and the women who now come through her program.

“Strength is what connects these women,” she says. “The work ethic is what I try to impress upon my students. It is very important for them to deal with their lives – their struggles and their successes. The pioneer women I studied early on were very committed to the land, to productivity, even though they didn’t produce a whole lot, and many were really struggling. Yet because of those struggles they found a moral vein, a purpose, a thread that moved through their lives. I hope I help the women in my program discover that thread.”

Horn also challenges her students to ask “Where are the women?” She gives two examples where women are not seen: “We find it in elite men who do not see black people or women because they don’t count, and in people who are angry at women in prominent positions because they don’t want them there.” Horn believes all of us have to find ways to help make women more visible. Activism is one way, being a role model is another—“the way we are in the classroom, and the way we live our lives. I think it’s a powerful thing to be a role model for young women.”

In Nassau’s Women’s Studies Project, connections between women are strengthened through the faculty seminar: each semester writers, artists, activists and women from the community gather to share their creativity, reflecting the AAWCC’s mission of supporting women in higher education. And the affiliation these women have with AAWCC says that they are not alone, they are bigger than Nassau Community College.

When asked what she would like to tell other women, Horn replies, “When you enter anything--a new institution, a theater, a bar, or a family gathering-- see where the women are. In asking that, we are asking many things – what are the images of women, what are their roles, what are their tasks, what are the messages they are giving to other women?” “See what the lay of the land is,” she suggests, “and you will find where your strength lies.”

Interview by Lee Riddell

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