

VIEWPOINTS

We've come a long way, Vermillion - thanks to women

Describing the impression that I had while staring through my camera's viewfinder Monday morning is a bit difficult.

I'd like to say it was simply an "aha moment," - a time of sudden insight.

There was, after all, an immediate, fresh bit of comprehension as I focused in on 16 women, standing in single file, across Main Street in the heart of downtown Vermillion.

There was also a sense of disappointment. It had nothing to do with the weather (it was cold) or the lighting (partly cloudy) or the subject matter.

I was disappointed with myself. Disappointed in how I have somewhat taken these people for granted.

Downtown Vermillion is a lively place today, thanks to women.

Like downtown districts in virtually every South Dakota community, there have been times when the rows of shops lining Main and other downtown streets resembled a jack-o-lantern's smile, with a vexing gap here and there caused by a vacant shop.

Fortunately, some Vermillion women have helped kept a strong

BETWEEN THE LINES



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presence on Vermillion's Main Street over the years during both good and not so good times. Yes, there are still a few empty spots downtown. But, getting back to that palm-slap moment that struck me so clearly Monday - downtown is currently thriving. The liveliness can be largely attributed to the entrepreneurial spirit of local women.

It's a trend that Nancy Naeve of KSFY television couldn't ignore, especially after a group of downtown businesswomen invited her to visit with them. Naeve, who attended the University of South Dakota here years ago, became familiar with downtown Vermillion's strengths and weaknesses at that time.

While roaming Main Street Monday morning, she noted that the downtown business climate is

much stronger now.

That strength comes from a strong entrepreneurial spirit in our community - and it turns out that a similar trend is growing across the country. Recent studies show women are exceptionally skilled at entrepreneurship.

The 2013 "State of Women-Owned Businesses Report," a survey commissioned by American Express, found women own 8.6 million businesses in the U.S. That's up 59 percent since 1997. These businesses account for 7.8 million employees and \$1.3 trillion in revenue.

While the recession caused an overall slump in private-sector job growth, the report recognized women-owned businesses as "the only bright spot" for actually adding 175,000 jobs since 2007.

According to the report, there were 14,121 women-owned firms in South Dakota in 1997, that employed 14,323 people with total sales of \$1.2 billion. By 2002, the number of businesses owned by South Dakota women grew to more than 15,500, employed more than 17,000 people and had total sales of \$1.5 billion.

Women-owned South Dakota businesses numbered nearly 17,100 by 2007. They employed 17,120 people, and generated more than \$2 billion in sales.

In 2013, according to survey estimates since the year is not yet complete, the number of women-owned businesses by the end of the year will total 19,000, and will employ 18,900. Total sales this year are predicted to total \$2.6 billion.

Crunch all of these numbers and you come up with these trends: From 1997 through 2013, the number of women-owned businesses in our state has grown by nearly 35 percent. The number of people employed by these businesses during that time period has ticked up 32 percent.

Total sales by women-owned businesses over the past 16 years are expected to show a total growth of over 116 percent.

Wow. South Dakota women, and particularly a number here in Vermillion, have forged ahead, ignored possible internal and external obstacles, took risks and challenged themselves.

They are the champions who have laid the groundwork for more female entrepreneurs.

Their personal successes in a business climate that can be challenging could be all that it takes for that next woman with an idea to start a business here in Vermillion - next week, next month, next year.

This is a trend that would be lauded by any community, and it's certainly not something that should be taken for granted here.

Vermillion women have always, to some degree, provided a unique influence to the local business climate. A traditional career path for some has included working side by side with husbands or other relatives in family-owned businesses.

Business opportunities for past generations of women in Vermillion have, just like elsewhere in the United States, not been as plentiful as they've been for men.

The survey above, however, indicates that those times are changing. Women, it appears, are making progress in knocking down barriers in the workplace by creating their own businesses.

For South Dakota and the Vermillion community, that is indeed good news.

PLAIN TALK POLL RESULTS

Who are you rooting for in the World Series?

St. Louis Cardinals	20
Boston Red Sox	15
Total Votes	35

To participate in the Plain Talk's weekly poll, log on to plaintalk.net.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

Please limit letters to 300 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Mail to: Letters to the Editor, 201 W. Cherry St., Vermillion, SD 57069, drop off at 201 W. Cherry in Vermillion or e-mail to david.lias@plaintalk.net.

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STK

WON'T
START
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WON'T
STOP
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Writing exercise recalls forgotten memories

Many years ago, when I was a newspaper reporter, I attended writing a National Federation of Press Women writing workshop in Kansas City.

In the class, we were required to set aside the unbiased writing our profession demanded and quickly adopt a biased approach toward the stories within us.

Using a subjective style begged uninhibited articulation of internal dialogues and buried accounts of bygone days.

The workshop facilitator defined the timed writing exercise as "stream of consciousness."

We were to journal non-stop for five minutes, not lifting our pens or censoring our thoughts.

Much like a car race announcer calling, "Gentleman, start your engines," the instructor prompted us to complete this sentence: "I remember when..." after which a silent resistance hung over us as heavy morning dew.

MY STORY YOUR STORY



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channel memories.

Slowly, the exercise peeled away untold layers of a well-preserved experience rooted in my childhood.

As a child, I remember Sunday drives with my family.

I remember analyzing degrees of newness as we traveled further and further away.

I remember my throat tightening and swallowing hard as ubiquitous unfamiliarity replaced sameness.

I remember new sights as we rounded mountains through Central Pennsylvania.

Conscience of the ticking clock and without pre-meditation, I pushed my pen across an unblemished page of paper, hoping it would act as a vessel that would magically

I remember holding my breath while trying to read road signs.

I remember interpreting my parents' arguments that spilled into the back seat.

I remember sitting there, pressed in with my siblings: thigh-to-thigh, arm-to-arm, shoulder-to-shoulder.

After what seemed like an hour of writing, the workshop leader chimed, "Time's up," and then invited us to begin the second five-minute assignment.

"Only this time, the journal prompt is 'I don't remember.' You may begin."

Sighing deeply before a belabored pause, I forced myself to recall what I didn't remember.

I don't remember how much time I spent dallying after the bell rang one snowy afternoon, dismissing my best friend, Bonnie, and me from our third-grade classroom.

I don't remember if it was the first snow of the season in October or one of many that had already fallen in December.

I don't remember how many blocks from school we were on our routine walk home when

we stopped on a city sidewalk.

I don't remember the level of intrigue, causing us to leisurely kneel at an iron grate that was tightly laid over a window well of a century-old house along the way.

I don't remember if it was a stranger's dwelling or one of an acquaintance.

With fists stuffed with snow, I don't remember why we were so taken, completely mesmerized by the repetitive motion of grating and shoving, circling and smoothing snow into the well.

I don't remember being bothered by my mittens that had hardened into crusty armor or by my numbing fingers that had grown thick and red.

I don't recall if Bonnie and I had conversation or carried on in silence.

I don't know how long we stayed there on frozen knees, pawing over those iron bars. I don't remember dusk looming.

When our play was done and rose to our feet, I can't figure out why I let out deep sonorous sighs or why my head felt airy

and trance like.

I don't remember if I cleaned up by clapping my hands and dusting off my coat before heading home.

I don't remember my frozen rump awkwardly carrying my stiff legs as pegs dragging along my feet, which had lost almost all feeling.

I don't know how many streets Bonnie and I crossed or if there was any traffic to speak of.

I can't recall at all our trek over dimly lit streets and down darkening alleyways. I don't remember seeing light pour from my childhood abode, a sturdy brick Craftsman at the corner of Third and Spruce.

I don't know how long I hesitated while standing at the front door before turning the tarnished brass doorknob. I don't remember crossing the threshold after my long haul home.

I don't know what caused the worn look on my mother's worried face or recall the yardstick she hid with a sweaty grip behind her back.

I don't at all remember that spanking.