

Good Evening Everyone. What a pleasure it is to be in New Brunswick. For me it is a Province of people who have their feet firmly on the ground, their heads looking above the clouds, and their heart in the right place.

It is such a pleasure to speak at this amazing dinner celebrating the work of the Honourable Muriel McQueen Fergusson and the Foundation that continues her legacy. It is always an honour to address those who provide such visionary leadership, as well as those who support this work, for it is indeed work worthy of heroes.

When I agreed to speak, they told me the theme of the evening was "Following in Muriel's Footsteps: Driving Social Change. I was sent a stack of paper, about a foot thick, with a DVD of The Honourable Muriel McQueen Fergusson. My first reaction was "Must be duplicates, after all how much information could there be on one woman?" Well, after reading the material and viewing the film of her life I knew I could never call her by her full name again. This was a woman who could easily stand on her first name alone; Muriel. Like Cher, Madonna, Celine, Oprah, I thought. No, after reviewing it again, more like Henrietta, Nellie, Louise, Emily and Irene, Canada's Famous Five. Although, after further thought, it did seem they were just the warm up act for our Muriel!

She had immense character, integrity, fortitude and pluck. How I treasured listening to her story, how I fell in love with her style and her message. Her history is spellbinding. Here was a woman who broke through glass ceilings, but made sure the exploding shards didn't impale others. Here was a woman who opened doors for millions of women but made sure no one was trampled in the rush toward opportunity. A woman who, I quote, "Painted her objections without a hint of confrontation". In others words, someone so the exact opposite of me, 'the bull in the china shop of diplomacy!', I began to dry heave with anxiety at the thought of speaking at the organization of which she was the Patron.

How I wish I would have known her, I would have sat at her feet and gulped in the fresh air of her ideas. I wish I could have thanked her for the leadership she provided and the path she bush-whacked for the rest of us. I wish I could be more like her because there is such an urgent need to carry on her work, her voice and her deeds. I believe in her mission. And although I haven't cracked even a small percentage of what she has accomplished, I think she might have been pleased with my work and that makes me happy.

I stand before you because of my work, but I can assure you, there is less to me than meets the eye. For some reason it is always easier to fight for one's principles than to actually live up to them. I have failed far more than I have succeeded. I am not a visionary like Muriel. This is not false modesty. I knew how to sell soap and I did it well. About how to save the world, not so much...! I place myself into the hands of dedicated Social Justice groups and say "Just wind me up and point me in the right direction. I'll do whatever you think is best". My work is a visceral response to their call for action.

Well managed Foundations, like this one, always provide a carefully planned flight pattern and I'm not afraid to soar on their instruction. I have found that good Executive Director's, like Therese, keep you safe. They have allowed me to do what I can do, in my own way, but under their steely guidance, keeping me out of trouble. So far they have never let my mouth write cheques that my ass couldn't cash!

Best of all, they have convinced me that the matching of funds is far sexier than the matching of shoes and purses. And, while my brain may be my favourite organ, their causes have a mortgage on my heart; which is a good thing, because my heart is where I do most of my thinking.

I have come to understand that the issues of social justice do not just affect our emotions, but our civic pride and our economic prosperity too. If you are looking for the starting block to unlock prosperity and break a cycle of poverty and violence, look no farther than changing the life of a woman. I don't need to know how a telephone works, or a car, or a computer to know when it's not working. I don't need to know how supply side economics work, or accounting, to know when our society isn't working for everyone. We need to rage against the unacceptable.

I now bring together, in my home, women who think like me so we can plot and scheme and organize...with a glass of wine, always a glass of wine. I now no longer just put my heart into my cheque book. I put my cheque book into my heart. I give just a little more than is comfortable. If there is one thing I know it is this: when we are better, we better others.

What becomes imminently clear is that we need to measure progress, not by gross national product, but by human development. We need to measure freedom, not by the number of borders we can cross, but

by the number of real options available in life. I am one lucky woman. My options are huge, thanks to the work of Muriel. But my options are not deserved or secure unless others have the same opportunities. I'm all about options. I want to keep them open and that demands some kick-ass kindness fuelled by compassion.

This evening is about an unforgettable human being, Muriel McQueen Fergusson. But it is also about a movement, the movement she began, to raise all of us up to be better people through our words and our thoughts and most of all our actions. I think Muriel would have agreed that "vision without action is merely hallucination". We need to be more like her, to embrace her intelligent disobedience, and it must begin with outrage and compassion.

The longer I live the more I realize the impact compassion has on life. Compassion is more important than facts. It is more important than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes. Compassion is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. Compassion will make or break our communities. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one common string we have and this is our compassion. Engaging in compassionate behaviour is a form of liberation. You transcend yourself and become part of the community.

This entire evening has been about community. This entire evening is about our gratitude to one woman, The Honourable Muriel McQueen Fergusson. I'm sure she would agree when I close by saying "Be thankful for your good life, and if you can't be thankful for what you receive, be thankful for what you escape."

I thank you deeply for this evening. I am so grateful for your community.