

GERTRUDE BAILEY REMINISCES

The only justification for looking back is to see how far we've come.

A small informal group of women executives in public relations started to meet once a month in each other's apartments or offices in 1946. There were several reasons why we were so exclusive. In 1946 when Denny Griswold was asked to make up a list of women executives in public relations, a few were all she could find. Whenever we couldn't agree on whether we were going to have luncheon or evening meetings the issue would be tabled. "We have to eat lunch anyway" was one side of the argument. Denny, our first chairwoman, would remind us, "We have a definite job to perform, to further the professional interests of every woman in public relations. We have to give a little bit more. Surely it is not too much to give one evening a month!"

By 1955 there were 23 of us and we were all listed, with our affiliation, down the left hand side of a beautiful letterhead that read "Committee on Women in Public Relations". Today, we have over 100 members representing 85 firms including 29 corporations, 24 counselling firms, 10 consultants, seven health and welfare organizations, six non-profit organizations, three trade and professional associations, a college, a library, museum and government. "We've

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come a long way, baby", but it hasn't been easy.

Some of our early encouragement came from women members of the press. The minutes tell of a Nov. 1949 meeting when the speaker was Pauline Mandigo, president of the Phoenix News Service, covering political, economic and international affairs.

She was asked, "Do you have any men in your organization?"

"Yes, we have a cleaning man. We don't discriminate," she said.

Early in the fifties CWPR recognized there was a lack of training available for women in p.r. We invited "Uncle Milty" Fairman of Borden to level with us.

"The trouble is that most of the men the p.r. trainee comes in contact with are from small business firms and from small towns who have worked their way up and who think of women as clerks, stenographers, or factory workers," he told us, adding that he thought women were sometimes too efficient and built up a feeling of inadequacy among the clients. He also believed that women insist on recognition whereas men were more apt to take things as a matter of course. Challenged on this point, he agreed that men and women in public relations become frustrated unless they get recognition. Well developed p.r. training programs were still a dream back in 1951.

Once referred to by a board member of PRSA as "sort of a sorority," CWPR by 1951 won recognition in a special article in PR Journal that described the executive role of 18 of our members. These included Lee Jaffee, director of public relations for the N.Y. Port of Authority; Caroline Hood, public relations director of Rockefeller Center, Dorothy Lweis, United Nations; Gertrude Bailey, Eastern manager of public relations for Monsanto Chemical Co.; Anna Glantz, N.Y. Public Library; Sallie Bright, Community Service Society of N.Y.; Sydney Boyd, Memorial Hospital, Dorcas Campbell, vice-president East River Savings Bank; Dorothy Ducas of the March of Dimes; and Melva Chesrown, our brave one who opened her own counselling firm.

We went about educating ourselves in 1952 through 1955 with meetings on Corporate Giving, Television-Tool or Toy, Understanding Communications, Company sponsored films, Financial Relations, the latter an open meeting at the Cosmopolitan club with Sylvia Porter, financial columnist of the N.Y. Post, as our speaker and booster. India Edwards, vice president of the Democratic National Committee, shared know-how with us. There was the warm and memorable meeting with Eleanor Roosevelt, Jan. 1954, at the home of Dorothy Lewis, good friend of the First Lady.

Madame Pandit was our guest of honor in '54 at a meeting at the United Nations where we also attended the General Assembly. In November of '55 the Committee took over the State Room of the Plaza for a reception honoring all the women delegates to the United Nations. It was one of our most stimulating meetings, chaired by Dorothy Lewis, with Mrs. Oswalk Lord, U.S. delegate, speaking on the role of women in the United Nations.

Our group began to gain more confidence. We reached out to bring along younger women. There was a "Little Sister" meeting when each of us were supposed to bring an assistant or two. Some didn't have any but brought their secretaries. Guin Hall, for New York State, undertook one of her Job Horizon Series on Public Relations as a Career for Women, and members of our committee worked with her. We developed a speaker's bureau and many members accepted invitations to speak at colleges and universities. We talked to editors of Mademoiselle magazine and editors of high school papers. An attempt was made to introduce a p.r. course at Stevens college. CWPR established a scholarship in public relations, a first, in 1954 for Margaret Doherty to study at Columbia.

During these early years, panel discussions brought outstanding men and women to our programs. There were the three top magazine publishers in '69, a panel on color TV-way back in '53, and lunch with the N.Y. Times to discuss news and features

with Clifton Daniels, Tom Mullaney and Charlotte Curtis. General Motors invited us to see their new building before it was opened to the public and the N.Y. Stock Exchange asked us to come down and talk about "timely disclosure".

Finally, in 1970, Dorothy Gregg and others broke down our resistance to formality and we adopted a constitution and by-laws. We were incorporated and our name was changed to Women Executives in Public Relations.

Our first annual meeting in May of 1970 had Helen Bentley, chairwoman of the Federal Maritime Commission and highest ranking woman in the present administration, as our speaker. It was held in the historical private dining room of the N.Y. Public Library, thanks to Ruth Baum, and attracted as many men guests as women.

More of our members are assuming leadership roles in the larger Public Relations Society of America. Our own Rea Smith is vice president of administration, while several of our members serve on the New York board and the national board of PRSA. In 1971, Jean Way Schoonover, president of Dudley Anderson and Yutzy, was appointed chairman of the National Task Force on Consumer Relations of PRSA. Members of our committee have had by-line articles in the PR journal and have appeared at national conventions as speakers, panel members, and workshop leaders.

We even have archives, alas no minutes before 1948, but the files do contain some fascinating press notices, "My Day"

accounts, biographies, and clippings, one of the latest a warm accolade to our first honorary life member, Caroline Hood, recently retired vice-president of Rockefeller Center.

It is heartening to read in the minutes some of the extracts from the "My Day" of each new member. That was always the way we got acquainted. The formula turned out to be a pretty good one, for we found we had many problems in common and we could help each other in solving them.

By 1971, our former president Charlotte Klein, was teaching a course at the New School for Social Research and giving us tips on "Making it in a Man's World." The only difference between that little group in 1946 and today's professional society of Women Executive in Public Relations is that "My Day" in public relations is turning out to be "My Career" in Public Relations.

Today, we are truly what we started out to be...
Women Executives in Public Relations.

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