

Women's  
Center for Ethics in Action

in alliance with men

To be given this Sarah Orne Jewett award is an honor rife with ironies. First of all I am a failed writer or as we say in my family just a "wannabe". We talk a good game. Unlike Jewett who was well published in the magazines of her day even before her books came, my published works amount to a few essays, reviews and political rants.

Unlike Jewett I have not stayed in one place, done one thing or even a few things very well all my life long. I am still striving. I have hardly achieved any of my visions although my pride in my four daughters knows no bounds. I am still on the road, still panting with the effort, flailing, failing, lurching and losing my way, getting side tracked, older – and only a little wiser once in a while. Self-deprecation comes real easy to me, in case you hadn't noticed.

Willa Cather wrote in her introduction to Sarah Jewett's *Country of the Pointed Firs* that "the artist spends a lifetime in loving the things that haunt her, mind teased by them..." and the Jewett quote she chose was apt: "On the coast of Maine, where many green islands and salt inlets fringe the deep-cut shore line; where balsam firs and bayberry bushes send their fragrance far seaward, and song sparrows sing all day, and the tide runs plashing in and out among the weedy ledges; where cowbells tinkle on the hills and herons stand in the shady coves..." What I have in common with Jewett is nature. It haunts me. It is my religion, my Animism. The rocks, the trees, water, flora and fauna all have spirits in them that speak to me, electrical impulses charging through them, connecting these living things and all of us.

Let me share the vision I have that has been with me since I was a young thing. It came maybe from the waters of Harraseeket Harbor where I grew up. Or from Waynflete where I went to High School as a scholarship student when there were 14 girls in my class. Or from the wife of the then president of Bowdoin College, Martha Coles who recommended her alma mater, Barnard College, a women's college in NYC. Or from my own mother, Linda Broderick who was a frustrated president of every volunteer activity she took on, it seemed, from the American Association of University Women to the annual Heart Drive. In 1973 Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder at a women's conference in Washington, DC declared, "It took 144 years for women to get the vote in this country. At the rate we are going it will take another 144 years before women are elected leaders in equal numbers with men." And Congresswoman Bella Abzug who often opined that, "women and men have been doing everything in pairs since Noah's Ark – except lead!" I was blessed and cursed to see a big picture of how life ought to be, and in that big picture women were as important as men in showing us how the world ought to work.

So it is no surprise that in 1973 I gathered a group of women in a smoke filled basement cocktail lounge of the Hay Adams Hotel across from the White House to create a Women's Campaign Fund, to put money into women candidates' campaigns so more of us would run for office and be able to win. We were progressive, pro choice but not solely Democratic so, for example, both Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins have been helped over the years. I chaired this PAC for its first five years and also launched its educational arm to *train* women politicians in 1982.

University of New England 716 Stevens Avenue Portland, Maine 04103  
207.221.4499

I believed women could be leaders in other ways too. I was the president of the Karen Silkwood Fund to bring awareness of the underbelly of the nuclear age to public consciousness – long before the movie was made. And I also ran something called Women for Meaningful Summits so women could push against Ronald Reagan's military build-up during the 1980s.

In 1989, while on Sabbatical in Maine trying (and failing) to write the great American memoir, I heard about a wonderful group of women who were launching a Maine Women's Fund. I practically begged them to let me be the founding consultant. I got to collect the checks from the founding mothers, open the bank account, and negotiate with the Maine Community Foundation to be our first fiscal sponsor. I met Dr. Carol Ward for a quick lunch at Arby's before she handed over a five-figure gift! I remember Ellen Wells inventing the Sarah Orne Jewett award! I was also pregnant with my fourth daughter Lydia who is 13 now, (--she is here tonight with Grandma Lois, my brothers Peter and Shannon, sister-in-law Meg and so many good friends--). After her birth I joined the Board and later the Advisory Board.

Back in Washington I started a Women's Foreign Policy Campaign during the early days of the Clinton Administration, on the theory that women had a lot to contribute in a post cold war world to the way we did business in the world. That had a short life despite grants by Ford and MacArthur. I missed Maine. Why not have a Women's Center for Ethics in Action, locate it at the University of New England, and promote women's leadership on local, regional, national and international levels – and do it from the place I loved best?

Washington wasn't the only place that needs women's leadership. It is one thing to be elected to national office. *By the way, in politics the number of women is going down. The percentage of women in state legislatures is below what it was five years ago. And the percentage in the National Congress is still just under 14%.* There are many other areas where women's perspectives and insights are needed: business, education, religion, civil society – all endeavors that need *more* women at the top. Many more women lead in all these fields in Maine, but still, *not enough.*

It is not that women are better -- just equal -- with different decorative flesh and some different sensibilities as well. My big dream is that a critical mass of women – *how about 50%?* – are in charge of all the major institutions in the world. Just imagine with me how we might change the temper of the times. We could set a *non* war-making superpower example in the world. We could pay attention to what the brain research shows – that the child, zero to three, learns the most the quickest. So why not put in place massive enrichment programs for our youngest children. We could stake our kids to a free college education, make it a birthright for everybody whether rich or poor. Health care might be universal and affordable if more women were in charge.

We could redefine *security* to be more than military might and smiting our enemies...how about including notions of community, of sharing power, economic health and human rights. We might even approach the rest of the world with a little humility, ask others for their advice, get many other countries engaged from the smallest and most humble to the most powerful. With women in the leadership mix in equal measure with men, the measure of what is important is bound to shift some on the spectrum, away from macho toward nurture. A nurtured planet might be a clean one with renewable resources and a global recycling mentality, one in which life is lived for more than the moment, for in fact our grandchildren's grandchildren -- and where we lead with love, valuing life more than death.

No small dreams, these. It is easier to dream them here in our state with all of you in this room.  
Thank you.