

Not Chosen

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Thirty years ago, almost to the month, I was in Anchorage, Alaska, watching while the Historian of the Year award was being given to a male professor for his book, the name of which I cannot remember.

Shortly before the ceremony, the guest speaker, Donald Ritchie, U.S. Senate Historian, had addressed the gathering and at the end of his speech he held up and showed the audience a copy of the book I had written. It was an oral history compilation combined with oil portraits of and photographs relating to the lives of each subject. Dr. Ritchie spoke of it as “unique” and something that he had never seen done before. He sang praises.

When I didn't get the Historian of the Year award, I was disappointed, but not surprised. I was in alien territory. Putting together the book had been a new venture for me. With the help of many, I had obtained several small grants including one from the Alaska Humanities Forum, but quickly became aware that as I was not a historian per se and did not have my Ph.D. I was not “qualified” to do what I had done, and, I was a woman. The fact that the book was worthy of note from the U.S. Senate historian, only made matters worse. I was close to being ostracized for having the audacity to let myself be nominated.

Although I was very naive in this particular situation, I was not unaware of discrimination against women. As a young attractive woman in the work place, I had many times been subject to sexual harassment. And as I progressed as an artist, I was certainly aware that it was a male-dominated field. But as I am not competitive or very assertive, I just turned my back and went on. However, until the book incident, it had not occurred to me that sexism and defense of position ran so deep.

Now, thirty years later, I am sad beyond belief to see that Hillary Clinton has lost the presidential election. Losing the election is not the worst, but to whom she lost, is a deplorable reflection of the underbelly of a great country. Yes, she was a human being with some garbage, but she was one of the most experienced and intelligent people in the political arena. All this was to no avail. She was a woman, a woman who had audacity enough to put herself out as a leader of a country that has apparently not grown up to see beyond its prejudices.

All that said...it is now time for all uppity, nasty women and those of other, but sympathetic genders, ethnic groups, religions, colours, to band together and unite. This is not the end, but a beginning.