

Conversations With My Mother

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We talked and giggled like school-girls about white lace gloves and navy blue dresses at springtime and black velvet hats for winter. We talked some more about me as a ten-year old child on her way to church on Sunday mornings. Then we sent the child away with lots and lots of hugs and kisses and exclamations about what an absolutely beautiful child she was. Then through the laughter I heard my mother say that she remembered sitting at the vanity table in her own bedroom. The table was full of drawers with mirrors on top; you know the kind with the side mirrors so that you could see yourself reflected in the glass forever.

Family Stories

As she looked at her own reflection and played with her hair she caught sight of her own mother sitting on the bed crying. Her mother was crying and when asked her what she cried about she responded that there was very little food or money in the house, nothing but potatoes for boiling and salt for seasoning. She was at her wits' end trying to provide for her family. My mother, probably not more than ten years of age herself at the time, tried to comfort her mother by telling her not to cry because when she got to be a big lady she would work hard and make sure all the drawers in the vanity table were full of the treasures she would ever want. This was in the middle of the Great Depression. My grandmother was a widow, her husband dead by the time her youngest child, my mother, was three.

Family stories say that my grandfather was a brilliant man, rising to the position of chief-engineer, with a crew working under him at the Herminie Coal Mine # I, Ocean Coal Company in Westmoreland County. He and his crew, but most especially my grandfather, was responsible for making sure that clean air was pumped from above ground to the miners below ground. They say that he came here from Virginia traveling around the countryside working as a Gandy dancer for the railroad, straightening the railroad tracks with what looked like a long crowbar and a song.

My grandmother said it was an amazing site to see that rail-bed straighten up as the men pulled that track in line to the beat and rhythm of their songs. He met my grandmother and fell in love with her at first sight, not because of her beauty but because she was a lady and educated, able to read and write. He proposed to her the second time he came to the house and made her promise to teach him to read. She did, and they married.

My great-grandfather got him a job at the coalmine. The Markle Cotton Mill in West Newton had gone out of business and the coalmine reigned supreme in the region now. They say he was good with his hands, my grandfather, and had a good memory. He worked on the compressor that pumped the air into the mine. He learned his job and

Did it well. When the compressor failed the mine closed down for as long it took as men and parts to repair it had to come in all the way from Philadelphia. One day when the compressor broke he said he could repair it. When asked how he could do this since he had received no special training he answered that he had memorized the mechanics of the compressor and could save the company some money this day. True to his word he did the necessary repairs and that day he became the chief engineer, Herminie I Mine Westmoreland County of the Ocean Coal Company.

There was a coal strike one year and my grandmother was shot at while out hanging the wash. The next day two policemen from the Herminie I Mine of the Ocean Coal Company were assigned to protect my grandmother and her children. One "Jonnie bull" (nickname for a boss' representative, of English background) sat on the front porch, the other on the back porch to watch over the Chief-engineer's family, as he continued to work, pumping fresh air into the mine for the strikebreakers who now worked the mines.

The strike finally ended and the family continued to prosper. My grandmother had two store accounts, one at the company store, and the other at an independent store, where she was known for her extravagance. When her son George complained about pies she had made for desert one evening she gave him permission to go to the independent store and buy his own pie and whatever else he wanted for dinner as she had an account there.

Hard Times

My grandmother remembered those better days as she spoke with my mother in her bedroom that morning. The family continued to grow and prosper. They were well thought of in the community, until my grandfather's death in 1927 when my mother was three years old. As was the case in coalmining communities, paydays had always been exchange days. As long as my grandfather was alive, the family had lived in company housing, owned by the Ocean Coal Company. As long as my grandfather lived and

And worked at either the Herminie Mine # I or Herminie #II mines, the family enjoyed good credit at the company store, where they purchased food, clothing, furniture and anything else they desired. They also had good credit at the independent store where my grandmother did her business.

Even though he had been the chief engineer, on the day my grandfather died his family was given forty-eight hours to leave their company-owned home, and seek residence elsewhere. They were told to take their business and trade elsewhere. They would no longer be welcome to visit their family doctor; the coal company too employed him. They were told that a widow woman with six children to support could not afford the services of such a prominent doctor.

Money set aside for her children's college tuition would be used to take care of the day-to-day living expenses of the widow woman and her six children. The family had fallen, over-night, on hard times and things would only get worse.

Friends my grandparents knew for years offered to take my mother and raise her as their own child to help ease the burden on her. Family members too came with the same offers. My grandmother thought about it for a while and decided that above all else the family would remain together and that she would do whatever was necessary at any expense to herself to provide for her children the best way she could. But she vowed that no other man would ever come into her home and be a father to her daughters.

The Seminar

I have toiled long and hard to write this curriculum this semester. I selected "Interdisciplinary Views of Pittsburgh" with Steffi Domike at Chatham because of a need to learn and know more about area history, to improve the learning environment in my classroom. I have sought out additional resources and resource persons to broaden my knowledge in local history. I have read the assignments and felt my interest and knowledge expand daily. I have been greatly impressed by the wealth of information I have received in this seminar. The more I read the more inquisitive I become. I have been tremendously excited by this experience.

My time, energy, and attention have been drawn to new interests and I have rediscovered many past interests that I stored away years ago and forgot about. I have read about and seen films on labor history and I have sought our more resources to get a deeper understanding of the issues so that I could make a curriculum unit jump to life from the written page. I have been introduced again to the role this region played in the

Underground Rail Road and now want to take a tour and visit these places as I continue through the seminar. I may become active in the Braddock's Field Historical Society and make a contribution there of time and energy, or I may become involved in the preservation efforts at the Carnegie Library there.

But, for a long time, I did not feel comfortable writing about any of the topics I found. I continued to read and learn, my appetite for learning had not been satisfied. I thought to write about recovering lost history, and in a sense this curriculum is still about recovering lost history, but did not feel I had enough time or knowledge to attack that topic thoroughly. I thought again, this time about comparing common threads that the people in this culturally diverse town share no matter their race or ethnic group. Still I felt I would be left with a shallow project, at best. I kept saying that I needed the text to speak to me and give me something to say. (Which of course, if a student had told me the same thing I would have felt they were procrastinating.)

I started this curriculum unit more times than I want to think about but I continued to cast each new thought aside. In the mean time I read two texts recommended to me and had a conversation with my mother.

Reflections on the Literature

The first text "*Miner's Hill*" by Michael O'Malley tells the story of an Irish Catholic family living in "Brass town" a coal mining and steel-manufacturing town in the early twentieth century about twenty miles east of Pittsburgh, PA in the Monongahela River Valley. It tells the story of a very determined mother, Bridie Riley, who wants her oldest son Patrick (Pat) to become a priest, a learned man of letters. He is the child all the family's dreams are focused on. If this one son (of three children) can become a priest his life and theirs, in turn, will not have been in vain.

Bridie Riley, made me think of my own mother and her single-minded determination that her children become educated and learned young men and women of letters. One of the most important things my mother wanted for us as children was for each of us to play a musical instrument. As a child of the Depression with radio as the theatre of the mind, my mother always dreamed of playing an electric guitar, the kind featured in groups playing Hawaiian music. Since she never realized her dream she insisted that all four of us play two instruments so that we could play in both the band and orchestra, which we all did. However, again as these thoughts crept into my mind, I shoved them aside again because I did not consider this a scholarly approach to writing a curriculum.

The second text "*The Unwritten History of Braddock's Field*" published in 1917 by George H. Lamb, I found interesting for what was not included. I did a quick read through initially because this is the community I grew up in, and found it interesting to find a history of the community. I read it as something left to document the works of a group of people who had made their money and left the area. As I read the section of the "*Unwritten History of Braddock's Field*" entitled "*Women's Achievements*" (p.280-297) I was more than just a little entertained by the accounts of these "upper-middle class women" and what they felt were important contributions to the general welfare of the community. I took delight in reading about "The Ladies' Aid Society" and the role it played in supporting and building the churches and supporting or initiating other community programs.

It was not until I had finished reading "*Eternal Memory*" by Ann Walko and "*Singing the City*" by Laurie Graham that I began to see past class and ethnic differences to a single thread that tied all these readings together. This theme was the story of women, no matter how humble or privileged, they were the fiber that determined the fate of their families and communities. All of these women were noble in character and disciplined in their tasks. What these women all had in common was that they remain nameless and forgotten to history for their single-minded purpose to both their family and community.

The section on "Women's Achievements: "The Unwritten History of Braddock's Field" does acknowledge the work of some of these women. In my first reading of the "Unwritten History" I was looking for contributions

of African Americans, and soon realized that the only item of interest was mention of 'Ma Barkley' a former slave, as this data was acquired before the great southern migration of blacks to northern cities. I was somewhat impressed reading about the establishment of the hospital and the role the Women's Club played in seeing it become a reality. But, it was not until reading these sources a second time along with the above named books by women authors that I heard the literature begin to speak to me.

The first time I saw the film *"The River Ran Red"* I was reminded of the first time I asked about Homestead and the Strike. I have lived in this region my entire life and learned early that Homestead and all the mills in the area were synonymous with violence and death, although no reason or explanation was ever given. The **Homestead Strike** was spoken of in hushed tones as if it were still taking place today. All mills were places men went to and died. Their families never knew if they would return home at the end of day's shift. I was frightened for anyone we knew who worked in those mills and was overjoyed that my own father did not work there. I remember asking as a young child about the mills and this place called Homestead and what happened there. The answer was that men had died there just for trying to earn an honest day's wages and not to worry I would never have to go there nor would my brother. My parents and later our teachers told us that as long as we did well in school we would never have to go there or to any other mill or mine. I had been frightened that the violence of the strike would occur again, possibly by the next morning, and every morning thereafter I feared for family and friends who worked in those places. It was then explained that this strike had taken place in 1892, whereupon, I asked why were we so concerned about something that had happened in the "olden days and times?" The answer I received seemed to justify to everyone that I was a part of this new, lost generation, born after World War II who would never know anything. It was as if we should have been born knowing about the Homestead Strike and the violence of the Pinkerton Guards against the steelworkers.

After seeing the film *"The River Ran Red,"* and reading *"Homestead Story of a Mill Town"* I remembered the conversations of my youth. I felt that I would finally have an answer to my questions about Homestead and the other mills in the Valley. And then I heard the woman speak. I remember my reaction to hearing her narrate the film. I was so shocked that I felt a sudden jolt go through me, and the film took on a more realistic life. I had always spoken to my father and his male friends about the Strike and heard them talk about the violence and death, but I had never thought about the women and children. The issue of Homestead and workers' wages was presented as a man's problem alone. I had never heard anyone talk about the living conditions of their families. Nor the sacrifices the women made to keep their families together. The only thing I recalled as a child was a neighbor-ladies yelling at us to quit play and stop making so much noise because someone's dad was home sleep getting ready to work the next shift. Everything in the neighborhoods revolved around either the men working or sleeping; there was no time to discuss women's work and her responsibility to keep the family together.

When my mother mentioned the incident with the vanity she had and then talked about her childhood, I listened and then I cried. My mother rarely talks about her childhood. When we were younger and she talked about her childhood, it seemed so sad that she stopped talking about it. Today, when she talks about her childhood, I know of the hard work that her mother did to keep her family together, and of the work my own mother did to keep her own family together. This again was seen as a woman's unspoken work, not sacrifice, to keep the family together. Only then did I find that missing piece that I was looking for from the literature, the spirit and soul of the written words finally made them heard. Suddenly, my own family history began to resonate and take on meaning beyond the folklore of the family.

These remained separate readings and thoughts, however, until the conversation with mother about lace gloves and navy blue spring dresses. I went to church as a child with my father every Sunday. My mother never went to church because she never had anything to wear. She preferred that we, her children, go and wear our white lace gloves in the summer and our black velvet hats in winter. There was not enough money for all of us to go and look presentable. It was more important to my mother that her children be seen in public and that her children would then become her representatives whether she was there or not.

The Curriculum Unit

This curriculum unit addresses the survival of a people whoever they may be, by the people who teach and pass on those skills to future generations. These protectors and teachers we call Mom, or Mother or some other endearing term. Without the knowledge passed from one generation to the next to survive and endure hardships we lose our ability to survive and we continue to make the same mistakes over and over again. If we look at the roles of the women mentioned in the readings mentioned above we find the same theme repeated over and over again. All of these women worked hard, not thinking of sacrifice just going about their work as mothers and wives, so that their families would survive intact. This is about women's work, never done from sun to sun, not the work of men and labor movements.

For every famous man, the saying goes, is a woman behind him supporting him at his work. I am not attempting to showcase famous people be they men or women. I am only asking that we take a closer look at our many roles as women and not dismiss the importance and value of these roles.

Feeling Tone

In order to look at our communities we must look at our roles as women. We must connect with ourselves by looking at the women in our families who preceded us. Only by revisiting our past can we understand ourselves. There have been times in my life, especially during adolescence, when I did not understand women of my mother or grandmother's generations, many who were not educated beyond high school. It was easy to look at their lives and say to myself "I'll never be like that" and of course, today I am just like my mother and admire her quiet dignity and poise more each day. Many were the times I felt these terms were reserved for some one else's mother or simply some other woman of world renown. But today I know that life gives us many obstacles and rewards, and that it is during the times of trouble that I look to my mother, and not to women or worldwide fame for strength, courage, and wisdom.

Today we are constantly looking for role models for young people. Many of these role models we seek are professionals in one capacity or another. Or someone who is recognized in some major corporation, or a part of some other profession in which they receive national acclaim. Fashion models are held up to little girls as examples of femininity and financial success. Many of our male children, are given to emulate all males who have acquired great financial success and power. We encourage our children to look outside of themselves, their families and their communities for role models. Today we define role models as those who have acquired financial success and national acclaim and no longer seem to value the quiet dignity and strength of character, which has been responsible for our survival. Children are encouraged to value material success over strength of character.

We should encourage our children to be introspective and positive about their potential regardless of their environment. We do encourage our children to dream the possible, sometimes impossible dream, of being "the" famous person or "meeting that famous person." Then as adults we wonder why today's youth have identity problems. We need to encourage our children to become more introspective and know the families they come from and not buy into the negative rhetoric about dysfunctional families, which is so talked about today. We need to tell our children about family folklore teach about our own heroes and heroines and encourage them to talk to family members. But most importantly our children need to know that they come from people of dignity, and strength, that they should have pride in themselves and their families who have paved the way for them.

I know today that the lessons taught me by both of my grandmothers were humble lessons of quiet dignity, and strength of character, which they in turn passed to their children, my parents. These were not lectures from a textbook, but lessons from the heart. Their hope for me was that I learn through understanding and compassion that I was to make a contribution to my immediate family and, if at all possible, to my extended family and community. As the oldest grandchild in my paternal family I was constantly reminded, that my younger

siblings and cousins were looking to me to give them an example to follow. Therefore, I had to learn my lessons of quiet dignity, strength, and pride well. I was the recipient, as the oldest grandchild, of the lessons both my grandmothers had learned about life and about being a woman so that I could pass their words and knowledge along to others younger than me. I remember my one grandmother telling me that she graduated high school in 1917, while my other grandmother said that she had completed the eighth grade (equivalent to a college degree she said). This meant that we were all supposed to go to college, because each generation built upon the last, and each generation was to do better than the previous generation.

Women's Work

When reading or viewing the history of the Homestead Strike I have always wondered how it was humanly possible for women raising children before modern conveniences were invented to do all that was expected of them. Not only did these women work hard at home, but many of them also had to find work outside of their homes as well. This work was not seen as a sacrifice or work that was satisfying or challenging, but work that was necessary for the survival of all. There was no sacrifice or self-fulfillment there was just work.

My grandmother worked as live in help for a prominent lawyer after her husband died and she saw her children only on the weekends. This was a woman who had given birth to eight children, six of whom lived to adulthood, and lost her husband at age forty-five. After all the family money ran out, she took in laundry, cooked and sold meals to men working on roads, and scrubbed and cleaned floors on her hands and knees. She had the opportunity to marry again but was fearful a man who was not the father of her daughters might not treat them as his own. My other grandmother lost both her husband and mother within less than two months of each other and also found herself taking care of and raising her Aunt's, who had recently died, three children in addition to her own child. They both took care of their families the best they knew how. Both of them did as women before and after have done, whatever was necessary to keep their families together. This was their greatest role, and one in which they asked no reward or recognition for.

I have often thought of the tremendous difficulties both of my grandmothers experienced raising their families in the middle of the depression with their young husbands not by their sides. At times I am sure that I judged them harshly in the way they raised their children. But as I have gotten older and live everyday I understand how foolish this judgment was. I know now that they suffered losses from which they never recovered. I know that both of these women lost their one true love in the prime of their lives, and that neither ever attempted to find a replacement for that love. I know now that there was no formal support system in place for them to turn to for help. They had to rely on their own mothers, if living, and other women friends. I know that they were forgotten and referred to as "widow women" in a tone quite disparaging. I know that they had difficulties renting houses because landlords did not want to rent to widows with large families. I also know that they persevered as mothers and women. I know now that that perseverance was character, quiet dignity, poise, pride and above all a need to keep the family together for the husbands they had lost.

In the film "***Women of Steel***" by Steffi Domike, we see women several generations removed from my grandmothers, women of my generation, making the same decisions that women have made throughout time, "the family must stay together." Although, their work was hard, dirty and dangerous in the mills, these jobs paid better than jobs as domestics and waitresses and provided a way to keep these families together. These are the stories that must be told. These women are our heroes, our role models that we can see and talk with daily. These women are we. These stories of women may appear different because of time and place and socio-economic conditions but the experiences are the same, and each of us can relate to someone in our own families who have been a part of these experiences.

According to Mrs. Samuel Hamilton in her contributions to "***The Unwritten History of Braddock's Field, 1917: Women's Achievements***" "Everything in the world depends on woman" and "The history of woman is the history of the world." Mrs. Hamilton goes on to state that the true story of the town of Braddock or any other place, cannot be written until we recognize the women who worked alongside their men." Many of these

women initiated actions that built and improved these early settlements that men later received credit for as community leaders. Mrs. Hamilton talks about the Ladies Aid Societies in the church and how it was these bands of women who worked to support and build the churches in the surrounding regions. According to Mrs. Hamilton every brick, in every church was paid for by the pies, cakes, and dinners made and sold by the Ladies Aid Societies of that church. Mrs. Hamilton attributes the quality education of the schools to the women who taught the children and their devotion and dedication to their task. Of course credit is given the men for opening their check books to help with the cost of things, but it is made quite clear that without the leadership of women the communities we live in today would not be what they are had it not been for the foresight of women. Mrs. Hamilton continues to list the roles women played in founding the hospital, building playgrounds, and providing for an enriched curriculum in the schools for the children of steel workers.

Mrs. Samuel Harris in her section of Woman's Achievements quotes Emerson, "Men are what their mothers make them." It was not until after several readings of this passage written in 1917, that I saw what I was looking for. It was the calling of all women everywhere to her family and her community. In writing about the schools of this community, the first of which was built in 1867, Mrs. Hamilton reminds us of the education of young women. Public education at this time was a mere one hundred years in existence. Mrs. Hamilton expounds, this time, on the role of woman as teacher:

"It is her duty to impart useful knowledge,
To train mind and soul and body, to impart
Pure ideas and high ideals of manhood and
Womanhood, to transform a mass of untrained
Children, many of who are the offspring of
A long line of untrained parents, into a nation
Of men and women able physically mentally, and
Morally, not only to recognize the deep responsibility of
Citizenship, but also to contribute their share toward
Furthering the development of home, country, and of
Civilization."

Mrs. Hamilton gives further credit to early women settlers. In the ***"Unwritten History of Braddock's Field"*** John Frazier is identified as the first white settler west of the Allegheny Mountains. It was his settlement that George Washington visited when he left Virginia to survey the territory we know as Pittsburgh prior to the French and Indian War. According to Mrs. Hamilton, had it not been for John Frazier's wife Nellie, his helpmate in the fields who provided him with a good home and encouraged him in his work, the settlement known as Braddock's Field, land which he had received from Queen Aliquippa in 1742, would have been abandoned.

"The bravest battle that ever was fought,
Shall I tell you where and when?
On the maps of the world you'll find it not
'Twas fought by the mothers of men.

Nay not with cannon or battle shot,
With sword or noble pen,
Nay not with eloquent word or thought
From mouths of wonderful men.

But deep in a walled up woman's heart
Of woman that would not yield.
But bravely silently bore her part-----
Lo, there is the battlefield.

No marshalling troops, no bivouac song,
No banner to glean and wave;
But oh! These battles, they last so long,
From babyhood to the grave."

Mrs. Samuel Hamilton, "*The Unwritten History of Braddock's Field:*

Woman's Achievements "

High School Conversations

I remember talking to girls in my high school graduating class during our senior year about their plans after graduation. We lived in a small town in the Monongahela River Valley known for steel making. By the time we came along in school our families and teachers told us, alike, that the mill was no place for us. Our high school course curriculum had been pre-determined by counselors, teachers, and parents when we were in junior high school and we were put on a career-path we would follow during high school and beyond. Many of us were the first to graduate from high school in our families and knew well the lessons taught by our parents and grandparents about responsibilities to the family. Many of the males in our class were looking to join the war effort in Vietnam. Some were going on to college, others were leaving town the day after graduation for parts unknown.

I also remember the girls in our class, regardless of whether they were going to college or to work, saying that they had to take care of their mothers. I remember one friend in particular, who received a partial scholarship to a local university. When she went home to tell her mother the good news, her mother collapsed to the floor wailing that she had failed her daughter because she had no money to send her to college. We talked about this the next day when she had to announce that she could not accept the scholarship. My friend had never realized that every day that she came home for lunch that the food prepared for her was all that was available, her mother always sat with a cup of tea and said she would always eat later. The day she told her mother about the partial scholarship she found out that in all of those years tea was her mother's only meal. We met again many years later and my friend told me that she had made a good living for herself and her mother. She became a hairdresser and her mother quit work. While many of us were protesting the Vietnam War, my friend was taking her mother with her on any and all of her adventures of the 1960's. When she left, she said that she had made her mother into a "lady." She went to the opera and the symphony, had season tickets to both and only listened to classical music and dined in fine restaurants. She had vowed that "her mother would never be a cleaning woman again," and she kept that promise. I knew that she would. My friend had learned the lessons of quiet dignity and pride that came with keeping her small family together.

Final Lessons

With these types of qualities we need to remind our students that they don't always need to look any further than their own families (nuclear or extended) or communities for appropriate role models. We need to remind our students of the very positive lessons they can learn from their parents, and also help them to identify those positive lessons passed from one generation to another. We must teach our students today that adversity makes us strong, and that each person has a story of adversity that has been overcome. We also need to remind ourselves, as well as our students, that once those lessons are relearned we will become stronger. We all need to be reminded of the lives of our families and their belief that each generation would build upon the generation that preceded it. We do not need to emphasize the negative history we all have in common without

a true understanding of the survival skills used by these past generations to make sure the family survived intact. It is those skills that have made us strong and will carry us through to another day.

Students need to understand their family history in the big picture of history to understand their own responsibilities to themselves and to their families. I am personally tired of hearing that the problem with young people today is that they have families all of which are dysfunctional. This is interpreted as the child himself being dysfunctional and therefore of little or no value to anyone and of no value to society. This whole idea of a throw-away generation of young people, which began in the 1980's, needs itself to be tossed aside.

We need to look and investigate what it was that helped previous generations of young people become positive in their view of the future. This, of course, is not true of all young people we come in touch with, but unfortunately we have all heard too many of them lose faith even though they have not begun. In the news today too often the focus is on homes with absentee fathers as the main reason our young people have turned to violence and drugs. I have not heard once that the positive roles mothers' play in raising their children has kept more children from harms' way. It is past time that we celebrate our children and help them to survive and thrive despite any adverse situations that they may find themselves in. It is not enough to teach them about Abraham Lincoln and how a man of such humble beginnings could go on to become President of the United States. That lesson, although a good one, should be taught along side a living history in which students are encouraged to discover their own family histories and the challenges they faced and survived. We should emphasize this as a positive history rather than a negative one, so that these lessons of history can be taught and taught again.

The emphasis should be on what a people does to survive in the face of danger, famine, slavery and poverty to make sure that the family unit does survive. We need to continue to help our students understand that if all they have for dinner is potatoes for boiling and salt for seasoning, as my mother said, that everyone had food and that strength was in knowing that everyone had enough to eat and the family did stay together. These are some of the life lessons we must pass on to future generations. It is the message of hope and empowerment that brought past generations through the hard times that needs to be instilled in our future generations.

It is the story of women.

Objectives

The objective of this curriculum is to have students become actively involved in creating and understanding History. Given the diversity within our classrooms today time needs to be given to recognize the contributions and achievements of all people, however, time does not always permit this. It is hoped that through this assignment students will come to an understanding that History lives and breathes. It is something that all of us take part in every day and create, which is the basis for interviewing family members. Also, that we all have our own unique family histories which we should know and carry forward with us. Students should also know that we all have heroines as well as heroes within our families no matter how humble they may be. Although much of the history we, as individuals have may be lost within our own families and needs to be recovered and recorded, it can be done. To do this, students will talk to (interview) older female members of their families so that they have a better understanding of themselves and the experiences of their families. From these accounts students will eventually write a Narrative Account of their family history in a particular time period. By placing their family history within a particular time frame students will be able to understand the social and economic situations that the family had to endure.

Feeling Tone

I will set the feeling tone for this assignment by reading from my family account above. I will explain to students that all I have written was from family folklore, which I have finally come to terms with and used to understand and appreciate the full meaning of "family."

When interviewing family members students should use questions from Appendix A. in the back of this paper.

To find out what the family lifestyle looked like pictures as well as films of particular time periods may be used to give students a visual presentation of the social and economic environment of that time period. Newspapers of cities or rural areas may be used to help students understand some of the important issues of the day as well as newspaper ads showing prices of goods and products available to families. Needless to say, some pictures (black and white) used may depict a desperate situation for some families. Students should also be encouraged to bring in pictures of family Homesteads to share with the class. The result may be that there are more similarities between how people lived than differences. Comparisons may be made in women's household work, men's work and play activities for children. Additional reflections and topics may be added to help students interview family members.

The Essay

The Family History Essay will be a cross-discipline report between the Social Studies/History and English classrooms.

At the present time the Pittsburgh Public Schools' curriculum is a standards based curriculum. There are two sets of standards: The Core Curriculum Standards (CCS) of which there are sixty two, and the New Standards Performance Standards (NSP). An example of a CCS in Citizenship (Social Studies) is: "All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups, and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania, the United States and other nations, and describe themes and patterns of historical development. The Standards upon which these essay will be evaluated will permit students to meet not only the Core Curriculum Standards in the Social Sciences but also allow them to meet the New Standards Performance Standards in English as well as the Core Curriculum Standards. Appendix B at the back of the paper will list all Standards in the Social Sciences and English as well as the New Standards Performance Standards.

The research part of the paper will come from questions from the personal interviews with family members. Worksheets from the local Carnegie Libraries will be provided to students who want to pursue family research beyond the interview stage to census documents, land records, birth records and other available resources either on-line or through other library resources. This is not a requirement at this time for this assignment, but will be made available and students may be encouraged to use these additional resources either based upon the amount of time set aside for this particular activity or for their own interests.

Preparation

Prior to the actual class presentations the students will develop a class rubrics to determine what criteria they feel the essays should be evaluated on. This information will be selected from the Standards from both the English and Social Studies Content Areas. Along with these rubrics, students will also be instructed to listen for common themes in the papers in terms of family folklore and record those similarities. This work as peer evaluators/editors will be done in small groups of students prior to the individual presentations. In this way students will be able to work in more intimate groups to read and share each other's work and note the similarities and the experiences faced by these diverse groups of people. This should also lay a foundation of open communication and understanding for the individual oral presentations.

If necessary additional readings from the "*Southern Poverty Law Center Teachings on Tolerance*" may be used to help prepare classes to show not just differences between racial and ethnic groups of people but also

the similarities. Whatever the case of Intolerance we, or our students may want to focus on, the message here should be that there was still a family (our families) that had to survive and did. The emphasis here should be not to diminish the negativity of intolerance, but to celebrate how we have survived given the adversity faced by so many of us.

This Unit may also be scaled down and used as an introductory piece for a "*Women's History Month*" project so that students can see the many roles women have played throughout the history of this nation both in their homes and in the community. Again we need to remind students that this is not a comparison or a contest to determine who contributed most to history women or men but an attempt to broaden and recover family (and national history if used for Women's History Month) to come to a better understanding and knowledge of ourselves.

The material for the family history will come from the questions in Appendix A. This information will be presented in the form of a Narrative Essay as defined in the English and Social Studies classrooms. All family histories will be presented as a written Narrative Essay and presented orally in class. Students will be encouraged to bring in pictures or other documents they feel comfortable sharing with the class during their presentations. As a part of their reports students will share any difficulties they encountered gathering information from family interviews as well as information that had no previous knowledge of in their families.

Presentation

This Unit may be presented in a number of different formats. I will present this unit as an activity to "Recover Lost History in our Families" with the emphasis on tracing our family history through the experiences of women, our mothers and grandmothers and the children they raised. Using this format the emphasis should be on those survival mechanisms all people have had to develop to survive over the generations through the roles women played in their families as heads of households, helpmates to their husbands, and purveyors of cultural traditions.

At the conclusion of the oral presentations students will write a two page Reaction in which they discuss role models and who their role models are. They will also discuss the issue "Can anyone be a role model?" Students will also include their reactions to the presentations explaining what information they learned from their individual families from writing their paper. How they managed working in small groups as peer editors/evaluators and what they may have learned from this experience. And finally what they learned from the oral presentations.

Hopefully, students will learn that as we celebrate diversity we need to take time to study those things we all have in common. What we all have in common are women in our families who were wives and mothers, whose job it was to see to the needs of their families and communities. Some of these women may have been better educated than others. Some may have come from a higher socio-economic class than others. But where families and communities survived and thrived, women took up that challenge no matter how humble or gifted they were.

Appendix B.

Pittsburgh Content Standards: (The Core Curriculum Standards) (CCS)

Communications: (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking) (CO)

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking, and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.

English (NS ELA)

1. NS ELA Standard E1c.

The student reads and comprehends informational materials to develop understanding and expertise and produces written restates or summarizes information; relates new information to prior knowledge and experience; extends ideas; [and] makes connections to related topics or information."

2. NS Writing Standard E2a- The student produces a report.

3. NS Speaking, Listening, and Viewing Standard E3b- The student participates in group meetings displaying appropriate turn-taking behaviors; responding appropriately to comments and questions; employing appropriate problem solving steps; and dividing labor to achieve group goals efficiently.

4. NS Speaking, Listening, and Viewing Standard E3c- The student prepares and delivers an individual presentation in which the student shapes information to achieve a particular purpose, to appeal to the interests and background knowledge of audience members; the student projects a sense of individuality and personality in selecting and organizing content, and delivery.

Citizenship (Social Studies) (C)

1. All students demonstrate an understanding of major events, cultures, groups and individuals in the historical development of Pennsylvania. The United States and other nations, and describe themes and patterns of historical development.
2. All students demonstrate understanding of themes and patterns of geography know the location of major bodies of water, landmasses and nations, and describe the relationships between geography and historical, economic and cultural development.
3. All students describe the development and operations of economic, political, legal and governmental systems in the United States, assess their own relationships to these systems, and compare them to those in other nations.
4. All students examine and evaluate problems facing citizens in their communities, state, nation, and world by incorporating concepts and methods of inquiry of the various social sciences.
5. All students develop and defend a position on current issues confronting the United States and other nations, conducting research, analyzing alternatives, organizing evidence and arguments, and making oral presentations.
6. All students explain basic economic concepts and the development and operation of economic systems in the United States and other nations, and make informed decisions about economic issues.
7. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others.
8. All students demonstrate they can work effectively with others.
9. All students demonstrate an understanding of the history and nature of prejudice and relate their knowledge to current issues facing communities, the United States and other nations.
10. All students demonstrate an understanding of the various roles they can play as citizens through participation in a community service project.
11. All students demonstrate the ability to resolve conflicts in peaceful ways, including, but not limited to, peer mediation, anger management, interpersonal skills, and problem solving.

Science and Technology (ST)

1. All students explain the relationships among science, technology, and society.
2. All students demonstrate basic computer literacy, including word-processing, software applications, and the ability to access the global infrastructure, using current technology.