



August 2014

Hello Friend,

August 26th is *Women's Equality Day*, commemorating the day in 1920 when the 19th Amendment became law and women were finally allowed to vote in the United States. Today women exercise the right to vote in much greater numbers and greater percentages than men. Women, who constitute more than half the population, have cast between four and seven million more votes than men in recent elections. In every presidential election since 1980, the proportion of female adults who voted has exceeded the proportion of male adults who voted.

I invited a group of our female colleagues to share their thoughts on “Women’s Equality Day” and its meaning in their lives. These five represent diversity in age, race, ethnicity, and marital status reflective of America today. We had a long and very interesting conversation. Here are a few snippets:

For **Betsy Ebeling**, “Equality” has meant much more than just the right to vote, it has grown to mean equality in all things. She recalls a time when men were allowed to smoke in the workplace but this practice was frowned upon for women. Men were paid more than women because they had families to support, an attitude that was “forgotten” in cases where a woman was the sole provider for her family. Betsy sees voting as a way to correct inequalities such as these. In her eyes, “voting has opened the door to other things.” It has allowed women to reach the highest levels of business, government, and everywhere else, ensuring that her grandkids will have a “good point of view.”



Jolene Tolliver faced a more overt inequality while growing up in the South. She told of family trips to church celebrations where they would have to pack food to last the entirety of the journey because the hotels and restaurants they came across prominently displayed “No Blacks” signs out front. Yet this was not the only inequality she endured; the church elders kept



women from occupying leadership roles. Women of color in the South were twice victims of inequality: once for their race and again for their gender.

Jolene sees a much changed landscape today. The Civil Rights movement of the '60s eliminated the Jim Crow laws that harmed so many, and was a giant leap forward in leveling the playing field for all. And although her denomination does not yet allow women Pastors, it does allow them to fill the role of "Overseer," a significant acknowledgement of a

woman's ability to lead. Jolene votes because she wants to "honor the privilege," and because she has lived the changes voting has brought.

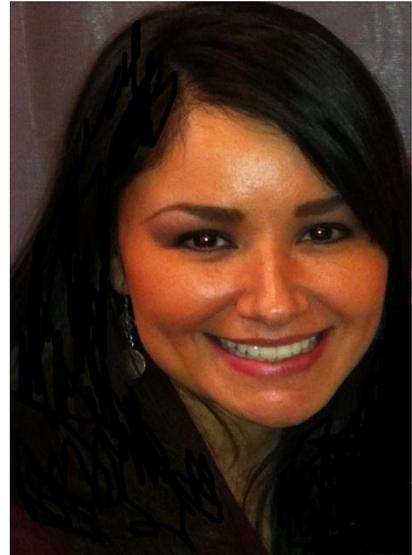
The chronological difference between the 60s and the 70s isn't much, but societal differences were certainly palpable. The passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 and the Civil Rights Act 44 years later allowed **Marla Butler** to grow up in a world with different attitudes. Where women of previous generations felt stifled and diminished, Marla always felt empowered in school and at work. Turning the tables on gender roles of previous generations, Marla was the principal wage earner in her family and in fact, was a supervisor in a male dominated workplace. Today she celebrates voting as a way to continue to strengthen and empower future generations.



Keisha Nelson's mom instilled in her a belief that voting was a right to be exercised with reverence and celebration because it had been denied for too long for too many. Voting was such a big deal in her family that when Keisha turned 18, she had to sneak to the polling place and vote in order to hide from her mother who wanted to photograph this landmark event. While mindful of her mother's reasons for voting Keisha says: "I don't want to say that I vote more as a woman than an African American. I do not fully agree with that. However, I do take gender

issues seriously when voting because I feel that women’s reproductive parts are regulated more than Wall Street.”

“Vote for those who can’t” is a mantra in the immigrant community. It’s a way to ensure that America remains a country where generations from across the world have come to fulfill their dreams; a place where nothing is impossible if you work hard. **Amalia Martinez** learned this at a very young age. Her mom, an immigrant woman raising five children in a low income household, refused to allow Amalia to see limits or boundaries in what she could achieve. She pushed her to be independent and not let anyone else determine her future. This feeling of self-determination got Amalia through law school and is with her each election day when she goes to cast her vote.



The fight for women’s equality has often been equated with “feminism.” While some in **Amber Madden’s** generation use the term with derision, she disagrees, seeing feminism as an important and ongoing fight for equal pay, equal representation in government, and individual freedom to make reproductive choices. For Amber, voting and participating in the electoral process are critical steps in a continuing journey that was started with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 but has yet to be completed nearly a century later.

Thanks to Betsy, Jolene, Marla, Keisha, Amalia, and Amber for sharing.

For information on voting in your area, contact your local elections board. Here are a few:

Chicago: <http://www.chicagoelections.com/en/register-to-vote-change-of-address.html>

Cook County: <http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/elections/register-to-vote/Pages/default.aspx>

Will County: <http://www.thewillcountyclerk.com/connect/site/index.jsp?menuItem=8>

Lake County: <http://countyclerk.lakecountyil.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

DuPage County: <http://www.dupageco.org/Election/Voters/37059/>

Sangamon County: <https://www.sangamoncountyclerk.com/Elections/Register/Default.aspx>

If you would you like to share your thoughts on Women’s Equality, voting, or anything else, send me a note @hector.villagrana@illinois.gov.

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