

## Howard — Women ascending

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A habit is defined as an acquired behavior pattern, one that eventually becomes involuntary. For New Yorkers it is slipping out of bed each morning, stumbling to the door and pulling in the New York Times that has been thrown down the hall in the early hours of the morning. If the paper isn't there, because of a weather incident, a driver's strike or perhaps a situation with the delivery person in your neighborhood, you might as well skip the coffee and toast and plunge into the day.

Four years ago, on New Year's Day, January 1, 2013, I could only smile when I glanced at the front page and the first article to catch my eye was entitled: "From Congress to Halls of State, in New Hampshire, Women Rule." The photograph accompanying the article included Senator Kelly Ayotte, Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Congresswomen Ann McLane Kuster and Carol Shea-Porter and Maggie Hassan, Governor. New Hampshire was the first state in the Union to send an all-female delegation to Washington.

Christa McAuliffe, from Concord, New Hampshire and selected from more than 11,000 applicants to participate in the NASA Teacher in Space Project, was hoping to become the first teacher to conduct experiments and teach two lessons from space before all seven crew members were killed in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster on January 28, 1986 when the shuttle broke apart seconds after launch.

Women in New Hampshire have been in the forefront of leading the way.

Two of the women (of course, my mother comes first) I admire are Gertrude Bell and Marion Randall Parsons. Gertrude Bell was born in the United Kingdom in 1868 to a world of privilege and class. After reading history at Oxford she became an archaeologist, Arabist, author and legendary mountaineer. It was

Gertrude Bell who traveled with an army major to the front lines in Mesopotamia and assisted in drawing the map of Iraq, engineering the promotion of King Faisal to the throne. There are only a very few men, perhaps none, who can list her accomplishments. She was a fearless and brilliant woman.

Marion Randall Parsons spent years working with the Sierra Club. A writer, artist, photographer, mountaineer and nature enthusiast, when her husband Edward died in 1914, she became the first woman elected to the Sierra Club board of directors. In her 22 years as a board member, she played a key role in many of the Sierra Club's conservation activities, including the establishment of the National Park Service. She climbed over 50 major peaks across the United States and wrote and published articles about these mountaineering adventures.

These two women are one reason I was so enthralled by the "Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains" exhibition that is now on view at the Museum of the White Mountains at Plymouth State University. It does not close until October 7, so there is time for a visit, and I encourage you to visit with your children or grandchildren, as there is an art studio and opportunities for children to interact with the exhibition.

One of the difficulties women faced in climbing was clothing. It wasn't until the 1920s that women could wear trousers in public. According to the catalogue for the "Taking the Lead" exhibition, "When Annie Smith Peck made a presidential traverse solo in 1897, she made sure her dress was appropriate for all possibilities. Newspapers described her hike: 'at five in the morning on September 3, following a hearty breakfast, Peck left the Ravine House wearing the same costume she had worn on her Matterhorn ascent. She also carried a linen skirt, but no guests at the Ravine House were up, so she rolled the skirt into a bundle and hung it from her belt.'"

When one thinks of landscape paintings in the White Mountains, the Catskills, and the Adirondacks, The Hudson River School painters come to mind. This mid-19th Century American art movement featured the work of men. However there were lots of women painting and writing and there are exquisite landscape paintings in the "Taking the Lead" exhibition. One of the chapters in the catalogue is dedicated to these women. They didn't receive the acclaim or the attention of the men.

There are no summits women cannot scale.

The only obstacle now is to figure out the priorities of what is important in your life, or perhaps I should suggest our lives. It isn't possible to have it all. Women have led and overturned governments, traveled in space, made notable additions in scientific inquiry, built and designed cities and buildings. Women have raised the children who have led and overturned governments, traveled in space, made notable additions in scientific inquiry and built and designed cities and buildings. Let's drop the "first" and just salute, reward and recognize individuals for their accomplishments. Women and men. For those individuals who have sacrificed their careers for the careers of their children and those explorers who have chosen another path.

Elizabeth Howard's career intersects journalism, marketing and communications. Ned O'Gorman: A Glance Back, a book she edited, was published in May 2016. She is the author of A Day with Bonefish Joe, a children's book, published by David R. Godine. She lives in New York City and has a home in Laconia. You can send her a note at: [Elizabeth@laconiadailysun.com](mailto:Elizabeth@laconiadailysun.com) (<mailto:Elizabeth@laconiadailysun.com>)