



Women in
Experiential Education
Professional Group:

**A COLLECTIVE
ACCOUNT
of OUR
ROOTS and
GROWTH**

Compiled and Edited by

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In 1980, Rita Yerkes attended her first AEE International Conference in Toronto, Canada. There was a men's and women's issues interest group chaired by a woman from Outward Bound that felt there was no longer a need for such a group despite the fact that over 25-30 people attended the session. This was not too long after the women in AEE had boycotted the conference that

HOW IT ALL BEGAN . . .

An Overview

by Rita Yerkes

was held in Kansas City, MO (a state that would not ratify or support ERA). At this conference Rita met Dorcas Miller and Mary McClintock and chatted in a coffee shop about a need for this group to continue... Rita and Mary engage in a conversation about career goals... Discussion also took place about putting together a book about Women in EE.

The next year at the Glorieta, NM conference in 1981, Rita attended the men's and women's special interest sessions which were sparsely attended, with the exception of a few women.

In 1982, at the conference in Arcadia, CA, Rita Yerkes and Wilma Miranda set up a special interest session for men's and women's issues. Four people attended; the other two were Joy Hardin and Mary Duffy (both from California).

The following year (1983) at the conference in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, is renowned for the "famous picnic table in the dark woods." (*editors note: see this story on page 11*).

Then at the 1984 conference in North Carolina (Lake Junaluska), Rita & Wilma convened the men's and women's issues group again and met Jean Vrbka, Karen Warren, Judith Neimi, Denise Mitten, and others who, at the end of the conference, agreed to form the Women's Special Interest Group for the next year in Colorado.

With assistance from Womanquest, Women Outdoors, Inc. and an AEE Special Interest Group grant, Jean Vrbka, Rita Yerkes, Wilma Miranda, Linda Cooper, Mary McClintock, Judith Neimi, Denise Mitten and Karen Warren invited AEE members to join us. So in 1985, we hosted our first pre-conference and set out on our journey to assist AEE in recognizing the needs of their women members. Needless to say, both the pre-conference and conference were a great success and the Women's Special Interest Group was off and running... We then started working on issues to bring to the Board... Rita served as chair with assistance from Jean Vrbka, Wilma Miranda, Karen Warren, Mary McClintock and Chris Heeter.

We worked on gaining visibility for women in the organization. This occurred through getting workshops on the program, newsletters, fundraisers, and mentoring other women in presenting at conferences and writing for the journal, applying for AEE special interest grants, as well as trying to get women keynote speakers.

Note: Anyone with information about happenings, events, or former leaders prior to 1981 is encouraged to contact Nina Roberts to complete this part of our history.



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At the Moodus, Connecticut, conference in 1986 we decided to run Rita for the Board and continue to get our issues and interests in front of the membership and the Board. We got support from other women and allies. At Moodus, we met the many wonderful women on that conference committee, who were also involved with the Northeast Region of AEE, and Women Outdoors. Marianne Scippa worked hard on that conference! When Rita was elected to the Board, Jean Vbrka, Karen Warren and Chris Heeter became co-chairs of the Women in Experiential Education Special Interest Group.

After Moodus, the Women in EE Special Interest Group applied to be a Professional Group and after much Board deliberation was awarded that status in 1987. Karen Warren, Chris Heeter and Lee Lovinfosse served as co-chairs of the Women's Professional Group. We made a commitment to always give new members the opportunity to serve. We continued to mentor women in the conferences through workshops, co-presenting, co-authoring, and working on proposals to help make the AEE a better association.

Some initiatives started by the WPG in AEE were:

- ☞ Having co-chairs share responsibilities
- ☞ Adopting the consensus model of leadership
- ☞ Sliding scale membership so that members at the lower income brackets could attend conferences
- ☞ Mentoring other members to write for the journal
- ☞ Mentoring other members to present at Regional and International Conferences
- ☞ Serving on Conference Committees and Board Committees to identify women speakers and consultants
- ☞ Serving on Publications Committees to identify themes and authors
- ☞ Proposing to AEE a policy Statement of Diversity that was then adopted by AEE
- ☞ Proposing to AEE diversity initiatives to provide a more inclusive atmosphere
- ☞ Conduct fundraisers so that members of lower income levels could attend conferences
- ☞ Serving on the *Journal of Experiential Education* advisory committee
- ☞ Became a model for other professional groups as they organized

Rita was elected to the Board for a second term and then was elected President. She also served as volunteer, interim, Executive Director when Dan Garvey left to accept another position. She conducted two national searches for the Executive Director during her time on the Board.

Marianne Scippa was elected to the Board in 1988 and then President in 1993.

Margaret Lechner was elected to the Board in 1990, Karen Warren was elected to the Board in 1991 . . .
And the story goes on!

Projects, Significant Events, **and Initiatives of the WPG and/or its Members . . .**

- **1983** National Survey of Women in Outdoor Leadership: Rita Yerkes and Wilma Miranda “Women outdoors: who are they?” Results published in *Parks & Recreation*, March 85.
- **1984** First Women in Experiential Education Newsletter: Edited by Denise Mitten and Judith Neimi.
- **1985** *Journal of Experiential Education*: Rita Yerkes, Guest Editor, “Experiential Education from the Male and Female Point of View.” First women in EE Pre-Conference, Estes Park, Colorado.
- **1986** Kathy Phibbs did her infamous “Girls just wanna have fun” slide show at the conference in Moodus, CT. The WPG (a SIG in this year) helped bring Helen Nearing and Beryle Banfield to the conference as speakers. This was the year that Christa McAuliffe was scheduled to be our main keynote speaker, but “herstory” had a different destiny.
- **1987** Women in Experiential Education becomes a Professional Group from a SIG. National study of women outdoor leaders: Research article published in *Camping Magazine*: “Women Outdoor Leaders Today” by Rita Yerkes and Wilma Miranda.
- **1988** International Conference in Illinois: The Women in EE group pushed for the Diversity Statement in response to sexist/racist comments opening ceremony speakers.
- **1989** Mary McClintock and WPG presents a “Diversity Statement” to the Board for approval ~ That is why AEE has a Diversity Statement today! *Journal of Experiential Education*, Karen Warren, Guest Editor, “Celebrate Diversity.”
- **1991** Kathy Phibbs, age 34, killed in a fall from Triple Couloir on Dragontail Peak, an ice climb in the Washington Cascades. She was Co-Founder of Women Climbers Northwest (in 1983), a Woodswomen Guide and Coordinator of the Woodswomen Northwest Branch. (Climbing partner Hope Barnes, 33, also died in this accident).
- **1992** Study of Canadian Outdoor Women: Martha Bell. Supported in part by a \$200 mini-grant from AEE. Board action: Karen Warren establishes the AEE Publications Advisory Committee ~ women members appointed: Alex Gayek, Nina Roberts.
- **1993** Women in Experiential Education Professional Group Survey: Marty O’Keefe and Robyn Duboff. Unpublished data. Results presented to WPG members at the International Conference that year. *Journal of Experiential Education*, Martha Bell, Guest Editor, “Critical Perspectives.”

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Projects, Significant Events, and Initiatives of the WPG and/or its Members. . . (continued)

- **1994** Becky Roehrs and Jeanette Ford spearhead the Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals and Allies Special Interest Group. *Journal of Experiential Education*, Alex Gayek and Kathryn Ramsey (Co-Guest Editors), “Experiential Education as a Catalyst for Social Change.”
- **1995** Pre-conference at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, led by TA Loeffler; she shared her research on women and professional development in the field of experiential education. Martha Olsen, WPG Newsletter Editor, dies in January of this year from long term illness.
- **1996** First African American woman elected President of the Board of Directors, Diane Yarborough. *Journal of Experiential Education*, Nina Roberts, Guest Editor, “NAALA: Beyond Participation.” *Women’s Voices in Experiential Education*, edited by Karen Warren ~ 50% of the proceeds support the WPG; Panel presentation consisting of the authors/contributors from this book was organized at the conference in Spokane, WA. Pre-conference this year was led by Tracy Sutton: 2 days of camping and canoeing, and discussion about women and leadership. Angel Russek was the recipient of the Michael Stratton Award.
- **1997** National Take Back the Trails Initiative Co-Coordinator: Nina Roberts, Diane Bedell, Marty O’Keefe, Angel Russek. *Journal of Experiential Education*, Karen Warren, Guest Editor, “Gender Issues in Experiential Education.” WPG co-sponsor’s the 2nd Annual Women in Outdoor Leadership Pre-Conference hosted by the North Carolina Outward Bound School.

Memories of the First Women in EE Pre-Conference

by Mary McClintock

In 1985, the first Women in EE Preconference was held with about 25-30 women at the International Conference in Estes Park, Colorado. This was co-sponsored/organized by Womanquest, Jean Vrbka from Lincoln Nebraska at the time, and by Women Outdoors, Inc.

The initial planning for it happened with Karen Warren, Rita Yerkes, Jean Vrbka and Mary McClintock in Massachusetts at a Women Outdoors leadership weekend in the spring.

This was at the time when AEE was going from a loose “special interest group” format to a more formal “professional group” format that required various organizational criteria and standards in order to qualify, get a tad bit of funding allocated from the National office, etc. We immediately started working on getting such status and created a structure for the group that included 3 co-chairs who were Jean Vrbka, Karen Warren and Chris Heeter.

Right from the beginning there were issues whether we qualified as a PG because were we really representing a profession as opposed to an interest group? We worked hard to fit within the qualifications, and “dot all the i’s, cross all the t’s” so they couldn’t say we didn’t fit.

I remember feeling a wonderful sense of very intense connecting around shared experiences, a real feeling of finally finding peers!

We quickly became the model for structuring other PG’s because we were so organized! Further refinements for our group as a PG occurred at other conferences.



Gender Issues for Women Influence the Journal . . .

- § Peggy Walker-Stevens becomes the first woman editor of the *Journal of Experiential Education* in 1984, after her term as President ended. Rita Yerkes began dialogue with Peggy about how to get women authors published in the Journal. Talking with Peggy led Rita to be the guest editor of the 1985 men's/women's special issue. This is the first inroad women made to the Journal.
- § Rita Yerkes guest edits the 1985 "Men's and Women's Perspectives" issue of the JEE. Her editorial is often revisited. She refers to events and struggles that are also mentioned in Dan Garvey's chapter on AEE History in Miles and Priest (1990). The fact that Rita was part of this new women's group (in 1984 when she was gathering submissions) could have been influential to the readership. That was also a landmark issue in terms of women in the group contributing to the discourses through which AEE'ers defined themselves.
- § Martha Bell recalls, "I know I read my issue so many times it fell apart, and I knew every word of Wilma's, Karen's and Denise's articles by heart and I thought I knew them too! They also dared to be self-critical of experiential practice (not just AEE politics) which I didn't know was possible, so I think that is also significant about that issue. As far as I know JEE publications had not mentioned anything 'feminist' before (although I could be wrong).
- § Men were published in that significant 1985 summer issue (Knapp and 2 book reviews) but they were not nearly as critical, incisive or powerful for me as the other 3 articles and the editorial. The 3 articles were immensely influential in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1989 when women held a nationally funded leadership workshop for a weekend to discuss women in outdoor leadership.
- § Alan Warner becomes editor after Peggy. Karen Warren and Lee Lovinfosse were influential in "bending Alan's ear" in 1989 about the need for mentoring women writers and the dismal lack of women published in the JEE. Lee sent Alan a letter, and Karen later talked with Alan and informed him we were starting a mentoring system. Later, Alan actually published bits about gender imbalance in writers through his years as editor. This can be credited to the WPG. Alan thought the mentoring system was such a great idea he developed a system for the Journal. Wilma Miranda became a JEE reviewer in 1989.
- § In 1990, Wima Miranda, Karen Warren, Alex Gayek and Martha Bell worked diligently as advisors to the Journal. Their involvement was critical in support of women's voices being heard throughout AEE by way of the Journal.
- § Martha Bell guest edited the November 1993 JEE issue 16(3) "Critical Perspectives" from New Zealand. She was also mentored by Bert Horwood and Alan Warner in the late 1980s to write her first Journal article which appeared in the JEE May 1990. In this issue is her tribute to the feminist women with whom she worked at VOBS one summer earlier in her career (1984).

Memories from a few of our leaders and members



Marianne Scippa:

I was first elected to the Board in 1988 at the conference in Carbondale, IL with strong support and encouragement from the WPG. I have many stories to tell. And, I do think we need to recognize the touch of class the women brought to the board, the decadent desserts, retail therapy journey's (Karen W's favorite), Board runs, swims, walks to manage conflict resolution (in rain, sleet, snow, deep freeze or smelting heat). It wasn't all rosey; actually there were some really difficult times of transition. In general, I've had some good reflections.

Margaret Lechner:

My warmest memory of being WELCOMED at an AEE conference was the welcome by Lee Lovinfosse at a WPG meeting. I don't remember the conference, but I remember the feeling that the WPG was a HOME within the larger organization. It's great to be celebrating the history ~ and it gives a good opportunity to express thanks to some of the quieter, but no less important work being done in encouraging some of us shy people to become involved.

Nina Roberts:

"I've been a member of AEE since 1988 or so. But it wasn't until 1991 when I attended my first International Conference at Lake Junaluska. I just remember the incredibly powerful energy of women all around, and many men as our allies. I had completed my graduate internship with Denise Mitten at Woodswomen that summer so had begun a major project collecting information about research studies being done on women in the outdoors. I figured this conference would be a prime place to network and gather pertinent details.

Although I wondered about the lack of ethnic diversity, for the most part the conference was everything I had imagined and more. I remember attending a WPG meeting with at least 25 women in the room. I felt this was the beginning of a long relationship with AEE! So what happens? I become the Mid-Atlantic Contact person! Next thing I know I'm a member of the Publications Advisory Committee, local contact for NAALA, and how did I become PAC Chair when Karen stepped down? And, I woke up one morning and became a member of the Board of Directors! Amazing how we get hooked! (or arms twisted, I haven't figured out which! *smile).

One thing that stands out at the 1991 conference is meeting Mary McClintock and her incredible 30 ft. mural covering an entire wall about the "timeline of lesbian, gay, and bi history." While I stared in amazement at it, I thought "wow." That's it, just "wow!" I thought, this woman is brave. Meeting a variety of strong and caring women that year was the start of my active involvement with the Association.

Karen Warren :

My tenure with the Women's Group goes back to 1983 at the Lake Geneva Conference when I got tired of the Outdoor Leadership SIG that I was involved with during the conference. I wandered into the Men's and Women's Issues SIG as that was really where my heart was. I remember about 5 or 6 women were there, and Rita was facilitating. There was talk of the formation of a conference on professional women outdoor issues.

In 1986, at the Moodus conference, the co-chairs were Jean, Chris and I. Also, I was on the conference committee with Marianne and Ellie and oh, what a conference that was. There was quite an eruption of women's things and we showed our wonderful radical fringe at that conference. Talk was abuzz about the women, especially when Kathy Phibbs staked a purple bandana flag outside the cabin where many of us were staying. That cabin was really rocking with parties and dancing well into the night, most nights. The flag was a take off on a panel that some of us did called, "A Search for a Feminist Standard in Experiential Education" it was the standard. Some people were pretty worried about "The Women," but I think it was at this conference that we worked our way into the collective conscience of AEE in a way that didn't exist before.



Mary McClintock:

There are many stories to tell of my experience with AEE and the WPG. For one, Wilma [Miranda] and I worked very hard on dealing with pushing the board to develop a diversity grievance policy after the famous line from the North Carolina Conference committee (1991) that said while we want to have women speak on women's issues, we don't want to have a speaker on gay or lesbian issues because we don't think it represents the membership.

This was in response to my suggestion that Karen Thompson be a speaker at the Asheville conference in 1991. (As Women in EE co-chair, I'd been asked to suggest speakers). I got really angry and channeled that anger into some intense work. . . that was the year I was doing workshops on lesbian and gay baiting. . .and I brought the 30 foot long timeline of lesbian/gay/bi history and posted it outside the dining hall in Asheville so everyone had to look at it while standing in line for meals, and Wilma wrote a blistering but diplomatic letter requesting development of a diversity grievance policy. By the time we got to Asheville, the conference committee was twitching and kept asking me if I needed anything!

The reason we were able to grieve their decision (re: Karen Thompson) was that Rita, Karen Warren and I had been very active in pushing for a diversity statement/policy after the sexist/racist opening activities /speaker at the Southern Illinois Conference. AEE's diversity statement/policy is the direct result of lots of hard work by members of the Women in EE PG. And I agree with Karen, I want to know more about the pre-1981 women. Who were they?

Becky Roehrs:

My first exposure to AEE was at the AEE Int'l Conference in Lake Junaluska in 1991. Chris Heeter had recommended it. I believe members of the WPG had put up a banner referring to homophobia and sexism present in AEE or in general, and it definitely got a bunch of people stirred up. It was my first AEE experience; so I couldn't figure out what the big deal was. I'd been a President of Raleigh N.O.W. and it seemed like a pretty normal type of activism to me. I also remember Mary McClintock fighting to get Karen Thompson as a speaker at an AEE conference as well.

Betsy Dagleish:

I came on the Board in 1983, and, at that time I was the *only* woman on a nine member Board. Elections were a bit more free form back then, and nobody represented any interest groups. I was affiliated with the Schools and Colleges groups, but I attended the WPG; and, I remember well the grumblings about women having no say in the organization. So I would stand up at every meeting and ask why there were no women from WPG running for the Board. In particular, I encouraged Rita, Connie Lewis, and Marianne Scippa to run for the Board, all of whom became Presidents later on! And, I also served on the Executive Committee.

My primary focus as a Board member was in networking with the ten other experiential education organizations around the country, and lining up AEE presenters for the International Camping Congress in 1987. I served from 1983 to 1987, the extra year being because they changed the timing of when new board members came aboard. I also helped get the regional groups established, and worked on the structure of the SIGs and PGs. One other focus was to establish a form of communication other than the Journal, the eventual result of this being AEE Horizons. Gosh! I didn't know I could remember that much! I really enjoyed my involvement during those years and I'm glad it's over.

Martha Bell :

Although I did not actually hear about or attend the pre-conference in 1985, the main conference itself had the energy from that pre-conference. I remember going to only women's workshops at the conference and being totally amazed that women were networking, talking, strategising, politicising, naming feminist issues. It was deeply nurturing to an isolated feminist from the north woods. Lee Lovinfosse shared her notes of her entire workshop with me following that conference, another amazing gesture in my limited outdoor career experience to that time. It characterised what would become my feeling about the mentorship and openness of the WPG after that.

I moved to New Zealand 6 months later and did not get back for a conference 'til 1989. My first Women's PG Pre-conference was in Santa Fe, NM, and that was a wonderful event culminating in a pot luck dinner at Sky's place. I remember talking about graduate work with Rita. Later there was talk about mentoring women writers at the WPG Annual General Meeting ~ we'd broken into small working groups ~ and about possibly getting a representative from the WPG to the Journal Advisory Committee.

Amy Kohut:

I remember the 1986 conference in Moodus, CT. This was a really powerful conference for me—the first time I heard the words lesbian and professional in the same sentence said in a positive light. In general, this was a wonderful conference and a time when I started thinking maybe I could have a role in this whole thing some day. Gail Burchard was there who had just founded New Dawn Caribbean Retreat and Guest House in Vieques, Puerto Rico. Then in 1988 at the Carbondale conference in Illinois, that feeling was reinforced. Anne Bancroft, the first woman to ski the North Pole, and the leader of the AWE (American Women's Expedition) team to the South Pole, was a keynote speaker and then took special time out during lunch to speak just with us as the Women's Professional Group. Santa Fe (1989) was remarkable for me in hearing Lee Lovinfosse present, and listening to her say "any woman can present." She was willing to help anyone with proposals, etc. It was soon after that when I got the confidence to submit proposals!



Chris Heeter:

The Women's Professional Group at AEE had an incredible impact on my life. I have traveled on, carrying the memories and the lessons that have, in part, sustained me in my different adventures... waiting for a chance to return. I never stopped, I'm still guiding women's trips, and creating whole careers around the need to be able to be out for weeks on end to guide trips. I have missed you all very much. There are too many coincidences happening right now to be overlooked. I am in the fledgling stages of starting my own business that incorporates adventure travel, leadership training, and wilderness medicine. When I got Becky's message about AEE and the Women's Professional Group, I told my business partners about it. You have to go, they said. It's time to return. So, we decided to spend a hunk of our investment to send me back to AEE. So, I'm here. Saddened by the years that flew by, but eager to return ~ to reconnect with those remaining from my previous years at AEE, to greet those who have carried the torch, and to find a place again within AEE.



Diane Bedell:

My first introduction to AEE, in general, was through the work of members of the WPG. I was doing the undergrad thing in public recreation management and knew that my main area of interest was in all-women's recreation. I had been introduced to Bonnie Bordas, owner of WomanTrek, an adventure based trekking program for women based out of Seattle. This must have been around 1983 or 84 and it opened the door (or pandora's box??) to me in realizing what the potential was for all-women's outdoor experiences. While in school, I made this my area of focus, but between 1984- 86 information on all-women's programming was pretty difficult to come by.

I managed to get a hold of one or two issues of *Woodswomen News* and ACA put out an issue of *Camping Magazine* on women's roles in organized camping. I recall being in a Philosophy of Leisure course in 1986 and using the material I had gathered from AEE, ACA, and *Woodswomen* to write a paper on all-women's outdoor programming. Wilma, Rita, and Denise figured strongly in shaping the direction of that paper, but guess what happened. I failed the course and (the only course in my academic career!) and the prof (male/heterosexual) commented that he couldn't possibly imagine what an all-women's course could have to do with anything important. I had written about the positive atmosphere and supportive environment found on an all-women's courses and he could only relate it to the cut throat atmosphere of sale tables in the basement of Macy's. (He actually wrote that comment on my paper!) Mine wasn't the only study criticized in that course, but I was the only student who was not allowed to submit a rewrite for credit. Go figure. Of course it was all just theory for me at the time, since I had not yet been on an all-women's outdoor experience.

My first AEE conference was 1990 in St. Paul. I helped coordinate the Bookstore, so I didn't see a whole lot of the conference, but I tried to follow what was going on. I also helped out on the WPG Pre-conference paddle (coordinated by *Woodswomen*). My next AEE conference was a few years later at the 96 Lake Geneva conference where I stepped forward to help out as Co-Chair. Bless Theo's heart, she was really wanting some help, and I was wanting to connect with this amazing group of women who had paved the way for me early on.



Angel Russek:

My first memory was attending the pre-conference activities in Santa Fe, 1989 and being welcomed by a great group of women including Karen W., Lee Lovinfosse, Martha, Alex, Rita, Wilma and others... I didn't even attend the main conference... I edited the newsletter for a while... then came on as co-chair in 1992... I have never, anywhere else in my professional life, felt the level of support, encouragement, back-up, wisdom, commitment and vision that I do within the WPG... thanks to all.

In 1993/94, myself and the other two co-chairs, Sharon and Mary, all living in Massachusetts at the time, planned a pre-conference in Austin oriented to professional development. Karen Warren, Denise Mitten and Diane Yarborough were presenters and covered material on gender and leadership, female authority and other stuff. We even gave out thick packets full of interesting bibliographies, book catalogs, etc. Over 30 women and one man attended.

Denise Mitten:

For some reason, recently I have felt that it is important to honor the lesbian roots of WPG and women's outdoor trips in general. I think the picnic table night was a factor in the success of the WPG. I think the bonding which occurred between some lesbians, as time went on in AEE, helped make the WPG more solid. While I think there is a phenomenon of lesbians starting lots of things in various women's movements, I'm not exactly sure why.

Once things get started, lots of other women join in. I wonder if some people would see it as exclusive to honor the lesbian roots? I wonder if it is necessary. I think it is worth discussing. I think we as lesbians try so hard to be inclusive sometimes that we don't value ourselves...

The Infamous Evening at the Picnic Table . . .

The year is 1983. The place? Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, AEE 11th Annual Conference.

The night is affectionately known as the "starlit picnic table conversation" and the "year of the famous picnic table in the dark woods." Jean Vrbka had put up a little sign in the main women's bathroom at the conference center asking for women interested in discussing being lesbians in the field, to meet at a picnic table by the lake after the keynote speaker.

Some people recall being "pretty scared" to go out to that picnic table, wondering who would be there, and if students who they taught (who they weren't out to) would be there! This turned out to be "amazingly empowering" and was the first step at getting lesbian issues into the dialogue of the Association.





How Did We Become a Professional Group?



by Karen Warren and Rita Yerkes

From 1981 to 1984 Rita Yerkes and Wilma Miranda led the Men's and Women's Issues Interest Group. In 1984, this group met again, this time during the North Carolina conference. At that time a Board member came to the first meeting and stated that the Board of Directors wanted to disband SIG's with little membership and activity, and that we needed to get 50 members to sign up at the conference as part of the group in order for it to be recognized by the Board. At that meeting, it was suggested that since it was only women who always came to the group, why not call it Women in Experiential Education rather than the Men's and Women's Issues group. Everyone agreed, so we changed the name. There was a pretty charged feeling in the room that we had just done something quite radical to claim a space exclusively for women in AEE. Judith Neimi was one of the speakers at the conference incorporating a terrific slide show on adventurous women. After her talk and slide show, she announced that the groups name had been changed and invited women to

sign up for the new SIG. We got 50 signatures in no time! That was also the conference where Rita laid the groundwork soliciting for the upcoming JEE special issue on men's and women's issues that was later published in 1985.

At the winter 1986 Board meeting, the Board decided to restructure the groups into Professional Groups and Special Interest Groups. The PG's were expected to be more organized and received funding. The SIG's were unfunded and loosely organized. What happened was that all the current SIG's at the time were converted and grandfathered into PG's **except** the Women's Group. It was becoming obvious to us that women from the PG needed to be on the Board to ensure a voice. Rita ran for the Board and was elected in 1986. Around the period where the women's group petitioned to become a PG, was the beginning of the debate around professionalism that women had to engage in over the years. With consultation between co-chairs Jean Vrbka and Chris Heeter, Karen Warren wrote a proposal to the Board to establish a Women in Experiential Education Professional Group. The proposal was approved at the February 1987 Board meeting wherein we were given a trial period of one year. Ensuing this endeavor, the groups name appeared on the 1998 membership application. Important to note that the WPG is the only group which actually had to apply, and also who were given a "trial" year.

Miscellaneous Items of Interest

- * NAALA and the WPG began a tradition of throwing joint parties at the end of conferences for a couple of years since 1992. Another way of building allies within these groups.
- * We continue striving to move beyond the efforts of constantly defending our "right" to be a Professional Group within the Association as we have been about the business of promoting and supporting the work of, and for women and girls in EE.
- * Women's Professional Group meetings have been structured in recent years to allow for in-depth discussion of various subjects of interest, and sharing of resources on specific topics. Examples: meeting the needs of adolescent girls, and pay scale differences for women and men in this field.
- * Members of the WPG continue to be available as mentors to assist women who may wish to write and publish articles for the journal or chapters for books. We encourage cooperative authorship, sharing interests, and exploring ideas.

The Clark Kent Award, later advanced to the “Clarice Kent Award” is given to the WPG woman at the conference who shows the most change and transformation from the previous year. The recipient is decided by previous winners. Rita Yerkes came up with the award and Karen Warren was the original recipient at the 1985 conference in Estes Park. Karen shares her thoughts: “As a quiet and curious women’s group member at the 1984 conference, I must have found my fire in the thin air of Colorado because I was magically transformed into an empowered advocate of women in AEE.”



So Rita created the Clark Kent award and bestowed it upon me. That began a tradition of giving it to a new woman each year. What is significant for me about the Clark/Clarice Kent award is that it was a way for us to internally recognize our empowerment, mentoring and development of leadership within the women’s group. The fact that it was both whimsical and serious at the same time speaks to how women in AEE have co-opted the AEE award process that has been historically problematic and exclusive of women and women’s ways of relating.”

Mary McClintock expresses her sentiments around this award: “The Clarice Kent Award has been a wonderful tradition within the Women in EE group. A playful, fun, loving way to celebrate the

transformations women in the group experienced as they became more empowered/found their strength, their voice, and their power. I received the Clarice Kent Award in 1991 at the Asheville Conference after *I DANCED* in front of the audience at Naomi Ross’ presentation on The Spiral Dance. . . seeing me dance in front of an audience was mind-blowing for many of the Women in EE members, especially for me!!” Amy Kohut shares, “For me, it was the 1993 conference in

Smuggler’s Notch where we had the first ever WPG-NAALA social/party together. I particularly remember some sparkly head gear that was presented to me - along with a couple of beers, so it’s a bit fuzzy - I’m sure it was stunning!”

At the 1996 conference in Spokane, Diane Bedell (WPG Co-Chair) was recipient of this award. “I know that the award is given tongue in cheek,” says Diane, “but there is also a serious side to it as well. It meant a lot to me to be recognized by the women of the WPG as someone who has started to come into her own power.”

Diane continues, “I also realize now that there is a whole lot to being an effective co-chair that I’m still learning. Just when I might start to get the hang of this thing, it will be time for me to give someone else an opportunity to give back to the WPG.”

A few more comments from Karen Warren, and search for the early women leaders . . .

“ . . .What I find interesting was that in the early 80s we saw a need to chart our history because there was an electricity about that which said we were doing something historical. We were challenging a system in AEE and in the field that had been held in place for a long time based on the historic roots of the profession. Now that challenge is the dominant paradigm idea that plays out a bit more subtly (perhaps the establishment of the NAALA PG and Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual SIG is currently the point of challenge of the dominant paradigm). I am also aware that, due to those of us who are still active in AEE and when our time in AEE started, that our “herstory” seems to start in the early 80s. I am really very curious about the women and their actions that came before. Also, I am very curious about the women who boycotted the Missouri conference, as this was a non-ERA state. Now that was a radical move and I wonder what happened. *Does anyone know the story or who might know the story?*”

More Thoughts and Memories from Chris Heeter...

The conference at Moodus in 1986 was really fun. This was the year that our presence was really noticed at AEE. The conference committee had given us meeting rooms that accommodated about 25 people, but most of our meetings had about 100 women and a few brave men. It was beautiful weather, so we held our very large meetings on the front lawn. That's when "that women's group" began to really be noticed, and both concern and intrigue grew. And this was the year Rita was elected to the board. When it was announced that she had been elected, I remember there were a bunch of us in the back of the auditorium that started shouting RI-TA, RI-TA. It was quite a ruckus!!

It was a wild year, riding on the incredible enthusiasm and response from the Moodus conference the following year in 1987. Wilma, Lee (I think), and I lead a workshop on "isms" that about 70 general AEE members attended. Just to get them in the mood, we opened the workshop by having people say their name, and then that they were either gay, lesbian, or bi-sexual. They had to pick between these 3 choices. We said it might be true for them, or simply an opportunity to try on a "scary" identity for 5 seconds. It was non-conventional, but it was powerful. Huge reactions — men (especially, but not exclusively)

fighting for the chance to say something during that workshop, mostly to clarify that they were not gay!

"One of the things I carried with me from the WPG . . . you don't have to trade in professionalism . . . in order to really be out there . . . helping to change the world a little bit".

Quite a bit happened the next year in 1988. There is a great summary of the '88 conference that Alex Gayek wrote in the WPG newsletter that was published in the winter of '89. Her article talked about the WPG protesting a "disrespectful rendering of a Native American ceremony" as the opening event of the conference. This resulted in a public apology to all the AEE members. We protested the blatantly sexist jokes by the opening speaker. This resulted in members of the board having a lengthy discussion with him about it. AEE at large was clearly uncomfortable with us, but respected us, and took our comments very seriously. This year, for the first time, 2 candidates for the board along with the '89 conference convener showed up at a WPG meeting to invite our input and find out more about us. These were significant signs that AEE was noticing the power, energy,

and wonderful talent that made up the WPG. At the conference in Carbondale during this year, Anne Bancroft (the arctic explorer) was the keynote speaker. Anne came to one of our WPG pre-conference meetings and spoke with us prior to her keynote address. Also at the pre-conference this year, we brought in Kathy Powell, a feminist therapist, and former professor at George Williams College (where I went to school). She facilitated our first meeting to help us structure the meetings for the duration of the conference, and deal with some tough issues. We were struggling a lot with how to balance bringing in new members with wanting to see old friends that we only saw at AEE. It was most helpful, and resulted in many new women becoming a part of the leadership of the WPG.

One of the things I have carried with me from the WPG is the notion that you don't have to trade in professionalism or respect in order to really be out there, pushing the edge of people's assumptions, and helping to change the world a little bit. I will always be grateful to the women of AEE who continue to serve as such mentors and guides along the way for me.



Becky Roehrs shares history and information about the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Allies Special Interest Group

When I held my first Southeast Region AEE WPG meeting as regional contact in 1991, only 3 women showed up, and they were almost whispering because they didn't want anyone to know they were at a WPG meeting. They didn't want anyone to think they were gay. We talked about the banner at the Lake Junaluska conference; it felt like a *sexism/ homophobia 101 / support group* to me. None of the women were gay (except me), but they were very upset. It definitely opened my eyes to what I would have to deal with at SE-AEE conferences. At the next couple of SE-AEE conferences about 3 women would show up for the WPG meeting. They weren't as worried about being considered gay; they wanted connection with other women since they felt isolated at their workplaces. The 1993 Vermont AEE Int'l Conference was pretty incredible. Karen Thompson was leading workshops and finally got to speak. There was a workshop held about the Amendment 2 issue in Colorado, and how AEE decided to deal with it. That's where Jeannette Ford and myself volunteered to start the SIG. Karen Warren talked to a couple of people, we had rooms to meet in, and our names were announced in front of 2000 people as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Allies SIG.

Mostly women attended the SIG meetings (and still do) and many wanted the opportunity to network with other lesbians. In 1995, at the conference in Lake Geneva, we had over 25 people at our SIG meetings and more people wanted to see the SIG become a PG. Erica Tucker led the SIG meetings at Spokane in 1996 and members wanted to network with other PG's, wanted a pre-conference with info on heterosexism, wanted info about coming out at the workplace, and wanted networking, networking, networking! We now have over 130 members of the SIG. At the 1995 SE-AEE WPG meeting, a new trend started where about 9-10 women started coming to our meetings. Cherie North volunteered to organize a WPG pre-conference sea kayaking trip at the 1996 SE-AEE Conference in Seabrook Island, SC. Sharon Heinlen was at our 1996 SE-AEE WPG meeting and, needless to say, she came to an interesting meeting. A misunderstanding occurred where a woman said she was having problems coming out, and a couple of women talked about coming out as lesbians in the field. The woman was talking about a different issue, was it about being a mother? It was very serious at the time, but now...

So What's This About the "*Pink Triangle*"?

"Looking back, it doesn't seem like that big a deal - given how far the world has come, or not," says Mary McClintock about lesbian, gay, and bi- issues, "but particularly how far AEE has come." At the conference in Santa Fe in 1989, Mary had an enamel pink triangle pin and put it on her conference name tag so if you looked at her name, you saw the pink triangle. "I remember feeling like it was a pretty bold way to try to connect with other lesbians, but hopefully one that most of the homophobic people would be clueless about," recalls Mary. "I don't remember any particular reason why then, or why that conference. I think it was during a time when I was wearing a pink triangle around in my every day work life." Mary shares that she was trying to be visible to lesbians and gay men, and so she wore the pin to the conference for the same reason. "I don't think I was at that point working directly in experiential education, but was probably in graduate school trying to recover from working in homophobic/sexist agencies with difficult adolescents." In communication with Mary, Karen Warren adds, "I remember the pink triangle in Santa Fe that you wore, and I thought it was pretty bold. You gave me your extra pin at the regional conference at Sargent Camp and I wore it, feeling pretty radical and vulnerable. I was sure everybody at the conference was looking at my name tag!" Angel Russek adds, "I remember realizing that these are women I want to work with and get to know since they are obviously "out" in the field. The movement from the WPG was initiated by a group of mainly (but not all) lesbian and bi women, and grew to the PG being more embraced by, and embracing, a larger community of women in AEE."



We invite the reader to become part of the growth and future of the Women in Experiential Education Professional Group! You can help us maintain a voice and support our endeavors in many ways.

- ☞ Become a member of AEE and check off the “Women’s Professional Group”
- ☞ If you’re a current AEE member, join the WPG for \$5.00.
- ☞ Continue to support Women in EE as a Professional Group within the association.
- ☞ Purchase our books -
 - 1) “*Women’s Voices in Experiential Education*” edited by Karen Warren
 - 2) “*A Guide to Women’s Studies in the Outdoors: Review of Literature and research (with author index and annotated bibliography)*” edited by Nina Roberts.Help spread the word to friends and colleagues who might be interested in these unique collections. Contact AEE for ordering information.
- ☞ Donate restricted funds to the WPG towards scholarships and/or research.
- ☞ Become active in your region in the U.S. or in the country where you reside.
- ☞ Submit articles and materials to the WPG Newsletter, the AEE *Horizon* and the *Journal*.
- ☞ Mentor young women in their efforts to become published authors.
- ☞ Present workshops at AEE Regional and International conferences.
- ☞ Become an elected official of the AEE Board of Directors.
- ☞ Participate in the growth of women in experiential education in whatever way is best for you!

Thanks for your support!