

FINAL
Lucy Hodder

I'm Lucy Hodder, and I'm here to share reflections about serving on the Commission as we approached a new Millennium. It was a time of hope and action. New Hampshire's **first elected female Governor, Jeanne Shaheen** had appointed many of us to the Commission in the late 1990s and she provided omni-present inspiration and encouragement for our work.

Let me tell a story of my early tenure with the Commission as one insight into our challenges:

The year was 1997. At my first meeting I was pregnant with my second child, while working as an attorney, juggling day care, and family responsibilities.

I remember sitting quietly as the Commissioners discussed how to advance and empower women in New Hampshire consistent with the **1995 United Nations Beijing World Conference**. Several New Hampshire women had traveled to this international conference and returned full of excitement and promise.

I was inspired, but also on the verge of a maternity leave. “Bring your new baby next month,” all the women said!

So, at 3 weeks old, I brought my newborn daughter Becca to my second meeting. I snuck into an empty Senate hearing room to breastfeed her and she slept peacefully for our Monday afternoon meeting.

Later that week, I received a call of distress from **Kate Frey**, our Commission Executive Director. The Commission had received a citation from the Speaker’s Office for bringing a baby to the Legislative Office Building, and a letter warning us that continued transgressions would result in our being banned from meeting in the State House facilities! That was how unwelcoming the State House was for working mothers at the start of my tenure.

Who were we as a Commission as we approached the Millenium?

We were 15 women, diverse in age, geographic region, race, professional and lived experiences and socio-economic status - committed to remedy the historical and institutional discrimination impacting women’s basic rights in New Hampshire.

We honored, celebrated and elevated women throughout New Hampshire, by lifting up their struggles and their achievements: We established events to commemorate **Women's Equality Day** on August 26th each year, and we hand-delivered teaching materials on the women's right to vote to schools throughout New Hampshire.

We acknowledged the injustice for working women on **Equal Pay Day** who were making only 77 cents for every dollar of our male counterparts. (It's 79 cents now, by the way!).

We hosted an annual awards luncheon to recognize the hundreds of New Hampshire high school **female athletes who were living the Title IX legacy**.

Under the leadership of Dr. Marie Metoyer and Valerie Cunningham we envisioned a **Women's Heritage Trail** - to document the stories of notable New Hampshire women who contributed to the life and culture of our history, yet whose diverse and significant accomplishments were invisible and undervalued.

I'm proud to see the current efforts of the NH Women's Foundation to help build out this trail with leadership from Nadine Thompson, Pat Yosha and others here today. *(Look toward WHT Table)*

And, we took action!

We exposed gender inequality wherever we found it. We proposed and supported legislation on civil rights, equal pay, domestic violence, and Medicaid. During an era of welfare reform when low-income single mothers women were being demonized, we **advocated for policies that would provide women with supports such as job training and child care, rather than punitive measures that would only perpetuate the cycle of poverty.**

We brought experts together to draft and publish **the Legal Handbook for Women**, particularly as a resource for women facing discrimination in the family courts around divorce, custody, and supports.

And we investigated and published a **report examining women in the corrections system** - highlighting the inequalities between the education and supports offered men versus women in New Hampshire prisons, ultimately leading to long overdue legislation and reforms in the women's prison.

I had the amazing privilege to serve as Chair after **Molly Kelly**, who went on to become a State Senator and a candidate for Governor. And ,the chair after me was **Pat Yosha**. Pat and Molly were both visionaries, making sure NH changed laws to support women trying to raise families while struggling in low paying jobs.

Now, fast forward with me to earlier this year, after the 2018 elections brought a leadership change to the New Hampshire State House. More women in positions of influence. That same daughter who got me in trouble as a newborn is now 20 years old. I am happy to report that the NH State House has just recently designated a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers. Twenty years later.

PAUSE

Like so many advancements for women – it can take decades to achieve small but symbolic victories to ensure our place at the table (or in the State House). And while the work we do may not always change the conditions of our own experience, we have created more equality and opportunity for our daughters, and their daughters, in ways large and small.

To a person, the NH Commission on the Status Women included women who were individually and collectively brave, compassionate and resolute. And for all we have accomplished, our work is by no means finished!

Thank you!