

Bev Kemball and Trudy Hoefnagels on Women's Day

BK: That is one of my favourite pictures of Audrey Hepburn. Did you see her in "Breakfast at Tiffany's"?

TH: Yes, I did. It was one of those special movies that somehow has an everlasting appeal. And the song still lives on!

BK: Her remarkable performance in that movie certainly showed what a glamorous, beautiful and talented actress she was. Isn't it a pity, though, that we tend to stop there and define her by her surface characteristics: her looks, gender, her husband (or lack of one) and her financial status? Yet she was so much more. Her courage and relentless hard work during the Dutch resistance to the Nazis was legendary.....and she was just a teenager at that stage. Her leadership and ability to manage the UNICEF portfolio. She had made it so highly effective that she won the prestigious Presidential Medal for Freedom. She was a beautiful woman AND a warrior, leader, and inspiration.

TH: Yes, it is so easy to stereotype, and our culture often focusses on this, and then easily, unknowingly even, we stereotype people based on race, religion or gender.

BK: In our culture, we become so used to people viewing women as emotional, weak and incompetent, as property, to be bought and sold, or as trophies to dangle on a man's arm or, most horribly, as sexual prey, to be pursued and used, that we don't always notice the way our jokes, our conversations and our actions support these demeaning perceptions.

In reality, we owe so much of who we are to the women in our lives...and not just because they cook and clean up after us! They make us better people.

TH: Yes, we forget sometimes that we are who we are because of the people in our lives. Different people bring different values, ideas and lessons to us. All those differences are good and they influence us to become wholesome, valued and special individuals. But, on this eve of Women's Day, it's appropriate to look at some of the characteristics that specifically women can bring to our lives; and the life lessons that we can learn from them.

Firstly: Women are generous by nature; they are givers and it tends to be easy for them to encourage those around them and to allow others to thrive. This is so clear to me when I look at my daughter. She is generous in advice, in acceptance, in her love and friendships. She gives in small and big ways. Just last week she apologised to me for giving the umbrella that I had bought for her to a homeless person! And in the month of September she is taking unpaid leave to walk the Spanish Camino, to spend time on her own and undoubtedly find answers to how she can give more of herself to others.

Women are also good communicators, while some might call it chattiness, women respond effectively to visual, verbal, and emotional factors. Women listen carefully, share ideas, and give advice to encourage those around them.

BK: That was so true of my mom! She had so many people who knew and loved her that going into the shop was more of a grand tour than a shopping expedition. I read War and

Peace while waiting for her. But I also learned from her to value every human being's unique story because we are connected in a community to which we all belong and have an important place.

TH: Women have a strong team spirit and feeling of togetherness, they value relationships highly. They are happy to listen to personal problems while they have the patience to hear out and understand emotions.

This was a wonderful lesson I learnt from my grandmother. As a teenager I knew that the safe haven of her comfortable lived-in couch was the place that I could chat about anything and everything. And no matter how upset, angry, nervous, happy or uncertain I was, I knew that I would find solace in her acceptance of me and that she would try and understand how I was feeling – even though we were generations apart.

Women are patient and have tolerance in handling adverse situations logically and efficiently. They can generally manage most things by being patient and calm.

This lesson I learnt and still learn from my sister: Even though her daughter is mentally disabled, she never loses patience, she treads lightly and happily through life, never focuses on the negatives, but rather looks ahead positively, knowing that even the most demanding and difficult situations will turn out ok in the end.

Women value teams. They manage to keep information flowing freely ensuring that everyone has the info they need. They eagerly ask questions to gain an understanding of other people's point of view. This trait can be beneficial when

making decisions, since they are willing to get input from other people in order to obtain a well-rounded view of a problem and come to a conclusion based on different perspectives.

BK: This is exactly what makes Boards with a mix of men and women outperform the stock market norm by 26%. Male only Boards tend to be very erratic and female-only Boards tend to be a tad too cautious. As human beings we need each other and we are so much stronger when a variety of skills are exercised and valued. The world has changed...the stereotypically male traits of physical strength and aggressive competitiveness that used to be valued above others are no longer effective in a more connected, and hence diverse, world.

TH: Think for a minute of all the ways YOU are better as a result of the skills, values and personality traits you have gained from your mothers, grandmothers, sisters, girlfriends and teachers.

BK: Now let's show our respect for all people, regardless of gender, colour or other surface characteristics, and let's allow that to influence all that we say and do this Women's Day and into the future.