Diane Loranger - Alberta Champion

By Michelle Liang

In 2025, it couldn't be more natural to be led on a mountain hike by a female tour guide, or to find out in the headlines of the news that a woman had headed the newest discovery in paleontology. Women had always played a key role in society, but in the 20th century, women were mainly responsible for staying in the background and supporting their families. Although it is unthinkable in the 21st century, traipsing into strictly segregated "men's" jobs was a severely discouraged career route for women.

In 1920, a determined, courageous infant was born in Edmonton, Alberta - a child that will grow up to become a great spark in the evolution of women's job equality, and an adamant Alberta champion.

This girl was Diane Loranger. Nicknamed "Madame Curious" by her supportive father, Diane (Daisy) Loranger was a tomboy from her childhood. During the Gold Rush era, in 1927, Diane's family moved to Hudson, Ontario, where her adventurous spirit was fostered further. In Red Lake, Ontario, Diane found a passion for the outdoors, where she investigated the concept of flight, trained herself to eventually become a medal-winning swimmer, and more importantly, explored the natural sciences.

Diane was unafraid to stand out from the other girls in her society; in 1938, Diane became the first high school graduate in Red Lake. In 1943, Diane completed a bachelor degree in the geological sciences.

Despite her great personal accomplishments, Diane knew that her destiny was to make a contribution to the world. Diane found her place in her work, with the male geologists of Imperial Oil. Without realizing it, Diane had become a pioneer in breaking the barriers between "women's jobs" and "men's jobs" as she persevered among a male-dominated industry. In 1947, Diane rose to a senior supervisory position in Imperial Oil, and began working in the oil fields in Western Canada.

Diane was faced with many challenges throughout her lifetime; being a female first of many accomplishments, Diane had to endure different hardships. Throughout her career, Diane had been slandered for being a woman, and often criticized for working in petroleum geology, a field that was exclusive of women at the time. Even in the outdoors, Diane was met with many difficulties. Determined to prove wrong the stereotypes on how women couldn't endure hardships, Diane often walked 14 miles a day in full gear, even in the harsh Albertan summers. Despite her colleagues' discouragement, and the physical pain that Diane was faced with, she did not retreat, but was pushed on instead by her deep love for the natural world.

However, Diane's greatest contribution to geology was in the field of micropaleontology, with a natural fuel coordination method she developed. Diane noticed that a type of ostracod microfossil was associated with the presence of oils, as a result, she spent time finding, dating, and analyzing the ostracod fossils. Through drilling and observing 39 sites across Alberta, using her hypotheses according to the ostracod fossils, Diane created an accurate prediction method for locating fossil fuel sites, using the fossils.

Continuing her work in paleontology, Diane also discovered a method for coordinating the different ages of Albertan geological landmarks, through comparing fossils found in the two different places. The method proved to be very useful in helping geoscientists find deposits of resources in the Albertan landscape.

Even in 1962, when Diane was 42, she was still passionate to keep on learning. After graduating from the University of London for geology, Diane became yet another first - the first person to receive a Ph.D. in Red Lake.

When time was on her hands, Diane continued to follow her heart, fulfilling her dream of becoming a pilot, which allowed her to freely reach remote geological sites for research. Exhibiting her independent nature, Diane stubbornly refused to see a machinist after her secondhand car broke down in her late years. Instead, Diane learned how to repair her car by herself.

After retiring, Diane still didn't stop working for the greater good. Diane donated over eight tons of clothing and furniture to mothers in need of financial support, and also volunteered selflessly in the advocacy of issues surrounding the treatment of elders, and accessibility for the disabled throughout the community. After living a vivid life, Diane passed away in 2004, in Calgary, Alberta.

Despite the fact that Diane, as an individual, brought positive changes to both society and even the world, she was barely recognized for her contributions. Although, Diane didn't care to be awarded, she just wanted the world to be a better place for the next generation, both for men and women.

I feel like Diane's passionate, determined character really correlates with mine, and I'm inspired to carry on her passion, and be a champion for science and nature, in Alberta. This summer, I've decided to volunteer at the Telus World of Science, in the Nature Exchange program, where children are encouraged to find interesting objects in the natural world. After studying the objects, they can then bring their finds to the center to present to employees, in exchange for points, which they can use to buy other valuable, natural objects that are provided by the center. This program helps fuel the next generation's curiosity and passion for the natural world, which is a cause that I look forward to being a part of.

Also, knowing that Diane wasn't quiet about her findings in geology (she published numerous papers and even documented her work in ecopaleontology in code), I've been encouraged to complete a nonfiction novel that I had been writing, on the astonishing history that fossils carry, and how to identify fossils. I discovered my passion for collecting and analyzing fossils in the fourth grade, and I wish to provide children around the world with the same joy I feel whenever I discover a new fossil. I've noticed that many children of my generation are becoming more and more attracted to electronic devices, and are spending less and less time in nature. I want to light a spark of Diane's passion for nature in every child's heart by passing my knowledge on an interesting aspect of the natural world to them, and encourage them to investigate the wonders of the world for themselves.

Thank you Diane Loranger, for bringing me encouragement to keep on going whenever I search for fossils in the summer, and to pursue my passion for writing, to carry on your inspiring message.

References:

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