



WOMEN ALIVE A LEGACY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Tribute to Chicago's Pioneering Women

Archeworks ~ 625 North Kingsbury ~ Chicago, IL
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DIANN DE WEESE SMITH

Rights Activist

It's not about me and what I've done. It's about *us* and the things *we've* done. I've surrounded myself with a m a z i n g w o m e n ; brilliant women who are motivated and capable and realize that the walls of inequality need to be broken.

I've always believed in the abilities of women, and I believe I have a responsibility to fix what needs fixing. A system where women are physically thrown off of running paths, denied treatment for rape, and financially discriminated against needs fixing. As an individual who could recognize these issues, I felt a personal responsibility to help bring forth change. As a woman who believes in equality, I have always had self-interest in the field of social justice.

Luckily, I met a no-nonsense woman named Joan Brown who, in collaboration with the YWCA, helped

begin the Loop Center, a place where women could come to find solutions to any of their problems. It was a safe house for women all over the city of Chicago and our wrecking ball against the walls of injustice. Joan recognized the ability in people to work in a businesslike, efficient manner

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that allowed great steps to be taken in short periods of time. This way of work was the only way that I would be involved in the project.

I've found great excitement in being a part of this. We've crumbled walls and changed the face of Chicago. I love knowing that we can do this—make such a difference. I've been blessed to have access to people with such abilities. It is a special kind of friendship that forms when you are working with such amazing, capable women.

Interviewer: Megan Kloc

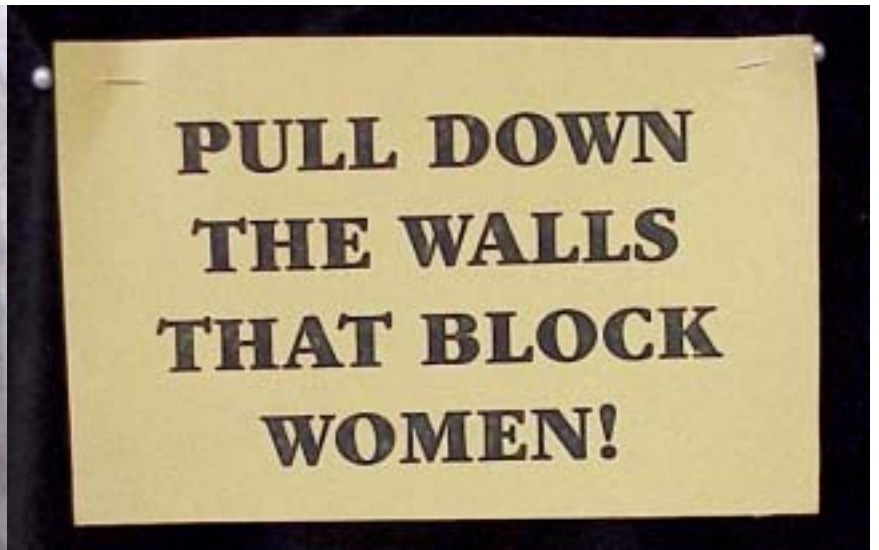
Diann DeWeese Smith

Diann DeWeese Smith was born in 1927, and has lived mostly within the Midwest. She has been an organizer of women throughout her life — from founding a Girl's Athletic Association “so we could use the ‘boys gym’ in high school”, to organizing powerful working women in the Chicago area who trade business information within the Chicago Network. When her son and daughter were in high school, Scott Foresman recruited her to throw out “Dick and Jane” and provide relevant reading material for children of all backgrounds.

First as a board member, then as director, she helped develop Rearing Children of Goodwill Workshops with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Together they trained 11,000 workshop volunteers to fight racism in Chicago.

By 1969 it was clear that women's needs had to be met. Diann was hired to create Loop Center YWCA. The new center grew from scratch to an attendance of 300 people a day, six days a week. Innumerable women's groups were created there and interacted with one another. Women professionals were recruited to donate help for women without means or expertise. That activity influenced other progressive YWCA centers throughout the US and Canada.

Nine years later Diann became an officer of the South Shore Bank which was dedicated to investing in Black communities. She moved to Mount Sinai Hospital five years later as Vice President of Development and Communications — and whatever else she could be to that Chicago neighborhood. She retired from full time work when she was 70 years old.



“Let’s face it; I am a women’s organizer!”

