

# Woman's Place: Home to an Idea

By ANNE ANABLE

DARIEN

"I WAS convinced that this was a particularly exciting time in history to be a woman, but until I talked seriously to Ida, I wasn't sure what to do about it," said Ruth Lyon, a former actress and mother of five who went back to college six years ago at the suggestion of her husband. She attended Sarah Lawrence's Center for Continuing Education and received an M.A. in women's studies last June.

When she met Dr. Ida Davidoff in 1972, Mrs. Lyon was president of the Radcliffe Club of Fairfield County, although she had left Radcliffe before graduating, and Dr. Davidoff, an eminent educator and marriage and family counselor, had come to speak on women's role in a changing world at the invitation of the club and the Darien Y.W.C.A.

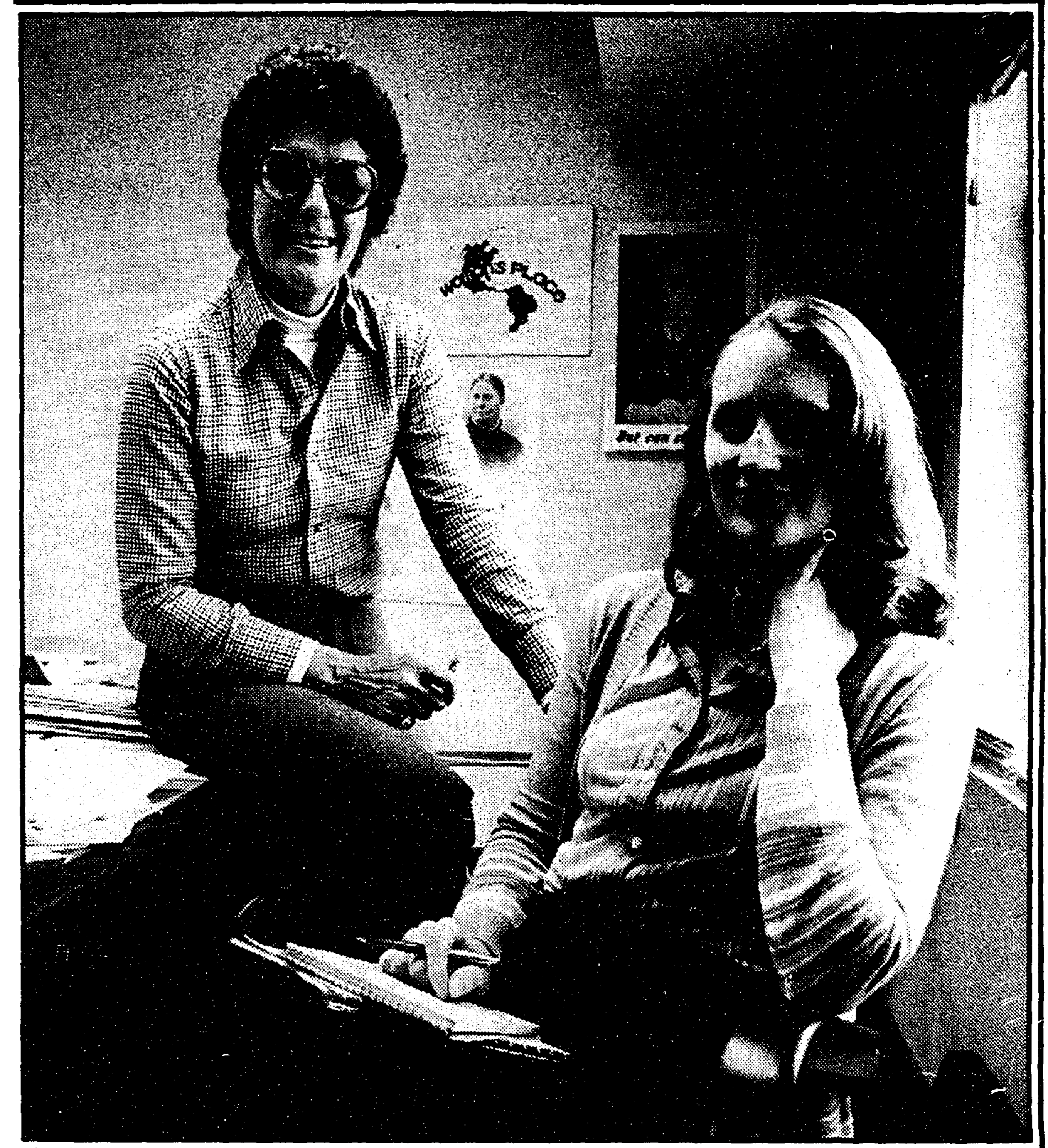
"We were both concerned with women reacting in a variety of ways to the ferment of the women's movement, and we decided the best thing to do would be to find out what was needed," Mrs. Lyon said.

They decided that the best way to start was to invite leaders from 80 Fairfield County women's organizations (ranging from garden clubs and the League of Women Voters to members of the National Organization for Women) to attend a luncheon meeting at St. Luke's Church in Darien to talk about various aspects of contemporary women's lives. To their astonishment, more than 150 women accepted, and the post-lunch workshops produced many of the ideas that were to become Woman's Place.

Woman's Place is situated above a pizza parlor and auto-supply store at 576 Post Road in Darien. It not only runs a series of seminars, but also offers advice and a helping hand to women in transition. This might include suggesting the names of women lawyers to someone who has decided her male divorce lawyer is too much of a chauvinist to have her best interests at heart, or helping a woman who has problems with a teen-age daughter to find counseling.

Liz Holtz, executive director, a recent Sarah Lawrence graduate, said: "Most of the people we suggest in our referrals came from the personal recommendation of our board members."

Woman's Place offers workshops, held in five or six weekly sessions. One that draws consistent interest is Career Exploration, for women who want to explore new work options. The Realities of



The New York Times/Joyce Dopkeen

Ruth Lyon, left, and Liz Holtz, executives of A Woman's Place, in Darien

Divorce has been sufficiently popular to spark a follow-up questionnaire as a step in determining both its effectiveness and its future direction. Money Management for Women covers the han-

dling of finances in relation to such things as taxes, insurance, investments and banking.

The Next Step compels participants to examine their options and to be better qualified to evaluate their choices in a changing world, or as Dr. Davidoff puts it, "to help women find out where they are, how they got there and where they're going."

Another workshop that has aroused steady interest is Assertiveness Training, defined as learning to be "appropriately assertive without being aggressive." The Realities of Step-Parenting draws both men and women, singly and in pairs to learn to cope with an increasing 20th-century phenomenon.

"We have always been aware that all the factors affecting women's roles were having an equal effect on men," said Dr. Davidoff, president of Women's Place, "but on the whole, I'd rather see men leading men."

Workshops cost between \$35 and \$60 per session and new courses are added as the need arises.

"We're starting a newsletter," said Mrs. Lyon, Woman's Place vice president, "and as a slogan we have chosen a quotation from Charlotte Perkins Gillman's 'The Home,' written in 1903: 'Shall the home be our world or the world our home?'"

"Interestingly enough, in the 19th century women were very supportive of one another. They visited each other daily, wrote long letters to one another when apart and because of the difficulty of travel, a friend who came from any distance would stay for weeks—sometimes months.

"Today, in a suburban community, a woman ferrying her children about, going off to the supermarket or to meet-

ings, keeping up with housework, cooking and such, may rarely see another woman in a relaxed framework of friendship. Should a woman divorce, she may find life particularly difficult as a single person in a couples' suburban society, yet, until her children's schooling is completed, she may feel unable to move to the city where she'd be less of an oddity.

"Then, with the advent of birth control, and longer life expectancy, there are women who choose to have fewer children and would like to explore career opportunities while in their 40's or 50's.

"During a time of transition it's important for women to meet others in similar situations and exchange ideas. One thing we learn from the follow-up questionnaire of those people who attended the divorce symposium is that meeting other women in a similar situation helped women to feel less isolated, and to cope."

"Woman's Place is evolving as we are made aware of what might be useful to our members," said Dr. Davidoff, "my mother used to call me a stirring spoon."

Anyone can call Woman's Place for advice and referral and membership, \$20, includes the newsletter and a five-part evening seminar series. The first, Modern Marriage, has already taken place; the second, being held Dec. 8, will be titled Sexuality as a Life Force. It is to be moderated by Mildred Witkin Ph.D., sex therapist at New York Hospital and Robert Madison M.D., a Stanford gynecologist. Nonmembers are charged a fee to attend. Information can be obtained by calling Woman's Place, 655-4203, between 9 A.M. and 1 P.M. daily.

The New York Times

Published: November 6, 1977  
Copyright © The New York Times