

Women and Life on Earth: Then and Now

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Published: March 11, 2020 in the Greenfield Recorder

<https://www.recorder.com/my-turn-gyorgy-MarchWomen-sHistoryMonth-33217299>

Anniversaries are times for people to come together, to remember, and see how things are now. Forty years ago this month, 600 women came together at UMass on the vernal equinox weekend, the start of spring 1980. Their goal, to gather as women active in different movements: for peace, safe energy, sustainable agriculture, women's and community health, under the newly articulated concept of ecological feminism.

The event had some 'herstoric' spinoffs, such as the Women for Life on Earth movement in England, which established a Women's Peace Camp at the Greenham Common airbase, protesting for years against the stationing of nuclear Cruise missiles there. Eventually successfully.

On March 28 this year, the focus is on this key election year, and coming decade. What are our action plans for 2020, how can we work together for the changes needed in the coming decade? For the health of our home communities —and the planet?

March 28 is another anniversary: 41 years after the meltdown at the Three Mile Island reactor near Harrisburg, Penn. That accident brought sudden awareness of nuclear dangers, and a rapid shift in public opinion. This was the case in Franklin County, where years of opposition to twin nuclear reactors planned for the Montague Plains suddenly made sense.

March is also the month of another nuclear accident, the March 11, 2011, start of the disaster at the Fukushima reactors in Japan. As with the accident at the Russian reactor at Chernobyl in 1986, its radiation spread widely. It continues to pollute, on land and sea.

Back in 1980, we were concerned with more than stopping nuclear power, ecological and military dangers. We were also deeply involved in projects for life. These took the forms of organic agriculture, founding food co-ops, recycling and composting projects in our towns, and community solar and weatherization projects.

We did not lack solutions at the time. What we did lack was political power. When 12 women came together after the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island and decided to organize a conference together around eco-feminism in the 1980s, Jimmy Carter was president, and had put solar collectors on the White House roof.

Very different in style, focus and allegiance from the Reagan administration voted in that November. *(and the collectors came right down!)*

Out of the March 1980 Women and Life on Earth conference came the Women's Pentagon Action, which that November brought two thousand women to D.C. for a day of workshops before encircling the Pentagon in a dramatic action, demanding "No more amazing inventions for death."

Back in 1980, there was a buildup in nuclear weapons, a cold war danger that had spread worldwide. Now the stakes are even higher. Forty years later, the nuclear threat remains real, with a massive buildout of nuclear weapons, large and small.

Then there is the real danger of climate change and related biodiversity loss.

Both the nuclear/military danger and climate crisis affect lower income and communities of color most, in the U.S. and worldwide. The income inequality that has reached obscene levels is paralleled by greenhouse climate pollution inequality. The less industrialized nations produce only a fraction of harmful greenhouse gases, yet they suffer its effects more than wealthier countries. Oxfam reports that 10% of the world's population creates 50% of this pollution. There are rich polluters around the world, not just here at home.

So what to do in this new decade? In early 2019, the Traprock Center for Peace and Justice decided to call a meeting of groups and women activists in our area to exchange goals and plans for this year, hoping for greater cooperation.

Not all will agree on solutions or actions to take. But we will hear each other, and recognize some of the extensive work and care going on in our area.

We know that many more women are active and care about peace, ecological, racial and economic justice in our area than those who will join our 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. meeting at GCC on March 28. We see this gathering of some 20 groups and 100 women as a start, with reporting at www.traprock.org and elsewhere.

March is women's history month, and a good time to remember the history of women and their communities, as we look forward and plan on making more.

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