

Is Soroptimist for women like me?

.....Connie Baehr, Regional Conference, Eugene, Oregon April 1999

"I sometimes ask myself that question. I have what I call "a regular, full time job" - it is defined this way: I'm a controller for a rapidly growing company that is involved in many varied businesses. A short work week is 60 hours; many weeks I work 70 or 80 hours. I have 23 people working for me, all of whom would like personal attention from me. I talk to people, sit in meetings, answer questions and make connections from 7am till 5 pm. After 5, I sit down to "do my own work".

I've been a Soroptimist for 13 years now, and most of that time, I've been a contributor. Recently however, my club has been surprised when I've made it to a regular meeting. My personal life suffers - luckily, my partner is also very committed to his job and spends much time at work of one kind or another. Despite all that, I hasten to say that I love my job. The challenge and opportunity to expand my skills is tremendous.

Many, many women I talk to these days have very similar lives. My sister, for example, has a job that requires her to work overtime for a portion of the year, all the while raising

three very active and involved children, maintaining a home and doing all the duties that go with being a farm wife.

Women's jobs are more and more demanding; employers expectations are high. Women have husbands, children and other family members and friends, all of whom require attention and effort. Their



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children frequently have more commitments than they do! When I joined Soroptimist back in the mid-eighties, it was typical for clubs to have minimum attendance and participation requirements. When a prospective member couldn't make the 2 or 4 scheduled meetings per month, she was discouraged from joining. Many clubs still have these rules, enforced or not. I recall many discussions with Soroptimists who were choosing not to renew their membership. Why? Because they felt, and still feel, incredible guilt because they can't "do everything". Soroptimist, like many other service organizations, faces a

population of potential members whose lives are incredibly hectic and harried. What was once reasonable to expect is no longer in the realm of possibility. For Soroptimist to survive, grow and continue to impact the world around us, we must rethink our expectations of our members. We must look for the most effective way to accomplish our objectives, even if it is a brand new, untried approach. We must get accustomed to using our influence and any power that we hold to accomplish our objectives. We must stand together, make our voices heard and support each other. We must learn to value our time above all else. And, we must allow Soroptimists to contribute in any way they can. Is Soroptimist for women like me and my sister? Absolutely! It had better be, because without all those tiny contributions from all these hurried and harried women, there will be no Soroptimists. What a tremendous loss that would be to our committees, our region, our nation, our world. Brilliant isn't it!

(Note from the editor: This speech (1999) is timeless and probably more true now than then.)