

# WOMEN IN TRADES NEWS

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## THE CROWNING OF A PLUMBER

compiled by Lisette Cook

Linda Skomorowski did not have an easy road to being crowned the first lady plumber in Canada in 1974. As a Journeywoman (interprovincial) plumber and licensed gasfitter, Linda works with her husband in their own business in rural Saskatchewan.

Linda first thought of entering the trades in 1972 with the hopes of joining her husband, already a plumber, in starting their own business. In discussing her hopes and intentions with Manpower she was put on a waiting list to enter a pre-apprenticeship plumbing course in Winnipeg. Linda was asked what she would do if her husband died and was also told that no one would hire her even if she did finish the course and that the physical incapacities would be insurmountable. Feeling that her alternatives were limited she found 12 out of 16 employers that would hire her in the event that she completed the course.

Even with letters of support Manpower still remained unreceptive to Linda. They had decided she needed a medical examination even though she had a medical from her own doctor declaring her physically healthy and emotionally stable. She would have to have another examination from a special doctor who had been a plumber himself. "Believe it or not" Linda noted, "there is such a doctor".

Feeling defeated Linda finally turned to the Human Rights Commission. They agreed to handle the case feeling that she was a victim of discrimination. After completing a year of Arts at the University of Manitoba there was little doubt that Linda qualified for entrance into the course. The Commission suggested that most plumbing jobs involved little more work requiring muscle than most mothers need in heaving a 50 pound toddler around. Manpower eventually waived the medical but would only promise to place Linda on a waiting list. It could take up to two years to gain acceptance into the course. Eventually Linda found a community college outside of Winnipeg that accepted her for the pre-apprenticeship program. Manpower sponsored

all of the students except Linda. She was the only person paying her own way and the only female student. Linda completed the course earning herself three awards. She received an Achievement of Excellence award, Most Outstanding Student in Construction and Drafting award and an award for Top Marks in Plumbing.

Since completing the course she has lost a job for supporting the union, been harrassed as the only woman on an all male picket line, has been crowned the first lady plumber and appeared on the Betty Kennedy and Elwood Gluver shows. She lives in a small community in Saskatchewan with her husband, their 5 year old son and 10 month old daughter.

Linda is one pioneer we can all look to when we feel defeated. She has proven that perseverance and determination can get us to where we want to go.



Information and photograph submitted by  
Linda Skomorowski