

IWF Early Leaders: Linda Hawes Clever, MD
By Jenny Erwin
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When I reached out to Linda to schedule time for this interview, her response was immediate, energetic and enthusiastic. So I knew I was in for a treat when interviewing her and I was not disappointed. She has accomplished so much in her life---starting the Department of Occupational Health at the Presbyterian Pacific Medical Center, serving on many prestigious boards, founding the non-profit RENEW and publishing, “The Fatigue Prescription: Four Steps to Renewing Your Energy, Health and Life.” She has so much insight from her medical work and her long-term membership in IWF. Plus, she has an infectious enthusiasm for learning in both traditional and nontraditional ways. She is a teacher at heart, and I so enjoyed learning about her and her many unique experiences. She is another IWF member whom I look forward to meeting in person, and I encourage you to connect with her as well. It will be a memorable experience--just what the doctor ordered!

When did you join IWF and what was your position at that time?

I was an early member of the Professional Women’s Alliance, joining in the 70’s. At the time, I was the Founding Chair of the Department of Occupational of Health at Pacific Presbyterian Medical Center, which later became California Pacific Medical Center. This Department of Occupational Health was the first hospital-based facility west of Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. The Department was created through the vision of business and industry leaders who believed that people should be healthy even though they work. Although I was already trained in internal medicine, infectious diseases, and community medicine, I took another residency in occupational health to get up to speed. I did this at the same time I was creating the new department and raising our delightful daughter with my physician-husband.



One criterion for membership when I joined the Alliance was that a candidate had to be the highest-ranking woman in her organization. Since I was the only woman department chair at PPMC and there were no women higher in the hierarchy, I qualified.

What were the circumstances that prompted you to become one of the founding members?

I joined because I enjoy being part of a group and learning from the others. The opportunity to gain new ideas from smart and talented women outside of my field was another reason. It was such an honor to meet these women who had such diverse

lives. From a professional standpoint, it helped me better understand the unique challenges of women in the workplace. Sadly, I saw the disappointments and frustrations of many high-level women who dealt with hard choices regarding work and family. Their dream of having it all cracked open when they saw they had to give up so much. I saw this as a personal and social tragedy.

What was the most challenging aspect of your career at the time you joined and how did the organization provide support to help you deal with this?

My training was in specialized areas within the medical field so I knew nothing about business. Being with our members helped me learn first-hand about their business interests. This cross-pollination was useful as I developed the Department of Occupational Health. Also, as I became more involved with community activities and served on various boards including Stanford and KQED, I learned from our members who were also involved in not-for-profit endeavors. This helped me from the standpoint of recruiting board talent and in expanding my world-view.

What was the major benefit of membership when you joined either WFW or Professional Women's Alliance? What do you see as the major membership benefit now?

There were two major benefits for me. First, membership opened entire highways of thinking and awareness. It provided me a much broader perspective, instead of my laser focus on medicine. Secondly, it provided me wonderful friendships with a diverse group of smart, spirited, fun (and funny) women. Now, I welcome the opportunity to see my old friends, and regret that I haven't been able to do more of it. I believe that the same benefits are still the heart and soul of IWF today.

How were you involved with the merger of these two groups into WFW?

I was not involved with the merger and don't remember much about that time except that I was warmly welcomed and there was no discord between the two groups.

It's been 35 + years since the Forum started. Do you think it's easier now for women in your field to advance to the top leadership roles? Why or why not?

*It is **not** easier today for women in the academic areas of medicine. There are still very few women medical school deans or even full professors. They still earn less than men of similar rank and are often asked to take on demanding and time consuming assignments that don't provide academic credit for tenure. Also, I think that younger women in medicine (and other professions) do not understand what's ahead of them. Society still has different expectations for women and men. Also, men don't want to give up their power (who does?), and there are only a few who are willing to mentor and help women or other minorities. There is some progress. I am starting to hear about men who want to be more involved with their families too! I am fortunate to have a husband who is enthusiastic about women achieving, perhaps because his mother was a leader in her*

community and had the chops to take on those roles. I bet it's much easier for professional women when their partner has strong female role models.

What do you see as the current challenges/barriers to women's advancement to the top of their field?

I think that culture is a deep vein within the core of our society, and that changes are slow and often subtle. Occasionally there is a large tectonic shift, but it takes a while for it to become the norm. In the science-related fields especially, young women may not be exposed to the courses, personnel and academic information they need to reach the top. I do believe that the "women only" schools give them a better shot at the higher levels of leadership because of a plethora of women role models.

*While I was very fortunate to have several key supporters in my life including my mother, who was an author, a college professor and a classic "housewife", my father, husband and professional colleagues, I **still** had some early resistance to taking on medical leadership roles despite holding earlier posts as chair and president. One example was when Brad Cohn, President of the San Francisco Medical Society wanted to form a new committee on clinics and asked me to be the chair. My perhaps surprising response was, "I am a woman! Do you really want a woman to do that?" While I knew I could do it, I thought that there was less chance of success with an outsider (women were the ultimate outsiders) at the helm. Fortunately, Brad said that he **did** want me in that role because he had confidence in me and knew that my gender did not matter.*

What are you most proud of in your career and your most significant contribution to your profession?

It's hard to know if the professional pebbles we have dropped into the pool of life are making a difference, yet two things come to mind. First, I am proud of the work that I did in the emerging field of occupational health. I was able to transform the concept of a healthy work setting into expanded awareness, action and results. It was and is rewarding to be part of this new movement started by Dr. Alice Hamilton, the first tenured woman faculty member at Harvard Medical School. I am also proud of RENEW, the non-profit I started with several other colleagues. Its focus is to help people be more effective yet calm in their home and work and to learn how to take care of themselves in spite of their many demands. It is designed for all ages and my book "The Fatigue Prescription: Four Steps to Renewing Your Energy, Health and Life" provides ways for people do just that.

What was the best advice you got as you climbed the ladder to success? Is it still relevant for aspiring women leaders today?

I remember two unusual examples that have influenced my life. The first came from my 8th grade teacher, Theresa Fitzgibbons, who said, "Linda, you are smarter than most anyone, and you always will be. Make sure people don't feel that way." Developing a sense of the worth of all people and not undervaluing them based on education or situation served me well especially when I was reviewing occupational environments

including the Golden Gate Bridge project. There I saw how hard people worked and how brave they were to return every day to often-dangerous and unpleasant work. The other piece of advice, which I did not actually embrace, was expressed when I was running for president of a national organization: "You are just too persistent, so tone it down." While I realized that there is often a price to pay for persistence, I knew that being true to myself meant being persistent...even if it was difficult for some people to handle. (I lost the election.)

Harry Truman said, "You can make lots of progress if you don't care who gets the credit." That relates to the advice my teacher gave me and I believe it is still relevant today. Plus, each person needs to understand what it means to be true to their own values. Women leaders need to identify and apply their personal and professional values and ethics, no matter what.

Are you currently retired and if so, was it a challenge to make that transition? What helped you successfully navigate retirement?

I am not retired and in fact do not like the term, since it often has pejorative implications. Instead, my philosophy is to rewire, refire, renew and keep on learning! Fortunately, my profession as a physician and educator does not have time limits; I still teach at Stanford and UCSF. I encourage people young and old to look at life as an experiment and find ways to do projects that grab their interest. I am very engaged, love what I am doing, and look forward to new adventures.

What current programs are of most interest to you and how would you like to be involved with IWF today?

I am always interested in programs in which I can learn and meet with old friends. I especially enjoy the new member luncheon and the opportunities it provides for the infusion of openness and possibilities. I attended Summer Camp for several years and enjoyed that. I continue to look for a combination of intellectual heft and building community. The Book Club looks interesting; the timing and topics have not yet worked for me.

How do you define success?

Success is finding a meaningful and healthy way to serve society, my family and friends.

Final thoughts

The Forum has been an important part of my life. I value it for its substance and the diverse group of women who provide that substance. Several years ago, when my friend, colleague and founder of Common Cause, John W. Gardner was a speaker at a Forum event, he commented, "It's the most impressive group of people I've ever met." True! The values, the conversations and the idea exchange with the members have added immeasurably to my life and career.