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She chose masonry because of her interest in heritage buildings. In the 1960s and 1970s, she lived in an old brick farmhouse on Highway 7. When her family moved out, it fell into disrepair and eventually had to be demolished. "When I see things like that...I just have a thing for old buildings and natural materials, and it really strikes a chord. It's pretty neat. When you take a look at a stone building and see the irregular shape of the stone, that's

they don't understand. "It does require machines, and women aren't necessarily brought up to be very comfortable with machines." But it's all in our heads, she says. She describes herself as "a strong five foot three." "But you know what, it doesn't make any difference. I do what I do, and I do it well. I'm never going to be six feet tall. But that's never had any repercussions for me in these physical jobs."

WE'RE AT A POINT WHERE WE'RE JUST DEFINING OURSELVES FOR OURSELVES. IF I WANT TO GRAB MY TOOLS IN THE MORNING INSTEAD OF PUTTING ON HEELS, IT'S JUST ABOUT WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME

somebody's hand and chisel you're seeing."

Her program at Algonquin included hands-on work and a range of theory—structural engineering, the history of Canadian architecture, drafting, and geology, as well as math and English. Blair says the permanence and creativity of the work also appeal to her. She graduated in August and now has a job helping to restore brickwork on an old school. She says it is physically demanding work but doesn't require superhuman strength (she's just five foot four). Nowadays, there is equipment to do the very heavy lifting.

"I think perhaps women don't really realize they can do it," she says. "Maybe there's not enough publicity telling women this is an option."

CREATIVITY IS ALSO what brought Gerry Davies into the trades. She graduated from Algonquin's furniture-technician program four years ago and says about one-quarter of the class was women. Now, at forty-seven, she has her own business making custom furniture, often using traditional joinery techniques. Heartwood Custom Furniture is run from her home near Manotick.

A former social worker and educator who burned out, she says she loves working with her hands, being self-employed, and having an outlet for her creativity. "Once I get into my shop, the day disappears. I totally get into my head. I think that comes from loving what I do."

But, she says, there are still few women doing what she does. What's holding them back? Davies thinks women are often unfamiliar with the industry culture and fear what

SHIRLEY WESTEINDE also believes that a lack of understanding about the trades is holding women back. "Women don't perhaps think about the creativity that's involved in construction." As baby boomers retire, the skill shortage in the trades is becoming more acute. A surge in interest among women would help counter that.

"It's a major untapped market. If we in the construction industry are wise at all, we're going to continue to make sure we focus on young people, but particularly on the female side of things. I still find that the majority of women, even if they're advised that probably they'd make quite a bit more salary than they would as a waitress or a cleaning lady or whatever, that the majority of them still choose not to take the non-traditional roles. It's a case of, ideally, instilling in them the pride of working in construction."

Lee Farnworth agrees. A former Nepean councillor and current instructor at Algonquin, she worked on many programs in the 1980s and 1990s that were geared at women in the trades. "It's an uphill battle. The same couple of problems arise, despite everything that's happened. There's the isolation that women feel in every non-traditional field. You have to have a certain critical mass for a comfort level. It's a challenging environment. It can be intimidating. We all know there's still harassment."

But for all that, she says, women are making inroads. And with the help of programs such as WIST, more women will enter the trades. "Good things have happened and are continuing to happen."