

'Woman's Work Book' is never done

BY MARILYN MEDER

At first she was constantly observing. Then, with each succeeding year, she became more and more disturbed. Finally, she decided she could stand it no more. So she took some action.

"People needed a book that leveled with them," said Bonnie Siegel. The issue that concerns Ms. Siegel is equal employment opportunities and conditions for women. Coming as a direct outgrowth of her concern is Ms. Siegel's first book, "Woman's Work Book", co-authored by Karin Abarbanel. Published in the fall, 1975, the book is now in its second printing.

Ms. Siegel, a resident of Bedford, says women are caught in a traditional bind when seeking a job. "If you are young, employers think you'll have kids and leave. If you're trying to reenter the market, you're too old," she said.

ONE OF THE ten founders of Westchester-National Organization for Women (NOW), and presently chairwoman of Westchester Business and Industry Task Force, Ms. Siegel has had ample opportunity to view job discrimination against women. She says that a great many problems arise from women's attitudes about themselves.

"Expectations are too high," she emphasized. "I'm really interested in the



BONNIE SIEGEL
... feminist, author

definitely explore the many opportunities available in "non-traditional" fields, such as higher mathematics, medicine and engineering. A tireless worker, who devotes much of her energy to helping women find jobs, Ms. Siegel admits that the struggle has been long and hard. "It is so difficult to get across to women that they don't have what they think they have" says the author shaking her head in frustration. "If you mention dependency, people think you're denigrating the housewife."

Leaning forward in her chair, she becomes more intense. She says when she addressed women's groups they would become enraged with her. "It was rough for me. It's no fun being the object of hostility. I think of those early feminists and how they persevered."

FREELY CALLING herself a feminist, Ms. Siegel says she has encountered no opposition from her own family. "My husband is very supportive. He doesn't have to prove anything."

She is also very concerned about the housewife who seems endlessly tied to her children. "I don't care how much you love your kids, if your mind is percolating you'll discover there are other things to do," she said. "Being a housewife is not a job. It's a condition

and it can clear up," she added with a smile.

Formerly a newspaper-woman, Ms. Siegel and her business partner Jodie Peters are currently working as marketing consultants to corporations in Westchester. As a consultant, Ms. Siegel sees an enormous need for educating men about the great potential of women in the work force. "I would like very much to change the attitudes of these corporations," remarked Ms. Siegel. "We want to show them there's a new market."

THROUGHOUT the conversation, Ms. Siegel kept returning to a key word in her approach to job-hunting: reality. Without it, she says, women will not succeed. "We must deal with how things are, not as we'd wish they'd be. Women are

going to have to become economically independent in order to survive," she said flatly. The author has received calls from many women asking for advice, and she says she can readily sympathize. "Anyone looking for a job really needs support. The only way we're really going to make it is when women help one another. You can't make it on your own."

And how does Ms. Siegel view the working mother and wife? "Marriage is fine. I wouldn't enjoy not being married. It's great," she said. The mother of two sons, Ms. Siegel also says she has a great time watching people's reactions when she tells them that she loves cooking. "It's such a contradiction, since I'm a feminist. It's funny when you don't fit your image," she

said with a smile. "Liberalism begins in the head and ends there."

AND MS. SIEGEL thinks there are lots of advantages to having a working wife and mother. "In a family, you have all the financial advantages, plus the sharing. My husband's found a lot of advantages in it for him."

Reclining back in her

chair, Ms. Siegel gazed thoughtfully out the kitchen window, before succinctly summing up her idea of a happy and secure relationship. "We should all be individually independent and mutually dependent," she said, "and in order to do that, women must be economically independent."

MARILYN MEDER is a freelance writer for Lifestyles.

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