

Upstanding Moments

Maeve Callahan, Videographer & Kathy Leach, Philmont Ranger 1972-1973

Trailblazer Kathy Leach holds the title of first female ranger alongside Nancy Wells. Since her first summer in 1972, Leach has been striving to break barriers that have held women back in Scouting. From: Undaunted, Stories From the Trail, her Women Ranger interviews and an assortment of many other articles and media, Kathy works to document and tell the stories that don't always get told. Most recently she has returned to the Ranch for a visit and new projects. When I asked Kathy about any ideas that she thought should be shared with the wider Ranch audience, she mentioned how the cycles of adversity and therefore self-resilience as a Woman Ranger created an opportunity to be an upstander for others facing similar circumstances. Here, Kathy shares with us the moments worth sharing about being not just a Trailblazer but an Upstander:

Philmont is legendary for tight-knit friendships among staff. Ranger Kat Resman told me how much joy she found in crossing paths with fellow Rangers hiking with their crew in the backcountry. In the space of a few minutes, she re-established those connections by asking, "How is the trek? Where are you going? What did you do on your day off?"

Kat said, "In those brief moments, we pack so much in, in such depth, that it's

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—UPI, Telephoto
Breaking into what previously was an all-male job, 22-year-old Kathy Leach of Laredo and 20-year-old Nancy Wells of Denver guided a group of Boy Scouts on the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

really just a delight. In the off season when I call my Philmont friends, we pack in all these life events in this quick way, and we celebrate each other. What a deep bond it is that you can just pick up right where you left off."

At other times we need to open our hearts and choose to speak up in support of someone who is not being welcomed into a group, for whatever reason. The lone voice speaking the words "Oh no" can be powerfully hurtful when no one else breaks the silence.

The words "Oh no" are what I heard when I summited Baldy with my Ranger Training crew in 1972, the first Woman Ranger in Philmont history to do so. That voice announced to me and everyone else that I was in "enemy territory" despite the Camping Director making the groundbreaking decision to hire two women for the Ranger Department. The worst part of that moment was that no one else spoke up in my support – not the Chief Ranger, not the ACRs, not the Training Rangers.

I experienced that same silence each time I entered the Dining Hall for meals. Even when I entered the Ranger Office to pick up my crew assignment, all conversation would instantly stop. No one would call me by name and ask how my day was going. They all knew who I was, but I did not know a single name. A friend later termed

the phrase “The Oh No Club.” Don’t be a member of the Oh No Club. Here is a story of what genuine support looks like, from a 2022 interview with Willa Pendley as part of Women Ranger Digital Stories project (part of our 50th year anniversary).

Willa recalls, “I think I was just raised to be a Ranger. I think that especially being raised by a female Ranger from the 80’s, that it’s powerful to be in a position of leadership. I faced the same struggles that my mom struggled with, unfortunately, with having to deal a lot with male advisors and the comments that they make and learning how to just kind of brush those off your shoulder, because ultimately you know that you’re capable and that you’re doing what you love.”

Willa talked about a difficult crew who challenged her instructions on bear procedures. The crew asked a male Ranger walking by to explain the correct bear practices. The other Ranger said to the crew, “Listen to YOUR Ranger. She had the same Philmont training that I had, and she is completely knowledgeable and capable in all areas.” That was the end of the discussion.

In Kathy’s words, always be an upstander: Your silence is as hurtful as thoughtless words. Find moments to be an UPSTANDER, not a bystander. In a recent Scouts BSA survey, 27% of female Scouts were told by adult advisors that they “did not belong.” It is long past time to embrace the great wealth of diversity in our culture. Step out of your comfort zone, be an Upstander, and truly make Philmont a universal experience for all our youth.

Despite the near forty-year gap in the experiences of Kathy, Kat, and Willa, there still remains a vast overlap of experiences amongst Women Rangers and their stories are all too relatable to my time and to many other women at Philmont or Scouting in general. The adversity that the first Women Rangers had to endure should become a remnant of the past. By being Upstanders, not just for ourselves but for our coworkers and fellow Scouts around us, we are able to,



in Kathy’s words, “change our culture of uncertainty to empowerment, and reach beyond what society offers to us.”

Kathy is currently serving on a national task force for Scouting America called Girls and Women Equity and Inclusion. She has been developing a prototype for a central online resource for Girls and Women where she frequently publishes interviews with Philmont staff. Check out the FAQ tab for an historical timeline of women trailblazers in Scouting. See <https://WomenInScoutingBlog.wordpress.com>



Top left: Kathy Leach (left) and Nancy Wells (right) pose for a picture in the Dallas Times Herald in 1972. **Top:** Kathy Leach stands on top of Touch Me Not in Cimarroncita in 1969.