

# **"SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE"**

## **An RWTO East Parry Sound Branch Skit**

### **Cast:**

**-2 narrators, one on each side of stage**

**-choir**

### **Actors for:**

**Scene 1: New Beginnings: 3 contemporary teachers, newly retired**

**Scene 2: Women of Vision: Bena McCowan, Anna Hunter, Laura Cook, Winnifred Balfour**

**Scene 3: The Not So Golden Years: 3 elderly retired teachers**

**Scene 4: Letter Writing and Action: Bena, Anna, Laura and Winnifred**

**Scene 5: Insurance and Independence: 'dancers' with canes**

**Scene 6: FWTAO and Equity causes: young mothers for lullaby**

### **Scene 1: New Beginnings**

*(on steps in front of school – centre stage – present day 3 newly retired teachers are walking away from the school, discussing their upcoming retirement plans.)*

**Teacher 1:** We are so fortunate to have a good pension to rely on for a comfortable life. After 30 wonderful years, I am sure I will miss some aspects of teaching, but right now I am looking forward to lots of traveling.

**Teacher 2:** I am looking forward to more gardening time and other hobbies.

**Teacher 3:** I am going to move into a new condo. Life is good.

**Teacher 1:** Yes, we are very lucky.

*(some happy chatter as they exit from stage - they then take their place at the choir area.)*

**NARRATOR ONE:** – stage right

Our new retirees should know that it wasn't always this way. It was not luck that provided us with our good pensions. It was the caring and determination of many women. Years ago, women teachers did not have our benefits and comfortable retirement income. To improve this situation, it was the women who had to push for changes; no one else was going to do it.

**Please join us as we sing Stanza 1.**

**CHOIR:** sings Stanza 1

How do we solve the problem of our pensions?  
How can we make retirement years all right?

**(WHAT DO WE DO?)  
(ANY IDEAS?)**

**The government needs to hear**

**The path for us now is clear,**

**We'll do our part; we'll organize and fight**

**SPEAK THESE 3 LINES**

**(WE WILL?)**

Oh, how do we solve the problem of our pensions?  
For us and for our future sisters' sake.

**(WE WILL!)**

.....  
**NARRATOR TWO:** - stage left

In 1917 The Teachers' Superannuation Act became law to provide financial support for retired teachers. After 40 years of teaching, a pension of between \$365- \$1000 would be provided annually.

In 1949, retiring teachers would have their pensions based on the salary of their last 15 years of teaching. However, those who had retired before that time remained at the pension poverty level of 1917. - most of them women.

**ALL: SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE!**

**NARRATOR TWO:** : Please join us in singing **Stanza 2**

**CHOIR:** sings Stanza 2

How do we solve the problem of our pensions?  
How can we make retirement years all right?

**(LETTERS!)  
(WE'LL PERSIST)**

**Our demands we must speak out**

**We might even have to shout**

**Past and present pensions aren't okay.**

**{SPEAK THESE 3 LINES}**

**(CERTAINLY NOT)**

Oh, how do we solve the problem of our pensions?  
We must have fair, just pensions right away.

**(QUEEN'S PARK!)**

.....

## **Scene 2: Women of Vision**

*Anna Hunter, Laura Cook, Bena McCowan, Winnifred Balfour are discussing what they could do to draw attention to the meager retirement pensions and hard life of elderly retired teachers.*

**Anna:** We must get support for our fellow retirees who have such low pensions.

**Bena:** There must be something we can do! These dedicated teachers are women who worked through WW1, The Depression, WW2 with salary freezes, and now they live in poverty.

**Laura:** Let's start a letter writing campaign! We'll write letters to let people know that teachers' pensions must be increased.

**Winnifred:** Fine idea, Laura. We'll send letters to the newspapers and present briefs to the Legislature. We'll describe some actual case histories so people will understand our concern and the situations of these retired women teachers.

(more discussion and ad-libbing as needed)

**NARRATOR ONE:** stage right

Anna Hunter, Bena McCowan, Laura Cook, Winnifred Balfour and many others began a tireless letter writing campaign to get attention for their cause. These women were selfless, visionary and just. Their goal was to gain better pensions and to improve the plight of elderly retired teachers. Women's salaries were lower than those of men, rural teachers were paid less than their urban counterparts. The inequalities in the salaries of the profession resulted in even greater inequality in pensions of retirees.

**ALL:      SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE!**

### **Scene 3: The Not So Golden Years**

*3 teachers walk or are escorted to the centre of the stage. These are 3 of the case histories described in the letter writing campaign. As they enter, the narrator tells about each situation:*

#### **NARRATOR TWO:**

Meet Miss Emily Smith, an 80 year old woman who has taught for 45 years. She is now confined to a wheelchair, and has had to give up her home owing to financial hardship. Miss Smith has a pension of \$51.00 each month.

#### **NARRATOR ONE:**

Miss Geraldine Proctor is a retired teacher who is going blind and is living alone. She has no family. Miss Proctor has to survive on a pension of \$25.00 per month.

#### **NARRATOR TWO:**

Here is Miss Esther King, a 93 year old retired teacher who is almost totally deaf and blind. She is receiving \$50 each month after 43 years of service.

There are many other examples of struggling pensioners like these women.

**ALL: SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE!**

## **Scene 4: Letter Writing and Action**

*Letter writing or mailing in background onstage - Laura, Anna, Bena, Winnifred and others are standing or seated around a table, writing and chatting*

### **NARRATOR ONE:**

Anna Hunter, Bena McCowan, Laura Cook, Winnifred Balfour and many others continued their letter writing campaign to address women's pension issues. The Rendezvous Club, with its motto "To Care and Share", had been formed in 1937. It was the first group of retired teachers ever formed in Canada and its aim was to address the issues that would improve pensions for women.

### **NARRATOR TWO:**

The women wrote continuously, and more women joined them - to their MP's, to daily newspapers and to weekly newspapers. Their brief to the Legislature was unsuccessful. No progress was made because the government argued that the women did not represent all retired teachers and, if the womens' pensions were adjusted, other professions were sure to seek pension adjustments as well. The government stated that it had no money to support this venture. But this setback would not deter these women.

## **ALL: SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE!**

### **NARRATOR ONE:**

And eventually something was done. In 1966, retired men and women teachers joined forces to form the Superannuated Teachers of Ontario. That group was recognized by the Ontario Government.

## **Scene 5: Insurance and Independence**

*Several actors at the front, props could include canes*

**ALL: But there was more to do.... Retiring women teachers all faced one common worry, how to maintain their independence in the face of inevitable health issues.**

**NARRATOR : Please join us as we sing “The Insurance Song”**

**CHOIR: sings “The Insurance Song”**

When you're fifty, going on sixty,  
Lady, it's time to think,  
Better beware, be canny and careful,  
Lady, you're on the brink!

I am sixty, heading for seventy,  
Good health might not be there,  
And if that happens, how will I pay for  
Assistance and extra care?

I am seventy, bracing for eighty,  
Worry! I can't afford  
Hospital visits, home service workers.  
What am I going to do?

*If aging and illness is our fate  
To cope with on our own  
We want to stay strong, and confident  
Remaining in control.*

Enter our sisters, caring and sharing,  
Added insurance too...ooo,  
You are sixty, seventy, eighty...  
RW takes ca..re of you...and you....and you.

**NARRATOR TWO:**

The Ontario Association of Superannuated Women Teachers knew that an independent lifestyle was of utmost importance to its membership. In 1961, dialogue began to create a unique insurance plan, tailored specifically to OASWT members. Benefits were expanded in 1974, to include spouses. The focus for our insurance was and remains to provide care and assistance for retired women teachers to enable them to continue living independently for as long as possible. From their efforts, our unique insurance was created. It provides extra care and reassurance and continues to this day to give RWTO/OERO members benefits for only \$14.53 per month.

## Scene 6: FWTAO and Equity Causes

**ALL:** But there was **STILL** more to be done....and more...and more.

**NARRATOR ONE:** FWTAO, our union for women teachers, picked up the fight and took on many equity causes. **Please join us as we sing Stanza 3.**

**CHOIR :** *sings* **Stanza 3**

How do we solve the problem of pay equity?  
Why do these men get more and we get less?

**Oh, what do they think of us,  
We won't sit at the back of their bus, {SPEAK THESE 3 LINES}  
We shall demand our fair and equal pay.**

Oh, we will solve the problem of pay equity,  
United we can right this wrong today!

.....

**NARRATOR TWO:**

Women teachers now had better pensions and pay equity in 1966, but there was another important issue that pertained solely to women, the issue of maternity leave. **Please join us as we sing Stanza 4**

**CHOIR:** *sings* **Stanza 4**

How do we solve the problem of our Mat. Leave?  
More time with pay is what we all can use.

**While being at home is great  
Our teaching career's at stake, {SPEAK THESE 2 LINES}**

**Jobs must be there for us when we return, (ELEANOR'S SOLO)**

Oh, we will solve the problem of our Mat. Leave?  
This is another right that we will earn.

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## **Scene 6 (continued)**

*actors .....representing young mothers.... move to the centre of the stage.*

**Narrator One: Please join us as we sing the 'I'm On Leave' Lullaby**

**CHOIR:** sings the "I'm On Leave' Lullaby" with actions

Married now, Baby mine!  
I'm so worried, conflicted.

Keep my job, give up my pension?  
We deserve time together!

Maternity leave  
Would be fair and right,  
Pay back the dues for our pension.

Return to our place, NOT in disgrace,  
NO longer second class citizens.

**CORA CORA    BAILEY    CLAP CLAP    BAILEY    CLAP CLAP**

**CORA CORA    BAILEY    CLAP CLAP    BAILEY    CLAP CLAP**

Cora Bailey, our first teacher executive secretary, created RWTO's organizational infrastructure, giving a foundation for the present RWTO/OERO. She initiated and developed the role of executive secretary. This allowed the organization to provide continuity of service and information through the changes of presidents and executives. Her work on membership, insurance, and convention guidelines is still used today.

### **NARRATOR TWO:**

Although women have made many strides forward over the years, we must remain vigilant, protecting our pensions, our rights and benefits.

**ALL: IT IS OUR NEVER-ENDING STORY.**



## **FINALE:**

**Narrator Two: Please join us in singing Stanza 5**

**CHOIR:** *sings Stanza 5*

Now you have heard a bit about our history,  
And about the women who've led the way

**Once retired life was bleak,  
But, now it is pretty sweet.            {SPEAK THESE 3 LINES}  
Our thanks to them, we give this very day.**

Oh, we can now remember how things once were.  
Their efforts gave us what we enjoy today!

**All actors and choir members move to the centre of the stage**

### **NARRATOR ONE:**

Our RWTO/OERO history is inspiring. Thanks to Lee Beech for writing it all down in her book, Uncommon Women.

There are many more individual memories and great stories of how things have changed over the years.

What do YOU remember?

**NARRATOR ONE: Join us once more in singing Stanza 5.**

**CHOIR:** *sings stanza 5 again.. (as the cast exits down the centre aisle, carrying their signs and other props.)*

Now you have heard a bit about our history,  
And about the women who've led the way

**Once retired life was bleak,  
But, now it is pretty sweet.            {SPEAK THESE 3 LINES}  
Our thanks to them, we give this very day.**

Oh, we can now remember how things once were.  
Their efforts gave us what we enjoy today!