

**Why did we join? Why have we stayed?**

Membership in a women's barbershop chorus: A narrative inquiry into leadership, learning, and the development of voice through singing

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## Dedication

To the wonderful women I have met through *Harmony, Inc.* and my local chapter, *The Atlantic Sounds*, thank you for adding a blend of friendship to my life! I joined for a night and have stayed for more than 20 years!

To the women who participated in this inquiry- -who listened to my ideas, who gave me feedback, and who shared my joy, confusion, and epiphanies at every point in my journey. Thank you! I could not have done it without you!

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## Table of Content

Dedication .....	ii
Table of Content .....	iii
Abstract .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	5
Chapter 2: The Context.....	14
<i>Social Behavior of Groups</i> .....	14
<i>Women's Groups</i> .....	17
<i>Leisure</i> .....	21
<i>Adult Education</i> .....	33
<i>Metaphors</i> .....	39
<i>Barbershop Music</i> .....	41
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	48
<i>The Qualitative Genre</i> .....	48
<i>Researcher's Role</i> .....	51
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	54
<i>Site and Population Selection</i> .....	57
Chapter 4: Stories.....	59
<i>Jan's Story</i> .....	61
<i>Rosemary's Story</i> .....	81
<i>Marney's Story</i> .....	96
<i>Natasha's Story</i> .....	114
Chapter 5: Analysis and Reflections .....	127
<i>Analysis</i> .....	127
<i>"Why did we join?" Visual Representation</i> .....	132
<i>What attracts women to this particular activity?</i> .....	132
<i>"Why did we stay?" Visual Representation</i> .....	136
<i>What are the common themes that keep members involved over time?</i> .....	136
<i>How does education and learning intersect with the membership experience?</i> ....	154
<i>Reflections</i> .....	156
<i>Future Research</i> .....	158
References .....	160
Appendixes .....	164
<i>Appendix A: Information Letter</i> .....	164
<i>Appendix B: Consent Form</i> .....	167
<i>Appendix C: Interview Questions for Participants</i> .....	169
<i>Appendix D: Focus Group</i> .....	173
<i>Appendix E: Harmony, Inc. Creed, and Theme Songs</i> .....	174
<i>Appendix F: A Poem</i> .....	175

## **Abstract**

This narrative inquiry explores the experiences of four members of a women's barbershop singing organization. The questions are explored by identifying the common themes that attracted them initially and kept them dedicated and committed over the years. They joined and stayed for many reasons including friendship, opportunities for personal growth, the experience of singing, challenge, the supportive culture, education, and fun.

This work explores literature in the fields of social behaviour of groups, leisure, women's groups, adult education, leadership, and barbershop singing. It will be of interest to volunteer, leisure, or any organization that struggles with the issues of recruitment and retention. Educators will learn of the importance and practical ways of nurturing self-confidence, self-esteem and risk-taking in their students.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It was a warm September evening as my new friend, Noreen\*, and I wandered through the halls of one of the city's junior high schools. We were looking for a group of women who sang barbershop harmony. The ad on the radio said the meeting of the *Atlantic Sounds*\* started at 7:00 p.m. Although I had sung in high school and church choirs, I was a little nervous because I felt I had ruined my voice while at university shouting cheers of encouragement for my teammates on the swim team. Noreen, who had directed a barbershop chorus in another city, said my voice would come back with proper training and I should not worry about it.

Noreen and I had met only a month before at a party. Neither of us knew many of the people who were milling around and we ended up sitting on the couch next to each other. Casual conversation covered the usual topics of the weather, family, and the food being served. Chatting came easily and within minutes we learned that, between us, we had four children under the age of five and we had very busy lives. On the other hand, we were both at the point where we wanted a leisure activity "just for us," something that would get us out of our homes for a few hours a week, that did not involve diapers, and that promised to be fun. Gradually, the discussion turned to singing. It turned out that neither of us felt we were soloists, but we both loved to sing.

\* All names of persons and the name of the chapter, the *Atlantic Sounds* are fictitious.

Noreen shared with me her previous involvement and experience with barbershop singing. I had never sung a cappella but thought that barbershop was an interesting form of music. We exchanged phone numbers at the end of the evening, and when I heard the ad on the radio a week later, I called to see if she would like to go.

We paused at the end of the school's main hall and heard the faint sound of a chord breaking and the beginning of what sounded like a vocal warm-up exercise. As we followed the sound, my heart beat faster and thoughts raced through my head. "What will these people be like? Will I be able to sing with them? What will they think of my voice? Can I sing at all? Do I have to read music?" I spoke to Noreen in whispers, "Are we late? Should we have brought anything with us? Do you know anyone in the group?"

We peeked around the doorframe of the classroom they used. It must have been the school's music room because instruments were lined up along the wall and an old upright piano stood in the corner. There they were--fifteen women of various ages and sizes standing in a semi-circle in front of hard plastic chairs. A rather tall man with an erect posture and lots of hair stood in the front of the women waving his arms. When they saw us, they stopped and sixteen smiles appeared, words of welcoming followed, and a warm blanket of friendship enveloped us.

That was 1983. I could never have guessed that walking into that room was a life-altering event, an event that would gradually but subtly change my life. Thus, I began a journey that would take me from being a new, scared-to-open-my-mouth prospective member, to being a leader within the local, regional, and national organizations. My

involvement with this organization changed the way I think about relationships, learning, conflict, and leadership. It provided me with the experience, skills, and confidence to continue my education and to apply for challenging employment opportunities.

At the time, however, orientation to this group overwhelmed me. I felt swamped with information about the organization and its structure, confused with faces and names to connect and remember, and weighed down with the number of pieces of music we had to learn and memorize. At night, the songs I was learning stayed in my head and kept me awake. I could hear the sounds of four-part harmony blending together like the flowers in a garden, each part separate and identifiable, yet together creating a beautiful collage of colour. When I listened to my barbershop learning tapes, I was excited to be learning a new form of singing, and I was a little nervous that I might not be able to do this very well.

Time has marched on. More than two decades have passed since that evening in 1983. I conquered those early fears and learned more than I ever thought I could learn. The songs that were such a struggle to learn come back to mind even after years of taking them off the repertoire list. The faces and names that I could not remember have become dear and devoted friends.

As I look at old chorus pictures, I realize many women have joined, stayed for a few months or a few years, and then left. Sometimes, the women who leave the group stay in touch and participate in social activities; others are lost to us completely. But there is a group of faces that appears in almost every picture. Our sizes, shapes, and perhaps

hair colours have changed slightly, but the smiles and the eyes remain the same. Looking at these faces, the ones with whom I struggled to connect so many years ago, has helped me create the question, “Why did we join? And, even more importantly, “Why have we stayed?”

My story covers 20 years. It was only through my studies at university and reading books such as *Composing a Life* (Bateson, 1990), *Narrative Inquiry* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000); *Composing Ethnography* (Ellis & Bochner, 1996); and *I Know Just What You Mean* (Goodman & O’Brien, 2000) that I realized the telling of my story along with the stories of other women from this group could be a legitimate form of research and one that would add value to the body of knowledge on women, leisure, and learning. It will also assist groups and organizations interested in membership retention. The findings will be of special interest to the *Atlantic Sounds* and *Harmony, Inc.*, which are the two non-profit organizations in which I have become an active member.

The *Atlantic Sounds* is a women’s barbershop chorus in Atlantic Canada and part of an international singing organization, *Harmony, Inc.* Over the span of twenty years, the chorus membership has been as low as 18 and high as 46. During the days when membership was its peak, a joke was made that we did not want to have more members than we could put on a bus to take to contest. A bus has 48 seats. During the low times, we wish we had the problem of fitting everyone in one bus.

Members of *Harmony, Inc.* often use the term *chorus* and *chapter* interchangeably. When speaking about the administrative affairs, the term *chapter* is

used. *Chorus* is used to describe the singing elements. For example, “The *chorus* will perform next week in its annual fundraising performance,” or “The *chapter* board of directors meets once a month.”

The *Atlantic Sounds* was established in 1980 and officially joined the parent organization in 1982. It had about 18 members when I began my journey in 1983. Of those original members, only one is still active within the chorus. Of the ten that joined when I did, four of us remain active members today.

### **The Inquiry**

This inquiry is reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In ethnography, there is an assumption that “ethnographers cannot stand above and outside what they study” (Ellis & Bochner, 1996, p. 19). I begin the ethnography with my personal story and explore and reflect on my memories with the chorus. I then explore the experiences of three other women who have been long-time members of the same singing group. The participants read each other’s stories (with permission) as well as the analysis from my interpretation of our stories. We then meet, as a group, to discuss the interpretation and to provide yet another collective perspective.

I have used four participants (including myself) because it has significance in the musical domain about which I am writing. Barbershop is a form of music usually sung by four people of the same gender singing four different vocal parts: Tenor, Lead, Baritone, and Bass. Including the three other women in my inquiry will broaden my perspective on the question, “Why did we join? Why have we stayed?” In addition, it will allow me to

look for themes that may be different from my own. Like barbershop singing where four voices create a complex harmony that reflects each person's individual voice and her personality, this inquiry will view the question from multiple subject positions while also searching for the similarities, resonance, and harmony that exists in these relationships.

I joined because I love to sing, I wanted to create something of my own, and I wanted to be able to talk to women about something other than parenting issues. However, I stayed for very different reasons. The singing, of course, remains an important constant, but it is the friendships and shared experiences, the musical education, the laughter we share, and the feeling of acceptance that keeps me faithful. Over the years I have developed self-confidence, and built on my skills in communication, conflict resolution, and leadership. I have heard others share the same or similar thoughts about their involvement. The stories of the other participants will provide additional insight into these and other issues as they have experienced them.

Because this research may be used by groups to understand how to recruit and retain members, I was interested in understanding what attracts women to this particular activity. A challenge bigger than attracting new members is keeping them for more than a few months or a few years and identifying the ingredients needed to keep them committed. These issues are always on the agenda of chapters within *Harmony, Inc.* as well as other non-barbershop organizations. Understanding why individuals join and what makes them stay is critical to successful membership drives and retention plans for any group or organization.



Belonging to this organization is a commitment that is greater than just attending a weekly three-hour get together of people who like to sing. It requires study and vocal practice, additional rehearsals, participation in performances as well as travel and participation in contests and educational events. The monetary cost includes monthly dues, travel expenses, and the purchase or sewing of costumes. There is also a strong culture within this organization that is very evident: tradition, procedures (written and unwritten), and structures are very important and keep the chorus functioning efficiently both musically and administratively. Members are encouraged to participate in administrative and/or musical leadership roles; for example, as a member of the board of directors, or on the music team. Members must be excellent time managers because most work outside of the home, have family commitments, and may be involved in other community activities.

The music often carries with it a steep learning curve and the musical leaders use a variety of teaching methods to speed up the learning process and thus the enjoyment of the music. Most members do not read music and have not had any formal vocal training. Vocal and musical education is one of the primary byproducts of this hobby and it is also what attracts already accomplished singers.

The stories of these women will create a harmonic movement and a symphony of words that reveals a progression of experiences that will add surprise, interest, and tension to this inquiry. Arthur Bochner (1996) puts it very well when he states the following:

We need to see the knowledge we're seeking in ethnography as the kind that helps readers use other people's sorrows and triumphs as a way to reflect on or recontextualize their own, enhancing their capacity to cope with life's contingencies. (p. 27)

"Why did we join? Why have we stayed" are two questions that are as vast and multi-faceted as the individuals who have touched the soul of this group. To truly understand the answers to these questions, it is important to listen carefully to the participants' stories and to encourage them to explore their thoughts and memories in ways that allow us to identify and understand how membership has impacted their lives.

This inquiry has been a process of dialogue and reflection. It explores both the resonance and dissonance that emerges within a voluntary organization where cooperative relationships are crucial for success.

I have organized the study in five separate chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, has provided a background of how I came to be involved in the *Atlantic Sounds* and some information that will allow the reader to move freely through the other chapters.

Chapter 2, The Context, examines current literature on the themes identified through the stories. The literature review will remain separate so as not to disturb the flow of the story or the reader's enjoyment and involvement with each storyteller.

Chapter 3, Methodology, reviews the methodology and rationale for this type of inquiry.

In Chapter 4, Stories, you will meet the four women about whose lives this study is written. They will share their personal experiences about membership in the *Atlantic Sounds*.

Chapter 5, Analysis and Reflections, completes the inquiry. It is hoped that the reader will engage and reflect throughout the inquiry and develop useful personal knowledge. It is in this section that the question “how is it useful?” is more fully explored. Three questions that will be answered include:

- What attracts women to this particular activity?
- What are the common themes that keep members involved over time?
- How does education and learning intersect with the membership experience?

In the appendixes, I have located the various forms I used with the participants (Appendixes A – D) additional information on *Harmony, Inc.* (Appendix E), and a poem written by one of our founding members about traveling to our contest (Appendix F).

## Chapter 2: The Context

This inquiry explores literature written about the social behavior of groups, women's groups, leisure, adult education, and barbershop music. In the literature about women's groups, I compare the benefits of leisure and therapeutic groups and explore friendship and conflict, voice, and self-identity.

### *Social Behavior of Groups*

Social psychology studies groups and group behavior as it impacts the individual. It looks at how individuals perform in situations where a group is present or can be interpreted as present (Kasschau, 2001, p. 544). The *Atlantic Sounds* meets the three criteria Kasschau establishes for being a group. First, we do things together and we interact and communicate with each other. Second, we share a common identity and goals. Third, in order for us to retain our identity and our membership, our members share certain common desires or purposes. As a competing chorus, a common purpose is to prepare for and to attend our annual regional competition. Our chapter is a cooperative one where everyone works towards achieving a common goal. Although we are not considered competitive internally (we do not have different teams competing against each other for status or prizes), our parent organization offers a competitive environment. It organizes and delivers a number of contests that offer fun, challenge, and rewards, while at the same time building on relationships, coaching, and education.

Over the years, our chorus has held many goal-setting sessions during which we identify and establish short- and long-term goals. Some years we reach these goals and other years we fall short. However, Kasschau (2001) might point out the following:

To achieve the groups' goals, members should remember the lessons for preventing "groupthink." Make sure that the minority viewpoints are heard in the group. A "democracy" runs on the basis of majority will. But every group must assure that the "loyal opposition" (often a minority point of view) is heard. (p. 555)

The lesson for us is to ensure that the process is open and that all members have the opportunity to communicate their ideas and concerns in a way that works for them. It is a challenge for the leaders to remain aware that not all opinions are being voiced and they must employ new or different strategies to hear everyone. Our chapter was established and built on the by-laws and standing rules of *Harmony, Inc.* A fundamental philosophy of this organization is that democracy shall exist at all levels and each member in the organization will have an equal vote.

During the years when goals are achieved, productivity and performance are truly in harmony. Musically and administratively, we achieve more collectively than we can as individuals. Kasschau (2001) states:

In some situations we might be able to explain the group effects because the group itself depends on the contributions of all its members. Each member senses the need to "do a little extra" to keep the group active since the group offers satisfactions that each member would not get without the group. It is feared that without these activities, the group would cease to exist. (p. 559)

In the *Atlantic Sounds*, every member works on, or has worked on, a committee which impacts the success of the organization.

Group norms and conformity can help groups achieve their goals. However, it can also be seen as unattractive to individuals who do not share the vision or who cannot see how the vision will be achieved. The pressure to conform is always present and the group leader must use appropriate skills to ensure that the conformity is comprised of individual beliefs and not created from pressure and “groupthink.” If contrary ideas are not expressed, individuals fall into the illusion of unanimity where they think everyone in the group is in favour of a particular action. This creates pressure to conform, and unproductive and unreasonable expectations can be created (Kasschau, 2001, p. 560-563). This can also create surprises for the leaders when they think they are making a decision that will please everyone, and they find out later that there is no support for the idea.

Although the *Atlantic Sounds* is, by Kasschau’s (2001) definition, a group, there are many types of sub-groups, and each member belongs to at least one, if not more. For example, I belong to the Bass section, I am currently in two quartets, and I am on several committees. According to Kasschau, besides contributing to the achievement of established goals, being in small groups provides benefits such as pooled ideas, protection from other groups, and safety in numbers. If a sub-committee of the board recommends a change in the standing rules, no one person has to take credit (or blame) for the recommendation. The strength comes in having a number of people with different points of view and perspective working together for the common good (pp. 561-562).

Kasschau (2001) points out that, "If a group stops meeting your needs, you are very likely to drop out" (p. 547). These few simple words sum up the membership and retention dilemma very well. In other words, members will- -and do- -leave. Although why members leave was not the focus of this study, it usually comes up during discussions about membership, and I feel that further study in this area will be very useful.

### ***Women's Groups***

Much of the research about women in groups has been from a therapeutic perspective. Sharon Horne (1999) states the following:

Women's groups have been central in the development of contemporary group work. From the initiation of conscious-raising groups of the 1960s, to feminist therapy and support groups in the 1980s, to the advent of member-led international action groups and Internet groups in the 1990s, women have made important contributions to the field of group work. (p. 231)

***Leisure vs. therapeutic groups: Differences.*** Initially one wonders what a leisure group, such as a women's singing group like the *Atlantic Sounds*, has in common with the women's therapeutic groups as described in the work of Horne (1999) and Kees (1999). In *Harmony, Inc.*, there is no explicit mandate regarding therapy and identity development as there often is in the groups that Horne and Kees examine. The structure and operation of these groups are very different in that therapeutic groups typically have 4 to 12 members, while our barbershop chorus strives to have a minimum of 35 members; therapeutic group members are encouraged to share during meetings while chorus members are asked to hold chatting and discussion until break and to ask questions at specific times; therapeutic group members usually sit in a circle while our chorus has two

formations- -the first in chairs for our business meetings or learning new music, and the second standing on sets of risers that elevate the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> rows of singers off the floor, (Kirsh 1987 as cited in Horne 1999, p. 233).

There are other differences between leisure and therapeutic groups in that it is the practice of a therapeutic group for members not to have contact with each other between meetings. In the *Atlantic Sounds*, many friendships are formed on the risers and have lasted beyond the Tuesday evening rehearsal. For example, on my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, I celebrated with 17 current and former members of the chorus. Only nine were active members; the others had left for personal reasons but still remain friends and stay in touch. We often attend community events together, we go to each other's parties, and sometimes our children become friends.

In my early years with the chorus, one of the members, Jeanie, and I became friends and we discovered we had boys born within a month of each other. Every Saturday for a winter I drove to the city with my two children. I would drop my daughter off at piano lessons and my son and I would then drive to Jeanie's house. The boys played while Jeanie and I would chat. She would make a light lunch for us while I picked up my daughter. For another hour or two we sat and enjoyed a social and friendly get together. The boys remained friends for a number of years after the piano-lesson outings stopped.

Although this was not a therapeutic session, it often had the benefits. We talked about the problems associated with raising children, and the struggles we had with our



music. Jeanie was an excellent musician and she often helped me with a new piece of music.

***Leisure vs. therapeutic groups: Similarities.*** While the differences are evident, there are also many similarities, for example therapeutic group meetings are held at regular intervals and attendance is valued greatly (Kirsh, 1987, as cited in Horne 1999, p. 233). These similarities are also true for our chorus. In fact, attendance is documented and prior to a major performance attendance is often compulsory. Attendance is crucial because each voice contributes to the overall sound of the group. One person's voice can alter the sound of the entire group and we depend on each other to make the sounds that people will want to hear. Recently a singing coach spent a day with the *Atlantic Sounds* and did what we call a "voice placement." The coach had each person sing the first line of *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*. She then positioned the individuals next to each other based on their resonance and voice qualities. Moving a person from the left to the right side of another person made a difference in the sound that we could actually hear.

Horne (1999) states that support groups are typically facilitated by trained group leaders who are familiar with the particular issue addressed in the group. This is also true of the *Atlantic Sounds*. The musical and administrative leaders in the chapter often start out as members with very few responsibilities. Over the years, these leaders learn the skills required to direct the chorus, facilitate a discussion during a business meeting, or manage a project such as a public performance.

The literature reveals that many of the outcomes of therapeutic women's groups can be similar to the outcomes of women's leisure groups. In her research of women's groups Kees (1999) discusses the "thriving" that can and does occur through participation in women's groups. Kees discusses the fact that while researchers have studied group psychotherapy for women dealing with breast cancer, and others have studied the use of support groups, little is written about leisure groups such as the *Atlantic Sounds* that have a focus of singing and where support and friendship is a major benefit. The research done by Kees and others in the field focuses on women's groups from a therapeutic and support-group perspective; however, many of the same benefits occur even though these are not the primary focus or purpose of the group.

In an email message from N. Kees (personal communications, July 31, 2003 and August 14, 2003), she stated, "I think your research could build on our knowledge of women's groups in general and the benefits of those not necessarily set up as support groups, such as your singing group." And, "I like the parallels you are finding between leisure groups and therapeutic groups." Although it is not the sole purpose of this research to delve deeply into the similarities and differences of these two groups, it certainly warrants future study.

In *Practice Trends in Women's Groups*, Kees and Leech (in press) describe the goal of the chapter they are writing, "is to provide an inclusive view of women joining together in groups for individual growth, support, and empowerment as well as for social action and systemic change" (§ 2). Although the chapter is essentially looking at the

practices of working with women in groups, it was a startling revelation to read that many of the benefits can be associated with the benefits of membership in the *Atlantic Sounds*. While social action and systemic change might initially be a stretch, involvement with our group has been a catalyst for change for many women. This may tie in with Shaw's (2001) description of women's leisure as political practice which can enhance individual empowerment.

Kees and Leech (in press) discuss addressing current research, "that has focused on addressing the needs of women with common histories such as eating disorders, substance abuse, and sexual abuse" (§ 3). I believe that involvement in the *Atlantic Sounds* has made it possible for some women to receive therapeutic results without joining a therapeutic support group. We have supported each other through marriages, divorces, abuse, deaths, change of employment situations, graduate schools, health concerns, kids growing up and having troubles, and probably many other issues that may, in the general female population, result in the formation of a self-help group.

### ***Leisure***

Research in the area of leisure may offer a better perspective on the phenomena of long-time membership with this singing group. Leisure is the time not spent at work or in performing some sort of duty. Most women do not have much "leisure time" and understanding how women view leisure- -its importance, benefits, and costs- -will be important information for the *Atlantic Sounds*.

Henderson, Hodges & Kivel (2002) carried out an examination of recent research about women and leisure from 1996-2000.

The norm for leisure research up until the early 1980s was the leisure experience of men. In 20 years, a shift occurred in making women's leisure visible. Yet, the continued focus on women in relation to men without explicit analysis of the complexity of the relationships will not move theoretical thinking forward. (p. 266)

Early leisure research focused on feminist theory and "feminism has become a commonly accepted philosophical approach to studying women, and the field of leisure research seems to be moving into a post feminist age" (Scruton, 1994).

Raymore (2002) provides an ecological perspective on the relationship between facilitators (enablers) and constraints (inhibitors) and suggests that every individual will choose to belong or not to participate in a leisure activity based on their own personal facilitators and constraints. "Facilitators to leisure are factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individuals to enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and to encourage or enhance participation" (p. 39). In other words, resources for leisure might include, for example, a friend or family member who will baby-sit regularly. However, the fact that a woman has a friend or family member that will baby-sit regularly does not necessarily mean that the woman will join our organization. Raymore states that "A constraint is a condition that keeps individuals from participating" (p. 40). For example, membership fees may be too expensive for some women; however, the fact that a woman has enough money to pay the fees does not necessarily mean she will join our organization.

A study by Deem (1986) of England determined that, "women's leisure is much more constrained than men's and occurs relatively less often in proportion to work, whilst

taking rather different forms and occurring in different locations and contexts” (p. 8). At that time--1980s- -the types of leisure activities that were acceptable for women were dependant on how they were perceived by the husband. If the activities might lead the woman to independent thinking or put the woman in situations where men would be present, they were considered unacceptable. While times have changed and we hope that progress has been made in 27 years, more recent research indicates that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Research by Shaw (2001) suggests that leisure may be a form of resistance for woman and that it has the potential to empower and bring about change. In the early days of my membership, several of my new friends were discussing the difficulties they were having with their husbands and children and finding and/or making the time to get to rehearsals. Some women found the task too difficult and left the chorus. Gradually we noticed a trend was emerging that we called the, “Training the husbands- -the first three years.” We noticed that many husbands were very supportive of their wives when they first joined, they were glad “the little woman” had something to do to get them out of the house, and to give them an outside interest. Usually in the second year, as the wives became more enthusiastic and interested in this hobby, the husbands fell sullen and often created barriers to their wives attending rehearsals. It was at this point that many women dropped out of the chorus. These women were worried that their relationships at home were suffering and because of that they were not enjoying their time in the chorus. The third year often brought about a change in both the wife and the husband. The wife

realized how much she loved this hobby and was able to voice this passion to her husband in a way that he both understood and became supportive, or he gave up and accepted this intrusion into his life.

The importance of relationships and the impact they have on our members cannot be overstated. Feminist, Gilligan (1982), looks at the role women play in man's life cycle and explores the different perspectives that well known researchers have taken on psychological development. Gilligan feels that males have been used for most of the studies on development and that females should not be measured by these tools (p. 2). Women fundamentally think differently about issues. Relationships are dominant in women's thinking and their decisions are based on the perceived impact on relationships. Gilligan states:

Thus women not only define themselves in a context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Women's place in man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. (p. 17)

With this statement in mind, it is easier to understand why some women choose to leave because of a fear that their relationships at home are suffering. But it also, interestingly, might be altered in the post-feminist context to be the very reason why some members stay in the group.

***Voice and Self-Identity.*** In singing, our voice is our instrument. It is the tool we use to make melodious sound so that we can share, in song, a story or a message with our audience. The term "voice" is also used when a person expresses an opinion or thought. We often think of someone "having a voice" at a meeting or in different types of

negotiations or discussions. In reflective terms, “voice” is the outer expression of our inner self. When we “find our voice” we nurture our inner selves to the point where we develop a voice of our own (Coulter, 1999, p. 3).

Coulter’s (1999) work, *Speaking Up*, focuses on “voice” within an organizational structure. She describes the development of voice as reflecting the changes in our view of reality; a change in the way we think. Organizations are moving more towards a team approach and empowerment. It is essential to the success of the team and ultimately to the organization that members use their voice in the full process of “contributing ideas, participating fully and making decisions” (p. 5).

Gilligan (1982), in her research on psychological theory and women’s development, used “voice” as a metaphor for the sense of self that emerges from women’s experiences. In her 1970’s research with girls and women, Gilligan discovered that there was an absence of women’s reality in the theoretical models developed by Kohlberg and Piaget. Her research observations noted that the women’s voices were distant (p. 1). This observation led to her desire to answer the question, “Where is the voice of women’s experience?”

Hinman (1997) interprets Gilligan’s view on the differences between men and women and attempts to integrate her insights into various situations.

These differences tend to reflect deeper differences between men and women, differences in the ways in which they conceive of the self. Men are much more likely to see the self in terms of autonomy, freedom, independence, separateness, and hierarchy. Rules guide the interactions among people, and roles establish each individual’s place in the hierarchy. In contrast, women tend to see the self in terms

of relatedness, interdependence, emotional connectedness, and responsiveness to the needs of others (§8).

Perhaps this is a reason why some the husbands do not understand the bonds that are developed or the commitment that is generated to the group and to each other.

*In Swim with the Dolphins*, Glaser and Smalley (1995) in the chapter, *All Work and No Play*, point out that women are often conditioned to feel guilt if they participate in leisure activities. Many women struggle with this moral dilemma every day! Our workload includes house, family, and often paid employment. When we do find the opportunity to relax, we are often consumed with guilt. We are so conditioned to be the caregivers of others that we often ignore looking after ourselves.

Over the years, reasons given by members when they resign vary but often include family obligations or financial considerations. No one uses the word “guilt,” particularly in this day and age of perceived women’s rights and freedoms. It would be interesting to ascertain if that is a dominant factor in their decision making process. The phenomenon of guilt may be one of the reasons why we lose members.

Glaser and Smalley (1995) also refer to the fact that working at home and on the job can make us feel indispensable and, when given the opportunity for a change, reluctant to give it up (p. 247). In 1984 after returning from our regional competition in early June and my first road trip, I was a little distressed to find out that the family had survived quite nicely without me. Somehow they had found food, things to do, and barely noticed my return. I was torn between feeling hurt that they did not miss me and elated



that I had found this new freedom which included my family being “okay” while I was having fun.

Thrasher and Smid (1998) devote a chapter on self-development in their publication, *Smart Women*. They reinforce the perception that some women sabotage their need for self-development and constantly put themselves last. Although the book is written for the entrepreneurial woman, the message can be generalized to any woman who is driven to accomplish specific goals in life.

*Smart Women*, on their journey to becoming a whole person, have long since sized up their martyr quotient and make good choices to balance their lives and arrive at a new sense of freedom and self-worth. A Smart Woman says no to the superwoman complex and creates a new definition of the word ‘balance.’ Then she sculpts her life to fit this new definition. (p. 189)

The chapter concludes with some wise advice, “The bottom line is, the women who do take time for themselves are more interesting to be around, less antagonistic and resentful, and have more energy and more joy to give back” (Thrasher & Smid, 1998, p. 191).

In *The Eleven Commandments of Wildly Successful Women*, Gilberd (1996) encourages women to redefine their definition of success and to examine their personal passions. In the first chapter, *One Size Does Not Fit All – Create YOUR definition of Success*, Lillian Vernon, Founder and President of Lillian Vernon, Inc. is quoted, “Success is measured not necessarily by what others see but by what they don’t see - - personal self-worth. Success is accomplishing what you most wish for yourself” (p. 1). Wildly successful women do not necessarily have to have corporate executive jobs or own large companies. They are women who have asked the question “why” and been

satisfied and comfortable with the answer. Although the book is written to enlighten women struggling with career boredom or corporate reorganization, it is scattered with references to examine values and find balance. Finding balance in life is like finding balance in a song. It carries you through the highs and helps you through the lows and leaves you with an overall good feeling.

Within a non-profit organization such as *Harmony, Inc.* there are many opportunities for women to develop their leadership skills. In this case, success is not measured by monetary value, but by a personal measuring stick that can be explained by the following question. "Why am I doing this? Because I am enjoying it, I am learning a lot, and I am contributing."

All of these women who write about successful women can be seen as encouraging women to move to a new level of moral development. In *In a Different Voice* Gilligan (1982) constructs her own stages of moral development and contrasts her theory with that of Kohlberg's which was developed using young boys. Hinman's (1997) interpretation of these stages concludes that when women finally choose to take care of themselves they have moved through the second transitional phase into the third level. It is to this level, to which many of our members move.

Moral development for females begins, according to Gilligan (1982), with the concern for individual survival. This is the First Level of moral development, corresponding to Kohlberg's pre-conventional level. It is followed by the transition from selfishness to responsibility, in which women start to become aware of morality as

requiring that they be responsible for the well-being of others. Level Two, which corresponds to Kohlberg's level of conventional morality, is one in which goodness comes to be equated with self-sacrifice. Many of us have probably had mothers or grandmothers who saw their lives in precisely these terms: to be a good person was to take care of other people (husband, children, and family) at the expense of themselves. For them, it was not a struggle to motivate themselves to take care of other people--the struggle came when they tried to give themselves permission to take care of themselves. It is precisely this struggle--to include the self--that constitutes the second transitional phase. It is often a difficult struggle, for initially it feels more like moral regression than moral progress, since morality is equated with self-sacrifice. Gradually, however, this experience gives way to a third level, one in which moral goodness is seen as caring for both self and others. This highest level is one which takes inclusiveness and nonviolence as ideals, and which condemns exploitation and hurt (§ 11).

During my early years with the *Atlantic Sounds* when my children were young, I worked part-time in administrative support. The position was interesting but personally unchallenging. Answering the question "Why was I doing it?" provided answers such as "because it was close to home, because I had more time with my kids, etc." but I was ready to expand my horizons and develop personally. I struggled for a time to move beyond Gilligan's Level Two and I feel many other women experience the same barriers. *Harmony, Inc.* offers many opportunities for growth and has an abundance of volunteer needs. My transition to the third level took a number of years, reflection, and a lot of self-

talk. I started out gradually taking on positions that would introduce me to the international organization and that would not require time away from family. As my confidence increased and I learned more, I began taking on greater responsibilities. For 14 years I served in a variety of leadership positions and developed skills in many different areas.

When I ask myself the question, “Why have I stayed?” My answer still satisfies my needs and definition of success. I have learned that I am not superwoman, nor do I want to be superwoman. I stepped back from any leadership positions for a time in order to complete my studies and to be able to add other forms of leisure to my life; however, I found I missed it. I enjoyed viewing the membership experience from a different vantage; but, I now know that I prefer being more actively involved.

The four women in this study have belonged to this organization for almost two decades. One participant is in her early 70s, one in her mid 60s, one in her early 50s and one in her late 40s. All have worked outside of the home. One woman is now retired, one works one day per week, and the other two work full-time.

MacRae (1990), in *Older Women and Identity Maintenance in Later Life*, argues with earlier research on aging,

It would seem that gerontologists have generally erred in ignoring the significance of the interpersonal world. Most theorizing on later life (which has of course influenced empirical investigation) conveys the impression that, in North American society, at least, meaningful self-identities can only be built around formal roles and statuses, most notably a working career. (p. 265)

MacRae's (1990) analysis, on the other hand, suggests that, "Building self around relationships to others and informal roles seems to be a wise identity investment for later life" (p. 264). Could it be that this singing experience is not only enjoyable but it also contributes to our long-term state of mind and our sense of self and personal identities? Although MacRae's 1980s sample was women aged 65 to 98, and most of the women had never worked outside the home (73%), 59.8% belonged to at least one type of group or organization. "Apart from the actual benefit of membership, these formal and informal groups also provide older women with the possibility of developing meaningful informal roles" (p. 256).

The participation in leisure activities plays an important role in the quality of life and satisfaction of older adults (Mannell, 1999). Mannell suggests that people will be happiest and most fulfilled in direct proportion to how much activity they are able to maintain as they grow older and that relationships and activities that have been developed and maintained through life are more likely to contribute to a sense of integrity and continuity (p. 3).

Leisure is important to the sense of self and well being that our members develop. Mannell (1999) states, "a prominent explanation of the way in which leisure is linked to psychological well-being is through the opportunities it provides for personal growth or self-actualization" (p. 6). With the strong self-identify that appears to be a direct benefit from group involvement, perhaps our members, once they find they can no longer handle the activities of the group, will continue to benefit well into their later years.

***Friendship and Conflict.*** Any group of women that spends as much time together as the *Atlantic Sounds* is bound to have conflicts as well as strong friendships. Goodman and O'Brien (2000) give some advice about conflict, "The adult fears that conflict will end a friendship and makes many hold back. And in turn, the holding back ends the friendship anyway" (p. 167). Dealing with conflict can be difficult for many women because, "Women want friendship to be "nice" too. In friendships, women tell themselves, relationships can run smoothly. No conflict need apply. But real relationships come with inevitable scrapes, nicks, and middle-sized wounds" (p. 165). They describe situations between friends in which some friendships are lost forever and others are saved because the commitment has been there to be open and honest.

Goodman and O'Brien (2000) state that although women want friendship to be "nice," invariably it comes with conflict, hurt and even betrayal. It is inevitable that the experiences of these women will reflect a full range of emotions and it will be beneficial to explore some of the ways that acknowledging and working through controversy and conflict adds value and strength to these relationships (p. 165).

Smitheram and Lund (2000) suggest that, "Conflict is a natural part of relationships and the goal of conflict resolution is to solve problems. Everyone has learned to respond to conflict by confronting, denying or problem solving" (p. 3). They describe nine methods of resolving conflict which range from self-reflection to legislation. An observer visiting the *Atlantic Sounds* might see any of five styles that people usually use to resolve conflict: competition, avoidance, accommodation,

compromise, and collaboration (Devon Dodd, 2000, p.1). If an observer attended a rehearsal she might see a person avoiding confrontation by ignoring an annoying comment that someone might have made, she might also see the director accommodating individual preferences for a riser singing position rather than have a confrontation about where a person should stand. She would also see a lot of collaboration as the different groups and teams work together to help the *Atlantic Sounds* live up to its potential. Although no formal method of conflict resolution has been declared as the way to resolve differences, an observer would see that many styles are in play throughout rehearsals, during external operations of the chapter, and in the friendships that have developed.

Goodman and O'Brien (2000) also describe the richest friendships as, "light as well as strong, bound by laughter as well as serious talk. If you can't hoot at something together, the relationship loses its bounce" (p. 97). We continue to be members of the *Atlantic Sounds* because of the singing, but we stay friends because of the fun and stories we share and relive as often as we can.

### ***Adult Education***

One does not often think of adult education as a function of a volunteer, not-for-profit, group of women who like to sing. However, education is an immensely important component of what we do and in what we believe. Education takes place at all levels of the organization- -local, regional, and international. The parent organization, *Harmony, Inc.*, provides educational opportunities at various times of the year, at various locations, and in various forms. The goals of the educational programs are to help the members

develop the skills to be able to sing well for a lifetime and to be able to become better leaders and administrators.

Over my 20 year history, I have attended over 60 educational events that were designed to teach us about our “craft” including proper breathing techniques, supporting quality sound production, tuning and balancing chords. In addition to the musical education that everyone needs in order to sing better, there is also an administrative training program. This program teaches us how to be better presidents, board members, or other administrative leaders. *Harmony, Inc.* also operates its own judges’ training program with the purpose of educating *Harmony, Inc.* members to become certified judges. These individuals spend three to five years of time and their own money to learn the intricacies of barbershop and how to help quartets and choruses improve their performances. While in training, they practice judging at various events at venues across Canada, the US, and sometimes in Europe. Once certified as judges, they are assigned to the contests that are offered throughout the organization at the area and international level. These individuals also spend countless hours coaching. Judges from *Harmony, Inc.* do not charge a fee for their expertise; they give of their time and knowledge freely and ask only that their travel expenses be reimbursed. I know of individuals who travel three out of four weekends to coach choruses or quartets. Some take holidays or time-in-lieu from their workplaces to meet these commitments.

At the chapter level, education and training are included in every weekly rehearsal. A few minutes of physical warm-up prepare the body to sing. Twenty to thirty



minutes of vocal warm-ups prepare our vocal apparatus to sing. We also develop new singing and breathing skills. We learn to extend our singing ranges and improve our vocal techniques. Not only does this help us become better individual singers, it also improves the overall sound of the chorus.

Most individuals who get up in front of our singing group are not trained educators. They do not have degrees or diplomas in teaching children or adults. They are there because they have particular knowledge or skills and someone within the chapter recognized this and felt they should share their talents with others. As soon as we begin to share what we know and can do, we become educators and, as such, must be aware of the adult learner's needs.

Brockett and Merriam (1997) review the early research of Knowles, Cross, Courtenay, etc., that has led to the emerging concepts of adult learning. They state that "it is important to have some sense of who adult learners are, why they choose to participate, and what factors can limit their participation" (p. 158). In our chapter, we know that our adult learners are all women over the age of 17; we think (but we are not sure) that most have completed high school, many have completed post-secondary education, some are stay-at-home moms, and many work at least part-time. From this information we can interpret that many of these members have had some educational success in the past and that they have learned how to learn.

Although most literature centres on academic education, Brockett and Merriam (1997) quote Cyril Houle's research on learners.

Houle concluded that the learners he interviewed fell into one of three “sub-groups”: (1) goal-oriented learners who participate to meet specific objectives; (2) activity-oriented learners, whose reasons for participation have little or no bearing on the content of the activity; and (3) learning-oriented learners who “seek knowledge for its own sake.” (pp. 15-16).

By identifying these distinctions, Brockett and Merriam (1997) feel that Houle set in motion the idea that the motives underlying adult learning can vary considerably (p. 132).

We can interpret this information to mean that our members participate in the learning activities of our chapter for various reasons. Perhaps the goal-oriented learners participate in the educational offerings because they want to learn something very specific that they can apply immediately; e.g., breathing properly or matching vowel sounds. The activity-oriented learners may be there for the reasons other than learning, i.e., socializing or singing. This is the group that is the most challenging for the educators as they tire of our educational time and want to do other things. They look forward to singing the songs and going on break so they can be with their friends. Perhaps the learning-oriented learners participate to add knowledge and skill to what they already know and do. This group likes to know why we are doing something and how learning about it will help them.

It is a challenge for our educators to create activities that will keep the interest of all three groups. It is important to provide enough depth and challenge to keep the chorus focused, happy, and growing musically yet not over challenge them.

Cross (1981) describes three major types of barriers to participation. Situational barriers deal with what is happening in a person's life at a given point in time. Institutional barriers are the practices, procedures, and policies that place limits on participation. Dispositional barriers relate to "attitudes and self-perceptions" about oneself as a learner (p. 98).

Situational barriers for our members might include lack of time due to family and work commitments. Sending individuals home with the task of learning three new songs in a week would be very difficult for members with these issues. The institutional barriers could be the practices we use to teach our music. Each member has her own learning style and it is important to frame our educational time in ways that will be understood by individuals with different needs. Dispositional barriers in our membership manifest in comments such as, "I'll never learn that" or "It is too difficult." Understanding how to help our members overcome these barriers should promote internal comfort and increased commitment to the chapter.

Understanding the participants, the motivation and the barriers will help us develop the teaching tools that we need to help us meet our objectives. One objective is for an individual to master being able to sing her own voice part with accuracy, quality, and without assistance. There are a variety of teaching methods that can be utilized to achieve this. One such strategy is Mastery Learning.

Mastery Learning, ML, is an instructional strategy based on the principle that every student can learn a set of reasonable objectives with appropriate instruction and sufficient time to learn. ML puts the techniques of tutoring and individualized instruction into a group learning situation and brings the learning strategies of

successful students to nearly all the students of a given group. In its full form it includes a philosophy, curriculum structure, instructional model, the alignment of student assessment, and a teaching approach. (Warren, 2003, p. 1)

The *Atlantic Sounds* chorus has used various methods of teaching songs. The method that seems most successful at the moment is using teaching quartets to demonstrate how a song is performed. First, they perform the song as a quartet in front of the group. Then quartet members stand in front of their sections and sing their part to the song a number of times. Gradually, the director will have the section members sing with the section leader. This practice is repeated until individuals are comfortable with the notes. Members also use tape recorders to record the section leader singing the song so that they can practice on their own time. Chorus members are following along on their music. Even those who do not read music are able to follow the notes, the words, and hear their part. It has been found that this group activity creates a sense of community and group participation.

The idea of the creation of a sense of community appears in the work of Mark (1996), in *Informal Learning and Adult Music Activities*, and Mannell (1999), in "*Older Adults, Leisure, and Wellness*. Belonging to a leisure group, no matter what its purpose, appears to stimulate learning, well being, and a sense of community. Music educators and researchers suggest involving adult music participants in the study of how to teach music in the schools because adults are involved in music for the love of it. They are not forced to enter a course to receive academic credit (Mark, p. 121). Bringing in members from the community stimulates learning and offers students a different perspective. In *Harmony*,

*Inc.*, a program called, “Music for Young Women” exists. Trained facilitators work with the schools to teach barbershop harmony to the young women in the school system. In SPEBSQSA, the international organization organizes contests for high school and university quartets in the hope of promoting barbershop and in the long-term increasing membership.

Research by Deem (1986) suggests, “It is a mistake to think that leisure in the form of education is only packed as something called ‘adult education’” (p. 57). She observed that the informal learning activities interwoven into women’s leisure activities are, “immensely important in helping women to develop confidence and skills, not only those relevant to a particular topic” (p. 57).

### ***Metaphors***

In *Narrative Inquiry*, Clandinin and Connolly (1000) state that metaphors are often used to guide inquirers through their study of a particular situation or phenomena (p. 163). Clandinin and Connolly use *soup* as a metaphor for narrative and as a way to describe and compare the differences and uniqueness of various stories (p. 155).

I wonder if a barbershop song can be a metaphor for the complexity and uniqueness of membership? Patton (2002) suggests that metaphors can be used to strengthen and support communication with the reader and Patton has used metaphors in his own research. “A great deal of meaning can be conveyed in a single phrase with a powerful metaphor. Moreover, developing and using metaphors can be fun, both for the analyst and for the reader” (p. 505). Patton cautions that researchers be sensitive when

using metaphors and analogies and consider how they will be received by the reader (p. 504).

I anticipate the readers of this inquiry will enjoy a metaphor that interprets the data into language that they regularly use to describe the object of their leisure time-- singing barbershop. For example, we often characterize individual personalities by using metaphors and analogies such as “she’s a note shy of a chord,” or “she’s as predictable as a progression of fifths.” We ask ourselves if the harmonic conflicts and dissonance that embellish a song and then resolve into balanced and joyful harmony serve as a frame for dealing with personal conflict with and beyond the chapter and employing different conflict resolution strategies in real life.

In the context of music education, writers often use metaphors to help readers understand music. Watkins (2001), a barbershop enthusiast and author of a barbershop web site, uses a cooking metaphor to describe how music is made and that the types of ingredients used produce different types of music; for example, one recipe will produce barbershop harmony and another will produce a symphony.

To sing a barbershop song well, all of the ingredients must be present. A singer must be confident of her singing voice as well as being comfortable with the song’s notes, interpretation, dynamics, and presentation. In addition, she has to be adaptable and flexible to the other voices, able to modify a note upward or downward by the smallest of a fraction--just enough to make the chord resonate. Can this experience reflect what happens to a person who joins this group? You learn how to stand alone, to take on new

responsibilities, and to be strong; yet you must be aware of and sensitive to what the other members are doing and feeling. Can this also echo the personal development and sense of self and voice that often emerge through membership?

The expression “lock and ring” is used to signify when a four-note chord is balanced to the point that overtones (notes not actually being sung) can be heard. Can this expression be a metaphor for chorus members working collectively towards common goals and feeling the satisfaction of success?

Or the expression, “crawl into a chord” is used when a chord locks and rings and is so nice that you don’t want to let it go. The sound is so melodious and comfortable that you do not want to move on to the chord, which sometimes provides a challenge. Can this expression be a metaphor for the comfort we feel in the roles we assume within the chorus? Can we get so comfortable that we do not want to move on to the next challenge? Perhaps it is a metaphor for the comfort we feel in the friendships we make. We rely on our friendships for the comfort and sanctuary they can provide.

### ***Barbershop Music***

***Barbershop Harmony.*** I do not remember the first song I heard in barbershop, but I do remember the first time it made me cry. The year I joined *Harmony, Inc.*, I attended the international contest and convention that was held in Ottawa, Ontario. The first quartet contest had just finished and the emcee asked the audience to rise and to sing our Harmony theme song, “A Blend with Friendship.” I began singing along with the 1,200 other voices, but about halfway through the song I found my throat getting tighter and suddenly my voice was gone. Overcome with an emotion I had never experienced

before, I closed my eyes and let the sounds envelop me. The harmonies carried me to a place of peace and tranquility where only the sounds of blending voices could penetrate. As the last chord died off, a hush blanketed the room. I looked around and realized I was not the only person wrapped so warmly in this cloak of sound that coming back to reality was difficult. Gradually, tissues were pulled out of pockets and smiles of happiness and friendship replaced the emotion of the song.

Over the years I have learned more about this strange effect that barbershop harmony has on certain people. I have learned that one either loves the sound and is moved deeply by it, or is indifferent to it. To understand its impact, it is important to understand a little of what make a song “Barbershop,” its history, and the role it has played in the musical culture of our country.

Averill (1999), an avid barbershopper, applied his research skills to the world of barbershop. In his article *Bell Tones and Ringing Chords: Sense and Sensation in Barbershop Harmony*, he describes its history and what it is about barbershop that gives people goose bumps. He begins by sharing a story of a post-show event in the home of a chorus member. Pick-up quartets and woodshedding pass away the hours. The individuals involved cherish their time together, the comradeship they share, and the sounds of the ringing chords (p 38).

Averill (1999) describes musicologist, Sigmund Spaeth, as a person who played a major role in formalizing what constitutes barbershop harmony.

The lead singer sings the melody of the song and is harmonized by a tenor above, a bass below, and a baritone voice that “fills in the chord” (for lead range). They



sing in close rather than spread harmony, emphasizing adjacent chord tones, and the resultant chords seldom have a range (ambitus) of much more than an octave. Songs based on a cycle-of-fifths progression are the source of the characteristic chromatic voice leading in barbershop. The dominant seventh chord (major triad, minor seventh) is so important to barbershop that it is called the barbershop seventh, or informally, the “meat ‘n taters” chord.” (p. 44)

The discussion of whether or not a song is a good “barbershop” song can be heard within both the men’s and women’s organizations and within choruses and quartets of all levels of expertise. Barbershop arrangers feel that songs should contain anywhere from 35% to 60% dominant seventh chords to sound like a good barbershop song (p. 44). The dominant seventh chord structure allows unique pitches for each voice, can still be comfortably voiced, and allows barbershoppers to go to what we refer to as “seventh heaven.”

Barbershop language includes terms such as “overtone,” “bell tone” or “ringing chords.” “Barbershoppers tune their chords so that the overtones produced by each of the voices overlap and fortify each other, producing a “ringing” sound rich in harmonics. Some call this phenomenon a “bell tone” (p. 46). We like to think of the sounds as “angels singing.”

Barbershop singing, with its close four-part unaccompanied harmonies, can be traced to the middle of the nineteenth century. Choruses and quartets in minstrel shows often used this style of singing. “During the days of vaudeville and burlesque, the quartets were called ‘four acts.’ Especially in burlesque, the close harmony quartets earned an image of inebriated pals loitering around a lamppost and singing into the night” (p. 39). This style of music was also referred to as “curbstone,” “street corner,” “lamp post,” and

“close” harmony, but from 1900 on, the term “barbershop” was the replacement term (p. 40).

Early descriptions of barbershop are often applied to African-American quartets. Newspaper articles dating back to 1880s can be found in which the music form is discussed in detail. Around 1910, the term “barbershop” begins to appear more often as a descriptor for white groups.

The early twentieth century was a very popular time for barbershop singing for both white and African-American groups. The record company, Victor, had 11 quartets working for them in 1913. Other record companies or “race” labels recorded African-American sacred and secular close harmony quartets (Avrill, 1999, p. 40). A decline in barbershop singing during the Great Depression was overcome by an association with the gay “90s” and two publications that kept the amateur scene well supplied with song arrangements (p. 41).

In 1938, a pair of Tulsa, Oklahoma, traveling salesmen named O.C. Cash and Rupert Hall launched a revival effort that grew into the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc. (S.P.E.B.S.Q.S.A.).” The society experienced rapid growth after World War II, reaching a plateau of about 40,000 members. The Sweet Adeline’s, Inc. and *Harmony, Inc.* are the two women’s barbershop organizations in North America. Other women’s organizations exist around the world, e.g., England and Australia. (Avrill, 1999, p. 41)

*Harmony, Inc.* *Harmony, Inc.* is the international parent organization of the *Atlantic Sounds*. It has over eighty chapters throughout the USA and Canada. The *Atlantic Sounds* chapter is one of the medium-sized groups and is one of 15 that exist within “Area 1” or the Atlantic Provinces. *Harmony, Inc.* is a small organization

compared to the other barbershop singing organizations in the world with a membership of less than three thousand. From the *Harmony, Inc.* web site:

Since 1959, the organization has expanded from its Eastern roots to include chapters in the United States and Canada from California to Newfoundland, and from Alaska to Florida.

Contests and conventions are held each year for the purposes of educating members in the performance of the craft, bringing together the membership to see the best perform, to inform the membership of the status and direction of the organization, and to encourage an atmosphere of friendship and camaraderie.

A steady growth in membership, a gradual geographic expansion, continuous improvement in the quality of performances, and the determination to abide by its democratic principles and maintain its unique "Blend With Friendship", all bespeak a bright future for *Harmony, Inc.* (*Harmony, Inc.*, n.d.)

O'Connor, in collaboration with many of the founding members including G. Ruth Geils, has recorded the history of *Harmony, Inc.* in two different publications; the first to celebrate the first 25 years (Geils & O'Connor, 2000) and the second, *Young in Heart*, to celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. O'Connor has been with the organization for most of her life, joining when she was only 14 years of age. Her impressive history includes two international championship quartet performances, international president twice, director of the chorus that has won more international chorus competitions than any other chorus in the organization, and service in a number of positions that advance the organization either administratively or musically. She also travels around the world coaching choruses and quartets. In other words, O'Connor has dedicated her life to *Harmony, Inc.* and in return has received the respect and adoration of everyone who

meets or works with her. During her three decades with *Harmony, Inc.*, she has married and raised two children.

*Harmony, Inc.* was established in 1958 after the Sweet Adelines passed a new by-law without the support of its membership that limited membership to white women only. Several choruses and members were so incensed by this action that they left the organization and established *Harmony, Inc.*, which was to be based on democracy and participation of members at all levels of decision making including the local, regional, and international organizations.

Its mission statement and thus the mission statement of the *Atlantic Sounds* includes the following:

*Harmony, Inc.* is a vibrant international singing organization of women who are dedicated to the performance and promotion of four-part a cappella harmony in the barbershop style, the celebration of friendship, personal growth and development through education, and the practice of democratic principles. (Geils & O'Connor, 2002, p. ii)

*Harmony, Inc.*'s vision statement reads, "*Harmony, Inc.* is an acclaimed, progressive international organization of women celebrating song and friendship through barbershop harmony." (Geils & O'Connor, 2002, p. ii)

It was during my years on the international Board of Directors that these statements were updated and published on all *Harmony, Inc.* documents. As I read *Young in Heart*, I am overwhelmed with my own memories of the organization, its ups and downs and the changes we have experienced. The words in our "Harmony Creed" and

“Harmony Theme Song” (see appendix E) state quite clearly how we feel about our organization.

My involvement covers half the life of the organization and for fourteen of those years I served in international or regional positions. My memories and recollections are vivid and I perhaps I have a broader perspective on the organization than most of the *Atlantic Sounds* chapter members who have not held similar roles.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *The Qualitative Genre*

This narrative inquiry is reflexive autoethnography. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state, “Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). It is a form of writing that has been around and evolving for over two decades.

Autoethnography is a broad term and includes many types of studies that seem to be similarly situated; for example, personal narratives, narratives of the self, personal experience narratives, writing stories, complete-member research, critical autobiography, and reflexive ethnography to name just a few (p. 739).

Validating the strength of qualitative inquiry over other types of inquiries is important and often based on whether or not the genre is to focus on individually lived experience, the experience of society and culture, or language and communication (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Narrative inquiry seems to be the natural methodology to use for this research because the phenomena of why these women joined the *Atlantic Sounds* and why they stayed can best be described through their stories. The richest answers will not evolve with a yes/no or multiple-choice survey (Bateson, 1990, p. 16).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry:

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up

people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated, ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (p. 20)

Bateson (1990) states that, "Storytelling is fundamental to the human search for meaning, whether we tell tales of the creation of the earth or of our own early choices" (p. 34).

To select another type of inquiry would seem an injustice to their stories.

Brockmeier and Harré (2001) state:

To present something as a narrative does not mean to "externalize" some kind of "internal" reality and to give a linguistic shape to it. Rather, narratives are forms inherent in our ways of getting knowledge that structure experience about the world and ourselves....we must look carefully at the ways in which people try to make sense of their experiences. And they do so, among others, by narrating them. (p. 50)

Bateson (1990) explores the lives of five women with very different backgrounds. She makes their lives available to the reader by interpreting their stories, identifying the themes, and weaving these themes together. She states the following:

These are not representative lives. They do not constitute a statistical sample - - only, I hope, an interesting one. As I have worked over the material, I have become aware that the portions of these life histories that interest me most are the echoes from one life to another, the recurrent common themes. Teasing these out of a wealth of material and conversation and recognizing aspects of my own experience in different forms has been the process that I found personally most freeing and illuminating. (p. 16)

She does not try to verify the narratives of the participants (p. 34) and recognizes that they are, "...shaped by each person's choice and selective memory and by the circumstances of our work together" (p. 33).

Narrative inquiry will allow the participants to gaze into the past, to view their journeys, and to discover how much they have changed and developed over the years. Freeman (1993) suggests that, “the idea of development, as traditionally understood, is often seen to move, in parallel with life itself, essentially forward in time” (p. 224). But through narrative, we learn that, “development, rather than adhering strictly to the forward-looking arrow of linear time, was itself bound up with narrative and was thus thoroughly contingent on the backward gaze of recollection” (p. 224).

Bateson (1990) suggests that, “there is no way to know which fragments of the past will prove to be relevant to the future” (p. 29). This is true in this inquiry as well. Each participant tells her story and until we weave them together and compare the experiences, we cannot really determine the common themes.

In a discussion of quantitative versus qualitative research, Patton (2002) states that, “qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases the depth of understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability” (p. 14). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer a different perspective on this and state that, “The narrative inquirer does not prescribe general applications and uses but rather creates texts that, when done well, offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 40).

I start with my personal story and explore and reflect on my recollections and experiences with the *Atlantic Sounds*. By trying to understand my life and my experiences, I hope I will understand a way of life or the culture of the organization. I



then explore the lived experiences of three other women who have been long-time members of the same singing group. The participants are invited to read each other's stories (with permission). As well, I analyzed the stories from my understanding and interpretation. The participants met to discuss my interpretation and to provide yet another collective perspective.

Over the years I have discussed this particular question with many people, although not in an organized research framework. I believe that the perspectives of Bateson, (1990); Clandinin & Connelly, (2000); Ellis & Bochner (2000), as well as Patton, (2000) have application for this particular inquiry. The stories will be detailed, and because so many chapters in this and other organizations face the same question, readers will be able to imagine their own uses and their own situations through these stories.

The purpose of this research is to find out why we joined this organization and why we stayed for as long as we have. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to truly hear their answers without listening to their stories and hearing their views and responses to the study.

### ***Researcher's Role***

My role in this inquiry is as narrator and participant. As one of the participants, I contribute my own stories and reflect on the passages that I, as researcher, have identified as possible themes. I reflect on my own history and share my experiences in the same way I ask of my friends.

Researchers often choose to focus on and study areas of interest to them (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and this study follows those observations closely. My personal history is critical to the inquiry and it is important to acknowledge that my perspective, and therefore my bias, is essential to the telling of this story. No story is visited in an unbiased perspective, and every narrator, even third person, is located.

The role of the researcher is an important and controversial one. Marshall and Rossman (1999) state that, "The qualitative researcher's challenge is to demonstrate that this personal interest will not bias the study" (p. 28). On the other hand, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) summarize the lessons learned by the research of Phillion (1999) to illustrate that narrative inquirers need to reconstruct their own histories and be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake (p. 46). Bateson (2000) realizes that she will add her own interpretation to the stories told by her participants (p. 33). Ellis and Bochner (2000) share a number of examples where their personal experiences are critical to, and guide the choices they make, in their research topics.

In this particular research, it was important that when I asked questions, listened to the stories, took field notes, or reviewed transcripts that I respected the nature of the inquiry, the stories my participants shared, and the feelings they created within me.

As the inquirer, I worried that I might react strongly if I heard or read stories from my participants that were different than my own recollection- -I might even want to block

out the dissident voices. History has been re-written based on narratives that obscure or ignore dissident voices (Brockmeier & Harré, 2001, p. 46). They remind us that determining the authorial voice is often difficult. “Sometimes the narrator is just one person, dominating the audience as well as being determined by it and the situation in which the narrative takes place. But sometimes the tale is created jointly or cooperatively, as pointed out by Middleton and Edwards (1990) in the study of collective remembering” (p. 46). Because narrative inquiry is relational, Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, I cannot help but become involved with the research (p. 81). I must recognize and acknowledge my own history and stories, and consciously create and review the field notes to ensure understanding. It is my intent to hear the dissident voices and their stories, to acknowledge them, and to weave their meanings into the narrative of this phenomenon.

The participants shared experiences that happened, in some cases, many years ago. As events are recounted from memory, it was important, as I worked with the field texts, to position them appropriately. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out:

To pay attention to the complexity generated by thinking of them in terms of the three-dimensional space makes clear the extent to which the texts are contextual reconstruction of events. Without this careful positioning of our field texts, and our explicit acknowledgement of how they are positioned, the research texts ultimately constructed from them are endlessly open to unanswerable questions and criticisms about knowledge claims being made and meanings generated. (p. 118)

Initially I thought reflecting on my experiences and about the experiences of others would not be too difficult. I thought it meant looking at only the positive things that happened and reflecting on the benefits. But as Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out:

Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and doubts- -and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, well, that's when the real work has only begun. Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. It's hard not to feel your life is being critiqued as well as your work. It can be humiliating. (p. 738)

Luckily, there are also benefits! Understanding myself, my participants, and our organization better has made a big difference to my life.

### ***Data Collection***

***Individual Interviews.*** "Qualitative data tell a story" (Patton, 2002, p. 47). This inquiry begins with the stories and experiences of four women who have been singing with this organization for more than fifteen years. Following ethical guidelines, the participants were provided with an information letter (see Appendix A), which explained the purpose of the research and the process to collect and use the data. Upon review of the letter, the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix B).

Once the consent forms were signed, individual interviews (see Appendix C) were arranged. Participants were given the option to journal their stories if they were more comfortable sharing in that way. Rosemary chose to write her own story and then, through the interview, we explored additional areas. Marney preferred to make notes about her stories to ensure we discussed each experience and theme. Natasha wrote part of her story and the rest was explored through the interview. It was important that the interview flow as a conversation with the questions providing a framework for the dialogue. The interviews were recorded and transcribed into field notes, and then into their stories. The

stories were returned to the participants to review and to make any changes or provide comments.

Patton (2002) describes three types of interviews- -informal conversational interviews, general interview guide approach, and standardized open-ended interview (p. 342). The approach used in this study was a combination of the informal conversation and the guided approach. The informal conversation allows flexibility for the researcher and participant to follow the flow of the experience. The guided approach provides the outline of issues and topics to be explored. By providing this ahead of time, the participant had an opportunity to think about the experiences she wanted to share. During the interview we were free to explore all dimensions of the experience while remaining focused on the pre-determined topic areas. Elaboration and clarification probes were used to encourage deeper exploration or clarification.

As research moves from the field notes to research text, the inquiry focuses on trying to understand these experiences from various positions. As Brockmeier and Harré (2001) point out:

Stories are told from “positions”, that is, they “happen” in local moral orders in which the rights and duties of persons as speakers influence the location of the prime authorial voice. They must be heard as articulations of particular narratives from particular points of view and in particular voices. (p. 46)

Each person’s stories are told in first person, as if she were sharing her story with the reader. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that writing in the first person encourages the reader:

To take a more active role as they are invited into the author's world, evoked to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. (p. 742)

**Focus Group.** Following the participants' review of their personal stories, the stories of the other participants, and my interpretation of the data collected, we met as a group. During this session, I presented to them the findings of the study and asked for their reactions and insights (see Appendix D). A review by inquiry participants is a form of analytical (reflective) triangulation and is often used in collaborative and participatory inquiry (Patton, 2002, p. 560).

Obtaining the reactions of respondents to your working drafts is time-consuming, but respondents may (1) verify that you have reflected their perspectives; (2) inform you of sections that, if published, could be problematic for either personal or political reasons; and (3) help you to develop new ideas and interpretations. (Glesne, 1999 as cited in Patton, 2000, p. 560)

The feedback obtained during this session confirms the findings and ensures that the right questions were asked. Opinion and value questions were used to determine if the research adequately reflected the participants' reality. It gave the participants, who were also the primary users, a chance to question and comment. Adding these perspectives to my own add face validity to the reflections and to the study as a whole (Patton, p. 561).

Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that analysis can take various forms including inviting participants to first read each other's stories and the researcher's initial interpretations and then come together to discuss their perspectives on the interpretation (p. 758).

### ***Site and Population Selection***

***Site selection.*** The site is a medium-sized chapter of an international organization of women barbershop singers located in Atlantic Canada. This site has been selected because it is the chapter with which I sing and therefore more economical with regard to research costs. It is also expected that the chapter will be very cooperative to this research as membership promotion and retention are always issues of concern. As a long-time member of the chapter, I expect I already have and will continue to build a trusting relationship with the members.

***Population selection.*** The women in this inquiry were unknown to each other before joining the *Atlantic Sounds* more than 15 years ago. Our friendships developed and strengthened over the years and have withstood the test of time. We have shared laughter, sadness, anger, joy and many other emotions in this 20-year period. Marney and Rosemary are members of the quartet of which I am currently a member. Natasha is from the Lead section and someone with whom I sang in a quartet for ten years and with whom I continue to quartet from time to time. These individuals have been selected because of our relationship and their willingness to assist me in my research efforts. They are aware that the findings may help other women understand the reasons they seek out organizations such as ours and why they remain members for long periods of time. The participants also understand that the conversation that emerges may help other chapters develop strategies for membership recruitment and retention.

These women hold a special place in my heart. We sing together regularly and many of our social activities and outings are with each other as friends. I included them in

my early thoughts and ponderings about the direction of my research. Upon hearing the question that I wanted to answer, they agreed to participate.



## Chapter 4: Stories

It is a beautiful sunny day and I should be in my garden. Instead, I'm sitting in my car. I have a green light, but I am so caught up in what my thesis advisor has suggested that I do not even see it! My struggle is presenting my participants' stories so that the reader can visualize these women and see their strengths as I see them. I do not want to change what they have written or what they have said during our interviews, yet as the author I know I can, "By relying on memory, editing, and selecting verbatim prose out of context and then surrounding it with their own constructed analytic contexts" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 753). Knowing this does not make my job any easier.

As I think of the participants I have selected, I realize we are all introverts- -at one time or another, we have all described ourselves as such- -and we are not likely to share a lot about ourselves in this type of inquiry. We reveal tidbits of information, but are cautious about sharing too much. It makes us very uncomfortable. There is a risk in being open and exposing ourselves and who we are. Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out:

The goal is to encourage compassion and promote dialogue... The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience. (p. 748)

If this is the case, then it is important to probe deeply and to try to make sense of our experiences in a respectful and honest way. By having this conversation, our readers may feel comfortable exploring their own experiences, examining their own values, broadening their own horizons.

So, how can I make the connection between the reader and my friends? My advisor suggests that I “bookend” each story with an introduction and reflections. By doing this, I can share with the reader what I see as special about each person and what I see her gifts are that have influenced me. In the analysis and reflections chapter, I will explore their stories from my perspective.

Each person has told her story in her own way. In effect, the participants are co-researchers (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). They were invited and encouraged to participate with me in the development of this study, “To author their own lives in their own voices,” (p. 742) and to contribute to and comment on the final analysis. It is my hope that by including other voices in this narrative, the perspectives offered will be broader than just my own. Together we will be able to identify and explore the issues that have had significance in our lives.

This type of narrative also has an impact on the reader. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe it as an invitation to participate more fully:

To take a more active role as they are invited into the author’s world, evoked to a feeling level about the events being described, and stimulated to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. (p. 742)

I hope the readers of this narrative will find significance and meaning in these stories and, in turn, be comfortable examining their own experiences from a different perspective.

### *Jan's Story*

The snow whirled around my old blue station wagon as I pulled up to Noreen's driveway. Her lane, that was several hundred yards long, had not been ploughed that day. I parked close to the mailbox, which I knew was somewhere in the vicinity of the end of the lane. I tooted the horn and squinted through the curtain of snow that seemed to fall faster every minute. Noreen's backyard lamp was the only light in the distance, and it seemed to be blinking in some kind of coded message, "You're fools... you shouldn't be out on a night like this... stay home!" As I blinked the snowflakes from my eyelashes, a ghostly figure appeared through the flurry. It moved closer, weaving up and down over the drifts. Gradually, Noreen's bright pink snowsuit became visible and the puffs of snow that looked like little whirling tornados turned into snow shoes as she commandeered the swells. I knew she had almost made it.

At the top of the snow bank Noreen stopped, dropped her music bag into the white powder, put her hands on her hips, and stared at me with her large, blinking eyes. Noreen's make-up, and in particular her mascara, was always perfect, but after her excursion from house to car, she looked rather like a cute raccoon. Her mouth dropped open to catch her breath before she lowered herself over the final drift and down to road level. "Are we insane," she yelled through the wind, "It's not fit for anyone to be out tonight!"

She shook her head in disbelief, sat on her behind, and slid down the final drift to the road. By this time, the snow was up to the bottom of my car door. She kicked the

snow out of the way, pulled open the door, fell into the passenger seat, slammed the door closed, and closed her eyes. We sat in complete silence for a few seconds as the melting snow began to form steam on the windows. We giggled as we thought of sharing our blizzard story with the other gals- -they would think we were so dedicated! While I navigated the road, she wiggled out of the suit and threw it into the back seat. Once again we roared with laughter, shook our heads at our insanity, and tried to see through the often blizzard-like conditions. "Do you see the line? No, but I think it's close. Here comes a car, let's see where it goes. Oh, there's a plow, let's just stay behind it." We often said we should write a book about our experiences! By the time we drove another 15 miles, the snow had stopped and the stars were out! This was often the way. Noreen seemed to live in a snow belt that provided very unique weather conditions.

This seemed to be our winter routine for over 15 years. I traveled 45 minutes each way to rehearsal and picked Noreen up on route. Nothing stopped us- -snow, fog, rain, heat or sun. For some reason we thought if we didn't show up, the group could not function without us!

During our drive to town we often reminisced about our early years with the chorus and the reasons we joined! We laughed at how we first met at a house party one summer evening and how, through the course of many conversations, we discovered singing was a common interest.

Noreen was the catalyst for my joining the chorus. I might not have had the courage if I had not learned that she had directed a barbershop chorus in another province

and was interested in getting involved again. She told me what she knew about the provincial group and when I heard the advertisement on the radio that they were looking for members, we decided to go. Singing has always given me great pleasure, and I participated in school and church choirs as well as school musicals. I anticipated I would enjoy this new form of music as well.

When I joined, my two children were two and five. My husband managed an automotive parts business we had purchased in our community. I worked part-time and helped out occasionally at the store. Today, twenty years later, the business has been sold, we have moved to the city, and we are “empty nesters.” I love that term because to me it means that the huge investment in our children has paid off and they have flown away- - capable of fending for themselves, able to be a part of and contribute to our society, and not dependant on us. It also implies great freedom and opportunity for us to explore individual and joint adventures. I will admit, though, that the first time my daughter (first child) left home, I cried for a week. The next time she left home, I helped her pack.

Our nest really is not empty at all because it is full of life and satisfaction. Our dog and cat keep us amused and our children are wonderful at keeping in touch.

I now live near several of my singing friends. In fact, five of the six people I sing with in my two quartets live within a ten-minute walk. This has provided me with the close friendships that I missed while living in the country.

When I'm working on recruitment drives for the chorus, I try to remember the experiences and feelings I had when I first joined. It is important that we make the

women considering membership feel welcome and understand that they may be a bit nervous. Our chorus is not like a church choir or a social group where you can just come and go- -it requires commitment, time, and devotion. Most people are not willing to sign up until they start getting something in return.

I had no idea what I would get out of this group when I joined. All I knew was that it was fun, it was a challenge, it was getting me out of the house, it was giving me something of my own, and I liked the people. These were very immediate benefits. If anyone had told me what I would accomplish or the positions I would assume over the next 20 years, I would have laughed at them and said, "You're crazy! Oh, yeah, sure, I'm going to be the area representative to the International Board of Directors for six years, I'm going to have the positions of 2<sup>nd</sup> vice president, membership and education chairs for the entire organization! Right. Oh, and I'm going to be chapter president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer! Suuure! Oh, and I'm going to have the nerve to sing in a number of different quartets and sing in public and even make it to the international stage!! Ha!" Well, it is true, I have done all of this- -over time- -and to my amazement.

Shortly after I joined, my mother decided to give it a try. She stayed for more than 10 years and only when a bad knee forced her off the risers, did she give in. She remains a faithful fan and supporter. This year my sister, also an "empty nester," has decided to join. My daughter, who is married and has a young family, is now thinking about joining. Having my family involved in something I love has given me the opportunity to create a

new type of relationship with them- -not a mother/daughter or younger/older sister- -but as singers and lovers of harmony.

Most of my experiences have been growth opportunities laced with a lot of fun, but there have also been a few times when I considered leaving. An unexpected conflict with the chapter executive during the early years nearly drove me out. Looking back in time is, of course, like having 20/20 vision. I can see now what happened and why, but at the time I was totally shocked. I had been with the chorus a short time and discovered I loved this hobby with a passion I had not experienced before. I found myself taking on new roles and thought our chorus was capable of great and wonderful things.

Unfortunately, my enthusiasm was perceived by some as bossiness and my expectations as orders. Our president and vice-president of the day felt that I was not acting in “harmony” or in accordance with our Harmony Creed. Without the knowledge of their board of directors, I was issued a letter of discipline by the executive. It is unfortunate that the leaders of the day did not take me aside and tell me that they appreciated my enthusiasm but what I was doing and saying were upsetting some members. I could have asked some questions and then changed my behaviours without causing anyone the grief that followed.

Instead, they presented the letter to me at the end of rehearsal on a cold winter evening. At first I thought it was a joke but then realized they were very serious. I think they thought I would take the letter home and never return, but instead, I shared it with some of the other members who were still at rehearsal. For some reason Noreen was not

at rehearsal that night and I had to drive all the way home by myself. It was a very sad and lonely drive.

When they saw me sharing the letter with a couple of people, the executive may have realized they had acted without the authority of the board of directors, and perhaps in haste. An emergency board of directors' meeting was called and the members advised of the actions taken.

It distressed me that my mother was on the board at that time, and it was very difficult for her to hear the discussion. When the board members heard what had taken place, they were concerned that they had not been consulted and that the action was inappropriate. Even a letter of apology to me for the way the situation was handled did not take away the pain that I felt. Although I was very hurt and confused about the events leading up to and after the conflict, it turned out to be a very valuable lesson. I learned a lot about myself, about how others perceive me, about working with others, about conflict and the repercussions of how it is managed, and about what I wanted to do within the organization.

This incident did not deter my commitment to *Harmony, Inc.* In fact, it strengthened it. I felt if the chapter leaders did not want my energy, someone would. It was at this point that I became involved at the international level where they were hungry for people with drive and determination. I must admit I felt great satisfaction when I won my first election to the international board of directors after being told by one of the chapter executive that I did not stand a chance.



Enthusiasm can be perceived as threatening and suspicious and needs to be nurtured and channeled with appreciation, a kind heart, and appropriate guidance. Over the years I have seen myself in some of our new members. Instead of trying to restrict or ignore their enthusiasm, I have learned it is much better for everyone to let them play a role and provide the support they need so that the “stepping on toes” is limited. If they feel appreciated and valued they are more likely to stay with us, to contribute in a meaningful way, and to enjoy themselves.

Perhaps wisdom comes with age and experience. The experience I just described taught me there are some intrinsic things I want to have- -either in my work life or in my volunteer world. When they are missing, I am driven to seek them out in alternative ways. I have learned that I like being in a role of leadership. With experience, I have become comfortable and find it a challenge and interesting. It is a challenge to participate in decision-making activities, to help guide the direction of the organization, to encourage members, and to promote our hobby.

During my first ten years in the chorus, my work life provided me with none of these opportunities. Although, at the time, I was unaware of these needs, I seemed to be interested in and drawn to jobs or positions that taught me those skills. I took on positions that put me in front of small and large groups, and which demanded that I become a public speaker, a manager, a trainer, and a mediator.

After I finished my undergraduate studies, new employment provided me with all the leadership opportunities I could handle. When this happened, I withdrew from many

of the leadership roles I played within *Harmony, Inc.* and was content to be "Molly Member" and just focus on my singing. (Molly Member is a term often used for members who actively do their part in learning and performing their music but who are not interested in or unable to take on additional musical or administrative leadership roles within a chapter.) I think that is how I kept things in balance. Now, my work situation has changed again and I instinctively turn to the chorus and help out where I can. I take on responsibilities that will allow me to contribute, feel useful, and to feel as though I'm making a contribution.

Describing how I feel when I sing is like trying to describe why I find a sunset beautiful or why sitting in a comfortable chair by a campfire and staring into the flames is relaxing. When everything is going well in the quartet or chorus, I feel larger than myself and there is nothing I would rather be doing at that particular moment.

That feeling happens within me more often now than in the past. I used to worry too much about what my fellow singers were doing or how we sounded. While I was singing harmony, I was sometimes not in harmony with the music or the emotion of the song. Other things could easily distract me. Singing in public made me very nervous, and I would shake like a leaf on a windy day. Now I do not shake quite as much, and if anything, I very much enjoy entertaining an audience. Somewhere along the line I started singing for the pure joy of the sound and have been able to capture that feeling more often. As singers, our job is to blend our voices, to sing in tune, and to express the

meaning of the song. Now, I focus more on doing my part and I trust that the others are doing theirs. It is much more satisfying and less stressful.

When I was in my second year with the chorus I tried to explain to my husband, who is not a singer but an avid fisherman and hunter, just how singing made me feel. He could not understand it at all and shook his head thinking he would never grasp what I was trying to share with him. Finally, I used something that I knew was special to him and tried to make a connection. "You know that feeling you get when you are standing in a beautiful stream in the middle of the wilderness. The water is flowing gently around you, the sun is reflecting off the crystal clear water, and you are at peace with the world. Then, suddenly, the largest fish you have ever seen grabs your hook and the reel squeals as the line tears off after this giant. Your heart pounds and you catch your breath in anticipation- -"That is how I feel." After a moment of silence he nodded and said, "Wow! You must have this in your life!"

Much of my maturing, growing up, and gaining wisdom have happened during my twenty years with the *Atlantic Sounds*. If I had taken a different path, I am sure I would have discovered other opportunities that would have allowed me to meet my desire for leadership and friendship. However, I know for sure that I have had many opportunities to develop my skills and my passions, and I would not have all the wonderful friends that I have now! They are supportive, fun with a touch of badness, kind, and caring. If I am down I can pick up the phone or drop in for a visit and not feel I am imposing. I can rant and rave and know that my outburst will stay contained within them. We celebrate with

small and large gatherings. We have lunches, dinners and parties! We sing, carry on, tell stories, and eat wonderful food. When we cry we have many shoulders upon which our tears can land.

When my daughter was married, five of my dearest and longest-time friends came to share my happiness. When my friends have lost loved ones, we are there to mourn and to help out. As I write my story, one of the founding members of our chorus has just passed away. She taught us music exercises and techniques that we still use today and she gave us a foundation upon which to build. She had a sense of humour and a love of fun that we saw at rehearsals and when we were away on our trips. She will be in our hearts whenever we share our memories, and she will be missed.

If we were to represent the lives of our chorus members with a barbershop song, we would hear a medley of ballads about love and loss, up-tunes that reflect celebrations and joy, comedies that mirror the lighter moments, parodies that mimic the irony of life, rhythmic songs that pound out the beat and create the momentum that gets us from one life event to another. If we created a quilt it would contain every shade of the rainbow. We have seen people through marriage, divorce, childbirth, custody battles, illness, death, school, abuse, surgery, and on and on. Some people leave the chorus when their life is out of balance. Hopefully they have their support systems in other areas of their lives. Some leave the singing group but stay connected with their friends from the chorus. These friendships continue to provide support.

For nine years I worked in a clinic that provided counseling services. My job was to take referrals from organizations and individuals and to carry out the initial intake with clients. To do this well, I had to learn to listen to the stories and to ask questions that were non-judgmental and appropriate. Some clients came for only a few visits and others came for a number of years. Some reappeared as their lives evolved and life threw new curves at them. They did not need intense therapy, but more a compassionate and neutral ear. Everyone needs support, be it from a family member, a friend, a counsellor, a support group, or a group such as ours.

If one of the roles of a support group is to help individuals think differently about their situations so that they can take action to make change or to accept things as they are, then there is a similarity between the benefits of being in the chorus and being a member of a therapeutic women's group. I use my close circle of friends to share my concerns and problems; I ask for their insight and for them to help me think in different ways. I know others do the same.

A feeling with which many of us have struggled is guilt. It is sad that it is a part of our vocabulary, but I think many women are conditioned to feel guilt about doing things for "themselves." It is probably systemic within families and within our culture. Some of our members experience guilt about the time away from family or the financial cost of membership. I used to experience guilt, but once my husband realized what my membership meant to me, he became much more supportive. Besides, he really likes to spend his free time hunting and salmon fishing in other provinces and it is important to

him that I be supportive. We learned that if we want to have each other's support for our own leisure activities, we have to be supportive of the other.

There are two choices that I made years ago that helped me develop my personal identity and build my confidence. The first, was taking on responsibilities- -starting small and then moving on to bigger jobs. I have always received feedback on my efforts and have grown from this. Even the conflict that I described earlier was a form of feedback. At the time it was pretty devastating, but it influenced me in many positive ways. It also made me realize how much support I had in the chorus and I stayed because of that. By taking on tasks that stretch my comfort zone, I find the challenges I need. I have often been my own worst enemy when it comes to doubting my own abilities but, as the years go by, and with practice, I have learned to reframe my thoughts and do not doubt myself as much.

Because this setting was a relatively safe one for me in which to develop, I wonder if there is any freedom or advantage to learning these skills in a leisure environment rather than a more stringent business milieu. Most volunteer positions are unpaid, and there is usually no "boss" to do formal evaluation. Perhaps this liberty allows individuals to take chances and to take on new challenges without as many fears.

The other choice I made was singing in a quartet. As the Bass in four or five different quartets (at different times), we have competed on the regional as well as the international stage. We have worked with some of the most highly trained and respected coaches in the barbershop world. When they tell you, "You are doing a good job," you

believe them and you feel very, very good. Although it would seem that singing with three other women should be fairly easy and not too stressful, there are many responsibilities that go with it. First, I have to know my own notes- -and know them well. In the chorus, if I am not sure of a note or a word, I can listen to someone else in my section. This is not the case in a quartet as I am the only one in my section. If I sing wrong notes, the chord will not lock and ring, and the sound will be disappointing for everyone.

Second, a quartet member has to develop a voice that allows her to express herself as an individual as well as a singer. There are occasions when I have to be comfortable telling my quartet that I do not like a particular song, that I think someone is singing a wrong note, that I do not like a costume, that I do not want to do a performance, or that someone is just a little behind the beat. All are potentially awkward and the possibility exists for conflict. Learning to express my thoughts and feelings while respecting the other person is always challenging.

I have never really been comfortable with conflict because I always considered it to be negative and a bad thing. I can usually see both sides of most arguments and often feel there is more common territory than people recognize. Perhaps this comes from being the youngest of three girls or from being raised on a small island where cooperation and “getting along” is usually preferred to arguing.

There have been times when I have seen our chorus pulled in different directions because of conflict. At one time, my preferred style of conflict resolution was avoidance.

Ignore it—maybe it will go away. Of course, that never worked because I usually felt angry, uncomfortable, or that someone had taken advantage of me. I felt my discomfort with conflict was a weakness and have taken quite a bit of training to help me learn new ways of thinking about and handling it.

About six years ago, I started teaching post-secondary students, and I also became chapter president. I had to learn to change how I thought about and dealt with conflict. Students needed feedback on their performance and they needed new ways of thinking about success. Members of our chorus and committees needed constructive support and feedback on their work. My experiences and training have helped me become more successful handling conflict and I continue to learn. There are always opportunities that allow me to test my skills, to try new strategies, and to maintain positive relationships.

Someone once said to me, “Dealing with people and conflict isn’t brain surgery!” At the time I laughed, but now I am not so sure if that is true. While it is true in the technical sense, in the holistic mind/body sense, it is not. How I teach and work with students or members of the chorus can impact how they think about themselves, about learning, and about the world. If a person feels good about themselves, their brain chemistry will change. A sense of well being is very powerful.

By thinking of conflict as a form of problem solving and finding solutions, we are much more likely to face the things that make us uncomfortable.

We used problem-solving techniques to avoid conflict and to develop our recent membership drive at the same time. Our membership numbers have been dropping and



Rosemary, vice-president and membership chair, recognized that if numbers continue to fall we could be in trouble. I volunteered to help her create a plan that would take into account the musical needs of our directors as well as the membership needs. We tried to think outside of the box, and to our surprise, we surpassed our expectations and attracted 26 individuals to our guest night. We hoped that eight or ten would join and already 13 have signed up. Just educating these new people about the language we use, how we sing, and about our organization is a big responsibility for us and can be overwhelming for the new person. As one new person put it, "There is so much to learn!"

As one of the organizers, the complexity of our hobby was brought home clearly when students from the local university's music department came to observe and write a report about our chorus and about the "conductor" ("director" in our language). Three young women- -two voice majors and a clarinetist- -came to observe. At the end of the evening they stood up and introduced themselves. They were in awe of what we do and how we do it. They discussed how they were going to approach their assignment and decided they would ask their professor if, instead of talking about the conductor, they could talk about how we teach music to individuals with different learning styles. We have so many individuals involved in "teaching" that it was difficult for them to write about only one person or one way of teaching.

Our members exhibit different learning styles, and it is important to be responsive to these needs. Our hobby is not as simple as just learning the notes to a song and singing them. A package of critical elements includes memorizing words and notes, breathing

and extending phrases, and interpreting the song by generating the appropriate mood, which is supported by facial expressions and body language.

Every week a member of the music education team is assigned to teach a certain element of the performance package. One group “warms” our voices in preparation for singing (vocal warm-ups) and often provides us with information that will help us improve our personal vocal production. One leader may take an extra minute to talk about breathing properly in order to sustain notes; another leader may talk about mouth shapes and vowel sounds in order to create a unit sound. On the rare occasion when I have had laryngitis or been unable to sing, I have sat and observed our rehearsals. When it comes to learning new things, our members definitely fall into different categories. There are those who are really not interested in improving their singing or developing their vocal expertise- -they look bored with the warm-ups and want to sing songs right away. Then there are those who are really not interested in “why” we need to do things a certain way- -they want to know how to apply it so they can use it directly in their singing. Another group wants to know everything about everything. The musical leaders try to use different approaches to meet these diverse needs.

Most of our members do not read music and are not be able to sing a 3<sup>rd</sup> or a 5<sup>th</sup> without hearing it first. It is important to know how much musical experience the members have, how they learn best, and what will help them learn. We use different strategies, and members can choose the one that works best for them. Each person receives a printed copy of the music; how they learn to sing the song will vary. One

effective teaching method is to use a quartet that learns the song first and then performs it in front of the chorus. Following the performance, they stand in front of their sections and sing the words and notes several times. Gradually, the different sections sing with their leader until the notes are learned. A second method is to put the music on tape for the members so they can play it back and learn by listening and singing with the music. Some people play the piano and can take the music and learn their parts directly from the paper. We also encourage members to purchase a hand-held tape recorder so they can tape the songs being performed at rehearsals.

The statement, "If a group stops meeting your needs, you are very likely to drop out," is alarmingly true. During my journey with the chorus, there have been times when I was not sure my personal needs were being met, but these seemed to coincide with other areas of my life that were out of balance. I cannot imagine leaving this organization. I would lose too much. Over the years I have watched dedicated individuals leave the chorus and I wonder why. One of my friends has just told me she is taking a leave from the chorus. Although this saddens me and the other members, I respect her decision. I hope the time provided by a leave will give her a new perspective. On the other hand, I ask myself if there are things that we need to incorporate into our chorus that will make leaves unnecessary. When members leave, what are the reasons? Are we listening adequately, and are we listening for the dissonant voice that, while others may remain quiet, may represent more than one. The dissonance may be reflected in membership numbers. An informal survey in one of the other barbershop organizations states that the

average person's membership lasts five years. I wonder if it would be possible to change this pattern if retention plans are developed and implemented.

As I am writing this, I have just agreed to serve another term as chapter president. The research for this thesis has given me new insight, and I think differently about many things. I wonder if I will be able to apply what I have learned about organizations and people and add value to our chorus. It is important that I hear from the dissenting voices and that they know I am open to listening. Every voice must be heard and always respected.

In my experience, if people feel heard and valued, it is easier for them to commit to membership. Our members often go the extra mile for the chorus. The recent membership drive is an example. Our members put up posters, invited friends and colleagues, and made the prospective members feel welcome- -all for the good of the chorus. We are constantly fund raising to reduce our personal costs for travel, costumes, or just to support the operation of the organization. We do this because we love barbershop singing.

A barbershop song that is performed well is beautiful and satisfying to singers and listeners. It also sounds effortless. The challenges we face in our effort to sing well are also reflected in the efforts required to keep the membership committed and harmonious. What looks easy on the surface often requires hard work, dedication, and time. New members are always amazed at how hard we work at our craft, how much time we take to develop that blended sound, and how many people we need to bring our final product to

the stage. It is a spider web of relationships that gives strength to the group, that allows us to perform to the level we do, and that keeps us together. If one thread is broken, the web does not fall apart. By encouraging individuals to develop their skills, we always have what we need to mend the web and to become stronger.

The development of management and leadership skills has been a critical aspect of my own experience of membership. The ability to think in the big picture, to plan for the future, to anticipate needs and facilitate the growth of an organization is part of being a leader. Because this is a small, volunteer group, we also have to operationalize the plans as well as manage growth and development. It is often a challenge to wear both hats, but it is also very rewarding.

After I finished my business degree, I applied for a position with the local college as a community project coordinator. I had to develop a business plan and endure a two and one-half hour interview with individuals from the college and the community. My previous jobs had not provided me with the opportunity to supervise individuals, to lead groups, or to participate in policy development. However, during the interview I was able to discuss my experiences with *Harmony, Inc.* I shared with them the stories of working with volunteer committees, of chairing large and small events, of public speaking in front of thousands, of singing with a chorus and quartet on the international stage, and of winning an international award for developing a communication newsletter. I could tell the interviewers about my experiences in leadership roles and how I handled different situations. I was hired over many other applicants.

The value of experience gained through volunteer or unpaid work is so often underestimated! Membership in this organization has given me the opportunity to listen, to learn, to try, to fail, to try again, to succeed, to teach, to enjoy and to give back. What more can a person ask for?

### ***Rosemary's Story***

**Introduction:** "You can do it. You know you can, and I know you can!" These are Rosemary's favourite words to me when I am thinking about taking on a new challenge and I'm not sure of myself. Before she retired, she used to sit on one side of her office desk and I sat on the other as we talked about the pros and cons of returning to "school." I give her credit for encouraging and cajoling me to finish my business degree when I was in my mid-thirties. She sees the potential in people and openly lets them know. She did that with me 15 years ago, and she still does.

Rosemary looks very much as I imagine a librarian to look. Slim and graceful. Long gray hair pulled back in a bun. Glasses that hang around her neck when she is not reading. She does not draw attention to herself in any way, and yet we are drawn to her because her love of, interest in, and self-education about this hobby. Her knowledge has made her a valuable advisor and mentor. She brings a voice of wisdom and justice to any discussion. I believe she values fairness and is compassionate. While she would love to have our standing rules followed to the letter (otherwise, why would we have them), she realizes that it is not always in the best interest of the chorus or members to be so rigid.

It was only when I started quartetting with Rosemary that I started to get to know her. Although I had worked on committees with her, there is rarely time to get to know each other, and she is not the type that would open up with just anyone at any time. I think there has to be a certain level of trust and friendship there first for her.

Although in her early seventies, she is very active- -walking her two dogs, going to fitness classes, taking seniors' courses, singing in the chorus and in our quartet, and serving on the chapter's board of directors. Her husband of over forty years is in ill-health and much of the house and yard work has fallen on her shoulders. She has a wonderful sense of humour; and when we go to the fun night at our area contests or have a party, she creates elaborate costumes to suit the themes. If there is no theme for the party, she will create one and wear at least one item that will attract a comment and a laugh, be it a hat, or a piece of clothing. She will be forever young!

For this inquiry, Rosemary decided to journal her own story before we had our interview. From our interview and conversation, I was able to probe a little deeper to understand better her experience. What follows is Rosemary's story.

#### Part One - As a Member of the Chorus

##### *"A Journey Begins With a Single Step"*

Ruthie was no bigger than a minute. Less than five feet tall, I could practically put both hands around her waist. She could neither read nor write and she was physically challenged. But oh, how she loved the *Atlantic Sounds* and every person who sang in it. In 1984 Ruthie and I sang in the church choir together and when she suggested I would probably enjoy singing with this particular women's barbershop chorus, I thought I should consider it.

My life has always been full of music. As a child when family and friends gathered at our home, voices and musical instruments filled the air with music. When I



married, my husband and I performed together, nothing serious and just for fun- -he on the piano or guitar and me singing. But it had been years since I had used my voice in this way, and I was just returning to it through the church choir. I sang in the Alto section where we harmonize all the time, so singing a new form of harmony- -barbershop- - seemed to be a natural extension for me.

Ruthie was so persistent that I decided I would attend one of the *Atlantic Sounds* rehearsals. Nervous and alone, I approached the school where rehearsals were held. I was greeted warmly by a large, friendly woman who took me under her wing. She introduced me to the director, stayed by my side during “break” (which included juice and cookies in those days) and remained not only my “guardian angel” for that first year but a friend for life even though she has long since resigned from the chapter. She also became my mentor, and I learned much from her about administration.

Those first few months raised some music administrative concerns. The music committee met after each rehearsal to try to resolve what I later came to know was a problem with the then chorus director. I could feel the tension within the chorus and, although this caused me some concern at the time, I truly loved the barbershop style of singing and soon found myself totally committed to weekly attendance. The concerns were kept within the boundaries of the board and the general membership was not drawn into the details. In due time the issue surrounding the director was resolved, a new director was hired, and the chorus advanced musically both locally and in Area I of *Harmony, Inc.*

I enjoyed the music, the harmony and the people and found it was a nice way to spend an evening. Having a chance to sing and meet new people outside of the workplace were definite benefits. Singing is supposed to help us stay physically healthy and it seems to have worked for me. I also consider music as form of prayer- -a connection to something other than the physical- -a way of giving back something to the world that you have received from an unknown source. So singing has been good for me spiritually as well.

My husband and four children were completely supportive of my commitment to the chorus and continue to be so. I was always sent off with best wishes, and on one occasion I was given a corsage for good luck. Each time I returned home to a neat and tidy house and once a complete new counter top awaited me. Unfortunately the style and colour would never have been my choice, and to this day I still view with a baleful eye- - but the thought was there!

For the first few months I sang in the Lead section and later transferred to Baritone where I remain. This is where I find the musical challenges that help keep me committed to this form of music. I have been “section leader” for many years and have assisted in the production of learning tapes and subsequent teaching of new music to the members. The Baritone section has had as few as two and as many as six dedicated members. It is common knowledge that the Baritone note locks in the chord, and singing Baritone is universally acknowledged to be the most demanding. The Baritone section is a

small group and we not only sound like one voice but we also feel close and connected to each other. All of us seem to be on the same track and have the same goals and focus.

I have made many wonderful friends through the chorus and have remained close to so many who, for one reason or another, left the chorus. Those who are able, remain avid supporters of the *Atlantic Sounds*. They attend our public performances and often join us in both social and fundraising pursuits. I feel that this speaks well of the familial harmony established over the years. We always let them know that there is a spot reserved for them on the risers should circumstances allow for their return.

The love of music and the ability to sing is a gift that most of us have been given. What we do with it, like most other gifts, is a choice. The handful of us who have been members for so long, enjoy our gift through singing barbershop. Some of my friends have chosen to take their singing gift to other forms of music and some are not singing at all and have dropped it from their lives completely.

Musically, I have been learning, and continue to learn, since the first night I joined. I have learned proper breathing, tuning, listening, and sight reading. Perhaps most important is that I have found a style of music that gives me more energy, releases tension, and enhances my mood.

Area and international contests and conventions are wonderful places to make new friends who come from many walks of life and who share in the joy of making music and having fun. A quick look through a photo album is a great refresher of the fun we have had together, the places we have been, and the people we have met.

Barbershop singing has a broad appeal, crossing the boundaries of age, ethnicity and economic status. It is like getting plugged into a generator and, in one short evening, getting re-charged for the whole week. I think this must be true of many of our members who, coming to rehearsal after a long workday in/or outside of the home, quickly find themselves in high spirits as they chat with their friends and prepare to sing together- -a family sharing goals.

Chronologically, I am the oldest singing member in the *Atlantic Sounds* chorus. That being said, however, with so much yet to be learned, the years ahead look challenging enough to demand a youthful attitude. As one of my favourite elementary school teachers once said (probably more than once), “You only get out of something what you put into it.” In a group like this, your age or your years do not really count. You get just as much interaction with each member- -no matter what the age. Everyone is very supportive of everyone’s situation.

I have also progressed musically over the past twenty years. I find that the fun is not only in getting together to chat and sing for an evening but in finding joy and satisfaction in singing better and in being aware of the movement of the entire chorus towards the shared goal of hearing the chords ring in the close harmony found only in the barbershop singing style.

Naturally one changes over twenty years as a person, whether one is involved in a group like this or not. Before I joined, I would say my personality was more of an

introvert. Gradually I learned to be more comfortable in the role of an extrovert. I gained confidence in relating to and understanding other people and in taking on new positions.

I have learned to guard against expecting too much of people. Not everyone is going to follow the rules to the same extent that I would like to follow to follow them or have them followed, so I have learned to accommodate different personalities and the way different people handle situations. I have, I think, learned more about other people.

I have also learned to be more compassionate and that I can like a lot of different people. I don't have to pick and choose by personality. There is such a variety in our membership. It is a nice cross-section of people from different walks of life, different economic conditions, backgrounds, and family relationships. And I have liked every one of them.

I have never really thought of membership as having a therapeutic effect, but it certainly has helped me build my confidence and communicate with people in different ways. I see how it has helped other people and there are other people I know who could benefit from membership.

I have never thought of myself as an adult educator. We provide direction to people and provide them with the tools they need to learn. The organization is very involved in musical and administrative education, but I'm not sure we have ever thought of it as adult education.

## Part Two - As a Quartet Member

During February of my second year singing Baritone, I was approached by three well respected chorus members. "How would you like to sing in a quartet?" WOW! I responded with enthusiastic acceptance and, thus, "Northumberland Notes" was formed. Our foursome competed in area competitions for several years, sang in the *Atlantic Sounds* shows and performances, and embarked together on a vocal and emotional journey sometimes similar to being on a rollercoaster securely embraced with love and respect.

"Nothing is forever" is more than a cliché- the answer lies in the personnel and name changes seen in the quartets in which I have sung over the years. Seventeen years and five quartets later I'm still experiencing the satisfaction found when four voices- - four individuals- -get together to share their musical and personal lives. I have loved each and every one of the women I have sung with and with whom I continue to sing. Purchasing four-of-a-kind costumes, including shoes, to fit various body types seems always to have been my responsibility. Most met with approval with the possible exception of the five dollar gold lame stiletto heeled shoes. To this day my barbershop closet contains many costumes, shoes, and accessories whose only purpose is to collect dust and preserve memories.

As a quartet member I have entered many regional and several international contests. During the contest weekends we have coaching sessions with skilled barbershop personnel and they help me improve my singing skills, which I apply to my chorus

participation. The two can never be successfully separated and I share the feeling with many others that the more quartets in a chorus the better the overall sound produced by the chorus as we learn to sing independently in our respective parts.

In addition to those dust-collecting costumes, I have many pictures, both professional and candid, which are helpful when reminiscing on the days of not so long ago. Fortunately, although there have been a series of quartets over those years, none of the members left because of internal conflicts. Some no longer sing as chorus members, one has left PEI, some have changed jobs, and yet others have taken on different family responsibilities and felt unable to continue with the quartet. Somehow, without even seeming to resolve differences in a formal or book savvy way, we maintained respect for one another, our families, our work and our hobby, and our respective positions in all of those.

In addition to the challenges experienced as a chorus member, quartetting provides its own singing challenges. I think these challenges, among others, keep me coming back week after week, month after month, and year after year. Without them, practices would get rather boring.

I set two goals for myself as a quartet participant. The first and dearest was to sing with my daughter on stage, whether as entertainers or competitors. This goal I haven't reached. It might be more accurate to say it is a dream rather than a goal. The second was that I would participate in a contest after entering life's seventh decade. This one I did

achieve- -a good feeling- -admittedly not my best performance, "*To Everything There Is A Season.*"

### Part Three - As an Administrator

The *Atlantic Sounds*, like most similar groups, has a board of directors responsible, primarily, for the administration of the non-musical chapter functions. In our chapter, the board of directors and the Music Committee has worked and continue to work together successfully.

In my second year, and still very new, I found myself serving on the board. Lacking board experience and initially reluctant to participate in discussions, I soon found my "voice." I continue to serve on the board in various capacities- -as a member-at-large, secretary, treasurer, vice-president, and president. The challenges and rewards become blurred and some of the most difficult issues turned out to be richly rewarding.

Chorus and administrative commitment have spanned an equal number of years. Although I have at times become tired of my chorus singing involvement, probably attributable to the fact that many songs introduced as "new" to the chorus, have, in fact come from quartet repertoire and leave little in the way of vocal challenge. On the other hand I have yet to become disenchanted with chapter administration. It never fails to spark my interest and challenge my administrative memory. More than once I have been addressed as the "Chapter Barbershop Guru"- -a term not richly deserved but supportive and satisfying- -maybe even ego enhancing!



There have been several difficult issues which I have had to deal with over the past years. I can only address the first one briefly as I was a new member of the board, a member-at-large, and had no prior information on the issue until it was addressed at a meeting following the issuance to a chorus member of what was then referred to as a “letter of discipline.” This caused a great deal of concern and hurt to all chapter members who were aware of the situation, some choosing of sides, and there seemed to be a lack of positive resolution to the issue.

To say it was thoughtlessly handled would be very close to the fact. On the other hand to say that the executive acted without due consideration, with little experience and much naiveté, having no knowledge of the now widely accepted skills of providing feedback or conflict resolution, would also be close to the fact. Memories are long lasting and, although I was not privy to the background of the situation, it still remains as a dark memory in the chapter’s history.

Yet another issue I recall involved a chorus member and a member of the music team. Many hours were spent both at the board table and between meetings trying to resolve the interaction between these two individuals. There were times when progress seemed to be made only to have the one step forward followed by two steps backward. I was the section leader in this instance as well as a member of the board but wearing both hats did not dissuade me from making every effort to find a satisfactory solution.

After many months of conflict, and following a letter from the board requesting an apology for inappropriate behaviour displayed during rehearsal, the member resigned

from the chapter. It is always painful or distressing to lose members no matter what the circumstances. We, as individuals and as members of a group, like to think of ourselves as acting as well singing in harmony with one another.

Those two situations were handled very differently. I think we learned from the first how a situation should not be handled and, as some of the board members were the same, we wanted to ensure that the second situation was handled better. The entire board was involved and opinions were sought. Everyone did not always agree, but opinions were heard and respected. A lot more time was spent trying to resolve the second situation. Nothing was put in writing until all avenues had been explored. The board crafted the letter in such a way that roadblocks could be avoided. It was hoped the situation would be resolved, and we wanted to ensure there was nothing in the letter that would get in the way.

In the first situation, the board members, once they were advised of what had transpired, were divided in their support or lack of support for how things were handled. This type of division is not good for the strength of a board. The second situation actually strengthened the board as a group. There was very good discussion and there was always respect for each other.

Over the history of the chapter, there has been, with these two exceptions, a great sense of congeniality and acceptance of our members who come from many different walks of life to share our love of singing and friendship.

Over the past 20 years I have participated in many chapter activities and each has brought its own degree of satisfaction. Uppermost in my mind would be acting as chair or co-chair of several chapter shows, many of which took place at the local theatre as a main stage presentation; Co-chairing the first Harmony Intensive Training School (HITS) held in the province; co-chairing the Area I Contest and Convention; chairing a committee to review the chapter bylaws and standing rules; serving as chapter vice-president and subsequently, president of a wonderful group of women. One of the great moments in my life, including both inside and outside of the chapter, has to be the standing ovation I received upon completion of my term as president. Although I hadn't or still don't consider that my contribution was above the norm, I must have, in the eyes of my peers done something right.

When I started with the chorus, I did not have much experience with being in a leadership position. I absorbed a lot by osmosis as we went along, by watching other people and by seeing how they handled things. There was so much good in all of our boards, and I have served on most of them. They have always interacted well and the members encouraged each other in whatever they were doing. I learned a great deal from two presidents early in my membership. I did not consciously recognize I was learning how to be a leader- -it just seemed to happen. I have taken on many roles in the organization- -some I volunteered for and others no one else wanted.

Perhaps if I did not have interesting administrative challenges and the challenges of quartetting, I would have lost interest and left the chorus. Being a person who comes to

rehearsal, learns her music, and performs as directed is what we call a “Molly Member.”

I’m afraid being “Molly Member” would not provide me with the excitement, challenges, and rewards that I want.

I don’t really think of belonging to this group as leisure. It is more like unpaid work. Perhaps early on I might have thought of this as a leisure activity- -a night out singing, relaxing, and chit chatting with each other. However, once you have to start doing homework, learning music and choreography, getting involved in committees, serving on the board or in other leadership roles, it really is no longer leisure. Even in the “work” things we do, we still find enjoyment. For some it is more work than leisure. Certainly the individuals with many responsibilities have to work hard to keep the chapter running smoothly. The directors, although financially supported, work very hard at teaching us our craft and ensuring that we continue to grow musically. Perhaps the difference is that we are given the opportunity to choose the type of work that we do within the chorus. The choice also empowers us and gives us the opportunity to learn and grow.

I think of a story as having a beginning, middle and an end. Somehow, for myself, I don’t feel as though the final chapter has yet been written. Perhaps “My Journey” is more aptly descriptive than “My Story.”

*“Music wipes away the dust of everyday life”*

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*Reflections.* It is a pleasure, as the researcher, to see Rosemary through her own eyes. I have learned things about her that I did not know before. For example, I always assumed Rosemary was a leader and I took for granted the standing ovation we gave her when she completed her term as president. I am pleased that it was a significant acknowledgement and accolade for her.

Rosemary's experience and her calm nature position her as a catalyst for balanced discussion and viewing situations from different perspectives. The first conflict she discusses (the letter of discipline) was the one in which I was involved. It is comforting to know that she was sensitive to the dilemma that had developed and acknowledges the turmoil that can be caused when conflicts are not thoroughly and thoughtfully explored. If I had left the chorus, as was my first reaction, there would not have been the learning and growth for the board members involved at the time and for myself. We did not realize that we were learning skills that we would apply from that time forward. Only with failure can we grow.

Being respected and being respectful are important qualities to Rosemary. Although she did not realize she had developed leadership skills, everybody else did. Whenever it is announced that Rosemary is chairing a committee or organizing an event, there is always a sigh of relief that it will be well managed.

Rosemary's contributions to the chapter have been significant. Although we always want to bring "new blood and new ideas" into the chapter to ensure it does not stagnate, Rosemary has a corporate history that allows us to keep things in perspective.

### *Marney's Story*

**Introduction.** If there is a piano, you will find Marney! She learned to play sitting on her father's knee in front of the parlour piano when she was a small child. Her father's entire family played instruments- -all fourteen of them! Whenever someone came to visit, Marney played the piano and learned a new chord or a new rhythm. Saxophones, guitars, and fiddles all use different keys- -and she learned how to play with them all. When Marney plays the piano her whole body gets into it- -her feet tap and keep the peddles in constant motion, her body sways with the music, and every part of her keeps the beat. She was born with rhythm and loves to dance and move around the floor to just about any kind of music. As a teen, she won many dancing contests and even appeared on a television show dancing with her uncle.

Marney is vivacious and her energy is contagious. Some nights at rehearsals, when she is teaching us new choreography, I am amazed that this slim, attractive woman with salt and pepper gray hair is over 60. She moves so effortlessly that she makes everything look easy. She has a love and appreciation of life that is an example to all of us- -one would think she did not have a care in the world. The reality is, she has learned to appreciate life through great loss and sadness. Her father and husband died when they were both in their thirties, her young daughter died of heart problems before she turned three, and just after her husband died, she discovered she was pregnant with her fourth baby. She raised these three children by herself, but she had the love and support of friends, family, and, of course, she had music. She has also lost many dear and close

friends. Only a couple of years ago her only sister passed away. Each loss has taken its toll on her, but has also strengthened her. Her strong religious faith has helped her work through the pain and sadness.

Her ability to understand and empathize with the pain and suffering of others has, I believe, made her a wonderful nurse and friend. She is a great listener and adds insight and wisdom at appropriate points. I cannot understand what she has been through because I have lived a half-century and never lost someone I loved or deeply cared about. That in itself is an accomplishment, but it makes me worry that perhaps I will never be prepared. I know, however, when that time comes, I will have a dear friend whose shoulder will be there for me to cry on. I know, too, that she will cry with me and when the time is right, she will help me find the strength to move on.

Marney decided to share her story through an interview. I gave her the proposal and the interview questions ahead of time, as I did with the other participants, and she chose to make some notes and talk about them. The following is Marney's story.

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Doris, a very close and dear friend of mine was very ill and she gave me detailed instructions for her funeral. Without even asking me she said, "and you will sing my favourite song." And I said, "Yes, yes I will. I will sing that." I didn't have a clue how I was going to do it because of the emotions involved, and I was also grieving for her. A couple of days after that discussion, Doris passed away. The morning of the funeral I began to warm my voice and started focusing. I knew I would have to use all the skills I

had learned and the ones I was teaching to the chorus about focus and getting involved in the song. "Okay, Marney," I told myself, "It's time for you to practice what you preach." With that final thought, I drove to the funeral. The church was full and when it came time for me to sing, I took some deep breaths and looked at her casket. I thought, "This is for you, Doris." I was totally focused. I was oblivious to the congregation. I was doing this for Doris. I sang a song that she loved, and I didn't cry. I attribute being able to do that to the training that I got with the *Atlantic Sounds*.

There have been so many benefits to me as a result of my membership with the *Atlantic Sounds*. I can think of more than ten reasons why I am still here! I have learned to sing, to speak in front of people, to listen, to accept, to reason, to focus, to teach, to laugh at myself, and one of the big reasons I am still here is that it is now time for me to give back. Of course, when I first joined- -almost 20 years ago- -my perception of what singing with this chorus would be like was very different.

"You've got to join this barbershop group! You'll love it!" We were in the middle of a local store as my friend, Cheryl, extolled the virtues of this barbershop group. Around the same time, my good friend and fellow musician, Don, was also trying to convince me that I should give barbershop a try. He had taken on the job of director with the *Atlantic Sounds* and was quite enjoying this type of music. It was a new chorus and they were looking for members. I didn't know very much about barbershop and had only heard it performed once. Even with Cheryl and Don speaking its praises, I wasn't convinced this was the group or the activity for me.



That was the fall of 1983. I had just ended a very bad and difficult relationship and moved with my three children back to our previous home. The first couple of rehearsal nights went by and I didn't go. Then, one night I thought, "I need something. I have to get joy and music back in my life again! I need something for me." Although I did not consider myself a singer, I had sung harmony with my sister when we were growing up. My children were small and getting out one night a week to sing really appealed to me. So I thought, "I'll go over and see what's going on."

The rehearsal location was close to my home and I went by myself. The chorus was practicing in a portable classroom behind the local junior high school. I told myself, "I'll go tonight to satisfy Don and Cheryl, but it probably won't be what I'm looking for."

I peeked into the room and saw women standing around with Don at the front. All of a sudden this woman, Lette, saw me looking through the door. Lette is a vibrant, outgoing woman who is easily identified by and loved for her bright colours, inches of silver bracelets that go right up to her elbow and jingle whenever she moves, and her warm and spontaneous hugs! Arms waving, she came tearing towards me and hauled me into the room. They put me in the front row, shoved a piece of music at me, and the next thing I knew we were singing a song. I was amazed at the sound of four part harmony done with voice alone- -no instruments! It really grabbed me and I thought, "I'm going to like this! I'm really going to like it."

There was such fellowship and friendliness within this group of women and everyone was having such fun that I just kept going back. In fact, I don't think I've ever

missed a night of practice except when I was out of the country or I when I was sick- -and that wasn't very often.

Then the challenges started happening. There has to be a challenge for me to stick with something and I have to feel accomplishment. That's where the fun comes from for me, and I think that's the way it is for a lot of the members.

Singing in the Tenor section was my first challenge. Even though I had taken private piano lessons many years ago as a child, I was no longer familiar with printed music. I am a piano player, but I do not use music to play. I had to start learning to read music all over again.

I thought I would spend only one night a week with the chorus, and it often shocks me when I realize how much time I spend either singing, studying, or thinking about it. Little by little, I took more time from other hobbies and interests and gave it to the chorus. In the beginning it wasn't that busy- -performances and our yearly area contest. Gradually, as the children left home, I had more free time and took on more responsibilities. I went from a position of "taking from" to one of "giving to" the organization.

When I became the first chorus manager, I took the responsibility quite seriously. Being the first meant figuring out what I had to do. I arranged travel and performances, and I was out in the community interacting with people who wanted us to perform for them. That was very satisfying and I took great pride in this.

The outgoing president and chair of the nominating committee asked if I would serve as a member-at-large on the board of directors for a year. I had not held a position like this before, and I thought it would be very interesting. I learned a lot about the organization, which was great, and I also learned that it was not my niche. There were people on the board who were better at meetings, paper work, “Roberts Rules of Order,” and all of the things that administration entails. I am much happier and much more effective out in front of the chorus in some musical capacity. I usually like the challenges that are presented to me, but there have been a few that I did not accept. Twice I turned down the opportunity to be chapter president. I knew it wasn’t for me.

During those days, the chorus was improving, and I knew that I had an ability to help, especially in what was then the “stage presence” area. After attending my first Harmony Intensive Training School (HITS), I was encouraged to coach this area. I could see in my mind’s eye what we had to do to elevate our entertainment value and to make better scores at contests. I loved it, and seeing the difference it made with the chorus was very rewarding. The first year I coached stage presence, with Noreen directing, we went from 9<sup>th</sup> place to 5<sup>th</sup>. What a thrill!

I had lots of opportunities to try new things and to push myself outside my comfort zone. For example, early in the life of the chorus we began to hold a show every year or two. I have been stage manager a number of times now, and it is always exciting to work with a professional stage crew to develop and produce a good show. Our very first show on the main stage was a real test to my skill as a manager. Being a young

chorus, we did not have our own risers and planned to use the platform staging that belonged to the theatre. The crew set them up in a straight line and adjusted the lighting for that set up. Barbershop, or a cappella, choruses never stand in a straight line, we are always cupped or in a quarter circle so that we can hear each other. The crew was quite upset when I arrived and moved the risers. I had to make them understand the reasons for the change and I also had to stand my ground. They felt they were the professionals, and I had to let them know that I was also a professional and knew exactly what we needed. They made the changes I requested, and I have worked very well with them ever since.

Opportunities are often not planned and sometimes appear without much warning. In 1994, our director stepped down and we needed someone to replace her. I had never really had an interest in directing, but I had done some “arm waving” at various events. I did not want to see the chorus without a musical leader. For the next six years, I directed the chorus and returned to the risers after our regional contest in 2000. It was phenomenal what I learned during that time. With only four years away from this role, I have just agreed to once again take on the job of director beginning in September.

Being organized and prepared before I go to rehearsal and knowing exactly what we are going to do each night is very important. I need to know what songs we will be working on and how we are going to make each one sound and look better. Getting things organized in my head and then putting them on paper helps me stay calm and feel in control. When I was doing choreography, I would dream about the song and the possible moves we could make that would be appropriate. They had to bring the song alive. I

realized I was doing dance steps in my sleep and by the time I had some of the up-tunes choreographed, I am sure my toes had worn out the bed sheets!

The rewards came from seeing and hearing the songs we love develop with practice and commitment. I can close my eyes and see how a song will come alive for me, for the chorus, and for the audience. When that happens and I am painting the picture with my hands, the chorus gives it back to me [I get goose bumps just thinking about this]. It is very rewarding to have the song played back to me the way I dreamed it would be.

The entire music team is involved in bringing the song to life. The section leaders help when tuning problems occur, and they work directly with their sections to fix any wrong notes. Most things in the chorus require a team effort of some sort, and we have many leaders that develop as a result of being a team member first, then a team leader.

I am not the same person I was 20 years ago. Before Harmony, I would only sing if I was buried in a choir. After being with this chorus for only a couple of years, I sang solo at a few weddings and a couple of funerals and I remember thinking, "Look at me up here, with a microphone, singing all by myself! I would not have done **this** two years ago!" You could not have coaxed it out of me!

When I stepped down as director, I entered the judging program and am working towards certification in the presentation category. This is the biggest challenge I have faced yet. I often have to shake my head and wonder why I'm doing this, but then I go back to the reasons I got involved in the first place. I wanted to get more education, to be

a more effective coach, and to help other choruses and quartets (as well as our own) achieve their goals. The judging program is a long and difficult process and I have been discouraged enough to quit, but reflecting on these reasons makes me stronger and better able to continue.

Being involved in the judging program means I need the support of our membership. It would be very difficult to do what I am doing without it. For example our director has said I can videotape the coaching sessions I do with the chorus. Another friend has offered to videotape me coaching quartets, and the quartets have agreed to be videotaped while I coach them. My friends have also been very supportive and patient because sometimes when I have to practice, I lock myself away scoring videos of choruses and quartets.

I always had lots of friends and now, because of barbershop, I have this large circle of friends that I started developing 20 years ago. Some of them, the core members, have become like family. We have been through a great deal over the past twenty years; we have worked together through thick and thin and have become family. Even if we become annoyed or angry with each other from time to time, there is an unconditional love- -we accept each other with all our attributes and our faults. Because we are all singers, some of my friends have also become members of my quartets.

My five quartets (not all at the same time) have mixed and matched various members of the chorus. A quartet lives pretty close together, traveling to and from performances, sharing a room at contest, practicing during the week, and you live each

other's lives. You take time to hear about each other's problems, the joys, and the accomplishments. We try to keep the channels of communication open so that conflict does not arise. We try to be understanding, and we say we are wrong when we are wrong.

My first quartet was "Northumberland Notes." We were one of the first in the chorus to compete at our regional contest. We stayed together for a number of years until our Lead left the chorus. We continued to quartet, but in general, when quartet members are not involved in the chorus, they do not have access to the education the rest of us receive on a weekly basis. The change is subtle, but gradually they start to lose technique or quality. Often they get caught up in other things and lose interest. Finally, we disbanded, but when we are all together at a party, there are a few songs we will dust off and sing for the crowd.

Perhaps the challenge of singing in a quartet is another reason why I stay. There is a lot of fun in being a foursome- -going out and doing your own thing. I know of other quartets that have formed within the chorus and have stayed in the chorus for that reason. Being in a quartet provides a different type of education. You learn to sing by yourself, you work harder to develop your listening and tuning skills, and you cannot lean on anybody else for your part.

One of my rewards is the feeling I get when I sing. I don't have any trouble at all putting my problems in the imaginary box and tossing it out of the room. I feel much better when I sing- -I love the sound of harmony around me. Of course it is frustrating if

someone is singing out of tune in my ear, but that sometimes happens and is part of learning to sing the way we do.

Twenty years ago I enjoyed the singing and I had no idea of how much there was to learn. We sing so much better now, and I am more appreciative and aware of quality. I enjoy singing more now because we have learned to generate naturally the emotion in the song in order to tell the story. The more we get into the song, the more rewarding it is.

I see many women in the chorus developing a sense of self and an understanding that it is all right to look after themselves and to enjoy membership. I had a head start on this because I was widowed very young. I had to learn to do things for myself- -just to keep my sanity with a house full of babies. I didn't have any feelings of guilt or conflict about doing something for me, although I hear others talk about feeling guilty about their time with the chorus and time away from their families. Most of us try to include our families in as many of our events as possible. Partners and children come to our shows and help out where they can, they help set up for bake sales or flea markets, or the men help us move risers to and from a performance site. My children are very proud of me and my accomplishments and they like to help out at our different events.

I believe we are setting good examples for our children about self, about independence, and about respecting our individual needs. They learn that we are happier people for being involved in the chorus because we are doing something joyful and something we love. They also learn about volunteer work and how it can be fun and rewarding. We have a lot of fun whenever we get together, no matter what the reason.



I've been with the *Atlantic Sounds* for 20 years, so obviously my needs are being met. To think about what my needs are, I ask myself, "What would it take for me to leave?" One of the challenges I enjoy is singing well. So, if the quality of our performance fell so low that it was no longer a challenge to sing with the chorus, I would leave. If all of a sudden we lost many members and we had a small group that was singing out of tune all the time, it would drive me crazy and I would have to leave. That would be a very sad day and I would be devastated. But I could not stay. If this happened, my need for people and friendship would still be met through my long-time barbershop friends and from my other circle of friends.

If the chorus became a group of women who did nothing but bicker and fight, it would not be a happy, joyful place to be, and I would not be there. Our creed says it all, "Harmony from our hearts as well as voices." There are ways of hearing people's concerns if they are not comfortable voicing them. We have a person who acts as a liaison between the chorus members and the board. The concern can be handled anonymously. Depending on the concern, things may or may not be changed, but at least the individual knows it has been discussed and considered.

I know if we hadn't continued to grow, to achieve, and to have fun doing it, I wouldn't be there today. The majority of our membership is dedicated to the chorus and goes the extra mile to help us meet our goals. There seems to be an aura that envelopes this group of women. Without spelling it out to new people that join, the feeling is there.

We try to “walk the talk” and set the example of cooperation by demonstrating that each person’s contribution is valued.

Over the years there have been very few conflicts. Because we are a group that achieves through work, we do not have time for gossip, cliques, and pettiness. We work at something, accomplish it, and then experience the joy in it. If these negative things exist, I am not aware of them. I am very proud of how this chorus communicates. Because there are avenues for people to take, any potential conflicts are usually dealt with quickly and effectively. One conflict that did escalate happened a few years ago and came from negativity from one of the members.

Negativity is like a malignancy in a group like this. It stops you from giving yourself to the song and to the performance. If you have a person on the risers who is negative or working against you in any way for whatever reason, it is very difficult for the person out front. None of us have our Ph.D. in this. We take the training *Harmony, Inc.* gives us and we try to give it back to the chorus as best we can. We do this so that the chorus members will become educated and then able to give back. It becomes almost a mentoring process.

When this particular situation became regularly disruptive for the chorus and very hard and stressful for me, I requested assistance from the board of directors. They were excellent and handled the situation calmly and effectively. I put my faith in them. The member was treated fairly and given some options, however she chose not to follow through and left the chorus.

Harmony provides many training sessions for directors and conflict is a topic that usually surfaces and is discussed at length. I feel lucky that our chorus seems to be so accepting of each other's differences and personalities. Perhaps this is part of our maritime culture.

In the judging program I have had conflicts, both internal and with others, when I felt my training was lacking. Time was going on and I wasn't getting the training I needed to suit the people who were supposed to certify me. I felt lost and neglected and I had to challenge them to pay a little more attention to my needs. After several e-mails and conversations, I am getting the support results I need to succeed in the program. I am now in my fourth year. It takes a lot of my time at home on the Internet with my training people, doing assignments, and traveling. I'm expected to coach anywhere I am asked, so I travel throughout the maritimes to coach. I thoroughly enjoy working with these choruses and quartets. It's a way for me to give back.

I do not consider what I do in *Harmony, Inc.* to be a leisure activity. Twenty years ago it started out as leisure; something joyful, something I could love, just relaxation, one night a week. But now, so much of my time is given to it- -from learning music and performing as a chorus member to teaching and directing music as an assistant director, to coaching the presentation category and developing performance plans, to studying, traveling to coach, traveling to practice judge, to doing assignments for the judging program, to fundraising. This has turned from leisure to a labour of love. That is the only way I can describe it. A labour of love doesn't drive people away! I'm into it up to my

neck. People in the chorus don't have to get as involved as I have. I made these choices and accepted these challenges.

Without being aware of it, there is definitely a therapeutic benefit to belonging to this group. In the beginning I joined to put joy and to have something positive in my life. I needed to close doors, open new ones and to take my mind off some of the things that had made me angry. In that way, it was very therapeutic! I didn't dwell or talk about the past and I looked forward to thinking about and doing what needed to be done to contribute as a member. I think this has been the way for many of the members. They have joined because they needed something different in their lives.

What gave me that therapeutic benefit was purely the joy of singing! Once I am into it, it is impossible to think of anything else! There were nights when I did not feel like going to rehearsal; but the minute we started singing, all feelings of "I don't think I'll bother going tonight," are gone. I was part of creating something beautiful and it helped build my self esteem. Taking on these challenges and being able to achieve my goals have elevated my self-esteem and confidence.

Working with 30 to 40 women every week takes a lot of patience. I didn't think I was a patient person, but I found out I was. When it comes to teaching choreography, you have to take into consideration the person who has a lot of difficulty moving and emoting and develop a plan that will include them and be comfortable for them. That takes a lot of thinking and home work. You know the end product you want to see, and you go through the steps to achieve it. You teach the choreography using language and movement that

they can understand and do. I had great luck with that because I was able to demonstrate what I wanted. Perhaps that is a natural talent I didn't know I had but that I developed.

There are all different kinds of learners and learning styles on the risers. I don't know how I learned to work with them or to adjust my style. I just knew that there were some people who picked things up right away and others that needed a different approach. I don't think we have ever had a member who could not grasp a concept if it was explained to her in a way she could understand.

Education is such an important part of what this organization does that we have to offer it in different ways and at different levels of complexity. At Harmony Inc.'s educational events, classes are offered on various topics for beginners, intermediate, and advanced levels. In chorus, our vocal team members come from different backgrounds and each has her own teaching style. A visual person might say, "Think of taking your breath as breathing through your belly button!" A vocal leader who likes to know why she is doing a particular vocal exercise is more likely to explain the reason to the chorus. Many of our members want to learn as much as they can about everything, and there are those that need to understand how a specific activity relates to their own personal goals as well as to the goals of the chorus. There are also people who need to have a lot of variety because they get bored easily. We try to meet the many needs of the members.

Education empowers our members to take control of our own musical contribution. It equalizes us with other members of the organization. We become "equal" and feel better about ourselves on the risers. That, in itself, is empowerment. Years ago I

used to invite the new members to my house on a Saturday morning for basic choreography. We would have coffee and cookies then we would move back the furniture and practice basic choreography moves. They would feel so much better after because they could not enjoy the singing experience more.

If I had not been involved with the chorus, I don't know how I would have filled my mind and my days. I'm sure I would have gotten into other things, but I can't imagine anything else as fulfilling. I also believe it has kept me healthy. When you have an interest like this you take very little time to worry about aches and pains. It helps me maintain a positive attitude and I don't have time to sit around and get down on myself. If I am going to do all of these things in the organization, I have to stay healthy.

In the grocery store one day, a woman said to me, "Marney! You barbershoppers are always so up!" She is right. We have learned to be animated and to let our feelings show. And, we don't seem to get wrinkled as fast as other people because we do facial exercises, push our eyebrows up, and express ourselves vocally and physically. We love to get dressed up in glitz, get the hair all sparkly, get the make up on, and get out there and do what we love to do- -sing and entertain! With what other woman's organization can you accomplish this?

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**Reflections.** The challenges Marney has taken on within *Harmony, Inc.* are very impressive. The judging program is not for the faint of heart. Many start the journey and find it too difficult, time consuming, or expensive. It usually takes between three and five

years to certify as a judge and until certification, all travel expenses are assumed by the candidate. Although it is part of *Harmony, Inc.*, it has its own set of very complex and comprehensive guidelines under which all candidates and judges must perform.

Marney was one of the members who called me after I received the infamous letter of discipline so many years ago. We talked on the phone for over an hour and she told me several times that if I resigned from the chorus, it would be a great loss. Marney and others made me realize that, while I had a lot to learn about working successfully within an organization, I also had a lot to offer.

It is interesting that Marney feels her strengths are not within administration. Perhaps she does not view the role of chorus manager or show stage manager as administrative functions. Yet, she is very organized, methodical, and does a fine job. She is very reflective, possibly more aware of the personal gains of participation, and for that reason she may downplay the managerial role and the associated satisfaction. She seems more interested in grounding the experience in the development of identity.

### *Natasha's Story*

**Introduction.** Natasha moves with energy and purpose and always has a list of things to do. She is a woman of colourful contrasts. As a real estate agent, she always looks very professional and even her short, dark hair cut suits this image. Yet, she tends to “speak with her hands” and when she tells a story or a joke, her flamboyant gestures add to the humour or grandeur of the yarn. She can participate totally in a serious conversation and then find something humorous that lightens the discussion at just the right time. Although she does not speak with a French accent, she will often add an accent or a French phrase to express herself more fully.

Natasha is also a kind person with strong spiritual beliefs. She is a nurturer and a Good Samaritan. If you need her help, she will do anything for you. While I admire her for this, I think it also overwhelms her with duty, and it is often difficult for her to say “no.” There have been times in the chorus when she would volunteer to take on yet another task, and we would have to say, “Natasha, you don’t need to do that; you have enough on your plate.” I think she feels she should volunteer but is relieved when she knows it can be handled by others.

Over the years she has developed the self-confidence to deal with a career change and family challenges. Natasha’s sense of humour and story telling has gotten her through many difficult family circumstances. She can make you laugh at the most difficult situations she has experienced. When you think there is no light side to a situation, somehow Natasha will find it. When she tells these stories, we think that it is impossible for so many things to happen to one person! She seems to be in the wrong place at the



wrong time so often. We have encouraged her to write her stories so that others may learn from her experiences, her humour, and her spiritual perspective.

Natasha shares her spiritual side in many ways, but the most significant to me is through her singing. She is a soloist. Her voice is rich and resonant and if you close your eyes, you can get lost in the feelings it will generate in you. I think she is most at home singing songs with a spiritual message. Last year I went to a concert where she and her gospel group were performing. I do not consider myself a religious person, but I have to say that their performance was truly moving.

Natasha shared her story with me through journal writing and an interview. The following is Natasha's story.

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First, Margaret encouraged and cajoled me to join our community church choir. Then, she insisted that I go with her to a prospective member night for the *Atlantic Sounds*. She must have known that I needed something in my life that I couldn't see for myself.

Margaret had been a member of the '*Atlantic Sounds*' for a brief period in its very early days. I'm not sure why she left but in the fall of 1987, she received a call from one of the members letting her know they were holding a prospective member night and previous members were invited and encouraged to take a friend with them. Margaret invited me and, although I wasn't sure this was the kind of music I would enjoy, she was adamant that I go with her, and I agreed.

I was extremely shy back then and frankly, was terrified going into the rehearsal that first night. I wasn't sure what to expect. Margaret had quite a lot of formal musical training and I had absolutely none, so I felt a little intimidated by the whole thing. Although I sang as a child in our school choir, I never learned to read music. Our director, a sister from the school, could not read music either, but she taught us how to sing in three-part harmony! The love of singing and especially harmony became important to me even though I did not sing from the time I finished Grade Six until I joined the church choir.

We arrived very early at the school where the chorus practiced so we would get good seats. There were only about seven or eight of us in the audience, and I wondered where the chorus was. Suddenly, from behind the curtains, the chorus filed onto the stage. The last person to enter was Noreen, the director. She spoke a few words of welcome and then turned to the chorus. They began their first song. I was hooked from that moment on! I had never heard such "tight" harmonies before. The hair on the nape of my neck rose! I was very impressed by the amount of passion and conviction demonstrated by these women, especially since there were so few of us in the audience. I thought to myself, "I want some of this!"

At that point in my life, I had never done anything for me and me alone. I worked full-time, was a mother of three young children, and as is typical of most working mothers with kids, I was stressed-out. I thought it was finally time that I did something for me, alone, outside of the family circle. My husband had his outings, including many

kinds of sports activities, and lots of social time with his friends. Now it was my turn, so off I went.

I have to say that my husband was not at all supportive when I first joined the chorus. I don't know if it was jealousy or resentment for the time he had to spend, as he would say, "babysitting" the kids. I used to feel quite resentful myself when he would be put up a fuss- -after all, for the first 14 years of our marriage, I had done nothing but work and take care of the children and home. I never considered it my duty or "babysitting"- - it's just what you did as a parent. Even with the guilty feelings, I stuck to my guns and would not back down with my conviction of doing something for myself.

I think belonging to this organization helped me avoid some of the pitfalls that I have seen in some of my close relationships. It is easy to become a martyr if you don't have interests outside the home that take your mind off your own problems and issues. Singing has given me more things to talk about with family and friends, and certainly I have many things to think about. It has given me a reason to get out of the house and to do things for myself and for others. I still feel guilt, and I know I continue to take on more than an equal share of the household duties, but I have become much better at handing my husband the dish towel.

Throughout the years, he has become, it is funny to say, my biggest supporter. Of course, it's much easier as the children have grown and are more self-sufficient. Now he never misses our shows and is always waiting by the phone when we are away at a competition to see how we fared out. I think the turning point for him was when I started

quartetting. I believe he realized how important this was for me and how much I enjoyed it. Perhaps he heard positive comments from other people about his wife's singing abilities and was shamed into it. But, perhaps he realized I was good at this and he was proud of me.

The children have always been supportive, but let's face it- -barbershop style of music is not their top choice! Except for my youngest- -just turned 19- -who has shown an interest in one day joining the chorus. We'll see! This sounds extremely selfish but I'm not sure if I want her to join. I love her dearly, but this is "my" bag and I need the time away from all of them.

During the past 17 years I have taken on many positions in the chorus. For a shy person, this is quite an accomplishment. I first became secretary to the board or directors. As I had worked in the administrative support field for many years, this was a comfortable position for me. Then I was president for two years and stayed on the board of directors for the next two years as past president. I served on a number of organizing committees for events and shows. Eventually I took over as director.

As director, it is very rewarding to work with the chorus and to hear the songs come together, the chords lock, and feel the song take life. Although I have really enjoyed this role, it is now time to turn the job over to someone else. I am tired and I really want to return to the risers, to the grass roots of why I joined. I came from the risers and I want to go back to the risers.

Singing is my hobby, and it is also my passion. At first it was definitely a leisure activity, but now as director, I consider it work. It takes quite a bit of time to prepare for rehearsals and to work with all of the different people in various support roles. Some evenings there is so much going on that it is difficult to get everything I planned into the rehearsal. There are times when you have to attend music or show committee meetings that are held either before practice or on an extra night.

Although it takes a lot of time, there have been so many benefits from my membership with this group. There have been times when my family situation was difficult and demanding for me. It was a challenge to keep my perspective and to keep going. My friends in the chorus were there to listen and support. They couldn't change the things that were happening but they helped me feel better, and they listened. That was very important to me.

Because I couldn't read music, it took awhile to get my feet under me. Everything I know about music I have learned from this chorus. Taking on the various roles really forced me out of my box, out of my comfort zone, and I developed enough self-confidence that I have been able to sing solos in church and speak in public. I took over the directorship of the church choir and for a number of years had both directing jobs. I also had the self-confidence and strength to resign from the church choir position when I felt uncomfortable with some things that were taking place that I could not change. Unfortunately, in that position I did not have a board of directors to support me, as we do

in the chorus, and I struggled for quite a while before finally resigning. Once I made the decision, I knew it was the right one and have never regretted it.

Today I am involved with the church for weddings and funeral services. I spend two or three hours with each bereaved family as they plan the funeral for their loved one. It takes confidence, understanding, compassion, and patience to help these families through these difficult times. I don't think I could have served our congregation like this if I had not developed the trust and self-confidence in myself that I could help.

My self-confidence also developed to the point where I was able to think about changing careers. I left the administrative support field, signed up for a real estate course, graduated first in the class, and have been in that field now for over 10 years. I'm also comfortable with the recognition that I'm ready to change careers again, and I'm confident that the right opportunity will appear.

Being in real estate is exhausting work, the church work can be emotionally draining, and the challenges of teens and family commitments can be overwhelming. Some nights I'd arrive at either chorus or quartet rehearsal so completely exhausted and laden down that I could have put my head down and cried. I would put on a brave face and fake my way through the first part of the rehearsal, but before I knew it, I was truly enjoying myself. For a short time I could forget all of my problems and just let the music wash over me! What a blessing music is. It can act as your healer, your muse, your enjoyment, and your hobby. How I envy those who can make it their career. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to make a living at what is your "passion?"

When I think of how I feel when I sing, aside from the usual response such as happy, joyful, elated, etc., there are times that I feel like I'm almost having an "out of body" experience. There is nothing I love better than to get into a song (particularly a heart-felt ballad) and sing it with all my heart and soul. I could have the weight of the world on my shoulders, and sometimes it sure felt like I did, and the music would help me feel better.

I used to worry when I sang, particularly when I was quartetting. When you are tense, your throat tightens, you sing like a little girl, and you are so worried about making a mistake, that you usually do. I think I'm finally coming into my own now and am more comfortable saying, "The heck with it." I am more relaxed and really enjoy the music. I love to crawl into a chord and forget about everything else. When you have three other voices doing the same thing, it is pretty neat.

I have learned that one of the things I do well is sing, and that knowledge has been a gift to me. For the past couple of years I have performed in a church gospel group with three other women. Although it is not barbershop, it is a type of music that carries deep meaning for me. It seems to have a spiritual effect in that when I sing and take the music out, it feels like a form of double prayer. I feel God's work coming through me. It is very moving for me as a singer and our audiences tell us it touches them as well. The self-assurance I developed from singing with the *Atlantic Sounds* gave me the confidence to broaden my musical journey.

The path has not always been easy and there have been conflicts along the way. Although I have learned to stand my ground and to speak my mind, I still don't like conflict and avoid it as much as possible. I always like to keep everyone happy, which of course is impossible. I have sleepless nights worrying about a situation and trying to figure out how to handle it. As time has gone on, I have become more comfortable with dealing with all of the issues that come up, but it still unnerves me. Even if we can't please everyone, as long as they feel heard, it makes it easier to live with.

If conflict within the chorus got really bad and the culture changed so that people were mistreated, my belief system would not let me tolerate continuing as a member. It would take a long time for me to make a decision to leave because I would want to see if things could be changed. Luckily *Harmony, Inc.* and the *Atlantic Sounds* have democratic policies and procedures that ensure people have a chance to voice their opinions.

If the sound got really bad for a long period of time, I would have to consider leaving. For that to happen, we would have to lose a number of people. But that is the main reason we have membership drives and we try to introduce our style of singing to as many people as we can.

Music is very powerful, but if it is done poorly, it is not very satisfying. We work very hard to sing well and are constantly learning new things. I have been fortunate to be able to attend many of *Harmony, Inc.*'s educational events. We receive education and training at our chapter, regional, and international levels. As director, I attended Harmony Intensive Training School (HITS) several times. By going to the classes, taking notes, and



talking to the other directors and instructors, I learned new techniques that I was able to bring back to the chorus. If I had a basic understanding of a topic, I was able to embellish and enhance what I already knew. Because these schools are so beneficial, our chorus raises funds to support sending the director and depending on the location of the school, some of our music team.

I have never really thought of myself as an educator, although that is what I do at every rehearsal. The teaching techniques we use are ones that we have tried and modified to meet our needs. There is one technique I learned about at HITS and by going to the web site and doing some extra reading, I was able to modify it to suit us.

Sometimes we can get pretty serious and intense when we are trying to tune a difficult chord or learn a new piece of music. I try to use humour as much as I can when I'm working with our members. Humour can lighten the situation, and it seems to relax everyone. It is part of what makes me who I am.

We have a lot of different types of members/learners. Some people always have their noses buried in the music. It's difficult to add interpretation to a piece when eyes are on the paper and not on the director. Some like to use learning tapes and others plunk their part out on the piano. We all seem to get to there at approximately the same time, but everyone has a slightly different way of learning. Very few of us have formal music or teacher training. In our chorus we have one music teacher and a few others that have taken piano lessons in their youth. Lots of our members used to sing in choirs, which is where many of us got our original interest in singing. Many of the instructors at our

educational schools are sharing what they have learned along the way, although we are fortunate to have a number of very well qualified individuals in the organization. Because they love the barbershop style of music so much, and they love this organization, they share their time, talents, and energy with our members.

For me, singing well is fun. It is a challenge to take a new piece and put it together, balance the chords, add the interpretation, and perform it for an audience! Some of us spend a lot of time on this hobby that is also our passion. Perhaps that is why many people don't last a really long time. Over the years there have been some key people that I can think of that contributed musically and administratively. I thought they would stay forever, but they left. For some it was financial, for others it was personality issues with other members, and for some the singing became more work than fun.

Many of these people still attend our social functions and have stayed good friends with some of the members who were there during their times. When we ask them if they miss chorus, they often say that they miss the people, but they don't really miss all the work. A few of our past members have traveled to our regional and international contests when they were close by. They love to hear the contests, visit with friends they have made over the years from other choruses, and watch us perform. As much as we would like them back on the risers with us, we are just glad that they are there supporting us as much as they do.

There have been times when I've thought that having that kind of relationship with the chorus might be nice. I've asked myself why I have stayed so long and there

were times when I thought I might take a leave of absence or even quit- -especially on those nights when I was so darned tired! But, when it comes right down to the nuts and bolts of it, I would miss the friendship and music too much. I've made some lifelong friends throughout these past years and cherish these dearly. Also, during the years, the sound of the chorus (not only ours but all of the choruses in *Harmony, Inc.*) seems to be continually improving; I don't want to miss out on any of it. A good fix for feeling down is to go away to a competition where the fellowship and music gets to me and I am as excited as I was the very first time I went.

Every year when we head off to our regional competitions we always wonder how hard the other choruses and quartets have worked, how they will sound, and what their performances will be like. You can work really hard and then get on stage and make an error that has not been made before. That can cost points and placement in the final results. Although we have never won first place in our area, we have won a number of awards and we have qualified to compete at the international level many times. It is a great feeling when you have performed your package and, as you leave the stage and enter the contest hall, you are greeted by loud and loving applause from your peers. This is always satisfying and seems to make all the hard work worthwhile.

I never in my wildest dreams would have believed it if, those many years ago, someone would have told me that I would do all the things I have done, learned all the things I have learned, and had so much fun. I have taken these successes and applied them to all other aspects of my life- -career, home, and family.

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**Reflections.** Natasha's journey with the *Atlantic Sounds* began a few years after the rest of us, and she missed some of the early growing pains that we experienced.

As Natasha reflected on her experience, it is revealing that all aspects of her life have been impacted by her involvement in this organization. I have always viewed Natasha as self-confident and outgoing, and for her to share that her inner turmoil sometimes gets the better of her, is enlightening for me.

Her story demonstrates the depth of commitment and the impact membership can have on our mental state. It is as if the heavy burden she carries when she comes to rehearsal is broken down and carried off, piece by piece, by the angels of song and the gentle caresses of harmony.

Natasha's difficulty in dealing with conflict is probably part of the burden she carries. Sleepless nights while living and reliving difficult situations are exhausting and can make the days harder to get through. Once she deals with a situation she sometimes continues to second guess herself. I think it is better for her now than it used to be; perhaps as her confidence grows, it will be easier for her still.

I was unaware that Natasha was so involved in pastoral work at the church. I knew she had been choir director for awhile and sang at weddings and funerals, but to spend the time she does with grieving families is, I believe, a testament to her spiritual nature. Her love of people and her desire to make their journey through a difficult time a little less painful is inspiring.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Reflections

### *Analysis*

During the course of this inquiry, I attended one *Harmony, Inc.* international competition and three regional ones. As I became more comfortable with the purpose of my research, I began sharing my question with some of the women I met. Invariably, as I was chatting with long-time acquaintances, they would say, “So, Jan, what are you doing with yourself these days?” I would then tell them about my research, and I could see their eyes light up as they began to recall their own stories of how they came to be members of *Harmony, Inc.* and why they stayed. Sometimes I would not even finish telling them about my research when they would enthusiastically jump in and share their experience with me. Although it was not data that I recorded, on every occasion my analysis was reinforced and supported; the themes were, in every case, similar to the themes identified in this study.

My research has changed how I view my membership with the *Atlantic Sounds*, and with *Harmony, Inc.* I look with different eyes at the friendships and associations I have had, and at the culture of our chapter and parent organization. With my new perspective, I observed, in a casual, curious way, interactions among the women attending these four events. The fact that the events are in different provinces and most of the faces are all different does not seem to change the commonalities that I see.

Whenever I attend these events, I usually get totally involved as a participant and have never just sat back and watched. I run from place to place watching the schedule, moving from one educational class to another, dressing for quartet contest and then

running off to evaluations, then running back to the room to change for chorus contest. It can be a very busy and hectic weekend. But at these events, I wanted to slow my pace and feel the mood; I was curious to see what I would discover if I opened myself to my surroundings.

Feelings of homecoming permeate the atmosphere at these events. We greet each other with hugs as friendships established over the years are rekindled. We laugh and share stories of what we have been doing since we last saw each other. And, it is more than that. The culture of this organization is one of support and caring. At the last *Harmony, Inc.* event I attended, I observed a number of examples of this support in just a three-hour time period.

Wanda, a young and beautiful director, who has been fighting breast cancer, receives a standing ovation as she and her chorus complete their performance. These women sing with emotion and conviction- -as if they need her to know they are doing their very best for her. When the chorus places in the top four and Wanda returns to the stage to accept their ribbons, the audience roars and shares her joy. With gentle and heartfelt encouragement from the audience, she removes her hat to show her bald head. With a shy, half smile on her face, she leans over to show the audience the purple lettering that covers half of her pale scalp that reads, "KICK ASS." Cheers of "Way to go, Wanda," "Go get'em," and "We love you, Wanda!" fill the room, and the emotion of the moment moves many of us to tears.

At the end of the evening, when I speak with Wanda to get her permission to share her story in my inquiry, she says the love and support that she felt on stage and throughout the weekend is overwhelming. Women are sharing their personal cancer experiences with her and letting her know how much they care. It is hard to believe, but she feels while the cancer has certainly been a challenge for her and always on her mind, it has also been a gift. It has brought her closer to those she loves and it has given her a new appreciation for life. It has given her a new connection with many of our organization's members that she never had before.

During the same contest, an announcement is made that earlier in the day five women from a United States chorus had their purses stolen while they were involved in a convention activity within the hotel. In the spirit of *Harmony, Inc.* members are asked to donate a dollar to the "get them home" fund. As I drop in my contribution, I see that people have clearly heard the call for help. The contest organizers reposition the chorus in the contest so that the members can deal with hotel security and the feelings of violation that happen when a personal item such as a purse is stolen. They need time to cancel credit cards, to deal with a variety of issues that result from such a loss, and to regain their composure. As the curtain rises on their performance, there is no evidence of the turmoil they have just experienced. They are united in purpose and focus on their mission to entertain their audience.

As the evening draws to a close, I chat with a woman I have not seen for years. She just finishes sharing her story about her thirty-year membership when I feel a tap on

my shoulder and see a face I have not seen for more than 15 years. A former member of the *Atlantic Sounds*, who left the province when her husband was transferred, has finally found a start-up chapter in her area. It is wonderful to reconnect with her and to know that she still has singing and music in her life. Her chorus is brand new, and this small group of women receive their *Harmony, Inc.* Charter that evening and are warmly and loudly welcomed by four hundred fellow barbershoppers.

At the end of the evening a special presentation is made to a group of women who have been members of *Harmony, Inc.* for more than 30 years. The names of more than 25 women are called and, as they make their way to the stage, I have a lump in my throat and tears in my eyes. Some of these women are more than 80 years of age and yet they stand tall and beam with pride as the international president hands them their certificates. Some of these women are founding or early members of our organization and were there through the ups and downs, the pains of growth, and the satisfaction of seeing a strong, democratic organization develop and flourish.

Throughout this contest I am sitting beside one of the women who will receive a certificate. During the evening she shared with me some of the turmoil of the early days, of the feelings of anger and disillusionment that accompanied the decision to leave their previous barbershop organization and to set out to form a new, stronger, more democratic one. Many of her friends from the early days have passed away now or are in ill health. She misses them terribly. She continues to come to these events to see old friends that are well enough to travel and to see the new friends she had made over the years. It helps to



have a change of scenery, to have the fun of getting dressed up and putting on the glitz, and of putting the cares and reality of every day life behind her.

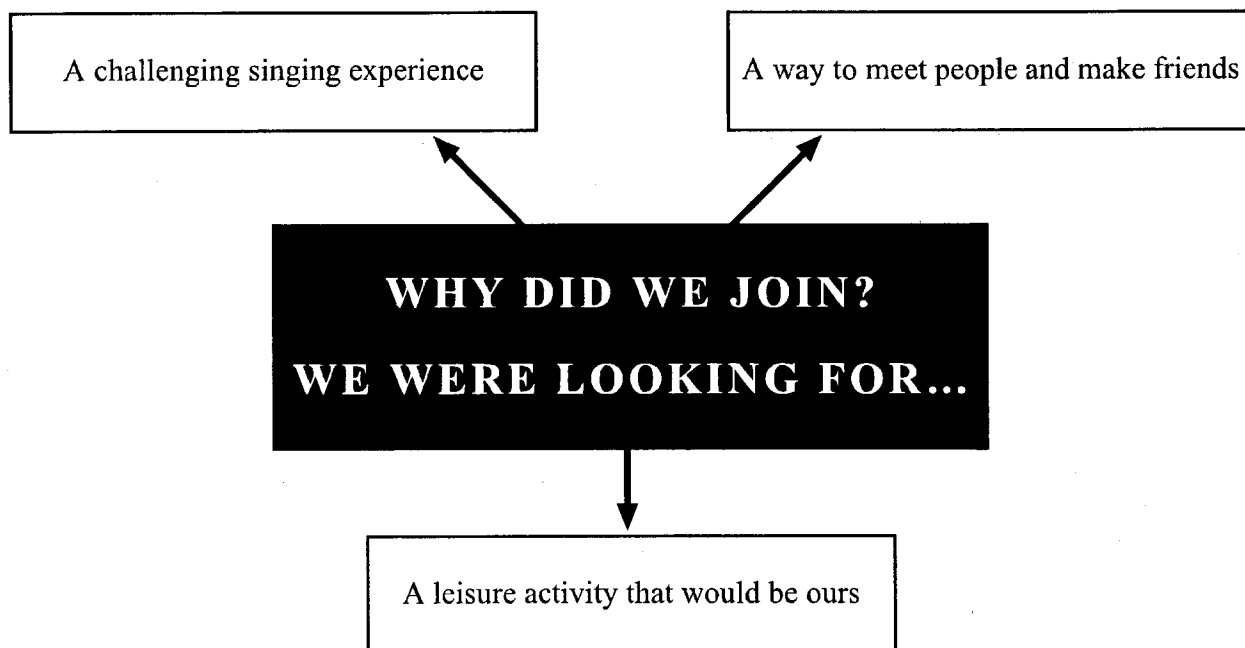
From the chair next to me she watches her friends receive their certificates. Her hands are clasped together tightly with excitement and her chin rests on her hands. I see moisture at the corners of her eyes and I can hardly wait until her name is called. As the president announces her name, she jumps up, and with arms raised high, she turns to accept the warm applause from the audience. She moves easily and proudly to the platform as if she were a young athlete circling a track after winning a race. Finding her place takes a minute or two as hugs are given to each person who has preceded her to the stage.

While the participants in this study do not have the long history of this barbershop veteran, they were selected because of their years of membership in the *Atlantic Sounds* and because of our common experiences and relationships. An analysis of their stories reveals a number of themes.

To answer fully the question, "Why did we join?" it is important to answer the first question asked in the introduction. "What attracts women to this particular activity?"

## Why did we join?

### *“Why did we join?” Visual Representation*



### *What attracts women to this particular activity?*

*It is perceived as a leisure activity.* Each participant in this inquiry was looking for and ready to add a new leisure activity to her life that she did not have to share with children or partner. We thought it would be just a “night out with the girls,” and never guessed that it would move from a casual, leisure activity to a labour of love that requires hours of dedication and work. Marney was looking for something that would bring back the joy and music she had lost after the ending of a painful relationship, Natasha hoped to enjoy the same type of freedom and enjoyment that her husband had with his activities

and friends, Rosemary's children were sufficiently independent and she was ready for something new in her life, and I needed a break from diapers and wanted to have fun, sing, make some friends, and relax.

Each of us had facilitators (enablers) and constraints (inhibitors) (Raymore, 2002) that either made it relatively easy for us to join or which created obstacles around which we had to work. For example, the attitude of Natasha's husband, who was unsupportive initially, is a constraint; however, her determination was a stronger facilitator and it outweighed his lack of support. I had two young children and a husband who worked long hours, which could have been constraints; however, they were all supportive of me joining. Hiring a babysitter enabled me to go every week on time when my husband could not get home from work when I needed him.

Even though I feel I am my own person and could join any type of leisure activity I choose, Deem's (1986) research about the types of leisure activities that are acceptable for women strikes a chord (or, perhaps a bit of a discord) with Rosemary, Natasha, and me. I have to admit the fact that the *Atlantic Sounds* and *Harmony, Inc.* are women's groups certainly made it easier for me to join. It was a facilitating factor.

Although I selected the participants for this study, it seems a coincidence that all of us have children. Not all members of *Harmony, Inc.* or the *Atlantic Sounds* have children, and it is not a pre-requisite for membership. When we joined, our children's ages ranged from toddlers to teens. Now, all of us are grandmothers and occasionally our conversations sound as they did twenty years ago when we talked about the "wee" ones

and their issues. Although we were all devoted to our children, we felt we would be better parents if we looked after ourselves by joining the *Atlantic Sounds*.

Perhaps the words of Thrasher and Smid (1998) in *Smart Women* have a ring of truth to them, “Women who do take time for themselves are more interesting to be around, less antagonistic and resentful, and have more energy and more joy to give back” (p. 191). I do not know what the level of agreement would be of participants in this inquiry to the descriptors of “antagonistic and resentful,” but certainly we all felt we would be more interesting and have more energy and joy to give to our loved ones.

Shaw (2001) points out, leisure may be a form of resistance and it has the potential to empower and bring about change. Although the four participants in this study all had different degrees of need for empowerment and change, upon reflection it is obvious that we all wanted to make some sort of change in our lives. If we were looking for empowerment, it was unconscious at the time. The changes took place subtly over time. In fact, it was not until participating in this inquiry that some of us realized the extent to which we had changed and grown.

By giving ourselves permission to take care of ourselves, Gilligan (1982) might suggest that we had moved through the second transitional phase into the third level of moral development. We recognized the need for and the benefit of caring for both “self” and others.

*It is expected to be a place where one can make new friends.* We were all interested in meeting new people and making friends. I lived in a small community and

did not socialize much in the area. Rosemary wanted to expand her circle of friends outside her work environment. Marney needed to surround herself with positive people, and Natasha was anxious to experience camaraderie similar to what her husband had with his friends.

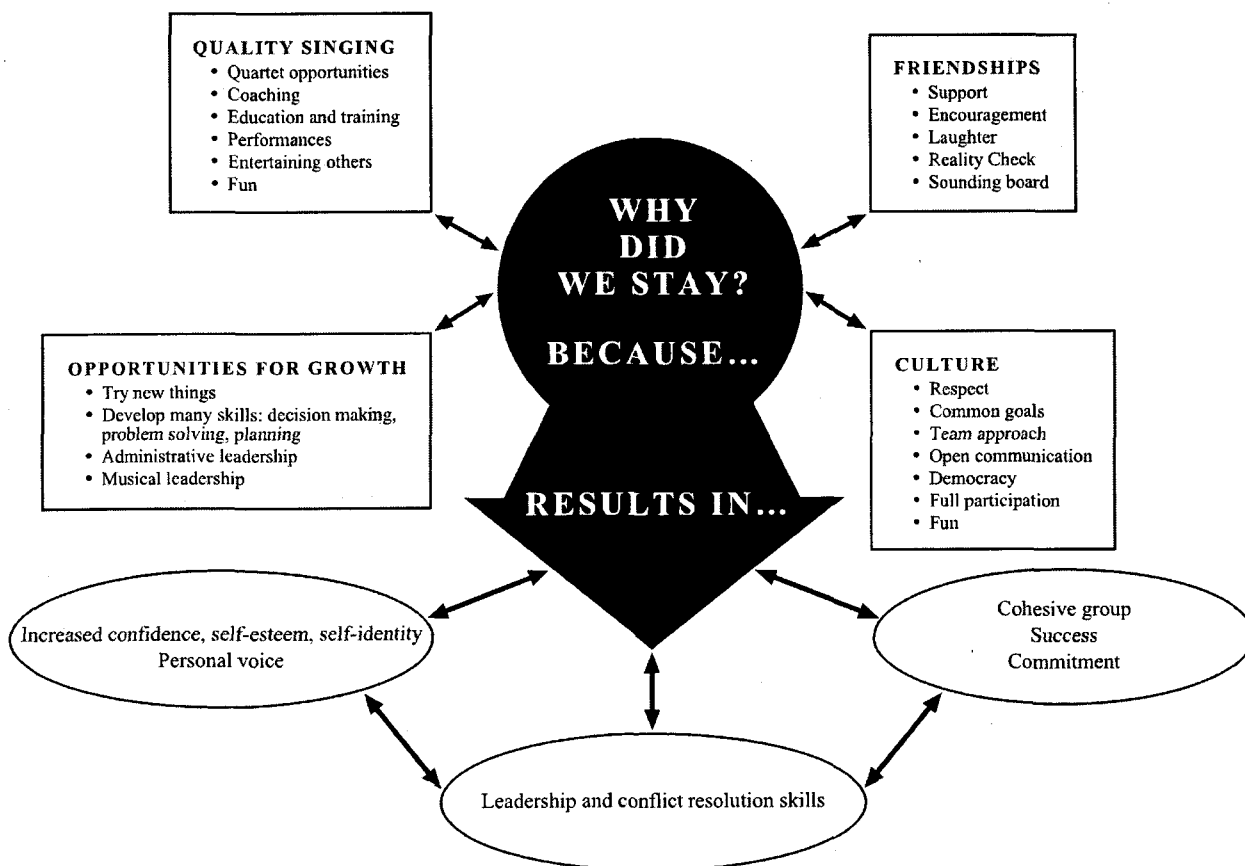
None of us had any real connection with anyone in the chorus when we joined. We were taking a risk by joining a group where we really did not know anyone. Marney knew a couple of people while Natasha and I went with friends who knew something about barbershop. Rosemary knew of a few of the members but she did not know anyone personally.

Our memories of our first rehearsals are vivid and positive. More than fifteen years later, we still remember who greeted us, how we felt, and how everyone was so warm and friendly.

*It is an opportunity to sing and to learn more about singing.* We love music and singing and have it somewhere in our backgrounds. For each of us, music played an important role in our upbringing. The memories from these experiences were pleasant, and we wanted to recreate some of the benefits in a new form. Marney and Rosemary had music in their homes as well in their schools. Natasha and I found our interest developed through school choirs and for me, several musicals. All of us had belonged to church choirs at one time or another. In each story, there seemed to be a break from singing before we realized how much we missed it and before we realized we wanted it back in our lives.

## *“Why did we stay?”*

### *“Why did we stay?” Visual Representation*



### *What are the common themes that keep members involved over time?*

**Friendship.** When we joined, the existing members seemed genuinely pleased that we were there. Even though we were all nervous about our initial singing performances, we felt great support from the membership. People talked to us, answered our questions, and made us feel welcome. This has continued through the years, and now we play an active role in ensuring other members have a similar experience. The

relationships we established during those first few rehearsals developed into some of our closest friendships.

Over the years, we have made many friends, and there is always room for more. We depend on each other for our singing fix, for support and encouragement, and for the fun we relish. Our longevity in the chorus and a quick pictorial of the friends we have made and stayed in touch with over the years supports the research of MacRae (1990). As we may all be considered as, “getting up there in years,” each of us has more clearly defined, and is more comfortable with, “self” and what it means to us. This has been nurtured through the interpersonal relationships we have developed with others and through the roles we have assumed. As we move through and explore the different stages of life, I like to believe that the time we have invested will contribute to our long-term state of mind, our sense of self, and our personal identity.

The value we place on these relationships is very high. Not only do we have many things in common which gives us lots to talk about, but we constantly learn from each other. We are comfortable sharing our own thoughts and do not worry if there might not be agreement. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldengenger, and Tarule (1986) explore the experiences of women. One section discusses a young student and how she and her other classmates have so many things in common. Initially they found they had everything in common--as if they were speaking with one voice. However, after the friendships grew and became stronger, a transformation occurred within the relationships. Each woman was able to find her own distinctive voice and

express herself in her own words, even when they disagreed. I believe this is how many of our relationships developed.

It is exactly these kinds of relationships that provide women with experiences of mutuality, equality and reciprocity that are most helpful in eventually enabling them to disentangle their own voice from the voices of others. It is from just such relationships that women seem to emerge with a powerful sense of their own capacities for knowing. (p. 38)

Belenky et al.'s (1986) closing paragraph describes our friendships very well, "... (they) had learned to speak with one another in a way that they could cultivate most easily in relationships imbued with care, trust, and endless discussions (p. 39). Goodman and O'Brien's (2000) description of friendships being bound by laughter and serious talk certainly depicts the friendships that have formed within the *Atlantic Sounds*.

***Opportunities for growth.*** The opportunity to step out of our comfort zones and try things began that first evening and has never changed. Involvement in chapter administrative or musical leadership began almost immediately for all of us. Among the four of us, there are few positions that we have not held. From her board of director's experience, Marney learned that she prefers to be in front of the chorus either directing or coaching. So great is her interest that she is investing four years and her own money and a great deal of time to become a presentation judge. Natasha found she has strengths in both administrative and musical leadership and served as both president and director. Rosemary and I, although we have been sections leaders, prefer the challenges of administration and have spent much of our *Harmony, Inc.* careers on the board of directors or in some organizational capacity. My 16 years as either a member of the



international or chapter board of directors taught me a great deal about governance, policy development, as well as organizational behaviour, delegation, and empowerment.

Mannell (1999) tells us that leisure is important to our sense of self and well being and that these are developed through opportunities for growth and self-actualization. We will be happiest and most fulfilled in direct proportion to how much activity we maintain as we age. The fact that we sing regularly and have many opportunities for personal growth, contribute to our feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction.

When we joined, we were not really looking for ways to challenge ourselves or to move out of our comfort zones. The chorus was small and there were many jobs to be done and opportunities to participate. We discovered our interest in and commitment to the chorus is stronger rather than weaker because we take on new roles and responsibilities. There are times when we take on tasks that are unfamiliar to us and stretch us to new limits. As we become comfortable in a role or with a responsibility, we take on new jobs that require us to learn and apply new skills.

Rosemary and I have teamed up many times over the years to co-chair events such as shows or membership drives. She also worked with me as part of the regional team when I was the area representative to the international board of directors. We seem to be well matched in our thinking and we are comfortable sharing divergent ideas. When I was asked to be president this year, my decision was much easier knowing that Rosemary would be the vice-president.

The triumph we feel when we have done a job well or when we take on new and challenging responsibilities adds to our self-esteem, self-worth, and our confidence. Over time, we have found strength in our singing voice as well as in the voice that expresses who we are, what we are feeling, and what we need. In the discussion about friendship, Belenky et al. (1986) suggest one way women find their voices is through supportive relationships. I believe that the self-confidence and increased self-esteem gained from personal growth also supports the development of voice.

By not putting ourselves last and by giving ourselves permission to participate in self-development, we are on the journey to “becoming a whole person” (Thrasher & Smid, 1998, p. 189) and creating a new definition of balance. In finding this balance, we have moved to Level Three of Gilligan’s moral development (Hinman, 1997). This is a level at which we are comfortable taking care of both self and others.

***Culture.*** Culture can be defined as “the set of key values, assumptions, understandings, and norms that is shared by members of an organization and taught to new members as correct” (Daft, 2001, p. 511). Every organization has its own culture and there can even be cultures within departments or working groups of organizations. Culture is how an organization “looks” and “feels” when you enter.

We have come to take our culture for granted. We think, “We have just learned to get along,” or “we are lucky that we get along.” However, luck really has nothing to do with it. We have worked very hard at developing these skills. We have learned from our mistakes and created a culture where communication takes many forms. Herzlinger

(1999) suggests that cultures are formed from differences of opinions, refined and strengthened through challenges, and led by people with complementary skills. “The culture survives its immediate leaders and is passed on from one generation to the next, in part through continual repetition of the pivotal events in the formation of the culture” (p. 113).

The four of us have positions within the chapter that allow us to contribute significantly to its culture and its success. It is a responsibility we do not take lightly. Because we have common values, we try to set examples that others will recognize, identify with, and emulate. Feedback from our recent membership drive demonstrates to us that we are creating a culture of friendship and support. Our new members feel welcome and, although nervous about some of the singing expectations, feel supported and wanted. We also try to obtain feedback from those who decide not to join and to determine if we need to change our recruiting strategies and to be more responsive to the needs of potential members. This demonstrates that our culture is open to listening to people and making changes where they are needed.

When we first joined, we felt the culture was supportive and friendly. We quickly identified with the group’s goals, interacted and communicated with the other members, and shared common desires. Kasschau (2001) would probably agree that as long as these elements are in agreement, the *Atlantic Sounds* has the makings for a long-lasting and thriving group.

One way we create bonds and commitment within the chorus is with ceremonies (Daft, 2001). Our new members go through four weeks of orientation. They are voice placed and perform with a quartet (a simple song). When they successfully complete this, they apply for membership. We have a ceremony at rehearsal during which the membership chairperson and president present each new member with her *Atlantic Sounds* name tag. Once a year, usually in the spring, we have another ceremony, Installation, during which the outgoing board of directors is thanked for their hard work, the incoming board is welcomed and the new members receive their *Harmony, Inc.* pins. These ceremonies strengthen the bond we share. We hold the Installation Ceremony on a different day and allow time for socializing and impromptu singing.

Our commitment to the chorus is demonstrated in many ways. We have a desire to give back to the organization. I served on the International Board of Directors for many years and helped *Harmony, Inc.* during the initial phase of developing an international education program. Marney has been involved with the judging program and coaches quartets and choruses throughout the maritimes. Natasha and Rosemary have contributed to the chapter both musically and administratively on the board or music team.

Our culture includes and encourages member participation. We all began by working in small groups and gradually moved to taking responsibilities for the entire chorus. Every person, no matter how busy they are, can help out in some way. Following our membership drive this year we assigned each new member to a committee (they were given a number of choices). There is at least one other new member and one experienced

member on the committee. Kasschau's (2001) research might suggest this is a good idea because there is safety in numbers, and it will allow the new members to share their ideas openly. We hope by getting them involved quickly and letting them know their contribution is appreciated, their commitment to the chorus will grow. We hope that within a year or so, the new members will be able to take over those committees and the more experienced member can move on to new challenges.

Using the small group, or team approach, is also supported by the work of Coulter (1999) in her study, *Speaking up: The Importance of Voice and its Implications for Organizations*. Organizations cannot survive without member participation, discussion, and input and people feel more able to contribute in these closer environments.

Although we have not done a goal-setting session for a number of years that includes every member, the various leadership teams meet and plan, and the members are asked for input. As a result, we identify the performances, or singouts, we will do and create a schedule for the year. This meets one of Kasschau's (2001) requirements of group status. We establish goals and work towards them. It gives our rehearsals direction, our committees focus, and our enthusiasm a boost.

We recognize this hobby of ours is not for everyone. One has to be able to sing in tune and the time commitment can become overwhelming. Some people realize early on that this commitment is more than they can manage, at least at this time. It is exciting when someone tells us, "I wanted to join years ago, but I knew I could not make the commitment. Now, I am here!" We try to stay in touch with those who leave and invite

them to our social gatherings. You never know when the time will be right for them to return, and we want them to know they will be welcome.

For the most part, we are all pretty healthy and credit this, in part, to singing. Singing releases stress and provides an avenue for developing new coping strategies. Putting our cares and woes in an imaginary container and then throwing it out of the rehearsal room is good therapy. It causes a chuckle and it reinforces the message that we leave our problems outside the hall. A feeling of well being usually accompanies a good rehearsal, and this in turn, helps the body and soul.

An unreferenced, but none-the less interesting, internet website White (2001), *Singing is good for you*, describes the health benefits of community singing. She describes research from the University of Manchester,

Singing provides catharsis across the full emotional spectrum. It can give a directly-experienced, felt-sense of happiness. It's a mood lifter and anti depressant with no side effects. And it's not news to health professionals that mental and physical health are intimately linked. (p. 2)

White (2001) also describes the physical benefits studied by University of Surrey in Roehampton UK.

People who sing are healthier than people who don't. Singing gives the lungs a workout, tones up abdominal and intercostals muscle and the diaphragm, and stimulates circulation. It makes us breathe more deeply than even many forms of strenuous exercise, so we take in more oxygen, improve aerobic capacity and experience a release of muscle tension as well. (p. 2)

If singing helps us release tension, then we have to ensure the rehearsals do not add to our stress. There have been times when rehearsals have not been fun and we go home agitated and tired, so we recognize that we need to incorporate humor and joy into

our weekly practices. If the atmosphere is strained or uncomfortable, people will think of other ways they can spend their time. Fun can be described in various ways and it has different meanings for different people. It can range from having a few extra minutes at break to visit and catch up on news to telling jokes and sharing humorous experiences. This type of fun, if carried on too long, can quickly turn into annoyance for the people who really want to sing. It is a conscious effort on the part of the director and other leaders to ensure that we are not “all work and no play,” and to find the balance between carrying on, working hard, and keeping stress in check.

Our culture is very important to us and we want to attract and retain women who share the same values. In her chapter, *Culture is the Key*, Herzlinger (1999) gives many examples of the importance of culture, of having a distinct culture, and of growing a culture. We pride ourselves in the culture we joined, and we try to do our part to maintain it for ourselves and others.

***Quality Singing.*** Singing in a quartet became important to all of us fairly early in our chorus lives. Over the years we have been in various quartet configurations. Sometimes we feel like we just recycle ourselves with other quartet members. The four of us sang together for a number of years as a registered quartet and competed several times until work and study obligations forced me to bow out for a time. Natasha is now singing with a bass she sang with years ago. Although we do not quartet now, our friendship remains strong. When we attend chorus events, we will often sing a song together for old times' sake.

Membership in the *Atlantic Sounds* would not be as interesting for us if we were not involved in a quartet. Quartetting is the ultimate experience for testing your voice and ear. We are constantly trying to improve our contribution to the sound and presentation. We use the vocal training we receive at chorus and apply it not only with the full group but in our quartets. In return, we take what we learn through quartetting and apply it to our participation in the chorus.

We take advantage of quartet coaching and educational opportunities whenever we can. The educational events sponsored by *Harmony, Inc.* are wonderful opportunities to work with the best. Once we have developed new singing skills, we share them with the chorus members through our various roles.

We love to entertain. For us, a reward is performing and seeing the faces of our audience when we sing a ballad that makes them choke up with emotion or an up-tune that brings a smile to their faces and gets their toes tapping. It is exciting to hear the applause and to know we have entertained our listeners! It is a thrill to leave a performance with the adrenaline still coursing through our blood! Exhilaration stays with us even after we get home when we try to sleep- -we replay the performance note for note, move for move- -and sometimes sleep eludes us.

Performances take many forms and range from wandering the halls at a senior citizen's home and singing to the residents to competing on the international stage in front of two thousand people. While there is less stress singing for seniors, there is also probably more joy. Singing is a medium that allows individuals to journey back in time



and visit old friends and long-forgotten emotions. It is not unusual to see people moved to tears as soon as we begin singing. At first I thought it must be because we sang poorly, but I have learned it is because we remind them of a lost love or a forgotten memory.

We also have fun when we sing well. Fun is actually a reward for good singing and we all cherish the goose bumps we get when (as Natasha so aptly puts it) we crawl into a chord and let it ring.

*What would make us leave?* We all agree that there are only two things that would drive us away from the chorus. The first is bad singing. If the quality of our singing deteriorates to the point where we are frustrated and unhappy, and if we have unsuccessfully tried to contribute to a musical turnaround, we would have to leave. For us, singing well is fun and if the chorus consistently sings poorly, it would be difficult to continue. Because people's lives change and so does our membership profile, it is extremely important for us to recruit new members to maintain the quality. Singers do not want to belong to a singing group that does not sing well.

The second reason we would leave is if the culture of the chorus changed. If the mores became unsupportive, disrespectful, combative, and negative; if it were generally an unhappy place to be, we would have to leave. The conflicts that have occurred in the past have been few and far between. They have been dealt with, we have learned from them, and we have moved on. Our chapter liaison contact is, at this time, the loneliest job in the chorus. Her job is to hear and pass along, in an anonymous fashion, the concerns of

members who might be uncomfortable speaking to one of the administrative or musical leaders.

Kasschau (2001) is right. We will leave the *Atlantic Sounds* if it stops meeting our needs and if the culture changes. We need to sing well and we need to be in a supportive, fun and friendly environment.

*If we have all this, then...* If we make friends, have a positive supportive culture, create opportunities for growth, and top it off with quality singing, then we will have many positive results. Our members will have increased self-confidence, they will be comfortable sharing their voice in song and in opinions, their leadership and conflict resolution skills will grow, and we will have a cohesive, successful, and committed group.

Over the years our confidence has increased. We are more comfortable using our voice, both in singing and in voicing opinions, than when we first joined, and our increased confidence gives us the strength to open new doors of opportunity. For me, it was a return to school, Natasha changed careers, Marney entered the judging program, and Rosemary allowed herself to be our administrative “Guru.” As we open new doors, other opportunities always appear before us.

Although we never thought of them as therapeutic, our membership has provided us with many benefits. In reviewing the literature, the words *Atlantic Sounds* could often be substituted for the words, “therapeutic support group.” Although not established as a

support group, the chapter has definitely become that to all of us. We look to each other for compassion, guidance, the occasional reality check, and hope.

Success is a direct benefit that can be measured in many ways. It is having an organization in which members feel appreciated, where they can contribute what they can at any given time in their lives, where they can develop leadership skills, where the singing is satisfying, and where they can have fun. In *Creating Success for Others*, Belasco (1999) tells us that there are three key characteristics that make it possible for everyone to be a leader: “Interconnectedness, interdependency, and creating success for others- -both for all those leaders serve and all those who contribute to leaders’ success” (p. 189).

Success is when we feel the excitement and thrill of performing for an audience, the pleasure and comfort of making new friends, the sore stomach muscles that often accompany a hearty laugh, and the sensation of “crawling into a chord!”

Success is also measured by retaining our current membership. From the research on the social behaviour of groups (Kasschau, 2001) we know that people will leave if their needs are not met. Monitoring members’ needs and obtaining ongoing feedback is important to the longevity of the *Atlantic Sounds*. Members of groups may leave because they do not feel valued, that they have not been heard, or they have had conflicts with other members.

Reflecting on the conflict I experienced over the letter of discipline, it is obvious to me now that my vision at that time was different than those on the executive, and I did

not have the skills or experience to recognize what was happening. It can be expected that when as many new members join a group as there were in 1984, it will take some time for group norms and conformity to develop. A “groupthink” among the executive members developed whereby they believed they were speaking for the entire membership. They did not allow or ask for the dissenting voices from the rest of the board of directors. These voices would have and did, once they were informed, provide a different perspective and frame from which to view the situation. It would have created a more democratic and progressive process. I am sure Kasschau (2001) could have predicted that the concerned feedback the executive received from the rest of the board of directors would hold a variety of opinions and probably some suggestions or ideas that could have led to a different outcome.

In the second situation described by both Rosemary and Marney, the entire board was more widely involved. They also involved the member about whom the concerns were focused. Although I was not involved in this situation from a board perspective, I was on the risers and was impacted by what was happening. This person has always been an enigma to me. She had many good ideas, was a good singer, and for a time was our bulletin editor. She wrote very well, and in her writing I felt there was a wonderful person we were not seeing. Perhaps she was in personal crisis unbeknown to us. We have members who deal with crises and they often find comfort within the membership. For whatever reason, this person seemed unable to accept, and perhaps trust, the support we

could give. She seemed unable to leave her problems in the imaginary vessel outside the rehearsal door.

Conflicts are rarely pleasant but they do not need to be destructive. Learning to manage our own feelings and emotions and to respond to other people in a respectful way is not always easy. We have all learned more about ourselves and about working with others. Although the personality conflicts we have had within our chapter have been stressful and draining, we have managed to grow stronger, wiser, and better able to apply appropriate interventions to achieve resolution. As Smitheram and Lund (2000) and Devon Dodd (2000) discuss, there are many ways to resolve conflicts, but they should always be about solving problems- -not denying they exist. This approach is much more positive than thinking, "Someone's to blame here! Now, who is it?"

While conflict within our own chapter is currently managed fairly well and we continue to learn, a few chapters within the organization have not always been so lucky. At one of the conventions I attended during this inquiry, I had a conversation with a long-time member from another chorus who shared her hurt, grief, and participation in a conflict that involved some other people I knew. She is still quite bitter, but somehow she manages to maintain a professional persona when the other people are in her presence. I am not sure if they have ever resolved their issues, but they are obviously not serious enough to make them leave their chapter or *Harmony, Inc.* The need to sing often supersedes the need to argue. However, it is not a healthy environment for the individuals or the chapter.

In any organization, relations of power influence membership, and ours is no different. At different times and in different ways, all of us have been touched by others', as well as our own, need for power or control and at times found it very discouraging. When this happens, we have to take a look at our own actions and behaviours first and then analyze the situation. Our epiphany is realizing we have developed the skills to deal with these unsettling issues, conflicts, or feelings.

A few chapters have fallen apart over issues and have either dissolved or split into two chapters. The split chapters are usually within close proximity to each other and then find themselves pursuing the same potential members. This arrangement invariably weakens the chapter(s), creates hurt feelings, forces people to take sides, and creates roadblocks to repairing relationships. Some Harmony members have worked as mediators and provided interventions and assistance to struggling chapters. Sometimes this is very effective and other times the chapter falls apart no matter what has been tried. In the cases where resolution has occurred and chapters have reunited, it is always as a result of a few people with strong leadership skills working together for the common good.

Organizations, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, require strong leadership to survive in an age of conflicting demands and limited resources. Beck and Yeager (1994) state that the following about leadership:

Leadership comes from understanding the essential behaviors for simultaneously challenging a team of people to reach for a vision while empowering each individual team member to take the actions that are needed to achieve that vision. High performance leadership exists when everyone, leaders and followers, are performing at their highest levels- -whether alone or in teams- -all the time. (p. 3)

Covey (1999) suggests that leaders must first, “identify a vision yourself that taps into other’s deepest and most noble motivations” (p. 151). Our vision for the chorus has stimulated our participation in various leadership roles.

Although the term “leadership” is not used many times in our stories, it is clear that we have developed leadership skills. Thoughts of creating a culture, chairing meetings, planning, speaking in public, coaching, or organizing events were beyond our comprehension when we first joined. Now we take on and utilize these skills without thinking about them. Involvement in this leisure activity, this labour of love, has prepared us for leadership positions. Daft (2001) describes the role of a leader as a person who creates vision and strategy, keeps an eye on the horizon, creates shared culture and value, helps others grow, reduces boundaries, focuses on people, acts as a coach, connects emotionally, listens, has an open mind, has insight, has courage, and creates change (p. 16). If members join us with these skills already developed, we try to figure out how they can best contribute to the chorus. If members join without some of these skills, we try to give them the opportunity to develop them.

This research demonstrates to me our relationships within the chorus are strong and resilient. As each barbershop song has its harmony and tension, so does membership. Some songs are challenging and test our skills, but once we have learned to sing from the heart, they become near and dear to us and we never want to set them aside.

***How does education and learning intersect with the membership experience?***

*We are educators.* We did not realize that we, as leaders within the chapter, are also educators. We have learned by trial and error which strategies work best for the members. Could this be an invisible pedagogy? With experience, we have developed the skills to incorporate different learning strategies into the methods we use to teach new music as well as helping members improve their vocal production.

We did not realize when we joined, how much we would learn about music and the voice as a musical instrument. It is only when new people join and we have to start training them that we can measure our progress. We now share our knowledge with our new members in various ways and try to help them apply what they are learning.

A review of our teaching practices leads me to believe we use a form of “Mastery Learning” (Warren, 2003). While ours is often informal with no structured curriculum, the results or outcomes can be measured. Evaluating the learning that takes place can be done in several ways. First, by measuring the length of time it takes us to put a new song on the risers? Does it take us three weeks or three months to move from paper to memorization? Do our scores change from year to year in the regional or international contests? What types of choreography can we adopt and how difficult can the moves be for the members and still have the package convincing for our audience?

We have never documented these evaluation criteria, but it would be an interesting exercise. We know from experience if we are learning and progressing. At times, when learning a song is taking longer than usual, the women who learn their music



quickly become bored. If a person is bored for a prolonged period of time, there is a danger of losing her as a member. Finding the balance between expecting too much and too little is sometimes a fine line.

Understanding the categories of learners and the barriers to participation (Cross, 1981), helps us deal with and modify the techniques and strategies we use. Of course, every year we have new singers, new learners, and we evaluate our practices once again. For example, we have decided to return to making and using learning tapes. Our members have told us they learn faster and are less frustrated if they can play the music (notes and words) on their own time, for example, in their cars or at home. When they come to rehearsal they already have a basic knowledge of the song and the learning curve is much shorter.

*We are adult learners.* Education is one of the themes that keeps us interested in this form of singing. I do not think I will ever, if I live four lifetimes, learn everything there is to know about singing or singing barbershop harmony. Mannell's (1999) research leads us to believe that participation in any leisure activity stimulates learning, well being, and a sense of community. We are involved with singing because we love it, therefore, learning comes more easily. When I think back to school days and the subjects I took, my best marks came from the courses I liked.

To take the school analogy further, our most easily identified subject area is, of course, singing. The more subtle learnings that we have all experienced are the ones that are more difficult to measure: cooperation, team work, project management, leadership,

and conflict resolution. I believe Deem (1986) would consider this type of informal learning important not only to the development of our singing abilities but to the development of confidence and other non-singing skills.

### ***Reflections***

Reflecting on the stories and the analysis, there are a number of lessons for the *Atlantic Sounds* as well as for other organizations trying to attract, keep and educate members. These lessons can be summarized as follows:

- In the marketing plan, target women who like to sing, who have had some form of singing in their background, who are looking a leisure activity, and who want to meet new people. [This is what we all wanted at first.]
- Build a culture that has a supportive environment; where prospective and new members feel welcome. Give them attention, guidance, and encouragement. Have a contact person who is available to answer questions during rehearsal, by phone, or through e-mail. [Long-time members felt wanted by the membership.]
- Encourage new members to become involved, and give them opportunities to develop musical as well as administrative skills. It is important not to swamp them with tasks or, on the other hand, give capable women menial tasks for long periods of time. [Long-time members became involved in administrative or musical leadership activities very early in their membership.]

- Provide support systems such as mentoring and guidance as well as feedback as new members take on new roles. [Long-time members had experienced members who took them under their wing and provided support.]
- Develop conflict resolution skills and ensure there are various avenues for individuals within the organization to take if they experience problems or concerns. [Members will leave if they do not feel heard and respected.]
- When conflict begins to emerge, do not overlook it, it will not go away, even though you may hope it will. Include the appropriate individuals and deal with it respectfully and for the good of the chorus. [Long-time members know conflict will not go away by itself and sometimes difficult decisions have to be made for the good of the whole.]
- Create opportunities for fun and for friendships to be established. These might be social times during rehearsal or activities and events outside the rehearsal time. [Long-time members have developed solid, long-lasting friendships.]
- Take advantage of local, regional, and international training opportunities and encourage all members to participate. [Long-time members take advantage of education and want to give back to the chorus and organization.]
- Incorporate multiple teaching methods to meet the needs of different learning styles. These may take many forms include providing learning tapes or using teaching quartets. [Members have different learning styles.]

- Ensure members are thanked for their contributions. Appreciation does not have to come in grand forms, it can be a short note, a thank-you, or a pat on the back. [Long-time members feel appreciated, which strengthens commitment.]
- Ensure there are opportunities for members to experience the rewards of performance. This means doing regular performances (sing-outs) at various types of venues. [Long-time members love the rewards of performance!]
- If membership numbers begin to shrink, plan membership drives before the quality of the sound is affected. [Long-time members want to sing well- -it is fun to sing well.]

### ***Future Research***

This inquiry explores the development of four women through their experiences with their leisure singing activity. It asks the question “Why did we join? Why have we stayed?” It identifies many ingredients that must be in place in an organization for long-time membership to occur.

Any inquiry creates as many questions as it answers, and so it is with this study. As the inquiry progressed, I found myself wanting to talk to people who had left the chorus after many years of dedication and commitment. I want to discover why they left after having been such an integral part of our organization. There are also people who have left the organization for periods of time and then returned. I am curious as to why they came back- -what was missing in their lives that they found in our organization.

I would also like to explore further the idea of leadership development through volunteerism. The participants in this study developed leadership skills that can be transferred and applied to other roles and organizations: volunteer, private, or public.

As this manuscript was reviewed by my advisors and other educators, they found they reflected on their own teaching experiences and the importance of nurturing self-confidence, self-esteem, and risk-taking in their students. As a teacher within the community college system, I was able to directly apply what I learned about working with adults through my chorus experiences to the classroom.

Dr. Basil Favaro, Internal Reader, shared these insights with me:

Choir membership and participation is fundamentally an educative process – education in its root meaning – drawing out of the learner’s heart and soul (not just brain) what lies deep within. ... Success in a choir is not just about singing in harmony but also acting in harmony.

There is an opportunity to further explore the implications of this research for teachers and adult educators, both in the classroom and extra-curricularly.

The interest Kees (1999) expressed in this study because of the parallels between leisure groups and therapeutic support groups is testament to the opportunity for future research in this area and in the importance of developing more leisure opportunities for women.

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## Appendixes

### *Appendix A: Information Letter*

UPEI letterhead –

Date

Dear [Name of Participant],

I am conducting a study about four women (a quartet) in a *Harmony, Inc.* barbershop chapter in Atlantic Canada who have been involved with the organization for more than 15 years. The title is, *Why did we join? Why have we stayed?* Through this reflexive ethnography, my personal experience will be studied along side your experience as well as the experience of two other women from the chapter.

I hope the study will identify the benefits and difficulties of belonging to this leisure group as well as identifying the reasons why we have stayed with the group for such a long time. I also wish to explore how this experience has contributed to who you are today.

I anticipate the research findings may be used by the chapter, and perhaps by others to develop strategies for membership recruitment and retention or to address other issues that may come to light through the study, for example, ways to teach adults new music.

There are two parts to the study- -the stories of the four individuals (through journaling and/or interviews) and a focus group.

The following are the study details:

- You will be given a copy of the research proposal ahead of time to read and think about. The purpose of this is to allow you to reflect on the research and questions that will be addressed during the interview. This will allow you to explore fully your thoughts about the various themes that have been identified in the initial research phase and to begin reflecting about your stories. This should provide deeper, richer, and more reflective narratives that will provide useful insight into the question.
- If you are more comfortable journaling or writing down some of your memories of events that happened to you since being in the chorus, please feel free to do so. At the end of the study, I will return your journals to you, if you wish to have them back.
- We will arrange an initial individual one and one-half to two-hour interview at a mutually convenient time and place. The purpose of the interview will be to delve

into your perspectives about various issues I have discovered in my initial research. I hope the conversation will be informal and that you will feel free to share your experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

- The interviews and the focus group will be tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The tapes, transcripts, and any journal entries will be kept in locked files and will be accessible only to me.
- Once the tapes have been transcribed, you will be asked to review your interview to ensure that I have recorded your story the way you want it told. I will make any modifications to the document that you feel are necessary to accomplish this.
- Following the interviews and my initial analysis, I will arrange a focus group with the four of us. You will be provided with a draft ahead of time so that you can review and make comments. During our time together, we will reflect on the analysis and add additional insights and perspectives. I will incorporate these findings into the study.
- A section in the thesis, "Stories," will have five parts. Each of the four participants' stories will be shared. For example, "Jan's Story." The fifth part of the section will be for the stories of the focus group.
- The analysis of the stories and their related themes will appear in a different section, "Analysis."

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Please be assured that I will respect the confidentiality of your responses within the limits of the law. Codes will be used on tapes and transcripts, and no individuals or their places of employment will be identified in any conference presentations, reports, or publications.

Please note that while I will ask the other focus group participants to maintain confidentiality of the discussions, I will not be able to guarantee that my request will be honoured by all involved.

You should be aware there is a very small community of barbershop organizations and chapters in North America, and in particular Atlantic Canada. Part the research is historical in nature and discusses *Harmony, Inc.*, and its beginnings in the world of barbershop. Although your name and the chapter name are not used in the study, knowledgeable individuals may be able to decipher the names of both the chapter and the participants.

Should you agree to participate in this study, you can withdraw at any time and with no impact on our friendship. You can also choose not to answer any question without giving a reason and without adverse consequences. If at any time you wish something to be "off the record," all you need to do is say or write the words and your wish will be respected.

**Appendix B: Consent Form**

UPEI letterhead

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the attached information letter and agree to participate in the study related to the Atlantic Canada barbershop chapter. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary.

I understand that participating in the study will involve the following.

- Receiving the research proposal for review and reflection.
- An initial one and one-half to two-hour interview with the researcher at a mutually convenient time. The purpose of the interview will be for me to reflect on my 15+ years of experience with the chapter.
  - If I wish to journal or write down some of my memories of events that happened to me since being in the chapter, I may do so. However, it is not required. My journals will be returned to me at the end of the study, if I wish.
- A focus group with the other participants will be organized. The researcher will provide me with a draft of her analysis. I will read this ahead of time and share my thoughts and perspectives. I can do this in writing and/or in the group. My participation in this is expected, but it is up to me to decide how much I wish to participate in the discussion.
- Once the tapes have been transcribed, I will be asked to review mine to ensure the transcript adequately reflects my stories. If there are errors, I can make corrections.

I understand the following important details related to participating in this study:

- The interviews and the focus group session will be recorded and transcribed.
- The tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be accessed only by the researcher.
- There is no remuneration for my participation in this study.
- The confidentiality of my responses will be respected within the limits of the law.
- My stories will become a part of the thesis section, "Stories." Part or all of my stories may be included in this section.
- My name or other identifying information will not be used in conference presentations, written reports, or publications. The researcher will not share any personal or identifying information with others.
- I also understand that I may withdraw from the study, or I may choose not to answer any questions without giving a reason and without adverse consequences. I understand that withdrawal from the study will not impact my friendship with the researcher.
- I understand that there is a very small community of barbershop organizations and

### ***Appendix C: Interview Questions for Participants***

As you know, I am conducting this study to explore the reasons why we joined our barbershop chorus and why we have stayed all these years. You will notice the questions are focused at two different levels. The first level is to help me gather some basic demographic information so that I can present a profile of the participants in this study. The second level will look for meaning in the themes that I have identified during my initial research.

As I mentioned in the information letter, if you want to stop at any time or if there are any questions you are uncomfortable with, you are fully entitled to stop the interview or not answer a question. There are no repercussions for doing this. I want you to be comfortable with me, with the questions, and with the process we will use. Also, if you would like a statement to be off the record, please let me know that as we are talking. I will ensure that it does not appear in your story.

#### **Level 1**

- When and how did you first hear about the chorus?
- What was your first experience with the chorus?
- Why did you join the chorus?
- Why have you stayed for so many years?
- How would you describe your family situation then (when you joined) and now?
- How do you feel when you sing? Has this feeling changed over time?
- What do you have in your life now that you would not have had if not for this group?

#### **Level 2**

Now, I am going to read to you some of the interesting pieces of information and passages that I found during my initial research. These are statements or stories that had an effect on me. Please reflect on them and share with me your personal thoughts and experiences. Your stories will help me develop additional insight and interpretation of the research.

You will notice that there is more than one passage offered for each topic. Feel free to share your experiences on the passages individually or grouped in some way that has significance for you.

#### **Why did we join?**

To answer the question “Why did we join?” I looked into the areas of women’s groups, leisure, and self-identity and voice.

### Women's groups

Therapeutic support groups for women provide many benefits such as personal growth and empowerment. Involvement in our chorus, although not designed as a therapeutic group, provides similar benefits even though the primary focus is not support.

### Women's Leisure groups

- A. One researcher suggests that leisure may be a form of resistance for women and that it has the potential to empower and bring about change.
- B. A prominent explanation of the way in which leisure is linked to psychological well-being is through the opportunities it provides for personal growth or self-actualization.
- C. Women are often conditioned to feel guilt if they participate in leisure activities.

### Self-identity

- A. Women fundamentally think differently about issues. Relationships are dominant in women's thinking and their decisions are based on the perceived impact on relationships. Women not only define themselves in the context of human relationship but also judge themselves in terms of their ability to care. Women's place has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of those networks of relationships on which she in turn relies.
- B. Having paid employment as well as running a home makes us feel indispensable and when given the opportunity for a change, we are reluctant to do so. We often sabotage our need for self-development by putting ourselves last.
- C. Success is measured not necessarily by what others see but by what they don't see- -personal self-worth. Success is accomplishing what you most wish for yourself.
- D. Women who take time for themselves are more interesting to be around, less antagonistic and resentful, and have more energy and more joy to give back.

### Voice

- A. Voice is the outer expression of the inner self. Voice reflects what is unique about us, the way we think and feel. It is an expression of how we view reality and make meaning from our experience.
- B. Voice can be used as a metaphor for the sense of self that emerges from a women's experiences.

### **Why did we stay?**

To answer the question “Why did we stay?” I looked into the areas adult education, conflict resolution, and the social behaviour of groups.

#### **Adult Education**

- A. It is important to have some sense of who adult learners are, why they choose to participate, and what factors can limit their participation.
- B. Learners fall into one of three “sub-groups”: (1) goal-oriented learners who participate to meet specific objectives; (2) activity-oriented learners, whose reasons for participation have little or no bearing on the content of the activity; and (3) learning-oriented learners who “seek knowledge for its own sake.”

#### **Friendship and conflict.**

- A. The adult fears that conflict will end a friendship and makes many hold back. Women want friendship to be “nice” too. In friendships, women tell themselves, relationships can run smoothly. No conflict need apply. But real relationships come with inevitable scrapes, nicks, and middle-sized wounds.
- B. Conflict is a natural part of relationships and the goal of conflict resolution is to solve problems. Everyone has learned to respond to conflict by confronting, denying or problem solving.
- C. Men and women conceive of the ‘self’ in different ways. Men are much more likely to see the self in terms of autonomy, freedom, independence, separateness, and hierarchy. Rules guide the interactions among people, and roles establish each individual’s place in the hierarchy. In contrast, women tend to see the self in terms of relatedness, interdependence, emotional connectedness, and responsiveness to the needs of others.

#### **Social Behavior of Groups**

- A. If a group stops meeting your needs, you are very likely to drop out.
- B. To achieve the groups’ goals, members should remember the lessons for preventing ‘groupthink.’ Make sure that the minority viewpoints are heard in the group. A ‘democracy’ runs on the basis of majority will. But every group must assure that the ‘loyal opposition’ - often a minority point of view - is heard.
- C. Each member senses the need to “do a little extra” to keep the group active since the group offers satisfactions that each member would not get without

the group. It is feared that without these activities, the group would cease to exist

### A Metaphor

A metaphor is defined as “the application of a name or descriptive term or phrase to an object or action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable.” For example, the eagle is a metaphor for freedom. Can a barbershop song be a metaphor for membership in this group?

### What have I missed?

As you were reflecting on these passages, were there any areas, ideas, topics, or themes that came to your mind? Please share them with me now.

### Conclusion and next step.

Thank you so much for sharing your stories with me. I will take the tapes and listen to them many times. Then, I will write your stories, hopefully, in your voice. I will return your stories to you to make sure you are comfortable with my interpretation of them. If you have any changes you want to make, I will make them. If you change your mind and do not want a story, or stories, used, I will respect that and remove them from my research.

Thank you so much for helping me better understand why we joined and why we stayed!



***Appendix D: Focus Group***

Time allocated 1.5 – 2 hours

Thank you for participating in this focus group. You have received a copy of the initial analysis. I would like to take the next hour or so to get your ideas and feedback.

Some questions may include:

- What is your opinion of the research you read?
- Do you feel it adequately reflects the reason why we joined the chorus and why we stayed?
- Were there any areas or issues that were not covered that you feel should be included?

*Appendix E: Harmony, Inc. Creed, and Theme Songs*

Young in Heart (Geils & O'Connor, 2000, p. 109)

**Harmony Creed**

**H**armony from our hearts as well as voices

**A**ffection for each other oft expressed

**R**adiant with our love of barbershop

**M**indful of our principles and ideals

**O**utstretched hand to every race and creed

**N**eatness in our dress and in our thinking

**Y**oung in heart, for singing keeps us young

**I**nspired to grow and flourish

**N**ourish by devotion to our music

**C**onstructive in our work for Harmony, Incorporated.

**Harmony Theme Song: (1990 – Present)**

**We're Harmony, We're Strong**

"A blend With Friendship" is our creed, in Harmony we fill a need;

Come lift your voices loud and long to celebrate with us in song!

From all our hearts in Harmony with love that can't be bound, we're partners in

Democracy, each woman's voice is found.

The chords are close, the feeling strong, our path is one that's clear;

We give of talents, time, and song to share what we hold dear (what we hold dear.)

In barbershop our spirits raise, to Harmony we're true.

In song and service, work and play, in ev'rything we do.

One voice, one vote that is the key, all women can belong;

For what we are is Harmony, we celebrate in song

In Harmony, we're strong! (Come join our song!)

**Harmony Theme Song: (1973 to 1990)**

**A Song of Friendship**

Just keep the song in your heart, a song of friendship,

Make one thought for the day of someone new.

Just keep your love of mankind a working blendship hoping to find a perfect  
meaning for you.

Put out your hand to ev'ry nation; follow your creed in ev'ry thing.

Let the life that you live be inspiration.

Then in Harmony we will sing. Yes, we'll sing!

In Harmony we will sing!

### *Appendix F: A Poem*

By Joan MacDonald

The following poem was written by Joan many years ago. Joan was one of the original members of the *Atlantic Sounds* and has a talent for writing poems and spoofs.

Our annual contest and convention is held the Saturday of the first weekend in June. At one time it was called "Harmony Training Program" or "HTP." It was later changed to "Area Contest and Convention" or "AC&C."

#### **Countdown to H.T.P.**

Have you been extra sweet of late  
To folks around your place?  
With fancy meals and pleasant voice  
And smiles upon your face?

Did they detect a trace of guilt  
And think you're acting strange?  
Or did they just accept it all,  
Not noticing the change?

In spite of our new "Women's Rights,"  
We very often find  
When taking off, we want to plan  
For those we leave behind.

The freezer's full, the cupboard's stocked,  
The laundry basket's clear,  
The house just gleams from end to end,  
(The fridge is full of beer?)

We leave a list of all the meals  
To have while we're away.  
All cooked and ready just to heat,  
A dish for every day.

What did we find when we return?  
They didn't eat a bite.  
The kids are thrilled to let you know –  
They ate out every night!

So just relax, don't fuss with plans  
For steaks and roast and hash,  
Just count the cost to make those meals  
AND OFFER THEM THE CASH!!