



TOWELS ARE NOW AVAILABLE for women faculty and staff at the University Swimming Pool's noon-hour recreational swim.

If you think that's not big news, let me assure you it is. I should know. I've been half of a movement — if two people can be a movement — to get towels. The other half is my lunch-time swimming buddy Karen Jenison, an instructor in recreation and park administration. I don't swim well. I splash when I flutter kick, keep my eyes closed because the chlorine

hurts, and tend to move diagonally rather than straight ahead. But I like to swim. Karen swims well. She wears a snorkel and zips straight up and down the lanes, doing 10 laps to my five. Karen also asks good questions. Like the one about the towels.

"I wonder," she said one day as we were carrying our wet towels back to our offices, "why they don't provide towels for women swimmers at noontime? They do for men."

She decided to ask Bill Busch, who is in charge of the pool. So, on October 3, 1974, she wrote him a letter. We really expected that, in the interest of fair play and male gallantry, towels would shortly be forthcoming.

Busch replied on stationary with the address Rothwell Gymnasium crossed out.

The Women From W.E.T.

By Anne Baber

Typed in was "Men's Swimming Pool."

"Hopefully," he wrote, "in the near future with enough of our ladies complaining, we will be able to provide a full-time women's locker room attendant, therefore alleviating the inconvenience of the ladies providing their own towels."

WHAT STARTED OUT as a request based upon convenience (who wants a wet towel sitting around the office all afternoon?) escalated rather quickly into a battle of the sexes. Like a bull seeing a red flag. . . What a masculine image! Maddier than a wet hen, I joined the Women's Equal Towel (W.E.T.) movement.

I was mad because of the phrase "ladies complaining." What a contradiction! Who ever heard of a lady complaining? Ladies never complain, my mother used to say. Ladies would not be swimming on their lunch hours. Ladies don't shower, they bathe. Ladies would never need towels at the "Men's" Swimming Pool.

I also was mad at the designation "Men's" Swimming Pool. A little research revealed that the pool had always been referred to as the "Men's Swimming Pool." An article in the *Missouri Alumnus* of December 1964 heralding its opening was titled "It's Here . . . Men's Swimming Pool." "M.U.," the article said, "has been one of the few major universities in the country that did not have facilities for an aquatic program for men students. The Women's Gymnasium contains a swimming pool, but it is too small to meet standards for competitive swimming. In fact, it is barely adequate to meet the needs in the women's physical education program.

"**THE NEW BUILDING** is considered an addition to the men's gymnasium facilities of the University."

It was funded by an appropriation from the Missouri General Assembly and bonds to be retired from student activity fees. No one, to my knowledge has ever complained about the pool's title. But ladies don't complain and after all women did have a pool, such as it was and is, of their own.

The "Men's" pool was built with locker rooms, dressing rooms and showers for both men and women . . . commendable foresight on somebody's part. (The Hearnnes Multipurpose Building wasn't.) And women, the article indicates, were allowed in the pool: the synchronized swimmers practiced there an hour a day.

Faculty swim was at noon in the new pool. Did faculty mean men?

Now, women make up from a third to more than half of all the lunchtime swimmers.

Since I had joined the W.E.T. movement, I too decided to write Bill Busch requesting towels for women.

Karen and Busch had sent copies of their letters to Dr. Ralph Stewart, chairman of the Health and Physical Education Department. So I did, too. Then I sent a copy to Dr. Luverne Walton, chairman of the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Women (not ladies). I also sent a copy of my letter to Sue Phillips, president of the Association for Women Students, and to Gail Ginder, director of the Women's Center.

PAPER CONTINUED TO FLY like confetti all over the Campus.

Bill replied to me (on pink inter-departmental note paper!) and, of course, sent copies to all the aforementioned people. Walton wrote me, "Though this may seem to many to be a very small thing, it is symptomatic of a much broader question, namely, whether recreational facilities and services provided to women are equal to those provided to men."

She sent copies to Chancellor Herbert W. Schooling and Dr. Helen Anderson, the new chairman of the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Women. And, again, to all the aforementioned folks.

Karen and I continued to swim at lunch. We brought our towels and carried them back to our offices. Our faith in fair play, male gallantry and even Title IX (forbidding discrimination based on sex in any education program or activity receiving federal funds) was wearing thin.

ONCE WE HAD BELIEVED a towel was a towel was a towel. But towels became, for us, a cause célèbre .

Officially, the reason that we couldn't have towels was that there was no attendant to hand them out and check them back in. In fact, a work-study student sat by the supply room door—a dutch door, through which towels could easily have been handed.

Busch said the girl was not always there and sometimes left early. He was afraid that towels would not get checked back in. It didn't seem like an insurmountable problem to Karen and me.

Once, early this fall, I forgot my towel. A friend, Keith Roys, professor of recreation and park administration, snuck one out of the men's locker room to me. I used it. Keith returned it. It was a perfectly ordinary towel—hardly the sort of thing one creates a movement to acquire.

KAREN AND I discussed a towel-in. Should we take our wet towels to the office of one of those people in the administrative hierarchy? Probably, no one would notice only two wet towels. So much for the strength of the movement.

In mid-September, Karen went to a party. Somehow the subject of towels came up when she was talking with Provost John McGowan, she later told me. He expressed surprise that there was still a towel problem. "You will have towels, tomorrow," he vowed recklessly.

Faithlessly, we took our own towels along to the pool the next day. We needed them.

Also in September, Dr. Mona Dingle, professor of economics, became chairman of the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Women. I was appointed to the committee and mentioned towels to her. "Well, Anne," she said. "You know that if we push towels and get them, then everyone will say, 'Look, we gave you the towels, now what on earth else could you possibly want?'"

I HAD TO AGREE that the towel problem was minute, but I still believed that it was significant.

A few days later, Karen and I heard that the towel problem had landed on the desk of the vice chancellor of student affairs, James Banning. We heard about this because Banning delegated Karen's husband, Dr. Lynn Jenison, assistant dean of student affairs, to investigate.

Now our faith has been restored. Only a year and a month and nine days after the original request, we have towels.

Thank you Banning and Jenison and McGowan and Dingle and Anderson and Schooling and Walton and Ginder and Phillips and Stewart and Busch and all the secretaries who typed all the letters. The Women's Equal Towel movement—including both its amusing and infuriating aspects—would not have been possible without you. In the opinion of two "complaining ladies," right has finally triumphed. □