

# Northern Woman

Journal

Volume 15 Numbers 2 and 3

Special Issue

Thunder Bay, Ontario

to SERVICES

- Sexual Assault Centres
- Women's Centres
- Information Centres
- Transition Houses
- Support Groups

CONCERNS

- Economic Development
- Violence Issues
- Pensions
- Health

March 1994

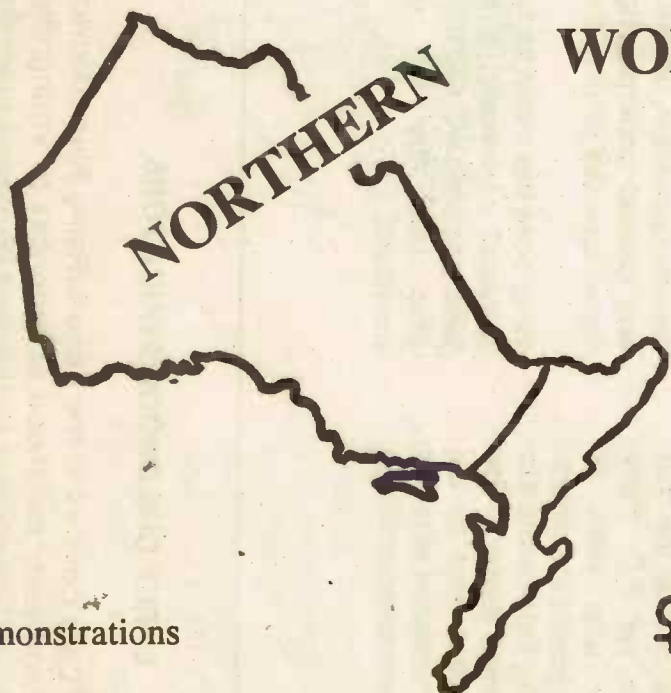
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## CELEBRATING

## WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

1973 - 1993



ACTIVISM

- Demonstrations
- Position Papers
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to CULTURE

- Northern Woman Journal
- Conferences
- Bookstore
- Theatre
- Music
- Art



## EDITORIAL

This is not an editorial but rather some reflections. Many months have elapsed since our last Journal issue but we have been busy fund-raising. To compensate for this delay we are providing you with this Special Double issue which includes a retrospective of NWO women's activism over the past twenty years.

Much has happened since the last NWJ. Canada's first female Prime Minister has come and gone, and how quickly the "old boys" of the media and the P.C. Party dumped the blame for nine years of Mulroney disaster on Campbell's shoulders. We can bet it will be a long time before the Tories select another female leader. The media power mongers also tried to lay responsibility for the NDP's dismal showing on Audrey McLaughlin, never acknowledging

how the media dismissed and marginalized her from the day she was elected. The NDP's problems are complex and multi-faceted, but few should be assigned to McLaughlin. Nonetheless, we can anticipate that the feminist process McLaughlin tried so valiantly to implement will quickly be abandoned by the next NDP leader. So now we have a massive Liberal majority, an official opposition dedicated to the separation of Quebec, and a substantive Reform opposition, whose misogynist, racist and classist underpinnings make the old Tories look like shining stars.

What does this mean for feminists and other activists? Ironically, it seems the social justice agenda will depend on the separatist Bloc (and the few determined NDP members).



### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

A number of new Child Care Centres in the Kenora/Rainy River Districts require staff to provide quality care and early childhood experiences to young children. A wide variety of program positions in both first Nation and Municipal programs are available and will appeal to energetic applicants who are interested in enriching their own life experience while contributing to the provision of child care services that are responsive to the unique needs of the community.

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District Child Care Selection Committee  
c/o Child Care Projects Support Worker  
20 Main Street South  
Kenora, Ontario  
P9N 1S7

Fac # (807)468-2449

#### For Further Information Contact:

Leanne Mineault  
Child Care Projects Support Worker  
1-800-268-2970 or (807)468-2400

**THE CLOSING DATE FOR RESUMES IS THURSDAY MARCH 31, 1994**

What can we expect from the Liberals? Initially, many feminists expressed cautious optimism, citing the presence of strong women in the Liberal caucus, and a modestly progressive "red book" social agenda. Such optimism will prove to be short-lived. It is instructive to note that Sheila Finestone (one of the strongest

Liberal women) was denied a full Cabinet post, presumably because she was too "passionate" about her causes - women, culture and multiculturalism.

The promises the Liberals have kept to date (eg Pearson, helicopters) can be viewed as gender neutral. Not so, the broken promise re NAFTA (see NWJ Vol.15#1 for women and NAFTA discussion).

What lies ahead is very scary. A UIC "overhaul" - a "restructuring" of the welfare system - catch words masking the destruction of our Canadian social programs (which now are frequently inadequate). Who will be most negatively affected by social program "reform" -- women, of course. A very disturbing trend in welfare reform discussion is the implicit assumption that caring for children is work of no value. (Listen carefully to Premier McKenna's words as he extols New Brunswick's welfare reform program). How many elder women without independent income will be sacrificed by old age security "reform," just as non-labour force mothers were sacrificed when the family allowance program was abandoned.

We find from a study of those elected in 1993 many anti-choice Liberal MPs. Don't be surprised (but be prepared) when an anti-choice private members bill is introduced. No question, the goals we thought we'd achieved in the 70s and 80s will have to be vigorously defended.

At the same time we must find energy to address new issues, such as the introduction into Canada of NORPLANT, a long-term contraceptive whose safety has not been proven. (NORPLANT has been "dumped" on developing countries for a number of years, resulting in very serious health problems for many women.)

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# From Gender Gap to Gender Trap

In preparation for the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, international women's health activists met recently in Bangladesh to prepare their strategy. The following is one of the documents prepared in advance of this meeting.

Women's womb is presently the most strategic object in this world. Every international agency is now talking about it in many different ways but most commonly as a concern about "women". The womb is part of the woman's body. Women never received so much attention until the womb was identified as the producer of something "undesirable" for the earth ruled by white and rich people. Women, the owner of womb, has become the centre of attention for population control programmes worldwide.

Particular discourses are deployed in order to make the direct link between the number of "undesirable" population and the women's "responsibility" to stop bringing those people into the world. Some terms are settled securely by now in the common mainstream discussions to legitimize the acts of population control. These are "unwanted" pregnancy and "unmet need" or "latent demand", etc. These words are used by mainstream population agencies, such as UNFPA, World Bank, IPPF, Population Council, Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, etc.

Some studies are conducted to prove that women do not want children. For example, the World Fertility Survey shows that women in Asia, Africa, and Latin America do not want any more children. Once this "fact" is established it has become a very crucial and effective tool of the population control agencies. They can now say it is the women who do not want any more children. The purpose of the depopulating strategy



has been constructed as the desire of women. The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) has made an estimate of how the desire could be translated into real population control. "If all women who said they wanted no more children were able to stop childbearing, the number of births would be reduced by 27 percent in Africa, 33 percent in Asia, and 35 percent in Latin America" (Safeguarding the Future, by Dr. Nafis Sadik)

Why the women do not want any more children is not analyzed. The social and political context in which women decide about the number of children is omitted and needs and desires of women are decontextualized. The reason is understandable. For example, a poor and black Brazilian woman may not want to bring her child into a desperate economic situation and a political environment where the child may be killed in the street by the vigilantes. If the situation were different, she may love to have children. The question whether she wants children or not is contentless if abstracted out of the real situation, but for the population controllers the decontextualisation is all they need. So these women must be helped in a way that they do not have to bear the "unwanted" children.

There are also clearcut commercial interests linked to evolving depopulating discourses. The women's desire regarding the number of children, as well as the spacing of births, is crucial for the expansion of the commerce of contraceptive commodities. There is an "unmet need" for contraceptives, it is argued, therefore the need should be met. The "unmet demand" or "unmet need" is a way to identify new markets. The marketing interests of the pharmaceutical companies coincide with and complement the urge of population controllers to reduce the number of children women produce. Now the two interests have merged into one and the same statistics are turned into tools to realise their respective interests.

Who are these women whose desire of having "no more" children has drawn so much interest among the international community? They are, of course, the women from black, poor, and various ethnic and cultural groups living in the developing countries. (In fact, the desire of elite and white women to have less or no children has become a problem for the ruling class in Europe and North America.) Generally the efforts to reduce the number of the undesirable population are termed "population control programmes" or "family planning programmes". These programmes obvious intentions to exterminate a section of the world's population have been criticized by many. Therefore the language has been changed to incorporate discourses arising from women's demands. Some of the new terms are "reproductive right", "women's right to choose" and "raising the status of women". It is proposed that woman herself now should "decide" and "act" to reduce the number of her children which are "unwanted" not only to her but to the world. The decision now is claimed to be not an imposition, but a free "choice" of women.

Women have always been the target of population control programmes. Therefore, it is nothing new that these population control programmes are trying to "involve" women as a means to achieve the goals of fertility reduction. What is new is the rhetoric, such as "raising the status of women", which is only a curtain to veil the original intention. These words are more acceptable to women instead of talking only about contraceptive prevalence and depopulation.

In the case of Bangladesh, we have seen that during the early sixties, the research by the population agencies on how to mobilize people to accept contraceptives showed that women must be involved and be given other economic benefits as well. They must be helped to come out of their houses. A woman should earn some cash income so that her status within the family is raised to a level to make her accept a contraceptive method without the "permission" of her husband. Once she starts bringing in cash income to the family the husband will not resist. Activities to raise the status of women help the population control agencies and the contraceptive distributors make direct relationships with the users of contraceptives and they therefore are able to circumvent the social, cultural or family norms associated with the child bearing decisions of the family. The precise objective is to cut individual women from their social and familial ties so that population controllers can make inroads to them directly. In the process, the women's bodies are displaced from the existing social nexus to be at the disposal of the population controllers, multinational companies, medical establishments, and other related interests. The womb lies in the woman's body, so as long as she is in the hands of the population control agencies, the chances of success for depopulation are much higher. It is indeed a war on the woman's body.

In the beginning of the population control programmes, the issue was more directly related to practical problems of having women as contraceptive users. Efforts were made to recruit women for specific contraceptive targets. But though millions of contraceptives were sold and some level of fertility decline has been observed, the long experience of over 30 years is not yet "satisfactory" in the relation to the decline in fertility rate. The developed countries providing aid for population control programmes are not happy with the results. So, women continue to remain the object of interest as they are still seen as the best means to achieve the goal of population control. Meanwhile, women have been very critical of population control policies and they are demanding access to safe means of contraception. But those genuine demands of women have been distorted towards the interest of population control agencies.

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continued from pg 3

Initially the stated goal of population control programmes was to achieve decline in the average number of children per family. But this decline in fertility rates in the developing countries is not yet "satisfactory" in the eyes of the population control establishments. Some countries have shown enormous decline, such as Brazil and Thailand. In Thailand the average number of children per woman during 1965-70 was 6.14, by 1987 the number had declined to 2.2. Other countries have also shown significant levels of decline in fertility, yet taken together the total number of people in the developing countries have not reduced enough to satisfy the depopulation strategists.

It is important in this context to look into the world scenario which focuses increasing attention on women. These are the situations generated by rapid changes in the world economic order, environmental degradation, and the geographic distribution of people in the developed and developing countries.

i. World economic restructuring needs women as a source of cheap labour.

The world economic order is changing rapidly. The profit oriented market economy is rapidly emerging in societies that previously used to produce mainly for the satisfaction of their own needs, rather than for the global market. Keeping women away from child bearing is a consequence of the logic of profit and export oriented production. The world economic system now requires women in the developing countries to be involved in the industries as cheap labour. In order to become a full-time worker, including working overtime and on holidays, they must be free from responsibilities such as marriage, child bearing, etc. The women engaged in jobs may not necessarily have to get married at an early age. "Women's access to labour market brings multiple benefits. It works to lower fertility by delaying the age of marriage. After marriage it provides women with an independent income which will improve their power and status in the family" (State of World Population, UNFPA, 1992).

The type of industries which are relocated in the developing countries for cheap labour do not recruit married women and do not provide maternity leave. Given the de-unionization policy implemented in the package of structural adjustment programmes of multilateral agencies, women are losing ground to fight against the processes that are denuding them of their fundamental rights as workers. Under this situation, women are needed only for their capacity for production; their role in reproduction must be terminated as dictated by the logic of the system. The UNFPA document is very clear on this: "It is also clearly recognized that more attention must be given to women's productive rather than reproductive role so that they may have status apart from motherhood" (Population Issues Briefing Kit, UNFPA, 1992)

ii. The world environment is degrading: Population is to be blamed!

Global environment degradation has generated worldwide concern. Something must be done to mend it and a culprit must be found to be blamed. It is agreed by all that the "consumption patterns of industrialized countries such as the United States must be dramatically altered if environmental sustainability is to be achieved" (Why Population Matters, UNFPA, 1991). This report continues: "Americans need also to recognize the role industrialised countries play in global environmental problems. For example, Americans make up only 5% of the world's population but consume 33% of the world's resources and produce 33% of the world's pollution." In other words, only 5% of the world's population cause one-third of the pollution.

But the western industrialised and developed countries are not prepared to change their consumption habits. On the contrary, they continue to blame the developing countries for their large populations as a major cause of environmental degradation. For many instances, population growth has been held responsible for deforestation, carbon dioxide output, methane gas emissions and loss of biodiversity. For example, since methane gas is produced by rice paddies and livestock and rice is produced and

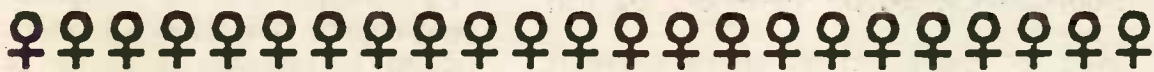
consumed mostly in the developing countries, population growth allegedly accounted for both 69% of the increase in livestock numbers in developing countries and 68% of the increase in sub-Saharan Africa's carbon dioxide output between 1980 and 1988. No mention of the contribution of the developed countries in this respect. United States alone emits 22% of all carbon dioxide produced in the world.

iii. Uneven population growth in the developed and the developing countries.

The growing fear of the western developed countries about the unequal number of people of other colour, race, or ethnicity is being expressed very openly in various internal government documents. "Ninety-five percent of world population is occurring in the developed countries, which on the average is increasing at 2.1% per year, the 42 least developed countries are growing at 2.8%. In contrast, the growth rate of developed regions, (essentially Europe, North America, Japan and Oceania) has dropped to 0.5% and may fall further. The same stark contrast is naturally to be seen in fertility rates: these average 3.8 in developing countries with the least developed among them at more than 6.0; but fertility is now only 1.9, i.e. below replacement level, in developed countries.

Racism is more obvious in all the discussions of "overpopulation." In the cover page of The Economist (May 30th-June 5th, 1992), a picture of black African children was prominently presented to terrify the readers about "overpopulation." In UNFPA documents, whenever population is discussed the projected faces are of people of colour. On top of this, national security issues and the question of strict immigration laws are now on the priority agenda of the population discussion in the European and North American countries.

Farida Ahkter is Executive Director of UBINIG, a Bangladesh research organization. She participated in the Women Working for Change project and visited Thunder Bay in 1989.

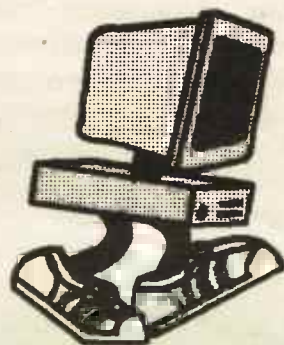


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# Patsy Cline I fall To Pieces

## Josie Wallenius

Flo and I were listening to Patsy Cline singing "I fall to pieces." I told Flo the holiday was like a big wave, the kind that begins its swell miles out, and the holiday was the swell, not the crash on the beach, because that would come later, water draining moving pebbles that had needed to be re-arranged.

I was at the stove, and Matthew appeared by my side.

"You're privileged Mum".

I sank, Not you too Brutus.

He meant the journeying. Russia, Libya, Nicaragua, Palestine.

"Look son, you know what's killing this world, it's propaganda. That why I went. And I tried to bring a message back, and I failed and if you think this is privilege, Frick You, because it has been my experience that nobody gives a mucking frick about anything outside their own lives which means I am a failure and I don't see anything privileged about failure, and besides, I know a hundred people who could go where I went if they made that choice, but they didn't make it, so shut up."

I flung in an extra barb for good measure.

"They can't even turn their T.V. off and read."

"Shit." I was speechless. The nights I was working full time and reading till 3 in the morning, sogging the pillow with tears.

**"SHIT" I SAID.**

He walked away.

"Frick" I thought. I wanted to tell him about his blood father.

I lay on a couch, the young women were talking.

My sister-in-law who is Canadian was asking my daughter-in-law what it was like living in London with all those IRA bombs going off.

The silence was quite rapt. Rapt. I stirred. My daughter-in-law said Londoners could take it.

My intestines knotted. The London blitz myths live on as though Dresden never happened. My mouth opened in the swell like a gasping fish.

"Well, at least the IRA warn people, not like the bloody allies when they carpet bombed Iraq."

It was as though I had thrown a gear shift **MOMENTARILY** into neutral ... somebody geared it back again, neatly. I had been giving my daughter driving lessons, but it wasn't her, she gets things, I have blessings to count.

The last evening I was at my sister-in-law's house. The last party of the swell. At last I was telling the kind story about my first husband for Matthew's sake, but it turned out it was for my stepson's sake, who had not understood something else, and there was a pause as people looked into the swell, and I thought if this is story time I will tell another.

I told Brian, who is my other stepson's son, that as an anarchist he was a chip off the old block, as his grandmother, my husband's first wife, had been a leftist when she wasn't escaping blows from her first husband, and I told them that his grandmother had a friend called Nan who lived over the road from me in Saskatchewan, and one day Nan had mentioned the Bay of Pigs to me and I had said,

"What is the Bay of Pigs?"

And I said to the people who were listening to this story that I had never forgotten to this day the look of contempt that Nan had flung at me for asking such a question. I said that I had never understood what the contempt was for, that I had said to my first husband that it was strange that Nan never spoke to me any more even though she lived over the road, and it had taken me over 20 years to want to understand that knowing what the Bay of Pigs meant was important for all human beings to know, but the funny thing was that Joan, Brian's grandmother had never shown me contempt although she knew more about the Bay of Pigs than Nan; so that showed you what a wonderful person Joan was, not to show contempt to people who did not know about the Bay of Pigs.

I lay talking with the old man in bed. I asked him who had heard the story about Nan's contempt because I wanted it to be my daughter-in-law, but he said it was my stepson's wife, so you never can tell, can you?

Anyhow, the day they left I went to the airport to see them off, then I went home. I walked into the house and into the silence. The swell was over and now the pebbles would move. I felt great. I went to work that night and unwound, then I did six loads of washing in the laundrymat before I came home. I was driving home, feeling O.K. and suddenly, pebbles moved, and I saw them at the airport again, I saw them again as I was seeing them off.

My son was taking their two shiny new suitcases from the trunk of the car, and putting them on the airport cart, and I suddenly collapsed into sobbing.

It was the suitcases. New, new for their trip to Canada to see Nan. A couple of working class kids with two new suitcases, their holiday dream. And I had dented it.

"You fricking cow, Josie" I sobbed to myself, "you fricking, fricking cow."

I got home still sobbing at the thought of the suitcases, I cried for about ten minutes and then it stopped. That was 2 hours and 50 minutes less sobbing than I had done when they had bombed Iraq.

And I thought of the suitcases again. Clothes, and 60 tiny bits of amethyst and 60 tiny Canadian flag badges, the ones you get from the M.P.'s office. 30 bits of amethyst for Daniel's class and 30 bits of amethyst for Alex's class.

Badges ditto.

So the kids could show where they had been.

I had not told my son, but I feel that I must when I write next, that I had been given little Canadian badges to take to Palestine from our M.P.s office, and had left them behind in a bin in a hotel room in the East Jerusalem hotel because I hadn't known what else to do with them.

### PRIVILEGE?

But he still thinks I am privileged.

When I used to visit England to see my family I used to travel from my daughter's place in Barnet to my son's place near Kings Cross station. I used to go by the underground train. The conspiracy theorists say all the big cities in the West have undergrounds so they can be blown up when the time comes. My son uses the train to go to work and my daughter-in-law uses the train to visit her mother.

I remember in Palestine the people said the world is like a train.

The people in the West are inside the train and the people not in the West are outside it banging on the windows and doors for attention. But everybody inside the train is hanging on tight, because things are getting uncomfortable inside the train too.

Well, just after the time of Iraq, I was in England, on the underground going to see my son, and the train was packed, and opposite to me was an Arab man reading an Arabic newspaper, and sitting next to him was a middle aged woman, neatly dressed, grey haired, carrying a bunch of seringa blossoms. The train was rocking along and I remember think that the woman looked as though she had picked the blossoms for a friend because she had such a kind face.

Suddenly the woman turned to the Arab man who was reading the Arabic newspaper,

"It's so dreadful what is going on, such a pity our troops did not finish it off and kill Sadam Hussein."

The man smiled politely at her, he carried on reading. The woman sank back on her seat, her kind face smiling.

The train rocked on. People were reading newspaper. They were going to work. My mouth opens. It is not me, it is never me. "For Christ's sake," shouts this voice, "It's all lies, don't you understand, it's all lies."

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## Patsy Cline I fall To Pieces

continued from pg 5

A few faces turned, I was trembling, and went to the door waiting for the train to stop. I stepped off and ran up the platform, and got on the escalator, I had no idea what station I was at, I just had to get off the train. I was still trembling. I felt a hand on my arm and turned around. It was the woman. Her face was flushed. She was out of breath. She had been running to catch up with me.

"What do you mean?" she said.

It's all lies, that's all I mean. Everything. It's all lies and propaganda.

We got separated in the crowd. We had both left the train. It had nothing to do with privilege.

Chapter 2.

I had been waiting for an answer from my son. My old man had said, don't write in anger, but I had, plop, into the letter box, it was done. I was afraid, till he answered, I got the letter this morning. Sometimes things are too personal to share, but he said,

"The badges went down well, but not as well as the rock samples. Both their classes, (my grandchildren's) were able to take a piece home, with around 30 pieces left which the school asked if they could keep to be used for study.

I remember them toiling up Silver Mountain, air thick with mosquitos, to get bits of amethyst for their little friends.

Baraka Bashad, my son, which is Arabic for "Blessed be."

# Book Review

Michèle Proulx

## DECLARATION OF THE FOUR SACRED THINGS

*The earth is a living, conscious being. In company with cultures of many different times and places, we name these things as sacred: air, fire, water, and earth.*

*Whether we see them as the breath, energy, blood, and body of the Mother, or as the blessed gifts of a Creator, or as symbols of the interconnected systems that sustain life, we know that nothing can live without them.*

*To call these things sacred is to say that they have a value beyond their usefulness for human ends, that they themselves become the standards by which our acts, our economics, our laws, and our purposes must be judged. No one has the right to appropriate them or profit from them at the expense of others. Any government that fails to protect them forfeits its legitimacy.*

*All people, all living things, are part of earth life, and so are sacred. No one of us stands higher or lower than any other. Only justice can assure balance: only ecological balance can sustain freedom. Only in freedom can that fifth sacred thing we call spirit flourish in its full diversity.*

*To honor the sacred is to create conditions in which nourishment, sustenance, habitat, knowledge, freedom, and beauty can thrive. To honor the sacred is to make love possible.*

*To this we dedicate our curiosity, our will, our courage, our silences, and our voices. To this we dedicate our lives.*

The Fifth Sacred Thing is Starhawk's first novel. Some readers may be already familiar with Starhawk's philosophy and world view as presented in her works The Spiral Dance, Dreaming the Dark, and Truth or Dare. In The Fifth Sacred Thing, Starhawk has taken another tack. She has written a story that is woven with her wit, her wisdom and her magic: a story that can only be categorized as Speculative Fiction. In the vein of Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, we are presented with visions of potential futures based upon the extension of present day circumstances and trends. In The Fifth Sacred Thing, Starhawk offers the reader a choice of alternatives. The hoped-for and hopeful option is a community based upon the above Declaration of the Four Sacred Things, where people live and work together to try to re-establish the balanced dance of the earth and her creatures. The other alternative is presented in what remains of the City of Angels where capitalistic avarice and consumption beyond replenishment have created a world where most suffer and a few live in splendid excess. Starhawk brings these opposing visions

together in a conflict that challenges both communities' very basis of existence: "There is still a place at our table, brother, if you will choose to join us."

In the character of Maya, it seems that Starhawk may be envisioning herself several decades hence, a ninety-eight year old crone-witch who visits with her departed lovers, reminisces and ruminates over her life's adventures, worries for both her grandchild and her lovers' grandchild and takes her fate and the fate of her city in hand when the need arises. It is at the Time of Reaper that Maya recounts the story of the Uprising:

"We have had two blessed decades to remake our corner of the world, to live by what we believe. Today is the twentieth anniversary of the Uprising. I've been asked to tell you the story of Las Cuatro Viejas, the Four Old Women who sparked the rebellion in '28 when the Stewards cancelled the elections and declared martial law.

"...While the Stewards' troops were massing down on the peninsula, commandeering all stockpiles of food, and the rest of us were debating what to do and trying to work up courage to do it, Maria gathered with her neighbours, Alice Black, Lily Fong, and Greta Jeanne Morgolis, Four old women with nothing to lose. On the morning of the first of August, they marched out in the dawn with pickaxes over their shoulders, straight out into the middle of Army Street, and all the traffic stopped, such cars as a few people could still afford to drive.

"Some of them were honking their horns, some were shouting threats, but when Maria raised the pickaxe above her head, there came a silence like a great, shared, indrawn breath. Then she let it fall, with a thud that shuddered through the streets, and the four old women began to dig.

"They tore up the pavement, blow by blow, and filled the holes with compost from a sack Greta carried, and planted them with seeds. By then a crowd had gathered, the word was carried through the streets, and we rushed from our houses to join them, bringing tools or only our bare hands, eager to build something new. And many of us were crying, with joy or with fear, tears streaming enough to water the seeds.

"But Alice raised her hand, and she called out in a loud voice. 'Don't you cry,' she told us. 'This is not a time to cry. This is a time to rejoice and praise the earth, because today we have planted our freedom!'.....

## SUPERIOR WOMEN'S COFFEEHOUSE



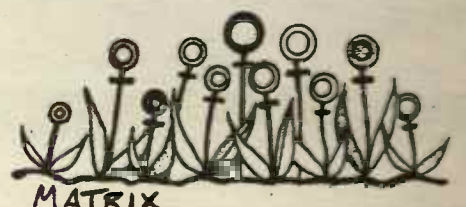
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# Panel On Violence: A Response

Jocelyn J. Paquette

Northern Ontario Representative  
National Action Committee on the Status of Women



## ROLE OF PANEL

to engage Canadians in a dialogue on violence against women in an interactive, responsive grass roots manner, with the aim of producing solid recommendations for preventive action, immediate intervention and long term implementation. (PANEL p.3)

This statement is from the Executive Summary of the National Action Plan of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women. It leaves me looking for the direction and vision required by our governments at all three level (provincial, municipal & federal) to affect positive change. These changes were to include legislative changes that would give ♀ access and equal treatment in our society. What we see in the final report is something very different.

I wish to present three issues of how the PANEL failed to provide the VISION ♀ hoped to have at the end of this process. Using the Summary and comments from NAC we will look at;

- ♀ consultation process
- ♀ representation on the panel
- ♀ final recommendations

## CONSULTATION PROCESS

Who were the women consulted throughout the country? They were women working in violence, front line workers dedicated to the elimination of violence against women in all its forms. Women attended the consultation only to have their stories told and re-told. In Thunder Bay for example there were 5 french language translators and not one professional to support the women when they disclosed. This lack of awareness to the pain and vulnerability felt by women over their experiences being voiced was evidence of the lack of accountability to women in this process. Ten million dollars to say women were at risk of violence in Canada! Services for victims of violence and frontline workers could have produced all the necessary documentation. Nothing new was discovered for most women in Canada.

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## REPRESENTATION ON PANEL

Who and how were ♀ consulted in this process? This question rang loudly when the National Action Committee on the Status of Women asked the PANEL to describe the selection process.

NAC and other national women's groups negotiated with the PANEL to initiate change in their structure and process. We as women felt it had to be more inclusive and accountable. (letter from Judy Rebick) The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (NOIVM), the Congress of Black Women and DAWN Canada in June 1992 met spoke with Pat Marshall (Advisory Committee of the PANEL). The original proposal asked that three minority women have full participation in the PANEL discussions. What was agreed upon was two minority women and one woman with disabilities. When the PANEL was written up the picture was very different. The women would now be "special advisors" and it was clear that their role would be limited.

The aboriginal women's circle established within the PANEL was the "model of operation that should have been adopted for the panel as a whole." (Sunera Thobani, NAC President) Women at the grass roots level working against violence, racial minority women and women with disabilities felt excluded from this process. NAC and other women's organizations pulled their support from the PANEL due to failure to respond to the concerns identified by women across Canada.

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## FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In the final analysis myself and many women I work with in Northern Ontario see the made by the PANEL in the following way;

- ♀ there is no timeline, in other words of the RESULTS to consultation on violence against women we are offered no timeframe in which some these recommendations are to be carried. No promise of legislative changes that could in fact bring about real change to lessen the violence of even meet the violence and deal with it through the courts.



- ♀ no accountability to groups, of those groups that took part in the consultation no commitment was made to ensure that even "some" of these recommendations are adhered to in the foreseeable future. The issue of hope for change was by this point squashed since no directive was in place to enforce or at least begin the process to put some of these recommendations in place.

- ♀ how can we take seriously the over 497 RECOMMENDATIONS that lack any boundaries, support or structure to carry out the work that is needed. ZERO TOLERANCE = NO ACCOUNTABILITY. Empty phrases. Women today deserve better.

- ♀ what level of government would be responsible for the implementation of the recommendations. [The report] calls for making women's safety a priority at the municipal level but does not commit the federal government to adopting the same priority. (Press Release, July 29th, 1993 from NAC)

In the final analysis the process of the PANEL not only excluded women and demeaned their experiences but it allowed little hope for the future.

While women are experiencing the negative impacts of the dismantling of social programs and funding cuts to shelters, transition houses and frontline workers, this report remains silent on these key issues which increases women's vulnerability to violence. (Sunera Thobani, NAC president)

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## CONCLUSION

Where do we go from here? Look at our options. The impact ♀ had on the Constitutional Accord must not be forgotten. We must secure access for ourselves. Though the Court Challenges Program was reinstated the Women's Program continues to be at risk. Cuts to the program due to reductions of transfer payments to the provinces furthers the aggressive assault against women in this country.

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# The Customs Game

Mickey Koivisto

When I was a baby dyke of 5 or 6, my friend Audrey and I found a stash of her father's Playboy magazines. We were intensely curious about the female body and innocently inspected the various body parts of the women at our leisure. A short while later Audrey's big sister hauled us out by our ankles from under their parent's bed.

By the end of Big Sister's hissy fit we felt ashamed. Big Sister told us we were "bad girls" and those pictures "were dirty". We believed her. Audrey still does.

I remember the incident vividly because it was the first time I was told that the female form was "dirty" and that I was bad for wanting to look. The shame stayed with me for years to come. The actions of Audrey's big sister made me feel that not only my body, but all women's bodies were dirty and lesbianism was a dark and sordid act that could not even be named. Many years later, as I kissed a woman for the first time, a twinkling of the feeling I'd experienced so long ago came back to make my belly do wonderful and exhilarating flips. Unfortunately so did the shame I'd been told I should feel. It would be another several years before I could make love to a woman and several more years before I dared to make love to her in the light of day.

Occasionally my behaviour is still affected by the shame that was instilled in me. I have to be ever vigilant against it - and this is after 10 years of fighting homophobia in myself and the world at large.

I've asked for On Our Backs, books by Pat Califia or Bad Attitude at women's bookstores wherever I go. More often than not I've been informed that such pornography isn't appropriate for sale in a feminist bookstore. This is usually accompanied by a look of judgement one that says "you bad girl." I can't help but feel that Big Sister is once again trying to define my sexuality. Perhaps I'm wrong, but I honestly can't see the difference.

I want access to sexual imagery produced by lesbians for me. That makes me a consumer of pornography. It does not make me evil. It does not make me want to go out and do everything I see or read about. Does this mean I objectify women? Why yes I guess sometimes I do. Sometimes, when I'm with my lover, intensely lost in her body, she is many things to me, including a sex object. She is also a Goddess in the flesh. When I look at On Our Backs, and I see two women entangled in each other's arms, sweating and laughing or doing whatever the fuck they want to, they are objects. They objectify my sexuality. The dictionary defines an object as anything that is visible or tangible and in this society my sexuality is not visible. I'm not positively represented as a lesbian woman. Although I want acknowledgement for my contributions I want to be recognized as a multidimensional human who happens to be a lesbian, I also refuse to buy into the homogenous rhetoric that says my sexuality has nothing to do with who I am. Recently, the lesbian and gay community has become polarized over the issue of whether to kick out the drag queens and stone butches.

Whether to be nice, non-offensive and Wonder bread like in order to gain the acceptance of heterosexual society. I am not of that ilk. The stone butches and drag queens got us through Stonewall and farther than we'd ever been. I believe we owe the success of the lesbian, gay, et al. struggle to them and I'll be damned if I'll be a nice white girl for my movement. My sexuality is not all of who I am, but it is a part of me. I believe that access to sex positive delineative portraits of other lesbians allows that part of me a certain amount of validity. In a society where my community and I are on billboards and pandied to by every industry from diaper manufacturers to funeral homes, magazines like On Our Backs might not be necessary. However, lesbians have a hell of a time talking about what goes on in our bedrooms. We have no role models, we have no sex education courses in high school. Most of us can hardly tell even our lovers what we want from them. Someday this will change. Seeing ourselves having sex between any covers - including those of a magazine produced by lesbians will help get us there. Right now, lesbians need every piece of material we can get that says "YES, not only is it o.k. to have sex with other women, it's o.k. to have sex however you like and here's a few ideas ya'll might like to try".

My family, my government and my contemporaries are doing their very best to ensure my day of equality never arrives. I want to be a big sister who says - "look, look everywhere you need to and remember that each woman including you is strong and unique and that's part of what makes her beautiful."



Do you know the difference between Nobel prize-winning literature and pornography? You're one up on Canada Customs and the federal government if you do.

Since the Supreme Court of Canada handed down the Butler decision in February of 1992, no prominent difference can be seen in the availability of heterosexual pornography. However, Canada Customs has targeted feminist, lesbian and gay bookstores, making it difficult for them to import not only erotica, but work by authors such as Toni Morrison, Anne Cameron and Jane Rule.

In 1993, over 5,000 books and periodicals were detained by Canada Customs. Many of them were available in mainstream bookstores. Some were required reading in Canadian universities. The common thread in their binding was destination or distribution. The materials were either destined for lesbian, feminist or gay bookstores or were shipped by Inland Books, a major supplier of lesbian and gay material.

## IN THE BEGINNING, PRE-BUTLER

Little Sisters Book & Art Emporium was the first store to challenge Canada Customs on its discriminatory practices. In 1986, the Vancouver lesbian and gay bookstore had its first shipment of books and magazines detained. Amongst the considerable amount of material ruled obscene under Canada's Custom Tariff Code and prohibited entry was The Advocate, a well known magazine. On behalf of Little Sisters, the B.C. Civil Liberties Association began to appeal the ruling. The BCCLA and Little Sisters launched a Federal Court challenge, but after waiting two and a half years to litigate the government conceded their mistake, two weeks before the trial. Hoping to raise the issue of discrimination, they sued for losses incurred. Again, the government conceded. A suit was filed with the B.C. Supreme Court in 1990. The Court decided not to hear the case before R. v Butler was heard. A new date was set for September, 1992, and was again postponed until October 1993, when the Crown unsuccessfully brought forward a motion to dismiss. In October, the Crown delayed for the third time, stating that they were inadequately prepared for a case which had been in their hands for more than three years. The also argued that twenty days would not be long enough to hear from all of the expert witnesses, they had demanded be there in person. Ten weeks have been assigned to hear the case, beginning on October 11, 1994.

While the government succeeds in obfuscating and obstructing the justice sought by Little Sisters, the by now impecunious bookstore and BCCLA have maintained sole responsibility for raising the money to continue the challenge. In addition to the \$80,000 and incalculable work hours spent, Little Sisters will be trying to raise an additional \$200,000 before this October.

## THEY SAID BUTLER WAS A GOOD THING

Aside from the Little Sisters challenge, Canada Customs has been coming under fire from several of Canada's literary organizations. The Book & Periodical Council, PEN International, The Writer's Union and the International Booksellers Federation began to pay attention. Canada Customs' targeting of gay, lesbian and feminist bookstores was called to the agenda at PEN Int'l.'s 60th congress in Spain. They called on the our government to



"immediately halt all seizures...". Also during 1993, The International Booksellers Federation, met in Belgium. They too called for the Canadian government to "join the other major democratic countries of the world in confirming and guaranteeing the principle of freedom of expression..." The Book & Periodical Council, representing over 6,000 individuals and 5,500 firms and institutions began addressing letters to the Minister of Revenue, Importations Unit in Ottawa, and the Prime Minister. The attention from these organizations came following a seizure of unprecedented scope. Between April 16 and May 4, 1993, Canada Customs detained over a thousand books, destined for 46 Canadian bookstores and libraries. They were from Inland Books, a large U.S. supplier to feminist, queer and alternative bookstores. Customs placated the media, literary, lesbian and gay communities, saying it was routine. As promised they released all the books on May 11. Except the ones going to feminist or gay bookstores. The government had no response to the letters of outrage. Although four months later, the Book & Periodical Council received a letter from then Minister of Revenue, Otto Jelinek reassuring them that "The examinations were conducted expeditiously." The "expeditious" service offered by Customs must have left bookstore owners wondering, just which country's Customs agency the Minister of Revenue was referring to. Although the Canadian media seemed to have little interest in covering the fight for queer sexual identity, those following the ordeal became dismayed as the actions of Canada Customs became even more homophobic and preposterous.

Bookstores which had never before been harassed became the targets of Canada Customs war on lesbians and gays. The Toronto Women's Bookstore, Everywoman's Books, of Victoria and Womensline Books in London began to have material inspected.

Everywoman's had a shipment of books detained (its first in an 18 year herstory). Without notifying Everywoman's Books, Canada Customs seized a lesbian comic; Hothead Paisan and returned it to Inland Books. After six months and numerous calls from the store to Customs the notification needed to begin appeals had still not been received. Customs later said that the comic was banned because it sexually degraded men. Eventually, the comic was allowed into the country. From Womensline Books the police seized Weenie-Toons! Women Artists Mock Cocks. This material was banned for "its degradation of the male penis." The Toronto Women's Bookstore also had copies of Hothead Paisan seized. They too, had never faced inspection by Customs. The Customs' raids of Toronto Women's Bookstore material started after they began selling Bad Attitude, a sexually explicit magazine published by lesbians.

While the file of seizures involving gay materials reads like a who's who of lesbian and gay publishing, mainstream bookstores remain relatively unscathed. Three notable exceptions are Pages and Le Dernier Mot. Pages, after mounting an anti-censorship window display, began to have materials seized. Le Dernier Mot, a left-of-centre bookstore which caters to journalists, had Andrea Dworkin's books; Pornography: Men Possessing Women and Woman Hating prohibited from entry after publishing transcripts of a telephone conversation which the government wanted banned.

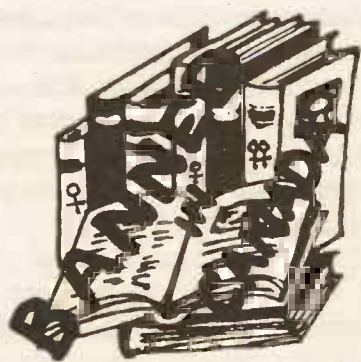
Due to their journalistic clientele the seizure made the pages of the Montreal Gazette.

Customs attempted to apologize to L.D.M. by saying that there was a distinction between gay and non-gay bookstores and that seizures of books going to non-gay bookstores were a "mistake."

The Sexual Politics of Meat was destroyed on its way to Wonder Words in Toronto. Book People, the distributor of the book was told "That they faced heavy fines" if they tried to resubmit the book of feminist analysis into Canada.

While a summary of Canada Customs' actions reads like an Orwellian Keystone Cops script They say they're just doing their job "intercepting obscene material." Their decisions are arbitrary, subjective and biased. While most of us expressed joy over the Butler decision there is little to cheer about in its application.

What went wrong?



RFR

#### EXAMINING BUTLER

The Butler decision evolved from a 1987 incident involving Donald Butler, a Winnipeg video outlet owner who sold "hardcore" pornography. He was charged with 250 counts of violating the Criminal Code's obscenity provision. Butler's case was the perfect test for Canada's new obscenity law because of the numerous charges brought against him. He was convicted on eight counts. The Crown appealed the acquittals. Butler appealed the convictions. In a nine to zero decision, the Supreme Court convicted Butler of all charges. They ruled that the Criminal Code prohibition on obscenity did not violate his freedom of expression. If the Court had ruled in favour of The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the criminal code provision against obscenity would have been invalidated. The pornography/censorship debates began again in fervour. The decision came after many of Mulroney's bills were defeated and many anti-pornography supporters had virtually given up hope on changes from the government. Now Canada was the first country to define pornography as hate literature. The Court had looked to its own verdict in R. v. Keegstra. Where the distribution of the material in that trial was deemed harmful to Jews, so to was pornography, said the Court, harmful to women. Anti-porn feminists cheered for the long awaited link between pornography and violence against women. Anti-censorship advocates called the decision, "A misconceived piece of legislation" and feared that bigotry now had license to run rampant. Although most of the material seized in the Butler case had been heterosexual, a small amount was gay male oriented. In a brief prepared by the Women's Legal Education Action Fund (LEAF), the judges were shown depictions of gay male sex so that they would better understand the degradation caused by pornography and empathize with women. This brought lesbian and gay erotica into the sphere of the new obscenity precedent and it was the first to be hit by the Butler decision. Glad Day bookstore of Toronto was charged with

distributing obscenity. In court, lawyers argued that there should be a different standard for judging lesbian and gay porn. Their petition was denied and the owners of Glad Day are no longer able to sell Bad Attitude, a magazine produced by lesbians, for a lesbian market. Ironically, the X-rated bookstores peppered throughout the area, legally supply lesbian imagery to a male heterosexual market. If Canada's policing bodies could be trusted, the Butler decision might have a chance of fulfilling its intent. However this has not happened in a society where homophobic behaviour is not the exception but the norm. The real pornographers have been left alone.

In a recent conversation with Janine Fuller, Manager of Little Sisters in Vancouver, we talked about the Butler decision, pending court case and the ongoing harassment of Canada Customs.

MICKEY: How far reaching has the support been from the lesbian and gay community?

JANINE: ...for a long time I think it was an isolated thing. In the States they thought it was a Canadian issue that didn't involve them, and in Canada it's just a bookstore - not necessarily an issue specific to a community, but that's changed a lot. Partly because this court case was delayed so many times. It's created more and more interest around it. People have become knowledgeable about what the actual issues are... in the States there are a lot more people realizing that we're talking about American authors being banned in Canada. That sort of contextualizes it for them.

MICKEY: It seems like The Globe & Mail has done some fair coverage of it, but I don't think that Canadians in general understand the significance of the case or what Canada Customs is doing...

JANINE: I think the problem is Americans are born believing in the First Amendment, it's something they espouse on an almost daily basis, where as our Charter of Rights

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has only just come into being in the last 15 years... But at the same time I think Canadians are getting pretty outraged by it, by the number of calls I get - from the straight media, the gay and lesbian media, there are a lot of people who realize this is a part of the big picture. It's not about one thing. It's about a whole history of harassment, not just for gay and lesbian bookstores, but for all book sellers. For 10 years this has been ongoing in gay and lesbian book selling communities in Canada, it's just been this feeling that it's o.k. to sit back and watch and think you're not going to be involved in this but eventually the feminist bookstores will start to experience the same kind of regulation - over the last year that's happened. Naiad Press, who have never really had any difficulty with their material are starting to have things like Claire of The Moon being stopped, I Left My Heart In San Fransisco - authors that you would not necessarily think would have their material stopped... When our court case was due to come up last October we had 39 affidavits - from book sellers and individuals across Canada, who were attesting to their experiences with Canada Customs. That was just a small medley. There's a lot of others...

MICKEY: It seems like Inland Books has been unfairly targeted and because they've consolidated shipments, mainstream bookstores are now being effected...

JANINE: Right. Where as it might have just been our shipment being stopped, because Inland consolidated their shipments the United Bookstore experienced a seizure, Cole's Bookstore has experienced a seizure. Marguerite Duras had one of her books going to Trent University for a course, and that book was stopped and banned in Canada. There's no doubt that Inland has been centered out and targeted. But the way Canada Customs operates is; once that once they catch one piece of material that they consider to be obscene you are an importer of 'obscene' material. When they're asked to explain why they've made these detentions they will say, 'Little Sisters has been targeted because they have a history of importing obscene materials.' That history has been made by Canada Customs. It creates itself through their actions.

MICKEY: They say that they're 'just doing their job' intercepting obscene material.

JANINE: To try to be fair to them - what they have to work with - in a determination of a detention, it is very limited. I've had Customs agents phone me and say; 'Look, I don't



want to be detaining this material, but I don't have a choice, because this is my job and there are 8 categories that I have to tick off when I review material and my supervisors are watching me review your material.'

MICKEY: Tell me about the 8 categories.

JANINE: They are 'sex with violence', 'child sex', 'incest', 'bestiality', 'necrophilia', 'hate propaganda' and 'other.' Certainly you can imagine 'anal penetration' is a category we often find our selves falling under and 'other' as well. 'Other' doesn't explain itself - it gives no explanation.

MICKEY: Bad Attitude for instance could fall under that category.

JANINE: 'Other' - Often we'll get 'other' - bondage. Most of our seizures are 'anal', 'other' or 'sex with violence' because there's so much conjecture around what is violence and sex and consentuality. With Canada Customs they have a one day training course that puts them into a position to decide the morality of any one community or any one individual.

MICKEY: That seems to be one of the biggest problems. Aside from the Butler decision itself - the way Canada's policing bodies are administering it.

JANINE: Yes, it's the inconsistencies... Pat Califia's Macho Sluts has been seized on four separate occasions to this bookstore alone. Now each time it's been seized it's gone through the bureaucratic maze to find its approval status. Why should it be seized over and over again and not just be on a list that identifies it (as o.k.)...

MICKEY: I spoke to a bookstore which dealt with their seizure problems by having the distributor send the material in small, unlabelled boxes.

JANINE: ...unfortunately, that doesn't solve the problem. We just can't be silent about this anymore. We have to be very vigilant in our efforts to make sure that these laws are changed and the way that Canada Customs essentially does discriminate against Inland our bookstores. I understand this bookstore considering those options and often we've had people suggest it to us, but I guess we feel so strongly - we've spent all this time and money and energy working towards getting this issue before the courts where people can see the reality of it.

MICKEY: I can see how booksellers might consider these options - to go back into the closet, to look for subversive ways to get material into Canada or to start censoring themselves when they order...

JANINE: Yeah, I don't think there's many book sellers who go through the excruciating process of thinking about what's going to be stopped and what isn't and 'how much can I afford to risk?' I don't want to prejudge what Customs is going to do, but I have such a long history of knowing what they're going to do. So it certainly does affect what you order and how you order it. There's a trickle down effect with publishers... This happened with Gay Ideas, a book by Richard Moore. It's a very scholarly work around a lot of issues such as outing, gay history and that kind of thing. Oxford Canada - which had the rights



to the book - said, 'Unless you omit these pictures, we're not interested in publishing it and we're withdrawing our proposal to bring it into Canada.' Beacon Press picked it up and published it, but again, if you're a small publisher you can't possibly fulfil the needs of all the people who are being censored.

MICKEY: It almost seems like Customs' mandate is to force lesbian and gay sexuality back into the closet.

JANINE: Well, when 'anal penetration' is a reason to be stopping it and the form is produced by our government - let's not lose sight of who's allowed this to continue...

MICKEY: Of course, there's the Community Standards of Tolerance Test...

JANINE: Yeah

MICKEY: But which community?

JANINE: Right. Who's making those choices? I've never been asked.

MICKEY: How has this whole process changed your opinion of censorship or the Canadian government?

JANINE: It's certainly opened my eyes. I think everyone has a sense of belief that the justice system is going to be somewhat swift and your voice will be heard, but after four and a half years (and really since 1986)... we've never gone to court, we've never had our voice heard. We've never had the chance to put this out to the Canadian public. It's discouraging.

MICKEY: How far do you think the freedom of speech should be taken? Do you think there should be limits on what is allowed into Canada?

JANINE: I think obviously as a society, we have a great deal of difficulty finding out what those limits are and how to set them. So I think it's a really difficult issue that needs a lot of discussion before it's implemented into any kind of law. I think with hate propaganda there should be certain provisions ... but they don't necessarily have to fall under the same Acts that we have. I guess the belief is that Canada Customs shouldn't be regulating these things. They should be done through Canadian law and not through Customs' officials who really don't know.

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MICKEY: That's what I thought when I first took a look at this whole thing; it's common sense. I agree with you. There are laws against harming women and child pornography. I don't think these issues have to be regulated by Customs.

JANINE: Yeah, and you have to believe they're protecting women and children. Part of the Butler decision was heralded as this great victory for Canadian women - that it would be protecting women and children. Well, it hasn't... The way it's been applied has been against the gay and lesbian book selling community.

MICKEY: Right, it certainly doesn't seem like there's been a shortage heterosexual pornography in Canada.

JANINE: Not at all. It's been co-opted by the right wing to achieve an agenda of their own.

MICKEY: Is there dialogue in the feminist and lesbian communities?

JANINE: Well I think there's had to be. I think that it's polarized the lesbian and feminist community. In many ways, I see that that's what the 90's is about - polarizing the feminist and lesbian community around a lot of issues not just censorship... It's this desire to get acceptance within mainstream culture. I heard Naomi Wolf speak the other day in an interview, here in Vancouver. She was apologizing for lesbians being involved in feminist politics and trying to make it o.k. I thought that was a really dangerous thing to be doing. You don't apologize for one group to get mainstream acceptance.

MICKEY: You're right. I was at the March on Washington and it seemed like an attempt to be homogeneous - 'Gee, look at how nice and clean cut we all are.'

JANINE: Yeah, like, 'Let's get control of what our images are.'... 'We don't want any more pictures of drag queens and ...

MICKEY: ... leather dykes

JANINE: Yes. But we can't forget this is our community, and that community is one which fought so long and is part of our history.

MICKEY: That's who was at Stonewall 25 years ago.

JANINE: Yeah.

MICKEY: Vancouver has some of the most sex positive dykes in the world I think. It also has some pretty militant pro-censorship supporters - the Women's Fire Brigade, for instance. What's happening in Vancouver?

JANINE: ...I think a lot of feminist dykes in Vancouver have - well, when they come in to buy *Afterglow* by Karen Barber and I tell them that it's a banned book in Canada - it gives them a completely different perspective on what censorship means, and I think there's definitely a feeling that Canada Customs is not meeting the needs of the feminists or the lesbians...

MICKEY: Has the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund come out and said; 'Gee, maybe, Butler wasn't such a good thing after all.'?

JANINE: No They will not do that. I don't think personally. They fought long and hard for Butler. They made certain choices that weren't necessarily the best choices in their lobbying of the government. But Butler exists and it's not going to change as far as Canadian law goes. We're stuck with it, so we need to find some ways to understand Butler and make it work for us.

MICKEY: You're challenging Canada Customs prior restraint powers and hoping to prove that Canada Customs acted in a discriminatory manner against lesbians and gays. Is it possible to win half of the battle? How optimistic are you and your counsel?

JANINE: ... there's so many variables that are going to bring a ruling in our favour or not or halfway... I think you get ever growing in you optimism when you have domestic mail being stopped (1)...

**We're not litigating one book. We're litigating a history.**

**It seems like Canada Customs is trying to force us back into the closet.**

It's just another piece of evidence that's just glaring... I think a lot of the reasons about why we're doing this is - let's put all of our eggs in one basket... We're not litigating one book. We're litigating a history. When we're talking about the Little Sisters' case we're talking about everyone - Everywoman's Books...The Toronto Women's Bookstore...the Red Herring Bookstore, in Halifax.

MICKEY: Anne Cameron was really vocal in her support of anti-pornography legislation, but her material was amongst the first to be seized...

JANINE: The same with Andrea Dworkin. She had *Man Hating* stopped. I think there's this feeling, 'that at no matter what cost you protect the women and the children'...

MICKEY: I know you have the support of many Canadian writers - even Pierre Burton...

JANINE: Yeah, Jane Rule, Carol Vance, Nino Ricci, all pretty well known Canadian authors.

MICKEY: The Crown wants everyone there in person. They are not satisfied with affidavits?

JANINE: That's certainly been a tactic they've used. Now originally when we set out with these affidavits it was believed in good faith that the Crown would be willing to let them into testimony... but, as a motive for having the case delayed, threw this thing at the last minute saying, 'Well, you've got all these affidavits and ... if you're going to bring them to Court we want the right to interview each and everyone of them. The Crown has an inexhaustible supply of money to be trying this case. We, on the other hand have to pay for every single one of those witnesses. We're in desperate need of people making donations so this case can be heard.



MICKEY: It's a really scary time for any small interest or individual who wants to challenge the government.

JANINE: I think that's really a touchstone for what's set people off. They're saying, 'I really can't believe this case has taken four and a half years...It's been delayed three times and these people keep having to pay every time.' We've spent \$80,000 to date and I wish I could have given that money to eighty-million different organizations. But that's just water through our hands.

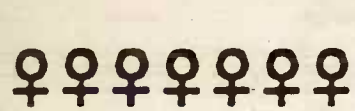
(1. Little Sisters had domestic mail seized and opened by Customs. It was sent from Ontario and contained sci-fi books. Customs and Canada Post apologized, explaining that the package had jumped a conveyor belt.)

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If you are interested in making a donation to Little Sisters and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, make cheques payable to:  
**Little Sisters Defence Fund**  
c/o B.C. Civil Liberties Assoc.  
518 - 119 W. Pender Street  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6B 1S5

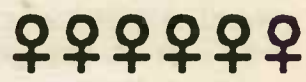
By Mickey Koivisto



Graphic by Elizabeth Horvath



# The Crossing Game



by LORI GILBERT

I saw "The Crying Game" shortly after viewing Diana Thorneycroft's exhibition at Definitely Superior (Touching: The Self); I had also recently read most of "Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Activity" by Marjorie Garber. So in a way, I was primed for the experience of seeing the film and I was ready to see a transsexual cross dresser rather than see the illusion or the glamour. The "surprise" that all my friends had been talking about did not come as such a great surprise to me, and perhaps because of this different mind set or mode of perception that I was in (as compared to my friends at the theatre), my feelings after seeing the film were very different than those expressed by others. People tended to have a reluctance to really say anything about the film, for fear of giving away the "surprise." The element of the male-to-female cross dresser/transsexual is an important element of the film, but it is not the only important element: there is a lot more to the film than Dil's "little piece of wang"<sup>1</sup>. However, you can't say anything about "The Crying Game" without making reference to cross dressing. In order to keep the "secret" one might be tempted to simply say that this is a love story, a really good, really different love story, and thus gloss over the numerous issues raised and the abundant material for analysis and discussion offered by the film. I think enough time has gone by, and enough people have seen the film by now, for me to comment without feeling any personal guilt about ruining the fun for anyone.

Because I had been recently exposed to the work of Marjorie Garber, it became evident that the image of the transvestite was being used, as it very often is in film, literature, and other cultural expressions, to displace or diffuse anxiety created by the crossing of other boundaries/borderlines: race, religion, nationality, political/military affiliation, and others.

The opening shot is one of a carnival seen from across a river, with a bridge in the foreground. We see immediately that this is going to have something to do with crossing, with bridging. Each of the main characters, except perhaps Dil, crosses the water at some time. Jody, the captured British soldier, has crossed twice. He tells Fergus that his family moved from Antigua when he was a child, and as a soldier he is shipped over to Northern Ireland; if we want to see Jody as a carrier or symbol of his people's history, he has crossed three times; since his ancestors would have crossed from Africa to Antigua (probably not intentionally). The history of English and European colonialism is written all over Jody's life, and when we meet him at the carnival, he is taking a break from his employment with the British Empire.

*The Crossing Game*

Jody's capture by a group of IRA members is facilitated by the use of a young woman as lure. Because this is Ireland, I can't help being reminded of the Unicorn, and how a Virgin was used as bait for its capture. There is another parallel, and the young woman's name tells us all about it. Her name is Jude, aka Judas, and she does indeed serve as scapegoat, carrying the blame for Jody's capture and subsequent death.<sup>2</sup> Jude is both sexual lure for the IRA cause, and waitress to the revolution. She serves tea and is constantly told to "shut up", "shut the fuck up", and referred to as "bitch". We first get to know Fergus when he questions Jude about her part in capturing the soldier: his questioning is voyeuristic, insinuating. Sadistically, he coaxes her to go close to the bound and hooded Jody, to touch him, to put herself in a dangerous and vulnerable position for his amusement. Obviously, the British Occupation is not the only enemy Jude will face before her story is over. (I remember the misty-eyed, smiling faces of people leaving the theatre with the love story of Fergus and Dil lingering pleasantly in their minds, while I dealt with the gut-churning and heart-pounding effects of the hate story played out upon the character of Jude.)

If Jude seems to signify Judas, then Jody must be Jesus. He gains a disciple through the process of male bonding with Fergus. I don't intend to write off "The Crying Game" as just-another-male-bonding movie, but male bonding does happen at the core of the film. The process seems slow, but there are a lot of rivers to be crossed and conflicting loyalties to be sorted through before Jody and Fergus come to the point where their bonding is complete. They compare notes on sports and racism, and reach a consensus on the dangers and treachery of women. At one point, when Jude is asked to guard Jody for a time, the captive screams out in panic, "Don't leave me with her, she's dangerous!" This singling out of Jude as being especially dangerous may seem absurd in the context of Jody's position as a hostage who may or may not be killed at any moment by any of his captors, but in the context of Irish-Catholic theology it is perfectly logical. The First Order of Irish saints accepted the service and society of women, either because in their faith they did not fear the temptation of these vessels of the devil, or because they recognized that their chastity was meaningless without the possibility of temptation. The Second Order refused the service of women, and insisted that women be kept separate from the monasteries. In documentation of the Third Order, women are not mentioned at all.<sup>3</sup>

The exchange of stories seems to complete the process of male bonding for Fergus and Jody. They each tell a story that involves crossing. Jody tells a story of a frog who allows a scorpion to ride on its back in order to cross a river. They get halfway across

and the scorpion, in spite of promising not to, stings the frog, who says, "Why did you sting me, for now we both shall drown?" The scorpion answers "I can't help it, it's my nature." A lesson in Biology-Is-Destiny, meant to reflect back on Jude and her natural condition of being "dangerous" and "trouble." Fergus is sceptical when Jody insists that Fergus will not kill him because it's not in his nature. He responds with this story: "When I was a child I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things." This is a story of crossing from childhood to manhood, and as he tells it, Fergus seems to have a realization that there is a loss involved in the "putting away," that something has died in the crossing. (This is the only place in the entire film where I was able to feel affection and sympathy for this character.) The crossing into manhood involves not only a physical separation from the mother, but also an emotional and intellectual from her, a perception of mother (and all women) as the Other. Like all good saints, Fergus is committed to the separation of male and female. Through the miracle of male bonding, rivers of race, colour, religion, nationality (and sexual orientation as we learn later) are successfully crossed, leaving women back on the Other side.



In discussing the death of Jody, and the transference of responsibility for Dil (the girl back home) from Jody to Fergus, I like to make comparisons with "Lolita." Fergus' original intention as a member of the IRA is to kill his hostage, the English soldier Jody. Through a process of male bonding that encompasses the mutual respect of soldiers, Fergus seems to win the trust of Jody, and Jody gives the responsibility of "caring" for Dil over to Fergus -- a kind of father-giving-away-the-bride between men, a transference of property. This is also a covenant.

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Remember that before God finalized his covenant with the Hebrews, Abraham had to be willing to kill his only son; at the last minute, God sent an angel to stop Abraham's hand. At the moment that Fergus is about to carry out the execution of Jody, the prisoner makes a break for freedom, and runs straight into the path of a British army truck. This effectively keeps Fergus' hands clean through the intervention of "fate." In "Lolita," Humbert Humbert's original intention as an obsessive child molester is to get close to the intended victim by marrying her mother. He develops a plot to kill the mother and become Lolita's legal guardian so that he will have unsupervised access to her for purposes of seduction. Lolita's mother, unlike Dil's lover, is not presented as a sympathetic character. We are supposed to like Jody, and he is extremely likable if you ignore his misogyny (much like Jesus), but we are not supposed to like Lolita's mother. And the mother, of course, has absolutely no intention of handing the daughter over to the step-father for "care-taking". At the moment that Humbert Humbert is about to carry out the murder of his wife, she too makes a break for freedom, makes a mad run based on the sudden knowledge of her husband's intentions, and is killed by an oncoming car. This effectively keeps Humbert's hands clean, and with the mother out of the way, seduction of the daughter begins.

In "The Crying Game," this intervention of fate in the form of a British Army truck seems to erase, in audiences' minds, the original intent of Fergus, the IRA man. The irony of the British soldier killed (accidentally) by his own army after surviving the ordeal of being held hostage, and at the point of being killed (intentionally) by his Irish captors, seems to allow a reading of "Whew! Fergus didn't have to kill Jody after all. We can still like him." And "None of this would have happened in the first place if the British weren't there." Well, not really. The cult of the warrior in Ireland, initiation into which depended on the willingness of a man to kill another man, existed well before the 16th century English invasions and also before the Anglo-Norman invasions of the 12th century.

Fergus goes across the water, escaping the fiery retribution of the British Army. We find him working construction (or is it deconstruction?) in view of a cricket field, ever reminded of the covenant with Jody. He constructs a new identity, signified by a new name and a haircut provided by Dil.

At the Metro bar, Dil cannot speak to Fergus/James or acknowledge him directly without being formally introduced. The bartender serves as her chaperone for this purpose. We see an old-fashioned courting ritual take place in an unlikely setting, but as a woman I also see the beginning of my instruction in how to be the kind of girl men are pining for in these days of pay equity, date rape persecutions and "no means no" legislation. the kind who speaks when spoken to, and who can be counted on to stay within socially acceptable boundaries of behaviour, reinforcing the notion that she is ultimately responsible for men's reactions to her. The kind who is loving and loyal as a dog, and stands by her man. The kind who waits to be rescued from her abusive

boyfriend, and who accepts this abuse as one of the "things a girl has to put up with." The kind who doesn't get her period, PMS, or pregnant. The kind who possesses the body of a slim, athletic boy with perfect prosthetic breasts attached.

When Fergus/James is finally admitted to the place of mystery, Dil's apartment, he finds a shrine to the memory of Jody. But Jody does not live in memory alone. "He looks after me," says Dil, and Fergus experiences visions of Jody wearing his white cricket uniform. Jody is immortal.

At last comes the moment of truth; Dil disrobes, revealing her/his penis. Fergus reacts by throwing up. This may be simply the film makers' method of re-assuring the audience that Fergus is heterosexual and that his "caretaking" of Dil from this point forward will be motivated by strictly disinterested altruism. On another level, however, we know that the Irish saint is deeply committed to the separation of male and female, and here he is faced with Dil, in whom all things come together so beautifully. Dil is a person who confounds all notions of polar opposites, binaries, dualisms, and whose physical appearance is a blend of genders and races.<sup>4</sup>

The characters of Jody and Dil seem to exemplify ways that film and other cultural expressions geared toward a presumed white audience, attempt to deal with the anxieties they expect their audiences to have about the presence of Black men on the screen. First the characters are stereotyped as primarily sexual beings, and as being more sexually active/potent than white men. This racist construction of sexual potency is supposed to be too scary for white audiences to handle, and so a character like Jody (the legendary hyper-sexual hyper-masculine Black Male) must be neutralized by restricting his freedom -- he is bound and/or hooded throughout most of his appearance on the screen. And Dil's comment, "Dil knows how to tie a body" suggests that physical restraints have always been a big part of Jody's sex life.



Dil's sexual potency, on the other hand, is toned down through feminization/emasculatation. Time and again, these are the kinds of images of Black men found to be most acceptable to predominantly white audiences. Marjorie Garber points out a familiar example in the comedian Flip Wilson and his character Geraldine Jones. Prior to the invention of the outrageous Geraldine, Black comics even such as Bill Cosby had great difficulty breaking into television, and the subjects they could deal with in front of white audiences were limited. With the anxiety about Wilson's Blackness redirected toward the gender ambiguity, this comedian was not only able to break through race barriers to appear on television in millions of white peoples' homes, he was also permitted to make jokes about sex while in the guise of Geraldine. Never underestimate the political power of a cross dresser.

As useful as the image of Dil is for the instruction of women in how to be girls, his characterization as a gay man reiterates familiar stereotypes: political naivete rather than political activism, low self esteem and neediness rather than pride and self-reliance, physical weakness and sickness rather than strength and health, and so on. We saw something similar in "Kiss of the Spiderwoman," which was also supposed to offer a positive, three-dimensional image of a gay man, and which also dealt with male bonding between heterosexual and homosexual against a back drop of political intrigue.

Jude crosses the water from girlhood to womanhood, bringing with her a power wardrobe and a big gun. She holds Fergus accountable for his abandonment of the IRA group and demands his involvement in an assassination. We know that Fergus, as a convert to the religion of Jody, must reject any loyalty to his old relationships and cleave to the new faith. We also know that it is against his religion to take orders from a woman. Jude refers to Dil as "the wee Black girl" re-minding us of Dil's apparent smallness and powerlessness in the situation.

Jude herself appears tough and in control, but her swagger doesn't quite conceal the nervous terror and rage just below the surface. With her "tougher look," tailored suit, and demanding ways, we can compare her menacing presence on the screen to that of other liberated single career women of film, such as Alex in "Fatal Attraction." That 80s backlash film was used to market the return of the good woman/bad woman split, "good" meaning centred on husband, child, family values, "bad" meaning single, childless, career-oriented and sexually aggressive. It also inaugurated the now familiar device of "good" woman cast in the post-feminist role of killer of the "bad" woman, or the part of herself that offends, that does not serve men's interests. The image of a woman with a gun began to create too much anxiety for film producers and their presumed male audience, however, when it was realized that if she could turn the on her own other half, she may also turn it on her "better" half, especially if she is able to make all the connections and figure out the extent of the betrayal.

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Witness the tremendous resistance to Woman With Gun in *"Thelma and Louise"*. It's not just the practical concern that the woman might take aim at the actual oppressor rather than an aspect of herself that causes such great anxiety; the gun also operates as phallic indicator, an extension of the phallus beyond the man and out into the world. I don't mean the penis, which is only a "piece of wang" after all, but the phallus, which is religion and culture and government and power. A woman is not supposed to be carrying one of those things around.

With Jude in town, Dil is in danger, so s/he goes into hiding disguised as a man. In other films that relay heavily on cross-dressing as a plot element, the male actors often dress up as women in order to find employment, or to escape from danger. *"Some Like It Hot"* combines both of these motivations, with an emphasis on the need to survive by avoiding recognition. In *"The Crying Game"*, Dil, who is a biological male, changes gender indicators of hair and clothes to look more like a boy. When Fergus gives the reciprocal haircut, he comments, "I want to make you into a man," perhaps an acknowledgement of the constructedness of gender, but also reflecting back on Fergus' crossing story and the requirements of becoming a man. However, even in Jody's cricket uniform, Dil continues to look like a girl dressed as a boy - a kind of Audrey Hepburn gamine look.

Fergus is protected (by Dil's tying him) from the free choice of whether or not to participate in the assassination. Dil kills Jude, placing the blame for Jody's death firmly on Jude's body: "She used her tits and ass to get him." Fortunately for Fergus, Dil is incapable of making all the connections and coming to the conclusion

that it was actually Fergus and his mates who used Jude's tits and ass to get Jody. The Woman is punished by death for being a woman; the feminine as constructed by men is rewarded with the privileges of staying alive, and being a vehicle for God's vengeance on that trouble-making woman.

We last see Fergus and Dil together yet separated by the restrictions of a prison visit. The scene takes place in a room full of tables, where men are safely and peacefully separated from physical contact with their visiting wives and girlfriends. As an IRA man in an English prison, it is a fairly safe bet that human rights violations are taking place, and that Fergus may not come out alive. Perhaps this explains his beatific expression: he is achieving the martyrdom that all good saints pray for. As he begins preaching the gospel of Jody from his monastic cell, the strains of "Stand By Your Man" attest to his unshakeable faith, and he knows that he can look forward to his next crossing because he sees before him a vision of heaven - that place where there is neither male or female, slave nor free, where all things are as one. It's sitting right across from him, in the person of Dil.

Notes

1. Reference to a traditional English folk ballad explaining the difference between male and female genitals. Apparently, God made a mistake in cutting the cloth that would be worn as Adam and Eve as skin. Adam's skin was cut too long and Eve's too short, so that Adam had an unattractive extra flap, and Eve had an annoying gap. They brought themselves back for alterations, but God was too busy and dismissed them with the comment, "She can fight it out with Adam for that little piece of wang."

2. It is interesting, in the context of the film as a whole, that both "Jude" and "Jody" are ungendered names, yet their characters are meant to exemplify what is "masculine by nature" and what is "feminine by nature".

3. See *"The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland"* for a more detailed analysis of developments in Irish-Catholic theology and politics.

4. The name "Dil" sounds a lot like "Devil" and perhaps this is why. If God and his saints set up a Natural Order in which Man is above Woman and White is above Black, then it takes a devil to disobey Orders by occupying several different levels of the hierarchy at the same time.

5. See *"Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Activity."* It contains a chapter offering in-depth analysis of the cultural image of the Black Transvestite. As well, Garber gives long-overdue consideration to female-to-male cross dressing as a phenomenon unto itself.



Lori Gilbert is active with the Northern Women's Centre and Definitely Superior Art Gallery.



NORTHERN WOMAN'S BOOKSTORE

BEST SELLERS 1993

Non-Fiction

*Beginning to Heal*  
Ellen Bass & Laura Davis

*You Can Be Free*  
Ginny Ni Carthy

*Courage to Heal*  
Ellen Bass & Laura Davis

*Taking Care: A Handbook About Women's Health*  
Mary J. Breen

*The Spirit Weeps*  
Martens, Daily & Hodgson

*Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*  
Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code,  
Lindsay Dorney

*Let the Healing Begin*  
Maureen McEvoy

*The Emotionally Abused Woman*  
Beverly Engel

*Woman's Comfort Book*  
Jennifer Loudon

*Women & Self-Esteem*  
L. Sanford & M. Donovan

*Courage to Heal Workbook*  
Laura Davis

*Women Who Run with the Wolves*  
Clarissa Estes

*On the Path*  
Nancy W.

*I Can't Get Over It*  
Aphrodite Matsakin

*The Myth of Women's Masochism*  
Paula Caplan

*Limited Edition: Voices of Women, Voices of Feminism*  
ed. Geraldine Finn

*Panel On Violence*  
continued from pg 7

Ten million dollars (the amount spent by the PANEL ON VIOLENCE) represents the amount allocated to date to the WOMEN'S PROGRAM per year. Now positioned and delivered through the new supra ministry of Human Resources and Labour the Women's Program, cut by 10% in 1992, sees the move as threatening. This move has resulted in separating the four advocacy groups of Aboriginal Programs, Official Languages, Disabled Persons' Program and Women's Program. The future of these programs is now in question and groups seeking equity and equality for all are further marginalized.

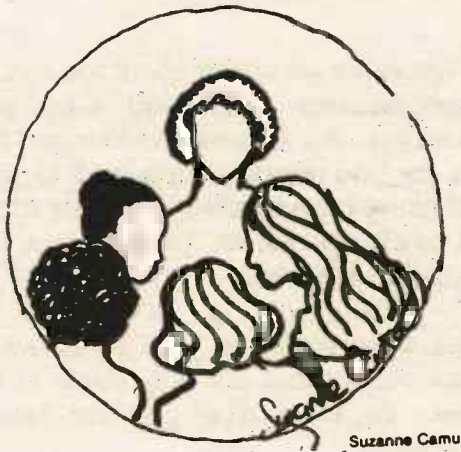
Take action. Contact women's organizations, whether provincial, national or local, and ask what you can do to keep our promise to one another.

ZERO VIOLENCE NOT ZERO TOLERANCE

♀♀♀♀♀

N.B. YOU MIGHT WANT TO CALL C.E.C. FOR FAX NUMBERS TO THEIR OFFICES. I BELIEVE THEY WOULD BE BEST TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT.

SEE YOU SOON, THE NEWSLETTER IS COMING.....



*Book Review*

In the characters of Madrone and Bird, Starhawk presents young adults who have been nurtured within this community since their early childhoods; where education is holistic and includes the spiritual and the mystic. Madrone, who is a healer, ventures south to the City of Angels to teach those resisting the thrall of the Stewards and the Millennialists. Bird returns to the City of San Francisco after ten years in a Millennialist prison, escaping only because he has withdrawn completely with-in sanity long enough to be overlooked by his captors.

Madrone's adventures in water starved Los Angeles are woven out of the courage and the strength of a person who recognizes her privilege and ability and though daunted by the scope of the challenge, is committed to living the vision of teaching and healing.

In Madrone's absence the Stewards invade San Francisco and forewarned by Bird, the community decides to resist without compromising their values of pacific resistance. Bird becomes the primary tool of the Stewards as they attempt to conquer not only the city but the hearts and the minds of its people.

Starhawk has written a novel that inspires speculation and hope. Even if you do not find her other works suited to your literary palate, The Fifth Sacred Thing is a work that few readers would not enjoy for its story and even fewer readers would not learn from.

THE FIFTH SACRED THING  
by Starhawk, Bantam Books  
New York, June 1993

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We are putting together a collection of fiction, reflections poetry and art work about women's personal experiences with menstruation (first time, memorable moments, general thoughts). We are seeking submissions for all age and ethnic groups. This anthology is not restricted to artists or academics; we encourage first time writers to send us their tales. Submissions may be eight pages or less.

Send submissions to: Paula Wansbrough and Kathy O'Grady, Department of Religion and Culture, Wilfred Laurier University, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3C5. Deadline: April 30, 1994.

**Northern Woman's Bookstore's**

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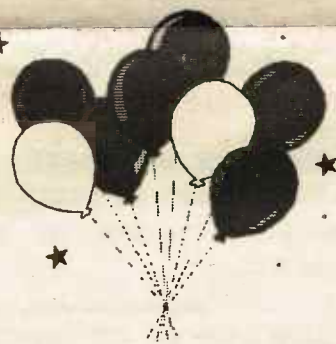
on  
**Tuesday March 15**  
**10am - 10pm**

Good Books, Good Conversation, Good Food, Games and Prizes.  
Bring your favourite cassettes and your musical instruments and let's party!

**Pot Luck Supper at the Bookstore**

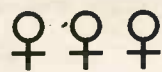
on  
**Saturday, March 19**  
**5:30pm - 7:00pm**

then go to Superior Woman's Coffeeshouse(at Unitarian Centre)

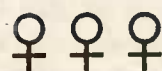


**Daily Prizes, Surprises and Games!**

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**Lets celebrate the growth of feminist literature!**



**10% off all books all week**

We must also examine the newest form of woman-bashing taking place in both public and private institutions, variously called "restructuring" or "downsizing," where a disproportionate number of women-held jobs are disappearing. A sure way to avoid employment equity... if you don't have any female employees you won't have to promote any. If you can't fire all the women maybe you can refuse to provide them with pay equity, which, it appears, at least one NWO municipality is trying to do.

These are scary times. But, as our 20 year retrospective demonstrates, women are amazingly resourceful in overcoming what seems to be insurmountable barriers. Northern women will continue to keep the feminist agenda visible and vibrant. Let's just follow Nellie McClung's lead.. "Never retract, never explain, never apologize. Just get the job done and let 'em howl."

#### Footnote

With the publication of this issue I will be retiring from the NWJ collective. For these many years the Journal has been my writing motivation, my analytical prod, my spiritual home. But after 12 (14?) years it is time to move on. I will be forever grateful to the Journal women for their friendship, nurturing and support. Over the years the NWJ has experienced highs and lows, but, in my view, has developed a life of its own; and (in the same sense that Jill Vickers attributes to NAC) has become an "enduring feminist institution" which will continue to be of great importance to NWO women.

#### HEALTH ALERT

The Winnipeg Women's Health Clinic is seriously concerned about the approval by the Health Protection Branch of NORPLANT as a contraceptive agent for use by Canadian women.

The experience with NORPLANT in countries where it has been approved, including the U.S., suggests some very serious problems which are likely to occur in Canada. Approval in Canada of NORPLANT is premature until a system to address these problems is in place. As a community health centre for women and as consumers, the Women's Health Clinic requests information on how these problems will now be addressed in Canada.

#### Summary of Concerns

A. NORPLANT is a new reproductive technology. Its use is entirely dependent on the insertion and removal by trained health practitioners. Informed consent is crucial to ensure that women understand the implications of this method. In other countries where NORPLANT is being used or where trials have been carried out, the lack of adequate counselling and informed consent has been well documented.

As the recent report by the Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies documents, Canadian women do not receive detailed and sensitive counselling pertaining to other new technologies, such as generic tests, with

#### \$NWJ\$

In the last issue we talked about the serious financial situation the NWJ was then experiencing. We are pleased to report that thanks to fund-raising efforts and to your donations we have been able to clear all our debts, pay the printer for the last issue, and keep up with our rent.

To raise \$ we turned to yard sales, which were successful, but are only viable in the summer. We thank all of you who helped with the sales.

Then there is the wonderful, wonderful Superior Women's Coffee House. Sincere appreciation goes to Jane and Margaret J. for the extensive time and energy they give to organizing these. While the Coffee House achieves only modest returns as a fundraiser, they add immeasurably to our cultural/social life, and hopefully, will become a permanent feature of the women's community.

Many of you have made generous personal donations to the NWJ, and we sincerely appreciate your support. However, this eases the Journal's financial problems only for the short-term. To ensure our longer term financial health we must increase our subscription base, thus we, again, ask your help. Would each of you please recruit three new subscribers? If we tripled our subscription base we could avoid future financial problems, and thus be able to focus our energies on producing a better and more regular NWJ. The reality is that

serious implications for their health and wellbeing. With cutbacks in health care programs in all provinces, how will such services be assured?

B. As a long acting contraceptive, NORPLANT has often been viewed by health care providers as an easy "technological fix" for complicated social problems such as poverty or teen pregnancy. Young women, poor women, women from cultural groups where English is not a first language, women with disabilities, are more vulnerable to pressure and coercion. In the United States, courts have ordered the use of NORPLANT as a condition of probation and women on welfare have been offered financial incentives to use NORPLANT. What policies are in place to ensure this doesn't happen here?

C. NORPLANT is associated with a wide range of significant side effects. As reported by the Population Council,, approximately half the women using NORPLANT discontinue use by three years.

As the removal of NORPLANT requires a minor surgical procedure, women do not have direct control over discontinuing its use. There is considerable documentation (e.g. Brazil, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Kenya, and the United States), that many women encounter resistance from practitioners in having it removed before the five year period. What role can the federal government play in ensuring ethical use of the drug particularly among vulnerable populations of women?

with the printing of this hefty special issue we will be back in debt. We urge you to renew your sub today, and promote subscriptions sales with your friends and colleagues. Let's make the NORTHERN WOMAN JOURNAL's 21st year the healthiest ever. Thanks for your help.

#### Please note:

If a \* appears on your address label it means your sub is due this issue. If a \*\* appears your subscription is past due. A \*\*\* means you're about to be cut off!

#### Please be advised:

Effective next issue the NWJ subscription rate will be raised to \$10 for individuals, \$20 for institutions.



D. The experience in other countries has been that many women are lost to follow-up after the five year period. This raises the concern of women becoming pregnant while the implant is still secreting decreasing amounts of the hormone and hence foetal exposure, with concomitant risks. What process is in place to ensure that women will be followed up and the implants removed?

E. Since NORPLANT insertion and removal require special training of health practitioners, how will this be handled across Canada and how will consumers be assured of the expertise of their care provider in this area?

F. Long term risks of the drug must still be assessed through ongoing research. What are the mechanisms to ensure research appropriate to the epidemiological profile of Canadian women occurs and that there is scrupulous post-marketing surveillance?

G. NORPLANT does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases nor against HIV infection. As a method that may be promoted and appeal to younger women, this is a major concern in Canada. Research show that as teenagers change to birth control with theoretically higher effectiveness rates, their chances of getting a STD increases (i.e. when teens change their contraceptive method to birth control pills they stop using condoms.) One can assume NORPLANT would have the same effect.

It is disappointing that yet again women have been excluded from the drug approval process in Canada. The federal government must create a forum for women's concerns and recommendations to be addressed.



# Celebrating Northwestern Ontario

Northern Woman Journal  
Volume 15 Numbers 2 and 3

Special Issue

## Women

The chronology and the historical portions of this retrospective were completed by Margaret Phillips. The following resources were invaluable in tracing our collective herstory:

\* *Northwestern Ontario's Status of Women's Initiatives 1973-1993*, Fiona Karlstedt 1987

\* *The History of the Battered Women's Movement in Northwestern Ontario*, Fiona Karlstedt and Leni Untinen, 1989

\* *Transition House Services in Northwestern Ontario*, Margaret Phillips, 1984

\* *Northern Woman Journal*

\* *N.W.O. Women's Decade Council Annual Report 1986-1993*

\* 'Story Telling' session with Lisa Bengtsson and Leni Untinen

Celebrating 20 years of women's activism in Northwestern Ontario is the theme for this Special Issue of the NORTHERN WOMAN JOURNAL. Yes, it is 20 years since the first Northern Women's Conference, which is seen as a benchmark in the evolution of Northwestern Ontario's feminist movement. Not that these Conference women were the first to concern themselves with women's status. The L.U. Women's Liberation Group and the Birth Control centre organizers are recognized as the motivators of the "second wave" of feminism in our region. Strong women's groups preceded even this activity - the work of the many Women's Institutes throughout N.W.O., the local Women Teachers Federation, and the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, come to mind. Further back are First Nations women and pioneer women, whose "herstories" of strength and courage and resourcefulness and innovation we are only beginning to discover.

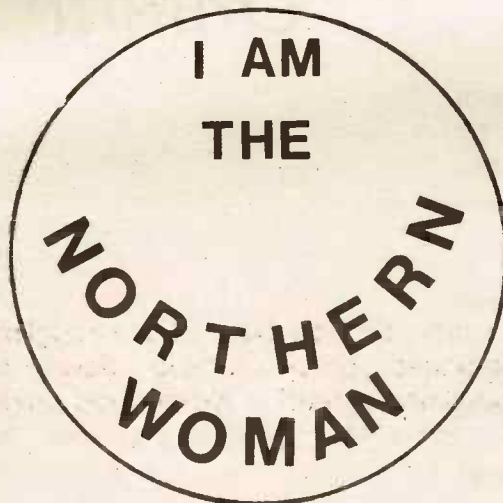
But the 20 years just past are years of new activism as enduring feminist organizations have developed to provide services and resources to address women's needs, and to articulate an analysis and a Northwestern Ontario perspective that women's experience matters.

This retrospective celebrates N.W.O. women's activism through the provision of services; the development of networks; the success of political action/advocacy; as well as the stories of a few (of the many) N.W.O. women who "make a difference". In developing the chronology we were amazed to realize all that has happened in 20 years (and we suspect that there are other achievements that have been lost to the record). We recognize that there have been failures along the way. Some because of systemic barriers as yet beyond our ability to dismantle; other failures for which we must assume responsibility, and which require our analysis if we hope to achieve our collective feminist goals. But we leave such analysis for another day... as this NORTHERN WOMAN JOURNAL is a Celebration of the very significant achievement of the N.W.O. feminist movement.



# Women and Northwestern Ontario

We were meant to strive and struggle  
Meant to risk and meant to dare  
We are the lifeblood of the planet  
And our place is everywhere  
Gert



Celebrating N.W.O. women. Northwestern Ontario. What is our reality? We live in a vast area of trees, rocks and water; a region of small towns, unorganized territories, widely separated from each other, centred only by one mid-sized city three hundred miles from the region's outer border. Our winters can be bitter, and seemingly never-ending. (On October 1st, this year, snow storms prevented Kenora women from attending a workshop in Dryden.) Winter driving can be hazardous. Air fares are astronomical. A Mulroney government legacy to N.W.O. is that we no longer have our train. Lack of affordable transportation is a N.W.O. reality.

The economy of our region (controlled in centres a thousand miles away), exacerbates patriarchal structures. The colonization and exploitation of our region affects everyone, but it is women who suffer most acutely. The poignant B.C. film "No Life For a Woman" could as easily have been made in Northwestern Ontario.

"I have no power over anything in my environment" (Project Mayday)

"I left a good job, my independence, my own cheque, my good feelings about myself when I moved here. It's been good for my husband... but I feel like I'm losing myself here" (Project Mayday)

As women came together and shared their stories, the commonality of their experience became known. In a series of participatory workshops, organized by Decade's Economic Development Committee in the 1970s, women talked about isolation; the power and control of the "company"; the hierarchy of single-industry towns; the invisibility of women's needs to community planning.

"Sidewalks. What I wouldn't give for a sidewalk." (Project Mayday)

"When my husband works long hours, everything is dumped on my shoulders and there is no one to take the pressure off." (Project Mayday)

"How can (a battered woman) get out of town if you have no money or car...?" (Project Mayday)

A decade later when Women's Health Information Network (W.H.I.N.) held workshops across the region identical concerns were again expressed, as they were in the 1985 Project Mayday study of women's lives in North Shore communities. Indeed, Northwestern Ontario women experience a "chilly climate".

Still, to many of us, Northwestern Ontario is a very special place. Some of us even choose to remain here when economic/family considerations don't dictate that we must. We believe, we feel, that Northwestern Ontario is different, is special. There is no easy, rational explanation to our sense of differentness, specialness. It is pure emotion.

Some years ago I was studying creative writing in the United States and having much difficulty with that foreign environment. I found that my writing was chock full of Northern images - frozen lakes, jagged rocks; stories of storms, of forest fires. I kept trying to explain my "geography" to my writing group but only Nancy (who was from

West Virginia) related at all. In a letter from home I received a wonderful newspaper article about my friend Millie, who, at that time, was taking the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment to task. When Nancy read the article she questioned why Northwestern Ontario was spelled with a capital N, while southern Ontario with an uncapitalized s. I replied that the article must have been written by a Northern journalist .... that Northerners always capitalize North. "Ah", said Nancy "now I understand...."

Not easy to explain, but indeed special. And Northwestern Ontario is enriched by very special women who have developed organizations that are tremendously effective in empowering women, individually and collectively. Grounded by the assumption that "Northern women are the experts on their own lives", the Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council (Decade) is a regional political action organization committed to ensuring Northern women's perspectives are heard, and that policies must be changed to improve the status of Northern women.

Decade Council is unique in Ontario, if not all of Canada; and is recognized as a model for feminist activism. We sometimes ponder why "Decade" councils have not evolved in other regions of the province.

In a similar vein the N.W.O. Regional Day Care Committee was the first regional child care advocacy group to organize in Ontario, again providing a consistent and strong voice in demanding Northern perspectives be heard.

That our activism be regionally based has always been a given, and herein, perhaps, lies our strength. From the first Women's Conference in 1973, through International Women's Year Coordinating Committee, Decade, W.H.I.N., N.W.O.R.D.C.C. - the need for regional activism brought women together for collective action. Local organizations develop to meet local needs, and take strength from the regional group, and in turn strengthen and motivate other communities and the regional body.

Here we're committed  
to struggle with fate,  
an inch at a time,  
if we must.  
This is the place  
where we bury the myths  
and write our own name  
in their dust.  
Gert



## NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO WOMEN'S DECADE COUNCIL



The goal of the Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council is to improve the status of women in Northwestern Ontario through the elimination of barriers to the full participation of women in all spheres - economic, social and political.

The Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council promotes non-partisan interest in and action on status of women's issues. Decade Council:

- supports individual women and organizations as they work together for the equality of women in education, employment, the home and the community;
- facilitates information exchange among women's groups in the region;
- develops a body of knowledge and resources that incorporates Northwestern Ontario women's perspectives;
- provides resources and skill development on status of women issues in response to needs of area women;
- mobilizes and co-ordinates action on specific issues identified by area status women's groups and services;
- advocates on those issues at the local, provincial and national level;
- works within a feminist framework and organizational structure, the foundation being the Statement of Unity.

Decade Council meets bi-monthly with representation from many regional communities. Our activities and priorities are designed to reflect the issues presented by Northwestern Ontario Women.

Present areas of work include, Women and Economic Development and Women Against Violence.

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# Networking

In 1983, as a result of sustained lobbying by the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses and regional and local groups, the Ontario government provided "bail out" funds to Transition Houses that were experiencing a deficit. A stop-gap measure of course, but a great boon to groups that were struggling to maintain their services to battered women. But there was one major problem. They left Atikokan out. Why exclude Atikokan from the "bail out" provision? Because the Atikokan Crisis Centre operated with **volunteers** (had operated with volunteers for **seven** years) and consequently their "deficit" was not as severe as those transition houses that had been operating with paid staff.

The herstory of the Atikokan Crisis Centre is yet another example of women's determination to make life better for women. It began in 1976 when two women who had experienced the problem of having no where to go and no one to turn to in a crisis situation began to study the need for emergency housing, and formed a committee to implement this program. In December 1977 they approached the Township Council for financial support.. but were turned down. The Crisis Centre committee, with other supportive women, sheltered women in crisis in private homes, or rented a room in a local hotel; often paying the abused woman's expenses from their own pockets.

The committee undertook a public education campaign and sponsored community workshops on violence issues. In 1979 they developed an agreement with the Township to use two rooms in the nurses residence. The Crisis Centre's expenses were covered by teas, bake sales, flea markets and donations.

The demand for services grew, and by 1981 the top floor of the nurses residence was utilized as the Crisis Centre. Services continued to expand and by 1983 the centre was desperate for secure funding. But, because they had managed for seven years with volunteers they didn't qualify for "bail out" funds.

Northwestern Ontario women thought this was unfair. The NETWORK went into action. Within hours the Minister responsible was bombarded with telegrams from women's groups across NWO. Atikokan received "bail out" funds. It was the ability to **act quickly** that made this lobby successful. The Decade Council Network was in place and was activated immediately.

The need for a feminist network was first recognized by the Canadian Women's Centres Conference, held in Thunder Bay in 1975. NETWORK NELLIE formed to "facilitate information sharing on issues requiring immediate collective action". Northern Women's Centre was the NWO link in (Ottawa-based) NETWORK NELLIE and began to develop communication links to women's groups throughout the region. Unfortunately, NETWORK NELLIE faded away after several years, but its concept stimulated the development of (more manageable) regional networks.



How often do you hear of a struggling, underfunded group turning down an unconditional grant? Never, you might think. But it has happened, not once, but twice in Northwestern Ontario. And not just one group, but seven groups - saying "we refuse to take this grant...give it to the organization that needs it most."

The grants in question came from a special "anti-violence grants pot" of a particular Ministry. Because of the NETWORK, anti-violence groups knew that, in the first instance, Kenora, then several years later Red Lake, had been unsuccessfully seeking funding for specific purposes. By directing all N.W.O. grants to one group, these respective organizations could achieve a substantial goal, whereas dividing the grant eight ways would not significantly help any of them.

The Ministry officials went into shock, almost pleading with the groups (one by one) to accept the grant. The groups remained steadfast. Interestingly, the major grants denied Kenora, then Red Lake, miraculously became available from other sources, and the individual shelters also got their piece of the pie. Feminist solidarity over political opportunism!!!

The ability to mobilize political action is only one aspect of Networking. Networks are vitally important for individual women to find like-minded women to share experiences, share information and alleviate the isolation of living in the north.

The Women's Health Information Network (W.H.I.N.) is a good example of a NWO organization that evolved to meet this need.

W.H.I.N. stemmed from the NWO Women's Health Education Project - a three year project, initiated in 1982, to survey health needs of women in 14 NWO resource-based communities and design workshops on topics identified by the women.

In reviewing W.H.E.P. and W.H.I.N.'s reports several themes emerge:

- \* isolation
- \* women's sense of a lack of control over their environment
- \* the need to validate their experience by sharing with other women

(The following excerpts are taken from an article "Breaking the Isolation" by Elaine Lynch in *The Healthsharing Book, Resources for Canadian Women.*)

"The survey was brought to the communities in the early spring of 1983 along with a workshop entitled "Cabin Fever", a topic that coordinators were sure many women could relate to after a long winter. This workshop set the tone for the others, heavily emphasizing group participation and sharing of information. The aim was to have the women identify what **they** needed to talk about, their problems and, in the process, validate their personal experience. "Cabin Fever" was well received and a number of women's groups formed as a result ....

Year Two of the project brought home to the coordinators the problems inherent in the task. The sheer magnitude of the geographic expanse between workshops, the dangerous road conditions (which broke one car axle and forced another car into an encounter with a guardrail) and the difficulties of air travel, which brought a new meaning to the phrase "fear of flying", made us wonder if the workshop format was the best approach.

But the 53 women who came out to the Women and Stress workshop in the isolated community of Manitouwadge, and the 56 who packed a room intended for 30 in Kenora to attend Exploring Life Changes: A Workshop on Menopause and Aging, reaffirmed our belief in the women's need for information and an opportunity to talk with one another. A frequent comment... was "I learned that I am not alone".

.... Women identified isolation - from one another, from extended family and friends left behind in another community, from husbands who often work out of town at the job site for days at a time - as a major stress in their lives. Community spirit was often identified as a problem... lack of organized play groups, child care, or interesting activities for women that might easily be organized were sometimes not dealt with because the women lacked a feeling of ownership in the community or were isolated from one another because of frequent moves.

The workshop on menopause and aging had the best overall attendance. This indicated again how much the women ... want to come together and discuss something that so profoundly affects their lives.



# Chronology

# Networking

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| April 1973     | 600 gather for Northern Women's conference  |
| 1973-present   | Northern Woman Journal  |
| 1973-present   | Northern Women's Centre   |
| 1973-1976      | many "consciousness raising" groups meet  |
| 1973           | First women's studies course "Today's Women: A New Awareness" facilitated by Estella Howard   |
| 1973           | Women's Program, Secretary of State appoints program officer for NWO  |
| 1974-1984      | Women's Programs, Confederation College   |
| 1974           | Pro-choice activists meet. Form C.A.R.A.L. branch 1982.   |
| 1974           | Rape Crisis Centre opens - closes in 1975   |
| 1976 - present | reactivated 1976. Now operating as T.B. Physical & Sexual Assault Centre  |
| 1974           | Planning Seminar & formation of NWO International Women's Year Coordinating Comm.   |
| 1975           | Kenora Women's Conference   |
| 1975           | Thunder Bay hosts National Women's Centres Conference with reps of 85 Cdn Women's Centres participating. Poet Gert Beadle discovered.                 |
| 1975           | Nipigoni-Red Rock Action Group hosts seminar "Inside-Outside" with 123 area women attending   |
| 1975           | First public Thunder Bay celebration of IWD. Thunder Woman Theatre performs   |
| 1975           | Need for housing for women and children in crisis documented. Crisis Homes Inc. established. City opens Community Residences.                         |
| 1975           | Women & Politics conference, sponsored by Women Teacher's Federation attracts 200.  |
| 1975           | NWO Women's Art Festival brings together over 1000 art works... the largest women's cultural event ever held in the district.                         |
| 1975           | 350 T.B. full-time homemakers with children under 14 participate in Women & Stress study.   |
| 1975           | First Regional Child Care conference attracts 140 day care parents, workers & advocates   |
| 1975           | The Information Caravan travels to 14 NWO communities with info on family law, day care, human rights, rape, health care, sex-role stereotyping, etc. |
| 1975-1976      | The Clinic Strike, though unsuccessful, demonstrates the plight of unorganized women workers & the need for legislative change                        |
| 1976-present   | The Northwestern Ontario International Women's Decade Coordinating Council (Decade Council) forms to carry on the work begun during IWY               |
| 1976           | Committee forms in Atikokan to document need for crisis housing   |
| 1976-1980      | Rainy River District Decade Council   |
| 1976-present   | Women's Place Kenora begins with volunteer crisis line - Crisis Centre opens. 1978  |

.... (In the third year) a series of training sessions for community women centred on the use of the W.H.E.P. workshop kits. ... The women were delighted to discover the common issues they faced and the similarities of their concerns. The weekend ... "allowed us to get to know ourselves again as people other than mothers and homemakers. By getting in touch with our interests, and our special abilities, it built on our self-esteem and made us ready to attempt something similar for other women" said a woman from Fort Frances."

The transition from W.H.E.P. to W.H.I.N. came in 1985. In the next seven years W.H.I.N. undertook an extensive array of activities which included:

- \* regional and local workshops
- \* facilitation of scores of health related workshops in many NWO communities
- \* published Health Network News
- \* produced "Long Distance Delivery: A Guide to Travelling Away From Home to Give Birth"
- \* developed resource kit "What Can I Do? Making Changes in Health Care"
- \* sponsored the Body Image Play (directed towards adolescents on the subject of eating disorders)

The Networking encouraged by W.H.I.N., while not always visible, has provided links between women in their communities and across the region that empowers women in their daily lives. Since late 1992, W.H.I.N., as an organization, has been taking a rest, but we are confident that the value of a regional network will reemerge (perhaps in a different form) and build on the experiences and solid achievements of W.H.I.N.'s decade of activity.



Sometimes Networking evolves as an offshoot of an organization's other objectives. A case in point is the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee (NWORDCC) whose prime function is advocacy. Networking springs from the opportunity to get to know one another that NWORDCC has provided through annual Forums. Because of these contacts day care workers from small regional communities now know their colleagues - and know where to seek advice on program expansion, resources, training, etc. Similarly, parents active with non-profit Day Care Boards discover (for example) that Atikokan was able to resolve this problem; and thus, a voice of experience is only a phone call away. Inconsistency of direction/advice from funding sources often plagues NWO day care, and the NETWORK has proven valuable in crisis management in some situations. Knowing there is a network to call on makes the very difficult job of providing day care in NWO a little easier.. less lonely.



There are a lot of women really excited about the regions' newest network - Northwestern Ontario Women in Trades, Technology & Operations (NW WITT). NW WITT in partnership with Equay-Wuk Native Women's Group has sponsored two successful regional conferences for aboriginal and non-aboriginal women employed or interested in trades, technology, operations and blue-collar work.

The conferences have explored appropriate training models and supportive services for women. Support to local women is one of the network's main goals and conference participants have volunteered to act as NW WITT community reps. These reps constitute the NW WITT steering committee and meet quarterly to plan and oversee NW WITT's activities.

This network has also identified the need for a NW WITT voice at national and provincial policy levels, to ensure the Northwestern Ontario perspective is considered in official planning.



# Not Another Conference

# Chronology

Sometime in the late 1970s a group of feminists were in discussion (I forget the precise reason for the gathering). Most of the group were from southern Ontario, a couple of us from the North. At some point I mentioned that we were planning a Conference (Working Women? Pensions? Women and the Economy?.. I forget which) but my announcement was met with a mix of surprise and condescension. "A conference" they remarked "why would you hold a conference? They are a waste of time. We stopped holding conferences years ago." The Northerners quietly smiled at each other, acknowledging yet another instance of the south's total lack of appreciation of the reality, the uniqueness, of the north. For indeed, Conferences have played a vital role in the women's movement of Northwestern Ontario; have created the climate to build the networks that give us our strength; have been a lifeline for individual women to break the isolation we've experienced.

It all began with a Conference.. the 1973 Northern Women's Conference, and for many of us there will never be anything that can match that experience. A group of us had been planning the Conference for months, hoping against hope that we could persuade 100 women to attend. It was a touch overwhelming when 600 women showed up ... and talked and talked (and laughed and cried) and celebrated our budding feminism. The joy in finding like-minded women, the joy in breaking the isolation.

It is from this first Conference that so much else has stemmed - the NORTHERN WOMAN JOURNAL; Women's Centres; action on violence issues; health; family law; child care; pro-choice activism... the list is endless.

What was it that was so important about that Conference. Sure we were delighted and inspired by the wonderful feminist speakers. Yes, we were enthusiastic about the interesting and meaningful workshops. But what really was important was that we found other women who thought as we did, we discovered we weren't crazy, we learned that we were not alone.



Since 1973 there have been innumerable Conferences; some on specific issues; pensions, health, the economy, violence, bringing together, usually in Thunder Bay, women from across the region to acquire information, share insights, develop strategies. Other Conferences have been organized locally - Dryden, Geraldton, Kenora, (although always including other regional women) with a wider agenda involving many issues and reaching out to involve new women.

Some conferences are primarily information giving/skill building; others are specifically action oriented. Some conferences bring in nationally renowned guest resource leaders; others recruit all the resource people from N.W.O. or the local community.

The issue, the style, the agenda of the Conference is not the key. What matters is that women have the opportunity to get together. The motivational speakers, the dynamic workshops, are not the key. It is the breaks/informal time where friendships develop, networks evolve, and support and nurturing abound that give lasting importance.

Of necessity, the largest single budget item of any conference, of any regional organization, is travel.

Conferences also have been the mechanism that allows the creation of networks that are vital to women working with women's services or on specific issues (more on

networking later). Meeting colleagues at conferences has provided day care workers, transition house workers, tradeswomen, Board members of women's services, the opportunity to meet colleagues and share experiences.

Over the past decade the Northern Woman's Bookstore has been invited to be a resource at many conferences throughout the region, and consequently I have had the pleasure of witnessing the empowerment that conferences bring to N.W.O. women.

In 1991 the Women Uniting for Change Conference brought together close to 400 women in the largest regional conference to be held since 1973. For many it was their first feminist conference and their excitement and joy was contagious.

It happens every Conference. Because every gathering - large or small - local or regional - involves new women attending for their first feminist gathering and gaining strength from the energy of women committed to making change.

Northwestern Ontario has an impressive record of successful collective action much of which has been motivated or enhanced by the opportunities provided at conference gatherings. We expect Conferences will continue to play an important role in feminist activism in our region.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1977-1983    | Northern Women's Credit Union  |
| 1977         | Decade's Equal Pay Committee (angered by Clinic Strike issue) organizes Working Women's Conference providing a forum for 235 NWO working women                         |
| 1977-present | Au Feminin Pluri-Elles   |
| 1977         | May Sutton, supported by Decade Council, initiates action on pension reform resulting in survivor benefit legislation in 1979  |
| 1978         | Ontario Native Women's Association (O.N.W.A.) establishes head office in Thunder Bay   |
| 1978         | "Women in Transition" study reveals 1100 reported or suspected cases of wife battering in Thunder Bay; produces a multi-lingual self-help handbook "One Day at a Time" |
| 1978         | Major study "Women's Work: the Northwestern Ontario Case" provides data base for advocacy on employment related problems of NWO women.                                 |
| 1978         | Dryden Women's Conference  |
| 1978         | VOICES: Thunder Bay's first feminist theatre   |
| 1978-1980    | Dryden Women's Decade Council  |
| 1978         | "Life Begins at Forty" conference  |
| 1978         | Beendigan Native Women's Crisis Home opens in Thunder Bay  |
| 1978         | Thunder Bay elects first feminist mayor Dusty Miller   |
| 1979         | Atikokan Crisis Centre opens   |
| 1979         | "Fifty Years a Person" celebration   |
| 1979-1983    | Ignace Women's Education/Information Group   |
| 1979         | Women Against Violence Conference  |
| 1980-1987    | Red Lake Women's Information Group   |
| 1980         | Research project issues report "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: An Occupational Health Hazard"   |
| 1980         | Women in Single Industry Towns workshops held in Thunder Bay, Fort Frances and Ignace  |
| 1980         | Voices: For Lesbian Survival begins publishing   |
| 1980-1983    | Mainstay House, Fort Frances   |
| 1981-present | Northern office of Ontario Women's Bureau opens in Thunder Bay (now known as Ont. Women's Directorate)   |
| 1981         | NWO Women's Health Conference  |
| 1981-1985    | Atikokan Women's Resource Centre   |
| 1981-1982    | Women's Production of Thunder Bay  |
| 1981-1982    | Women and Addictions Project   |
| 1982         | Women and Stress Conference, Kenora  |
| 1982-1988    | Project May Day  |
| 1982         | "A Day for Us" Conference  |
| 1982         | Pension reform activism through meetings in district communities & regional Conf.  |
| 1982         | Faye Peterson Transition House opens   |
| 1982-1992    | NWO Women's Health Project   |

# Chronology

# Political Action

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1983          | Women in Crisis, Sioux-Hudson North organizes Transition House opens 1985  |
| 1983 -1985    | Childbirth Education & support group   |
| 1983- present | Northern Woman's Bookstore   |
| 1983          | Women and the Economy conference   |
| 1983          | Feminist Reunion Dinner  |
| 1984          | Dryden BiCentennial Conference   |
| 1984          | Forum on Women and the North communicates NWO perspectives and concerns to Ontario Status of Women Council (now Ontario Advisory Committee on Women's Issues)  |
| 1985          | "Contingency Day" campaign to raise awareness re retirement and pension needs of women   |
| 1985          | North Shore Women's Conference   |
| 1985          | "Run to Win" guidebook produced  |
| 1985          | Hoshazaki House, Dryden opens  |
| 1985          | "A Day in the Life" workshop, Fort Frances   |
| 1985          | Women and Decision Making project  |
| 1985/89/92    | Women and Disabilities conferences   |
| 1985-present  | Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee   |
| 1985-present  | New Starts for Women, Red Lake   |
| 1985          | Thunder Bay Advocates for Quality Child Care form. In 1986 successfully lobby City Council to maintain quality child care.   |
| 1985 -1987    | Committee to re-instate birthing services (Nipigon)  |
| 1986          | Young Women's Conference   |
| 1986          | Feminist counselling workshops held in Dryden, Thunder Bay and Terrace Bay   |
| 1986          | Geraldton Women's Conference   |
| 1986          | Women & Mental Health Workshop, Atikokan   |
| 1986          | "We Have a Lot to Share" workshops held in Dryden, Thunder Bay & Terrace Bay   |
| 1986          | Marjorie House opens in Marathon serving women and children in North Shore communities   |
| 1986          | NWO women participate in pay equity consultation   |
| 1986          | "Women in Northwestern Ontario" presentation made to Task Force on Single Industry Towns   |
| 1986          | Heather Bishop and Tracy Riley help us celebrate "end of the decade"   |
| 1986          | Sioux Lookout & Marathon videos produced for input into federal Child Care Comm. hearings  |
| 1986/87       | Massive NWO lobby re "indirect subsidy" day care issue. 300 Geraldton parents send letters to Minister of Community & Social Services. Day care children send Minister pictorial "Save Our Day Care Centre" messages |
| 1987          | "Team Building" NWO Transition House Conference  |
| 1987          | Forum on Women and the Economy   |
| 1987          | Safe Access Project  |
| 1987          | "Ask Your Candidate" voter's guide distributed   |
| 1987          | Kenora Women's Place purchases home  |

As feminists gathered, exploring our shared experiences, our analysis deepened, and the systemic barriers to women's equality became exposed. The need for legislative and policy change to provide justice and equality for women became apparent. Political action is necessary and N.W.O. feminists have been in the forefront of demands for policy and legislative reform that takes into account women's experience. Supporting, or leading, political action federally and provincially, we have also continuously articulated a N.W.O. perspective, as while some issues are common nationally (even globally) there are other issues that are specific to N.W.O. Frequently overlooked by southern-based policy developers, it is important that our Northern voice be heard. Over the years regional groups such as Decade Council and the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee have become skillful in presenting the N.W.O. perspective.

During these 20 years we've learned that effecting political change is indeed hard slogging. The solutions seemed so obvious to us, and our assumption was that when we pointed out the injustices (with substantiated research) government/institutional action would be quickly forthcoming. Our initial optimism is long gone but our determination remains. While we've lost our naivety, we've refused to lose our hope.

In 1977, a Thunder Bay woman, May Sutton, was suddenly widowed and soon experienced a drastic reduction of her income as after her husband's death May's pension (under the Spouses Allowance Program) was cut off. Then in her early 60s, in less than robust health, May's prospects of finding paid employment were non-existent. Recognizing that her plight was shared by many women, May set out to do

something about this deplorable situation. Two years later, legislation was enacted providing survivors benefits to widowed persons between the ages of 60 - 64 years.

In the intervening two years May, with the assistance of Decade Council, mobilized senior citizens and women's groups to take political action on this issue. Utilizing every possible forum including the Working Women's Conference, Dryden Women's Conference, Senior Citizens Alliance, Life Begins at Forty Conference, May made N.W.O. aware of this problem. She then went national, with articles in Homemakers magazine, the NAC newsletter, and a CBC-Toronto television interview; as well as participating in Ontario Senior Citizens workshops. She achieved results. Viewing this particular legislative victory as just one small step, May stayed involved with the Women And Pensions Committee, which focussed on broader issues of pensions and women's poverty. One small step perhaps, but a great example that one woman's determination can "make a difference".



Quality child care. Absolutely vital for women to have the opportunity for economic equality. With much persistent effort community groups in many N.W.O. communities throughout the 1970s identified the need for a day care centre, and convinced their municipal council to accept responsibility for the centre's operation. With a change in government funding policy in 1986 (the elimination of the "indirect subsidy") the economic viability of many of these centres was jeopardized. The threat of closure of these day care centres was a N.W.O. crisis. In response to the crisis, the Northwestern Ontario Regional Day Care Committee was formed and one of the most extensive grassroots lobbies the North has ever seen was initiated. Parents, children, day care workers and community activists made politicians abundantly aware that the policy decision (made in Toronto and

Ottawa) did not take into account the reality of day care in the North. N.W.O. was mobilized, and the Minister of Community and Social Services was inundated with letters, videos, petitions, telephone calls, and children's "Save Our Centres" dramatic pictorial contributions. Over several weeks children's art work arrived daily on the Minister's desk.... and he got the message. Agreeing to meet in Thunder Bay, the Minister listened carefully to our representations, and put into effect a policy that, at least temporarily, eased the crisis for the municipal centres. The longer term goal of comprehensive child care reform remains elusive, consequently the N.W.O. day care community must constantly renew its advocacy efforts, but because of that 1986 political action, day care centres in our small regional communities continue to exist.



# Political Action



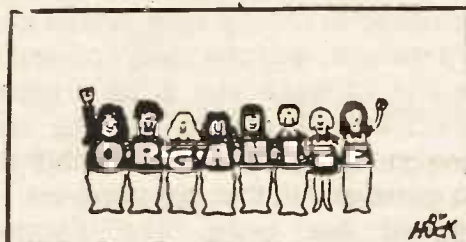
The issue of violence against women has been a focal point for N.W.O. organizing. Women's shelters have developed in many communities and Decade Council has been persistent in analyzing policy development re battered women. There are a score of examples of political action on this issue. We will briefly relate just two of these actions.

The 1983 provincial government Family Resource Centre initiative was developed without consultation with the battered women's movement, or with the affected municipalities/First Nations communities. It contained many elements that were completely unacceptable. It appeared that the F.R.C. proposal was designed to ensure that the philosophy and operation of battered women's services would be removed from women's groups/local communities and controlled by politicians/bureaucrats. The eligibility criteria were unworkable; the budget totally inadequate; training for staff and volunteers totally lacking and expectation of service providers unrealistic. It is instructive to note that the F.R.C. announcement came shortly after the

With the solidarity provided by existing N.W.O. shelters and other Decade members, these groups were able to stand firm. Because of the Decade action, changes to the operations policy were achieved. Continuing critique and action led, in the longer term, to the stabilization of all transition house funding.

One of the most engaging portraits of determination and political courage is the image of Freda Hoshazaki locking the door, closing down the black-ribboned Hoshazaki House (the Dryden Transition House) moments after it was officially opened. That didn't actually happen but Freda was prepared to do it. Six years of planning by a community group finally, in 1985, led to the opening of the Transition House. The Dryden group experienced all the barriers common to transition house development, including municipal resistance; and they were temporarily side-lined by the F.R.C. initiative, but they persevered. The final roadblock was that the promised Ministry of Community and Social Services operational funds failed to materialize. Repeated communication with the Ministry led to more promises but no cheque. Drastic action was called for, thus the committee was prepared to simultaneously open and close the doors. An enterprising journalist heard rumours... and telephoned the Ministry. The cheque arrived within 24 hours.

Oh, these gutsy Northern women!



## NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO REGIONAL DAY CARE COMMITTEE

Post Office Box 144  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
P7C 4V5



Comprehensive, high quality, publicly funded, non-profit child care  
as the right of every child

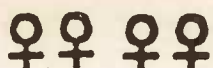
# Chronology

- 1987 Rural Women's Network Conference, Fort Frances
- 1987 Workshop & presentation by Lillian Allen
- 1987 Women's Health Conferences held in Nipigon & Sioux Lookout
- 1987 "Twelve Angry Crinolines" street performance brings attention to the marginalization of women artists
- 1987 W.H.I.N. conducts PMS, menopause, patient rights, nutrition, birthing, conferences throughout the region
- 1987 Joyce Weiland gives workshop-critique with women artists
- 1987 Workshop kits on Free Trade and Privatization produced
- 1988 Video tapes produced on history of battered women's movement in NWO
- 1988 Women and Transition project, Kenora
- 1988 Maya Bannerman performs
- 1988 Project on Out of Town Birth
- 1988 "Healthy Horizons: the Impact of Technology on Women's Health" Conference
- 1988 Banakonda Kennedy-Kish paintings and drawings about the birthing experience, and a workshop called "A Walk In The Medicine Wheel"
- 1988 Broad/Cast - exhibition examining media images of women in NWO
- 1988 Incest Committee sponsors workshop with Elly Danica, author of DON'T: a Woman's Word
- 1989 "Freedom from Fear" brochures produced
- 1989 "What Can I Do? Making Changes in Health Care" resource kit
- 1989 NWO activists participate in "Child Care Bake Off"
- 1989 Conference on violence issues brings together educators and shelter workers
- 1989 Training kits produced for Boards of Directors of shelters
- 1989 Cross-Cultural community forum on incest and child sexual abuse, Kenora
- 1989 Violence Against Women Who Communicate poster competition and exhibition, in conjunction with photography exhibition
- 1989 "Women Working for Change" brings together NWO women and women from Bangladesh, Zambia and the Philippines to share experiences and strategies
- 1989-present Lakehead University Women's Studies Program
- 1989 Sylvia Wagner - "Mrs. M and the Alter of Life" solo exhibition installation pieces examining the figure of the Housewife as she is portrayed in television commercials
- 1989/90/92 Women Healing gatherings
- 1989 "Celebrating Women" conference, Kenora
- 1989 Thunder Bay feminists trashed and harassed for "women-only" vigil in memory of 14 women murdered in Montreal

# Chronology

- 1990 A Room for Honouring Women - artists examine male violence against women in response to the Montreal massacre
- 1990 Women Living Independently with Disabilities (W.I.L.D.) forms in Thunder Bay
- 1990 Anne Cameron reads in Thunder Bay
- 1990 Women & Work in Northwestern Ontario - Socio-Economic Research Report
- 1990 Women & Family Law - Equal Justice? report, Kenora
- 1990 Naming the Violence - solo exhibition by Jennifer Garrett
- 1990-1993 "Take Back the Night" marches, Kenora
- 1991 Kenora Sexual Assault Centre initiates network of self-help groups across district
- 1991 Lucie Blue Tremblay helps us celebrate IWD
- 1991 "Women Uniting for Change" conference
- 1991 WEAVING MAT(t)ERS - exhibition by Sasha McInnes
- 1991 New Starts for Women shelter opens, Red Lake
- 1991 "Fighting Days" performs in Kenora
- 1991 "On Shifting Ground" - examination of, and critique of, the image of women as nature, fertility, earth symbol
- 1992 Ontario Cabinet Forum on Women's Issues
- 1992 NWO groups lobby for inclusion of women in constitution talks
- 1992 Women & Addictions conference, Kenora
- 1992 Body Image play tours region
- 1992 Artists Against Violence
- 1992/1993 "Striving and Thriving" conferences, Eagle Lake NW WITT network forms
- 1992 Company of Sirens perform in Thunder Bay
- 1992 Provincial Child Care Reform consultation
- 1992 Hope Thompson "Mandate" - gender and power in corporate landscape
- 1992 Judy Rebick speaks on women and the constitution
- 1993 Superior Women's Coffee Houses
- 1993 "More Than Dollars" Community Economic Development workshops in Dryden and Nipigon
- 1993 Cross-cultural training sessions for shelter workers held across region
- 1993 Young Women's Committee forms
- 1993 Women and the Economy Committee sponsors 3 workshops
- 1993 Family Law Forum, Kenora
- 1993 "Moving On: A Woman Guide through the Separation and Divorce Process", produced by Women's Place, Kenora
- 1993 Self-Empowerment Workshop, Kenora
- 1993 Sexual Harassment Workshop, Kenora
- 1993 "From Fear to Freedom" booklet produced by W.I.L.D.

# Women's Voices



*Michèle Proulx Interviews Lucie Nichols*

Lucy Nichols has worked as a nurse and as a midwife for many years. She has recently completed the process for certification as a midwife in Ontario.

It is just now becoming possible, in this province, for a woman and her baby to enjoy the excellent care that midwives provide in the birth setting of the woman's choice and with OHIP coverage. Lucy and I spoke in October about her involvement in these exciting changes.

**MP** What drew you to midwifery?

**LN** It was something that I wanted for a long time. I first did my nursing training twenty years ago; I remember when I did my time in maternity - my feelings were really torn because part of me was completely appalled at the way birth happened in the hospital. But the other part of me was completely fascinated with it and wanted to be involved with somehow; I certainly adored working with the babies and I enjoyed working with the mothers after the birth. I knew that there was a profession called midwifery but I also knew that it did not exist in Canada. I knew that it was something I really wanted to do, but because I live in Canada, there was no way of doing it, the idea just went in the back of my brain and stayed there for a long time. It became more of a possibility for me when I moved to Thunder Bay and I met a woman here who was a midwife. She had trained as a midwife in Germany and she was working at that time, which was 1980, in a very underground sort of way, attending home births. When we met, I immediately expressed to her my long hidden desire to be a midwife, and she said "Apprentice with me and I'll teach you to be a midwife." I started attending births with her and just went on from there. I worked with her for two years and in that two years we, I think, attended five births. The demand for midwifery at that time was pretty slow; I felt that it was going to be a long time before I could gain enough experience to call myself a midwife at that rate. So that's when I made arrangements to go and obtain training in Scotland.

**MP** What did that training consist of?

**LN** It was an eighteen month program at a maternity hospital in Scotland. Midwifery has been an organized profession forever in most of Europe and Britain. It was a good training in some ways but not so great in other ways. There used to be a pretty common tradition of home birth in Britain, but in the last fifteen to twenty years they've really got away from home births and have been pushing women pretty hard to have babies in hospitals. So the midwifery training was very hospital oriented - there wasn't much to say about home birth. I was fortunate to have a couple of teachers who were midwives with experience in Third World countries, so they were really comfortable with the idea of delivering babies in all kinds of circumstances. I would pick their brains about what you would do in a home situation - I learned a lot from them.

When I came back to Thunder Bay, I went into practice with the woman I'd worked with before.

**MP** Did you find, that over time, you developed a clientele by word of mouth?

**LN** Yes, certainly in the beginning, when I started working as a midwife it was still very much an out-on-the-fringe kind of field. It was not a medically accepted thing, although it was never illegal. Midwifery just had no legal status in Canada.



Midwife assisting woman in childbirth. Woodcut: Scipio Marcino 1721.

**MP** What about home births?

**LN** No it was never illegal. It was "a-legal" - not legally recognized. When we first started practicing, we would attend a birth at home and the couple would then go to register the birth, to get the baby's birth certificate. We would always instruct them to say that the father had delivered the baby because we couldn't really afford to have our names out there too much. But then, gradually, we just stopped doing that and we became more public and more open about what we were doing and we found some supportive doctors. We actually did some work within the hospitals here, to build some good relationships with the staff in the hospitals. We were probably, in some ways, a lot further ahead than some of the midwives in Southern Ontario, because we ended up having pretty good relationships with the two hospitals here and having a number of supportive physicians. Not supportive in the sense that they thought home birth was a good idea, but supportive in the sense that they were there to back us up if we needed help, to transport a woman to hospital. When we did go to the hospital we were always welcomed by the staff, we were never treated badly, we never felt that the staff were going to treat our women badly because they were women who had come in from a home birth. Generally speaking, the medical community became pretty accepting.

**MP** So in a sense you were being active for the cause of midwifery and home birth through your example.

**LN** Well, I think so. There are certainly members of the medical community who will never accept midwifery as a valid profession and who will never accept the concept of home birth as a safe option for women. And I don't think that there is very much that anybody can do to change that. But, yes we tried really hard to show that we were safe, competent practitioners and that we gave safe care to women.



MP What is it, that makes a midwife a midwife?

LN I could quote from the international definition of midwifery which explains that a midwife is a primary caregiver to women during the childbearing cycle. That is, during the pregnancy, the labour, the birth and the post partum period. Midwives are specialists in normal birth. My role as a midwife is to care for women as a primary caregiver, in situations where they're healthy and they're having a normal pregnancy and anticipating a normal birth. Physicians, particularly obstetricians, are trained specialists in complicated cases. Obstetricians are trained to deal with the more high risk women, women who have complications in their pregnancy, who, for one reason or another are anticipating a complicated birth. That's one really basic difference between what a physician does and what a midwife does.

MP The term "Midwife" itself - I don't know what language it is - what its origin is - but I know it means "with woman."

LN Yes - with woman. It's from the Old English. And that also illustrates the difference between the way midwives function and the way most doctors function - midwives are really with the woman. We don't see our role as being the decision maker, the one who directs the course of what happens. My role is to work with a woman, to inform her, to give her all the best information that I can about what's happening and to support her decisions. I see the woman and her partner in the birth - even though they are together making decisions - it is the woman who is the primary decision maker. I am there to support her decisions and to care for her throughout the process. Nurses are very different from midwives. First of all, the nurses' role is not as a primary caregiver. Even though occasionally they will catch babies at hospital, that's not the intention of their role. Their role is to care for the woman in labour and to inform the primary caregiver, who is generally a physician, of what is happening and to have the primary caregiver be responsible for making decisions.

MP The nurse is the intermediary between the woman and the doctor?

LN Well yes, at least theoretically, an important part of the role of the nurse is to act as an advocate for the patient. Unfortunately, I think, very often nurses do not live up to that role and they end up being more the spokesperson for the doctor. So the communication goes the other way. Instead of from the patient through the nurse to the doctor, it goes from the doctor through the nurse to the patient.

MP It's a power structure that seems to be well established in general medical practice.

LN It's a bit of a misleading power structure, because if you really examine it, it is always the patient who is in charge, the patient who is ultimately responsible for the decisions that are made. Unless it's a dire emergency and the patient is unconscious and unable to make decisions. The patient is the employer of the physician, the nurse, the hospital. It is the patient who ultimately

has the responsibility for accepting or not accepting any care that is offered. However, most of the time patients don't really understand that and are not given the support to act....

MP What is the connection between practising midwifery and advocating for the legalization of midwifery - not just local leading by example, but your connection to the provincial level of activity?

LN There are two different things. First, there are the practising midwives in Ontario, most of whom belong to a professional organization known as the Association of Ontario Midwives. The AOM has been very actively involved for over ten years, trying to get midwifery recognized. Then there is the consumer side of it, the Midwifery Task Force of Ontario. The Midwifery Task Force is a consumer lobby group which has also been very active for over ten years to get midwifery legalized. The two groups have been working on parallel courses. For the government, one of the major kicks in the butt was a very unfortunate occurrence, a home birth where a baby died. When that happened, because it was a death that occurred in a home birth situation, there was a coroner's inquest into the death. From that coroner's inquest came the vehicle for examining the whole of what's been happening in Ontario with midwifery practise. The inquest became a very lengthy, and a very involved process with expert witnesses from many countries around the world, and from the provinces and from different professions - nursing, midwifery, medicine - you name it. The outcome of that inquest was first of all, that there was no blame attached to the midwives who attended the birth, and secondly, a very strong recommendation that midwifery should be legalized and that the government move on that as quickly as possible. That was the impetus for the government to establish a task force on midwifery with a series of hearings throughout the province and a very thick report. From that came the legislation which has been passed.

MP How will midwives fit into the existing health care structure?

LN For now, midwifery is an independent self-regulated profession. Midwives will have their own college, the College of Midwives which will be the regulatory body for the profession. Midwifery will be governed by the Midwifery Act which is part of an umbrella piece of legislation called the Regulated Health Professions Act of Ontario. This act covers all of the health professions: nurses, doctors, chiro-practors, massage therapists; each has its own section. The Midwifery Act is a section of that umbrella act and it covers all aspects of legislation pertaining to midwifery - everything that we can and cannot do. The College of Midwives



will be set up to govern midwifery practice in Ontario. Doctors will have nothing to say about what midwives do; we are an independent profession.



MP Will midwives operate out of hospitals or out of private practice?

LN This is incredibly exciting and unique in the world - the way that we've managed. We've worked very, very hard in this province to make midwifery happen in the way we think is the best way for it to happen. Most doctors are really pissed off that midwifery is going to be funded by the Ministry of Health and that we will be paid salaries, not on a fee for service basis. As far as I'm concerned, the fee for service system is completely incompatible with giving good care. It encourages churning people through as quickly as possible, to make enough money to pay the overhead etc., to buy that sailboat, whatever. Midwives will be paid on a salary basis - that salary will be based on an estimation of the number of full time practices; you'll be required to attend a certain number of births per year averaged over a certain number of years, so its not as though you can collect a full time salary and attend three births a year. You will have to maintain a certain level of practice in order to qualify for full time salary. If you want to do half time practice, you can but then you only get half time salary. So that's one aspect that is quite unique. Mostly what is really unique about how we are going to be practicing in this province is that it will be a requirement of a midwife's practice that she provide continuity of care - in other words, we care for women through out the entire pregnancy, labour, birth and post partum. This continuity of care is a extremely important aspect of what we do. Another critical aspect is that we will follow the woman to her choice of birth place. So its not that you can be a midwife and only deal with babies in a birthing centre or only work in a hospital or only do home births. If you are a midwife you are required to attend births in all settings according to the wishes of the women.

MP So the status of home birth in Ontario has changed from "a-legal" to legal?

LN Definitely, because its a requirement of our medical practice of midwifery that we attend home births.

If you would like more information about midwifery or the midwifery program to be offered at L.U., call Lucie Nichols at 343 4774.

My memories of feminism in Thunder Bay form a collage of images ... women's faces and the places where we met to create and plan.

Underscoring the images is a remembrance of feeling pressured for time...too much to do, too little time! We all had day timers (printed especially for busy women) with every day filled to overflowing. I remember my new-found pride in womanhood and all things created and achieved by women...all the films, books and even the day timers.

The "first conference". Until I heard the Friday night speaker I would have bet that I wasn't disadvantaged by being a woman. I wept to hear her story which was my own and my failure to see anything wrong with it.

I remember Women's Centre on the second floor of the YMCA and the door Damon Dowbak painted in the children's room. I remember setting up a crib for my son, then less than one year old, in the children's room so I could work on a day care project.

I remember using a gestetner to run copies of the NORTHERN WOMAN JOURNAL which was put together at "the Y". How professional we felt when we changed to our newsprint format! I remember the move to Bay Street and working to clean up the old kitchen, stripping away grease of a million

french fries, so we could set up a big table for the Journal where we would cut and paste in fun and frenzy.

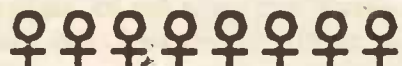
I remember the issues we tackled...rape and sexual assault, battered wives, and financing loans for women who had only their husbands' credit ratings...and the things we built - Rape and Sexual Assault Centre, the Faye Peterson Transition House and the Northern Women's Credit Union.

I remember taking the time to enjoy life with women I enjoyed. Typing and printing **Salt and Yeast** was a labour of love which showed me that we need poetry in our lives too. Even our meetings could be made into pot lucks and parties with the line between work and pleasure lost entirely.

I look at the old pictures which show us when we were young... pictures taken 20 years ago! Pictures which show us singly and in groups at our meeting places. And I wonder how did we do all the wonderful things we did. But then I remember the passion and the devotion we shared and I know the answer.

Lynne Thornburg

## Memories



## Memories

Lots of nostalgia.

The wonderful, wonderful New Year's Day parties, especially when Women's Centre was on Amelia St.

Midnight swims at the Y.

The visit to Thunder Bay of the Abortion Caravan.

The intensity of discussion and analysis, combined with nurturing support of early Women Centre collectives and the 1982-85 Journal collective.

The production of the "Prisons" issue of the Journal.

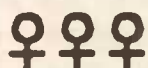
Fiona presenting roses to Iona Campanello, thus totally defusing an anti-choice demonstration.

The empowering of NWO child care workers as they joined 500 others in storming P.M. Mulroney's office when he refused to appear (or send Cabinet representation) to a National Child Care Conference.

And a memory that will remain forever with every present:

Kim Erickson singing Bread and Roses at the Ontario Cabinet Forum on Women's Issues.

Margaret



To mark the twentieth anniversary of the Northern Woman Journal, I was asked if I could write a short piece that spoke in some way to the unique character and sense of humour of women in the movement. Two particular occasions came almost immediately to mind. Capturing their essence on paper though is another matter, so please bear with me. One indelible memory I have is that of Gert Beadle reciting her poetry at a function in Dryden during the 1980's. In attendance that night were various government and municipal dignitaries. Taking centre stage in her fuzzy, flapping, pink slippers, Gert looked every inch the kindly grandmother. Her unsuspecting audience had no idea of what they were in for as she began her program with a poem about the husband who, in an attempt to crush his wife's spirit, tried to kill her houseplants by urinating on them. Forced to sit and listen politely to a composition about some guy pissing in his wife's pots left them squirming. It was one of those rare moments in time...

The second occasion that comes to mind happened several years ago during a Decade Council retreat at Quetico Centre when a group of us were sitting around one evening talking about some of the incredible characters we knew; in this case, two long-time friends, Hilda and Mary. Leni's telling of the story of Mary's deep regret at having ignored Hilda's advice to invest in Cabbage Patch Doll stock left us howling with laughter and blinded by tears. That night was a celebration of who we are. We need to celebrate on another with the same affection every day - it does the heart and soul good.

Fiona Karlstedt



# Women's



Leni Unitnen

... I was two paragraphs into writing this speech when my son came by to take me to lunch and I asked him, "So what do you think women brought to the North?" Jokingly, he said, "The women brought Tupperware" and I thought about it for a moment and decided, "No, the women are Tupperware":

They are flexible.  
They protect and preserve.  
They are marvellous caretakers of the leftovers.  
If they are the real thing, they wear the good housekeeping seal of approval.  
If they don't have the seal of approval, they lack credibility.  
They never break when you drop them.  
And they are never at the table on really important occasions.

But with all that where would we be without tupperware and where would the North be without women. Women have brought to the North all of the stereotyped feminine characteristics ... warmth, tradition, caring, sharing and a strength and staying power fed by love and preservation.

Industry's role in the North has been to take Minerals from the earth, wood from the land. Women's role has been to plant roots, to add substance, to build a place to live, to stay in Northwestern Ontario.

... Women attempted to play the perfect role: the perfect mother, perfect company wife, perfect soul mate. They lived in exact-model company houses or sometimes substandard housing and made them into warm homes where they prepared the meals, washed the socks, relieved the stress, and sent their men back each day to the company. To keep everyone happy, women geared their own interests and recreation to their partners, trekking the ski-doo trails, sitting in the boat or the bar, longing to take a course that wasn't available or to see a play that would never come to town.



# Voices



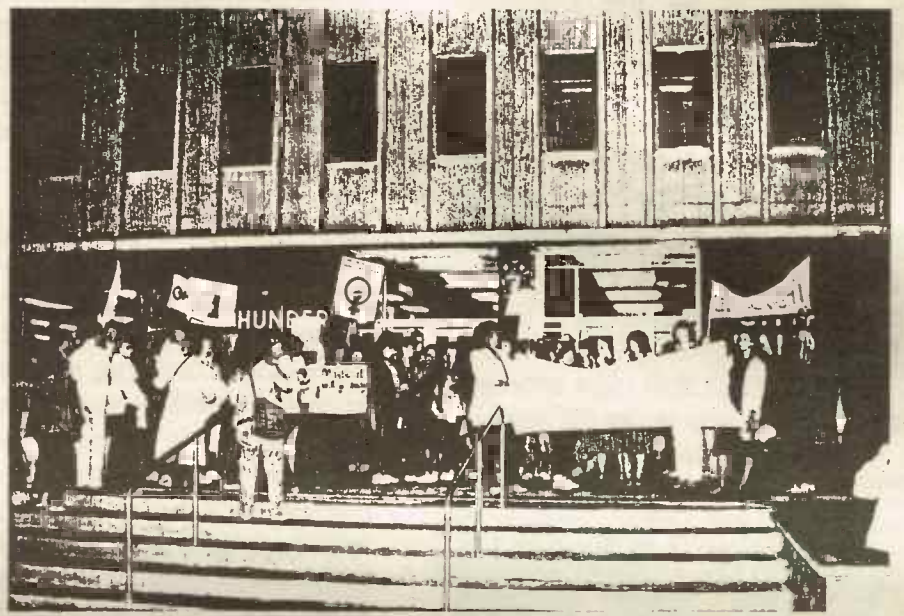
Women's roles have traditionally isolated them from other women. Family structures and needs allowed little time for women to get together in a structured way. It was not until the '70s that things began to change...when women started meeting to share ideas and concerns. Groups were established dealing with what some men and women alike construed as totally selfish subjects, like women and violence, or women and economics. A large conference was held in 1973. What women found out was that their concerns, needs and interests were shared by other women living in much the same circumstances. Conferences became our lifelines. We used them to tie into each other and to women living in other parts of the province and country. We listened to women when they raised a concern. We talked about it, printed it, and studied it. And more women added their voice to the concern.

As fast as women came together, they were labelled...home wreckers, women libber's... and women were forced to defend a stereotyped image. The media had a field day in their interpretation of the women's movement. What that did unfortunately was successfully isolate women who didn't want to be portrayed as a man-hating reactionary in bush boots and braids. But women are used to dealing with isolating tactics. We learned to push ahead. We took the issue of violence and forced it onto the front pages and into government. We learned to write briefs and we learned to lobby. More importantly we learned the value of supporting each other and standing together.

There was and still is a resistance to women wanting change. Change costs money. It isn't going to cost us any because women never had it in the first place. And so men, industry and government have a vested interest in resisting the issues raised by women. But the movement moves on....

We will no longer accept that some of us are beaten in our own homes and there is no help available. We will no longer accept that we work at jobs equal to men's and are paid less. We will no longer accept that we aren't at the table on important occasions.. the Board table, the Council table, the political table. We will no longer accept that after we have dedicated our lives to raising children and homemaking we run the risk of being left impoverished because of inadequate pensions. We want affordable day care. We want training and employment and equal access to good paying jobs. We want economic equality. We want our contributions recognized.

So, let them label us and let them howl, we still ain't satisfied.



# Memories

My fondest memory is when my daughter, then in Grade 7 or 8, joined with her two close girl friends in our second **Reclaim the Night March** (through the streets of Fort William). She remembers being hoarse in the morning from chanting "**Women Unite, Take Back the Night.**"

One of those "exotic dance" places we marched passed was Uncle Sam's Tavern, which has since been demolished to build a community health centre. How's that for neighbourhood improvement and "personal is political".

Donna Phoenix

# Memories

When I had the mastectomy in 1976 and was just a short time in bed after the surgery...still very groggy...I heard a voice (nurse) say "No, you can't come in, only family is allowed". Then I heard Estelle Howard say "I'm her sister". I barely remember seeing Estelle, my eyes wouldn't stay open, but she gave me a drink and held my hand. Right from my first days with feminists I felt "Sisterhood" and a new and tremendous pride in being a woman, but the visit from Estelle was certainly a highlight of the sharing and caring women did for and with each other.

The many funny things we did in our various Women's Centres are memorable, especially the skit one Christmas. Maureen did a flash, Laurie was a robot, Monika was the emcee (Monika Meatloaf) and I was Noreen Nitpick (did I name myself?) Doreen was Gay De flowered.... did a skit about Women's Place receiving funding for a project "On Our Backs". I don't think it would be politically correct to do that now do you? I have a copy of the script somewhere.. must find it.

Noreen Dunbar

There are a million memories of the Thunder Bay sisterhood and the education they gave a willing rebel. That I was a little long in the tooth when the reality of what I had missed in my life occurred to me probably explains why even today I can't believe the nerve I had. I used to think, Gert, if you ever lose your nerve you will fold like a pricked balloon or a wet paper sack.

History will record I never lost my nerve, my spirit which had been under negative influences for the most of my life was suddenly unfettered and ready for action as long as it was in protest against patriarchal regimentation. I have not known a more profound sense of belonging anywhere than in the circle we called consciousness raising, there is no more tangible evidence of what women could and should feel in a time when they are together pursuing an ideal.

Feminism is many things to many people but to me it was an idea whose time had come, an ideal. It still is. The dogma of liberation the political correctness went over my head, I was in love with my own free spirit. The publishing of Salt and Yeast changed my life, I guess the party at the centre on that occasion might be a high point, perhaps the party on my 65th birthday when they presented me with a vibrator, perhaps the feminist play, perhaps working on the Journal, perhaps taking the Common Woman players to Sudbury. Certainly doing my poetry as outrageous as it could get gave me a sense of liberation and great joy.

The sisterhood at Thunder Bay gave me back my creative spirit and the strength to preserve it, I have in turn given that spirit to countless women. The Courier calls me Kelowna's Pagan Crone but they do it with affection and they print my scurrilous attacks on religious intolerance and misogyny. I attend the Women's Centre board meetings by special invitation but I am truly a liberated woman: for that I thank that great collective that has my undying love and gratitude.

Gert

The following is from "Letters to My Sisters" which was performed by the Common Woman Players, a group of Northwestern Ontario women, at the 1979 Sudbury Women's Conference.

Dear Sisters

Atikokan has been a one industry town since its beginning. First a CN Railway divisional point, and later the home of Steep Rock Iron Mines. They overlapped for about five years. Between 1901 and 1954 all travel to and from Atikokan was done by train or canoe. In '46 when I arrived on the scene, only a few of the women - mostly wives of the management and executives - were from large centres. Wives of the hourly men and railway personnel were usually from rural Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario, and wouldn't be devastated by the lack of the "finer things in life," not that they wouldn't appreciate theatre, ballet, art galleries and libraries. They were considered frills and would come later. Eighty-five percent of them were young with small children. The winters were bitter cold, long, no transportation except one taxi that ran if the weather was conducive. There wasn't any place to shop anyway. The Hudson Bay Post was out at the mine site and the hospital was a box car on the railroad siding. When a baby was due, first the doctor had to be found and sobered up, then came the fun of just getting to the hospital. If it was in the winter, it was hardly worth the effort. The mother lay in state in one of the two beds with diapers hung to dry from rope strung back and forth across the room, and she was kept busy with a towel wiping the condensation off the walls to keep her bed reasonably dry.

Besides starting a new mine, other new records were set: the highest birth rate in Canada, highest incidence of insanity and suicide. More beer and booze was sold in Atikokan than in Toronto.

Roads and shopping improved somewhat, but women had to look after their own "food for the soul." They started women's groups, church groups, agitated for a new hospital and churches, taught classes in art, crafts, sewing and cooking, started the Northernares singing group which just disbanded this year, and a Little Theatre Group. Council didn't think an indoor skating rink was necessary, so women raised the money and had a regulation size rink built so the kids wouldn't freeze to death playing hockey and figure skating. Women coped with pay cut backs, mud, cold, frozen fuel lines, booze, tears, isolation, boarders in their homes, lost friends and homesickness. Swing-shift was brought in at the mine. This innovation of the devil is the ultimate in breaking up friendships. Just something more for people to put up with.

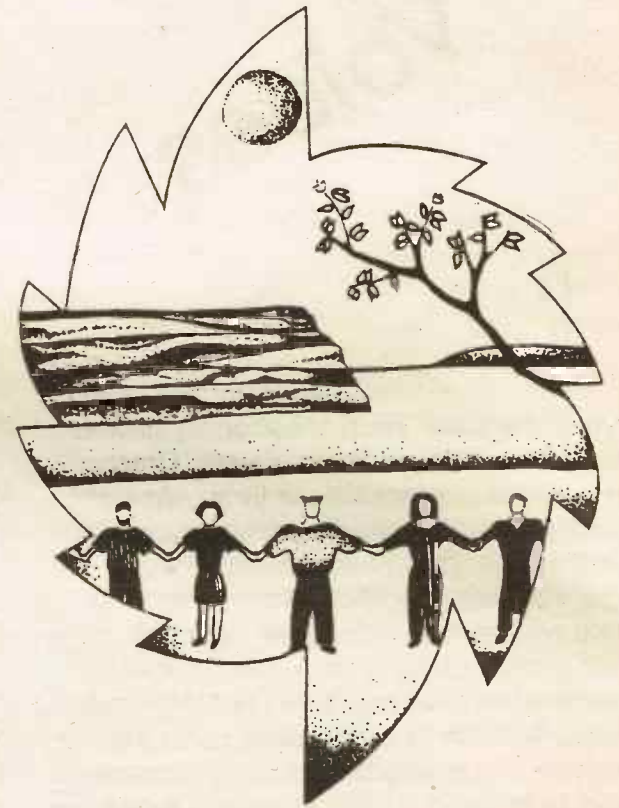
When hours at the mine were cut from 56 - 72 per week to 32, many women had to find jobs. They worked at anything they could find, catering, working in the new stores and restaurants, taking in boarders and/or roomers from the construction crews and the mines, in tourist camps and at the mines. They did their jobs, raised their families, kept up with the work of their service organizations: Children's Aid, hospital work, teaching, church work, helped their neighbours and accepted help when it was needed.

This was my life - trying to get the most out of a one industry town in Northern Ontario. We didn't give up, we howled, rebelled, cried, beat our heads, then stuck our tongues out at the devil and got on with the job of making a home and town worth fighting for.

And now the mines have closed down!!!

For the first while I thought I'd lose my mind. Being told that it was going to happen didn't really sink in until that day when I had no job to go to. After 14 years of going to work five days a week, solving work problems, knowing the security of that pay cheque, gaining confidence from doing a job well, and having the dignity of working with people who respect you, doesn't do much to prepare you for the degradation of having to register for Unemployment Insurance. Why should I, who have always made my own way, now have to accept this dole? Why aren't there jobs for us here in this town? Why should I have to put up with the indignity of having to go down to the UIC building at all? Why should I be made to feel like a pauper asking for a hand-out, to have to answer questions that I had no answer for? I slunk out of there like an old dog with distemper, hoping no one saw me. Then I met more people who had been through the same ordeal and who were as angry as I was, and who asked the question - "why aren't some of the available jobs here in Atikokan?" I wasn't the only one that went

## Women's Voices



PCHRD

out of that office with "Stick it lady, I'll do without it. To hell with them and their bloody money."

Management, Council, Government and workers all knew that the closure of the mines was imminent and yet nothing had been done to entice a new industry big enough to take up the slack, into the area. True, an Industrial Development Official had been brought in, but not until six months before the pit closed down, why wasn't it done ten years ago? We want something that will hire local people, not like Hydro who bring in all but 20% of their labour force. The construction company that is putting in the new \$5,000,000 sewer system uses their own men and equipment. When asked about the percentage of local employees it came out 13 of 30. The road construction company that is doing the highway outside of town and the streets of the town use people brought in from other Unions and their own equipment. When questioned, the town clerk who is also the secretary of Council, didn't know the hiring policy of these companies. What is the matter with Council that hiring local labour cannot be one of the stipulations of the contract? Many of the miners are pulling up their roots and leaving. I'm not going to!! I've too much time and energy invested in this town to give it up now, just because our government bodies have boobed. Now that Council has decided that dumping nuclear waste into this area would be a good thing for all of us, I think there is a reason for me to stay. We've been betrayed, and the only thing to do is to get onto our horse again and get something done about it.

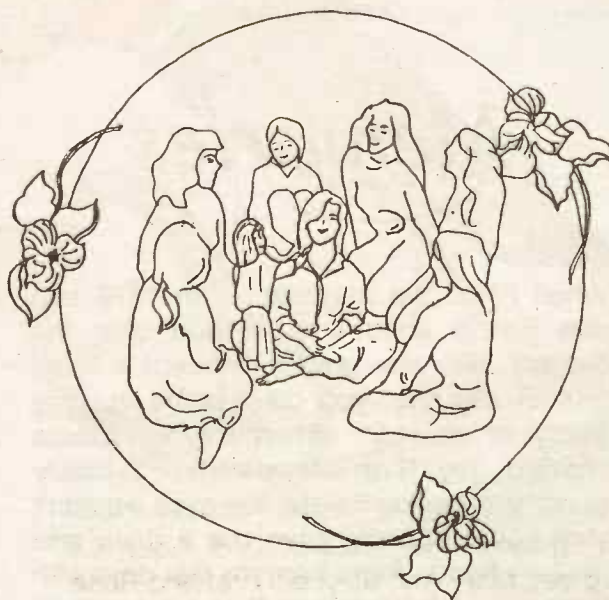
Thanks for listening,

UIC number 16975

Ruby Chumway

Ruby Chumway continues to work to make her community a better place for women.

### Atikokan Crisis Centre



*Our vision is...*

*"To live in a peaceful society without fear of violence, to have freedom of choices, where people are equally valued..*

**WE BEGIN BY  
VALUING OURSELVES"**

**Atikokan Crisis Line:  
597-6908**

**Toll Free Crisis Line  
1-800-465-3348**

*(area code access: 807-705-204)*

## Memorial Award Honours Millie

In recognition of her outstanding contribution to the people of Northwestern Ontario, the Millie Barrett Memorial Award has been established.

A mentor to many of us, Millie's commitment to economic, political and social justice inspired us all. Millie's deep respect for people made her a superb grass-roots organizer. Her skills and her wisdom were generously given to women's groups, Native organizations, environmentalists; to all who shared her love of Northwestern Ontario. Her friendship enriched our lives. Actively involved and influential in every community in which she lived and worked, it was the small communities that Millie loved best, where people "spoke her language."

Whenever a difficult task needed doing we called on Millie. From chairing tumultuous meetings, to facilitating a "counter" conference, to negotiating with decision-makers, to setting the record straight with southern officials, Millie met the challenge with determination, poise and good humour. Millie's passionate voice spoke our hopes and our vision.

An enthusiastic participant in the 1973 Northern Women's Conference, Millie's involvement with NWO women predated that conference, and extended throughout her

lifetime. True to her nature, a serious health problem did not deter Millie's commitment to the value of community development, which she personified. Many of us, unaware of her personal situation, continued to call upon her, and as always received her assistance and support. Just a few months before her death, Millie was actively involved with the Women Uniting for Change Conference, where she facilitated a workshop on Older Women and Housing issues, and chaired the resolutions session.

Millie's passing is a great loss, personally and politically, to the people of Northwestern Ontario. Her words and her works are her legacy to the region. Our task is to continue to develop her ideals.

The Millie Barrett Memorial Award will be administered through Lakehead University, and will support mature students pursuing studies or research in the political, historical, or social policy fields; and, who have demonstrated commitment to Northern concerns that reflect Millie's spirit and ideals.

Contributions may be made to the Millie Barrett Memorial Fund, in care of the Director of Development, Lakehead University, 955 Oliver Road, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7B 5E1.



*"The people who belong here, whether they are born here or are here by choice, will tell you that it isn't so much that they chose this land but that the land chose them. The land, the bush, is the arbiter of everything here. The bush imposes a certain respect, a certain humility a certain healthy tempering of human arrogance. And it promotes a certain competence, an ability to deal with the essentials, to cope with harsh realities among those who belong here."*

MILDRED E. BARRETT

1924 - 1992

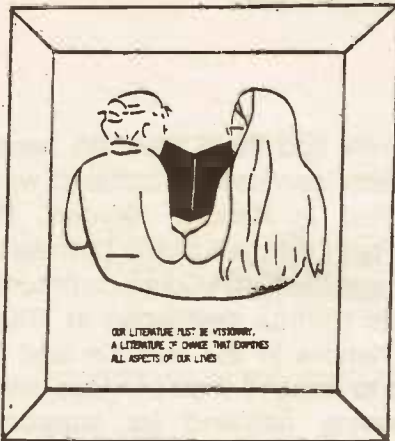
## Feminist Literature

For feminists over 50 one of the most exciting aspects of the women's movement was the discovery of feminist literature. Finally, our voices were being heard, our experiences analyzed, our history recovered. Whenever we met, someone would bring forth a book she had discovered that had "changed her life", and would loan this treasure for others of us to eagerly devour. Hours would be spent discussing, digesting, savouring our new insights and emotions. Kate Millet, Robin Morgan, Vivian Gornick, Shulamith Firestone impacted on our lives and motivated us to feminist action.

Feminist books trickled in to Thunder Bay--you couldn't find them at the library or mainstream bookstores, only the Co-op Bookstore stocked a feminist section, and were helpful in ordering when we knew what we wanted. Then we learned about the Toronto Women's Bookstore, so whenever we got to Toronto a day was spent there, absorbing this wonderful array of women's words. Spending all our hard-earned savings we'd come home with a suitcase full of books - again to be shared, digested and discussed.

Many, many times over the years we talked about how we'd love to have a women's bookstore in Thunder Bay, but all we did was yearn. Then one night in the fall of 1983 the discussion reemerged at a Journal meeting. We need a Bookstore! Let's do it! How can we start a Bookstore when we can barely get the Journal out? We can do it! It's impossible! Round and round the circle for hours. At the end of the evening a decision was made, the Journal would not undertake a bookstore, but Anna McColl and Margaret Phillips, in partnership would.

Three months later the Northern Woman's Bookstore opened.

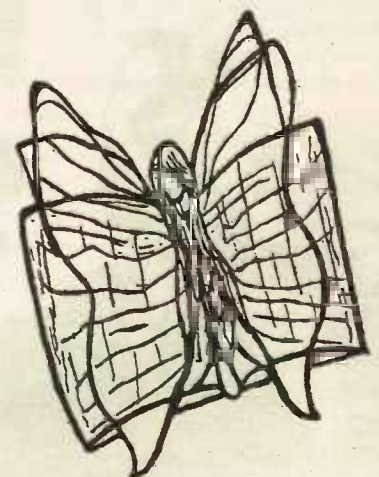


Opening in the store-front cubby-hole of Women's Space on Bay St., then to N. Court St., then Camelot St, the Bookstore now has a permanent home, sharing space with Equinox Enterprises at 65 S. Court St. Margaret, Mary Ann Kleynendorst and Rose Pittis, purchased this home, in partnership, in 1992, and separately operate their respective services. Anna retired from active Bookstore partnership in 1988, but remains closely involved.

Starting with a mere 300 books, today the Northern Woman's Bookstore stocks over 2000 titles covering a broad spectrum of women's interests: feminist theory, violence issues, health, women's spirituality, lesbian, biography, women's history, self-help, recovery, psychology, education, work, older women, children, literary criticism, women's studies, Third World, environment, humour, poetry and fiction. Women's music, feminist periodicals, and greeting cards compliment the books. Rose has recently provided a new source of joy - a wonderful selection of women's jewellery.

The Bookstore serves as a resource to women across Northwestern Ontario, providing a mail order service (anywhere in Canada) and taking (or sending) books to conferences and workshops throughout the region. The Bookstore has been to Kenora, Dryden, Eagle Lake, Sioux Narrows, Terrace Bay, Geraldton, Hearst, Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, resourcing Women's conferences; Women Healing gatherings; NW WITT conferences; violence, health, MPD, and addiction workshops.

As with all feminist bookstores, the Northern Woman's Bookstore is more than a "store", it is an information centre, a gathering place, sometimes a quiet place to browse, sometimes an active place for feminist dialogue. On March 15th the Bookstore will celebrate the 10th anniversary of its official opening. A great anniversary party is planned and events and sales will continue all week. Come down and join in the fun.



# Services

The early years of feminist ferment quickly faced a contradiction: analysis/political action or service? (The interweaving of analysis, action and service remain a challenge.) From the moment there was a telephone number and an identifiable woman's space, individual women in crisis appeared. So many times the discussion group/action meeting got put on hold while a safe home for a battered woman was located; vehicles found to transport a woman's belongings in the dark of the night; a sympathetic lawyer contacted to provide advice; money raised to provide transportation out of town, or simply to buy food. The support individual women sought covered the gamut of issues: legal, financial, health, violence, employment, education.... It quickly became apparent that there was a great need for services for women, provided by women, grounded in women's experience.

Through the 1970s we find women bonding together to provide the service, the nurturing, the needed support. Creating women's centres, information and support groups, specific services and individual support, women reached out to meet the needs of women in crisis.

The development of these vital women-centred services progressed despite formidable barriers encountered along the way. Because of hundreds of thousands of volunteer 'woman-hours', services have been achieved. The energy, the personal and monetary sacrifices, and the considerable emotional stress required, demonstrates the depth of women's commitment to their sisters.

As services matured, the need for paid staff and adequate funding brought into play a new dimension... feminists engaging with the state. The lessons learned have often been painful. The extent of hostility to women's equality, the intransigence of patriarchal

structures often leave us bruised. But, women continue to strive for new modes of operating, new ways to empower women to create opportunities, make decisions, best suited to their needs.



Throughout Northwestern Ontario the first issue that women organized around was battering.

"It is a story of struggle, achievement, tears and celebration.

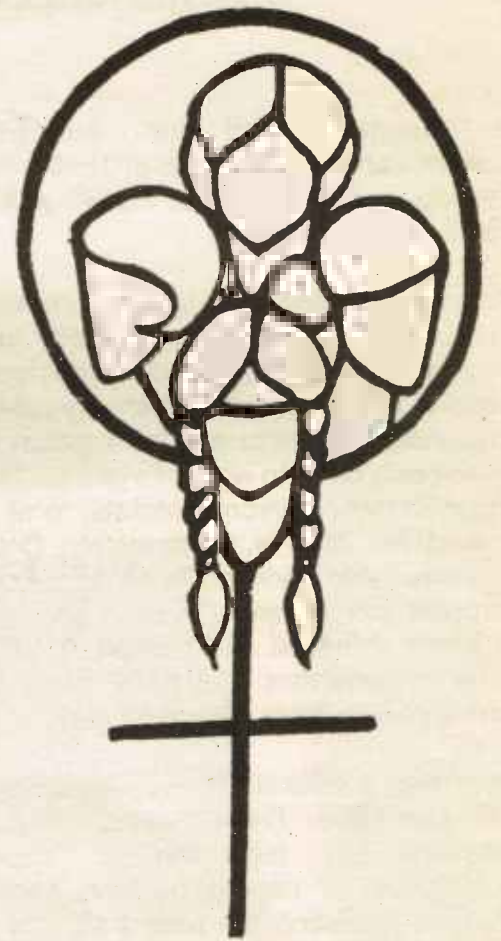
Each women's group had a dream, simplistic in its approach. STOP BATTERING. PROTECT WOMEN. As women in each town addressed the tip of the problem, the iceberg rose from the water. The numbers and problems of battered women overwhelmed the vision in reality. As each organization toyed with the idea of opening a transition house, their battered sisters demonstrated there was no turning back. Women were in this issue for the long haul."

It is not surprising that woman-battering issues have been a priority in Northwestern Ontario. Violence against women persists because of the unequal power relations between men and women in our society. A patriarchal society that economically, socially, politically subscribes a second class status to women condones violence against women.

Given the economic status of NWO women; the "male culture" of resource industries; the lack of child care; the scarcity of adequately-paid jobs for women; the lack of recognition of the value of women's traditional work; NWO women are indeed vulnerable. While the root cause of battering - the power and privilege held by men - is still not seriously addressed in our society, NWO women have established services for battered women and have raised community consciousness about violence issues.

Twenty years ago there were no services. Today shelter services for battered women are provided in Kenora, Dryden, Sioux Lookout, Red Lake, Atikokan, Thunder Bay, Geraldton and the North Shore communities. Rape crisis centres developed in Thunder Bay and Kenora in the mid-70s and have continued to expand their services, with an ever-increasing demand for support for incest survivors. Over the years a number of groups have addressed the issue of pornography. Most recently attention is being given to the insidious problem of sexual harassment. The work goes on.

Although often the first problem addressed, violence was by no means the only issue that brought women together. Women's health issues - physical, mental, emotional - were high on the agenda. The Thunder Bay Post-Partum Counselling Services, a self-help and support group, formed in 1980. "The groups offered one-to-one support and weekly group meetings. When a depressed mother contacted the group she was given the phone number of a volunteer who was willing to listen, share similar experiences and offer reassurance. In a caring and sharing atmosphere, women discovered that they were not alone, that they were not "crazy", that they did have the power to regain control of their lives."



The Childbirth Education and Support Group had a special interest in the physical and emotional health care provided to birthing mothers and couples. The group held a "respect for the right of individuals to choose the kind of maternity care that meets their needs, and the right to information which will enable them to make informed and responsible choices regarding childbirth options." As well as providing peer support, the CESG had some success in pressing the medical system to be more responsive to birthing mothers needs.

The work of the Women's Health Information Network (see Networking) led to the development of other community-based groups that addressed women's health needs in a number of NWO communities.

Information and support groups have been an important service enriching the lives of many NWO women.

Reviewing the history of the Red Lake Women's Information Group (1980-87) we find an impressive story of educational activities and political action. Workshops and information sessions included: women and addictions; financial management; violence issues; women and health; women through film; body images; women and decision making; economic development; pensions; stress; PMS; DES; breast self-examination; assertiveness training; man-made language; child and family legislation; pornography (leading to a Pornography Working Group to plan ongoing public education). Action was taken around violence issues and child care. In 1985 the group produced and distributed an information pamphlet on day care, housing, affirmative action, and services for women in crisis - thus raising the visibility of these issues in the lead-up to the municipal election. These achievements are all the more noteworthy when we consider the transient nature of the town and the reality that the groups had to be regularly replenished as active members moved from the community.

## Services

The Ignace Women's Education/Information Group (1979-83) was a "bunch of women who wanted to make the most out of living". The group met regularly to discuss common concerns, promote workshops and training/education programs, and establish access to resources (books, films, etc) of interest to women.

A group of women "committed to the quality of life for women" formed the Atikokan

Women's Resource Centre (1981-85). The Centre was "a place where women with diverse interests could meet and share ideas, discuss concerns and take action. A resource library was set up to afford women greater access to information on status of women issues and other topics of interest. Guest speakers were featured at monthly meetings..assertiveness training offered. Volunteers were active in coordinating such activities as clothing, toy, coupon and skill exchanges, a food coop, and assisting Atikokan Crisis Centre in developing services for women in crisis. To keep area women informed a weekly column was published in the local paper."

AWARE, the Terrace Bay Women's Resource Group "developed a number of strategies to promote understanding of and action on women's issues in the community... space was acquired for a drop-in centre where women could meet other women and form mutual support networks. Information evenings and workshops were conducted on women "and addictions, assertiveness training, communications, sexism, family law, women and violence, and women in single industry towns..... The impact of these activities can be assessed in part by what came after. Volunteers were trained to lead workshops on women and addictions; a single parents groups was formed; and a committee formed to investigate the extent of wife battering in North Shore communities."

Throughout history individual women have always provided support to other women in crisis. With the development of a feminist analysis the need to plan for situations of needed support became clear. The assistance provided to women seeking a safe, legal abortion is a key example of such planned support. In the 1970s & 80s many NWO women were denied abortions in their home communities (even those communities where hospitals provided abortions). While

the situation has eased somewhat since the 1988 Supreme Court decision striking down the federal abortion law, there are still communities in our region without abortion services. Since the early 1970s a core group of Thunder Bay women have volunteered their time supporting and counselling women coming to Thunder Bay for their abortion, and accompanying (and fundraising for) women who have found it necessary to travel to Minneapolis, and later Duluth, to obtain their abortions. The work of this group of women has been largely unrecognized (except for the gratitude of the women supported) but has been (is) a vital service to women.

## Women's Place Kenora

One of the most amazing stories of feminist service is demonstrated by the herstory of Women's Place - Kenora (WPK). It is a chronicle of courage, determination, commitment and vision.

It began with a Women's Conference in 1975 where the need for a women's centre and for rape crisis services were identified. In 1976, one woman, distressed by the inadequate service she had received, organized a group of volunteers to operate a rape crisis line. From the calls received it quickly became apparent that support for women experiencing all forms of abuse, not only rape, was needed. Thus a community organization - the Kenora Women's Crisis Intervention Project - formed with the goal of establishing a crisis centre, and the "grants" game began. For the next number of years the group survived from one short-term grant to another short-term grant with never sufficient funding to adequately meet needs.

In 1980 a suitable location was found to house the Crisis Centre but the municipality refused to approve the premises for sheltering, or to provide per diem funding.



Disappointed, but undaunted, the Centre (which incorporated as Women's Place - Kenora in 1981) then undertook public education programs to sensitize the community to the issue of violence against women, and embarked on a capital fundraising campaign with the objective of establishing a Transition House. WPK broadened their horizons and organized a wide range of activities including workshops on alternative health care, group dynamics, women and addictions, pensions and pornography. The Centre was also utilized for support groups such as MOPS (Mothers of Pre-Schoolers) and the Newcomers Club, as well as recreation and cultural activities. The Centre temporarily had to close when the lease expired in December 1982. However, service continued as the crisis line was moved to a member's home (files were stored to await new space and new funding).

Having raised some capital towards a down payment for a Transition House WPK applied to Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation (which had a program to build shelters). While CMHC was receptive, the mortgage was dependent on the commitment of the municipalities to provide per diem funding... which was again denied.

WPK's goal to provide a Transition House was further frustrated when, in 1983, the province intervened and offered municipalities 100% capital funding for Family Resource Centres (FRC). WPK presented a critique of the FRC project to the municipality and the province, however the Town accepted the Ministry's offer.

Accepting the inevitability of the FRC, WPK submitted a proposal to operate the facility. Their proposal was rejected in favour of a group that had no experience in working with battered women. Ironically, WPK was asked to train the FRC crisis line workers.



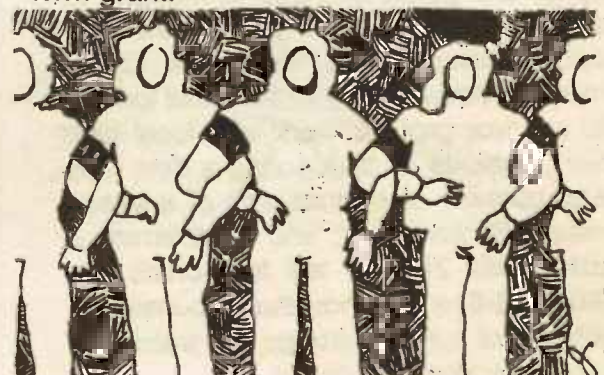
committed activist and founding mother of Kenora's Women's Place, Charlotte Holm

Concurrent to all this political work, WPK re-established a downtown Crisis Centre. (In a 10 day period in Nov. 1984 the Centre dealt with 24 women and children in need of shelter.) They succeeded in getting improvements to the Town's emergency assistance policies; they surveyed the availability and quality of services for battered and assaulted women; encouraged health and justice agencies to develop protocols; and conducted six workshops "Images of Women" .... which "clarified the connections between violence against women in the home, at work, and on the streets. In 1986 a workshop "Equality Under the Law" was co-sponsored with the community Legal Clinic; and many years of analysis and focus on the justice system's response to women victims of violence was rewarded when the province selected Kenora for a Victim/Witness Advocacy Program. (The province, of course, did not recognize WPK as contributing to this decision, and they rejected WPK's offer to consult in the development and implementation of the program.)

**"By keeping the issues visible and holding agencies accountable WPK was able, albeit slowly, to create a climate for change within the community."**

Supported by other community agencies, WPK pressed the Ontario Housing Corporation to increase the availability of subsidized housing for abused women and single-parent, female-headed families, and in 1987 forty housing units were approved.

The rape crisis centre continued to operate with volunteers... and the occasional short-term grant.



A most positive development came in 1987 when WPK received a major capital grant to purchase a house. WPK gives much credit to the other women's groups of Decade Council who supported their quest for this funding. The new home providing office, library and meeting space (a large meeting room was later added) quickly became a "well-utilized centre for community women".



Anti-violence work continued. In 1988 WPK participated in the provincial campaign to increase awareness of rape and sexual assault by producing a fact card that was mailed to 6000 households, and sponsored a week long radio campaign and circulated additional cards to local social service agencies. Much energy also went to letter writing campaigns re violence issues, free trade and privatization.

In 1990 the Ontario government made funds available to Rape Crisis Centres, and finally Kenora was able to hire full-time staff and "actually engage in planning our program and activities, rather than just responding on a crisis basis". With crisis services secured WPK could expand activities. Survivor groups were facilitated, group facilitators trained, a resource guide for abused women "Out of the Shadows" produced, WEN-DO courses held, and a Cross Cultural Forum on Incest and Child Sexual Abuse organized.

To ensure a clear distinction between assault services and women's centre activities the Kenora Sexual Assault Centre incorporated as a separate entity in 1991.

Since permanent funding was secure the KSAC has been able to reach out to district women through the group support program providing group facilitation training and self-help training. Local community work has included developing a protocol with the hospital and police services to respond to victims of sexual assault; public education sessions including the "Break the Cycle" campaign; development of a manual for self-help survivor groups; work with local high school students by sponsoring a date rape poster contest; co-sponsorship of a sexual harassment workshop; and establishing a **district wide 24-hour toll free crisis line (1-800-565-6161)**. Individual counselling, facilitation of survivor groups and training of crisis-line workers continues.

WPK activities have also flourished (and in 1993 staff support secured when the province began funding women's centres). Open meetings are held monthly with timely and provocative speakers, films and discussions. WPK sponsored the 1992 Woman Healing Gathering, organized a Women and Addictions conference, and co-sponsored workshops on Self-Empowerment, and on "Sexual Harassment: A Workplace Hazard". Take Back the Night marches and December 6th memorials are held annually. Lobbying and letter writing continues.

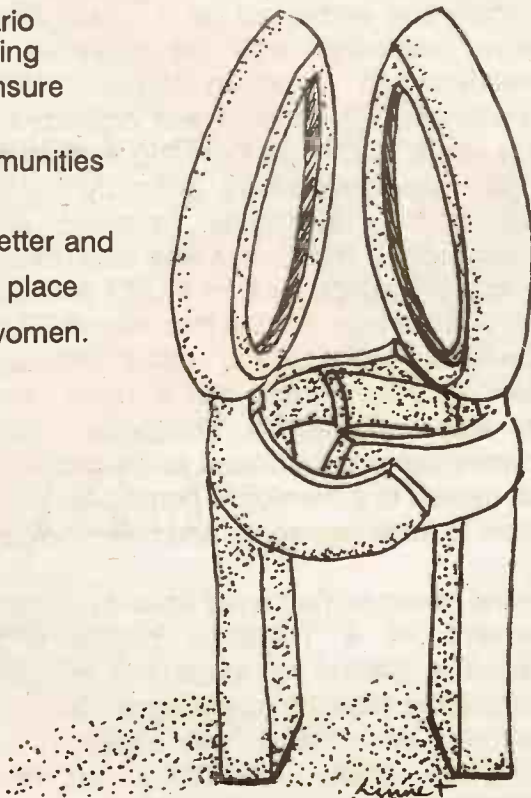
The whole area of family law, separation and divorce, and support and custody issues have been extensively worked on. A Women and Family Law Forum was held and a booklet "Moving On: A Woman's Guide through the Separation and Divorce Process" produced.

The meeting room provides a wonderful safe and comfortable space for many community groups (Nursing Moms; Women for Sobriety; self-help groups, etc.) to hold regular gatherings, as well as groups/agencies holding one-time events/training sessions. Indeed it is a "well-used community woman's space", and the ever expanding library is a valuable resource to the community.

Believing that women must have "bread but roses too", WPK also plans fun events bringing in feminist theatre and musicians to help Kenora women celebrate.

The energy, the perseverance, the commitment of the women of WPK is a stellar example of feminist service for women, by women, grounded in women's experience.

The NWJ salutes Women's Place Kenora and the many hundreds of women in communities across Northwestern Ontario working to ensure their communities are a better and safer place for women.



### SUPERIOR WOMEN'S COFFEEHOUSE

...is superior entertainment for local women. Thanks to our already loyal fans (women who have attended the Coffeehouse more than once) and their friends, the Superior Women's Coffeehouse has enjoyed tremendous success. Since last July, Coffeehouse audiences have been entertained by many local women, including: Nancy St. Jarre and Sue Paskoski, Josie Wallenius, Joyce Michalchuk, Glenna McLeod, Nancy MacGibbon, Val Saunders and Ellafern Poindexter. The highlight of the season was a performance by Heather Bishop on January 22nd. Coffeehouse performers are now booked into the summer.

In addition to musical performances, our audiences enjoy poetry reading and storytelling, art exhibits, craft displays and, of course, coffee and treats at each event.

The Superior Women's Coffeehouse takes place at the Unitarian House on S. Algoma on the third Saturday of every second month. Translation - the next Coffeehouse will happen on Saturday March 19th at 8:00 pm. All women and their friends are welcome. Admission is really cheap and it is the place to be in Thunder Bay...If you (or someone you know) is interested in performing at the Coffeehouse, contact Jane through the Northern Women's Bookstore.

Thank you to all who have supported us so far - audience, performers and workers. Let's keep the Superior Women's Coffeehouse open for a good long time. See you on March 19th.



**WOMEN'S  
APRENTICESHIP  
PROJECT**

Marion MacAdam  
Project Co-ordinator

Royal Canadian Legion Building  
300 McClellan Avenue  
Kenora, Ontario P9N 1A8  
TEL: (807) 468-3698  
FAX: (807) 468-3051



# FROM THE JOURNAL FILES

7-4

Legally, equality under the constitution is essentially a paper tiger. Provinces play the major role in enforcement of human rights. Socially, women are losing their traditional power sources, but are NOT GAINING IN TRADITIONAL MALE POWER STRUCTURES.

These economic hard times are making the feminist take a back seat. Welfare mothers are being forced to find work in jobless economic markets with no availability of child care.

Men as a class are coming down hard on women as a class--especially poor women--because we still are basically powerless.

## OH BROTHER

Dear Viola:

In response to your request for written support regarding a name change for the Lakehead University's "Man In Society" course please allow me to explain that the term "man in the phrase "Man and Society" is in this instance, the generic term meaning "all people". Similarly, the pronoun "his" can also be used generically as in the common phrase "Man and His World". We must never forget that the word "man", when used generically, includes the female.

I have not seen the course outline for "Man and Society" but I imagine it covers all the aspects of a man's life. No doubt it deals with basic anatomy. For example, under the heading "Man's Body" (which of course refers to male and female) one could study man and his heart, man and his ovaries, man and his fallopian tubes, the breasts of man.

The life stages of man would be included. Topics would be: man at puberty, man's menstruation, man as father, man as mother, man as husband, man as wife, the end of the child-bearing years--the menopause of man.

As one man to another, Viola, I am interested in all education which promotes the brotherhood of man. I have discussed this with other men of good will including my sister. I am a man of two minds about this question but I am also a daughter. I will abide by my mother's opinion for I believe that, when tinkering with the language, all generations should be consulted.

Besides, isn't it true that we are not the men our mothers were?

If I could consult her man to man, I know that she would firmly state that the use of the word generically to mean all people somehow--illogically perhaps--leaves out half of all mankind.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Baril March 1982

## Editorial

Survivors! Determined, persevering, resilient Survivors. As the NORTHERN WOMAN enters our twelfth year of publication we conclude that we - that Northwestern Ontario women - that all women - are survivors.

Preparing this Anniversary issue and consequently reviewing all our past issues, has prompted our mixed emotions! A joyful nostalgia for the excitement, the optimism, the birth of awareness that the early Journals evoked. A sense of pride for the creativity, the courage, the excellence of Northwestern Ontario women writers. A disheartening recognition of how little change has occurred in the institutions/attitudes/actions that oppress women. Be it 1973 or 1984 the issues remain - violence, reproductive rights, economic equality, health care, day care - and on and on.

Thus as we observe our anniversary we do celebrate the courage, the strength, the survival of women; yet we understand the need for unrelenting analysis and constant vigilance.

VOLUME 2

Editorial:

Our Heritage

ISSUE 3

True to her Taurian nature, the paper has stubbornly persisted, bouncing back into publication from innumerable bouts of self-criticism, colic, fractures, diversity diarrhea, and funding influenza. Her health has stabilized for the time being and we, the bright-eyed collective, hope, from past experience, to have learned the proper prescription to ensure the well-being of the Northern Woman.

## EDITORIAL

For most of us involved in the Feminist Movement, instant recognition of our oppression was very unlikely. It is more probable to assume that although we were exposed to inequalities and sexism very early in our girlhood, this recognition of our oppression did not occur, or was not acknowledged as being a problem of being born a female. However, if it was recognized at all, it was likely to be viewed as a personal not a universal oppression.

The growing stages of our awareness (raising of our consciousness) can be compared to the rungs of a ladder. We all began on the bottom rung. Consciousness-raising is the first step up from the bottom rung.

Our educational system and our day-to-day living does not usually provide us with the perceptions and knowledge that allow us to effectively discern areas of discontent and oppression. External influences such as women's conferences, women's centres, feminist literature, rap sessions with our friends, women's studies, films, consciousness-raising (CR) groups, do contribute to internal recognition of our oppression. Click, click.

# FROM THE JOURNAL FILES

May 1988 Volume 11 No. 2

## Pro-Choice

And then there was the Abortion Caravan's journey through Thunder Bay. Beginning on the west coast the Abortion Caravan travelled across the country gathering support and momentum for their Ottawa protest of the abortion law (1970). Meetings were organized along the way and Caravan members and local women gave personal testimony to the need to repeal the law. Apparently the Caravan's western stops had been supportive but uneventful... the gatherings mostly committed pro-choicers. Then they reached Thunder Bay. The Women's Liberation Group in their enthusiasm and idealism had widely promoted a public meeting... and the crowds came ... the small basement church hall was overflowing ... primarily with pro-choice supporters, but including a small, vocal group of anti-choice women and their "brothers" who persistently disrupted the meeting's agenda. Apparently frustrated by the pro-choice speakers calmness and logic, the anti-abortionists broke up the meeting with a vitriolic display of verbal abuse... which spilled out into the streets where deflammatory accusations of a personal nature nearly caused a riot. Totally stunned by this amazing experience, the Abortion Caravan continued on to Ottawa apparently blanking out this experience as the Thunder Bay stop is omitted from all of the Caravan's historical accounts. Women's Liberation meanwhile matured their political sophistication.



## Editorial

Many months ago, as the Northern Woman Journal collective was meeting to plan future issues of *The Northern Woman*, we suddenly found ourselves engrossed in a discussion of our (i.e. women's) situation. Many hours later Donna (who always discusses with pen and paper in hand) brought to our attention key words she had heard us say. Restricting. Inhibiting. Tied up. Locked. Cramped. Confined. Limit. Cage. Stopped. Caught. Duty. Subordinate. Trapped. Silence. Inferior. Blocked. Excluded. And so, this "Prisons" issue was born.

Prisons is not a cheerful topic. Yet, an understanding that the factors that imprison women are systemic is crucial. The "prisons" imposed by rape, battering, pornography, sexual harassment, denial of reproductive rights will only be counteracted when we fully understand them as issues of male power and control. The dilemmas women face regarding double work days, inadequate day care, isolation, and 'super-woman' exhaustion will be rationalized only when we understand the tyranny of the "institutions" of marriage and motherhood, and can separate the "institution" from our very normal desire for warm, caring relationships.

We will only regain control of our own well-fare when we acknowledge the misogyny of many "experts" (medical practitioners, counsellors, etc.) who have usurped women's traditional healing roles. And it is important to recognize and analyze the renewed economic oppressions women are experiencing - blanketed by that over-used term recession. Let's face it, the governments' (6&5 and 9&5) restraint programs are a direct attack on women. It is not accidental that in Canada poverty is largely a female phenomena.

Urging an examination of the prisons that restrict us is meant not to depress us, but to empower us. It is only when we understand and acknowledge the roots of the oppression of women, that we will develop the strength, the courage and the creativity to demolish the "prison wall".

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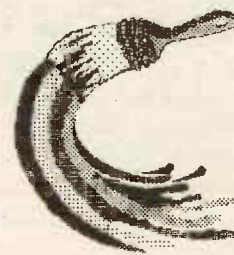
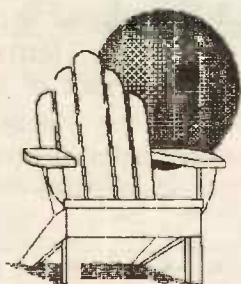
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# Book Review

*Politics as if Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women*, by Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin, Christine Appelle; University of Toronto Press, 1993

Reviewed by Margaret Phillips

If you have ever engaged in feminist discussions about reform/revolution; action/service; process/task; professionalism/grass roots; to take/not take government funding, you will find this book interesting, instructive, thought-provoking and satisfying.

In fact, *Politics As If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women*, by Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin and Christine Appelle, is an important book for all "second wave" feminists (of whichever ideological distinction) as its analysis will inform our understanding of the Canadian women's movement, and help clarify our analysis of the successes and failures of the feminist organizations in which we are (were) involved. The book will also be important for young women and for newly-involved women as a herstory of the English Canadian women's movement and the evolution of NAC as the prime national organization of the movement.

*Politics As If Women Mattered* is not, the authors make clear, a history of NAC, but is a political analysis based on the study of available NAC documentation. The period under study is 1972-1988. On first glance it seems unfortunate that the study ended in 1988, given the significant and remarkable challenges and changes NAC has experienced in the past five years. But with the evolution of NAC and the now-proven enduring nature of the organization it is appropriate that the present stage and continuing development of NAC as a vital Canadian political "institution" be recorded in a future document.

The premise of this book is that given the failure of male-stream politics to incorporate the concerns that women have advanced for this past 100 years, "women's movements can and must develop enduring institutions through which their efforts to gain equality can be organized over the course of several generations."

Only within women's movements - that women control - will a political analysis, derived from women's experience and perspective, develop. As a "parliament of women," operating parallel to the political system Canadian women's movements develop a political analysis "as if women mattered."

**Women's movements can and must develop enduring institutions through which their efforts to gain equality can be organized over the course of several generations.**

Organized in 1972, from the Strategies for Change Conference, NAC originated with the limited mandate of lobbying to ensure the recommendations of the Royal Commission of the Status of Women were implemented. However, NAC quickly advanced to an organization which developed feminist approaches to public polity.

NAC's credibility consistently has been based on its claim of representing women better than did any other existing political structures. The authors conclude that "NAC made good on this claim. In particular, the ideological diversity of its membership was remarkable, as was its ability to act as a bridge between generations of feminists".

The "bridging of generations" is an important theme in Canadian feminism. NAC benefited from the experience of other national women's organizations - particularly the National Council of Women (which celebrates its 100th year in 1993). As well, working in coalitions has always been important.

One such coalition the Committee for the Equality of Women (later restructured as the National Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Women) was established to lobby for the creation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women; and many of its members became the founding mothers of NAC.

While traditional feminists with experience in lobbying were the initial majority of NAC representatives of the new, radical "grass roots" feminist groups who had made their voices heard at the Strategy for Change Conference also participated from the beginning. "In time, these new groups developed an analysis of the oppression of women that was distinctly different from that of the royal commission, and they thereby came to represent an radical and leftist grass roots grafted on to NAC's founding coalition. Initially an organization of convenience, NAC became the arena in which such conflicting understandings of the condition of women could be debated and explored. As a result, it came to take on a unique role as a "parliament of women."

**The ideological diversity of NAC's membership was remarkable, as was its ability to act as a bridge between generations of feminists.**

It is this ability of women from different generations and diverse ideological persuasions to work together under one umbrella organization that significantly differentiates the Canadian Women's Movement from the United States movement. Canadian women's willingness to engage with the state and to accept government funding also differs from American feminism which (at least in the Republican era) as been strongly anti-statism.

The authors discuss the influence on Canadian feminism of the political environment of the liberal era which they term 'radical liberalism', which "embodied a commitment to the ordinary political process, a belief in the welfare state, a belief in the efficacy of state action in general to remedy injustices, a belief that change is possible, a belief that dialogue is useful and may help promote change, and a belief that service or helping others is a valid contribution to the process of change."

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY INFORMATION FAIR

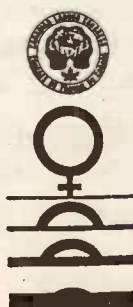
Tuesday, March 8, 1994  
7:00 p.m.  
Scandia Room, Valhalla Inn

Guest Speaker: **DR. SHIRIN KUDCHEDKER**  
SNDT Women's University  
Bombay, India

**TOPIC: Violence Against Women: A Comparison of Canadian and Indian Experiences**

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Groups such as the Voice of Women and the Committee for Equality coalition became feminist in purpose while remaining

"traditional in their views of politics and organization and adhered to a reformist, rather than radical, analysis of women's situation". The new grass roots groups embodied 'radical feminism' with the focus on gender as the source of oppression. Despite these conflicting perspectives there was a willingness by both groups to work together resulting in "the Canadian tradition of integrative feminism."

**The new grass roots groups embodied 'radical feminism' with the focus on gender as the source of oppression.**

The period under study 1972-1988 is considered to have these distinct stages. The founding era 1972-78 had the dominant objective of lobbying for Royal Commission implementation, yet the 'radical' feminists advanced alternatives, particularly, the issue of violence/sexual assault (absent from the R.C. report) required NAC to develop policy positions.

During this period two government departments - Women's Programs of the Secretary of State, and Status of Women Canada were established, and the quasi-governmental Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women appointed these three state structures also "shaped NAC's political environment." NAC assumed that government funding should be sought (without considering how this would affect NAC's options). By the end of the era the new generation of feminists held the majority on NAC executive, and the move from Royal Commission preoccupation and to a new role for NAC began. The founding era "equipped NAC for the changes ahead, in that the political experience of the older generation of feminists had been transmitted to the younger generation."

The Transitional Era, 1979-1982 was a period of conflict for NAC with energy consumed by the issues of internal structure; government funding; membership accountability; executive accountability; voluntarism vs paid staff; as well as basic purpose (i.e. lobbying or being the focal point of a transformative movement).

Why such conflict? The experiences of the founding members and the new generation concerning political process was significantly different, as were their views on what "feminist politics" should be. Nonetheless ... "The realities of politics, economics, and geography in Canada had forced women from all factions to come together to conduct politics with a shared structure and consequently, to deal with, rather than avoid, the conflict..." and that "the resolution of that conflict bore practical fruit."

(Because NAC was wreaked with internal conflicts they could not give leadership on the issue of the Canadian Constitution. It was a quickly mobilized coalition of women - the AD HOC COMMITTEE - that dealt with the constitution crisis and won for Canadian Women equality guarantees. The networks NAC had developed were, however, very important to the AD HOC Committee.)

One result of the years of internal turmoil was that "some members of the executive were beginning to care far more about the integrity of NAC and its political processes than about the factions represented on the issues in dispute. This commitment would be the basis on which the institutionalization of NAC could begin... It also reflected the emergence of integrative feminism as the intellectual basis for NAC's role as a parliament of women!

The final era discussed, 1982-1988, is titled Institutionalizing NAC. The authors "use the term *institution* in reference to an instrument of social organization that exercises collective power over a number of generations." Recognition is given to the discomfort many feminists feel about "institutions," but it is considered that feminists now have the experience of creating our own institutions and that new women see our institution as "natural."

This third period studied saw NAC gradually resolve the conflicts that had so stressed it; develop internal structures more acceptable to the membership; and develop a high public profile. In this era NAC dramatically increased its membership becoming more inclusive (lesbians, women with disabilities, immigrant women, visible-minority women, prostitutes), as well as more broadly based in terms of issues of concern to member groups (violence; sexual harassment; pornography). NAC also became the focal target of the anti-feminist movement - and became strengthened by the solidarity of traditional and radical feminists in the wake of the Right's attack. The authors suggest that "...it is because of umbrella structures such as NAC that efforts to drive wedges among different elements of the women's movement have been less effective in Canada than in other countries."

While becoming more inclusive in the past decade, NAC has not been successful in achieving significant involvement of Quebec francophone women or First Nation's women. The relationship of Quebec francophone women to NAC is discussed throughout the analysis. The FFQ (Federation des femmes du Quebec) joined, left, re-joined, left again during the study period. The FFQ, a 'liberal-feminist' organization was viewed (by government and others) as the critical Quebec women's organization, however, it is noted that "francophone feminism in Quebec developed institutionally separate wings, with revolutionary left and radical feminists resisting organizational involvement with liberal-feminist groups such as the FFQ....Moreover the development of a progressive form of nationalism in Quebec shifted the focus of many younger francophone feminists to collective rather than individual rights claims...these collective claims set feminism in francophone quebec on a trajectory that anglophone feminists within NAC would take some time to understand."

The concept of individual rights rather than collective rights is also a major factor in NAC's inability to include many First Nation's women's organizations. NAC was a leading supporter of Mary Two Axe Early and other Native women who had lost their

status in their quest for changes to the Indian Act. But this was an "individual rights issue...and status women, more intent on collective rights were never significantly involved with NAC. Throughout the 1980s...many aboriginal women came to pursue a more militant, collective-rights approach, which rejected white feminism for a number of reasons, including its stand on individual rights and its failure to defend aboriginal collective rights during the Charter negotiations."

It is within the third era that NAC developed "feminist approaches to conventional political issues that transcend the more limited status-of-women approach." Bringing a woman-centred perspective to the Free Trade debate and Meech Lake (and more recently the Referendum) moved NAC into "a full-fledged feminist politics." This entry into 'male' territory is threatening to politicians but resonates well with many women who can link the analysis to their particular experiences. "The development within NAC of a public-policy debate that took women seriously and that took public policy seriously represented one of the most important advances NAC had ever made as an institution of an enduring women's movement."

**Bringing a woman-centred perspective to the Free Trade debate and Meech Lake moved NAC into a full-fledged feminist politics.**

In a concluding chapter the authors ask "Can NAC survive?" and conclude that NAC will become increasingly important. "Ironically, the very fact that most women know that changes needed to eliminate the poverty, violence, and degradation that often marks their lives will not come quickly makes it likely that NAC, like its model, the National Council of Women of Canada, will survive for many more decades."

The only NAC conference I have attended was the founding conference in 1972. While not active, I have always supported NAC, and have observed its evolution with keen interest. In discussion's critical of NAC (including threats to withdraw membership) my reaction has always been - NAC is all we have, and we need it. From a vantage point of 20 years involvement in Northwestern Ontario feminism it is clear that the power structures of our society will not advance the equality of women. In fact the anti-woman agenda grows stronger. Feminists have to admit that our progress has been minuscule; and agree that it will take several generations to begin to accomplish the goals that in the 1970s we naively believed would be quickly achieved. NAC has served us well and we can only hope it will grow and strengthen and ensure a Canadian political culture "as if women mattered."



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