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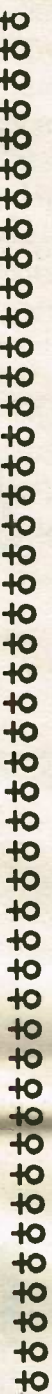
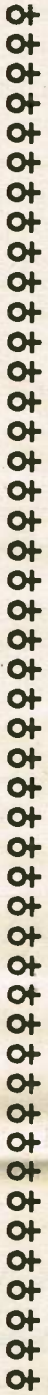
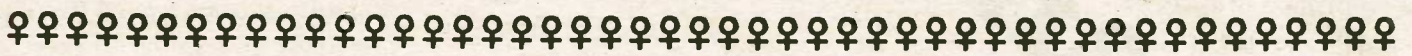
Woman



Journal

Thunder Bay, Ontario

Volume 16 Number 4



Editorial "Departure"

by
Debb Hurlock

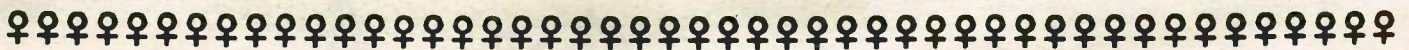
I'm thinking right now of a poem by Bronwen Wallace called "Getting The Words For It." This poem also reminds me of her poetry which constantly strived towards finding the words to describe those moments and those times that we experience "between words." It is 'those moments' when words cannot reach the depth of our feelings and thoughts. I am trying now to "get the words" that will be an explanation of sorts, a reason or *the* reason for the yielding exhaustion of the *Northern Woman Journal*.

As you may have noticed within the past year, it has been increasingly difficult to produce a Journal every four months. Several reasons factor into this, one being that the energy of women involved in the Journal collective, past and present, has been slowly drained by other circumstances and responsibilities in our lives. What this means for you, is that the Journal has arrived at a stalemate. The collective, and all who have a vested interest in the Journal, do not want to see it cease production. Yet, the womanly power needed to bring the Journal to fruition every four months is simply not available through the current collective members. I think we can all agree we do not want to see the Journal disappear permanently, although unless it is revived soon by willing woman, it may become a Journal only available through back issues.

The work that pours into each issue is work in its purest form; it is satiable, gratifying and rather magical. During one of the final late night meetings to finish this issue, a fellow collective member asked my reason for wanting to join the Journal collective. I remembered my reason quite readily. For me, being a member was a privilege; it meant being a part of something that made a difference, where words became a common thread for women all across Canada and particularly Northwestern Ontario. And, to think that this print medium, which was spawned 23 years ago from the Northern Women's Conference, is still entertaining, informing, and affecting women is profound and extraordinary.

Maybe some time in the near future some more women too will recognize the radiance and magic of being involved with something as necessary as the Journal. On behalf of all Journal members, past and present, I think I can safely say that we will profoundly miss the Journal and the spirit that each issue was crafted with. So, do enjoy this issue and I guess after all I have been able to muddle my way to an explanation. It seems only fitting, as I borrowed the words of Bronwen Wallace to open this editorial, to borrow them again to depart:

*as the same old rhythms rise
and change and relocate themselves,
keeping it up, keeping on
for as long as I do.*



Each and every time we have asked for your assistance, you have given generously. We thank you for your support over the years--- your contributions have enabled us to keep publishing the Journal. One last time we would like to ask for your help in paying off our debts for the printing and mailing costs for this last issue. If you would like to make a donation, please do so by mailing it to the *Northern Woman Journal* or drop it off at the *Northern Woman's Bookstore*.

Government Cracks Down on Child Support Defaulters

Attorney General Charles Harnick and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues Dianne Cunningham announced On July 18, 1996 tougher new enforcement measures to ensure that children get the support they need.

Nearly half of parents registered with the Family Support Plan are failing to pay any money at all to their children. Less than one-quarter of the plan's cases are now in full compliance. Defaulting parents now owe their children close to \$1 billion in child support payments.

"The plan is broken, and children are suffering as a result," Mr. Harnick said. "The status quo is unacceptable. This government is committed to ensuring that children receive the financial support they deserve."

Ms. Cunningham added, "Women and children need a family support plan with real teeth to enforce it and an efficient system to ensure that child support payments are made."

Under the changes announced today, the government will:

* suspend drivers' licences of those who refuse to meet their family support responsibilities

* report to credit bureaus the names of parents who do not pay their child support, thereby affecting defaulting parents' credit ratings

* screen provincial appointments, including judicial appointments and appointments to agencies, boards and commissions, to ensure that the province does not appoint individuals who do not pay their child support

* seize lottery winnings of more than \$1,000 to pay child support debts

* provide better methods to trace and locate defaulting parents who cannot be found, so the plan can take enforcement action

* allow support orders to be registered as security under the Personal Property Security Act, so that when an asset is sold, the collection of money owed as child support is a priority

* introduce a pilot project for mandatory referral to mediation to change support orders

* enter into partnerships with the private sector to examine ways of collecting outstanding support payments

The package of reforms also recognizes that responsible parents, who have reached amicable separation settlements and who continue to pay, do not need to be supervised by the government. New measures will be introduced to reflect practices in other provinces where recipients are given the option of opting out of the program. Under these new rules, parents who have opted out may immediately return to the plan at any time. To protect vulnerable spouses from coercion, abuse and unequal bargaining relationships, Ontario will give judges the discretion to prohibit parents from opting out of the plan.

"We will also urge the federal government to do more to ensure that children get the support they deserve," said Mr. Harnick. "We will be seeking improved access to income tax information regarding defaulting payors."

"Our support payment enforcement measures will be some of the toughest in North America," said Ms. Cunningham. "Parents who do not pay child support must feel the full weight of society's condemnation. All of society suffers when women and children are denied the support they need and deserve."

Book Readings Northern Woman's Bookstore

Joan Drury
Thurs. October 24 7:30 p.m.

Elizabeth Woods
Wed. November 6 7:30 p.m.

56 Court Street S.
344 7979

Feminist author and publisher Joan Drury will read from her second mystery novel, *Silent Words*. After reading selections from her works, Ms Drury will also discuss her life and career as a feminist publisher. She will also be available to sign books.

Elizabeth Woods is author of *If only things were different: A model for a sustainable society* and author of several children's books. Ms Woods will read from a work in progress. Elizabeth Woods is publisher of WoodsWorks and lives in Victoria, B.C.

Women and Labour Adjustment: Organizaing To

Our Own Agenda

by Dianna Leeder, Community Developer
Women's Labour Adjustment Committee Development Project
Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council

Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council is sponsoring a project to develop a women's labour adjustment committee for women of the North Shore. We were approached during the spring of '95 by the Ontario Training & Adjustment Board to take this on as a pilot project with the opportunity for continued funding for work the Committee determined would help women. So, why labour adjustment and how can it help women?

Adjustment is a process that helps individuals, groups and communities understand, manage and anticipate changes resulting from shifts in the labour market. A traditional labour adjustment committee is usually comprised of laid off workers, employers and interested community members that come together to place the "displaced" workers or to help workers "adjust" to the fact that they no longer have a job.

Trendwise, we know that Canadian women are participating in the labour market and working outside the home more than ever before. There has been rapid growth in the labour force activity of married women, especially those with children. These women are making a significant contribution to family income.

Women are much more likely than men to work part-time and many women work part-time because they cannot find full-time work. Most women employed outside the home still work in occupations like clerical work, teaching, or sales and service. Women active in the paid work force still earn substantially less than men and are still less likely than men to be contributors to retirement funds like CPP/QPP, RRSP'S and employer-sponsored pension plans.



The percentage of women with post-secondary qualifications has grown and those with low levels of education have become fewer over the last decade. Women currently make up the majority of students in Canadian universities. Their share of enrolment, however, declines the higher the level of study. Women with post-secondary qualifications are more likely than other women to be active in the labour force and be employed. The earnings of highly educated women are significantly higher than those of other women.

Young women, immigrant women, visible minority women, disabled women and Aboriginal women are more likely to be unemployed than other women. Aboriginal women experience lower participation rates than non-Aboriginal women.

And, of course, even when employed outside the home, women continue to be responsible for more unpaid domestic work than men. And the number of day care spaces in Canada still doesn't meet the needs of families.

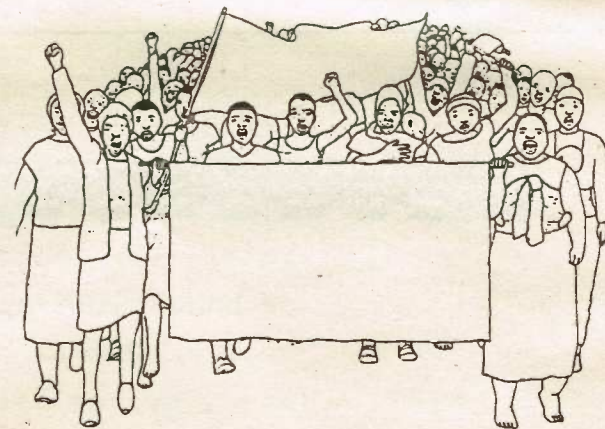
All this, but we are still reminded that Canadian women face lower levels of unemployment than men. For many this means that access to good jobs for women is not a high priority. Yet, women make up more than half of the total population with low incomes and the incidence of low income is especially high among visible minority and Aboriginal women. Mother-lead low income families have the lowest incomes of all family types.

As of the last census done in 1991, there were over 3,000 women in our district who did not have paid work. That number is undoubtedly short of reality. So many changes have taken place since the last census, what with the trend toward downsizing and restructuring and the equally negative trend of government cuts to our social and community programs. There are undoubtedly many more women who are not counted because they have given up looking for work.

So, what is there to "adjust" to? Clearly, women have been adjusting for years. Why do we have to adjust even more because of changes in the labour market that have limited our access to paid work even more and are successfully pushing us back into our kitchens?

Let's think positively. Maybe women could adjust. What would it take to help women become employed? Let's start from the beginning.

Here we have a woman who needs paid employment. She may have young children. She may be on social assistance and realizes that she can't feed her children and pay all her expenses from her recently cut cheque. She has always wanted to work rather than collect assistance, but she would have liked the opportunity to be a mom that doesn't work outside of the home while her kids were so young.



She needs child care she can afford and count on to give safe, loving care to her children and ensure that they get adequate stimulation that does not include 6 hours a day in front of the TV. Many regional communities have no licensed child care at all, so she ends up finding a woman down the road that babysits. She knows she has to be careful about her choice (if, in fact, she really has a choice) - she has heard stories of what sometimes takes place in unregulated daycare facilities. An affordable, high quality child care system would be nice but maybe that's asking too much.

So, our woman finds child care that she trusts. Of course, she can't afford to start the kids until she gets a job. She hopes that can happen fast enough that she doesn't lose the space. She starts hunting the papers and watching the local bulletin boards. The jobs she sees are few and far between and are primarily in retail and service occupations that don't pay very well. She figures she'd maybe be better off if she retrained for a higher paying job. Her choices for what kind of job she wants to train for are limited in her community. There are jobs at the local mill or mine, the town office, maybe at the government office that pay better. She has to be careful about training for a job that would mean she would have to work shifts; she knows that she would never be able to find a child care provider for overnights.

Our woman isn't quite sure where to look for training. She tries the local high school. They tell her that they once offered courses that would help her earn her diploma, but they lost the provincial funding that allowed them to do that. They send her to Contact North who gives her lots of brochures about post-secondary school courses she could take by distance education. She's really confused now. Everything looks really interesting, but what she really wants is a good-paying job. She wishes there were someone that could help her link one to the other.

She finally does train in a field of her choice and she starts looking for a job. Suddenly the entire community (and province, and country) are in a downsizing mode and are laying off employees all over the place. Even the government jobs that were always considered somewhat permanent are going (weren't many of those jobs brought to the north to help sustain small resource-based communities?). Everyone is talking about how bad things are.

The occupation she trained for does not have any openings in her community. Now what does she do? She feels as though her time has been wasted. She does learn, however, that there are jobs available in other communities in her field if she is willing to move. That doesn't seem like much of an option to her; her life and her family are all in this community.

She hears that a local office does job creation and she hopes that they will be able to help her. Unfortunately they tell her that realistically, the chances of her being employed in the field she trained in are next to none.

O.K., maybe this is close to the worst case scenario, but it is happening all too frequently. The bottom line for this woman and so many others is that there are too few jobs for women, too few again that pay enough for a woman to support herself and her family, training programs that don't lead to local jobs, inadequate child care, and a social security system that is moving farther and farther away from actually helping women who are outside of the job market. Women who have historically been even more disadvantaged in the labour market, like disabled and visible minority women, are being hit doubly hard by the current economy. If we don't have a partner or parent to help support us, we could be in real trouble.

The Women's Labour Adjustment Committee Project has approached the development of this committee not as a traditional adjustment committee may have. From our first strategy session we knew that this process was one of constituency-building and of looking at women's economic security.

Early on, we created three working groups who were to gather information and undertake activities that would be useful to the Committee when they came into place. Groups on job creation, poverty and training started meeting, with membership always open to any woman with the interest.

At the same time outreach was done in each community to invite women to join the process either with the groups already formed, to start a regional group around another issue, or to start a group that would work on issues specific to their local community.

Each Group took a different approach and worked on different angles. A good part of what was done was building

of our analysis. What is happening to women, and why? How do we support women who are victims of the "labour market changes" that probably more truthfully should be called "poor social and economic policies".

Groups looked at the cuts that have come down the pipes from government to government to government to women. They also tried to engage employers in discussions about employment equity. Others supported the woman member of the Local Training & Adjustment board, and developed a draft of a handbook for women who are interested in training. Still others looked at the accessibility of government job creation programs for women and developed principles for effective job creation to be used as a lobby tool. They also introduced the future Committee to the municipal economic development offices with the hopes to start a relationship that could be built on later to encourage specific job creation for women. Collectively, the groups have put together "Principles for Women's Economic Security" that will guide the future work of the Committee.

The project also hosted viewings of the recent film "Counting Us In, Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies and Global Economics", distributed information on how women could prepare to answer the first-ever questions about unpaid work on the May census, and facilitated workshops in the district on women and economy issues.

The outreach we did told us lots about where women are at with their current position in society. Sadly, many are feeling a sense of desperation that they never have and many of those women are isolating themselves in their homes. Many feel that unemployment is part of living in the north. It would appear that the home may be precisely where society wants us.

The result of the group work is that we have women who want to work on behalf of the Women's Labour Adjustment Committee toward the common good of women. These groups of women will be proposing the following activities:

- work with other women's groups to develop workshops how women are coping with unemployment and lack of access to jobs that has been exemplified by the cuts to services, the myths we have to overcome in our communities and how women can support one another in tough times



continued page 10

Celebrating Dr. Leni Untinen

by Maureen Ford

To open this short essay, written to recognize the awarding of an honorary doctoral degree from Lakehead University to Leni Untinen, I want to set the scene for the LU convocation by turning back the clock several decades and viewing the "procession of the sons of educated men" as described by Virginia Woolf in her 1938 anti-war treatise, *Three Guineas*.¹ Woolf is writing about the education of women at the same time as she makes her case for pacifism, and she sets a series of important questions before her countrywomen in the process.

Close at hand is a bridge over the Thames, an admirable vantage ground for such a survey.... It is a place to stand on by the hour, dreaming. But not now. Now we are pressed for time. Now we are here to consider facts; now we must fix our eyes upon the procession - the procession of the sons of educated men.

There they go, our brothers who have been educated at public schools and universities, mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, ascending those pulpits, preaching, teaching, administering justice, practising medicine, transacting business, making money. It is a solemn sight always -- a procession.... Great-grandfathers, grandfathers, fathers, uncles -- they all went that way, wearing their gowns, wearing their wigs, some with ribbons across their breasts, others without.... But now, for the past twenty years or so, it is no longer a sight merely... For there, trapesing along at the tail end of the procession, we go ourselves. And that makes a difference....

We are here, on the bridge, to ask ourselves certain questions; and we have very little time in which to answer them. The questions that we have to ask and to answer about that procession facing this moment of transition are so important that they may well change the lives of all men

and women for ever. For we have to ask ourselves here and now, do we wish to join that procession, or don't we? On what terms shall we join that procession? Above all, where is it leading us, the procession of educated men?

I open with reference to Woolf partly because it was Woolf's acerbic (but priceless!) depiction of a parade of wig-adorned, ermine cloaked, patriarchs that first prompted me to eschew participation in university convocation processions. More importantly, however, Woolf's questions serve perfectly, I think, to set the scene for Leni's contribution to Lakehead's 1996 Convocation. Woolf challenged the women entering universities in her era, to consider the terms under which they would enter the institution and, especially, the direction they would take upon graduating. Would they follow in the footsteps of the "sons of educated men" to become judges, captains of industry, or military leaders? Or, would they follow a different path? Leni, through her very presence at the Convocation as well as her address to the President's dinner (see opposite), epitomizes the terms under which women of the 1990's are prepared to join the procession of educated persons.

Leni Untinen was honoured by Lakehead because of the critical work she has done in Northwestern Ontario to bring about better health care, education, and training to women in the region. Particularly noteworthy has been Leni's active participation in organizing to bring about an end to violence against women and their children. As the biography printed in the Convocation program attests, Leni has served as Chair and Board

member of Crisis Homes Incorporated, an organization that sponsors Faye Peterson Transition House, has taught courses in Family Violence Education at Confederation College, and has served for many years as the Co-ordinator for the Northwestern Ontario Women's Decade Council. Leni has also served as a member of the Women's Studies Advisory Committee and as a guest speaker in Women's Studies classes. It is the nature of Leni's work that makes her presence in the procession of educated persons so important. Women in the 90's, who would follow Leni's lead, will put less energy into parades that establish their social standing and more energy into serving their communities with determined socio-economic and political analyses and activism.

Leni's presence on the stage at the Community Auditorium went a long way towards dispelling my disappointment in the convocation address delivered by Dr. Lorne Everett, a private sector scientist whose field involves the monitoring of hazardous wastes and groundwater. It was not that I was unhappy to hear Dr. Everett advocate a personal morality that requires individuals to stand apart from the pressures of international industrial capitalism in matters of conscience. It was, rather, Dr. Everett's lack of a socio-political analysis of the larger context, for instance, his failure to talk about the need for partnerships between scientists and communities, that I found dissatisfying. A more welcome message to my ear was the address that Leni gave to the President's dinner, later that evening. And, there, I am happy to report, Leni did more than join the procession of educated persons, she challenged it to be accountable to communities beyond the bounds of academia.

Leni's brief speech attests, more eloquently than I can, to the significance of her involvement in the life of the university. Leni's words flesh out the admonition offered by Audre Lorde in her essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's house." Lorde writes:

CONGRATULATIONS

Those of us who stand outside of the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference---those of us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are Black, who are older---know that *survival is not an academic skill.*²

Leni reminds us, in her address, that the presence of women in the university and, in fact, our increasing numbers there, must not be separated from the historical contexts of families and tuition-driven funding. When she advocates an education for women in the 90's she does so mindful of the needs of our communities for "relationships based on security not dependence" and for political and social projects that embody respect for, rather than fear of, differences.

When Leni accepts honour from the university, she does so in the company of the women's communities of Northwestern Ontario. She does not receive an honorary doctorate; in Adrienne Rich's words, she "claims" it. Celebrating Leni Untinen's presence in the procession of educated persons, then, I close this essay with an excerpt from another convocation address, one that was delivered by Adrienne Rich to a woman's college, over ten years ago:

The first thing I want to say to you who are students is that you cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education; you will do much better to think of yourselves as being here to *claim* one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb "to claim" is: *to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction. "To receive" is to come into possession of; to act as a receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true.* The difference is that between acting and being acted upon, and for women it can literally mean the difference between life and death."³

1. Originally published by Hogarth Press; 1982 edition, by Penguin Books of Harmondsworth, 70-72.

2. Audre Lorde. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Freedom CA: The Crossing Press, 112.

3. Adrienne Rich. 1986. "Claiming and Education," in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. New York: W. W. Norton Co. Inc., 231.



Leni Untinen's Address to the President's Dinner

When I was a young woman, I thought about my future. In practical terms I thought about being a teacher and in impractical terms I thought about being a lawyer. Then I fell in love, and my decisions became based on hamburger or tuna casserole and what to call the babies.

At the time of my marriage, my grandfather said it was not that they objected to my marrying or even that they disliked my fiancé but that they had always wished I would marry a doctor. Well, I hope somewhere in the universe my grandfather knows that I didn't have to marry a doctor because today I am one.

In those days of the early 60's, things were much different. Because teaching and nursing were seen as separate from university, I only knew one young woman who went to university and while I don't remember the course she majored in I do remember she married a doctor. Too often in that era, young men attended university so they would do well and young women so they would marry well.

Fortunately for the women of the 90's and for the university's tuition-generated income, things are much different today, with hundreds of female students graduating.

In my public speaking to young people, I tell them about concentrating on getting a good education. I tell them how no one should be forced to remain in a violent relationship because they do not have the marketable skills to look after themselves and their children.

I talk about relationships based on security not dependence. And I tell them there are differences between males and females and that those differences and the work they each do and the ways in which they work, must be respected.

When we sell the message of "respect for differences" to society, we will eliminate the violence and oppression of women and children, and end racism, sexism, ageism, and every other "ism".

Today I am very grateful for the honour that has been given me. The women's community of Northwestern Ontario is grateful for the recognition and the respect for the work we all do.

Back to the Land--

by

Lynne Thunderstorm

25 Years Later

Lynne Thunderstorm lives on the land in Telegraph Creek, B.C. These are her own words - this is her story:

My story is one bridging almost 3 decades of transformation, from idealistic city kid to seasoned northern farm woman. The newest challenge has been my divorce after a long long marriage, and the decision to remain on this isolated farm with my children, in spite of all the unknowns ahead.

When I wrote this piece, I had not yet gone through a season alone. Now, as summer ends, my woodshed overflows, the haybarn is full and my root cellar bursts with things to eat. I know we will survive.

I used to be a city kid. In the early 1970's, when the back-to-the-land movement in the States emerged from its urban hippie roots, I thought I knew how to change the world. By the time Nava and I were married and I was six months pregnant with our first child, we had loaded up the old Rambler American, kissed our worried parents goodbye, and headed north to Canada. With only \$500, and the words of Bradford Angier and the Nearings to guide us, we set out bravely to live the good life.

A quarter of a century has passed. Our three homeschooled children ride horseback through this isolated mountain valley in northwestern B.C. as effortlessly as I used to bike through the city streets of my childhood. We live in the house of our dreams which is powered by a homemade hydro system that produces a surplus of electricity even during the coldest, darkest months. We have green fields, a small apple orchard, organic gardens that feed us the year round; we have milk goats and chickens and a view to take your breath away. And even though our oldest daughter, Leaf, attends university, she still returns home whenever she can to ride her horse, to help bring in the hay, and to just plain be here.

But now our marriage has ended and Nava is moving down south somewhere. Suddenly, I have to decide whether or not I can make it here alone on the family farm with my two younger children, 7 year old Fox and 14 year old Raven. I also have to decide if I really want to.

Our original dream was ambitious. With the infinite confidence and serious playfulness of youth, we intended to become sovereign beings. We figured that if three or four families lived together in a self-sufficient community, sharing child raising and food production, we would all have time for the things in life that "really mattered".

Those were the times when nothing seemed impossible. We found the perfect piece of land to homestead in northern Alberta, advertised for partners, and waited. Soon a constant flow of men and women eager to break away from the collective numbness of our modern society passed in and out of our lives. 150 people contacted us the first year alone. The fact that no one stayed after an initial enthusiastic visit shocked us out of our naivety. It seemed the path we had chosen was a radical one, indeed, even for this age, and it might turn out to be a lonely one as well.

Nevertheless, I remember laughing when people accused us of running away from reality. For me, the entire experience was a deep adventure into the fullness of life. I wanted self knowledge and growth and communion with the earth's forces as much as I wanted to provide my family's material needs directly, outside the box of consumerism.



Joy followed me in those early years as I mastered rudimentary survival skills. I had tricked myself, perhaps, into thinking that the mastery alone would bring me peace, because later, that same mastery would be what plunged me into the darkness I am only now climbing out from. However, then, to pluck a sweet carrot from the earth, and to witness a wet baby goat as it dropped from its patient mother in birth, were privileges that made me feel blessed. I had never dug a hole before, or worked my body until the sweat ran rivers down my back. These simple tasks carried me aloft on the arrows of our human history, back to a common source, as I discovered for myself what it meant to be responsible for my own well being.

I also learned how important the creative process was to me as I began to embellish my work, to transform it into art. The first quilt I made was nothing more than an old ragged sleeping bag newly covered with a bold patchwork design, but in the flickering kerosene lamp-light, the Sistine Chapel would not have looked more elegant to me. And so it was with Nava's first rocking chair, the woven sapling fence we made to keep the chickens out, and even the composting outhouse with the large picture window. Perhaps it was this sense of accomplishment and purpose permeating our daily tasks that was the most subversive element in living the way we did. Magic existed everywhere around us and each new day was an adventure.

However, I became lonely, or, more truthfully, the loneliness I had carried with me all my life began to surface. I had expected Nava to understand me completely, to appreciate who I was, and to share my precious truths. But while our partnership had developed an efficient economic design, I realize now we never learned to love ourselves, or to honor the precious spark of uniqueness in each other.

I also lugged around the feeling of being the perennial outsider. In my blind young fervor, I know I alienated many of my well meaning neighbors who might have become friends and allies if it hadn't been for my self-absorbed need to be right. Here I was, a complete greenhorn to country living, rejecting everything these experienced farmers had worked their entire lives to obtain.

The fact that we were both hard workers eventually earned us a certain credibility in their eyes. Our gardens might have looked messy with their raised beds and scraggly mulch, but they grew bumper crops of tasty vegetables that no one could find fault with. And even though we didn't know the difference between an evener and a martingale when we started out, we did our own horse logging with a team of green broke Belgians, and we built a two-story scribe fit log barn we could have lived in ourselves.

The seasons came and went. We should have flourished there. Now that the fencing was done, the buildings were completed and the orchards were beginning to bear fruit, we could have settled into an easier phase and started to dig in our family roots.

The children and I will stay here. I guess I knew all along we would choose this.

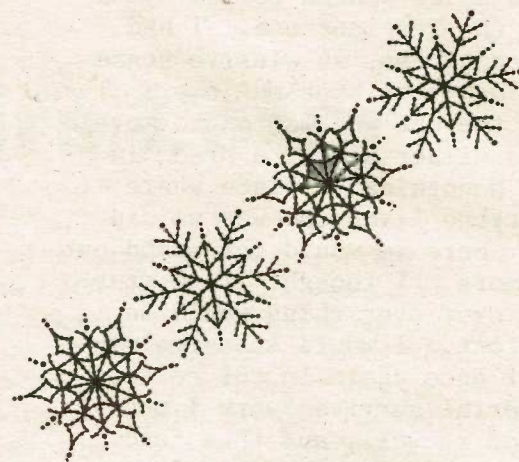
It was my mistake to think that merely changing my external surroundings would provide me with what I was missing in Alberta. I do not intend to make that mistake again. I know that no person, place or style of life can create my pain. I carry my own unrest to the furthest snowy peak, into the sanctuary of my garden, and into my bed at night.

I am happy with our decision to live here. For 14 years this farm has been my home, and it is the only home my children know.

Nevertheless, I get discouraged by the warnings I hear about the poverty of rural women, the dead-endness of single parenting in an economically isolated community, the drudgery of this ceaseless struggle for barely enough money. I worry that I will be unable to manage tasks that are unfamiliar to me, things Nava always took care of, like cutting fallen trees off the fenceline after a spring wind storm or patching up a leak in the waterline. I am afraid of the haunting loneliness that comes, unbidden, when I least expect it.

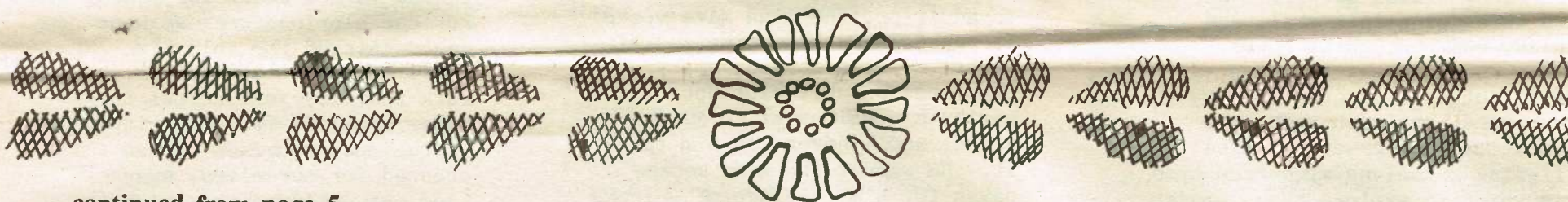
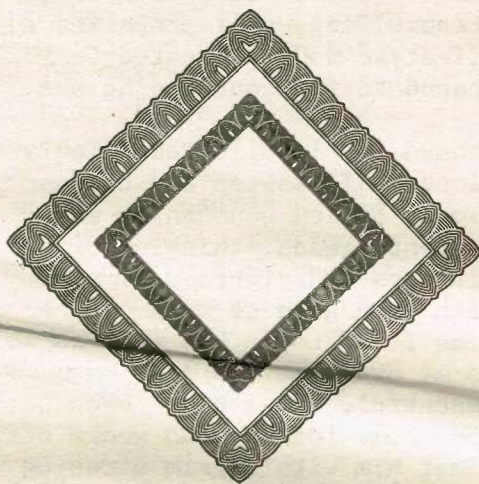
There are definite challenges ahead of me. I will have to learn many new skills. I will have to know when to ask for help and when to quit. I will have to keep my plans loose, my job list flexible, my time open for self renewal, for my children and for making sure the important dreams come true.

I have come a long way from my city roots. I still believe in magic, and I still want to change the world. But I am a country woman now. Any changing will have to be done right here, in the shadow of these mountains, within the pattern of seasons, with my own strong hands.



Tonight would have been my 26th wedding anniversary. Last year at this time, all our neighbors gathered here for a surprise silver anniversary celebration. They brought food, gifts and songs, and the kids put on a play that made us laugh and laugh and laugh...

Now I sit alone at my table, and compose the requiem for our marriage, and for the shared dream this farm and our children represent. Nava and I grew into adulthood together. We traveled to this scary and exciting place together. It is time for us to part, and, separately, to face the unknown.



continued from page 5

- print and distribute on the Internet and otherwise, a handbook on women's training to women across the region

- organize a meeting between women and the Local Training & Adjustment Board to let them know what women want

- link women's training to actual jobs by setting up a computerized women's skills data bank that would register women and their skills and match with the people looking for someone to do work

- invite partnerships with local and federal job creation programs to organize community focus groups with women about how they can create their own jobs and the kind of support they think they need from local programs to be successful, and organize a training session for regional women on the set up of peer lending circles in their communities

- engage in a partnership to assess the availability of "quality" child care in regional communities and support women in choosing and developing new opportunities for quality care

- develop a workshop for women on dealing with the stress of unemployment from a feminist perspective

So here's the million dollar question. "Is the adjustment?". Maybe not. Our Committee will not likely look much like traditional adjustment committees and isn't looking at helping women update their resumes or improving their interview skills. But we are looking to engage in activities that have the potential to support local women and use the local services and programs in our communities to promote women in employment.

We have been told that since this project got started, the provincial and federal governments have drawn a line between economic development and adjustment that leaves the province with the later. What that means for us is pretty unclear, except to say that we will need to argue for how we can help women "adjust" through the work that we have identified. But then, what's new. Women have always had to fight for money to do the work they know is necessary.

From a feminist perspective, labour adjustment in isolation is not all that valuable to women. If we weren't so disadvantaged in the labour market to begin with, it may have been worth a shot. What seems to have been missed is that the latest round of changes to the labour market have not just moved women from employment to unemployment, but have successfully dug us deeper into poverty no matter where we started from.

Labour adjustment must be expanded to include all areas that lead to a lack of income security for women. That is the framework that we have worked under and hopefully will continue in. I encourage all women to join us, or take part in other activities that will support women's economic independence. We have the opportunity, we have the networks, women are the only ones that can pull it off. The time is now.



OLD AGE PENSIONS: ABOLISHED

CANADA PENSION PLAN: IN JEOPARDY

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE: DECIMATED

BY LENI UNTINEN AND

MARGARET PHILLIPS

In a few short years it is unlikely that we will recognize Canada as the country we grew up in, worked so hard for, and believed had a distinct and humane identity. The factors contributing to a Canadian identity as a compassionate and fair society have been the provision of a public pension system, unemployment insurance and Medicare. As this article will detail, pensions and unemployment insurance are being destroyed. How long may it be before we also lose Medicare?

In Ontario the draconian policies of the Harris Conservatives have occupied our energy. With activists thus diverted, the federal government has quietly enacted policies that will have a much more negative long-term effect than even the horror of the provincial measures.

OLD AGE PENSIONS

The most serious is the axing of old age pensions which was announced in the federal budget and will come into effect in 2001. There has been little public outcry about this, for two reasons. Firstly, current pensioners and near-seniors (those who turned 60 by December 31, 1995) are not affected. They will continue to receive their pension. (By not penalizing current pensioners the government has avoided a confrontation with the influential seniors lobby.) Secondly, as there was no public consultation and little media attention, most Canadians are unaware of this policy. If you are 59 years of age or younger did YOU know that you won't get an old age pension?



Old age was implemented

in 1952 to recognize the contribution of seniors to society and to provide some retirement income. O.A.S. is considered "our collective commitment to one another and to the fundamental democratic principle that all citizens have the right to services that enrich us all".

Axing O.A.S. deprives elder women of recognition and respect for their years of volunteer community service and family nourishing; and abandons a societal commitment to one another.

In 2001 a "Seniors Benefit" will be introduced that will replace O.A.S., the Guaranteed Income Supplement (G.I.S.) and will incorporate age credit and pension income credit. It will be available to poor seniors and is based on family income. Old Age Security was a universal entitlement. The Seniors Benefit is a welfare program for low (or no) income seniors. We fear that the recipients of Seniors Benefit will quickly become as stigmatized as single mothers on welfare are now stigmatized. We wonder if seniors will be required to participate in workfare programs to receive their benefit?

The federal government is promoting the notion that the Seniors Benefit will be financially advantageous to many, pointing out that those presently receiving G.I.S. will get more money. We question that the 32 cents per day these seniors will receive will do much to augment their standard of living.

The women who will be most seriously deprived by the new policy are those without independent income who are married to men who earn more than the seniors benefit maximum. Many women who have devoted their lives to home, family and their husband's career, will be punished because of their husband's financial success. The impact will be most severe for women in abusive relationships, but all women will lose the sense of dignity and self-esteem that the old age pension provided.

Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment Insurance was established as comprehensive coverage with premiums pooled and paid as a right to those qualifying. It was an income replacement program, not a needs program. Bill C12---An Act to Reform Unemployment Insurance was passed in the house of Commons, May 1996.

Why Reform?

At the end of 1997/98 the program would have had a \$10 billion surplus. The proven fraud rate is 1%. Unemployment Insurance premiums are cost shared by employees and employers. If the government doesn't contribute, the fund is not in deficit, and fraud is considered minimal, what drove the strategy for reform?

Business is constantly complaining about payroll taxes, i.e. those costs that employers must pay or share with the employee. The lowering of 1996 premiums gives a 1\$ billion break to Canadian businesses. Business wants more.

- In 1990, 87% of unemployed Canadians were eligible for U.I.
- In 1995, 52% of the unemployed were eligible for U.I.
- In 1996, 46% of the unemployed were eligible for U.I.

Soon, less than 40% of unemployed persons will be eligible for U.I. In Ontario, 32% of the unemployed are eligible for Unemployment Insurance. This is equal to United State's standards and is in keeping with the Free Trade Agreement, the United States saw Canadian unemployment insurance as an unfair subsidy for Canadian workers and industries. The program was immediately at threat. That threat is being realized with the passing of Bill C12.

Up until now the U.I. Fund is maintained in the government's General Revenue and Expenditures but it must be balanced every few years through lowering the premiums, raising benefits or the government would have to make up any deficit. However, covering a deficit has not been a problem because of the \$10 billion surplus. Bill C12 eliminates the balancing requirement and allows the government to handle any surplus monies in whatever manner they see fit. This poses the question, what will happen if the government uses up the \$10 billion surplus and down the road the fund goes into deficit? Will we hear cries of an E.I. crisis and the need for even more cuts to benefits?

How The Government Brought About Reform

The Government realized that the public's perception had to be changed. The honourable Doug Young, Minister of Human Resources and Development stated that Bill C12 "[g]ives the unemployed a trampoline rather than a hammock." This implies that the unemployed are lazy and prefer not to work and they must be bounced back into the labour force.

Seesaw:

The Positive and the Negative

By the year 2001, benefits will be reduced 9% for women and 35% for men. Women in general, earn lower wages and subsequently are entitled to less benefits, so this differential in reduction of benefits is the government's bid at equalization.

There will be a \$30 top up for low income families, those earning less than \$26, 0000 annually. However, this opens the door for needs testing. In addition, while we pay premiums as individuals, our eligibility will be based on family income.

Child Care assistance will be available for women who are now in or entering the labour force, if they collected general benefits in the last 3 years or maternity benefits in the past 5 years. However, we can assume family income may impact eligibility for this assistance.



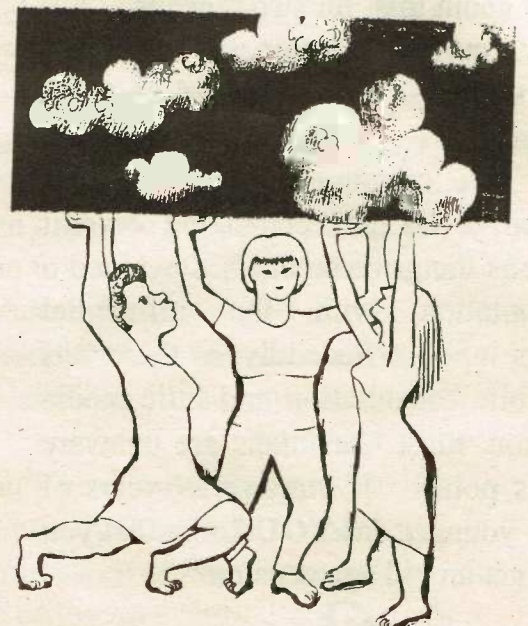
By the year 2001, benefits will be reduced 9% for women and 35% for men. Women in general, earn lower wages and subsequently are entitled to less benefits, so this differential in reduction of benefits is the government's bid at equalization.

You will now need, in most cases, 900 hours to qualify for E.I. This equals approximately 23, 40 hour weeks. To date, individuals working less than 15 hours a week at one job were ineligible (neither paid premiums nor collected benefits). With reform, premiums are paid on all income. Those persons who work multiple short hour jobs, will combine the hours and become eligible for assistance upon lay off, once they have worked 900 hours. Those persons who formerly qualified after 20 weeks, based on their earnings between 15 hours and the regular 35 to 40 hour week, will now have to work more weeks to establish 900 hours.

This will become a major problem for seasonal workers on short hour weeks.

Those persons who earn less than \$20,000 annually will have premiums returned. The maximum earning premiums will be paid on and subsequently which benefits will be based on, is lowered to \$39,000. High income earners, over \$39,000 will be required to pay back benefits. This could equal a 30 to 100% benefit payback required. Benefits will be lowered from the present average 55% to less than 50% of your working income.

This is no longer a universal program or an insurance program. This is a program for the poor. While low income top up and child care assistance are not negative options, the government should be addressing child poverty and the needs of the working poor through a much more comprehensive strategy, not through Employment Insurance.



Women hold up half the sky
Chinese cultural revolution slogan

Other Results

Employers will get subsidies to hire unemployed persons. Employees will get earning supplements to accept low paying jobs. This will create a cheap labour pool for business. However the question arises, on a future layoff, will benefits be paid on the low salary or the salary plus supplement?

Changes also include abandoning government sponsored training and college courses. Individuals will have to utilize repayable loans and vouchers.

Instead of creating jobs, this strategy encourages overtime and moonlighting. Employees, particularly seasonal or those expecting a layoff down the road, will be forced to work overtime in order to build up their 900 hours. It is cheaper for the employer to pay overtime or hire part time help, already earning \$39,000 (moonlighters) because this employee's contributions have already been paid and the employer would not have to match these funds.

Other Information

Bill C12 passed May 15, 1996 and comes into effect July 1, 1996, following Senate approval. There were no cross country hearings. The bill passed quietly at the federal level, while attention was on Ontario program cuts. The legislation immediately goes to the Senate for examination. Senate could call for hearings but the chances are slight because the Liberals have the majority in both the House and the Senate. However, women Senators are being contacted and asked to provide a forum for women's concerns on Bill C12 to be aired, prior to Senate approval.

Canada Pension Plan

Women in Northwestern Ontario have been actively involved in the struggle for adequate pensions for the past twenty years. Survivors pensions was a campaign waged in the late 1970s by a Thunder Bay woman, May Sutton, supported by Decade Council, which resulted in legislative change to continue spousal pension on death of a spouse to widows(ers) age 60 -64.

During the 1980s much activism was directed to having a woman's perspective included in Canadian pension policy. In NWO local "women and pensions" workshops were held in many communities, culminating in a regional Conference. Key positions developed by NWO women included: (1) the expansion of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) to provide benefits equal to 50% of earnings up to the average industrial wage; and (2) the inclusion of homemakers pensions within CPP.

Despite the Mulroney Conservative's promise, homemakers pensions were never implemented, and by the 1990s have totally fallen off the public agenda. CPP benefits of 25% of earnings up to the average industrial wage have not been increased, and presently are in jeopardy of being reduced. Survivor benefits could be abolished. Renewed activism to save CPP is needed.

In discussing the CPP the first thing that must be done is dispel the myths that abound. As economist Monica Townsend says "An extensive mythology has grown up around the funding of the Canada Pension Plan, and little effort has been made to counteract it. Ill-informed and misleading media coverage has contributed greatly to public misunderstanding.

The first myth is that the CPP is "broke". This is not only false, it is impossible. CPP is a pay-as-you-go plan. The employees of today pay the benefits of current retirees. Therefore there is no fund to "run out". As long as there are contributions there will be CPP. Contribution rates have been established for the next twenty-five years to take account of the aging of the population and to maintain a fund of two years worth of benefits. To maintain this two-year cushion, a modest increase in contribution rates may be required.

Myth # 2 is that CPP won't be there when baby boomers reach retirement. Since the 25 year schedule of rates is extended every five years, up to and beyond 2030, when the last of the baby boomers retire, the financial stability to maintain the CPP is assured. Whether the CPP continues is purely a political question.

Yet another myth is that the CPP is a drain on government dollars. CPP is entirely funded by employee and employer contributions. Government revenues cannot be used for the Plan.

The unfortunate result of the perpetuation of these myths is a lessening of public confidence in CPP. But who gains and who losses if our public pension system is abandoned? The big winners are the banks, financiers and speculators who profit from managing private pension funds, and the very wealthy who can take advantage of big tax breaks offered by an expanded RRSP system. The losers are average Canadians, particularly women for whom the CPP has many advantages (and who have never been well served by the private system).

CPP has advantages that must be safe-guarded, namely: portability, protection against inflation, low administrative costs. CPP covers all workers, takes into account family responsibilities, and it provides pension splitting on divorce, pension sharing between spouses, retirement age flexibility, and spousal benefits.

CPP undergoes a review every five years. A federal-provincial-territorial review is presently underway and is expected to submit a report this summer.

Changes to CPP under consideration by the review committee include: reducing the benefit rate from 25% to 22.5% (up to the yearly maximum); requiring workers to contribute longer before receiving full pension; changing the 15% "drop-out" provision to 10%; raising the retirement age from 65 to 70; partial indexing of pensions; eliminating survivor benefits and death benefits. It does not take much imagination to see that these changes will have the most devastating affects on women.

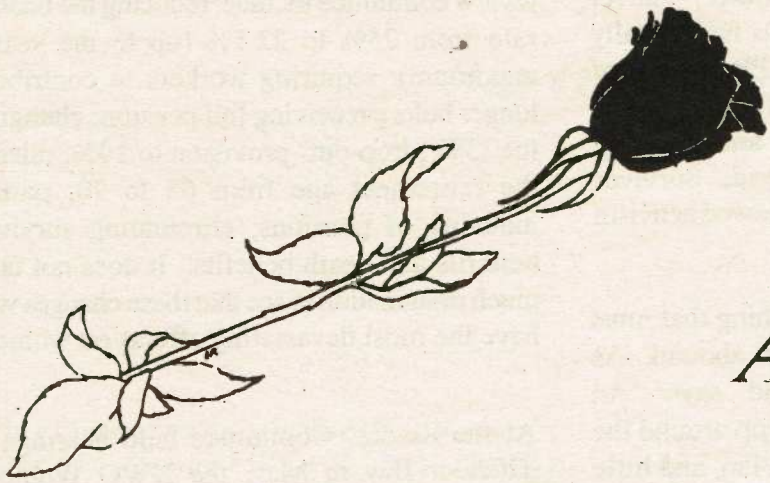
At the Review Committee held hearings in Thunder Bay in May, the NWO Women's Decade Council examined the proposed changes, and the negative impact these would have to women. (Please see side bar for excerpts from Decade Council's brief to the Review.) Decade urged the Committee to include a gender impact analysis in any strategy developed, and demanded that CPP continue, and be operated in a fair and equitable manner. Decade concluded "A focus on job creation in order that more people are working and contributing to the plan, efficient administration along with adjusted premiums will respect the faith of the contributors who envision a Canada Pension Plan as a cornerstone of their financial security."

It is important that the debate on CPP not be considered in isolation. Rather, the changes proposed reflect the continued abandonment of the federal government to the social cohesion of Canadian society. The Canada Pension Plan was created as a social insurance

program, and as such protects the most vulnerable by underpinning an insurance element with a foundation of social support. The sense of social solidarity or collective responsibility is a key element of a social insurance program. The proposed changes would dilute and threaten the social insurance concept. This seems to be a repeated agenda of the federal government. It is not just CPP (or unemployment insurance, or old age pensions) that is threatened, it is our Canadian identity.



continued on page 16



A Tribute to Kathryn Brulé

Kathryn Brulé (nee Klein), former member of the Northern Woman Journal Collective lived from Christmas Day, 1938 to February 5, 1995. Her colleagues from earlier working days at Lakehead University knew her as Kay Andrews.

Kathryn patiently taught the Journal Collective how to do proper layout. She worked at Lakehead University and many other jobs outdoors and indoors caring for people and things. The most unusual was solitary custodian at the Beckwith Estate on White Otter Lake north by boat or plane from Armstrong.

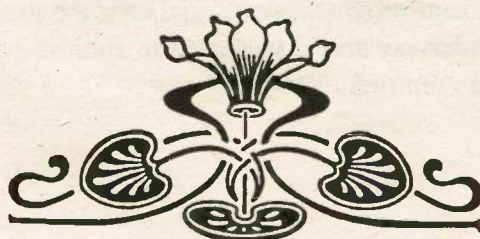
To each of us she meant something special. We find it impossible to capsule our relationships with her.

Fort Resolution, an Aboriginal community in the Northwest Territories has been her home since the late 1980s. There she gained the respect and love of students and colleagues at Northern College for her excellence as an adult literacy educator and as a person.

In her letter to Thunder Bay women and friends in December 1994, Kathryn reminded us that during her time with the Northern Woman Journal Collective she had passionately criticized conventional treatment of the dying. "A person spends years building/creating a life, then when the show draws to a close no one gathers round to celebrate it with the star performer." So we sent Anna McColl on behalf of all of us to let her know that she occupied an important place in the hearts of the Thunder Bay women.

In her last days, in the people-friendly small hospital at Hays River she was surrounded by her mother, daughters, grandchildren, her fiancé, colleagues and students from the College, and friends from miles around. Even a big dog was allowed to put his muzzle on her bed and exchange a gaze of affection.

Northern College at Fort Resolution is establishing a Kathryn Brulé bursary in honour of the inspiring work Kathryn has done. If you are interested in contributing to the bursary, contact Sara Williamson at (807) 683-5669.





Poetry

WOMEN'S PLACE

She'd fled their home
with her two toddlers
when he roared in his fury;
"Three is too many for me!"
While wildly sharpening
his hunting knife.

In the twilight
and the minimal safety
of the strange place
she hugs her children
and stares over their heads
into a cold and dark
cul de sac...

Lini Richarda Grol

Michael's Deli and Bar

Here I am in Michael's Deli and Bar,
blown in from the street by an unexpected
winter. Here I am, the place almost empty,
Michael behind the cash, a solitary
waitress beside the coffee pots,
one other customer in non-smoking and
a whiff of smoke from around the corner.

Here I am trying on disguises, pretending
to pretend to be somebody I'm not.

A maybe-someday-streetperson,
hair oily, eyes shadowed dark with lack of sleep,
clothes many-layered and too big.
An agoraphobic loner afraid of the street,
of open spaces, apologetic in my request
for a table, for coffee, for shelter.
Or maybe an ex- or future escapee from
the psych ward, careless with appearances but
carefully not-wild-eyed, forcing the wildness
behind that extra-sweet, ghost-child smile
that has always made people want to take care
of me.

All these disguises, and I wonder if they wonder
if I can pay for the coffee and apple pie I order
(a sugar-and-caffeine high to counteract the
sleepless night that has left me with dark circles
under my eyes and no energy to choose any but the
nearest-to-hand clothes).

How do they know I'm not royalty in disguise?
I have the bones for it, the cheekbones and
the hipbones. I have seen my mother do the
transformation--tired aging housewife into woman
of true elegance, stunning in the right colors,
the right lines, the right smile. And she not
knowing, of course, as she does not know
when she wears the deadening colors and the
shapeless shapes, when she shuffles in ugly footwear
that announce her the home-bound, mother-tired,
worn-out-by-life woman she mostly is.

So many disguises all at once in Michael's
Deli and Bar, with its memories of beer golden
on the patio in the dust of Jasper Avenue,
sunshine and the noise of traffic. Winter-
driven, I am bundled in layers, all my disguises
at once.

Anne Le Dressay

Poetry

*Come on, Sun
push through the white haze,
illuminate the long bare branches
of the poplars
and the dark soft arms
of that pine leaning toward you.
Make blue shadows
to define white meadows of snow
as this ink makes patterns
on white page.*

Ruth Latta



Excerpts from Decade Brief

"To reduce CPP pensions by 10% to 22.5% of average earnings will have a serious effect on many women. 64% of women 65 years and older are CPP beneficiaries. The average monthly amount they receive is \$306 compared to \$466 received by men. 56% of unattached senior women presently live below the low income cut off. For those whose incomes includes CPP benefits, a cut will have devastating impact."

"In developing our position on pension reform, we are cognizant of the reality of Northwestern Ontario women's lives. The lack of employment opportunities for women in single industry resource communities restricts women's choice and make many women "homemakers by necessity". While survival benefits, by no means offers economic security, the present amount contributes to the income and dignity for many women who face severe economic hardship upon the death of their spouse. This particular benefit cries desperately for expansion not a reduction."

"Northwestern Ontario women share the following concerns with their counterparts across the country:

- Women have less access to private plans than men. In 1993 only 43.5% of employed women belonged to a registered pension plan through their work.
- Many female dominated work sectors do not provide private pension plans.
- Women, with their average lower incomes, contribute less to RRSPs. In 1992 only 21% of female tax filers contributed to RRSPs. Subsequently, more women than men rely on public pension plans for economic security in their senior years."

"The consultation paper presents the option to reduce the general drop out provision from 15% to 10%. This change would require workers to contribute longer before receiving full pension. This strategy is in direct opposition to women's employment realities. The drop-out provision accommodates family responsibilities. Where once, child rearing was the predominate factor, this is now complicated by women caring for elder family members and by forced layoffs and early retirement due to re-structuring. In addition statistics inform us that women are often younger than their spouses and many women leave the work force to care for aging and ill partners. For similar reasons the option of raising the age of entitlement is not viable for women."

"Partial indexing will have the result that because women live longer than men, their income will decrease as women age and the oldest women will be the most impoverished. All proposals to reduce the role of CPP will have a negative affect on women."

Sun Sets on Advisory Council



This is a farewell note from the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. Council was recently disbanded and our office closes permanently on April 30. Last year, the federal government shut down the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Saskatchewan has no Council and in March, Alberta lost its Council. Councils in most other provinces remain at risk to termination.

Council was first established by the Ontario Cabinet in 1973. Its unique role as an arms length body permitted Council to comment on matters where the government fell short on issues regarding women.

Over the years, Council has been in the forefront on issues such as family law, violence against women, childcare, pay equity and pensions. We have worked on almost every major issue of the day -- employment standards, health, environment, reproductive technologies, older women, employment equity -- to name only a few. Newer publications include a fact sheet on women and the economy, childcare and women and poverty. Issues that we worked on were identified by women and women's groups and were brought forward by Council members.

New plans call for Dianne Cunningham, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, to bring together a broad range of individuals concerned with women's issues to discuss the creation of a climate for economic independence and safety for women in Ontario and to promote shared responsibility and commitment among the business, health, media, education, training, voluntary/community and justice sectors. These sessions will be held in several Ontario locations over a two-year period.

Women represent 52% of the population. We need to use all women's fullest potential to face the very tough times ahead. An advisory council is one way to point out the need for change, to call for change. But, as time has shown, it is not without its frustrations and limitations.

Let's not be silent! Let's meet with our MPPs and tell them our concerns. Let's organize community forums around specific issues. Let's get appointed to regional boards and commissions. At election time, let's vote, because your vote does matter. It's the most direct route to influencing government. Or even better, let's either run for office ourselves or support women candidates. These are just a few ways that we, as women, can make our presence felt.

As the women in Alberta said, when their Council was cancelled: "Our lives begin to end when we begin to be silent." Whatever approach we take, let's make some noise!

Council members and staff April 1996

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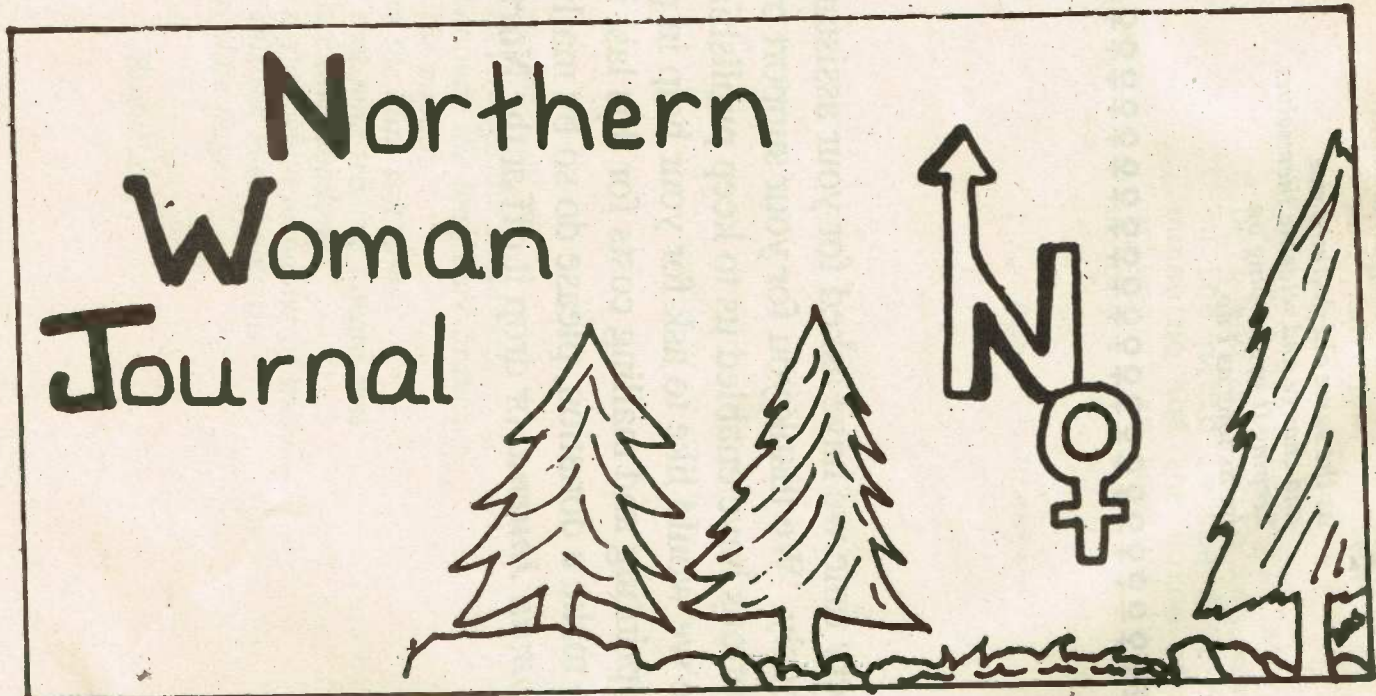


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