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breaking the silence

a feminist quarterly

Justice and Canadian Women

This issue is dedicated to the memory of the women killed in Montreal December 6, 1989.

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from the collective

In accordance with a collective decision at our April 1989 Annual General Meeting, this is the last issue of *Breaking the Silence (BTS)*.

The reasons are mostly economic, but lack of energy and continued inspiration play a role as well.

BTS 's format is relatively expensive. Lack of core funding means *BTS* has constantly had to apply for grants and justify its existence to people who don't share or are not sympathetic to our goals. Consequently we have to keep changing our stated goals to get money for publication.

Moreover, our message, which is general social criticism, is difficult to fit into government agency funding categories such as health issues, sports, etc. Unhappily we have also had to compete for funding with other magazines and feminist organizations.

BTS is not willing to devote half its space to advertising. Besides, our subscription numbers are not high enough to attract advertisers, and most organizations interested in advertising in a feminist quarterly haven't the money to do so.

The economic problems spawn burn-out. If *BTS* had core funding, we could hire someone to prepare those grant applications and take over administrative duties to leave collective members free to concentrate on content and design. Because we have to do everything ourselves we burn out more quickly.

Production done through cooperative editing and hands-on layout, for example, requires a large number of volunteers. This mode of production was a conscious decision: we wanted to give women a chance to learn and develop writing, design and layout skills and so were hesitant to centralize the process by using desktop publishing when that became an option. (Besides, we didn't have access to equipment or the funds to pay someone else to produce *BTS* through a more electronic process. We also did not want to let go completely of our final design, a fear we had with contracting.) But our production process was exhausting.

For years, every time it seemed like there were no longer enough women or enough energy to continue *BTS*, new collective members turned up. This time that didn't happen. Although some women who were recruited by the collective or who came to our annual workshops got involved and became long-term collective members, many stayed only for a short time. (Looking back, perhaps we should have found other ways to recruit.) This time when we lost several key members in a row, there were no new members banging on our door. We just never quite recovered our expertise base. Those still involved burned out even more quickly.

With flagging morale and energy, we began having trouble thinking of ideas for articles, and when we did think of ideas, we had trouble finding women to write the articles. When we, as individuals, joined the collective, our feminist interests were wide and varied and we each had different contacts we could draw upon for articles.

Because putting out *BTS* takes up most of our energy, we no longer have the involvement in other areas. Having used up our wealth of contacts and with few new members joining with new contacts, we had to start doing more of the writing than we wanted to. But we suspected our message was getting stale.

At one point, *BTS* was saying things no one had said before. But we've lost that edge. The topics we originally covered have become more mainstream, and so *BTS* is not as important a forum for those issues anymore. For instance, it is now commonplace to see articles about day care, employment equity, and reproductive rights in the major daily papers and other mainstream publications.

BTS does not have the resources, knowledge or experience to discuss the issues that are now on the cutting edge. Perhaps it is because today's burning issues are not middle class, educated, white feminist issues and that's what our collective largely is. Have we set up our own institution in which only white middle class feminists are comfortable? Could we have done anything else?

We feel we cannot become more radical again or espouse fresh ideas in the format *BTS* has developed. We don't have the energy to revamp *BTS* to provide that format. Our ideas and energy, while they have become shared, are now taking off in other directions. We all want to follow those directions and leave a good thing while it is still a good thing.

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***about* Breaking the Silence**

For too long women's voices — our struggle and our joys — have been silenced. Living in a patriarchal world, we are separated from each other, isolated and silent.

The *Breaking the Silence* collective is committed to providing a voice for women.

A feminist alternative to the mainstream media, *Breaking the Silence, A Feminist Quarterly* covers a wide range of social, political and cultural topics written by and for women, and encourages them to act on Canadian and international issues.

Innu women speak out

by Colleen Lundy

"We feel that we have been brought to the edge of the cliff in the last 25 years. Now they want to push us over." (Rose Gregoire, an Innu woman from Sheshatshit, Labrador)

The struggle against low level flying by foreign militaries using the Goose Bay air base is now almost ten years old. Three Innu women who have been active in the resistance to the militarization of Labrador and Quebec recently spoke at the annual meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women about their people's struggle.

Rose Gregoire, Elizabeth Penashure and Kathleen Nuna told the assembled women about their land, their culture, and the threat to the future survival of their people. Their words were moving and powerful, expressing their determination to stop the military invasion of their homeland.

"We are Innu, all the people that the Europeans called Montagnis Naskapi . . . We have one land that stretches from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Atlantic Coast, Nitassinan."

The land is central to the Innu's way of life as one of the last hunting and gathering societies in North America. It has sustained them for countless generations — for at least 9000 years according to archaelogical data. No wonder that Innu have repeatedly said, "If the land is gone there is no culture."

Illustration: Catherine O'Neil

The Innu spend half the year on this land and it is the basis of their very identity as a people according to Rose Gregoire:

> Sometimes we were hungry, but we never felt hopelessness or that we had lost control of our lives or that we did not know who we were. And we always knew as we know now that Nitassinan, our country, was our home and belonged to us, the Innu people of Labrador and Quebec. And although the Innu life was hard we were rich in our own culture. No foreigners bossed my mother and father around our land.

The Innu have never abandoned title to the 259,000 square kilometre region they call Nitassinan (homeland). Their meaningful connection to this land is in sharp contrast to their lives in the small villages where they were settled by government in the 1960s.

The Naskapi-Montagnais Innu Association describes the situation as one in which the Innu were "coerced into static ghettos and denied their means of subsistence," and where "hundreds of

Innu live in a half world of alcoholism, malnutrition and cultural and social disintegration."

Villages such as Sheshatshit, 50 kilometres from Happy Valley/ Goose Bay air base, are economically depressed with high unemployment and almost a total reliance on welfare. Families live in substandard and overcrowded houses, many of which have no running water or sewage and are not adequately heated during the harsh winters. The dependence on expensive store-bought food results in a diet lacking in nutrition.

The impact of racism and the constant pressure to assimilate into white society contribute to the high rates of alcoholism and violence in the village. This dependence and alienation is a way of life that is very different from the lives the Innu once led. As Rose expressed it, "we have been changed in only a few years from one of the most reliant and independent peoples in the world to one of the most dependent."

At the present time the Canadian government allows West German, Dutch and British air forces to conduct military flight testing over the Innu land, thus restricting the Innu's right to live upon it for even half the year. These air forces are training for a new NATO strategy called "Follow-on forces" or "Deep Strike" which require nuclear capable aircraft to fly into enemy territory at low altitudes and thus avoid radar detection.

While in training, the war jets frequently fly over Innu camps at altitudes as low as 100 feet. This produces noise levels that are greater than the human pain threshold. In 1986 an International Federation of Human Rights report concluded that such frequent low altitude overflights constitute an infringement upon the rights of the Innu people.

In spite of such assessments and the protests by the Innu and their supporters, the Canadian government has not stopped the overflights and instead is lobbying for a dramatic increase in military activity. The area has been offered to NATO as an ideal site for a proposed $800 million Tactical Weapons Fighter Training Centre.

If Canada is chosen for the Centre, the number of low level flights will increase to 40,000 a year, and there will be a dramatic increase in the number of bombing ranges. The Department of National Defence acknowledges that the training operations "will be much more varied and complex than those done under the current low-level training program at Goose Bay." There will be flag exercises, where several fighter-bomber aircraft engage in low-altitude dogfights at supersonic speeds. These exercises will increase the number of supersonic booms (the noise that occurs when an aircraft breaks the sound barrier). Supersonic booms have been known to crack foundations, blow out windows and kill livestock. The booms will be as intolerable for the Innu as they have been for the residents of Dixie Valley, Nevada.

Along with the environmental and cultural devastation, such a massive military development also brings concerns specific to Innu women. An increased military presence means more risk of sexual assault, pregnancy and venereal disease for Innu women. The potential dramatic increase in the number of military men will further threaten their safety and well-being.

Electronic Counter Measures and electronic surveillance could also be used in the military training. These produce high levels of radio-frequency raidation which may pose a serious health problem, particularly for the Innu women of child-bearing age. Little is yet known of the possible damaging effects of such radiation on women's fertility or on the developing fetus.

The toll which this military testing is taking on Nitassinan and its people is mounting quickly. The Innu children are already manifesting anxiety reactions such as nightmares. Some instances of soil, water and vegetation by the thousand of tons of exhaust emissions have been recorded.

The effects of similar military activity on areas such as Dixie Valley, Nevada foreshadows the destruction that would occur in Nitassinan. The Innu would not survive such an assault and one of the last wilderness areas in eastern Northern American might become a wasteland.

In the face of this threat, the Innu have recently escalated their resistance and have been camping on the runway of the Canadian Forces Base in Goose Bay. Consequently, the RCMP have

laid over 223 charges of public mischief against Innu women, men and children.

Elizabeth Penashue, one of four so accused, appearing in Provincial Court in April, challenged the right of the government to imprison her. "They, the government, are the ones who should be brought into the court and tried on the crimes they have done against the Innu. They are the ones who should be spending time in jail for the outright stealing they have done from our land." The four were acquitted and charges against 219 others were dropped. The judge accepted the Defence argument that the Innu believe that they own the land involved.

The acquittal, however, has not stopped the RCMP harassment of the Innu. The Innu continue to be charged with trespassing on Defence property. The RCMP has also confiscated rifles and geese and charged several families living in the country near the Minipi bombing rage with hunting without a licence.

The mounting evidence about the negative effects of low level flight testing and the ongoing opposition of the Innu prompted the Department of National Defence in 1987 to commission an Environmental Impact Study (EIS). From the start the study process was called into question by the fact that it was given to a subsidiary of the Lavalin Inc., a prospective competitor for defence contracts if the development of a NATO base went ahead at Goose Bay.

Not surprisingly, the EIS final report released October 31, 1989 concludes that the NATO warplanes would cause only negligible environmental damage while producing a significant economic boost to Goose Bay. The Naskapi Montagnais Innu Association insists that this report "bears no reality to our life on the land and the devastating impacts of low-level flying." The association is intending to launch a court injunction asking the Federal Court to order Canada to cease the current low level flight testing and to withdraw its bid for a NATO base.

The Innu women have been playing a leading role in opposing this militarization. Their courage and determination has strengthened and sustained the struggle. They have been protesting with the men and children on runways and they have been arrested, imprisoned and separated from their children.

As important as their role is in this struggle, the Innu women have made it clear, as they did at the annual meeting of National Action Committee on the Status of Women, that the defence of their homeland is not just a women's issue, but an Innu issue. They are fighting for their survival as a people.

The outcome of this struggle will affect not only the Innu, but all of us. We must speak out about the effects of such military activity on the Innu, on the environment and on our security as a people. Such resistance needs the support of feminists and all others who are striving for justice, freedom and peace. "We will work with any person," said Rose Gregoire, "who will fight alongside us and create a free and healthy world for our children and grandchildren."

bts

Colleen Lundy is a faculty member of the School of Social Work at Carleton University in Ottawa.

P4W: Correcting past mistakes

by Jo-Ann Mayhew

For several years I have been writing on issues facing women imprisoned in Canada, particularly those women incarcerated at the antiquated Prison 4 Women in Kingston, Ontario. My writing is prompted by my personal experience and by being a captive witness to the pain, indignity and brutality inflicted on very young women, elderly women, physically ill women and marginally illiterate women with whom I live.

My own observations are reflected by those of Sally Wills, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society in Kingston. In a 1988 brief submitted to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons on Justice, Wills states that "when we look at female offenders it is quickly seen that they are doubly oppressed (by prison and the facts of their own lives). Ninety percent of female offenders are victims of sexual abuse and/or incest (yet "Corrections" maintains the right to the physical violation of arbitrary strip searching). Virtually all female offenders are victims of physical and emotional abuse (but "Corrections" will use Mace rather than talk an individual down). Ninety percent are women of poverty, low education and broken homes. Approximately 80% are mothers; 50% are single parents. Most of us have a knee jerk reaction to the Inmate Mother; however, just because a woman is an offender does not mean that she is a poor parent. For most mothers the most difficult part of serving a sentence is the separation from her children. Most female offenders (approximately 80%) admit to drug and/or alcohol addictions."

In 1988, Ole Ingstrup, a former Danish correctional official, was appointed as Canadian Commissioner of Corrections. Ingstrup has issued several Mission Statements intended to offer clear direction to the Correctional Service. He has also organized a Task Force to address the situation of female offenders.

Because of his Danish experience, Ole Ingstrup brings a very positive humanistic spirit to Corrections. The problem is transferring his personal view through the negative environment of this Maximum Security prison. P4W simply has *not* been part of similar correctional reforms for thirty years! The Task Force may change this but all past efforts have failed. The reason for the failure is that traditional solutions – prisons for women across the country – are unwarranted by numbers and are wildly uneconomical ... unless one views prisons functionally as a means of providing a high profile building contract to some politician's riding with the promise of lots of permanent government jobs, mainly as guards. More guards are needed for Maximum Security prisons and that is what is being built. The incidence of violence in Canada is not rising but more and more Maximum Security prisons are being built for men. I am appalled at the vision of this happening for women ... hence the very real need for the Task Force to consider alternative models.

For over fifty years Corrections has simply added pain-filled years to the cycles of abuse women inmates have already encountered. The cost of this traditional mode of incarceration has continually mounted — it is now estimated by statistician Gayle Horii at $80,733 per year per woman. Against the realities of the profile of female offenders and the cost to taxpayers, I continue to speculate whether the continuation of this brutal treatment of women is by accident or the reflection of a more sinister social design of "righteous wrath" against "fallen" women.

I am not optimistic about the outcome of the Task Force's deliberations. The "needs" of the female offender have been studied to exhaustion since 1938! In 1989, I have already been told that the most significant remedy being considered is the construction of a 10-12 bed Minimum Security Facility in the Kingston area. This is hopelessly inadequate. It demonstrates, once again, steadfast blindness to the realities of women in this prison and throughout the entire country.

I realize that remedies for addressing the situation of female offenders are complex. But the simplistic, naive idea that a 10-12 bed facility has significant merit is bureaucratic solutionism at a most cruelly inept and ignorant level. The only meaning to emerge will exist in ol' boy backslapping as construction contracts are signed. Corrections will pacify the public by high profile media coverage of conferences, substituting planning in place of action ... again.

It is past time that basic facts were taken into account as the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) is attempting to formulate solutions. It must be accepted that deporting women from all across Canada to Kingston constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. Nothing should be done to further entrench this practice. Constructing any new institution in the Kingston area would knowingly compound the existing discrimination.

A viable, economical alternative would be to lease, or purchase for future re-sale, several houses that could accommodate a reasonable number of women. In many ways, there would be substantial benefits to following this course.

Financially, the cost of such an undertaking would be far more economical than the construction of another prison. The project could be viewed as a blueprint for a national network. Houses are a real estate investment and could be re-sold as provincial facilities developed and the demands on the Kingston area decreased. It would be an opportunity for a government agency to demonstrate fiscal responsibility as well as engage in vibrant social change. These factors would be a healthy challenge to the status quo.

The need for several houses rather than one facility comes from an analysis of women's needs. The women in the custody of Corrections represent distinct groups.

Women sentenced to (relatively) short prison terms frequently warrant minimum security conditions after brief evaluation periods. In a community home they would be permitted and encouraged to make full use of community resources. Currently the CSC pays substantial amounts to have self-help groups and counselling brought into the prison. These funds could be channelled to support and develop similar programs in the larger community.

Often, women doing long prison terms or even life sentences come to be viewed as minimum security risks. They regress when held in a maximum security environment over an extended period of time. These women need relief from the harshness of P4W but they would not be allowed access to the greater community. These women would need resources brought to them and a structure created through which they could earn community privileges to churches, libraries and a YMCA or similar places.

Two other distinct groups come to mind. One is women

who need and want substantial help dealing with substance abuse and past victimization. Current experiences at P4W are making it clear that these problems are closely related.

The other distinctive group is our Native sisters. They would be better served if they were assisted in setting up a residence in harmony with their own cultural and spiritual background. The dislocation of Native women represents the most brutal form of outrage being tolerated by the justice system. These women suffer not only geographic and family difficulties but are also placed in a situation where "rehabilitiation" is standardized by an alien set of cultural norms.

If successful in the Kingston area, this community correctional housing model could be expanded into a nation-wide network. In comparison to traditional prison construction, the savings would be enormous. Currently, in Burnaby, British Columbia, construction is about to begin on a **new** traditional prison for 120 women at a cost of **$40,000,000**. The design for Burnaby is a modern version of the **failure** in Kingston.

In contrast to the fierce fortress model contracted by the mainly male enterprise of Corrections, community homes would demand intense human involvement, not just dollars, concrete and steel. Employment would be offered to many individuals with positive social skills. The programming for women in the areas of addiction, sexual abuse, upgrading of educational tools and job skills would serve other community members as both additional referral services to community agencies and sources of employment. The model would also be compatible with victim/offender reconciliation efforts.

Community models could easily be adapted to accommodate mothers and their children. The grim and tragic family repercussions of sending mothers to prison is a fact that is ignored by the present system, as Sally Wills clearly points out. The institutionalized practice of separating women from young children to whom they have just given birth or for whom they have cared over months and years is barbaric. Corrections should be moving in the direction of maintaining relationships and developing healthy growth rather than actively contributing to separation, its pain and the on-going trauma of dislocated primary bonds.

The Task Force on Female Offenders may make recommendations that will dictate the direction of many millions of social dollars. Many institutions dehumanize, but prisons, as they now exist, make it their business. Our brothers in American and Canadian prisons have been trying to tell us that prisons breed hatred, violence and social contempt. Four years within the walls of the Prison for Women are making these male realities my own. The price for this brand of corrections in Canada is $759,083,378 each year.

The small number of women involved make the feasibility of attempting alternatives practical. The issue is much more than dollars and cents; profound questions as to the direction to be taken by the justice system into the 21st century are raised. The prisons built for women today will incarcerate the daughters of tomorrow — in increasing numbers. Prisons are not left empty and the social definition of crime is easily changed. I hope Mr. Ingstrup's Task Force will recommend and enact remedies that will avoid entrenching disaster.

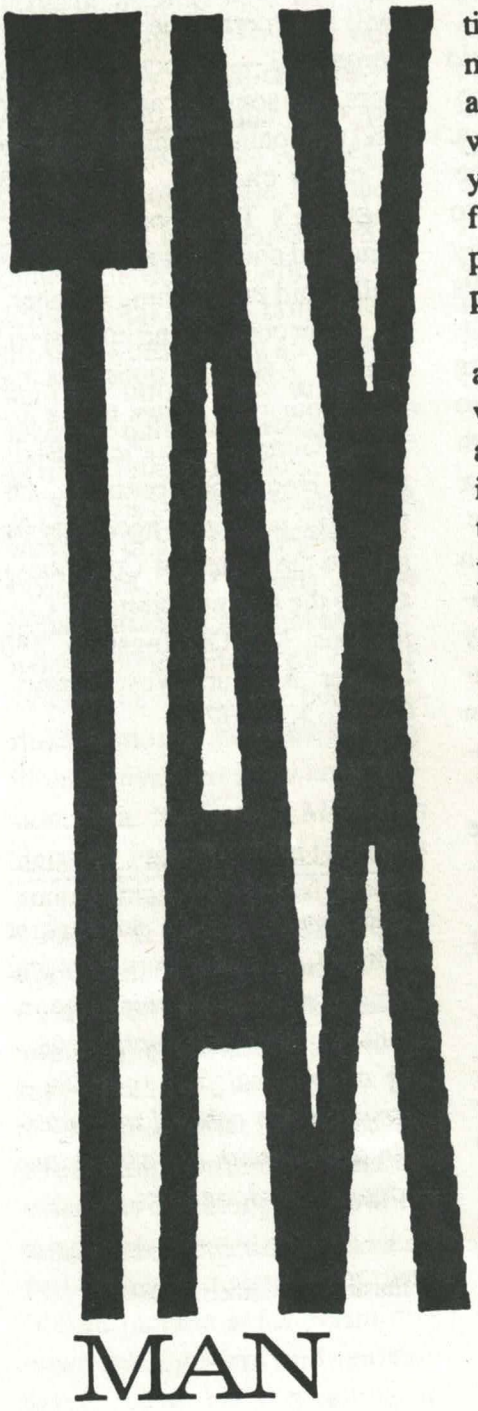
Your concern and interest will matter. Ask more questions and send your own views to the Solicitor General, Mr. Pierre Blais, at the House of Commons, Ottawa, (no postage is necessary for mail to the House of Commons), and to the Commissioner of Corrections, Mr. Ole Ingstrup, 340 Laurier Avenue West Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0P9.

bts

While serving a life sentence at P4W, Jo-Ann Mayhew writes and studies, and is learning woodworking. Her main goal is attaining a chemical free life. She is attempting to rebuild and maintain a bond with two strong and independent daughters.

Illustration: Catherine O'Neil

TAKING OUT THE TAX MAN



by
Alyson Huntly

The tax man. If you too have recurrent nightmares at certain times of year, you'll know who I mean. There *you* are, drowning in a sea of T4s, crying out for help as waves of Schedule 2s break over your head. There *he* is, casually flicking through receipts, with his pin-stripe suit and Jack-the-Ripper leer.

Most years I try not to think about it too much, at least in my waking moments. I avoid looking at that bulging drawer, overflowing with all the important or potentially important pieces of paper that I have so conscientiously saved. Or that odious form, grey and neat in the mail, SIN number and name already complete. So most years I've avoided - repressed it, you might say.

And I've no idea (do any of us ever know?) what it was that caused me finally to face up and take it all in hand. Maybe it was the snow in October, or my year in therapy.

But this year, something was different. I was ready to face my nightmare, confront the oppressor, challenge the tax man.

I started to build a small support group. My friend Jane was first to join, mostly because she gets real enthusiastic about Take Back the Night marches, and could really get into the idea of taking back the tax man.

Later we revised that a bit. We couldn't imagine taking *back* something we'd never wanted in the first place, but taking *out* maybe. Like garbage.

Jane doesn't do her own income tax. Her husband does it, which she doesn't like to admit to many people - although she knows that she *could* take care of it if she had to, being an independent feminist type. She'd use an accountant.

Another friend, Phyllis took a bit more convincing. You have to know her to understand why. Phyllis is organized, *really* organized. Not only does she do her own income tax, a month ahead of the deadline, but she actually enjoys it. She's the sort who likes forms. Weird, I say.

But the major question for her was "what about my tax credit?"

"What about your tax credit?" I choked.

I have always thought of tax credits as some sort of cruel joke, played on people gullible enough to believe those little purple forms are really intended to be used. First you figure out your rent for the year, then you add 1% of your net income, substract 2%, divide by 5.78 and end up owing $10 more or 1% of your net income, whichever is less. I'd never heard of anyone actually *getting* a tax credit before.

But, Phyllis knows a good cause when she sees one, and eventually she agreed to join.

Karen and Nancy needed no convincing at all. They'd both been gouged by one of those scam outfits.

You get half your cash now, they complete the form for you and keep the rest of your rebate. Karen and Nancy needed the cash for rent, so it had sounded like a good deal. The catch is, they could have got twice that or more.

Those outfits are probably in cahoots with the tax man. We agreed we'd take them out too.

Later, we talked a lot about tax issues with Karen and Nancy. About the fact that all those so-called "deductions" are not even worth one little pile of rat dung to them, since they don't earn enough to benefit.

By the time Mari joined, we were already a full-fledged consciousness-raising group, holding regular sharing sessions to get in touch with our own experience. Mari shared that she hadn't filed her income tax for five years.

Scary or what! I thought the earth might cave in right then and there, and Sue had to make sure all the doors were locked and bolted before we could continue.

Mari didn't believe in income tax any more. Ever since the tampax thing. She just figured, since they started taxing sanitary napkins, how could she have any respect left for the system?

When you think about it, it's true. First they gouge the poor, mostly women, while the rich get off scot-free.

Then they start taxing tampons. Toilet paper isn't even taxed! (That's because men use it, which makes it an essential item.)

So we put tax-free tampons in as one of our main organizing principles.

Josée was late joining, and by then we already had a vision statement and a long-term strategy, and were well into goals and objectives. But we thought it was important to hear her story as well. Josée, by the way, is the sort who brings crystals, incense and chocolate-covered almonds to every meeting to help us get in touch with our strength.

Josée does her income tax each year, and on time, but sort of randomly. She fills in numbers on the form, but doesn't much worry what numbers she puts where. She never got it right when she tried, so she concluded that someone would correct it for her no matter what she did.

That helped me to share my experience too, that I've never got it right either. No matter how many times I checked and added and re-checked. I'd always get this form back in the mail telling me what the right answer was.

Phyllis said it had something to do with income averaging, but we weren't really listening. By then we were already planning "direct action."

The direct action plan, when we finally completed it, was disarmingly simple. Take over the tax office, take out the tax man, and implement a plan for comprehensive tax reform.

We set a date for a week Friday and planned a pot-luck supper for Thursday night to work over the last-minute details. Josée agreed to bring the chocolate almonds.

By Friday night we were jumpy, but feeling great. Phyllis had prepared a press release and leaflets. Karen and Nancy brought their kids. Jane brought banners left over from the Take Back the Night march, with the words changed. And thanks to Josée's almonds, we were a powerful force that marched into the tax return office.

The building was brightly lit, but we encountered no resistance (Josée flashed a crystal to get us past the guards). In fact, they were so many women entering the building that we began to wonder if word of our action hadn't got out further than we'd thought.

TAKING OUT THE TAX MAN

Then we realized it was the beginning of the nine o'clock shift and these were women coming in to work.

We crept down the corridors along our prepared route with Jane marching boldly in the lead, then the kids' strollers and the rest of us, and Josée bringing up the rear. It was eerie. The bright lights, and room after room of women all hunched over their computer screens, their fingers tapping a constant and unrelenting rhythm, with supervisors glaring at their backs like something out of a sci-fi novel. "Slaves of the system," muttered Mari.

The tax man's office, in the heart of the complex, was labeled accordingly: "The Tax Man." We paused, and for a brief second, perhaps, our courage faltered.

But Jane moved forward, knocking boldly. There was no turning back.

None of us could have been prepared for the sight that met us as we entered that room.

A huge video game, in full-colour full-action violence, covered an entire wall. All the other walls were plastered with Rambo posters and others too horrible to mention.

"I've been expecting you," said the tax man ominously, as he swung his chair around to face us.

There, in the heart of the patriarchy, sat a pre-pubescent khaki-clad symbol of the system, blowing bubble gum between his pudgy cheeks. He cracked his knuckles, and his bubble gum.

"So, it's come to this, has it?" he said.

We gasped. It was too much for us! It wasn't just the décor, or even his outfit that floored us, though Josée wonders still about the disempowering impact of the bubble gum (did it gum up the crystals?). But at that moment, all of us knew, deep in our hearts, that comprehensive tax reforms were not a possibility. At least this time around.

We were reduced to mumbling incomprehensible things about the system and patriarchy and the injustice of it all, till the tax man got bored and turned back to his video game.

Jane, who has a pre-teen son herself, was able to help us later with a deeper analysis of why we were beat. It has a lot do do with the twelve-year-old male mind - the absolute and unshakably confident arrogance that goes with having the world at his feet. Any sort of rational discourse about radical social change becomes instanly ridiculous.

At our next pot-luck we acknowledged that our struggle had only just begun. We would be back next year, we vowed.

But the tax man had condescended to compromise on a few issues, and so we could celebrate those smaller victories. After all, we had managed to get a tax credit for tampons and sanitary napkins.

Phyllis showed us how to take advantage of it. First you add up all your tampax receipts for the year. Then you divide by 2%, add 1%, substract 3.45% of your net income or $300, whichever is less, plus or minus the difference between the two.

It's really quite simple!

bts

Alyson Huntly is an Ottawa feminist who does her own income tax (but never gets it right), likes filling out forms and enjoys writing for BTS.

The Way of Flint Women

by Patricia A. Monture

Native history is oral history. The tradition of oral history as a method of sharing the lessons of life with children and young people also had the advantage that the elders told us stories. They did not tell us what to do or how to do it or figure out the world for us — they told us a story about their experience, about their life or their grandfather's or grandmother's or auntie's or uncle's lives. It is in this manner that Indian people are taught independence as well as respect, because you have to do your own figuring for yourself.

Following this tradition of oral history and storytelling, I want to share one of my experiences with you. Like most academics, I spend a bit of time going to conferences, listening to other people, and learning and sharing what we are thinking. This is a story about a conference I attended, a legal conference. It is also a story about anger. My anger is not unique to this conference; it is paralleled at many other conferences I have been to and the classes I have been to most other days in my life, so it is an important story.

I arrived at the conference at supper time. That was no mistake. I wanted people to be busy doing something else when I arrived. You see, when you know you are going to be the only Indian in the place, it is not exactly a comfortable feeling. Although the drive from my home to the lodge where the conference was being held was only forty-five minutes, it seemed much longer.

I was scared. I was scared because I was going to be the only Indian person in pretty much a room full of White people. And it just was not any old bunch of White people; this was a gathering of university professors — law professors from elite and non-elite schools all across the continent; the kind of people I had held in awe and respect through these last eight years of university; people who are published and doing the things I am still dreaming of doing and working toward.

I was scared too because I know that those people do not think the same as I do. White people do not line up reality in the same way that I do. They do not understand life and creation the same as I do. They do not know things in the same way I do. I guess what I am not saying, because I am trying to be polite, is that I know that racism exists in Canada. I know that, because I have lived it.

I checked in and got unpacked and settled without incident and decided that I would go for a walk to stretch my legs. I was happy and relieved to be out in the woods again, near the water. As the earth is my mother, being close to her is always calming.

It was not very long before it was time to go to the evening session. I think the topic of discussion that evening was racism. I am finding that my memory is a bit foggy after the events to follow. I know that I sat and listened. I wanted to know where people were coming from. I was not going to jump with both feet into a situation and gathering I knew very little about.

I know that I was not entirely happy about what I heard, that it did not sit well and I lost the comfortable feeling that I had carried with me into the room. I know that because I spoke, and if I remember right, I spoke about understanding and respect. I spoke about how it is that the position of Native people is so frequently described as a position of disadvantage.

I explained how I just could not understand how Native people are disadvantaged. Looking only at the materialistic yardstick, just about everybody in the country knows that we have less education and less income and more kids and less life expectancy than the majority of people in this country, but I still do not see, I said, how we are truly disadvantaged. You see, when non-Indian people are not satisfied with the world they see around them, and it seems to me that more and more of the people I meet are in this position, well, those people do not have anywhere to turn. I have an entire community, or rather, pockets of community all over this land. So when the world of the dominant culture hurts me and I cannot take it anymore, I have a place to go where things are different.

I have had the opportunity to learn Native teachings, to learn about body, mind, and spirit, to learn about balance. Most of the time I am a happy and complete individual, but when I look around me at the people at university, this is not by and large what I see. I see a lot of people who are hurt, a lot of people who know how to live in their heads and do not know that anything else even exists.

Disadvantage is a nice, soft, comfortable word to describe dispossession, to describe a situation of force whereby our very existence, our histories, are erased continuously right before our eyes. Words like disadvantage conceal racism.

It did not seem that people wanted to hear what I was saying, it did not seem like most of the people in that room wanted to understand how it was that we are different. This bewildered me, but it did not surprise me. This refusal, this inability to accept, respect and rejoice in difference is the point at which my anger grows. Equality is really a celebration of difference.

By the next morning, I had decided that I just wanted to watch again for a while because I definitely was not feeling like I was in a safe place. This is pretty typical of an Indian person who is not feeling comfortable. We are taught that inaction is a better course than action because it is in that manner that we learn where it is we are and how to participate.

I should probably tell you a little about the woman who stepped foward as chair in my small section meeting. She was not the group facilitator. She is a White woman, I would guess from a fairly privileged background. She teaches at an elite United States law school. She conveys herself in a caring manner.

She started the afternoon session by telling a story. That story was about a 67-year-old Black woman who lived in the Bronx or someplace like that. She was poor. She was a month behind in her rent. Because she was a month behind in her rent, her landlord wanted to evict her. She was old and arthritic and had no place to move to, so she just decided that she was not going to go. The landlord contacted the police and the police came to her apartment door and told her she had to move, I guess. Well, if I remember right, they kicked in her door and found her with a knife — she was not going to leave her home. So the policeman, another Black man, shot her hand off. I am not too sure how or why or the details, I have lost them. Then he shot her in the head, dead. The police officer was eventually charged with murder or manslaughter, the point being that there were criminal charges laid. He was not convicted. I do not know if that means we are supposed to believe that this 67-year-old Black arthritic woman was a danger to society or what, but she is dead.

In the manner of good lawyering, we began to pick at this hypothetical. What if she had been a White woman and he had been a Black man, would he have been convicted? What if he had been a White man, would he have been convicted? And on and on in the method of legalism we went. I started squirming in my chair. I did not miss the fact that the Black woman in the room was not missing the fact that I was squirming in my chair. I could not identify why, but the conversation we were having hurt.

Equality is really a celebration of difference.

I suppose I sat and listened for about half an hour. I am not sure how much I really listened. I was thinking quite intensely on why is this hurting me. Why is this experience so brutal. Why do I want to get up and leave the room.

I do not want to hear any more of this.

By the time I spoke I was almost in tears. What it was that I had identified was that we were talking about my life. I do not know when I am going to pick up the phone and hear about the friend who committed suicide, the acquaintance that got shot by the police, the Native prison inmate that was killed in an alleged hostage taking, ironically two days after two Indian inmates in Stoney Mountain had killed a White prison guard.

This is my life. I do not have any control over the pain and brutality of living the life of a dispossessed person. I cannot control when that pain is going to enter into my life. I had gone away for this conference quite settled with having to deal with racism, pure and simple. But I was not ready to have my pain appropriated. I am pretty possessive about my pain. It is my pain. I worked hard for it. Some days it is all I have. Some days it is the only thing I can feel. Do not try to take that away from me too.

I explained this to the group and I know I cried a little bit. I do not hide my emotions and I guess that is difficult for some people to handle.

The woman who was facilitating the conversation said essentially, "What do we do next? I think what Trisha said is important and what do we do from here? Does this mean that we cannot discuss issues of racism because we are causing more hurt when we do?"

I did not like the sound of that idea too much because I do not think until racism is understood we are ever going to get rid of racism, that is the kind of beast that it is. I thought about my criminal law class in first year. Whenever the issue of rape had to be dealt with, be it in the rules of evidence or whatever, people took great pains to make sure that they were not inflicting any harm on any of the women in the room. "You never know when one of the women in the room in the class that you are teaching has been a victim of rape." But as an Indian woman, I have never had the same courtesy extended to me.

The rest of the discussion that afternoon focused on racism and how to deal with racism in a classroom. How do we talk about racism? When do we talk about racism? In what manner do we talk about racism? Several of the men brought up how they could identify with feeling invisible, as I had earlier mentioned, when the issue of gender was discussed. Men are seen as perpetrators and never as victims of the social reality that we live in. I thought that was a good point and all in all we had had a good discussion that afternoon.

I was not ready to have my pain appropriated.

At 6:00 I went to supper. I sat beside a law professor from California, a Chicano man I believe. We had an animated chat. During our conversation I remember noticing that a very heated discussion was occurring at the dinner table behind me. At the time I had the feeling that something important was going on in that dicussion, but I did not pay any attention to it.

The following morning, I arrived at the plenary to hear the woman who had introduced the story of the Black woman's murder in our small section quite emphatically, and almost defensively, insist that the issue she was talking about was not an issue of gender. This puzzled me greatly, because the woman in question is a White woman, and by her own admission does not know very much about racism. I sat through a lot of that conversation not knowing quite what to think, knowing I did not understand what I heard. The conversation kept returning to the woman's insistence that this is not an issue of gender.

I figured out what everyone was talking about when one of the women there described what had taken place at the dinner table behind me the night before. A Hawaiian law professor, also a minority woman, had offered this story. She was having dinner with a group of her legal colleagues. The topic of conversation was sports. As she told the story, the conversation began to centre around specific athletes, I believe football players, and what the people at the table thought of each of these superstar athletes. The woman who was telling the story was asked to comment on a certain individual and she said something like, "I used to really like him. I used to think this man

was a great, great athlete. Then I saw him advertising beer or underwear or some such thing on television and I do not believe he is really interested in sports for the sake of sports. With all these endorsements he has been doing, I think he is interested in sports only for money." The unfortunate part of that comment, and the woman did definitely confess that she simply did not know what else to say and did not know an awful lot about football or sports, was that the athlete in question was Jewish. There was a Jewish man sitting at the table and he took offence at the woman's comments. To him it sounded very much like "those money grubbing Jews" stereotype again. This was definitely not the intent of the woman. Her point in telling this story was that intent does not excuse somebody from racism. Racism is racism, and racism stings. All the good intentions in the world do not take away the sting and do not take away the pain.

I eventually began to notice that a friend sitting beside me was definitely uncomfortable. She was more uncomfortable than I was, and I could not quite figure out why. The whole morning I got the feeling that everybody else had a secret that excluded me. Something very important and very definite was going on here and I was somehow being excluded from it, and I could not quite grasp what it was. I was very shortly to find out.

One of the men who had eaten dinner the night before with the woman who told the story insisted that with all this experiential stuff we were definitely going overboard, and that it was certainly time for us to begin dealing with important things like "mega-theory." "Let's make this academic and stop feeling for a while." He also took great pains to explain all he had done to help minority people and how long he had been there for minority people. I think he was questioned about how he knew he was helping if he did not know what minority people actually felt.

The woman who had introduced the story of the Black woman's murder insisted "No, we are talking about racism, not gender. The fact that I am a White woman and that two other women there were White women and that the three men that were there were White men did not make it an issue of gender. Yes, there were issues of gender involved in it, but that was not the important issue." I was getting very bewildered about how this was not an issue of gender. I mean, we were talking about White people, *all* White people.

Everything clicked into place when I realized *why* it was not an issue of gender: the comment that had started the entire conversation the evening before had been made when talking about whether this conference was too experiential. The woman from my small section had said: "No, it is not experiential. Let me show the good stuff that can come out of the experiential, let me show the good stuff that came out of pain." When she finished telling the story about the pain that I had laid on the table the previous afternoon, the man had said "The pain of minority people is like television, we can turn it on and off as we want to."

I was stunned. I was standing up speaking before I knew it. I cannot find the words to describe how brutalized I felt when those words came out. That was me that was being discussed all morning. Did the man intend to belittle my pain and my life? Did he know how deeply he had clawed into my essence? Did that woman intend to appropriate my pain for her own use, stealing my very existence, as so many other White, well-meaning, middle- and upper-class feminists have done?

It is difficult for me to remember what it was that I said. I know I cried. In many ways it was an emotional outburst and I was aware, I think, that the people there might discount my words on this ground. It has been too long, I said, that we have not been listened to. Whenever something like this happens in discussion of gender and race, I cannot separate them. I do not know, when something like this happens to me, when it is happening to me because I am a woman, when it is happening to me because I am an Indian, or when it is happening to me because I am an Indian woman. The forum has not been set yet in which those issues can be discussed.

There are a lot of teachings that Indian people have about balance and harmony and tranquility, about well-being. The modern education system is not aware of these things. They have

not listened, they have not understood, they still believe that they are going to help us. Well, I do not want to be a White person. You cannot make me be a White person. You cannot help me be a White person. Look at this world, look at what is around you. The earth is my mother. She is being raped. She is being destroyed. There will not be anything left soon if we do not start taking care of the earth. And you, as a White man, and you, as a White woman, stand there and tell me that I do not know, I do not understand — because I feel. I cannot know?

I responded to what had been said that day as violence, for what had been done to me that day was violence. The White people there had already decided that I was not supposed to hear about that comment. That comment was what had been making the friend next to me so uncomfortable: she was afraid that comment would slip out and I would be hurt. Well, I am glad that it did slip out, even though I was hurt. I do not deserve to have those things kept from me. As I said before, my pain is all I have got some days. Do not take it away from me. It is mine. Understand it, understand where the pain comes from and why: I have to struggle with that. If we cannot understand this pain that women, that Indian women, that Black women, that Hawaiian women, that Chicano women go through, we are never going to understand anything.

I think I talked a long time. I do not know. I think I was in shock. I felt brutalized, violated, victimized — all of those things — but I was not silent. I knew I had to respond, I knew I could not sit there and let it continue. I could not consent to my own disappearance and my own death. I could not watch anymore, so I spoke.

When are those of you who inflict racism, who appropriate pain, who speak with no knowledge or respect when you ought to know to listen and accept, going to take hard looks at yourself instead of at me. How can you continue to look to me to carry what is your responsibility? And when I speak and the brutality of my experience hurts you, you hide behind your hurt. You point the finger at me and you claim I hurt you. I will not carry your responsibility any more. Your pain is unfortunate. But do not look to me to soften it. Look to yourself.

I reached a point where I just could not talk anymore. Everybody else just sat there. I looked at them and they looked and looked at me and I felt as if I had been caught under a microscope.

Then I sat down.

A woman across the room very much wanted to break the silence. That is another difference between Indians and non-Indians. Indians understand that silence is not a bad thing and silence can mean a lot of things. A lot of things can be said without opening your mouth. The silence itself did not make me uncomfortable, but the fact that everybody else in the room was uncomfortable with the silence made me uncomfortable.

Eventually, this woman spoke and she said: "What can I do to help?" Well, that pulled the rug right out from under my feet again, because I do not need you to help me. Helping is offensive; it buys into the "I am better than you are" routine. I know the woman who spoke did not intend to inflict that fresh pain; I know she did not understand that, but all I could think of were some unpleasant things to say to her. I was to the point where I was defensive and I knew I could not speak in that manner because I knew she had spoken from a kind and sincere place, the only words that she knew how to speak.

I was very grateful when one of the other minority women, the one who had earlier told the story of how intent does not excuse racism, spoke very eloquently indeed and addressed the issue in a good way. I was very very grateful for that and it made me smile. It made me smile because when we women — we Indian women and Black women and Chinese women and Hispanic women — are together we take care of each other. She took care of me and she spoke when I could not speak anymore. She carried the ball for awhile, which is something you see all too rarely in this individualistic world that we live in. When will all peoples, all nations, all colours, respect the circle of life?

After that, the session got wrapped up and there was a lot of nervous energy in that air. People did not know what to do. Before I knew what happened, I was surrounded by the men and women of colour who sat in the room. In their physical proximity

to me I felt safeness. I knew they understood, I knew they had been there too and they stayed there with me and it was good.

This story does not have an end. It goes on and on and on. When I am done telling this one, I can tell you another one and another one and another one and another one. I want to know and I want to believe that it makes a difference. That what I have struggled with will make a difference to my son and to his children and to those who come after. We have an obligation to those children to see that there is something here for them, but I am scared that is not happening and that it is not happening quick enough. How many hundreds and hundreds of years have we been doing this? And when is it going to stop?

Tonight these questions are just too big and too hard and I am too alone.

bts

This article is an abridged version of a piece that originally appeared in the Canadian Journal of Women and the Law *2, 1 (1986): 156-70. Reprinted by permission.*

Words & Bleeding Wounds

by Mary Anne Lamy

my centre is calming now
when once it was a boiling mass
spilling over at your slight command
one word from you was enough
to melt fantasy or truth
my days were filled with highs & lows
myriad valleys between

was that me
in those un certainties

was that you
in those hard terrors

or some nether demon
staking claim to souls

try your words again i whisper
face turned to the biting north

they fall crying piteously
off my hard clear shell
clattering to the deeps

i stand in growing wonder

how did they ever pierce my heart

by Mary Anne Lamy

i keep all traces of him
absent from my place
fearing his words
his loudness
his hands

i do not wish to breathe
the air his lungs expel

i have set up areas
where he may or may not enter
i cover the sound of his laughter
with dead words
i have staked out my home free
& guard it with precision

my self so deeply buried
i can not see the borders

Naming our own violence

by Sue Sorrell and Pam Bentley

A friend of ours was sexually assaulted by her lover last year. What is unusual or what some may think is unusual about this act of violence is that our friend and her lover are lesbians, and her experience is not the only one we know of.

Our friend didn't know where to turn. Like many sexual assault victims she did not believe she was totally blameless in the situation, her sense of complicity being fostered by her assailant's justification, "I was just giving you what I thought you wanted."

If resources are few and far between for women who are sexually assaulted by men they know, they are practically non-existent for women in our friend's situation—"practically non-existent" because some women do have support systems of friends to rely on. But that is not enough.

What could our friend do? Call the police? Go to a rape crisis centre?

Women have a hard enough time pressing sexual assault charges when there is a man involved. How could she impress the seriousness of this other woman's action upon a heterosexist police force? The problem is, how could she explain to counsellors or police who associate rapists with males that her rapist was a woman?

Painfully aware of her limited options, our friend relied on close friends for support, unable to find support from friends outside her intimate circle because they either did not want to hear or did not want to believe it. Unfortunately, even her close friends played a role in the silence surrounding the incident as well. How do we talk about this? What do we do as her friends? If it had been a man who had abused our friend, we would have been up in arms. As it was we conspired in her silence and so protected "one of our own."

Other incidents of violence take place as well within the lesbian community. There is often talk about this or that woman who is known to physically abuse her lover or lovers. There is less silence around this form of assault, often because with some women it erupts in public and we become witnesses to it, but also because it is a little less taboo than sexual assault. Nevertheless, while it is whispered as gossip or occasionally as a warning to anyone interested in the woman, we are hesitant to make an issue out of the woman's violence. We know that if we did she would be sucked into a system of justice that would only compound her feelings of powerlessness and more than likely aggravate her abusive patterns rather than help her to change them. So we do not call her on her actions ... this makes us conspirators in silence.

Sexual assault and battering are not the only forms of abuse occurring between lesbians. A woman might be powerful for any number of reasons, in such a way that she can use that power to coerce or harass other women. How can this be dealt with effectively?

In all three of these situations, it is problematic for us as lesbians to make use of existing avenues of recourse. It is not hard to understand why.

Like any marginal group in our society, lesbians are not well provided for by our patriarchal, sexist, heterosexist system of justice. The law often works against us, and even when we succeed in change the gains are slow and difficult. Hence the well publicized cases regarding spousal benefits for same-sex lovers, visitation rights for lovers of hospitalized women, and attempts of lesbian couples to adopt or retain custody of children.

But the subject of sexual and physical assault is a lot touchier, just as it is in the heterosexual world. Is it worth the struggle in these situations to try to seek justice through the courts? Do we

want to stand before a (presumably straight) judge and try to explain what is going on?

Even without these problems we are hesitant to make use of the existing avenues. We are very protective of our community and understandably so. Despite its problems, to many of us the lesbian community is our family.

But we are talking about rights even more basic than economic or familial ones — the right to not be injured, the right to feel safe. Where are we without those rights, especially important within our own community at a time when we cannot always be ourselves nor feel secure in society in general?

Why do we not take responsibility for the violence and abuse within our own community? Is it because we underestimate the strength of our ties?

Many of us seem to feel our community is very tenuous and volatile, so we try to present a homogenous front to the rest of the world. But in Ottawa, where our community is relatively strong (though not without its divisions), we could try to take that extra, albeit difficult, step of taking responsibility.

We are not talking about keeping up our image for the rest of the world, we're talking about taking care of our own, because we certainly cannot expect the straight world to do so for us — nor should we.

We have to realize that precisely because community is so important to most of us as lesbians (whether we rely on it overtly or not), it is not in any danger of collapsing if we start being accountable for our actions. Because we are marginalized, we do not realize our collective strength. In terms of dealing with violence, we are more likely to lose what is important to us by not talking about it and by not forcing those responsible to account for their actions than we are by ignoring it. We have to try harder to come up with solutions rather than just shrugging our shoulders, and saying "What can you do? She's trouble, stay away from her. It's none of our business."

One alternative to seeking recourse through the formal justice system is to ostracise those who are known to be violent and who — and this is important — **are doing nothing to change**. For instance, an assaultive woman would not be allowed to attend women's events unless she had admitted her violence and was actively seeking help.

Not wanting to abandon these women totally, referral information should be widely distributed and counselling resources made available, for both violent women and their victims. Lists of supportive doctors and counsellors could be drawn up and distributed. Support groups could be established for both lesbians who batter and/ or rape and those who are being or have been battered and/ or raped.

We could set up our own safe houses for battered lesbians and start a pick-up service they could call for help at any time. If a woman had to get out of her home, she could call and someone would come immediately, no questions asked.

More research is needed on why women batter or assault other women. Much has been done in this area when it comes to men; entire rehabiltiation programs have been set up both within and outside the prison system. Once again, equivalent research about and resources for women are seriously lacking. An article in *Broadside* (Aug./Sept. 89) describes research in this area by Barbara Hart and by Claire Renzetti.

The authors of the *Broadside* article, "Coming Out About Violence" assert that as well as research about victims and perpetrators of violence in lesbian relationships, "[c]omprehensive services must be developed for them. Batterers need to be accountable to the community in the way that batterers in heterosexual relationships should be."

Keeping this accountability informal would largely guard against the system being corrupted or abused, but we admit there is always that danger. Accusations could be made unfairly by someone seeking revenge or power. This type of false reporting should be regarded as the lowest of the low.

Inconsistency is another risk of this kind of informal justice system. More importantly, there is the risk that trying to force the perpetrator of the violence to deal with her problem could further alienate her, which is not the intent. However, these risks are even more serious in the formal justice systems, over which we have no control and in which we do not actively participate.

(continued on page 42)

Forum on justice for immigrant women

In the fall of 1988, Breaking the Silence *received a grant from the Ontario Women's Directorate to hold two forums on issues of concern to women. The first forum, held on October 27, 1988, focused on equality and the workplace and the second, held on November 23, 1988, focused on justice for immigrant women in Canada. The forums were taped by our co-sponsor,* CKCU-FM, *in Ottawa. These articles are based on excerpts from the second forum. Yola Grant of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation (INTERCEDE) talks about the treatment of domestic workers in Canada and Lucya Spencer of the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) talks about groups working to improve the condition of immigrant and visible minority women in Canada. Both women have been working for a number of years to improve the lot of immigrant women in Canada.*

On life for domestic workers

by Yola Grant

There are approximately 50,000 domestic workers in Ontario. Only about 5% of them are men. These men are invariably non-whites, oftentimes used as houseboys, cooks, labourers and gardeners.

Most domestic workers are therefore women and they are usually mothers, a fact they have to deny as a condition of being admitted here for employment as domestic workers. Domestic workers are typically from the working class and to a lesser extent the middle class of their home countries. They are motivated largely by their search for employment prospects.

Very few come to Canada to seek language skills or to travel — that's a luxury restricted invariably to white European women who come here as au pairs or nannies and while these Europeans are also open to exploitation, their situation is quite a bit different from women who are bound by contracts to stay with an employer. Indeed, domestics who want to leave when their situation becomes unbearable have to obtain a release letter (a permission to leave) from their employers!

Domestic workers are also expected to live with their employers; it is part of their contract requirement. This might mean sharing a room with a dog in the basement, or sharing a room with the employers' colicky baby, waking up to care for him at night, while still being expected to be on duty the next day. Money is also deducted from the domestic's salary for a private room and for board.

The program under which women come to Canada to work as domestics is called the Foreign Domestic Movement Program and is an initiative of Employment and Immigration Canada. The majority of domestic workers come from countries such as the Phillipines, the West Indies, Malaysia, Indonesia, some from Latin America — mostly Mexico — and a few from Hong Kong.

While the recruitment is for women who speak English rather than for au pairs who are expected to come and learn English (for example French nannies), domestic workers usually speak English but not necessarily as their first language. As domestics, they are also often uncomfortable having to fight for their rights in a second language in a foreign place. They're not quite sure they should be speaking up because they've

been made to feel marginalized as workers.

Many come with different cultural expectations and work expectations. In some countries, for instance, especially developing countries, people are used to working six days a week, sometimes 12 hours a day. For them, the concept of fighting for a 44-hour work week is a little bit foreign as they may not realize they are being exploited.

The term "domestic work" also brings to mind an environment that is not traditionally considered a workplace. Domestics have been excluded from basic employment protections because of the widespread belief that what happens in the home is not real work — it's unpaid labour, women's housework. **Our society doesn't recognize domestic work as productive work** and hasn't come up with any units of measuring housecleaning, cooking meals, feeding children, nurturing, caring for the sick, the elderly and the young, though we have come up with those units when we look at institutional subjects. Domestic work is still treated as though it is something that should not be regulated by the state because some people believe that the state does not have the right to interfere in family problems.

A typical day for a domestic worker who considers herself in a good situation means being available for work at 8:00 in the morning when the parents leave for work and finishing at 6:00 p.m. She might have two kids to care for, to see about their recreation and feeding, some light housekeeping duties, perhaps some laundry for the kids and occasionally she'll have to prepare supper for the family. In the best case, that's a 10-hour work day.

More typically though, domestic workers are expected to wake up at 6:00 a.m., prepare breakfast, attend to three kids and at least one in-law, do the laundry for the entire family, prepare lunch and supper, clean up after the meals and do all the housekeeping required to maintain a family. Their workday usually finishes at 9:00 p.m. — a 15-hour day.

On Canada's laws for domestic workers

Why do immigration laws require domestic workers to remain continuously employed while in Canada? This is a requirement that's not imposed on any other worker anywhere in Canada. Continuous employment means that if you leave your employer today, you should have one lined up for tomorrow or you may be deported. Domestic workers are not entitled to unemployment benefits and that should be sufficient to prevent them from coming to Canada and roaming about; they are not entitled to the normal income security associated with work interruption.

Why does the government demand that domestics upgrade their education? It seems to be another sphere in which our government thinks they're doing domestics a favour by requiring that they upgrade their education to qualify for landed immigrant status. This assumes that a domestic worker is uneducated, which is often not the case. Indeed, some domestics were teachers, nurses and government employees who accepted domestic work in an effort to find a better life in Canada.

The courses usually available do not include upgrading as lab technicians, medical doctors or even secretaries. The courses available are invariably to move on from domestic work to the service sector. The community colleges and high schools have the discretion to deny domestic workers entry in programs of their choice but immigrants are compelled to do some form of upgrading before they will even be considered for regular landed immigrant status.

Why don't domestics have the right to unionize? There are few other workers except agricultural workers who are prohibited from organizing a union. This may not be a big deal to most Canadians, since 76% of them are not unionized, but it is a big deal for low-paid workers. Unionization has traditionally been the only way that men and women at the bottom of the pay scale have achieved any improvement in their working conditions and wages. It has been the only way that immigrant women have achieved any equity — limited as it is — in the workplace.

Why were domestic workers excluded from the Workers' Compensation Acts for so

long? That just accents the fact that the home is not considered a workplace. In April 1985, Ontario amended the Workers' Compensation Act to extend coverage to domestic workers but in some provinces domestics still do not receive any protection from job-related accidents or diseases.

Finally, why does the Employment Standards Act deny domestics the rights other workers have, such as the right to refuse to work overtime? In April 1987, the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation in cooperation with the Women's Legal Education Fund launched a court challenge under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to win overtime protection for domestic workers under Ontario's Employment Standards Act. In response to the Charter challenge, the government introduced in October 1987 legislation that gives domestics the right to be compensated for overtime. It grants domestics overtime compensation after a 44-hour work week. The new law also states that employers could give time off instead of overtime pay.

However, these changes are not enough. We are proceeding with the Charter of Rights case. We are still concerned about the ability of the employer to force someone to work overtime at all and that it is really the employer's option to pay time and a half or give time off in lieu of payment.

Why shouldn't it be up to the domestic to choose between taking overtime pay or time off in lieu? Why can't the employer rearrange his or her life so that he or she doesn't need the domestic 60 hours a week? All other workers have the opportunity to say to their employers, "Go ahead and rearrange your business needs, because I'm not going to be available past 44 hours."

With no entrenchment of overtime in the new legislature, it is unlikely that vulnerable domestic workers will ever receive any extra money from a demanding employer, and it is unbelievable that the domestic will get extra time off when even receiving regular time off seems impossible.

On ending exploitation

I'd like to close with a scenario that was in the news in 1987. A foreign car manufacturer made a proposal to Premier David Peterson to establish a plant in Ontario and to bring in foreign workers who would live on a compound by the manufacturing plant and be paid less than the Ontario minimum wage. The proposal was greeted with much outrage; it was considered highly scandalous that one would think of violating the laws of Ontario in such as fashion.

This raises a parallel, in that living in a compound is very much what is required of domestic workers who must live with their employers as part of their contracts.

I'd like to change that scenario a bit and ask what would the reaction would have been if the proposal had been made not by a foreign manufacturer but by a Canadian manufacturer. I suspect that the reaction would have been one of even more outrage—that a Canadian manufacturer would think of bringing foreign workers to Ontario and paying them below the minimum wage. And I wonder if part of that might be because it's a manufacturing industry. Is it possible that because it is work normally done by men, it is therefore easier for us to see that our laws are enforced? Is it because it's not housework that one recognizes it as work?

The final scenario I'd like you to consider is if instead of a manufacturer we had a foreign employer living here who would like to bring over an employee to do housework. A few years ago, some Iranians and Saudi Arabians brought over servants for life as members of their family. The Canadian authorities reacted with shock and dismay when the situation came to light.

The servants were often released and given the option of becoming landed immigrants. Part of our indignation is that we do not tolerate the notion of servant for life in our society. We recognize workers and we recognize work and remuneration.

However, we are, it seems, prepared to tolerate a situation where Canadian middle-class families can sponsor immigrant women to do domestic work and we are not prepared to protect these women with employment legislation.

It is also common knowledge that cabinet ministers, senators, politicians, upper-class white Anglo-Saxon men who make our

laws, identify very well with the Canadian middle-class employers because, like them, they too have nannies and domestic workers and they too are not prepared to pay them the wages that they deserve.

Our hope is that Canadian society, particularly Canadian women, will work with foreign domestic workers to bring an end to that level of exploitation.

bts

On organizing immigrant women

by Lucya Spencer

One in five Canadians today was born outside of Canada. Half of this number, about two million, are women. Immigrants have come to Canada because economic, social and political conditions in their countries of birth have limited opportunities for them and their families. They've also come because Canada has actively sought immigrants for unskilled and semi-skilled jobs that are tough to fill, such as in the house building and in the service industries.

The popular stereotype held by many Canadians is that immigrant women comprise a homogeneous group with some superficial variations in language and dress. In fact, the immigrant women's community in Canada is strikingly diverse. All immigrant women do not share the same history, nor do they live the Canadian reality the same way. Factors such as race, class and language will determine the specific quality of any immigrant woman's life.

While differences among immigrant women are great, their commonalities are equally significant. Whatever their class, race, language or religion, all immigrant women must deal with the consequences of a society which is sexist, of immigration and refugee policies which are sexist and of a labour market which is sexually segregated.

They must also live and work in a society which discriminates on the basis of race, both in the form of overt discrimination arising from individual acts of racism and of systemic discrimination which is built into our institutions at many levels and affects whole groups of people. The consequences for immigrant women are especially severe.

Many women feel enormous personal discouragement and stress as a result of finding certain doors repeatedly closed to them or to their children because of gender, colour, birthplace or language.

But the consequences of inequality go well beyond the individual's experience. In Canada, immigrant women are often stuck in job ghettos, face greater unemployment and underemployment and encounter restricted job mobility and advancement. Their access to services to which all Canadians are entitled, including health services, is very limited. They earn less money than Canadian women, no matter how long

they work here. Their pensions if they ever get them will also be very small.

These commonalities have formed the basis for immigrant women to work together and to organize an increasingly active immigrant women's movement, locally, provincially and nationally.

Several years ago the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), where I work, recognized that special programs are needed for immigrant women. This realization was not unique to OCISO. It is well known to other agencies and confirmed in all the literature that has been written about immigrant and visible minority women in this country.

Special programs for these women are needed because they are often excluded from access to many programs and services due to a number of factors such as immigration regulations, and also because of barriers such as a lack of child care services or their inability to speak one of the official languages. They also have specific needs as women: information on family planning and on their rights in relation to domestic work and domestic violence.

These women are the most disadvantaged sector in Canadian society — even more disadvantaged than their male partners. Indeed, statistics show that women arrive with much less knowledge of either French or English than men but are less likely to receive language training.

They are, nevertheless, forced through economic circumstances to enter the paid labour force in even greater numbers than Canadian-born women, but are usually stuck in the lowest paid and least protected sectors of the economy. Programs for these women are therefore recognized to be necessary.

The Immigrant Women's Program of OCISO not only serves government-sponsored refugees but recognizes the needs of all immigrant and refugee women in the region, including refugee claimants, domestic workers on employment authorization, spouses of foreign students, family class immigrants, landed immigrants and, in some cases, even new Canadian citizens. The overall goal of the Immigrant Women's Program is to work towards the full empowerment of immigrant, refugee and visible minority women in the Ottawa area and to achieve equal and full participation of these women in all aspects — social, economic, and political — of life in this country.

As immigrant and visible minority women know, equality is never given on a silver platter to anyone. They have to struggle to receive equal treatment. But immigrant and visible minority women are becoming increasingly more organized and are learning to speak out for the changes that will make this society a better one for all of us.

The Immigrant Women's Program, for instance, networks and lobbies on behalf of the women they represent at many levels. At the local level, this might include advocating for access to language training for a client, giving career planning and counselling services, accompanying women to Employment and Immigration Centres, lobbying individual offices to grant women access to training courses, guiding women to child care facilities, and supporting their choices when things become difficult.

At the provincial level, this might include lobbying the government and working with provincial women's organizations, helping them prepare briefs on issues of concern to immigrant and visible minority women. We also have had ongoing consultations with the Ontario Minister of Citizenship and the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues bringing to their attention the concerns of immigrant and visible minority women and requesting that they respond in a positive way.

On the national level, the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (NOIVMW) has also recognized the needs of these

(continued on page 42)

We're all sisters here, ...

by Tünde Nemeth

I love working with women, especially collectively and for a good cause.

That's why I always approach collective projects with happy anticipation, as a chance to work in an egalitarian setting with mutual support, where everyone's voice is equally powerful and equally respected, where everyone's experience is valid, where decisions are made by consensus, where no one feels coerced or left out.

Sometimes the reality far exceeds my expectations, as it has in working for *Breaking the Silence*. Not that we haven't had our share of troubles — we certainly have. But it's been a wonderful experience for many of us.

There have always been a few stronger personalities in the group. What I mean by this is women with "leadership" abilities in the traditional sense of the word. Women who are comfortable enough in their own skin that they don't need to impose their power on others — it's just there. Women who try to let go of their need to be perfect, who try to understand and accept their weaknesses rather than being paralyzed by them.

At its best, the *BTS* collective has succeeded in drawing on each member's strengths and supporting her weaknesses.

Power dynamics in the collective

This is what is meant by the idea of "power-to" — the ability to use your strength, to assert yourself in order to accomplish things and fight for your rights, not to take "power–over" anyone else (1).

This is what working in a feminist collective is supposed to be about, right? Empowering ourselves and each other, working towards the common goal of a decent life for all women, all around the world.

But it doesn't always work out as well as this, no matter how committed or well-intentioned we are.

You know what I mean. No matter how we deny it, the power dynamic among us doesn't always seem quite so egalitarian, quite so ... well, sisterly. Sometimes it's hard to tell that we're all after the same goal, let alone on the same side.

And when that happens, it's awfully confusing.

It's especially confusing because it can take quite a while to figure out what's going on. You start with the premise that we're all sisters here, we share the same oppression, we're committed to changing the world in a way we've agreed on.

But gradually you come to realize that something is not quite right.

Maybe you're finding yourself carrying more of the load than seems fair. Or wondering if there's something wrong with **you** because you're suddenly feeling unfeminist and you always seem to be saying the wrong thing.

You bite your tongue when the chairperson, in proper feminist fashion, asks everyone to say how she's feeling — because you're sitting there thinking, why bother? Nobody will be honest about how she's feeling anyway.

Or maybe you're the one finding it hard to be honest. Maybe you're having trouble articulating just what the problem is.

Maybe you think you're hallucinating — you can't believe there really is a power problem in **your** collective. So you decide you're being paranoid and sit through yet another meeting

agreeing to things you don't agree with.

Then you start talking with some of the other collective members, and discover that you're all having the same hallucination. Your sisters also think they're alone in not being able to really say what they think. They too think one or more members of the collective are drawing power to themselves in a way that doesn't seem right.

This power may take the form of one or more members dominating the discussion in collective meetings so that, one way or another, she (or they) always seems to get her way about what is to be done and when and how, regardless of what the rest of you think. Sometimes it's just a matter of one person (or a very few people) having all the really good ideas, the great network of contacts, the most consistent political correctness, and the seemingly limitless energy, vision and desire to get things done.

Other forms it can take include: one person independently deciding to bypass the collective process by, for example, speaking on behalf of the collective without benefit of consultation; changing decisions made at collective meetings and acting on these decisions without the knowledge or consent of the other members; or perpetually not living up to commitments made at meetings.

Hierarchy in the collective

As you talk, you begin to suspect there's an invisible power structure — a (gasp!) hierarchy — at work in your collective.

One way to tell is to watch what happens when you decide, individually or collectively, to set aside all your years of socialization as women and confront the problem head-on.

And what happens? The woman (or women) with the power problem claims the rest of you are crazy or wrong, or are oppressing her; or — my personal favorite — says something to the effect of, "I'm more oppressed than you are (because of my class/ race/ whatever), so you either do what I say or you're being politically incorrect."

You feel disappointed and angry. Feminists aren't supposed to play these power games. Furthermore, we're supposed to be able to work these things out when they do arise.

So what just happened here?

Everyone walks away wondering, what really happened here? How did we end up with a hierarchy when we all thought we had a collective?

I think the ideology of sisterhood, combined with the notion that feminism's "ends and its means are identical" (2) — in other words, that the theory is the practice — allows us to deny that there is a power structure among us. But there is, undeniably and inescapably, if for no other reason than that the stronger personalities do tend to get things done and get what they want.

The point is for everyone to be conscious of it.

Collective members can help each other recognize when they're stepping over the line by agreeing to bring the question of personal power into the open honestly and constructively. We can listen for those who deny it the loudest and challenge them on it.

Each of us also has to listen to herself, to what she denies, and each of us must challenge ourselves more than anyone on our relationship to power. Each of us has to agree to not become defensive when the collective thinks we've crossed the line. All of us can try to become more conscious of our own potential for abusing personal power.

We can all recognize that no one is immune.

In order to do this, we need to become overtly aware of two things: that "the-theory-is-the-practice" is only true in theory; and that being sisters doesn't mean we always get along.

Theory equals practice?

The notion that feminism's ends are the same as its means raises all kinds of problems because it evokes a whole network of assumptions.

First, the notion itself rests on an incorrect assumption of a single "feminism" with a single common end. In fact, feminism is a pluralistic movement with widely divergent ends, means, theories and practices. Some of us, for example, are committed to changing the world by changing the way people think; others are equally committed to separatism. Some of us believe we can best effect change from within existing institutions and systems of the patriarchy; others do not.

Even if we could agree on a single theoretical perspective, the idea of "the ends equals the means" allows us to assume that if we share a goal we also share a practice. That is, it leads to the further assumption that if an organization has feminist goals it will use feminist means to reach those goals; it will necessarily be sisterly, will operate on consensus, not hierarchy, will treat its workers with more respect than malestream organizations, will provide on-site day care, etc., etc. Obviously — and sadly enough — this is not the case (3).

Even when the organization is structured as a collective, there are no guarantees because the collective structure itself does not in fact preclude hierarchy. The structure simply makes for yet another assumption — that all collective members are equal, regardless of what actual power dynamic exists within a given collective. In fact there are fewer checks on personal power than in an overtly hierarchical structure, where at least the rules are clearer and therefore when people break the rules it's easier to tell.

Sisters

The second problem with the idea that feminism's ends and means are the same is that it rests on a glorified, idealized vision of "sisterhood" that is dubious at best. I think very few of us who have made it through the past, say, five to ten years of feminism still believe that our common gender is all we need to be able to get along and work together.

Yet our collective optimism is founded on this very idea, despite our experience to the contrary. Most of us have long since faced the fact that although women share a fundamental oppression based on our sex, not every woman considers it the central oppression in her life.

In fact, it's possible that it's only central for white heterosexual women of the middle class, and possibly only those in North America. North American Native women, for example, along with feminists in other parts of the world, are likely to view their primary oppression as based in white, western imperialism and colonialism, and their gender oppression as part of that but not separate from it; hence, many ally themselves far more closely with the men they live and work with than with other women outside their community.

The personal is political works both ways

I think it's a mistake to ignore and thus deny individual power in a collective situation. I think we tend to put power struggles down to individual differences or personality conflicts.

I think we may be forgetting in the process the one thing most of us can probably agree on as a deeply and passionately felt truth: that the personal is political.

But what may be just as important in getting out of the impasse of personal power politics is to also understand that the converse is true: the political is personal.

The personal can be the key to understanding the ways in which women use power with and against each other. We can use findings in recent feminist literature about individual women's friendships to try to sort out what's going on in the collective. It's useful to know why we try to avoid conflict in our relationships with other women. It's useful to understand the role of envy, anger, fear and other deep-seated emotions.

This understanding can also help us handle disputes and power problems within a collective.

In the constant crisis of trying to get funding so we can try to get the job done with too few people on too little sleep for too long, I think we can get so task-oriented that we never really get to know our fellow collective members as friends, but at best as friendly co-workers.

Maybe we could use our ability to empathize to really listen to the women who grab power and then tell us how oppressed they're feeling. Maybe then they wouldn't need to feel so insecure about their position in the collective and the world.

Maybe we could do better at nurturing our collectives, the way we try to nurture each other in our personal relationships. It wouldn't even taken any more time or energy than we already waste dealing with and gossiping about conflict.

I'm calling for this kind of action because I am in some despair about what I see happening in the women's movement — the deep divisions, the public squabbling, the numerous women I know personally who have either

been burned, are victims of burn-out or are just plain deathly ill.

I fear that we are on the verge of self-destruction (aided and abetted by the media's gleeful eagerness to publicize our problems and obliterate our successes) with the new right waiting none too patiently to leap into the breach.

I'm not ready to let that happen. We have far too much stake in this to allow ourselves to be once again subsumed in man's world, once again an aberration or a footnote in the history of that world.

bts

Notes

(1) Terms I became familiar with through Marilyn French's 1984 book, *Beyond power: On women, men and morals* (New York: Summit Books).

(2) Ibid, p. 445.

(3) For a good discussion of how bad it can really get in feminist organizations, see Ruth Latta, *Breaking the Silence* 6, 4 (June 1988): 27.

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loss

by Joanna Kafarowski

I stand again with the ranks of unpregnant women.
My form is slender, my breasts are firm and taut,
My stomach no longer churns and pitches at meal-times
And I drink whatever I like —
Except milk — I don't want to drink that for a while.

I sleep easier at night not having to worry
About hurting tiny arm, tiny leg,
I have no more rabid fears of a German measles outbreak,
I have —
No more baby.

The needle marks in arms and hip will fade in time,
A mark of character, I'm sure,
And this blank paleness is so becoming
For one of my complexion.

I'll soon forget the first names of the nurses in emergency,
The technicians in ultrasound,
But my body is working quite well now, thank you, and —
I don't want to visit the doctor again —
Ever.

The women poor of Peru

Illustration: Catherine O'Neill

by Liisa North

Soledad, age 35, with three children and a husband who works occasionally as an electrician, rises at 4:00 a.m. In the damp grey cold of a Lima winter morning, she shivers as she dresses. In the crowded room which is her home, the children share a single bed. Her husband sleeps near the kerosene stove in the corner.

The dishes and children's school books clutter the table. The many-times mended clothes hang from nails. She eats a stale bun with tea and packs her merchandise for the hour-and-a-half ride from Villa El Salvador to the centre of Lima. Most likely, there will be standing room only in the packed noisy bus.

She is one of the thousands of *ambulantes* or street vendors who crowd the capital's major commercial districts to hawk cigarettes, candy, magazines, lottery tickets, cheap clothing and trinkets for tourists.

Before leaving around 5:30 a.m., Soledad wakes her teenage daughter, Manuela, who will serve breakfast for the family and make sure her two young brothers arrive on time for the morning shift at the local primary school. Fourteen-year-old Manuela will do some school work, but most of her morning will be spent cleaning and washing clothes at the water spigot in the shack which adjoins the house. Sometimes, she will share these tasks with her mother during the evening hours.

Her father, depressed and angry, will soon start off his daily round of haunting construction sites in search of work.

Soledad will return home sometime after noon with her morning's earnings. In her "free moments" she also knits sweaters on consignment. Since Ramiro lost his job three months ago, her work brings in the household's only regular income.

Around 1:30, Soledad and Manuela will pick up the family's most important daily meal at a *comedor popular*. It is one of some 800 communal or popular kitchens which function in Lima today. The weekly fee is modest because Soledad, like the other women who organized the comedor, combine resources and take turns preparing the meals for the dozen families served by it.

Some of the women work at the *comedor* in the mornings. Soledad spends one afternoon a week cooking the snacks which will be distributed in the evening. But she is distracted and worried about what her younger children may be up to — no one is at home. Manuela attends the afternoon shift at the high school.

On Monday afternoons, Soledad and two of her neighbours from the local Glass of Milk Committee will go to the municipal depot to pick up their weekly

ration of powdered milk. It will be distributed free by other members of her committee, one the approximately 7,500 organized and run by women in Lima. The milk program was lauched in 1984.

Despite all her efforts, Soledad's family barely gets by. The parish nurse has told her that the children are showing signs of malnutrition, a diagnosis confirmed by their frequent minor illnesses.

The daily struggle to ensure her family's survival adds up to an eighteen hour work day — knitting, maintaining her business as an *ambulante*, participating in the *comedor comunal* and in the neighbourhood Glass of Milk Committee, in addition to performing her household duties. She says, "I feel tired all the time."

This life cannot be understood without reference to the distorted dependent character of Peru's capitalist system and the economic crisis which has been wracking the country for more than a decade.

The historically low living standards of the majority have been deteriorating since the mid-1970s as the prices of Peru's principal exports have plummeted, inflation has soared, public expenditures have been cut back and investment has declined as both national and multinational firms have transferred their profits abroad.

Abject poverty reached unprecedented proportions during the government of Fernando Belaunde Terry (1980-85), which dismantled reforms carried out in the early 1970s, adopted recessive economic policies under IMF pressure, and spent half of the public budget on military expenditures and the payment of the country's enormous foreign debt.

The statistics on wages, unemployment and under-employment are hair raising. By mid-1985, real wages in Lima had taken a nose dive to almost half their 1974 level. In the mid-1980s, open unemployment hovered around 10%, but under-employment (workers earning incomes below the minimum subsistence wage) climbed to 54% of the national labour force. In 1984 it was estimated that only slightly more than a third of the labour force was adequately employed, that is, earning satisfactory incomes and enjoying stable employment.

As both employment and wages contracted in the modern sector, men — but especially women and even children — began to invent jobs. Thus one of the many paradoxes that confounds the observer of modern Peru — the proportion of working women has been increasing steadily despite the general decrease in employment opportunities. In Lima, their participation in the labour force rose from 34% to 40% between 1973 and 1984. In effect, more and more lower-class women invented occupations to make up for their husbands' decreasing real wages and increasingly lengthy periods of unemployment.

In the national labour force statistics, the occupations these women created are hidden under the respectable-sounding categories of commerce and services. The great majority of commercial and service sector workers form part of the so-called informal economy. They are the *ambulantes*, the operators of street corner stands, the owners of "micro enterprises" — the poor of the city, the underemployed, the so-called marginals who make up the majority of the urban population.

This is where most of Lima's female labour force can be found. It is estimated that 26% are working in commerce, another 36% in services and some 20% as domestic servants. Only 16% are employed by industrial enterprises where wages and employment security tend to be better. It should be no surprise that the average income of women is only half of the male average and that the majority of those seeking work are women.

Soledad, as an *ambulante*, and similar to thousands of women migrants who inhabit the *pueblos jovenes* (young towns populated by waves of migrants) works in the least remunerative of occupations. The earnings from her independent business and knitting do not compensate for her husband's lost income.

With steadily rising prices, not even the basic food needs of the family could be met when Ramiro lost his job. That is why Soledad joined a group of women, assisted by the local parish social worker, to organize the neighbourhood *comedor comunal*.

For the same reason, she participates in the women's committee which organizes the distribu-

tion of powdered milk. Clearly, it is the women of the poorest classes who are bearing the brunt of the country's distorted economic system and its decade-long crisis. It is they who run the organizations that try to resolve the daily problems of survival.

Comedores began to mushroom in Lima's poor districts in the late 1970s. The origins of the *comedores* vary. Some were established through the initiative of the numerous mothers' clubs which date from the early years of the Alliance for Progress as well as the organizational efforts of the reformist military government headed by General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975).

Others are run by women's groups organized more recently by Basic Christian Communities and parish officials. Still others are the result of efforts undertaken autonomously by groups of women brought together by their common desperation to provide at least one nutritious meal a day for their families.

No doubt, the food donations and the *comedores* as well as the milk program have alleviated the extreme poverty of many families. The presence of *comedores* has also facilitated work outside the home for some women.

But to what extent has women's participation in these activities promoted self-confidence in their own capacities, pride in the importance of the work they perform in and outside the house, a greater sense of independence in a notoriously male-dominated society, or an awareness of their oppression as a gender?

To what extent has their demonstrated capacity to organize themselves to confront the daily problems of survival encouraged and facilitated greater access to the spheres of political power at the local and municipal levels?

A myriad of women's groups have participated in marches, demonstrations and campaigns for the improvement of public services and the provision of basic infrastructure for the *pueblos jovenes*. But have women obtained positions of responsibility in distric tgovernments and other traditionally male-dominated local organizations?

Women working in community health clinics, parish social service units and feminist centres have provided courses on nutrition, child care, hygiene, sexuality and even training for the organization's income-generating activities.

These learning experience have been vital for women who, in many cases, have not had the opportunity to even complete their primary education. Some participants have even noted greater respect and understanding on the part of their husbands who, quite often, were initially resistant to their wives' involvement in activities outside the house.

But there is little to suggest that the sexual division of labour in the family has been challenged or altered.

Comedores in some districts have organized federations to coordinate and improve their services. In Villa El Salvador, where Soledad lives, the women's groups have also joined together to form a federation.

Feminist groups, addressing the specific problems of gender oppression, have gained access to the mass media with a frequency unimaginable only five years ago. Radio programs, documentation centres, inexpensive publications series and celebrations honouring women's activities have proliferated during the last few years.

Women have certainly acquired a new visibility and they have demonstrated their capacity to organize on a large scale.

Nevertheless, the women's organizations tend to remain isolated in their own activities. Their primary concern with day-to-day survival programs leaves little time and energy for discussion of broader political issues, much less formulation of alternative public policies.

Relations and communication with local governing bodies dominated by men are consequently sporadic. The latter may seek the assistance of the women's groups for implementing or supporting certain programs, but few women have obtained directive positions in the institutions of local power. Worse yet, many among those who have done so tend to be silenced when confronted with male authority.

The rapid multiplication of women's groups, especially in Lima but also in other coastal cities, responds to the country's worst economic crisis of the century. Most of the activities organized by the groups represent collective efforts to resolve the day-to-day problems previously man-

aged by women individually inside their own homes. This also raises the question of their long-term viability should general economic conditions improve.

Even the productive activities organized by women — confectionery enterprises, artisan workshops, restaurants — tend to be extensions of traditional household activities. In other words, most organized women are still engaged in "women's work" and are perceived as members of auxiliary institutions by most of the men who run the local governments and political parties. In many cases, moreover, the combination of work in and outside the home, in addition to work in community projects, further lengthens the women's workday.

The achievement of the women's organizations should not be belittled. Much has been accomplished and many seeds for change have been planted. However, their current limitations need to be clearly recognized with reference to women's advancement into spheres of public power.

Although some women have acquired important positions and influence at all levels of government, the danger exists that a focus on survival activities and the legitimate pride engendered among women by the successful resolution of their most pressing daily problems may divert them from questioning the fundamental responsibility of the national government in resolving the economic crisis. The demand for profound structural transformations in a society whose distorted productive apparatus channels 52% of national income to 10% of the population cannot be avoided.

Women face the challenge of becoming active promoters and participants in this national process of transformation. How will they enter the public sphere to address the multiple forms of class exploitation while increasing consciousness concerning the equally multifarious manifestations of gender oppression? The disadvantages they face, the inheritance of their historical marginalization, are enormous.

At least 22% of Peruvian women have received no formal education in contrast to 12% of men; the differences in access to educational opportunities are striking at all levels of the system.

Almost a third of Peruvian women say they have more children than they want, and another 44% say they don't want any more. However, birth control information is not readily available outside middle-class circles, and men are frequently opposed to its dissemination.

Maternity care is scandalously deficient for the majority: it is estimated that a third of all deaths among women aged 20 to 24 are caused by complications associated with pregancy.

Most women who work are found in the lowest paid and least prestigious occupations. In unionized enterprises where the majority of workers and employees are women, men continue to dominate union leadership positions.

Women's representation in congress and political party leadership circles is more symbolic than real and, despite some variations, this remains the case right across the political spectrum.

In Villa El Salvador, Soledad and Ramiro do worry about the general state of the nation. Both ask, "What will happen to our children?"

In recent weeks the women and men of Villa El Salvador, poor but organized into the Urban Self Management Committee (CUAVES) and the many other institutions created during the last few years, have taken on a leading role in promoting marches and demonstrations for the Affirmation of Life. This remarkable community's struggle to create a participatory, egalitarian and peaceful society has resulted in its nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

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A family by any other name

by Catherine Stuart

In April 1987, the Ontario government enacted a new set of laws governing how a person can legally change his or her name. The new Change of Name Act, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Consumer and Commerical Relations, is a major step in the fight to have women treated as equals under the law.

Besides women who are marrying or divorcing, there is another large group of women who can benefit from this law. Women who have sole custody of their children and the responsibility that goes with it can now be the head of a family in which every member has **her** surname.

Significant? Just ask any woman who has become breadwinner, mother and father to her family. As a woman in that position, I can tell you that this change is **very** significant. This new law gives equal legal credit to the value of a woman's surname and a man's. Even though some may argue that my surname is my father's, it is the name I grew up with and is every bit as important to me as a man's name is to him.

Under the Change of Name Act, if you want to change your surname because of a formal marriage or a common-law union, or the dissolution of either, you elect a name change through a simple bureaucratic procedure. However, only your surname can be changed in this manner.

Changing one's name for any other reason in considered an application for a change of name. This requires more paperwork, but is still a relatively simple procedure that can be done by mail and currently costs $100. Any or all of a person's names can be changed in this procedure. There is no need to appear in court before a judge. This means a parent with sole custody of a child has the legal right to change that child's given names or surname or both.

Women who are single parents, having left a marriage or common-law union and who changed their own surnames to their spouses' or a hyphenated combination, may want to revert to their original surname. If they have children, they can suffer the resulting confusion of their children having a different surname.

Mrs. A. smiles when her children's dentist calls her Mrs. B because the children's surname is B. Mrs. A tactfully corrects the school secretary about the surname because the difference is important if the school needs to call her about a sick child. Some women even keep their ex-spouse's name, thinking it is less confusing for the children, even though they hate using that name. The Change of Name Act gives them another choice.

In my case, I chose to keep my own surname when I married. Once I found myself in the position of sole supporter of my family, I seriously questioned why my son should keep the surname of a person who was no longer a part of the family and chose not to be involved. My ex did not bother to come to the custody hearing, so I obtained sole custody of my son. My ex did not bother to send the court-ordered child support payments, so I had to garnishee his salary. My ex did not bother to visit his son (it has been five years), so I did not feel any compunction about changing my son's name.

So with a little paperwork, and a couple of month's wait, I now have a family with **my** surname. It is just a small family, but it is my family. I am the only person completely responsible for it, and I am very pleased the government now treats me, regardless of my gender, as the head of my family.

If you are interested in finding out the specifics of the Change of Name Act, call 1-800-268-7543 (toll-free). Or write the Office of the Registrar General, MacDonald Block, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y5.

bts

Catherine Stuart is a teacher and technical writer who makes her home in Ottawa.

Beating the bakesale blues

by Joan Selby

Raffles and bakesales were the financial mainstays of the women's organizations my mother and grandmother belonged to. Lacking corporate sponsors and rich benefactors, women's church groups and auxiliaries to men's service clubs limped along, trying to finance a new church organ or promote community events on nickel-and-dime budgets.

The advent of the most recent women's movement in the 1960s sparked an explosion of women's organizations committed to changing women's role in society and to promoting equality between the sexes.

They pressured governments to fund activities and projects aimed at redressing the traditional power imbalance. Women's groups were optimistic that with adequate and secure funding, the influence and power needed to create real changes in women's lives would materialize.

Twenty years later, many women are woefully aware that government funding has not proved the panacea they had hoped. Certainly, some strides have been made, but while the bucks are bigger, women's groups are scarcely more able to develop long-term strategies for change than they were when they relied on rummage sales and teas.

Last winter, a group of Ottawa women gathered to brainstorm ways to beat the bakesale blues and improve funding for their feminist organizations.

Why?

First, they agreed, available funding is inadequate to support the myriad of initiatives women's organization have taken on. As a result, groups and projects with the same goals are forced to compete against each other. Moreover, the limited available funding is temporary and services are threatened whenever govrenment budgets are slashed. In such as atmosphere, long-term planning has become impossible.

Second, because of government bureaucracy and tight budget controls, an inordinate amount of work goes into applying and accounting for funding. This drains time and energy delivering critical services.

Third, the stringent critieria frequently attached to government funds tend to shape the services delivered. Projects considered priorities by the women's community are often eclipsed by those favoured by government, forcing women into unwelcome investments in the status quo.

Women's organizations are left vulnerable, both practically and psychologically, by this constant struggle for funding and by the fight to maintain the integrity of their agenda for social cahnge. The alarming burn-out rate among the staff of women's organizations reflects the high degree of

stress, which is felt not only by the women delivering the service but by recipients as well.

So what can we do to improve things? The Ottawa women felt that if women were to overcome the problems spawned by dependence on government funding, people must be made aware that funding for women's organizations is a political issue. The funding problems reflect the existing power imbalances in our society — mainly male politicians, dangerously removed from the realities of women's lives, set both the priorities and criteria for distribution of funds and the limits on spending.

We must start by breaking down the barriers created by competition among women's groups and by encouraging networking. Only then can we take collective action and lobby both for more money for women's organizations and for control of that funding, which is crucial to our ability to shape our own future. Through existing women's networks such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), we can continue to educate politicans and bureaucrats about essential services and the need for adequate, ongoing funding.

In tandem with these efforts, I believe more women must take on the challenge of running for political office. With women representing more than half of the Canadian population, it is a sad commentary on our status that our country has never enjoyed a female premier or a female prime minister. While the last federal election sent more women MPs to Ottawa than ever before and the New Democrats have recently chosen the first female leader of a federal party, too many women are still constrained from seeking election by lack of confidence and capital.

The New Democartic Party has attempted to address the latter problem by establishing a fund to help women defray some of the expenses involved in campaigning. The Agnes MacPhail Fund (1), established in 1983, makes money available to women NDP candidates ($1,000 in the 1988 election) to offset lost wages or child care costs, or to use for any purpose connected with campaigning.

The other federal parties must be pressured to follow suit.

If we are ever to truly control our destiny and bring about change in women's roles in society, however, perhaps we need to go beyond dependence upon government, regardless of how benevolent it may become.

Collective efforts such as cooperatives, for example, can produce self-funded services and lead to increased independence, empowerment and confidence. Mutual self-help was the atmosphere most of our grandmother operated in.

Perhaps it merits another examination, not as an alternative to government funding for women's organizations, but as an option which can supplement that funding and render us more independent.

bts

Notes

(1) The Agnes MacPhail Fund honours Canada's first woman member of Parliament. Elected as a CCF emember in 1922, just three years after Canadian women won the right to vote, she served until 1940. Three years later, MacPhail was one of the first two women elected to the Ontario legislature.

This article is based, in part, on a workshop of the same name held in Ottawa in February 1988.

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Joan Selby is a member of the BTS *collective and as a result knows first hand the financial problems faced by feminist organizations.*

A Silk Hat for Tea

by Eleanor Albanese

Grace looked up at the clock. 11:00 a.m. — still two hours until work — the walk through the valley and up the long, steep hill; cars steaming by, lifting up the pavement with them. Two hours.

The tea had been poured and sipped, the cup turning around and around in her heavy fingers. The dishes had been washed and left to dry on large red tea-towels. The knick-knacks hung from every corner, windowledge and tabletop, all badly in need of dusting.

But dusting seemed to Grace to be such a sorry waste of time. Sitting, thinking over one's life — the loves and the could-have-been-loves, and the memories of children dressed in nighties scampering from room to room — now that was a worthy way to pass the time. Dusting trinkets? Save that for the elves.

She remembered once a most unkindly neighbour whispering over her shoulder, just loud enough for Grace to hear, "She must think she has elves, the way she sits about with her house in such disorder." Oh my, my, my, how the world had become a gentler place for mothers over the years. And so it should be. In her day, the women silently and desperately competed over how white their diapers were or how neat and shipshape one's shirts were pressed.

Not Grace though. Never Grace. Grace danced in the kitchen to the radio on hot summer nights and listened as close as she could to the breathing of her husband and children on windy December nights. On those nights, sleep was like a friend she could see off in the distance, but not quite touch. And Grace would lie awake and wonder and wonder "What will I do with this life of mine? It's not enough — though I love Jack and the little ones — it's not enough. What is it I need to do?"

She had looked for an answer — in the warmth of her husband's strong back against her skin, in the sounds of the children rushing through the path in the field ahead of her, and in the sermons of the quiet and pensive minister on Sunday mornings. But she had found none. Not even the handsome young man who'd come to deliver her wringer washer, spilling over in his eagerness to please her, not even he could ease her mind.

She had tried to bring her spirits up by cooking wonderful dishes of hot corn bread and stew. She'd found strips of cloth and rolled her daughters' hair up into ringlets. She took long walks over to her sister's home on the other side of town. She once tried to talk to Jack about it.

"Jack, do you ever wonder what it's all about?"

"What do you mean Grace?"

"Well, why you're here. I mean, what special reason."

"There's plenty good reason to keep busy if that's what you mean. What with trying to keep the house up and enough wood to last the winter."

Silence.

"Is that what you were wondering dear?"

More silence.

"More or less?"

"Yes," Grace had said. "More or less."

It had warmed her heart though. Because he was strong and goodhearted and never rough with the children the way she'd seen some fathers be.

Sometimes, over at her sister Mai's house, where everything stood in perfect order, like tiny army soldiers about to march off into battle — sometimes over there Grace would forget herself for a while. Nothing had ever seemed out of order there. The children were just as playful, the

house just as numbered, but when Mai's children tripped and fell, they would always seem to just miss the mud puddles. Even though Grace herself couldn't be bothered with order in her own home, she had taken great comfort in it while over at Mai's. Together they would sip tea, with freshly baked scones appearing in the centre of the table with seemingly no effort at all.

They would always begin their conversations by talking about the children — the latest tooth that had appeared, or whatever. And gradually Grace would feel herself become lighter and lighter. Then Mai would lean close to her and whisper "Look in my cup Gracie. Just a quick look." Grace would shyly lift Mai's cup up to her face as though she were about to look into her lover's eyes for the first time.

"There's a deer — no, it's a fawn."

"Where? Where do you see it?"

"Look closely now. Look into the cup from this side. See. Over in that corner."

"All I see is a bunch of wet tea-leaves. But don't worry about me Gracie. You just talk and I'll just listen."

"Oh, this is foolish Mai. I don't know how I ever get talked into this." But Grace couldn't wait to tell Mai of all the images she saw there.

"Go on Grace. Don't stop. You see a deer — "

"Yes and — "

"And what. Tell me more."

"Well there's a moon. But also the sun."

"What does it mean? It's a good sign I hope."

"Mai, you know I only see good signs."

The truth was, that sometimes Grace would see owls, which always frightened her, but if something didn't give her an absolute sense of goodness, then she quickly shook the cup around until new patterns appeared.

"Why do you do that — shake the leaves all around like that?"

"Well, I'm ... I'm not sure. It's sort of like doing a puzzle. Sometimes you stare and stare at the pieces and none makes any sense at all. So you move the pieces around a bit and there it is."

"Ah, I see."

The deer had turned out to be a new baby girl for Mai. And the moon and the sun had meant a long labour which began early one morning and lasted late into the following night.

Later, years later, when the children were older, Grace lost her shyness about reading tea-leaves, and when the ladies of the neighbourhood (even the ones who'd once shunned Grace) came trickling in for tea, she almost always felt that same lightness of heart. Though she never accepted money, she did enjoy the gifts people would bring her — bread, knick-knacks, cakes, and almost everything imaginable. The gifts changed with the times: during the forties people brought food and baking; during the fifties crafts and knitting arrived with the guests; and during the seventies, her house filled with gadgets and fads of every sort.

Though Jack had never got involved in what he called her hobby, after his death she found herself missing his face appearing and disappearing in the background, always smiling with curiosity. Jack was as true and predictable as they came — unlike her sister's husband who, in search of exciting times, more than occasionally missed a night at home. In fact, Jack had been, by the standards of the day, close to perfection. Therefore, Grace had felt slight twinges of guilt whenever he had disappointed her by his sense of privacy. She had wanted so much to reach inside of him and pull out his private thoughts. She had wanted him to confide in her the way he had done when they'd first met.

Once Grace had dared to ask him if he wanted her to look inside his cup, and to her total amazement, he chuckled, "Why not? Can't do any harm." She had lifted his cup in her trembling hands but instead of seeing the patterns of the leaves, she had found herself giggling like a school girl.

"Well ... what do you see?"

"Nothing. I mean, there's lots there, but I can't make it out."

"Ah well. I guess you have to be a woman," and off he had gone to putter around in the yard.

She had wanted to call out after him, "Wait Jack. I see all kinds of things — more children and a move to a big city and ... " But the moment was lost and besides, how was he to know that she'd been preparing for that moment for fifteen years.

(continued on page 42)

BOOK REVIEWS

Glory Days
by Rosie Scott
Seattle: Seal Press, 1988

reviewed by Lisa Woodsworth

This is no gentle exposé of New Zealand mores à la Katherine Mansfield nor civilized whodunnit by that country's other celebrated writer Ngaio Marsh. Rosie Scott's portrait of Auckland's fringe society gnaws at one's mind.

Her heroine Glory Day, painter and night club singer, is tougher than any of the vicious junkies or knife-wielding bikers she hangs out with. She has to be, not only to survive but to re-create the violence of her life on canvas.

"Senseless Violets," the collection of paintings she is working on for her first solo exhibition "was" as Glory describes, "mostly to do with smashed bodies — road accidents, murders, domestics, pub fights, gangland violence" composed of "heartless skin colours, dark pinks, haemorrhage browns." "I wanted," she explains, "to use that hard-earned knowledge of mine to give another texture to the paintings, to pay attention to the motives of the killer, usually a man, as well as the pain of the victim, usually a woman. Dangerous ground — between merely cheap, banal sentiment on the one side, and voyeurism on the other, when even a hint of either would have been outright failure from my point of view."

And dangerous ground it is. When a young junkie who Glory delivers to the hospital emergency dies, Glory's handicapped child Rina is kidnapped, her paintings are sabotaged, and she, the Good Samaritan, is cleverly set up for murder.

In all her rage and glory, Glory (ever true to her name) is determined to put a stop to the person destroying her life. In a desperate attempt at discovering her enemy she leads the reader through her stormy past of broken marriages, and a childhood plagued with poverty, alcoholism and abuse.

It is Glory's relationship to violence, her acceptance of it, and above all her own violence that make the story particularly fascinating. Obese, with a larger than life character, she is warm, generous, revered by her daughter and tiny circle of friends. Her towering personality and realized ambitions evoke passions of an insidious nature that culminate in a peculiar savagery in which her own mutilated but ever vibrant body takes on the allure of one of her own paintings. Secondary characters are no less colourful.

The book, shot through with New Zealand underworld argot, seethes with pent-up anger and a quirky black humour that stands Glory in good stead when the going gets rough. Rosie Scott has injected all the undeniable tension and expected suspense of a crime novel into one of uncompromising originality that demands to be read.

As a new addition to the International Women's Crime Series (Seal Press and Raincoast Books), *Glory Days* whets the appetite for other titles in the series in which offbeat women detectives unravel mysteries that explore complex social and political problems.

Since *Glory Days* is by no means a preachy novel in the way one might expect in a book labelled feminist, there is no reason to suppose its sister books to be either. And yet its underlying feminism seeps through, inciting the reader to take a stand and root for Glory.

Rosie Scott is a political activist and member of the women's movement living in Auckland, New Zealand. She has also written "Say Thank You to the Lady," a prize-winning play and several stories.

bts

BTS *Collective member Lisa Woodsworth lives in Ottawa but is currently in the process of moving to the country.*

Found Goddesses: Asphalta to Viscera

as revealed to Morgan Grey and Julia Penelope

Illustrations by Alison Bechdel

Norwich, Vermont: New Victoria Publishers, 1988

reviewed by Pamela Bentley

Found Goddesses is the kind of book to share with friends and refer to in everyday conversations. For that is how to fully enjoy the fun it contains.

On the premise that goddesses reclaimed from ancient matriarchal religions and rituals have little relevance to "life as a Lesbian in the latter part of the Twentieth Century," Morgan Grey and Julia Penelope set out to "find" or create relevant goddesses. Their discoveries range from "Chancy, our goddess of unpredictable edibles" who is worshipped in ritual feasts known as potlucks, to "Paranoia ... Our Goddess of the Ever-Watchful ... who watches over all Lesbians, who know Paranoia in all Her aspects."

One of my favourites is "Asphalta, goddess of all roads, streets and highways, and guardian of those who travel on them" who "is best known for Her miraculous powers of finding parking places." Even before reading of her existence, I was familiar with Asphalta, as I am unusually lucky at finding parking spaces (though Asphalta doesn't always protect me from meters running out before the parking officials come along). Now I know who to thank.

Another favourite is "Munchies, Our Goddess of Easy Eating" under whose entry is included a description of a test of faith performed in the dead of winter when a follower of Munchies is sent out with a list of junk foods to seek out and bring back to the priestess conducting the initiation rite.

Found Goddesses is set up like an encyclopedia or dictionary of goddesses complete with cross-references, listings of the minor aspects of each deity, and an index by topic of which goddess to call upon. The dry, methodical categorization juxtaposed with the entries' imaginative content heightens the humour of the collection. Sprinkled throughout are drawings by Alison Bechdel, known to many for her "Dykes to Watch Out For" cartoon strip. At the risk of sounding like I only read books with lots of pictures, I was disappointed that there weren't more of Bechdel's interpretations of various goddesses and their followers.

The only annoying thing about *Found Goddesses* is the tendency of Grey and Penelope to push the joke a little too far and risk confusing their readers past the point of humour. In the entry for "Anima," the goddess who "watches over the connections Lesbians share with annimals," they get carried away with punning on words containing the work "cat" and in the process lose the reader and the thread of the joke. Of course, over-punning is always a risk when working in the presence of the goddess Hilaria.

As I've already mentioned, this is a book to share with friends and leave lying handy around the house. If nothing else, it will inspire you to have some fun finding your own goddesses to watch over the activities in your life.

bts

Pamela Bentley is a BTS *collective member who is forever reading books that have nothing to do with her Master's thesis.*

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(continued from page 20)

As two middle-class women writing this article, it is likely that many of our solutions are much more available and applicable to women of our class. This is not to say, however, that it is not possible for women of every class to participate in the healing of our community by designing and setting up appropriate support services, if those with more ready access to resources aid less privileged lesbians in doing so.

We can begin to make the lesbian community safer and stronger by giving ourselves permission to talk about the violence within our community, placing responsibility where it belongs and **doing something** about it.

bts

Sue and Pam are two Ottawa feminists who have given this topic much thought and discussion before deciding to write this article for BTS.

(continued from page 25)

women. NOIVMW has come to realize the difficulties which these women have encountered. In March 1988, NOIVMW produced a status report, in which it identified a number of the barriers faced by immigrant and visible minority women and also listed some recommendations. The report was presented to the Department of Secretary of State and we are hoping that some positive initiatives will be taken.

Immigrant women in this country are organizing for changes and it is not an easy task. Nevertheless, we are hoping for changes at the local, provincial and national levels which are necessary to ensure full and equal participation in this society. Immigrant women are part of the Canadian society, part of the Canadian mosaic and as such are entitled to equality of opportunity, rights and dignity.

bts

(continued from page 38)

After that morning, she had forgotten about trying to crawl inside of him — his heart or his secret thoughts. "Maybe he doesn't have anything much to say. After all, he more or less says what he needs to say through his actions," she later discussed with Mai.

On the morning of his death, the snow had piled up against the front door like the gentle barrier his life was. He'd collapsed shortly after breakfast from a heart attack. And after all the flurry of ambulances and phone calls and hours of crying, Grace had found herself back at home sitting in the chair he'd had breakfast in. She'd insisted on having some time alone, and was determined to have her way in spite of the pleas from her concerned children.

There in front of her was his plate, with two crusts tucked neatly on the rim, like half moons. He'd sipped his tea to the finish; the tea leaves floating downward from the place his lips had touched the cup to the bottom. Now Grace had all the time in the world — no one to watch her or hurry her along. There, in the centre of his cup was, unmistakably, a perfectly formed owl. It had been years and years since she'd seen one.

"So," she'd sighed with relief, "he had secret thoughts after all."

12:30 — Time to go. Grace bustled about getting an extra pair of stockings, for it was a windy September day. Her children all wished she would quit her job — near seventy years old and still climbing that hill! Not only that, but her wages were despicable. But Grace didn't mind. She enjoyed the Silk Hat with its smell of fried onions and coffee, and how the people who saw her always carried with them the hopes of a child. She didn't even read the tea leaves. She felt as if the people who came to her arranged the leaves in such a way that they'd see hope into their futures. She simply affirmed what they already knew.

Grace hurried to find her red hat — the one Jack had given her on her 30th birthday. Yes, there it was hanging with her summer things. Thank goodness she took care not to toss things away. Her red hat and warm stockings; nothing else would do.

bts

RESOURCES

Too Few to Count: Canadian Women in Conflict with the Law is an anthology of nine essays edited by Ellen Adelberg and Claudia Currie which mounts a strong, controversial debate against traditional theories of female criminality. The collection explores the consequences suffered by women in a criminal justice system designated for and controlled by men. While some essays provide an overview of facts, history and statistical information, some expose in personal, powerful detail the experiences of young women, Native women, and others stereotyped by the myths about women in prison. Order a copy by sending a cheque or money order for $14.95 (plus $2.00 for postage and handling; $2.50 U.S.) to Press Gang Publishers, 603 Powell Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V6A 1H2.

Every Voice Counts: A Guidebook to Political Action is a recent publication of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW). It was written for the Council by journalist and author Penney Kome. This guidebook shows how to take personal and political activism one step at a time including doing research on your issue, recruiting people to your cause, running a public meeting, dealing with the media and government bureaucracy, and taking legal action. The various stages are illustrated by actual and hypothetical cases. Copies are available from CACSW, 110 O'Connor Street, 9th floor, Box 1541, Station B, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5R5 (613) 992-4976.

Women, Paid/Unpaid Work and Stress: New Direction for Research is a background paper recently released by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The document, written for the Council by Graham S. Lowe, is an exhaustive review of research on women, work and stress. It examines the different and unique stresses of women at home and at work and suggestions are made for ways to reduce stress in women's lives. Copies are available from CACSW (see address above).

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective has recently produced five new books on reproductive health. The series of books deals with health concerns that many women face at some time in their lives. The topics are:

1. Avoiding Pregnancy: Choosing Birth Control That's Right for You
2. Infertility: Problems Getting Pregnant
3. Miscarriage: You're Not Alone
4. Talking about Periods
5. Women Talking about Health: Getting Started with Workshops and Groups

Accessibility to women with limited reading ability was one of the collective's goals in producing these books, because there is very little information on women's health available at this level. Many features make these books easy to read: simple language level, information broken by questions and headings, glossary, detailed table of contents, large print, graphic on every double page spread, and use of graphics to make the text more understandable.

The books reflect the needs and concerns expressed by women attending public meetings during a two-year project on women's reproductive health. For further information, please contact: Vancouver Women's Health Collective, Suite 302-1720 Grant Street, Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2Y7.

Moving forward: Creating a Feminist Agenda for the 1990's

A conference aimed at bringing together feminist activists and academics to facilitate the sharing of research and resources is to be held June 15-17, 1990 at Trent University.

If you would like to receive an agenda and registration details, please send your name and address to the following:

Women's Studies Conference
c/o Philippa McLoughlin
Trent University
Peter Robinson College
Box # 161
Peterborough, Ontario
K9J 7B8