

OUR LIVES

Canada's First Black Women's Newspaper

\$2.00

May/June 1986

Volume 1. No. 2

Amandla! Toronto and South Africa - We Will Win!

by Afua Cooper

It is a cold day. But the sunlight is bright and it compensates for what might have been an otherwise dreary winter's day. I hurry from the photocopying building because I want to write a few more paragraphs of an essay before I go to the demonstration. I sit at my desk in the library but I cannot concentrate so I leave and hurry across to the faculty of law. I am surprised at the size of the crowd. I see familiar faces (the same ones that are usually seen at demos of this nature). The placards and banners are also familiar. "Free Nelson Mandela", "Jail Botha", "Apartheid is Wrong". But also "No Racists on Campus", and "We are Ashamed of Our Law School". I am still amazed at the size of the crowd, to be honest I did not expect such a turnout. I go to talk to some of my teachers and fellow students and Ginny promptly gives me a placard which reads "Connell and Babb are in the Same Boat" "Chant" she says, "chant". But instead I continue to survey the scene around me. It was a minor replica of perhaps what the civil rights scenario looked like in the U. S. and it even hints of a scene in Soweto or Alexandria. There are plain clothes policemen and women milling around, pretending to be one of the demonstrators, some are equipped with walkie-talkies and no doubt guns, the uniformed police are all over the place too. But what makes the blood rush to my eyes and the drumbeat pound in my head are the mounted cops. Mounted cops! My god, what for? To protect Babb? To protect Babb from innocent student demonstrators? They sit on the horses (who by the way had sharp spurs) ready to he crowd, ready to injure defenceless people in order to protect an apartheid criminal! I discover that I am shivering but not from the cold. And this is Canada! I think to myself, Canada! not the U.S.A., Chile or South Africa. Surely this cannot be happening in Canada. But I remember that the night before I had heard over the news that the U of T said they would 'beef up' security, but I had not expected this. I hear Ginny saying that it must have cost the university a lot to bring out this extra security yet at the same time classes are overcrowded and fees have gone up. I think of welfare mothers who have to pinch and squeeze in order to survive. I think of people dying from winter's cold because they do not have a place to live. I think of the bag lady who camps outside of my building at nights and I know that if I don't stop thinking I'd burst. But why should Canada be different from Chile or South Africa? After all, the police walked into Albert Johnson's house and killed him before his children and nothing came of it. Immigration went into the home of a Canadian citizen of Jamaican origin and whisked off his children to Jamaica without his knowledge. The Canadian state in order to rob the Native peoples of their lands deliberately placed smallpox in blankets and gave them to the Native people who



died like flies as a result. When South Africa sped up the process of putting Africans on reservations in 1902-1903, it was Canada that the Boers came to in order to view the Canadian reservations and so pattern the African ones off the Canadian model. I also remember that it was only in the sixties that Native peoples in Canada were allowed to vote and during that same decade were allowed to leave the reserve without a pass. Canada, South Africa, South Africa, Canada. The analogy is striking. What's the difference? I guess everybody is shocked by the mounted troops. A white woman next to me says "I cannot believe they would go so far. Inviting Babb to the campus is bad enough but to 'protect him with mounted troops is very very unacceptable" I think to myself 'unacceptable to whom'? Glenn Babb, the South African ambassador to Canada, after a long controversy is finally on the U of T campus debating the divestment issues. Apologists, racists, and fascists are happy. Freedom of speech has triumphed they say. Earlier in the day I heard one of the organisers of the debate saying that "freedom of speech is one of the basic tenets of Western democracy, of the institution of Canada way of life". "Sure", I say to myself. But for oppressed the whole world over who cannot and do not have the time to engage in abstractions, abstractions that are meaningless, abstractions that are used to cover up outright racism and deprivation of human rights, freedom of speech means something more, something concrete. On one hand it means wounded knee, Chile in September 1973, the 800 people who died in Jamaica 1980 general elections. The bombing of innocent Blacks in Philadelphia, Ton Ton Macouts in Haiti, 80 killed by apartheid bullets in the Alexandria township, Palestinians experiencing another form of apartheid and yes, rigged elections in the Phillipines!

and all these happen with the aid, connivance, compliance and outright support of Western governments including Canada. Yes, how could the Duvaliers continue to rule Haiti with an iron grip if they did not get the support of Western "democracies"? On the other hand freedom of speech means for people who are oppressed, the right to have clean water, the right to eat a full day's meal, the right to an education, the right to go to bed at night and sleep without fear, the right to have control over one's body and many, many other basic things. The contradictions, the paradoxes, the ironies are too many at this demonstration. Babb has been welcomed by the U of T administration, was invited as an 'honoured' guest while some years ago a Palestinian speaker was denied speaking at Hart House. Several years ago, many students were expelled from U. of T. because they

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occupied the room in which Banfield, a known racist, was supposed to speak. To speak on the inferiority of people of color! Good old U of T! We know that with a snap the president of the university could easily have cancelled the invitation. But we have to 'preserve free speech' he says. So while Babb is exercising his 'freedom of speech' his fellow Boers exercise theirs in South Africa killing Black people! I know that Babb is at U of T telling Canada not to divest its holdings in South Africa, simply because the U of T has investments in South Africa. Yes, the U of T is a partner in the crime of apartheid. The silence of both the provincial and federal governments is very telling too. Only Bob Rae comes out and condemns Babb while Chretien and Mulrone mouth the same freedom of speech bullshit. I despair. Is this the country that I will raise my son? How can I let him know that he is a human being with dignity? My god, how can I protect him from a vicious and racist system? What shall his inheritance be? Surely the love of his parents cannot suffice, surely he will need another shield to fend off the poison arrows. My soul laments, what shall his inheritance be? What shall I give

I walk from the demonstration back to the library knowing well that I am not able to study. I see Merle and Gerald, we greet each other and embrace. Merle says, "Imagine getting one's degree from this university!" We discuss perhaps, what impressed the demonstrators - the mounted cops. Hope and Ginny joined us and we all go into the cafeteria to have some tea and thaw out. I look at the faces of my companions, these warriors who are always demonstrating against oppression of whatever kind, who are always going to meetings, rallies and forming committees and coalitions. I know that sometimes they despair, feel weak and tired but never feel defeated! I admire them for their strengths and know that because they wage an unceasing fight, because they never give up and are always vigilant I am able to tap into them and feel renewed. I also know that I provide some kind of energy for them. We know that this Babylon system must change because we will make it change! Through our united efforts - from Toronto to South Africa - we will win!

Great Black Women



Lois DeShield—Backstage at the Black Education Project Family Day—1975.

Every Issue, *Our Lives* will feature a **Great Black Woman** in our community. This column will be in recognition of the dedicated and outstanding struggle we women have waged toward our liberation and the liberation of our people.

Lois De Shield is a veteran community activist. Her work began in Hamilton where she lead advocacy for quality, anti racist education for Black children in Hamilton schools.

De Shield picked up the struggle in Vancouver where she lived before moving to Toronto in 1974. Here she worked with the Black Education Project, the organisation which pioneered the fight for equal education and ridding the educational system of racism. With the other Black activists of the Black Education Project, De Shield fought against the streaming of Black children into vocational and behavioral streams in Toronto schools. That fight still continues today. But it was through the agitation of De Shield and other activists that the Toronto Boards of Education now have race relations departments, Black parents' organisations, Black Heritage Programs and school -community relations departments.

De Shield is the founder of Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre a community agency which finds jobs and acts as an employment advocate for women from the Black, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Italian and Spanish speaking community. Currently the co-ordinator, the agency has been in existence for the past seven years.

De Shield's life long activism stands as a rich example of the lives of Black women in Canada, paying tribute to our foremothers, Harriet Tubman and Mary Ann Shadd.

We thank her for her steadfastness, her love for Black peoples and her life of commitment to our freedom.

Great Black Woman! Lois De Shield.

Domestics Aid Group Fires Sister

by Hazel Palmer

INTERCEDE, the agency which counsels domestic workers on their rights, offers assistance for them to achieve landed status, is currently experiencing an internal tug-of-war to gain management control over the agency. Notwithstanding the status of the dispute today, it originated over the decidedly unwarranted and unfair dismissal of DESIREE HIPPLEWITZ, the Black counsellor.

Hipplewith, originally from Guyana, spent two years as a teacher and later as a policewoman before coming to Canada as a domestic worker in 1977. She spent five and a half years as a domestic and joined Intercede, as a volunteer, when it was formed in 1978.

When the Service Unit opened in 1984 to specifically provide counselling to domestics who are going through the process of becoming landed immigrants and to deal with complaints in regard to their working conditions, Hepplewith was chosen unanimously as one of the two counsellors hired because of her "outstanding qualifications and qualities". Judith Ramirez, Intercede's Co-ordinator and the supervisor of thje Service Unit, was pleased by the choice made by the hiring committee, and furthermore praised Desiree for her "steadfastness in the work of getting a new (landed status) policy" and for inspiring other domestics to meet landed criteria.

However, working relationships deteriorated rapidly and by the end of 1985, Desiree had received two warnings about her casework. Although both instances were resolved--once explained and the respective clients corroborated Desiree's account of events--they were not forgotten.

The third warning which consequently led to the dismissal, arose from an incident where one of Desiree's clients, who was attending a literacy school to upgrade her skills for personal and immigration purposes, requested access to her personal documents in Intercede's files, in order for her lawyer to have a better assessment of her chances for obtaining status. Meanwhile, a senior representative from the literacy school the client attended, wrote a letter to Immigration complaining that this particular client's situation and hopes for obtaining status were not being taken seriously. The tutor sent a copy to Intercede whereupon Ramirez requested to look at the client's file. Desiree explained that it was not there and the reason why. Directly after this incident Desiree received her final notice and was discharged. Ramirez stated that Desiree's "casework management did not meet acceptable standards". This after two years and countless succesful cases handled by Hipplewith

Hipplewith refused to accept her dismissal and decided to bring it to the attention of Intercede's Board of Directors. In the meantime, it was agreed that she be suspended for one month pending the decision of the Board. However, it only took one week for the Board to meet and vote 6-5 in favour of Desiree. Consequently, Ramirez resigned from her position as Co-ordinator and her membership on the Board, as well as four other Board members. All resignations were accepted and Desiree returned to work on March 10.

Six days later, Desiree along with the remaining six members from the Board met to ratify Desiree's position, and to pick up the pieces and move forward. Unexpectedly, however, Ramirez attended the meeting withdrew her resignation and announced she would be continuing to work as Intercede's Co-ordinator. "From that moment on," says Desiree, "it became a management problem" This battle continues, but what about Desiree?

Although the Board had voted to have her re-hired as a counsellor, once Ramirez returned to work March 17, Desiree says, her working conditions were "disgusting". "I wasn't given my normal work to do. I had no access to any of the files, to clients, or to use the phones. I just sat there like a dummy."

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Danger At Home

One Woman's Voice

by Debbie Douglas

Every year, thousands of women are battered in Metropolitan Toronto. Some of these women are Black. Some are in shelters and yet others continue to live in battering situations due to reasons ranging from limited services available to fear for their lives and the lives of their children.

Over the years the Black community has set up organizations to help its members deal with health, education and employment. But there is lack of organizational help for women and children who have left a battering situation, and, information for those who continue to live in this dangerous environment.

The Ontario Association of Transition Houses with the co-operation of the Ontario government have developed advertisements that are now aired continuously through a 24 hour period with information for battered women. The ads although intended to reach all potential battered women, excludes the Black woman because of the white "actress" used to portray the battered woman. For the Black community this exclusion brings it share of contradictions. We are a community which has been exploited and distorted images have been presented of our lives sometimes forcing us from speaking openly about serious problems which beset us as much as they beset any other community.

Wife battering is an issue not particular to any one community. The amount of Black women who use existing community services clearly show the need for discussion and the development of programmes to meet the demands of battered Black women and their children.

Although some Black women and Black feminists groups have begun discussion around wife battering, the community as a whole needs to become involved so that the ongoing discussion of ideas can eventually lead to concrete action. Black women who are battered need services which will meet their needs not only as battered women but as who face racism and racist stereotypes living in a white dominant society.

The Shirley Samaroo Shelter which is being set up for immigrant women who have been battered and their children, is the first in Metropolitan Toronto. In spite of the head way that the development of this shelter shows, Black women as a group are not all immigrants and have issues that are uniquely different from those of white women (immigrant or not) and other women of color. From speaking with Black women who have left battering situations, the one constant wish they have expressed is for an increase in Black counsellors in shelters for battered women. The majority of these women were quick to point out the help that they received from existing shelters but they continue to feel that they can better identify with and therefore feel more comfortable with a counsellor who is Black and therefore culturally similar. It remains to be seen whether existing shelters and shelters such as the Shirley Samaroo will heed the voices of Black women. This is in no way an exhaustive discussion on wife battering in the Black community. We present here one voice in the dialogue which must begin to occur among Black women as we attempt to find a solution to wife assault. Following is one woman's personal story.

B. is a thirty-three year old mother of five, who came to Canada in 1975 as a domestic worker. Two years later she met and married Mr. --- and settled down to raise a family here in Toronto. B. after five years of verbal, emotional and physical abuse, left the marriage. She tells her story:



Two years after marrying ---, I brought my two children, who I had while still in my teens, to Canada. This is when the trouble started. At first I thought that things would get better with time, but it didn't happen that way.

I remember the first time --- hit me. It was a Sunday night and he had been drinking all day with his friends. My two oldest children had been in Canada for just over a year and I had a new baby. After --- friends had gone home, he started shouting at the children. He said that they had embarrassed him in front of his friends because they hung their head whenever someone talked to them. He told them that they acted like monkeys but he wasn't too surprised since their father was probably from Back-O-Wall.

Well, I got really mad and told him that my children's father was certainly better looking than he was and if he didn't have anything to say he should shut his mouth. Well, that got him started. He forgot all about the children and started in on me. He told me that I should be grateful that he married me with my two children and allowed me to get landed status. He said that if he was smart he would leave right now. I told him then that he hadn't done anything for me that I couldn't do for myself and he was welcome to leave. Before I knew it I was sprawled on the floor and the kids were screaming. --- had punched me in the side of the head. I felt the blood pumping into my eyes and could feel my right eye begin to swell. I got off the floor and went into the bathroom, --- slammed through the front door.

That night, I cried and cried. Before the children went to bed, they asked what I was going to do. I didn't know what to say. All I said was go to bed, I'm alright. In bed I thought about who I could turn to. I had no one that I could really say was a friend. The only other Black women I knew were the ones at the factory where I worked. We weren't really friends. We just worked together. I got out of bed and started writing a letter to my sister in New York. Halfway through I stopped. I felt ashamed. How would it look if I told my sister that --- was beating me up. Anyways, I thought I should keep my business private.

The next day at work, I kept my face turned away whenever someone talked to me. I thought that someone may have noticed the bruise but no one said anything. I guess they didn't notice.

The second time he hit me, I took the children and left. I went to a shelter for battered women. The police took me there. I stayed there for one week then went back home. Everyone was nice but it wasn't home and the kids didn't like it very much.

After leaving --- for the third time, he agreed to go to marriage counselling with me. We went to the pastor of the church that I attended on Sundays. At first I thought it was a good idea. The pastor talked to him about finding different ways to show that he is angry instead of beating me. My husband agreed to try. Then the pastor turned to me and said that it was my fault also. He said that no matter what happened between husband and wife, the wife should not leave the home, especially with the children. He said that marriage was for good and bad.

The last time I left I made up my mind that I was never going back. I had told --- that if he ever lift his hands at me again it would be the last time. He thought I was joking. I showed him though. I returned to the shelter and stayed there until I received my Metro Housing. That took a long time. I needed a letter written by a community organization on my behalf. Some of the other women had one done and it helped them to get housing. I asked the staff if they knew of a Black organization who could write such a letter. They didn't. I finally got one from Dan Heap's office. They were really nice about it and I appreciated their help but the letter didn't do much good. MTHA kept saying the same thing every time I phoned or visited the office: You're on our waiting list. We'll phone as soon as something is available. It took five months of daily phone calls and/or visits before I got my housing. When I found out that I had a chance at a three bedroom town house in the east end, I rushed down to the office and accepted without first seeing the house. I liked the staff at the shelter but I was tired of sharing one bedroom with five kids.

I found a new job at one of the hotels downtown and started working full time again. The day we moved was one of the happiest in my life. I was finally going out on my own with my kids. I was afraid sometimes but I knew that I would be happier living on our own without a man beating me up everytime he got mad or drunk.

I didn't start talking about being battered until I joined a group for battered women. I was really surprised when I walked into my first meeting. There were all kinds of women there. Old, young, White, Black, Chinese, every nationality. The women were not all poor either. There was a lawyer's wife and a policeman's wife. That was the first time I didn't feel ashamed. I knew it wasn't my fault and I did the best I could. I just have to keep living now, as best I could.

Sometimes You Fight Alone

by Donna Barker

It was the end of the meeting and the women were sitting around chatting. I was trying to include myself but was almost decided that I wouldn't come back. A familiar scenario. I would hear about a feminist group and go to one or two meetings and then stop going. I never did join a white feminist group and for a long time I thought it was because I preferred working alone rather than in groups. I believed that until I started working with Black women

Anyway, the meeting was over. The women were talking about the fact that a man had been watching them from across the street in a restaurant. They were afraid of him and didn't want to leave. I asked them to point him out to me. In full view in the big picture window was a tiny little white man who looked fairly unhealthy. I didn't share their fear.

"Him? Oh shit, no problem. I could take him if I had to." They nodded silently, looking at each other and trying to take in what seemed to them shocking information ...I would fight. I could fight. I knew who I could hurt and who I couldn't.

Their conversation drifted into an intellectual discussion about violence and then one woman said something about a fight she had witnessed between two women. She talked about how horrified she had been the it was *women* who were fighting and about how surprised she had been that when she had tried to talk to them, one woman had threatened her. I suppressed a giggle. She just couldn't believe that even though she had done nothing, someone had threatened her. However, she went on, because she had stood in a non-threatening manner, the woman had backed down. I suppressed another giggle. Further, the moment was apparently one of agony for her. She wouldn't have wanted to fight with a woman and would have been in anguish had the police arrived.

I piped up. "It doesn't matter to me if it's a man or a woman. If someone attacks me, I attack back. Period. It doesn't surprise me a bit that someone would try to hit me and if I'm in danger, I fight. I have no choice."

"Well, if she had hit me, maybe I would have done something"

"I don't always wait. I know when someone is ready to hurt me. It's happened enough times that I know. We aren't talking a boxing ring where there are rules and regulations and somebody could get disqualified. We're talking how not to get seriously hurt when someone is serious about hurting you. And anyway, it doesn't make any difference to cops who hits first. They'll always think it was you ...I mean ...me." Of course I meant me. It doesn't happen to them.

"You sound like you've been in a lot of fights."

"Yes, I have."

"Did you grow up in the States?" The question really was did you grow up in a violent Black ghetto where you people beat each other up all the time and throw Molotov cocktails.

"No," I said, "I grew up in a white middle class neighbourhood in Calgary, Alberta, Canada." They looked dismayed. Who then did I fight with in a "civilized" white middle class community (they were all middle class). On some level, because they were feminists, they could accept that middle class men beat their wives but that is not what I was talking about. I foolishly tried to explain.

"My brother and I were the only Black kids in our entire school, our entire neighbourhood. You could count the Black people in the whole city on one hand. Believe me, lots of people didn't like our presence and lots of people wanted to beat us up."



I was born in Regina, Saskatchewan one year after my parents emigrated to

Canada. We moved to Calgary where I grew up until I left home at sixteen.

They didn't believe me. I could feel the thoughts running through their heads. You must have provoked it. That doesn't happen in Canada and not in middle class neighbourhoods. You're exaggerating. You have a chip on your shoulder. Black people are violent. There must be some other explanation. You don't look like somebody who gets into fights. People don't really hit somebody just because they're Black and after all, you said you hit first sometimes, etc.. etc. Finally one woman said, "I've never been in a fight in my life. The few times I've been close to it I always talked my way out."

Why did she say that, I wondered? Was she trying to acknowledge that as a white woman her experience was different and find out more about mine or was she trying to say that the fights were my fault and Black people aren't smart enough or verbal enough to get out of them. My eye contact with her at that moment confirmed the latter. I wanted to fight her then. Smash her face in while she tried to talk her way out of it. Hurt her not so much for her white ignorance as for her unwillingness to learn. Her blindness to her own hatred of me. The same hatred that causes some people to attack or want to attack me on sight.

I learned about fighting very young because the white kids were taught to hate early. It is very important that the hatred and lies start early in order that the system of white supremacy maintain itself. Of course, white people say that kids pick on anyone who is different and that this is normal for children. My skin color was different so the kids chose that to pick on. But where did the kids learn the details in their taunts. Where did they get the idea that I was stupid and dirty. Where did six year olds get the idea that Black girls think only about having sex? There *was* a difference. One major difference was that the adults agreed with and supported their children's taunts. I was unprotected and they always wanted to blame me. Like the teacher who always insulted me in Grade Three. "Don't you people know how to darn the holes in your socks." Don't you people ever shut up." I had the highest marks in the class and she hated me for it. She would call me stupid anyway. In the spelling class she would ask each child to spell a word out loud. One day when it came to my turn, she told me to stand up (no one else had been asked to stand) and gave me the hardest word. I will always remember those minutes.

"Spell geography."

"G-E-O-G-R-A-P-H-Y". I sat down. "Stand up. I didn't tell you to sit down. Spell pediatrician."

"P-E-D-I-A-T-R-I-C-I-A-N."

"You think you're so smart. Spell antidisestablishmentarianism."

"A-N-T-I-D-I-S (pause-this word was easy. Long but I just had to sound it out) E-S-T-A-B (pause) L-I-S-H (pause) M-E-N-T (pause-A or E. I chose A) A-R-I-A-N (pause) I-S-M." I looked at her to see if I had made any mistakes but was smiling because I was pretty sure I hadn't. My smile was met with a glare. Suddenly the recess bell rang. She spat two words at me. "Get Out!"

After recess, the class always lined up outside the door and we walked single file back to the classroom. The teacher came out and as usual told us to stand up straight and make as straight a line as we could. I did so and carefully aligned my shoulders with the girl in front of me.

"Donna!" she barked, "you're not in line." I shifted slightly but couldn't see how I could move to get straighter.

"I said line up properly!"

"I AM in line."

Suddenly a rage overcame her. She grabbed me by the hair and slammed my head against the brick wall of the school. She pulled my head back and slammed it again. I started fighting. I kicked, I punched, I bit. When she let go of me she was crying and her leg was bleeding. She turned and ran. Soon after, I was summoned to the vice-principal's office over the P.A. system and the three of us sat down. She told lies about how bad I was, how I never listened to her, how I wouldn't get in line, how I had attacked her just because she told me to get in line. The vice-principal tried to look at me sternly but knew something wasn't quite right because the teacher kept referring to me as the "little nigger". He didn't ask me for my side of the story and told me to go back to class and behave myself.

My head was still dizzy from having been pounded. Had I not fought back that woman may have killed me and no one would have been there to stop her. And, even though I had lived, no one knew that I was right. It was then I realized that those attacks that had so surprised and perplexed me were not going to stop and that I had to protect myself. A rock formed inside my gut. The rock that is my integrity.

There have been many times when that blind rage has surged at me from white people.

It was always when the realization that I am not inferior and more importantly that they are not superior, hit them. Such a realization, when it strikes white people runs against one of their fundamental beliefs about themselves and attacks their sense of identity. An identity carefully constructed by their elders. They have been taught that superiority and leadership over black people is a fundamental, innate characteristic of their whiteness. They have been taught a history of lies, distortions and omissions. They think, for example, that African people are starving because they were too stupid to advance and make their own way. They, therefore, cannot face that they raped Africa hundreds of years ago. They cannot face our magnificence before that rape. They cannot face that their miserable "Dark Ages" ended and they flourished since that time because of what they stole from us and called their own. When faced with the truth, they are confronted with their won ugliness; their destructiveness, their inhumanity, the fragility of an identity based on lies.

The attacks on me often came when I had done something intelligent, as with the teacher. Many whites can accept that blacks excel at feats that require physical prowess. Such a view, is consistent with their belief that we are mindless animals. These beliefs justified slavery and justify the roles we are forced into which exclude us from power in their institutions. Although because my brother and I were the only blacks, some whites were able to accept our intelligence by labelling us as exceptions. "You're really smart for a black person," swas an often heard "compliment". To them, a few exceptions are not a threat.

Other attacks came when I did not respond with fear of submission to hostile or condescending treatment. At such times, the attacker was incredulous that I did not accept that virtue of my colour, I was hateful and deserving of such treatment. I did not know my place. One such incident happened on a bus. The driver glared at me and when I briefly showed him my bus pass he waved me back. He looked at it closely for a long time and then rudely waved me away. I sat ner the front and watched as he let white people on the bus with no trouble but stopped two other black people and made a show of scutinizing their right to be on the bus.

Finally I said in a loud voice, "I notice that you stop all the Black people and hassle them but you leave the white people alone. Does it make you feel like a big man to act like that?" I felt the people around me tense.

"I think you better shut up Missy."
"No, I think you better stop acting like a jerk."

He got up and started walking towards me. I knew the look in his eyes and immediately stood up to ready myself. It would have been impossible to defend myself while sitting.

"You got a big mouth little girl."

"You got a weak ego little boy."

He pulled his fist back hoping to arouse fear in me, "I oughtta slug you."

A white guy came up behind him and touched his arm, "Come on man. Come on. Calm down. This ain't worth it."

"This mouth lady here needs to learn a lesson about keeping her mouth shut".

"Hey come on. This ain't no lady. She ain't worth it."

He was on the driver's side, giving him good advice. The driver looked at him, then turned and walked back to the front muttering about "mouthy Black bitches." I picked up mu stuff and yelled "Fucking asshole!" as I got off the bus. The part of

me that wasn't shaken half wished that he would follow me off the bus onto the street where I could have more room to move.

Other attacks would just be walking along and some kid would throw something at me or step in front of me taunting, pushing and not letting up.

My brother and I always stood in defense of each other. The only time I ever lost my temper so completely that I do not remember my actions was in defense of my brother. I was at the school track doing a workout when my brother's class came outside. His teacher told them to begin by jogging around the track. Some of the kids who did not know the danger of sprinting on cold muscles took off racing. The teacher told my brother to catch up.

"But I'm not warmed up yet" he said, "I thought you told us to jog."

"I said move."

"But I'm not warmed up yet."

"If you're too damned lazy to do as you're told, get off the track."

My brother looked at the teacher, not sure of what he was hearing.



"That's right Barker, get the hell our of my class!"

My brother and I looked at each other somewhat incredulous, acknowledging to each other that what was going on was very unjust.

The next morning as we entered the school, the teacher approached my brother. I took off my boots and started heading towards my class. From behind me I heard, "Okay you fucking cocksure nigger, it's about time you learned some manners. You think you're tough er. You think that you can get all the little girls.I'll cut you down to size."

I knew that when a white man starts talking about his jealousy of the stereotype of the Black man's sexual prowess that serious trouble looms.And besides I could not let him get away with talking to my brother like that. I whirled around just in time to see the teacher slam my brother hard and noisily into a locker door. I saw red and lunged. The last thing I remember yelling was, "What the fuck are you doing to my brother." When I regained consciousness, the teacher was lying doubled up on the floor, holding his stomach and I was vaguely aware that I had just kicked him. In the swirl of my senses I found my brother's frightened eyes and screamed, "Run!" And run we did, past our bicycles chained to the bike rack and all the three miles home without stopping.

We came back to school the next day with our mother at our side to meet with the teacher and the principal. The teacher apologized and did not bring up the subject of the fight. I guess he was ashamed to admit that he was beaten up by a grade nine girl. After some platitudes about how unfortunate the teacher's behaviour had been, the principal threw in that he thought that he thought that I had been unladylike. He meant it as an insult but I took it as a compliment. By ladylike he meant that I ought to have been helpless and I sure hadn't been.

My brother and I remember that fight as vividly today as if it had happened an hour ago and it is that and other incidents like it which cemented a bond between us that nothing could ever sever. Such bonds are crucial between Black people, between Black women.The give acknowledgement - speak to the truth about our experiences as Black people. A truth that is not apprehended by whites, as in the white feminist meeting. they give us strenght when we are alone because for all of us, sometimes you fight alone.

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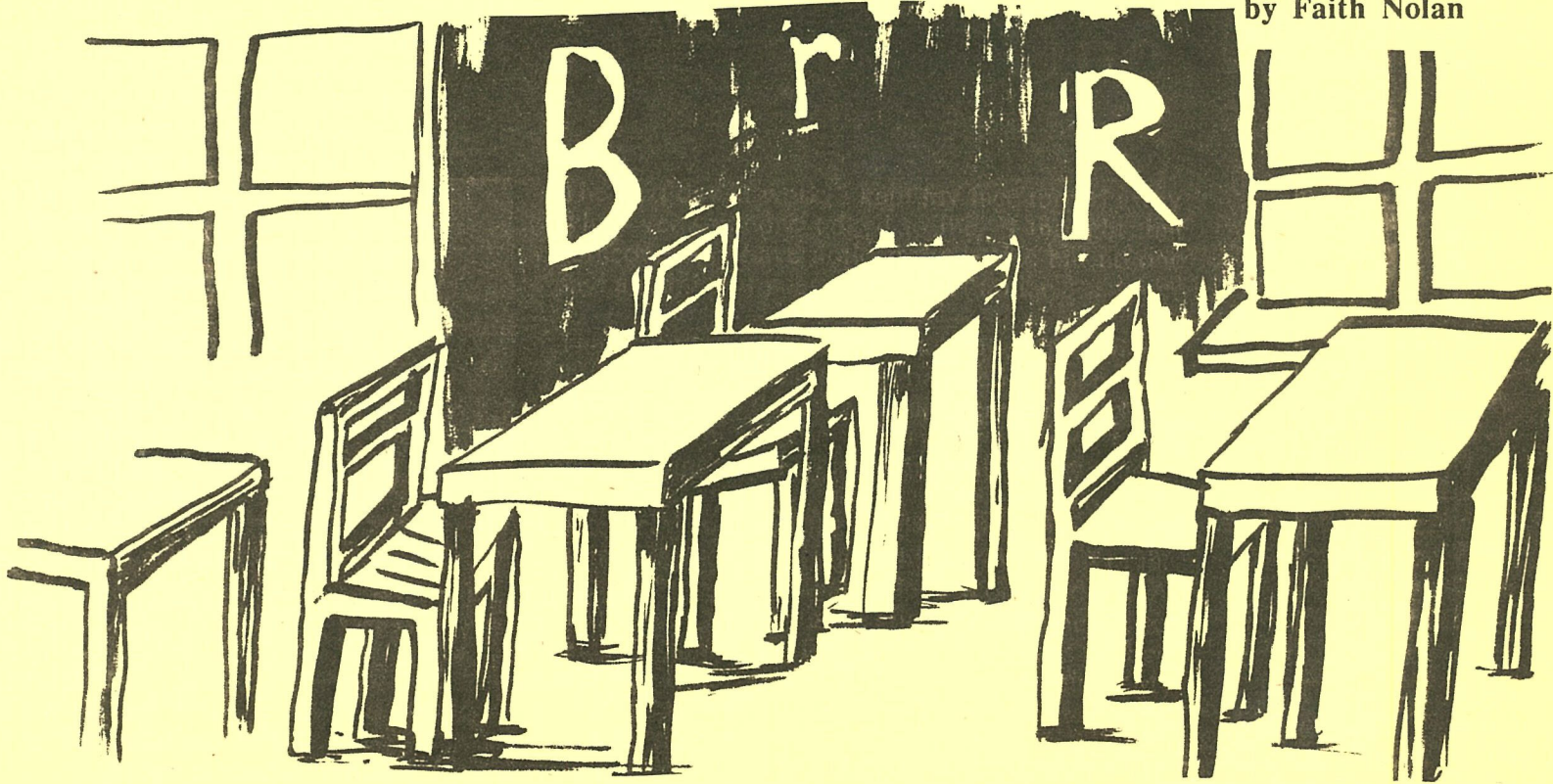
Say it here!

Send stories, articles, poems, letters, reviews and ideas.

**Our Lives
P.O. BOX 44
Station P
Toronto, Ont. M5S 2S6**

Streaming Racists

by Faith Nolan



My family moved to Toronto from Halifax in 1960. We lived south of Regent Park at Queen and Sackville because the cheap slum dwellings were the only kind rented to Black people in Toronto then. I attended St. Paul's Catholic school where my sister and I were the only Blacks in the school. The incident I remember best was when a little white boy wrote me a note calling me 'nigger', saying that if we had children they would look like zebras. After school I caught him and beat him. My victory was throwing his new black penny loafer over the school fence. The next day he complained to the principal, better known as the "sadistic Brother Dominic". I was called into his office where he said "you've no right to fight because the boy told the truth. Don't you know you are a 'nigger'", he said, smiling sweetly. "I am not! I am a negro!", I cried. I told my mother, who made him apologize and told me I had done the right thing.

I remember walking down Queen street and not understanding why adults would stop and ask "Are you Indian?" "What are you?" I still hate that question because then they would feel my hair touch my skin as if I were some freak they could accost instead of a six year old little girl. After a while I learned to run away and stay off the main streets. I carried on fighting anyone who called me 'nigger' until grade seven. Before that I had the second highest marks each year. I wanted to erase my Blackness. There was very little to remember anyway. Santa Claus was white, history and literature taught that Blacks didn't exist except as Black Sambo. It didn't occur to me that Blacks were omitted from educational materials so I wasn't upset. My grades had dropped, I started to skip school. Brother Dominic had his revenge in telling me not to return to the school for grade eight after I was suspended. The next year I was in public school with Chinese and Black students in my class for the first time. The teacher now a Cabbagetown principal would pick on the Chinese students by repeating their last names over and over and saying they would soon be taking over the world. "You'll wake up some morning and find them outside your windows and in your bed". Very few snickers were heard, the Black students empathized with their embarrassment even though we were as yet unable to vocalize why. What struck me the most that year is that one day I was made class Prime Minister in a game. I was embarrassed thinking it was not my place. Too many white people had called me 'nigger' and stared me down with hating eyes to even consider that I could even pretend to be the prime minister. Isn't the very term Canadian meant to mean white anglo-saxon?

That is what I had been taught through the deliberate omission of my race in the media and education. I was the only Black in that primary school allowed to attend the nearby top rated Jarvis Collegiate.

My grades were back to normal. At Jarvis for the first time in my life I met rich kids from Rosedale and even a few from Forest Hill. You could tell by their expensive jeans and the way a majority of teachers would smile respectfully at them because their parents had money. The teachers would comment to them about what they had read in the papers or seen of their parents on television. They were chosen to be in the chosen nucleus and attend "exotic" school trips with the teachers. The poor Black, Chinese and immigrant children would band together with working class whites to borrow money, cigarettes and equality from each other. When as we called them the 'Rosedale snobs' thought Black was in, they would try to get close to me by telling me about their good Black friend who was either a visiting African dignitary or their wonderful maid who was so much in their family, she even ate at the same table as them. I was sickened at the thought. My mother would jokingly refer to us as her Black maids as we cleaned the house after school each day. My mother said she would never allow us to grow up as maids.

Sometimes I would overhear white girls talking about how they didn't like Blacks only some Black guys who came on to them. On seeing me they would say that I was different and fit in well.

High school was a cold, lonely and isolated place where the happy rich whites banded together on the bases of race and money. The poor banded together on race. Because there were only about fifteen Black kids in the high school out of three thousand we stood outside the perimeter and were never accepted.

Eventually all my Black friends dropped out given that they were never accepted or acknowledged as having any place there anyway. Except that one day when the Black students went to the principal and demanded that they be allowed to take off Martin Luther King's memorial day. The principal threatened suspension for any students who did and four out of the seven third and fourth year students quit that year.

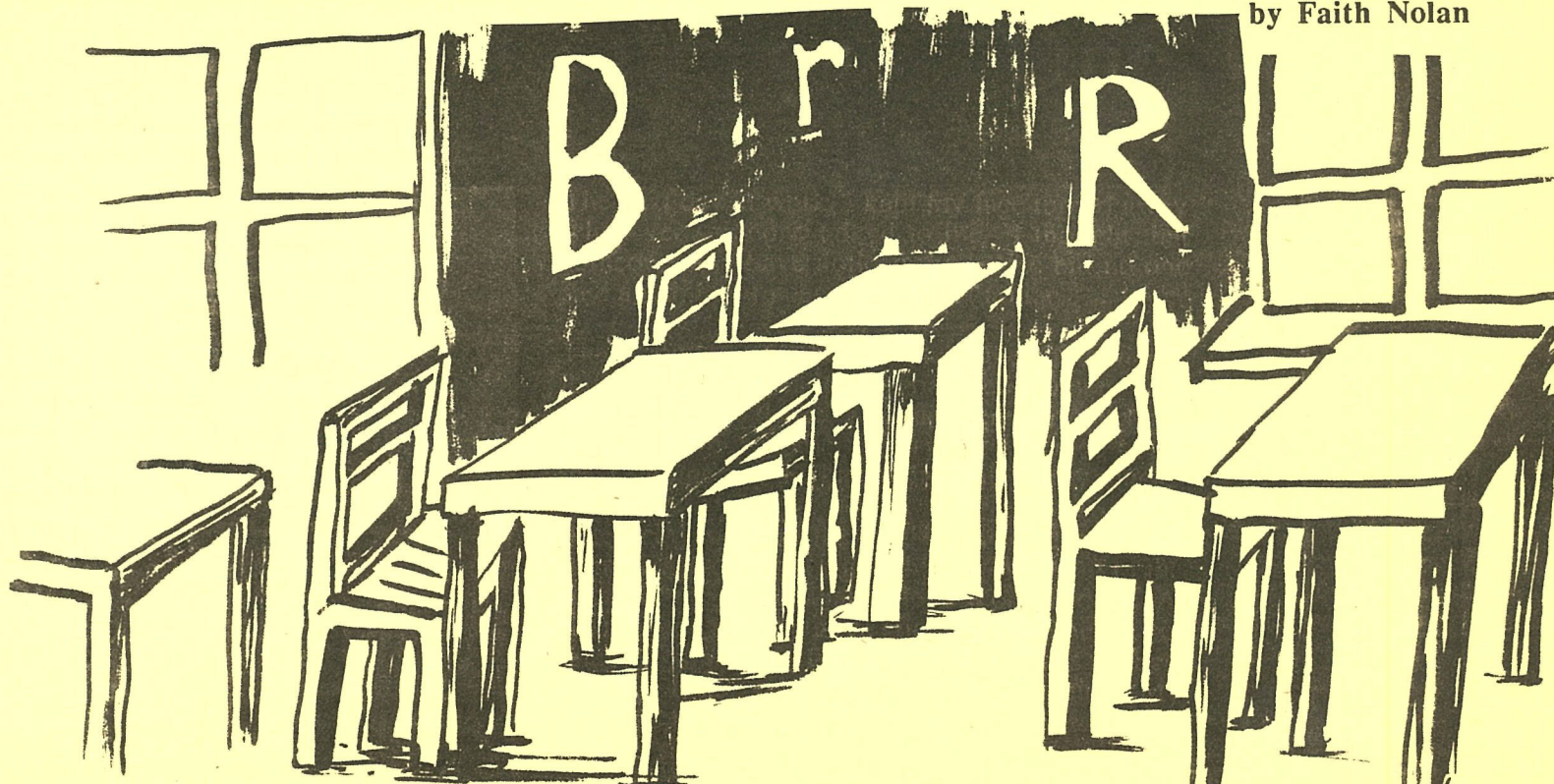
At thirty I've been looking back to those years of schooling. The thousands of kids who went to the schools I did are now my age. The privileged have become the new leaders of local governmental agencies or artsy fartsies. The middle are white or blue collar management or social workers and educators.

The idea of inferiority because of either racial difference or being poor came to all of us in society. As a working class Black I know these to be untrue as I did when I fought them as a child by fighting both students teachers and principals. These same middle and upper class classmates of mine are the teachers of today's children who are not unlike their parents and teachers before. I often wonder about this when newspapers and media praise the gains made towards equality and justice. Are these my bourgeois racist schoolmates who are writing so eloquently of what they have never known, fought against striven towards? Or does this mean the thousands of racists and anti poor people whom I encountered as a child, teen, and woman have disappeared from Toronto? These people the educators among them in particular have a long way to go in getting rid of their lifelong participation in racial assault, and, admitting either their complacency or their out and out participation would be the first step in eradicating racism.

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Domestics Aid

Working conditions were so tense that after two weeks back on the job, Desiree was forced to leave her post again. With the management dispute continuing and Intercede funds frozen, Desiree has not been paid since February 21. Hepplewith has been assisting the steering committee with their fight to gain management control of Intercede, however, because she has 'employee' status and is not a board member, there's not much more she can do but wait.

In the meantime, Desiree is unemployed. Her case against Intercede in limbo she is attempting to get her life together and focus on her future. She is still unsure of what the future will hold, but hopes to continue working in the social service field. Desiree states firmly that she is not giving up but admits, "I feel as though bread has been stolen out of my mouth".

SISTERWRITE

Book reviews
by Patricia Hayes



THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE by Gloria Naylor, Penguin Books. 192 pgs.

Brewster Place becomes the reservoir for Black people with shattered dreams and hopes. The book tells the stories of seven Black women who find themselves in one of the dumping grounds of North America.

The rewards for so many Black women, who fight a life long daily battle of racism, sexism, classism and chauvinism are loneliness, humiliation and poverty and the characters sharply outline the moulds that so many Black women find themselves naturally falling into and never falling out of them.

Naylor profiles Mattie, Etta Mae, Kiswana, Lucille, Cora Lee, Theresa and Lorraine so intimately that their pain, desires, frustrations and fragments of broken dreams explode throughout the novel, making it hard for the reader not to be able to relate passionately with at least one of the women.

Mattie's life as a woman is stomped out at an early age by her father and Ben her one and only lover---her son's betrayal extinguishes the last flicker.

Etta Mae, Lucille, and Cora Lee remain as empty shells waiting for the "love" of a man to fulfill them; never realizing that this "love" in most cases has oppressed and will destroy. Kiswana keeps up the "faith" - all Black people will overcome and she is willing to forsake her middle-class background and family in order to make this dream come true. Lorraine and Theresa expected Brewster Place to be their haven where they could live and love, but they too are destroyed by the violence of a racist homophobic society.

How about something like this for an ending, run to your nearest bookstore and pick up this book no Black women of any worth should not have read this book



Kona Mokhoera — Fedtraw organiser and ex-political prisoner-

THERE IS A WOMAN IN THIS TOWN

Patricia Parker

there is a woman in this town
she goes to different bars
sits in the remotest place
watches the other people
drinks til 2 & goes home—alone

some say she is lonely
some say she is an agent
none of us speak to her

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she lives with her husband
she raises her children
she says she is happy
& is not a women's libber

some say she is misguided
some say she is an enemy
none of us know her

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she carries a lot of weight
her flesh triples on her frame
she comes to all the dances
she does not come to the dances

some say she's a lot of fun
some say she is too fat
none of us have loved her

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she owns her own business
she goes to work in the day
she goes home at night
she does not come to the dances

some say she is a capitalist
some say she has no consciousness
none of us trust her

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she comes to all the parties
wears all the latest men's fashions
calls the women mama
& invites them to her home

some say she's into roles
some say she hates herself
none of us go out with her

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she was locked up
she comes to many meetings
she volunteers for everything
she cries when she gets upset

some say she makes them nervous
some say she's too pushy
none of us invite her home

Is she our sister?

there is a woman in this town
she fills her veins with dope
goes from house to house to sleep
borrows money whenever she can
she pays it back if she must

some say she is a thief
some say she drains their energy
none of us have trusted her

Is she our sister?

once upon a time, there was a dream
a dream of women, a dream of women
coming together and turning the world
around, turning the world around and making it over,
a dream of women, all women being sisters,
a dream of caring; a dream of protection, a dream
of peace.

once upon a time there was a dream
a dream of women, for the women who rejected the
dream, there had only been a reassurance, for the
women who believed the dream—there is dying, women,
sisters dying

once upon a time there was a dream, a dream of women
turning the world all over and it still lives—
it lives for those who would be sisters

it lives for those who need a sister
it lives for those who once upon a time had a dream.

From *Movement in Black: The Collected Poetry of Pat Parker*



BLACK WOMEN'S
COLLECTIVE (TORONTO)

Help Us To Carry On The Struggle.
Subscribe to Canada's **only**
Black Women's Newspaper.

We publish six time per year!

Rates: individuals - \$ 15. includes postage
organisations - \$ 25. includes postage

OUR LIVES is a non-profit newspaper run
for and by Black women.

Donations are also welcome in these hard
times. If you wish to be a sister to
OUR LIVES

Send donations to : Black Women's Collective
P. O. BOX 44
Station P
Toronto, Ontario.
M5S 2S4

WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Black Women's Collective is a group of Black women who came together to unite and organise politically and autonomously around Black women's issues. *Our Lives* is one way that we can speak to each other about ourselves from our own perspective. It is a way to link with other Black sisters.

The background of the women in the Collective are diverse. Some of us were born and raised in Canada; some in isolation in white communities and some from Black Canadian communities whose history in Canada goes back hundreds of years. Some of us are from different parts of the Caribbean and arrived in Canada anywhere from early childhood to recently. Some of us are from England and South Africa. We are working class and middle class. Some of us are not employed. We are writers, artists, domestic workers, musicians, teachers, social workers and health-care workers. We are lesbian and heterosexual. Some of us are mothers.

We have all been involved in political work in the Black and women's communities and are tired of the way in which our voices and our issues as Black women are ignored or treated in a cursory manner.

Those of us who worked with white feminists were fed up with white women's racism and their expectations that we should devote our labour to issues of priority to them, for their benefit, as they ignore the fact that all issues are shaped by race, race, class and sex.

Those of us who worked in various Black community organisations are tired of male sexism and the unwillingness of both men and women to address Black women's issues or challenge sexism.

Homophobia too is often unaddressed or justified as a correct position by our community. Black lesbians must often hide our lesbianism or face being ostracized.

We in the Black Women's Collective have come to the realization that communities and organisations that do not fight all oppressions - racism, sexism, classism, homophobia - can only oppress Black women. If we continue to give our labour and support to these organisations and groups we will perpetuate the injustices against us and further the interests of those who oppress us.

The Black Women's Collective supports all Black liberation and Third world struggles against capitalism and imperialism as these struggles are materially linked to ours.

GROUPS FOR BLACK WOMEN

Congress of Black Women is a national organisation with a Toronto chapter which was started in 1983. The group works against institutionalised racism and sexism. Membership is open to all Black Women. Meetings are held on the fourth Saturday of each month. Write to: *Congress of Black Women* - P.O. Box 781, Station P., Toronto M5S 2Z1.

Coalition of Visible Minority Women was formed in 1983. The coalition is a multi-racial, multi-national group of women - Black, Chinese, Philipina, Japanese, Korean, South Asian and Native women - with a representative

steering committee. The goal of the coalition is to build well a political work the group holds social activities. All unity among these women through networking and meeting are closed and are held weekly, every Sunday, at 4 p.m. Contact: *LOC*, P.O. Box 6597, Station A, Toronto, Ont. M5W 1L4. ph. 964-7477. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of each month at 2 p.m. at 15 Spadina Rd.

Zami is a political and personal support group for Black and/or Caribbean lesbians and gays. The group started in July, 1985 and meets every Thursday at 8 p.m. at 519 Church St. (Community Centre). Contact : *Zami*, P.O. Box 7289, Station A. Toronto, Ont.

Lesbians of Colour (LOC) was started in 1984 to give support and organise around being lesbians of colour. As

EVENTS

Benefit Yard Sale by the Black Women's Collective for Sister Desiree.

Place: 24 Bartlett St. (Dufferin/Bloor)

Time: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Date: Saturday 14 June 1986.