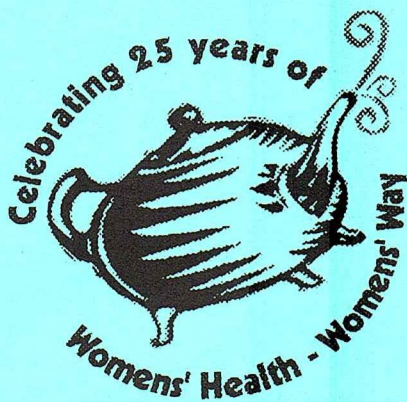


# VANCOUVER WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE



## Ideas are brewing

NEWSLETTER  
November 1996

### The Collective

#### The Vancouver Women's Health Collective

is a volunteer based organization operating on the principle of self-help. The Collective has existed since 1972 to help women develop a more pro-active approach to their own health care. We work to provide a range of services to women in Greater Vancouver and across the province, including a Health Information Centre and Helpline, Directory of Health Practitioners and Therapists, and educational work.

#219 -1675 West 8th Ave.  
Vancouver, BC V6J 1V2  
(604) 736-4234  
fax 736-2152

### Newsletter

Welcome to the VWHC Newsletter, a forum to connect us with our members and the community at large around women's health issues and activities at the Collective. We would like to include more articles, reviews and events so please - **send us your stuff!** You can leave a message at the Collective, or drop a note in our newsletter box.

## Celebrating 25 Years of Women's Health - Women's Way

by Carrie Gorkoff

Twenty-five years. A quarter of a century! Upward and onward we crawl. A milestone. Through all the ups and downs, we are still here. The grassroots have not been uprooted. We may have flailed and we may have been cut down, but we did not dry up and die. Yahoo!

Yes, 25 years. An accomplishment to be proud of. How did we get here? Was it always this good? Where are we going?

It all started in 1971, when a woman who was extremely dissatisfied with the service she received from her doctor, ran an ad in the paper, inviting women to meet and share their similar experiences. And low and behold, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective was born...kicking and screaming.

By 1972, with self-help being the focus, the Collective was providing clinic services for women including pap tests, pregnancy tests, diaphragm and cap fitting. We gave public workshops regularly on topics such as alternative medicine and mental health. We established the health information phone line. We

provided abortion counseling and referral services. Lastly, we gathered the information centre materials and created the file system.

From this point forward, our magnificent 25 year old herstory grew - almost drying up at some points, and flourishing at others - largely due to varying amounts of funding. The Collective has been, and continues to be funded by the BC Ministry of Women's Equality and the City of Vancouver, as well as through our grant-writing efforts to various companies and foundations. Income comes also from donations, fees for workshops, and special fundraising events, which, by the way, are happening soon. The fundraising committee has decided to *mark* this special year by producing a calendar, featuring pictures of members of the collective on each month. *Creativity* is encouraged. We need a **photographer**. If you want to help out, or know someone who does, let us know - us being the fundraising committee. Just call the Collective at 736-4234.

Back to herstory. So, yes. We have accomplished a lot

Please see *Celebrating* page 2

**Celebrating** continued from page 1

through the years. One of the major highlights of the Collective's progress was marked in 1984. Besides being the time period when the clinic services ended, the Collective received a grant from the Promotion Directorate of Health and Welfare Canada for a self-help project on five health topics: PMS, DES (a drug given to pregnant women in the 40's and 50's and 60's), cervical health, vaginal health, breast health and menopause. The grant involved development of workshops and information packets on each health topic as well as travel to other parts of the province, Alberta and the Yukon, to present these workshops.

Today, the Collective continues to *help women to help themselves* by providing information on healthcare choices. We do this through: education and support; publications; our health information resource centre; specific research projects; and networking, advocacy and lobby work with many organizations and community groups on a local, provincial and federal basis.

...And into the future we leap with the unveiling of our *Women's Health Information Network* (WHIN). In the fall of 1992, the VWHC received a grant from the Ministry of Health to explore the development of a computerized women's health information network for BC. During the next two years, two separate studies were conducted. These resulted in a list of guiding principals in the content and the end user requirements of WHIN, and in a definition of both

advocacy specific contents of the database and the role of the community health advocate. The databases are designed to be user friendly and will be accessible to anyone at one or all of the women's centres, community health centres, community centres and public health units, depending on the community's needs and resources. The community health advocates (CHA) will work out of these centres and use the databases to help women make better health care choices. The maintenance and updating of the databases will be

## VWHC 25th Anniversary Celebration

with

### Laura Love Band

at Richards on Richards  
Wednesday, December 4th, Doors open  
8:00pm  
Cost \$15.00

Tickets available at VWHC or call 218-2272

Laura Love will be debuting their new CD. The evening promises to be filled with fun, music and frivolity.

**Come and celebrate with us!**

the responsibility of the VWHC and funding will be/has been targeted through regional, provincial, federal, foundation and corporate sources.

WHIN answers the 90's need for accessible health information and provides the means to build community specific and province wide networks. Each of the components of the system are based on the model of health information delivery and advocacy work that the VWHC is already well known for. In using WHIN as a tool for community development around women's health care, we can maximize

the changes introduced provincially around health care reform to better benefit women. Members of the health community strongly support the introduction of this system:

*"The WHIN project proposal is an important resource tool for nurses both as women and as patient/client advocates."* (BC Nurses' Union) *"The information that women are given is often confusing and complicated...they face barriers to making sense of the information they receive...some are unfamiliar with medical jargon...some are ESL...some cannot afford to travel to the VWHC. WHIN offers a solution to all these barriers."* (REACH Community Health Care).

We could go on and on about what the Collective has done, what it continues to do, and what it plans to do, but the best way to really find out is to give us a call, visit us or join us. Anyone of our flourishing committees would love to hear from you.

And, the big kicker to all of this . . . (drum-roll please . . . we get to celebrate. To commemorate and celebrate our 25th year of existence and to kick off the beginning of the WHIN

system, a big event is being planned. It's happening on **December 4th at Richards on Richards**. An evening of fun and frivolity with the **Laura Love Band**. An opportunity to bring all our friends and comrades together . . . to put our TEAPOTS in the cupboard, and take out the FLASKS; which of course, we would never really do, being so health conscious and all. Watch for more information.

# The Community Health Advocate Project

Since May of this year, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective (VWHC) has been coordinating the *Community Health Advocate* (CHA) project. This project has been designed as a community outreach component of our Women's Health Information Network (WHIN); see the 25th Anniversary article for more details about WHIN. It encompasses the research and writing of a CHA training manual, the co-ordination and development of partnerships with various community groups, and the training and setting up of designates as health advocates in these partnered community group settings.

As this is a pilot project, we are currently working in partnership with community groups in the Vancouver area. Our partners to date are the Gay & Lesbian Centre of Vancouver, the Kitsilano and Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Houses, the Mount Pleasant Family Place, the Vancouver/Richmond Mental Health Network, and the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. Each of these organizations brings varied and diverse voices to the planning. In addition, they are providing a member of their community to train as a CHA, and a space within their centres out of which the

trained CHA will work.

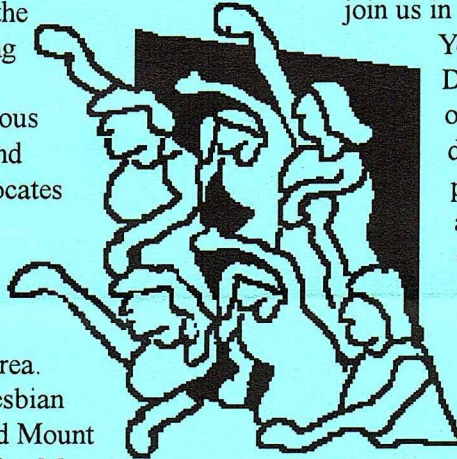
Over the summer, a great deal of activity has gone into the CHA project both at VWHC and in the community. We hired Jean Kang on a student summer grant program, to complete the medical research for our manual. We were fortunate to have three student nurses

join us in a practicum over the summer; Sandra Young, Coco Elgood and Denise Delane assisted in research and writing of the CHA manual and joined in doing outreach with our community partners. The community partners met a few times to give their input to ensure that the contents of the training manual would speak to all women.

Going out to our community partners has been beneficial in many ways. We were able to bring our services to the minds of our

community partners and establish and strengthen our relationships with them.

This program will continue over the next few months and we look forward to having the trained CHAs out in community very soon. If interested in more details, call Megan Graham (736-4234).



## Vancouver Women's Health Collective

### Information Centre

Have a health concern or need good health information?

Looking for a new doctor, therapist, or holistic health practitioner?

Looking for a health-related support group or workshop?

We have an extensive reference library, clippings files, and referral files on doctors, holistic practitioners and therapists. We have volunteers on hand to assist you with all your inquiries.

Monday	10:00 am - 1:00 pm
Tuesday	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Wednesday	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Thursday	10:00 am - 1:00 pm
2nd and 4th Sat.	1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Give us a call at 736-5262

or

drop in at 219-1675 West 8th Avenue  
Vancouver, B.C.

# Books, books, books

## **Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom Creating Physical and Emotional Health and Healing**

**By Christiane Northrup, M.D.**

*Reviewed by Anna Rinaldo*

When Wendy gave me this book for the newsletter book review section she asked me if I had heard of it. I looked at the author and immediately recognized the name, as I'd previously been given a newsletter written by Christiane Northrup. The newsletter did not do much for me; it was very flashy in layout with photos of Dr. Northrup in her white lab coat, encouraging women to take charge of their health and to stop relying solely on western medicine. The newsletter (and now that I think about it more, it may have been a promotional product to advertise the newsletter) definitely was trying to persuade the reader to subscribe, the cost of which was quite expensive. I wasn't impressed with the content of the newsletter and how it was presented. So much for my first encounter, now for the second:

I often read the acknowledgements, preface, and introduction of books and I was particularly interested in learning more about where Christiane was coming from. Her introduction is titled "Physician, Heal Thyself". I found this to be a positive and important beginning to "Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom". She honors herstory:

"While I had always believed this intellectually, to become effective as a healer I had to experience it personally. Only by living through a serious health problem did I become understanding of what other women with health and life problems are living through. As long as I was an overachieving, never-sick white female fully living out of the male-

dominant worldview, I was not able to see the patterns that are so commonly associated with women's health problems. As long as I saw myself as separate from other women, I could never understand that these patterns were part of many women's struggles to be whole."

"Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom" is a valuable guide for our healing journeys. Christiane frequently refers to a very basic premise that I believe we are all challenged to reclaim: "...trust what we know in our bones: that our bodies are our allies, and that they will always point us in the direction we need to go next".

"Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom" is divided into 3 parts: (1)From External Control To Inner Guidance; (2)The Anatomy Of Women's Wisdom; and (3)Choices For Healing: Creating Your Personal Plan.

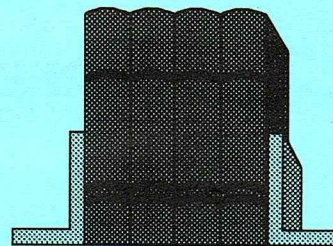
Christiane covers a lot of material and in a way that is HEALING. For example, in her description on how to work with dreams she states "Choose a night when you have some energy and focus to devote to the process". As I read this I felt relieved-I don't have to do it all and do it right and do it right now! She transforms the breast self-exam from a fear based procedure to one of gentle exploration, acceptance, caring, and love:

"A good time to change how you think about and do your breast exams is right after you've had a normal exam with your health care practitioner and you know that everything is currently normal. When I am examining a woman's breasts, I ask her to do so 'not necessarily to find suspicious lumps' but to send energies of caring and respect to this area of her body.

Approach your breasts with respect. If you are currently afraid of your breasts and find them "too lumpy,"

start changing your attitude toward them by paying special attention to them during your daily bath or shower. When you wash this area of your body, pay attention to how the skin feels under your fingers. Imagine that you have healing power in your hands (which you actually do). As you wash your breasts and under your arms, do so in the spirit of blessing this area of your body. As you do so, you will be learning the basic contours and feel of your own breasts. Do this as a daily part of your bathing until you have reclaimed some respect for your breasts as an important part of your anatomy."

Thanks to Christiane for "Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom". It is a wonderful guide for supporting and empowering women in our lifelong process of improving our relationships with ourselves.



## **NEW BOOKS**

**Breast Cancer? Breast Health!**

**The Wise Woman Way**  
Susan S. Weed

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**The Harvard Guide To Women's Health**

**Karen J. Carlson, M.D. et al**

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**The Good Vibrations Guide To Sex**

**Cathy Winks and Anne Semans**

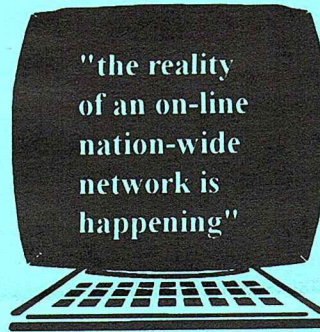
# The Canadian Women's Health Network

(CWHN) is almost up and running. After years in the planning stages, the reality of an on-line nation-wide network is happening.

Women's groups have always organized socially on healthcare issues. We have long understood that our social conditions have profoundly influenced our health. We have worked for *alternative strategies* in healthcare. We have responded to emerging issues as they relate to our health. Building on these experiences, there has been a national coordinating team of women working towards creating a network to share healthcare information, that includes strategies and insights for change to benefit all women. With the implementation of the CWHN, we can push for these alternative strategies to become *mainstream*. We can work to create a place where healthcare will meet our needs. The CWHN will be a place where women will strive for change.

Recently, Health Canada funded the *Centres of Excellence for Women's Health*. The idea is to put together diverse groups of women from community groups and service providers to academic researchers, all working towards women-centered policy and research that meets women's healthcare needs. This is a dynamic time. With the CWHN receiving funding to implement their network, women will be able to get healthcare information from a national clearinghouse.

They can also organize with other like-minded individuals and groups on women-centered research and policy design. Lastly, they can read about other initiatives in women's health through their newsletter, *Network*.



In B.C., we are looking to organize a provincial committee of CWHN that will respond to this province's vision of what women's healthcare needs are. We are hoping that women in B.C. will think that having a national network is advantageous. We are looking for women who will volunteer their time and share their ideas and information around healthcare. CWHN needs the voices of all women for it to be a truly diverse network that links women, health, action and ideas together. Our work in B.C. is significant and must be shared. If you would like more information about CWHN and are interested in creating a voice in B.C. by developing a provincial network, please contact:

Robin Barnett - ph. 875-3136 (w)  
rbarnett@w.womenhosp.bc.ca  
Megan Graham - ph. 736-4234 (w)  
mgraham@mindlink.bc.ca

You can access the CWHN web page at  
<http://www.web.apc.org/cwhn>

## FREE COUNSELLING SERVICE AT THE COLLECTIVE

I would like to draw attention to the counselling service which I am now offering on a voluntary basis, through the Vancouver Women's Health Collective at 219-1675 West 8th Ave, Vancouver, BC.

My name is Laura Rolls, and as a third year holistic counselling student of the Coastal Mountain College of the Healing Arts, I am doing my practicum placement at the Health Collective for the next few months. This service is offered free of charge.

My intention in counselling, is to simply be with my clients, allowing them the space to be heard and assisting them in gaining awareness into their present difficulties. As a counsellor, I offer a safe, non-judgmental space in which we can explore life issues together.

I am counselling at the Health Collective on Wednesdays, beginning October 16, 1996, at the following times:

12 - 1 pm, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 3 - 4 pm, 5 - 6 pm or 6:30 - 7:30 pm.

Anyone interested in scheduling an appointment should contact the Vancouver Women's Health Collective at (604) 736-4234.

# RITUAL ABUSE IS REAL

**Editorial note:** *In response to feedback from the Ritual Abuse Advocacy Coalition regarding the reviews of the book "Where the Rivers Join" in our last newsletter, we have invited them to submit an article which addresses the issues surrounding ritual abuse. We hope to be able to raise awareness and to open a dialogue on this little known topic and we invite your further comments.*

Survivors of ritual abuse are caught between two worlds: that of the perpetrating group, which may include the survivor's entire family of origin; and that of so-called 'normal' society, which habitually denies, silences, ridicules and misrepresents the reality of ritual abuse.

We are bombarded daily with radio, TV and newspaper articles that distort and deny our experience through propagation of the so-called 'false memory syndrome' lie, yet provide overwhelming evidence of this society's cruelty toward children. Well-meaning journalists wring their hands, emphasize and re-emphasize the 'unbelievable', 'incomprehensible' nature of apparently aberrant 'evil' acts; while ritual abuse survivors, whose lives are a litany of answers to the 'who, what, where, how and why' of such tragedies (e.g. missing children, brutal child murders and child prostitution rings) are, by the same journalists, censored, ridiculed and shunned.

Many of the components of ritual abuse (e.g. organized crime networks, destructive cults, drug trafficking, murder, kidnapping, child prostitution and pornography rings, rape camps, torture and mind control

experiments), when considered separately, are already recognised as part of 'this' world. However, when survivors report a web of similar crimes taking place, not in an episode of the X-files or some reassuringly 'foreign' country, but at the epicentre of 'normal' society, the media censors, distorts, marginalises and ridicules our experience, and encourages others to do the same.

Ritual abuse survivors live their lives in the cracks, between the shadow of the offending group and its devastating effects on our bodies, minds and souls, and the brick wall of denial that has gone up in our faces ever since we began to speak out. Some of us may be fortunate enough to have found a supportive therapist, partner, friend or fellow survivor to share the journey with. Others may come up against denial, rejection, minimizing or further abuse.

Ritual abuse survivors often experience rejection, ostracism, malicious rumours and discreditation, as well as ridicule and harassment, from friends, family and co-workers after disclosing the abuse. Survivors have lost jobs, homes and entire support systems, not to mention acquaintances and friends. Survivors seeking support are told they made it up, it wasn't really that bad, that they are mentally ill, physically dangerous or not eligible for help. The usual avenues of assistance, such as crisis lines, emergency rooms, transition houses, police protection and disability payments are commonly unavailable for reasons of disbelief, denial, misunderstanding, misguided support, or outright danger. Survivors who have access to

money, a relatively safe living space, a believing therapist and some distance from the offending group, can begin to heal. Others may end up running to stand still, fighting current harassment, child custody disputes, welfare tribunals and unsafe housing, disbelieving or abusive psychiatrists, often ending up on welfare, living in their car or on the street. It is no surprise, therefore, that some survivors choose the "flight to health", to return to the offending group or reinstate disbelief in their own memories.

Ritual abuse does not take place in an alternate reality, but is, like institutional racism or sexism, embedded in the very structures of our society. Like other forms of organized injustice, destructive secret societies, networks and cults are able to operate precisely because of a shielding skin of myths, e.g. the nuclear family is sacrosanct, good and evil people live in separate bodies, 'civilized' modern humans

*"Ritual abuse does not take place in an alternate reality, but is, like institutional racism or sexism, embedded in the very structures of our society."*

don't eat flesh or rape kids, daycare workers do not dig tunnels, children habitually

lie. To sidestep these myths, to avoid educating oneself about the painful reality of ritual abuse and confronting the subsequent challenges to one's worldview, is essentially to ally oneself with the support structure of societal denial which allows ritual abuse to take place. Put simply, if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem; there is no comfortable middle ground.

Those who experience the privilege of not having been

*Please see Ritual Abuse page 7*

*Ritual Abuse continued from page 6*

ritually abused can choose to use the space this gives them to fight against the societal structures which enable people to profit from controlling the minds and bodies of others yet remain above and beyond the reach of law. Those who have not been ritually abused can also choose not to minimize, marginalize, exoticize or pathologize ritual abuse survivors' lives. Ritual abuse survivors cannot afford the luxury of debating whether or not our experience is real, we simply get on with the business of understanding it, so that we can save our own lives.

After all, we're not really so very different.

*Copyright Rowan Swords, c/o The Ritual Abuse Survivors Advocacy Coalition,  
Little Italy Postal Outlet, P.O. Box 21582, Vancouver, BC, V5N 5T5*

## What's Happening?

### Contact Point

#### A place for lesbians on the west side

- a safe place to meet and socialize with **women** of any age, race, colour, creed **who love women**
- tell us where you are at, share your interests, or come for a hug and a smile
- for more information leave a message with **Raine** at the **Women's Health Collective 736-4234** or just drop by!!

**6:30-8:30 pm every Sunday**  
**Women's Health Collective**  
**#219 - 1675 West 8th Ave.**

### Life Quilt for Breast Cancer

The October 20th event at the Diane Farris Gallery was a big success with around 700 people attending. The completed first panel was unveiled and all the bordering squares from the first panel were displayed with their accompanying stories. It was a very emotional day for all those participants whose squares were

on that first panel. Speakers included Jackie Ralph Jamieson who spoke of the square she made for herself and Rosalind McPhee, author of "Picasso's Woman", who passed away last spring from breast cancer.

Approximately \$10,000 was raised to help the quilt continue in its travels.

After a brief two day stay at the BC Hydro building in Burnaby, the three quilt panels were packaged up and sent to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary where they will be until December 6th. We are currently compiling the data from a

preliminary needs assessment that was sent out via the "Äbreast in the 90's" newsletter. We have had excellent response and are hoping to get some good data that will enable us to get some practical support out to those in need.

We are also currently organizing our across Canada tour. Tentative plans are made to visit Saskatchewan in April, Quebec in May, and we are confirmed to attend the First International Breast Cancer Conference in Kingston from July 13-17. As soon as other dates and locations are confirmed, we will let you know via the newsletter.

### Abortion Peer Support Group

Many women have difficulty dealing with the multitude of feelings triggered by an abortion.

Along with the stresses which accompany any major decision, women must exercise this choice in a hostile climate shrouded with messages of guilt and shame.

The Vancouver Women's Health Collective believes women need a safe place to talk about their experiences of abortion in complete confidentiality. The inherent quality of healing which takes place when women tell their stories and are listened to has long been a part of the women's self help movement.

The Women's Health Collective runs post-abortion support groups twice a month. For times and dates or more information, please call:

# VWHC Committee Reports

*Volunteers are an essential part of the Collective and there are many opportunities for volunteers to share and expand their skills and interests. Here is a brief sampling of our activities and what our volunteers are doing on our various committees.*

## Administration

We've had lots of extra help in our office over the last few months. Volunteers have busily been faxing, photocopying, data and word processing, cleaning, answering phones and helping wherever they can.

## Information Centre

During the summer, we hired a student through a student employment grant program, and this generated a flurry of fruitful activity which included updating our doctor/therapist files and archiving and cleaning up our health info files. Volunteers continue to help us in many ways from doing info centre shifts to doing background clerical and computer work. (See "Activities" section for more details about the info centre.)

## Fundraising



This committee is hard at work organizing our 25th Anniversary events. Lots of surprises coming up! Don't forget...The Laura Love Band will be coming to to kick off our celebrations on Wednesday, December 4th, 8:00pm at Richards on Richards. Hope you can come and celebrate with us!

## Education

Committee volunteers have been participating in internal workshops on workshop facilitation and techniques. A couple of members have just recently worked on and conducted menopause workshops. Others have expressed interest in doing youth sexuality and safe sex workshops.

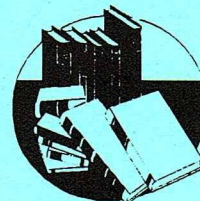
We will continue with internal development and process and are planning to develop workshop packages in conjunction with responding to community requests.

## Steering Committee

At long last...a committee to keep us on track has been formed...and they have been delving into the inner depths of the Collective, getting to know our policies, our long term plans, and our role within and connection with the community.

## Publications

With an influx of new volunteers, we have been able to spark up energy and have been busy planning, editing, writing, and desktop publishing...and voila...the newsletter is reborn!



**Interested in volunteering?  
Call Wendy at 736-4234.**