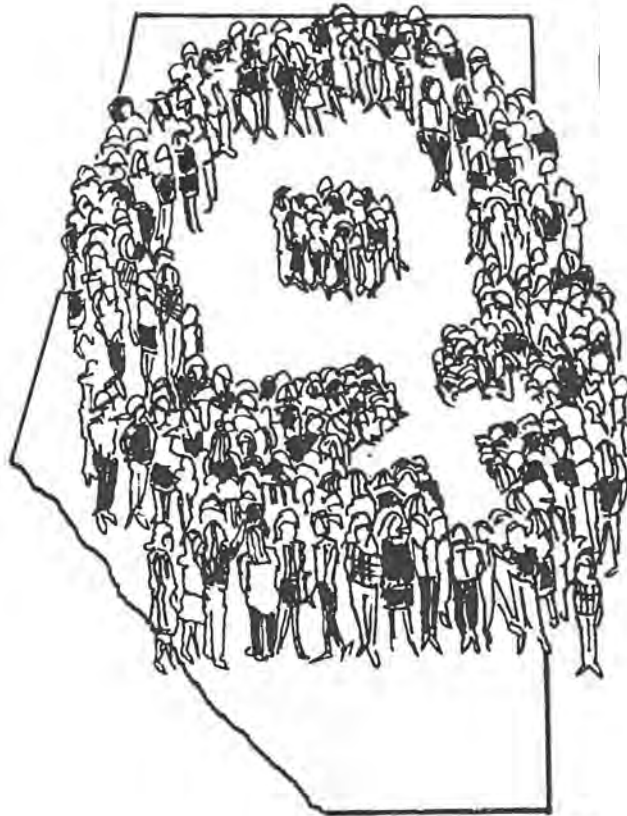


ALBERTA STATUS OF WOMEN  
A C T I O N  
C O M M I T T E E

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*M. Reece*

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1983 ANNUAL ASSEMBLY  
LISTER HALL, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FRIDAY, NOV. 25 to SUNDAY NOV. 27

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# SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

**Friday,**

**November 25**

7:30 pm Registration  
*"Picture Wall"*  
*Regional Wall Displays*  
*Women's Work Wall*  
*Business Wall*  
*Wine & Cheese*  
*to 10:30 pm*

**Saturday,**  
**November 26**

*"Where We Have Been"*  
 8:30 am Registration

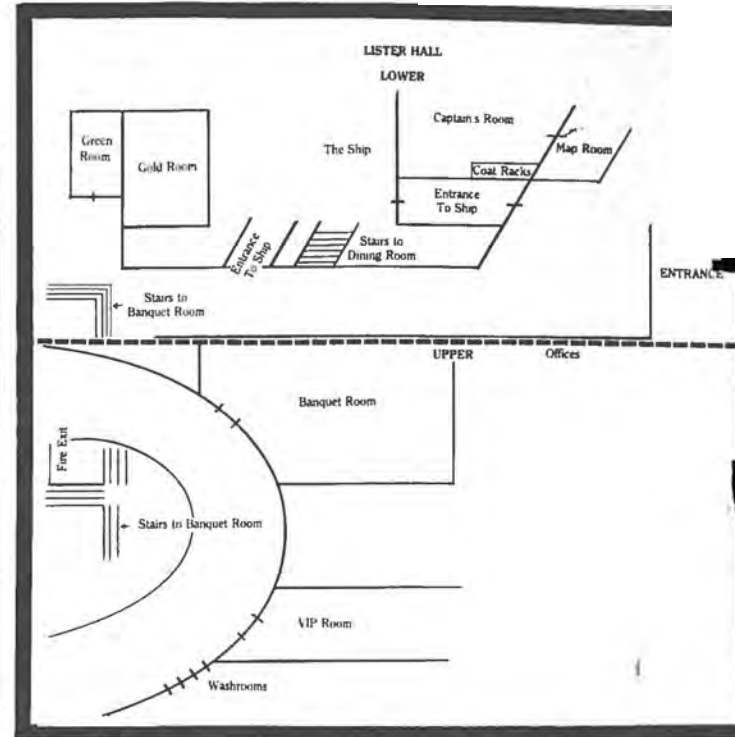
9:00 am Assembly in the Banquet Room  
 9:30 am Working Groups Formation  
 10:00 am Coffee Break  
 10:30 am Annual Report:  
*Board Report*  
*Regional Reports*  
*"Your Report"*

**Saturday,**  
**November 26**

12:15 Lunch in The Ship  
*"Where are We Going?"*  
 1:30 pm Working Groups  
 3:30 pm Coffee Break  
 4:00 pm Assembly  
 5:15 pm Election  
 5:30 pm Reception in the Map Room  
 & Captains Room (cash bar)  
 6:30 pm Banquet  
 in The Ship

**Sunday,**  
**November 27**

*"We're on our Way"*  
 9:30 am New Groups  
 New Board  
 12:00 Farewells



STORIES OF A YEAR...



**Report to the 1983 ASWAC Annual Assembly**  
**Alberta Status of Women Action Committee**

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# Who We Are...

### 1982-83 BOARD (present)

Donna Anthony, Edmonton  
 Marilyn Assheton-Smith, Edmonton  
 Myrna Barber, Grande Prairie  
 Meaghan Dean, Edmonton  
 Ardelle Dudley, Fort Saskatchewan  
 Rachel Ferrington, Calgary  
 Deborah Kosher, Fort McMurray  
 Liz Lunney, Edmonton  
 Janet Maher, Edmonton  
 Irene Puik, Fort McMurray  
 Anne Runyan, Edmonton  
 Doris Schupp, Calgary  
 Alex Scott, Grand Centre

### 1982-83 PAST BOARD MEMBERS

Jeni Ellman, Edmonton  
 Ione Challborn, Edmonton (now in  
 Winnipeg)

### ASWAC STAFF

Frances Adams, Office Manager  
 Mair Smith, Organizer

### REGIONAL PROJECT STAFF

Chris Bennet-Clark, Vermilion  
 Jennifer Berezan, Calgary  
 Carol Burnett, Lethbridge  
 Marilyn Guille, Whitecourt  
 Barbara J. Hill, Vermilion  
 Dora Marlow, Cardston  
 Suzn Morgan, Calgary  
 Judy Moynihan, Fort McMurray  
 Shelagh Parsons, Edmonton (Co-ord.)  
 Marty Whitesun, Hythe  
 Lois Willetts, Edmonton

Cover artwork: Terri Gupta  
 Layout: Meaghan Dean

# BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

Here's your 1983 ASWAC Report!

Every ASWAC board is unique and so is the work that each board does. The 1982-83 ASWAC board wanted to produce a written report of its year that reflects not only what it has done but how it has done it.

To do this, we chose a quite different format from previous ASWAC annual reports. Instead of handing you a sheaf of legal-size paper at the Assembly in November, we are giving you this booklet to read at your leisure before the Assembly.

Our reasons for making this choice are many, but some stand out in our minds more than others. For one thing, we are keenly aware that the ASWAC board and staff have worked together over the past year, so it seemed more natural and logical to

create a way in which anyone interested in writing a report could do so. In previous years the writing of the annual report has tended to fall to one person, usually the president.

For another thing, it is important to us to try to convey to you some of the incredible variety of perspective each board and staff member brought to our work. This variety usually is lost in a report compiled by only one or even two board members.

This format allowed those who used it to each speak for herself. Some stories may talk about the same things, but you'll notice none will talk about it from exactly the same position. This so much more accurately portrays for you the way we really worked.

Yet another reason is our desire

that those board members not comfortable with the written medium have other options to choose from for telling you about their year. By getting this written and out to you beforehand, it frees us up to focus—between now and the Assembly—on other just as valuable and legitimate ways of reporting our work. For instance, those more comfortable with the verbal medium may report to you that way. Also, there are some aspects of our work that just cannot be conveyed in the written word. We don't want to see this information omitted simply because of some old habit that told us an annual report can only be made in writing.

Read and enjoy. Hope we'll see you at the ASWAC Assembly in November when we can talk with you some more.

## Where we've been...

Here are but some of the things that kept us busy this past year. The details of each require far more space than could be given here. So, if there is any of the following that interests you and that you would like to hear more about, please feel free to ask us.

Some of the ISSUES we've discussed include: pornography (pay t.v., MP David Kilgour's proposed pornography legislation), Medicare, council on women's affairs, Lodgepole hearings, women's federal tax status, sexual assault, shelter allowances, grants (getting and administering), creative disintegration, decentralization of ASWAC, working relationships, ASWAC clearinghouse functions, Common Women Books and the May women's shelter conference, sexism and violence in the judicial system (McGillivray case and others), woman fired for being pregnant, abortion, redefining the feminist position on peace...

ASWAC has written and submitted BRIEFS to: federal NDP task force on older women, Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council women and work special program. MEDIA WORK we've done included being invited to partic-

ipate in numerous radio and some television shows to discuss a variety of subjects. PUBLICATIONS put out included: the ASWAC Newsletter (8 issues), Municipal Election '83 handbook and the 1983 ASWAC Annual Report booklet.

ASWAC has shown direct SUPPORT and SOLIDARITY for many issues, events and groups: Red Deer Status of Women, Abortion By Choice Edmonton, Webspinner, Summer School for Women Organizing, International Women's Day, Women's Program University of Alberta Faculty of Extension, Ending the Silence conference, Alberta Society of Women Against Violence, women of Greenam Common (peace camp in England), Everywoman's Place Social Political Action group, Calgary Women's Summer Festival. PROTESTS actively engaged in included: Laudon Wainwright III concert in Edmonton, First Choice Playboy Channel.

ASWAC has carried out extensive NETWORKING through SPEECHES and DISPLAYS at various conferences and other events, including: unions, schools, Jewish women's group, National Farm Women, political parties, provincial cabinet ministers, Sisters of the Assumption, rape workshop in Peace River, community groups,

women's peace groups, sundry conferences, training session for regional workers, microtech, incest workshop in Lloydminster, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (in B.C.) Canadian Labor Congress (in Quebec), Canadian Congress of Learning Opportunities for Women, Learned Societies (women's studies meeting in Vancouver), Women's Caucus of the Canadian Federation of Students, Sexual Assault Centre (Edmonton), Council of Women's Emergency Shelters, Grande Prairie Business and Professional Women's Club, Calgary Working Women, Fort McMurray Women's Action Committee, University of Alberta Women's Centre, Women Law and the Economy conference at Banff.

This past year has also seen many CHANGES begun, including those affecting board agendas, minutes, committees, executive structure, the annual general meeting. Some of the many MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES were: delegate and nomination to the National Action Committee on the Status of Women conference, turning over the ASWAC talent bank to an autonomous group, nomination for the National Pacifier Award, made greeting cards for sale, devised a new ASWAC pin.

# SOME OF OUR STORIES...

## An ASWAC exclusive

ASWAC stoard member Ardelle Dudley was recently in the office on one of her quick whirls through town. It was an opportune time to chat with Ardelle for a few moments to get her impressions about how this year on the stoard has gone--the highs and lows of her experience as a stoard member and her hopes for the future. In providing this interview for you, we were particularly fortunate that one of Ms. Dudley's closest friends, A.D., was also in the office at the same time. Knowing Ardelle as intimately as she does, A.D. agreed to interview her for this particular feature.

A.D.: Ardelle, what made you decide to run for the board in the first place? It seemed like you had managed to stay away from that kind of commitment to the Women's Movement for so long--what changed your mind?

Ardelle: A very good question, A.D. I like sharp journalists! Actually, you're quite right. I did spend several years hiding out whenever I went to an annual ASWAC conference. But last year, just by accident, I happened to have a little higher profile. Near the end, when everybody was worried that there weren't enough women running for the stoard, an old woman friend of mine spotted me hiding under the Common Woman Books table. She joined me there for a chat and really pinned me down to brass tacks about when I was going to get serious about women's work and do something...um...well...

I guess you could say, more public about what I'd been saying all these past years. To make a long discourse short, I guess you could say I was successfully guilted out. It was just a few moments after that that Mair Smith had a bright

pink nomination form in my hands and was steering me over to the wall to take a Polaroid Pic. That started it all.

A.D.: So are you saying that you were forced to run for the board? Are you saying all those years of Assertion Training Courses--which I happen to know you've taken--were useless to you when it came to saying "no" to a convincing feminist?

Ardelle: Well, A.D., when you put it that way, I feel ashamed and weak to have to admit that was part of it. Now I don't want to be misunderstood...I hate to be misunderstood, you know...It wasn't totally my problem with assertion that got me into this year of "public commitment". Deep down in my woman's soul I guess I was really ready to take that next step...that acceptance that the personal is the political (and vice versa, of course). I am strong sometimes and feel I can handle things pretty good when I set my mind to it. So I decided I may as well take a lunge at it and see what would happen. At the time I knew I could always resign after the first stoard meeting if things didn't go well.

A.D.: You keep saying "stoard". That's a word I haven't heard before. What does it mean and why aren't you calling it what it really is--a board? I do recall at last year's annual general meeting that the membership passed a motion changing the name from steering committee to board. Isn't that what it really is?

Ardelle: Umm...I couldn't slip that one by you, eh? Well as I recall, we all called ourselves "the board" for a good long while after we began our meetings. Then, during one of our constant

and continuing discussions about power, roles, authority, equality--you know, all those things that we talk about--one of the women on the board...I mean stoard, just used the word, like she had been saying it all her life. I'll tell you A.D., it came out so naturally that all of us just nodded like we understood it and carried on talking. It wasn't until quite awhile later that we talked about the word and figured out that we were yearning for the good old days when it used to be the steering committee and we didn't have the problem of what I call "contamination". The days when women had steering committees and men had boards and nobody was mixed up about whether they were one or the other. But, I digress somewhat. The point is that at our meetings we began to realize that the words we use determine what we do and how we do it. So, in the end, many of us agreed that creating our own word was the best solution and gave us freedom to carry on with our work. It also includes the staff...staff...board...stoard...get the picture? We weren't wasting our good energy on trying to define words that aren't ours.

A.D.: Speaking of doing work, Ardelle, I've heard a few comments around that women are wondering if this year's board...pardon me, I mean stoard, really did very much work. I've heard that you spent far too much time on your process and didn't really get down to business at your stoard meetings. In fact I've heard a few women say that meetings were often like group therapy. What do you have to say about that?

Ardelle: Ah!...the old task/process split again, A.D. I guess you and I are on the same grapevines, too, cause I've heard the same rumbl-

## ...The old task/process split

ings myself. To tell you the truth, I was scared shitless the first time I heard those rumors! I hope you don't quote me on this, but I was also angry, especially when I realized that there were women out there who were criticizing me and the stoard. I would only tell you this, A.D., cause I know you're my friend, but I was also hurt to think that other women would feel unkindly toward all of us and the work we felt we were doing. We talked about this alot at our stoard meetings and went through the usual rantings and ravings. But, in the end, I think we all felt pretty comfortable about the amount of work we accomplished and how we accomplished it. It isn't that we don't care about those kind of concerns that other women have, because we do. But we finally realized that we were worried and guilty about not pleasing everybody ...not meeting everybody's

needs. You know, A.D., that we women really want to do that...Finally, we agreed (or most of us did) that all of us women on the stoard do a lot of work all of the time; each in our own ways. And that we all carry responsibility very well and that each of us has her own strengths and weaknesses. We have done the best we can and I think we all feel happy enough about that.

A.D.: Yes, but what about that thing about "group therapy", Ardelle? After all, you women were elected to the board...stoard to do work for other women in the province, not sit around and work on your personal problems!!!

Ardelle: Well, A.D., being an old "therapist" myself, I really do know what you're talking about. I've thought a lot about group therapy over the years and have had the misfortune to even be in group therapy a few times. It's not pleasant, I'll tell you! Why, one time in the Sixties—you remember, the days of sensitivity groups, "let it all hang out", the days of "I hear you saying"—I sat through an entire group marathon session, two days long (just like our stoard meetings), angry as hell, not wanting to be there, being sarcastic with

everybody, and I listened to Sixties rock and roll through headphones through the whole bloody thing! Our group therapist damn near took me out and drowned me in the Pacific Ocean (where we happened to be at the time, for "mood" you know) because I was being so unco-operative and not talking about my feelings and revealing my inner guts. Like I say, A.D., that was group therapy. But I digress again—why aren't you keeping me on track? I thought that was your responsibility? Back to the stoard...It's true,

completely true, that we did talk about feelings a lot. And I certainly recall us crying—many times. There were even times when we got angry, pissed off royally, in fact. And, at the beginning we all yelled a bit. But group therapy? Heavens no! What happened with us on our stoard was not like any group therapy I've ever been in anyway. I felt safe most of the time. As time moved on, I felt piles and piles of support and I never felt like someone was going to drown me in the Pacific Ocean! And besides, I didn't listen to rock and roll once. I was really involved, I learned more than I could ever tell you about and I ended up feeling almost completely intact as a woman. If that's group therapy, I'll take another bar of it!

A. ...mm...You certainly don't seem "therapized" to me, that's true. I guess maybe that area is one that needs a little more discussion. Just to change the topic a bit, Ardelle—you mentioned men earlier. Another thing I've heard is that there was quite a bit of man-hating going on in the stoard. Now I think that men do have a few problems, but I've also known a lot of men who are working real hard at understanding all this women's stuff and I even have a couple of men friends who are feminists. They feel pretty badly about some of the things coming out of the stoard. Do all of you really hate men?

Ardelle: Well A.D., that's a

tough question. I guess the easiest way to answer that is to take a look at our work. Seems to me, looking back over the year, that all the work we did was in the interest of women. All of us agreed that was what we were on the stoard to do. And everytime we worked for women or tried to work for women, what we found out was that behind every troubled or oppressed woman there was a powerful man—it just seemed to work that way, somehow. So, as much as we tried to limit our vision to women and women's worlds and work, we were almost forced to try to figure out what role men played in some pretty heavy-duty problems, like rape, incest, low wages, poor health care, single parenting, pornography, well...you know the scene. I could go on and on. Some people think that we shouldn't get so emotional; like maybe we should try to be more objective and see it from the man's point of view for a change. But you know, that's damn hard to do! I mean, A.D., how would you handle it?

A.D.: Well, Ardelle, I think

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some of us are trying to do all of that and also live with men too. Does that mean we're not good feminists--does that mean that we couldn't do good work on the stoard?

Ardelle: Good point, A.D. What is a feminist anyway? That's another thing we talked a lot about. Good Goddess, what a hard question! And, you know, in all the time I was on the stoard I never had the feeling that the name of the game was exclusion. In lots of ways, you're not asking me those questions anyway--you're asking yourself. And maybe all of us get really scared when we ask those questions. I'm not sure. But I know that the stoard needs all the good women it can get--and that all the women it will get will be good, regardless of how different their views are. In fact, one of the wonderful things about my year on the stoard was that all of us were different, all of us were the same; all of us were strong, all of us were weak; all of us loved men, all of us hated men. All of us were everything. And all of us were good feminists, not because of who we were but because we were women. Women who cared about women. Maybe that's

## ...What is a feminist anyway?

close to what a feminist "is". Now...the thing about living with men... You know I live with three cats. Two of them are male (neutered, of course, just to save wear and tear on the furniture). And I can tell you in all honesty, A.D., I sure don't hate those cats!

A.D.: Hmm...I'll have to think about that one--later. Our time's running out Ardelle and I know that you get into the ASWAC office so seldom, I feel real guilty keeping you away from that correspondence file. But one last question...Would you do it all again? If you had it to do over, would you do it the same way? In fact, I'd like to know if you're going to be on the stoard again next year?

Ardelle: A.D., would you mind very much if I just didn't answer that one?

A.D. Whaaaat????!!!! Chickening out now? Right at the end? Where's your sense of responsibility and obligation to women, Ardelle, to yourself? Do you mean to say that this is the hardest question in the interview?

Ardelle: Damm right, A.D. I've been running away from this one for weeks now! And I

must tell you, it makes me real, real nervous when you talk to me like that--about responsibility and obligation and all that jazz! Maybe you could use different language. Maybe we could call it something else something that doesn't sound so threatening, so powerful, so scary. Give me a break! I mean, can I really do more than I already have (don't you dare answer that, A.D.) What I mean is, well...this is embarrassing for me to say but I guess I have to. What I say is "Can I hack it?" Another thing I say..."Can I really do it--again?" Do I have the energy, can I keep risking? Do I care that much? What will happen to me if I make the commitment again?

Ring...Ring...Ring... (That must be the telephone!)

Ardelle: Goddess, A.D. there's the phone and I'm the only one here. I just have to get it because I know it's a woman wanting to talk to somebody about something that's important. Tell you what! I'll finish this up with you at the Assembly, November 25...catch you later...thanks for your help dear...I'm sure we'll see you around!!!!

## The organizer — evaluating my work

Mair Smith

Right now I'm in the process of evaluating my work as ASWAC's organizer for the past year and building some plans for next year. It's a good time to pick through some of the doubts and inconsistencies, the changes and challenges.

Characteristically, it's a lonely role. There's only one of me; I spend a lot of time driving, alone; thinking alone; when I'm in the field I'm often the 'different' one; the visitor to your group; the discussion facilitator; and it's not always really clear why I'm there - I don't have money to hand out to help you do things; I'm not 'expert' in any specific field.

Although I have had great support

from board members in the past year, the loneliest part is still in planning, evaluating and defining my role. This is especially true now, as we come to the end of the board year, and I realize that soon I'll be working with a whole new board with new ideas, style and skills. I need to be conscious of continuity, not just from this board to the next, but throughout the existence of ASWAC. I need to be able to present to the new

board some broad plans of how I see spending my time next year, both in terms of my sense of where ASWAC is in her development and in terms of my own skills and preferences.

I've written elsewhere about the newsletter, which continues to be a major communications tool. However, communicating with members, with the board and with interested women around Alberta continues to be a major part of my role. I believe that all our communication, formal and informal, verbal and non-verbal, is part of the data base of the women's movement, and I want us to find more and more ways of talking with each other.

Throughout the year I've been wrestling with the knowledge that 'communication' in our society has

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more to do with the sender (speaker, writer) than the receiver (listener, reader), and that we need to find a more balanced position. Each hearing, each reading is a new creative act, and we need to find ways for that creativity to express itself and become a more active part of the whole. In my work as ASWAC's organizer I'm very conscious of the fact that I'm often cast 'n the role of sender, and I want to be - not because I'm lazy or because I don't have anything to say, but because I want more of us to be more involved in the ongoing debate as creative partners.

I've visited many of you on your home turf this year. Sometimes it's a highly structured visit; a meeting with a group, a workshop on one of the issues, and sometimes it's been across the kitchen tables, in an office, in a restaurant or bar. Each time there are expectations and assumptions on both sides; for instance, I usually assume that you will expect me to be 'organized' and 'knowledgeable' about your pet issue, and my fear is that you'll write me off when you find I'm neither. If you've invited me to a group meeting, I fear that you'll expect me to bring the group to great clarity and the shared experience of a feminist high, and I know that this probably won't happen and if it does it will be through us all sharing the responsibility. Written down, my fears and expectations look ridiculous, I know, but as I hope to be visiting many more of you next year, I want you to know some of what happens to me before I get there - and I'd like to hear from you as to what your expectations are.

*"For the record, these are the places I've been this year."*

For the record, these are the places I've been this year--some more than once: Calgary, Red Deer, Hinton, Jasper, Thorsby, Camrose, Stettler, Manning, Fairview, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Redwater, Olds, Canmore, High River, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, Barrhead, Whitecourt, Hythe, Hardisty, Fort McLeod, Grand Cache, Wetaskwin and Lacombe. On my visits I sometimes met with a group, or facilitated a workshop - but in every case my prime objective was to meet individual women.

Our fieldworkers have been to many other places in addition to these. Come to the assembly, and find out how wide our net has spread.

## ...Find more ways of talking

What I'd like to have happen - and what usually does happen - is that we can talk about whatever is uppermost for us at that time, and that our shared experience, skill and caring can throw light wherever we need it. Because this is more possible in small, informal meetings than in larger groups of strangers who've come for a particular, advertised purpose, I've come to prefer the former and see it as much more valuable.

*"I also realize that I was trying to be a computer, and frankly, I prefer to be a woman... One of the best ways for you to retrieve (my) information is to ask."*

I've struggled a great deal with the fact that I keep a huge amount of resource information in my head. I started the year feeling guilty about this, and attempted a mammoth project of filing it all on index cards. The more cards I wrote the more possibilities for new cards and categories of cards appeared until I realized that Sisyphus and I had a great deal in common. I also realized that I was trying to be a computer, and frankly, I prefer to be a woman, so until I can hook up with a computer in a creative relationship I intend to feel good about all the information my head can carry, and work on finding more and more ways of sharing it with you. One of the best ways for you to retrieve information is to ask. If you've come up against a roadblock in your feminist work, or if you need a particular resource and aren't quite sure if it's available - call me or write to me, and I'll bet that I can help.

During the year I became aware of some major changes in the way I was working and thinking about my work. These changes didn't take place in isolation, and you will find echoes of them elsewhere, but for me these were the implications. I started to put more emphasis on thinking than on doing. This thinking took several forms - analysis of issues, analysis of the structures in which we work; analysis of each piece of work I/we did in relation to an emerging whole; challenging some of my previous concepts which were in danger of becoming rhetorical and, therefore, ossified (eg. 'provincial perspective' and 'membership involvement').

I became increasingly aware that

I/we work with our hearts as well as our heads, and I began to make this visible to myself and others, and to put emphasis on the 'feeling' work as well as the thinking and doing.

None of these changes happened suddenly, of course: their sources are from a long time ago. This brings me to the biggest change of all - an awareness of the importance of my keen sense of ASWAC's process and development. It's no accident that I did a short stint as ASWAC's archivist last year - I believe I'm still playing that role. This keen sense of continuity is useful only as long as it is not used to hold an organization back in old patterns just because that's what happened before; I believe I also have the will and ability to use our history as a way of explaining the present and predicting the future, in tone as well as in content.

So, after that mighty claim, I should have some pretty concrete plans for next year, right? Well, I've set myself four broad tasks, but of course it's more complicated than that. The tasks are: to concentrate my 'visits' with members in the area of small, informal, in-depth discussions about feminism in Alberta, the role of ASWAC, the role of all of us as parts of these; to develop my resource knowledge and continue to wrestle with methods of sharing it - and two 'thinking' tasks: to develop my/our thinking around provincial perspective and membership involvement. These 'thinking' tasks will involve listening to you a lot - so, inevitably, all the tasks flow together into one again.

*"I want to continue to work on the contradictions implicit in this new role with the board and the members."*

And, in the context in which I hope and expect these tasks to take place is a continuing awareness of the organic change of ASWAC and our work, part of which will be the arrival at the end of November of a new board. And - finally - I still have a lot more distance to go with ASWAC and I'm feeling circumscribed by the implications of the title of organizer! I want to continue to work on the contradictions implicit in this role with the new board, and with other members.

# "I have learned so much..."



Frances Adams

This annual report corresponds with my first anniversary of working as ASWAC's office manager.

It has been quite a year for me. I've learned so much about women, feminism, pornography, abortion, power, myself and so on. A relative newcomer to Alberta, I have made friends and felt the positive spirit and energy that bonds women across Alberta. I've also exposed myself to a lot of pain - the pain of women not being able to work together, of never being able to do "it all", of knowledge and of being labelled and discounted for my views and my work. Sometimes I want to run away but I need, rather, to work through some of my confusion and uncertainty and I look forward to a period when I will have more time to reflect on all that I've taken in.

A lot of the work I've done this year has been around women and violence. I was heavily involved in the Playboy Weekend/First Choice Pay-TV protest as well as the action around Alberta Chief Justice McGillivray's statement that a woman shouldn't be surprised if she is raped when she goes to a man's apartment to party late at night. My volunteer work at the Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre and Every Woman's Place pornography committee has flowed together with my ASWAC work on this issue. I have tried, as have other women, to network with other organizations working in this area to coordinate our efforts and support each other. I feel that we are making headway in this regard.

I've communicated with many of you over the past year, by phone, by letter and in person. Through the office, I have been able to connect women with women and with other women's groups. I've been

able to get information out to women who need it - for action, research papers, articles or plain interest. This sharing of our resources and our knowledge is one of the highlights of my work.

One of my other great pleasures is the newsletter. It is something concrete and visible that comes out of our work and being part of the process from conception to mailing and feedback is very satisfying. I would like to get more input from membership - articles about your work, your knowledge and thoughts.

I haven't played a leadership role on the stoard (staff and board) this year. The expectations of the stoard that I had at first came from my experience in other organizations where I was often the leader and where structure (as in hierarchy and rules) was largely unquestioned. Being considered, and considering myself, the leader with the most responsibility can be ingratiating at times. Other times the weight of it can be unbearable.

The women that I have worked with this year have prompted me to do a lot of thinking about power and structure and responsibility. We have spent a lot of time looking at patriarchal structures and examining our own (where would you put membership, staff, executive and board members on a flow chart?). I'm still sifting through this one and will likely be at it years from now. I can see how hierarchical structures are loaded with power imbalances. Changing the rules or methods does not necessarily prevent power imbalances, however, and we will always have some form of structure in which to work together. I can see, for instance, that those who do more work have more power. While we have not been able to work together in a way that pleases everyone (I'll scream from the roof tops if we ever do!), the reasons for making changes are still, nonetheless, real and compelling.

Several issues that have come to the stoard such as health and abortion, for example, have become clearer through our discussion and analysis. We put a lot of pieces together, no longer seeing issues

as divorced from one another. Pornography, rape, war, sexism and so on are all pieces of the same puzzle. Unfortunately, and partly because of our analysis, we haven't taken action on issues that we care about a great deal. Not settling for the superficial necessitates doing a whole lot more work and trying to communicate on a non-superficial basis to the 'outside world' is a difficult task.

At our September meeting, we spent some time discussing our 'philosophy of action' and came to a consensus that all the ways by which we work are valid ones. I feel a need to hash this one out some more because I don't feel comfortable enough with it to 'do my own thing'. I don't know yet whether I can work with it. I need support for whatever action I take as an ASWAC member and worker. Doing my own work doesn't necessarily mean that I won't get that support but neither does it mean I will.

I find this reporting a dissatisfying process. It is mechanical for me right now because it is so difficult to put a year of hard work into a few words. I can't sum up my work for you in a way that feels good to me because I'm not through it all yet. It is still too fragmented and incomplete an experience for me. I know what I think of a lot of feminist issues and of a lot of the work we have done but it is more difficult to say what I think of ASWAC.

I am regularly asked, by potential members, friends and silly people, what it is, this ASWAC, that I work for. What a difficult question that is! I'm working on the answer, but not diligently. See you at the Assembly.



# Newsletter — the best ever

Mair Smith

I feel really proud of the work that we've done with the newsletter this year. In most respects - size, appearance, content and consistency, I believe that we have achieved the best newsletter ever this year. In another respect too - the involvement of people outside the core production group (presently Frances Adams, Meaghan Dean and myself) - we have made strides this year. There have been many suggestions, brief notes about events and reports, from both board members and members at large, plus three major articles, graphics and photographs from members. Twice, members came in to help with layout and we've even managed to persuade members to help with the task of mailout. It no longer feels as though we're working totally in isolation.

We've tried to keep a balance between our own ASWAC news and that of other feminist organizations. Increasingly, women from other organizations are beginning to give us news of their events, although this still mainly happens in Edmonton and Calgary.



I started this year by trying to include a calendar of events from around the province. I would phone members in different parts of the province to find out what was coming up and then try to incorporate it. I've discontinued this in its original format, but would like to try again next year, with some changes. I want to hear from anyone who would like to try again next year, with some changes. I want to hear from anyone who would like to be a contact for her place or her group and we can set up a system of reporting.

We tried some new things this year - we used photographs for the first time; we included a petition in one issue, and in another we gave you a poster as a centrefold. Next year - maybe some colour and, we hope, many more original gra-

phics and writing.

All this adds up to the usual plea for more members to get involved in the newsletter - writing, reporting, illustrating, layout, distribution - its all up for grabs. Its not the easiest animal to work with because we don't always know exactly when we'll be at a particular stage in the process - but if you express an interest then at least there's a possibility that we can connect on times and tasks.

It became clear this year that the ASWAC newsletter does not have the capability for long articles with analysis and opinion. This realization was part of the reason for the debut of Webspinner in February of this year. Webspinner is not an ASWAC project, but nevertheless, I want to write about her here - she's closely tied in with the work ASWAC is doing in communicating and networking with women around the province. All the then ASWAC members should have received a copy of the first issue of Webspinner and many of you subscribed at that time or later. Webspinner has no external funding and operates on a skinny shoestring - please support her! She's Alberta's only women's newspaper!

## Our mandate, structures, environment

Janet Maher

Basically, I want to address three main issues - our mandate, our structures, and our relations with the environment in which we work/have worked. The space allocated to each here probably does not reflect the relative importance I attach to any one of them.

### MANDATE

From the primary goal of improving the status of women in this province, the range of possible actions is in effect infinite since there is powerful little we could do that would not improve the status of women in the province. My review of resolutions at the past several annual meetings suggests some directions, but largely of a more concrete nature, for example, to work more actively on the issue of choice, to eliminate violence, to address the economic status of Alberta women, etc. While any given board might choose in a given year to emphasize one strategy or

tactic over another, it seems that the basic mandate remains that of informing and involving our members, and the broader public, in improving the status of women in this province.

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*"...future effort could incorporate strategies for communicating...analysis to a wider audience."*

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Where I think this board has been especially active and adept has been in developing the analysis which is essential to all three elements of the mandate. The instances I recall most vividly are the discussions of Bill 44 and medicare/user fees. Recognizing the value of those and other similar efforts, I think future efforts could incorporate strategies for communicating this kind of analysis to a wider audience.

### STRUCTURES

The 1982 annual meeting referred a whole parcel of questions relating to structures to the current board. In retrospect, quite frankly, I think we treated this issue much too delicately in the early months. As an organization dedicated to informing, involving and improving, we do not absolutely need a president, secretary or personnel committee. What we do need to facilitate the work of ASWAC, however, is to ensure performance when necessary of the functions assigned to various board members in the bylaws.

Although group membership still remains to be considered, the current arrangement is problematic, less in its structure than in its implications for servicing. As we move from servicing to more explicitly involving members in action, then it is likely that group membership will be replaced by individual membership.

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# Explorations into our media

Meaghan Dean

When I stood before you as a board candidate at the 1982 November ASWAC annual meeting, I told you some of my interests and goals. Looking at it all from where I am now--13 moons and many risks later--I cannot in all honesty tell you precisely what became of those interests and goals. What I do know is that they were dealt with--and in a manner which "produced results" I never could have guessed at back in November 1982. What I do know is that I do not feel finished with this work I am doing and want to stay with the board for a while.

What were/are my interests? What were the goals I put forth? My interest is communication--in whatever form it takes. The two goals I had hoped to achieve within this while on the board were:

1. To increase ASWAC's use of media for communicating the organization's activities and other important work, especially through more use of such things as press releases, press conferences, etc. Also, to increase the use of the ASWAC newsletter.
2. To continue explorations into how we can communicate, both as individuals and as groups, begun by Carol Gordon, the previous board's communication/media committee chairperson.

I am pleased to say that much of the latter was undertaken while very little of the former came to be, with the exception of the newsletter. This happened not so much as a result of specific board decisions but because of how the working process of the whole board emerged. This in turn produced the need for different, more practical ways of dealing with communication than I had envisioned in November 1982.

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*"To try to tell you in detail everything that happened with communication over the past year would be like trying to describe in detail every breath I've taken. It's impossible."*

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To try to tell you in detail everything that happened with communication over the past year would be like trying to describe in detail every breath I've taken. It's impossible. All I know is that at

the time it's what needed to be done; it was an integral part of every comment we made, subject we discussed and thought we analyzed. How we each chose to communicate at any given moment was the life's breath of everything this board did. So, while my particular account of this past year includes a lot of reference to communication, this is not because I originally aspired "to be chairperson of the media/communication committee" but simply because communication was so much the common thread of my/our board experience.

## MEDIA USE

Very little energy went in to putting out news releases to mainstream media during the past year. One went out in the fall stating ASWAC's assessment of the results of its poll of provincial election candidates about their positions on issues particularly affecting women. It was sent to all newspapers and radio and television stations in Alberta. To our knowledge only one newspaper used parts of this excellent press release.

The other major press project ASWAC co-ordinated dealt with the

protest in Edmonton against the First Choice "Playboy Channel". This was more successful, as far as it went, with coverage ranging from talk shows to clips on evening news to photos and front page news stories. While this resulted in women's disapproval of push-button porn being given more high profile coverage than it usually gets, the over all benefits, in my opinion, were minimal. Our reasons for protesting were buried or ignored amidst the media's more immediate interest in "getting reaction" to "a confrontation situation". Meanwhile, Playboy Channel went ahead with its plans (decided upon long before we were asked to comment) and our thoughts and protests about it became, like so much else we try to convey through media, just so much "old news".

These two efforts, while not solely responsible for it, did contribute in some way to the slow and steady turn away from focusing primarily on mainstream media during the year. The decision to focus more on our own media and on how we communicate what we

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## Janet cont'd...

### RELATIONS WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

I see three main categories of relations for ASWAC - relations between board and membership at large, relations with other organizations, and relations with government. On the last category, I think our analysis this year has brought us quite clearly to the conclusion that government is responsive to women and women's concerns only in the crudest instrumental sense. In other words, government is only likely to pay attention to anything we say or do if it suits their purpose: they estimate that they need our co-operation in some venture or other, or they quite simply fear the consequences if they do not respond. Our work this year on the McGillivray judgement was in many ways a prime example of the latter. I cannot think of any specific example of the former. Work on other issues such as the Lodgepole hearings has been instructive in developing a clearer understanding of the way in which government

channels the concerns of women, and other public interest groups, under the guise of democracy and consultation.

The questions of relations with membership and with other organizations are bound up with that of the role of ASWAC as a provincial organization. The availability of funding for the provincial development project has enabled us to address concretely the isolation and alienation of women in various regions of the province. In future, I think it may be important to assure regional representation on the board to maintain the lines of communication developed through the project. The question of the role of a provincial organization is further bound up with the question of structures and relations with other organizations and could be the subject of useful debate at a general meeting. Although this has occasionally been a topic of conversation among members, past meetings do not record any direct discussion.

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know needs to be communicated was a conscious decision. We were not satisfied to continually have the considerable resources of ASWAC sold short by mainstream media's inexorable demand that we only react to events initiated by others. I find it interesting that the election press release--initiated solely by ASWAC--was ignored while the pornography effort--instigated in part by media--resulted in considerable coverage.

*"We found ourselves realizing that media and communication take in far more than writing articles and...position papers."*

We embarked on an exploration of our communication needs, how we communicate and the media forms that best help us convey what we need to get across. We quickly perceived this to be a complex, wide-ranging and at times scary journey. We found ourselves realizing that media and communication take in far more than writing articles or issuing position papers; we found they also take in everything from how we conduct board meetings to the design of ASWAC's annual meeting.

#### EXPLORATIONS

##### Newsletter

So, where did we put some of our energy? Well, the ASWAC Newsletter is one place. We published more regularly--every six weeks or so--and used it to convey to members where ASWAC is at and what women are up to. I feel the content and look of the newsletter have perked up considerably. Also, concerted effort has gone into including as many people as possible in its production, with the result that the appearance of a newsletter is no longer dependent on the expertise of one person. I feel we have laid a firm foundation for the continued use and development of the newsletter as an important part of ASWAC's organizing repertoire.

##### Minutes and Agendas

How we communicate what we do at board meetings and how we communicate among ourselves during board meetings have undergone noticeable changes during the year. When we started the board was doing your basic minutes. You've most probably seen this style of

## ...Focusing more on our own

minutes before--very short sentences describing the topic and recording whether the motion was passed and who moved and seconded it. They tell you little, if anything, about the substance of the sometimes lengthy and thoughtful discussion preceding the vote and usually absolutely nothing about the tone and feeling of the debate. We quickly realized that to have any kind of sincere commitment to communicating to the membership what we do at board meetings while subscribing to this system of minute-taking was a contradiction.

By the second or third board meeting we had talked a fair amount about our dissatisfaction with the minutes and were taking more detailed notes. The result was a couple of book-length sets of board-minutes--far more informative and interesting, but extremely time-consuming and energy-draining to do. By the end of our year we had hit on a balance between the two extremes--more detailed but concise. Nonetheless, the situation is still far from ideal. I can't help but feel that as long as we cling to the idea that "taking minutes" is the only "legitimate" way of conveying board business to those who weren't there, the best we will ever come up with is a bandaid solution to our deep discontent. Let's face

What we were doing with board meeting agendas by the end of the year was almost unrecognizable from what we did when we started. At first the agenda was made up primarily by the executive--a task which seemed to fall to those women more by default than design. The result was usually a lengthy list of subjects we were supposed to wade through in two days. It wasn't long before the rumbles of discontent surfaced about this; we started to notice some patterns developing. For instance, responsibility for the agenda was falling repeatedly to a few; Sunday afternoons often arrived with an impossible number of items left undealt with; for some of us, the content of the agenda drawn up by others reflected little of what is really happening in our lives; board tension increased markedly by Sunday as we fought with our individual and collective guilt about the prospect of not being able to get through The Agenda. In short, we were being tyrannized by words on a couple of sheets of paper. We constantly found ourselves faced with the "choice" of either talking about what we really wanted to talk about or doing what was on The Agenda.

*"The story of our slow but steady changes in agenda-making is too complex and lengthy to describe in gory detail here..."*



it women, the basic premise of the rules of minute-taking is that they exclude "extraneous" information. If we really do want to include more information, perhaps the solution lies in letting go of our paying homage to the idea of minutes as the only "proper" way to record our activities. This will undoubtedly open up a can of worms for us, as we cannot question minute-taking without also questioning why we have a board, why we have bylaws--why we have the organizational structure we have. Where the minutes will go from here I don't know, but I do hope that at least the exploration into our dissatisfaction which our attempts at change this year reflect will continue in some form.

The story of our slow but steady changes in agenda-making is too complex and lengthy to describe in gory detail here. However, suffice it to say it was a change easier said than done. We fought, we screwed up, we laughed, we scared ourselves spitless at times. We found all of us had different expectations of agendas and different motives for needing agendas; letting go of these was hair-raising stuff sometimes. By the last few board meetings we were using a system that seemed to eradicate most of our earlier concerns. Based on the Hogie Wycoff model, it basically consists of each board member taking responsibility for bringing items she wants dealt with to the meeting. Our first act is to take half

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an hour or so to draw up the agenda--getting everyone's item and an estimate of how much time they think they will need. This done, we total the estimated time, then "fine tune" the timing (through negotiation) and decide what segment of our two days will deal with what subjects. The over all effects of this system were many, but two main ones were that all of us took responsibility for the agenda and we now controlled the agenda--the agenda did not control us. As with the minutes, it is still not an ideal system, but the groundwork has been laid for some interesting refinements in future. However, this too will need to be explored in the over all context of ASWAC's organizational structure. Challenging stuff ...

#### Executive/Committees

I have left what we did with the executive and committees to the last because I'm finding this one of the most difficult things to describe. In many ways the process involved here defies the written word, so I invite you to seek me out and we'll have a chat if you would like to hear more about this.

What I can tell you is that we started out with the conviction to have a duly elected executive in name only. We were so sure we could serve both the Society's Act (God) and the basic tenets of feminist political propriety (Mammon). What we eventually realized was how much we had underestimated the individual and collective power of our conditioning around such patriarchal structures as executives and committees. Despite our best intentions we start parcelling out the power and the bullshit starts.

By the mid-point of our year the word (and concept) "executive" seemed to have dropped from the board's vocabulary. There was little reference to "committees"

## ...Preparing our agenda

either; everyone simply worked on what they wanted to work on. Period. How this came about and the effect it had on us is difficult to pinpoint. It did not happen at a particular moment or as a result of a particular, momentous motion of the board. It simply happened. Furthermore, it is beyond my ken to describe what happened for other board members. All I can do is give you an idea of what the process did for me and even this is becoming lost in the thickening fog of passing time. As far as I am concerned, the executive "problem" simply became a non-problem somewhere along the line. I don't know exactly how or when and frankly, I don't really care anymore. As for the committee business, I can remember the day things clicked into place. I can remember struggling for months with how to cope with the horrendous contradiction of wanting to explore the pervasiveness of communication while doing so from the artificial isolation of being "media/communications committee chairperson". Then one day I simply let it all go. Whether I was or was not a committee head and whether or not a committee even existed had little to do with the work I/we were doing with communication. I felt great; I remember suddenly feeling so free to get down to work. And that's about the best I can do here with this for now ...

#### Where to From Here?

I now know better than to talk of any future I might have with ASWAC in terms of specific predictions and goals. The work I have done over the past year has taught me much--including the fact that it is not always possible to pin down exactly what form my work

over the next year will take.

What I can share with you are some of the reasons/concerns which fuelled my own decision to run for the board again. I hope to continue my/our explorations into communication. Specifically, to do my part in chipping away at what I see as the debilitating active/passive roles imposed on us in so much of our daily communication. For instance, I would like to explore the alternatives which could break down that almost unspoken assumption that membership is a faceless, silent, passive receiver of data "sent to it" by what is usually expected to be an always identifiable, vocal, active core group, such as a board.

Most importantly for me right now, I want to take what I've learned with the board this year and spread it around--to find ways of applying the ideas within a wider group of women.

I sense a quickening in the changes ASWAC is undergoing. I am part of that changing and for the time being I want to stay an active part of that changing.



Rim Thompson

## A reminder...

*New ideas and creative changes are emerging in the life and work of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee. Come, join in the ASWAC Assembly Nov. 25, 26, 27 at Lister Hall commencing at 7:30 pm. It will be a working meeting focusing first on where we have been individually and collectively in our women's work and then shifting to discussion of the new future for ourselves and ASWAC.*

## ...To join us at the assembly

# Structures and doing our work

Marilyn Assheton-Smith

I would like to contribute to this annual report by describing, in part, my experiences and learnings on the ASWAC board this year. In a sense this will then be a very personal report, and perhaps reflect a unique personal experience rather than a widely shared one, but I think it will display to you something of the nature of "a year on the board".

First, let me give you a little of my history. I have served on other boards, such as the board of the federal Company of Young Canadians in the early seventies. I have done community organizing (especially in the sixties), and I have been concerned about justice for women I think since I was a child. But, in spite of paying ASWAC dues regularly, I have done virtually nothing as an active member of the women's movement until two years ago when I provided a little help at the conference. The following year I worked on the conference and at last year's meeting I decided to run for the board.

My history means that I know well standard parliamentary procedures, standard agenda rules, and standard notions of hierarchical decision making structures. I guess I could say I work well within them. But I do not like them. This year has been a year for me to explore alternatives and begin to put them into practice. It has been a year of individual growth.

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*"I think we have, as a unit, kept the business of ASWAC running."*

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Given this, what have I 'done' on the board? I think we have, as a unit, kept the business of ASWAC running. This has been primarily an office task, with Frances and Mair throughout the year and Shelagh and Lois as part of "the project" in the fall. My contribution to that has been moving furniture with office moves, hours on the "company books" as a part-time treasurer, and doing whatever I could to offer moral support or respond to requests from the office workers. I guess I still feel that is the one central job of "the board"; if the office runs well and we contribute to that by



working at times and keeping out of the way at others we have met our most essential commitment to you as ASWAC members. It is clear, I think, from the above paragraph that I am not saying we supervise the staff: we provide as much additional energy and support to their work as we are able to, given our full-time employment elsewhere.

I have also been part of a process on the board which shifted us from a hierarchical structure and a standard agenda process to something closer to a collective or team. The last board warned us that we needed a nominal executive and similar procedures to meet the demands of external agencies such as banks and funders. They were correct but in my opinion we created that nominal executive then turned much of 'the work' over to them. We needed to struggle hard to break through that, and to recognize that we had to share our work as a total group. It seems to me that we only partially succeeded in that struggle, but even that partial success was important.

The first part of our struggle was to re-create a board in which there was not an executive "taking responsibility and doing work" and "the rest of us/them". The second part was to then determine what our work/agenda should be. As many of you know, outside groups frequently set the agenda for women's organizations. We are asked to respond to a statement in the media, write a brief to government, to organize a protest march - the list of 'agenda items' or demands on our time is endless. And such demands are often all reasonable; given the status of women in our world there are thousands of 'agenda items' we could/should be addressing.

Slowly we came to realize that our agenda had to come from our interests and energies. What we began to do, almost without realizing it, was take some major topic at each meeting and begin to explore

it. By major, I mean truly dangerous areas for women such as violence, pornography, war, abortion, and medicare cutbacks. But we also explored other areas such as relations among women and women's groups, and relations to formal institutions such as the government. That exploring was enriching for us; what we did not do was determine how to fully share our insights and newly gained knowledge with other women. It was, for me, a first step but like true beginners we did not quite get to a series of additional steps which I think need to be taken.

But I also recognized in our discussions and work, that I had to make some very clear choices about my energy in the women's movement - I had to decide how and where I could most effectively act. It seemed to me that my work energies should not go into the above "issue" areas, important as they are, but into women's research, women's knowledge at the university level, and various aspects of women's experience with formal education. My commitment to women's work has grown much stronger and it feels on much firmer ground than it was last year when I began on the board. I will likely offer to run for the board again if women want me to be there. But my work will not shift into the many issues of women. It will continue to support the ASWAC office staff the best I can, and it will otherwise go into my education/research set of agenda items.

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*"I would like women working in areas which (are no longer important to me) to...know that I, as an ASWAC member, support them and am not their enemy."*

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One promise I made at last year's meeting was that I would try to involve more members in the work of ASWAC. I have mixed feelings about that now. I would like more women who are doing women's work to feel that their work is 'part of ASWAC', and to keep in contact with the board and the office. I would like women working in areas which I personally no longer feel are important nevertheless to know that I, as an ASWAC board

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# Beginnings are always difficult

Myrna Barber

Beginnings are always difficult for me - I hate to take the first step - no matter how exciting and rewarding the following steps will be. But nonetheless, I take a lot of first steps and I have yet to truly, deeply regret one of them. The step to become a member of the ASWAC board was one that gave me shivers in my stomach. I was forewarned that it could very easily be beyond the realm of my experience. And it has been.

The 1982 ASWAC conference was my first exposure to ASWAC (yes, I live and breathe in the province of Alberta. I was surprised too!). I didn't like parts of the conference - that is probably partly why I joined the board - I don't like to complain without action. But more than that - and incredibly more positive was the spirit of the women I met - the desire for growth and understanding matched and exceeded my own. You know, there are times when I really don't want to grow and understand anymore. The ASWAC board experience has been a catalyst for me in continuing growth that I would prefer to run from.

This narrative on my perceptions of ASWAC and its board are going to be on a personal level - I'm just not into cold, objective analysis.



I have a certain reluctance to say some of my thoughts because I'm not sure they are shared, but that really doesn't matter because its the many differences between us that have made my step of joining the ASWAC board a good step.

Over the past year there has been much discussion about what the board should be doing versus what the board is doing. I find structure comforting in a perverse way - unstructured situations throw me. I like to know what needs to be done, how we can do it, and then, let's get on with it. The board has asked why does it need to be done, why do we need to do it, leading to thought patterns very different from the ones I use in my own life ... thought patterns though that prompt the growth and understanding that first attracted me. (Putting your head in the sand can be a very rewarding experience - ha ha!) For the past year to have been a more comfortable,

easier experience for me, I would have preferred to have influenced other board members to my way of thought and action. But would I have learned anything? Would I understand my gut reactions to the world out there any more? I think the answer is no. I also believe the experience would have been wonderfully more satisfying - but

I like levels of dissatisfaction - dissatisfaction probes and inspires me. I guess these are all reasons why I'm still on the board.

The discussion of Edmonton versus the rest of the province, and fluctuations between, give me feelings of frustration and boredom. Frustrated because they go nowhere; bored because, does it really matter? Is that the real reason for low attendance from out-of-towners? For myself, board meetings often mean a wipe-out week. I wake up Monday morning, wonder where I am and what needs to be done. Speaking as an out-of-towner, I would prefer one day board meetings - I need time to think about and perhaps act on some of the thoughts that have developed in the course of the meeting. When it's all rush-rush, which for me it is, I lose that, and I think that means I lose a lot.

## Doing our work cont'd...

member support them and am not their enemy. I would like members to feel that ASWAC is something which they can in some way "use" to further the cause of women. I know that members have tried - for example one member has been extremely interested in getting a pension scheme set up within ASWAC - but I do not know exactly why it does not work better. It may have something to do with patterns of authority, responsibility, and a need for "someone" to give "permission" for work to be done. I would welcome ideas on the topic.

But I also know that these 'ideas' should be or result in other women thinking about how they will work to make the ideas real. I will not "serve" to accomplish tasks or complete agenda items set by someone else. I do not say this with

anger or even as a challenge: I well know that each of you works in your own way too. I simply say it to share with you an explicit recognition of how my energies are now able to be mobilized and focussed and utilized "for" other women and how they are not.

This is a short statement, reflecting only bits and pieces of eight st/board meetings and twelve months of work in ASWAC from November of 1982 to November of 1983. For me, this is a statement which reflects sharply the meaning of feminism, and why I claim the word feminist for myself in spite of what the mass media has done to that word. I hope that in our assembly, as we all talk about our work, we will find other definitions of feminism and women's work which will enrich my own.

It has been a difficult year in many ways and I've had countless discussions with people to help me understand what's happening to me in relation to ASWAC. I finally, a couple of months ago, had a conversation that seemed to make it clearer to me. Not crystal clear, but clearer than it has been. There is a theory that states that every arrow has a point. It also has a shaft and feathers at the end (my technical knowledge of arrows is really limited). In essence though, until the point breaks the surface, the rest of the arrow can't follow through. I believe that many of the women on the board are the tips of the arrows and when I started on the board I was way back there with the feathers - I think I've moved up a little and grown far more than I would have if I hadn't been on the board. Maybe I never will be the tip of the arrow but I can now appreciate the role and my relationship to it.



# Donna's open letter to a sister

Dear Sister,

I want to tell you about the work I've been doing this year. I've been doing ASWAC work and regular job work - I began a new job and joined the Board at about the same time. I want to draw some comparisons, and I want to tell you about it in the way women talk to each other - simply and candidly, depending on our shared experiences to fill some of the gaps.

I've been flirting with the women's movement since the early seventies when I joined a CR group in P.E.I., putting more of my energy into other kinds of activism. Since moving to Alberta I have gradually waded into deeper and deeper feminist waters. When I joined the Board, later known to us as the Stoard, it was with some anxiety, knots and knarls in my mind and belly. The things I'd heard! (great goddess - the things I've heard since!) I'd heard it was elitist, "bourgeois" in the activist circles I used to travel with. I anticipated conflict - and there has been conflict on the stoard, and it has been based to some extent in our differing understandings of how political/economic structures affect us as workers and as women. But there is one thing we can see even without the lens of a Ph.D. in political economy - capitalism, communism, socialism and all their hybrid variations haven't changed much for women - patriarchy is universal and it endures. Elitist indeed!

*"Working on the board has been an exciting, irritating, exhausting, healing experience."*

Working on the stoard has been an exciting, irritating, exhausting, healing experience for me. What made it all these things, you may well ask? Writing letters? Signing endless documents? Interviewing and hiring women for the summer project? Contributing to an annual report? Well yes, but a lot of that kind of work has its parallel in my job work. I write reports and letters and memos and go to meetings and serve on committees and attend conferences in my job as well - but I can't describe my work there as exciting and healing. It is interesting and I like it -



but heal me it can't.

In my job, I work for men. I work to make the system work, to preserve the status quo. There is no escaping the knowledge that in that job I am working against women's interests because women's interests demand change in the status quo. Then there is the way women are treated in their jobs - the put downs, the demeaning and belittling comments, if not to oneself, then to the woman in the next office, the woman at the typewriter, the woman in the elevator. There is the unrelenting criticism of any woman who has come even close to achieving the higher ranks, underscored by the condescending but weirdly approving attitude to women in the clerical ranks. There is the granting of considerable power to some women who are good at their jobs but who do not challenge "men's jobs", just as some women are granted considerable power in the home. There is the constant awareness that in any discussion on any topic, no matter how serious, your presentation or concentration can be blown apart by a reference to yourself (or another woman) as cute or an allusion that you're sitting on a goldmine - and that nothing you can say or do will prevent it happening again. Yes, it is crazy-making. No, I can't not notice. Yes, I have fought back but no, I have not won. Yes, I do endure and get stronger. No, I didn't say I like working with men, I only said I like the work.

When one has one foot in the bureaucracy and the other foot in ASWAC, the difference stands out in sharp relief. The phone might ring just as I'm recovering from the latest barb and it is Mair or Marilyn or some woman I haven't even met and she is calling the woman I think I am. There is a task that needs doing, or a crisis has arisen, or something needs signing, or my opinion is being sought. The switch is not from one type of work to another, the switch is from one set of percep-

tions and expectations to another that is opposite. These women speak to a different being. Fortunately, I have her handy at all times, even in the office.

The woman calling knows that even on a bad day my brain is located exactly where it should be and that it hasn't drifted to some nether region where it has run afoul of excessive amounts of alien hormones and begun to think of ways to muck up the natural order of things. Better still, she wants to talk to a woman about women's work - even if we disagree endlessly in our concepts of work, action, approach - neither of us would rather be talking to a man about our work. We are not displaced - it is our work, we will define it, we will plan it, we will do it, we will care about it and about each other - and that is healing, and that is exciting.

*"In women's work, we are responsible for our own work. We work for ourselves and we work for equality."*

In job work there is no escape from the hierarchy. I answer to my boss yet he is ultimately responsible for the work I do. Think about it, isn't it weird? In women's work, we are responsible for our own work. We work for ourselves and we work for equality. The stoard this year (as every other, I know) has worked hard to establish equality among us. We reckoned we should try to practise what we preach and we've learned it's easier said than done. Authority figures, power structures, organizational charts are known and understood and safe. It's okay to tinker with them as long as we can see their familiar and oddly comforting outlines in everything we do. Trying to tear down these structures, models, methods - so that we, women, are empowered is frightening, seems chaotic and formless, looms like a great nothingness. The stoard has tried many times to challenge the power structures in our own work; we have succeeded brilliantly sometimes, fallen flat on our equal butts at others. But either way, the experience has not been of nothingness - we are grounded in our experiences,

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# We have struggled hard

I know that during the last year, I have made some sometimes clear, if not entertaining comments. "When men were men and sheep were nervous" pops to mind from a lighter moment. We have struggled hard this year to find a way in which we feel comfortable, to carry on and out, the work of the organization called ASWAC, and our work as women, individually and collectively. This process has, at times, been a very difficult thing for me to understand/cope with. On the one hand, we all have some sense of what "work" is - don't we? For some this means meetings, minutes, actions, papers - a much easier thing because we can show - literally - that kind of "work". On the other hand, for others, perhaps like myself, trying to discover new ways and means of carrying out that "work" is a very difficult, and at times trying, thing to understand. I refer to our struggles with "process", of trying to define how we feel about, I don't know, anything - how a meeting should proceed, how or why something should or should not get done.

The process of discussing process, if this makes any sense at all, is what has perhaps caused me the most amount of ... and here, I can't really find the proper word which would encompass all my

thoughts, struggles and feelings. Perhaps a combination of excitement, anger, sadness, concern. Excitement that something new and challenging was taking place; anger at myself sometimes for not being able to, or feeling unable to, grasp a concept or idea, and at others who seemed to be able to - or not able to hear what I try, none too succinctly sometimes, to say; sadness, that we as humans, as women, sometimes seem to have so much difficulty communicating with one another; and concern about the ways in which these concerns can be changed, rectified, made to go away.

No matter how, sometimes, something is being said, there is an effort, a risk involved - will I be understood, have I said the right thing, the wrong thing, have I made myself clear? I think being clear and being understood are two very different things. It is so important when we work together, as people, and very different people, from diverse experiences and backgrounds, that we learn how to work together. That when someone tries to say something, that we listen, that we, in the process of listening, try to address the grain of truth in what is being said. For example, if someone is trying to say that they feel uncomfortable about a situation and don't like

it as a result, the grain of truth would be that, for some reason that person is feeling that way. No one else may be - but because we are not each other, who is to question the validity of that expression? It is very difficult not to become defensive, to attack the individual instead of the issue - which can sometimes be very difficult to define in terms so that everyone will "hear". And in recognizing that grain of truth - address it, deal with it, fight with it, and try to become friends with it. That we cannot, as feminists and humans, take responsibility for someone else, but we can help each other by helping ourselves to listen.

This is the first time in my life that I have ever tried to write anything down in this way, to try to contribute something of myself in written form. It has been a struggle. I hope that I have managed to convey to all of you the unquantifiable value this last year has been to me and how much it has meant to me - to learn and to grow and that it, like a garden, gave and took a lot of care.

In love and sisterhood,  
Rachel Ferrington

Think Uppity!

## ...Grounded in our experiences

our knowledge of our selves and of our condition; we have our pain and our joy to validate the work we do and the way we do it and to teach us as we work. And that is healing, and that is exciting.

The irritation and exhaustion; I suppose I can't escape talking about that having brought it up myself. Well, for example, I hate writing official letters - especially to other women's groups. I should be good at it - Lillith knows I've had lots of practise - but I never feel good at it. It's those damn structures again - I can never feel like I'm talking to a woman. I feel like I'm talking to a position, or an organization, and that I can't say what I mean to say. I don't want to write a letter of support to be attached to a brief - I want to write a love letter. I want to tell a woman I think she is brave and brilliant and wonderful to be doing what she is doing

in the way she sees fit to do it. Or I want to state forthrightly that I think what she is doing is off base, won't further us, will place us in jeopardy - and I want to know that I can say that without seeming critical of her, or her commitment, or her motivation. It makes me cranky and tired to realize that I often chicken out and write a support letter that gets attached to something.

There has been too much work at times but the exhaustion isn't because of work, the exhaustion has its source in the contradictions inherent in our lives and our work - job work and women's work. We need to support each other, help each other grow - you can't do that with a mealy-mouthed acceptance that women are wonderful because they are, and that everything they do is wonderful because they are women. Yet, under patriarchy we know that women exist as an underclass, that we are debased and assaulted every

day of our lives, that even big, strong feminists have a breaking point, that we need every gram of love and support we can get, that we dare not criticize women lightly just because it has always been done, and that the criticism must be in concert with caring and helping each other grow.

Nearing the end of this exciting, irritating, exhausting, and healing year, with more questions than I've found answers to, the biggest question is, what next? Where will I find such a brave, brilliant, determined, opinionated, uppity, ornery bunch of women to work with again? The best answer - one I've learned from the aforementioned bunch - is anywhere and everywhere.

I'll see you soon,  
Love, Donna.

PS. Thinking about running for the Stoard? Talk to us.

# Between despair and empowerment

Anne Runyan

It is a very difficult time for me to write this piece, but for that reason it is all the more important to forge ahead with it. The challenges in and to my personal and political life over the past year are converging at the point somewhere between despair and empowerment, creating only a dim cognizance of the promise of both. At no other time have I been so aware of the meaning of "risk-taking" in the context of my own life, the lives of other women, and the life of the women's movement, yet, at no other time have I been less sure of its consequences and my/our own ability to deal with them.

*"For such will be our ruin if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the immensity of our private emotions forget the public world."*

I am both reminded of and haunted by Virginia Woolf's entreaty in Three Guineas which follows her description of a photograph of a bedecked General standing in front of the carnage his army had wrought on countless innocents: "It suggests that the public and the private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other. But the human figure even in a photograph suggests other and more complex emotions. It suggests that we cannot dissociate ourselves from that figure. It suggests that we are not passive spectators doomed to unresisting obedience but by our thoughts and actions can ourselves change that figure ... How essential it is that we should realize that unity the dead bodies, the ruined house prove. For such will be our ruin if you, in the immensity of your public abstractions forget the private figure, or if we in the intensity of our private emotions forget the public world. Both houses will be ruined, the public and the private, the material and the spiritual, for they are inseparably connected."

Sadly, 50 years after these words were written, we find that both realms are in advanced states of decay, for women's minds, bodies, psyches, and feelings are being systematically brutalized both at home and when they venture out into the world. The constant and painful recognition of this negative symbiosis formed of violence and begetting more violence has led me to see more clearly the necessity for separate and safe places for women to heal, renew, and recreate. I can no longer, in good conscience, ask myself or any other woman to work in a milieu in which there is an inordinate potential for victimization or revictimization either by strangers or supposed allies. What I am suggesting is a new form of separation based upon a more fundamental connection inspired by the following excerpt from June Cavanagh's poem, "I Am A Dangerous Woman":

"I am a dangerous woman  
Carrying neither bombs nor babies  
Flowers nor molotov cocktails  
I confound all your reason,  
theory, realism  
Because I will neither lie in  
your ditches  
Nor dig your ditches for you  
Nor join in your armed struggle  
For bigger and better ditches.  
I will not walk with you nor walk  
for you  
I won't live with you  
and I won't die for you,  
But neither will I try to deny  
you  
Your right to live and die  
I will not share one square foot  
of this earth with you  
While you're hell-bent on  
destruction,  
But neither will I deny that we  
are of the same earth,  
Born of the same Mother.  
I will not permit  
You to bind my life to yours  
But I will tell you that our  
lives  
Are bound together  
And I will demand  
That you live as though you  
understand  
This one salient fact."

I know of no other way to honestly approach my (and perhaps our) current dilemma which I reduce to the following complex question: How can I keep my relationships with men and their systems from interfering with my feminist politics and sensibilities, and how

can I keep my feminist politics from interfering with my relationships with women and their work and, hence, my feminist sensibilities.

*"...how can the genuineness that feminism portends arise from the alienation...of... patriarchy?"*

Similarly, I ask, how can the genuineness that feminism portends arise from the alienation and brutality of that which we call patriarchy? Because I work with normatives, I know that it must, but because of the women I have worked with over the past year through ASWAC and other fora, I have a stronger glimmering that it can. However, it is only my own role(s) in that process that I have or wish to have any control over, a realization that is both empowering and frightening. This individual task, though, cannot evolve or be sustained without an insightful and nurturing collective. This year's ASWAC "stoard" has been that for me. I can only trust that there are similar "cells" or "affinity groups" within the artificial boundaries of ASWAC and throughout the entire women's movement, for it is only through these that we can attempt to "go too far" in our analyses and our feelings without necessarily slipping back into or being forced into patterns which are dangerous to women.

The specifics of my work with ASWAC (and simultaneously and primarily with the Alberta Society of Women Against Violence, the Sexual Assault Centre, and Every Woman's Place), which included developing and disseminating feminist perspectives on peace and non-violence through analyses of and experiences with their opposites, direct and structural violence, have informed these senses of my/our own needs and will continue to spur on my work in and outside of ASWAC. It is my hope that working towards a reality in which "Thou" is both along side of and on the other side of "I" will contribute to more meaningful and less violent forms of reflection and action so essential to our journeys and struggles.

# About that government funding —

Mair Smith



THOUGHTS AND INSIGHTS...

In April this year, we heard that we had been given a \$66,000 grant by CEIC, to allow us to employ women around the province to organize regional ASWAC conferences. You will have read in your newsletters over the past months of the progress of this project, which we bureaucratically called the Provincial Development Project, and so I won't reiterate that kind of reporting here. Instead, I have some thoughts about this project and short term projects in general, and government funding which I want to share.

Projects of this nature, which generate high energy for a short time, I believe pose a dilemma for us all in our sustaining feminist work. On the plus side, women have been able, for ongoing periods between May and December this year, to put their best energies into feminist organizing around the province. Most of these women were already deeply involved in the women's movement, and will continue to be involved. The nature of changes in that involvement will be an interesting area to study. The freedom for these women to work in this way comes from the related areas of jobs and money - concepts which are central to the women's movement and which are always problematic for women.

## Job Creation Grants Are Very Attractive to us Because ...

- 1) There are many highly skilled women who are underemployed or unemployed.
- 2) There is an enormous amount of work to be done (not to be confused with jobs of which there are far too few, especially for women and especially in the women's movement.)
- 3) We know how incredibly little of this country's

But ...

So, we get to hire women for a very short time (no security) and pay them appallingly little. Now they're not underemployed - they're exploited.

But, does the 'work' fit into short term projects like this? By now, we are clear that the women's movement is a lifetime commitment for many of us, and for some of us it is our primary commitment. Are we not undervaluing our work by chopping it up into bite-size pieces, just to satisfy Federal Government Makework requirements (which are short-term! Don't you wish Canada Employment inspired the same life-long primary commitment as the women's movement.)

But, it is not a free gift. Though job creation grants don't curtail

resources go to women, so it seems as though each grant we get must be a step in the right direction. ASWAC knows herself to be a democratic, non-hierarchical employer, seeing employees as members of the same team as volunteers, the only difference being that employees can devote their best energies to women's work without guilt and strain. This kind of employer is unusual and also desirable in the new world that women are creating so it is important that we get more chances to model this kind of work relationship.

- 4) The kind of self-sufficient, self-starting, initiative-taking jobs which are designed within our kinds of projects are excellent for developing attitudes of self-confidence and assertiveness in the work place which will be of great benefit in later work situations.

None of this is to negate the super work and positive feedback which has been coming in from the workers, in this particular project. However, I'm feeling the weight of these contradictions more keenly than ever this time and will not involve myself in another such short-term project, at least until I've given the whole topic a great deal more thought and discussion. The thought that keeps coming in is "how do we validate the work that we do if we are content to settle for so little at such great cost?"

us much within the nature of the work we do, the bottom line is the creation of a specific number of jobs, no matter how the quality of those jobs develops. ASWAC as the employer, has only limited control over the deployment of money within the project, and without extra funds to pour into it, it has to live with some very uncomfortable realities - the abysmal pay; the built-in hierarchy (one workers gets slightly less abysmal pay than the rest and is expected to take extra responsibility). All this is very different from the way ASWAC's permanent staff are treated. The contradictions here are endless - I won't continue to unravel them.

But, it is also lonely and weird out there, and despite support from each other, board members, ASWAC members and other women, working on one's own in an anti-feminist corner of the province (and do we know any that aren't?) can be very scary. And, being paid for it can do strange things too: guilt, and its mirror image, resentment. I know, because this happens to me too.

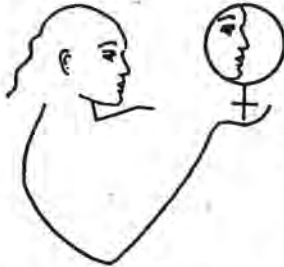
# About silence and silencing

Meaghan Dean

One of the inherent weaknesses in most accounts of the board's activities is that they tend to focus almost entirely on what was said. I want to write also about some of the things that were not said and their effects on me and my work with ASWAC. I want to talk about that other vital dynamic that is always so much a part of just about everything we do—silence.

Being at board meetings has taught me a lot about silence. I realized that I am just as swara of the silences in our meetings as I am of the talk; that the women choosing silence in a discussion are sending me messages just as vivid as any spoken word. During board meetings I have experienced silence that was creative, peaceful, contemplative, comforting; I have also known silences that were destructive, sullen, manipulative and silencing. I discovered that while my assessment of another woman's silence might be very accurate, only I had the power to determine whether I would allow that silence to be destructive or creative for me. I learned a lot about what we women do with silence, with the threat of silence, with the threat of being seen as not doing anything. I've learned and thought a lot during this past year about what could be called the politics of silence.

As a feminist I find the politics



of silence fascinating, probably because so much of what feminism is all about is to end the silencing of women. For the most part I am quite comfortable with silence, yet I become enraged at silencing. There have been times over the past year when a board member's silence was comfortable—as though some sixth sense told me that person was very much there and contributing just as much with her listening as with anything she might say. There were other times when that sense (and my powers of observation) told me a woman's silence was quite something else. When a woman tells me she isn't saying anything because she has nothing to say and yet I've spent several hours watching her rolling her eyes and casting frustrated and bored glances at someone else, I feel lied to. And that dishonesty hurt. It hurt because it reminded me how hard we have to work sometimes to learn to trust one another. It hurt because it reminded me how we sometimes choose to be more afraid of one another than of

the violent world we need to change.

There were times when a woman's silence was exquisitely eloquent. There were other times when a woman's silence felt like a rip-off—what I judged in the heat of the moment to be a cold-blooded bid to play it safe by letting everyone else do all the risking. There were times when I found some women's silence so chillingly non-negotiable. Let's face it, it's a lot easier to challenge someone on what she did say than on what she didn't say.

The power of silence. We women know a lot about it, especially the power of silence as a weapon. Look how much of our existence is plagued by systems, attitudes and rules geared to keep us quiet. It was not surprising then that the use of silence as a weapon/manipulation was also part of my board experience. But we also confronted that silence more directly and more honestly than in any other group experience I've known. For that I am grateful to all of us. And there is something I know now that I didn't appreciate when I went on the ASWAC board—that silence (for whatever reason) says a lot. The talk and the silence—it's all important.

## On cost control and responsibility

Marilyn Assheton-Smith

When Ione Challborn, who had done the treasurer's work on the board, moved to Winnipeg I agreed to do the work until a new board member could become acclimatized to ASWAC. Liz Lunney was that new member and she quickly took on most of the detail work of the treasurer. But in my continuing involvement with that work I began to realize how entrenched the structure of hierarchy is in our work, and how sharply that entrenchment is displayed around money. I am going to discuss here some of my understandings, but I do not presume to have a full analysis of the problem nor a complete solution. This is more along the line of one more stumbling step.

The 'standard' procedures around money are associated with concepts like accountability and cost-control. In each of these there is an element that likely remains important to all of us. If you 'give' money for a certain kind of work, you want to know that 'your money' was at least partially used for that work. It may be a bit problematic if the giver to women's organizations is not an individual woman but rather a private company, but presumably women in the organization can be accountable to the company by negotiating the ways in which their money will be used and refusing to take it if unacceptable demands are placed on its use. It becomes quite problematic when governments 'give' money for it

may well be argued that they only "give" back to us some of our own money and therefore our primary accountability must be to women, not governments. But all of these arguments basically accept the position that funds are "in trust" in our hands, they are here to serve women's interests and not to benefit any of us personally. That part of "accountability" seems to me non-problematic but it leads to the question of who decides that monies are appropriately spent, who 'controls' their use.

Cost control is the other key term generally used and it refers to something slightly different from the above problem of accountability  
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## ...Cost control key term

and control. Again, there are elements in this term we would not likely find offensive. If we have agreed that two workers should receive a salary for a year and that, for example, board members should receive travel expenses, if we have no effective "cost control" board members' travel may use up all the money needed for salaries. Our workers are soon unemployed because the funds are dry. Cost control presumably keeps us on track in this regard, matching expenditures and incomes and ensuring that expenditures in one area do not encroach on monies needed for other areas. But again comes the question - who controls?

The hierarchical procedure is to say - the treasurer controls, or the comptroller controls, or the boss controls, or big daddy controls, or the husband controls, or someone who is "responsible" must control. That responsible person has a great deal of information about expenditures. She gets phone bill receipts so she knows who phones whom. She knows if there is any latitude in the budget so she can grant a little more money to one person and refuse it to another (all "within policy" of course, given standard procedures). She becomes a key woman in the organization. The women who get along with the treasurer will get those extra little monies; the women who do not will not. The treasurer's power becomes part of the interpersonal dynamic as individuals choose to be obsequious towards her, or to manipulate her, or choose to fight her and rebel against her, challenging her right to control.

*"The treasurer's power becomes part of the interpersonal dynamic..."*

But she also comes to feel incredibly "responsible for" the money: it becomes her problem if funds are overexpended. She is the only one who knows how every person is spending money, and she is the only one who can see red alerts as they develop. She begins to pass judgements on spenders, begins to feel tense as funds are pushed to the limit, begins to feel in her gut problems of poor cost control. No one else will feel them in their gut, for no one else knows what she knows.

One attempt to get around this structure is to say "every woman



is responsible, she should decide how and when to spend money". But if the previous treasurer's job is left in place with this decision it can only generate conflict and anxiety. For the treasurer still feels responsible. And if each woman makes her decisions without knowing the rest of the financial picture, there is no assurance expenditures will remain within limits.

Another attempt to get around this structure is to designate pockets of money for each woman involved. As a board member or a staff-worker or an ASWAC member, each woman has a claim on dollars in the organization. This may be negotiated in advance but often the simplest decision is to make these funds in some way "equal" - to grant each board member dollars for phone calls for example. Such "equality" neglects the very different circumstances of members, the different needs each might have for phoning. If the negotiating occurs in a more open context in regard to differential "needs" it may still occur in the previous context of "negotiating with a treasurer who controls or acts as an authority". Then it is difficult to avoid "negotiating for all one can get". Old patterns of resistance and hostility to big daddy dominate the process.

It seems to me that there are three directions which must all be taken if the various traps outlined above are to be avoided. The first direction accepts the essential elements of accountability and cost-control: that is that it is known how money is spent and it is known how much money is spent and available at any point in time. Thus, receipts and accounting for expenditures is taken for granted, not denied. The shift then comes in relation to who controls and how, not whether or not there will be some form of fiscal control.

The second direction recognizes

that part of the "treasurer's problem" is that she alone really knows who spends and why. The shift here would be to ensure that everyone knows, that monies expended are not only presented in categories of expenses but attached to names. If anger and tension develop they are shared by all and must be addressed by all: it is not the problem of one woman.

That also means that as each woman makes an expenditure decision she knows she is making a public and not a private act and she gauges her actions accordingly. The assurance of anonymity is likely the greatest protection for those who would spend shared resources without thought for others' needs.

The third direction incorporates the negotiating and planning process into a group context rather than an individual one. This implies that the women actually expending monies sit down together and negotiate on their own behalf. But they do so in a context in which group decisions will be made and held to, at least until further group meetings can be held. They cannot go after the meeting to a "treasurer" and say "I changed my mind, I really need more money", implicitly demanding that the treasurer exercise control by granting/refusing them more. It also means they cannot go "over" their negotiated dollars unless more money becomes available and until further negotiations occur with the group. There is no "big daddy" anymore.

*"There is no 'big daddy' anymore."*

The treasurer then becomes simply an accountant, keeping track of the expenditures and presenting the information back to the group. She must have considerable knowledge and skill, but she no longer has power, authority, or responsibility for other women's decisions. But neither can any woman inadvertently exploit other women by spending money freely and thus denying other women access to it.

There is in this discussion, more of a solution than I had expected. It has not been tried in any group I have been in, but it seems to me something close to it is neces-

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# MONEY, MONEY, MONEY...

## Reading between the numbers

Liz Lunney

The attached financial statement is a representation of the receipts and disbursements incurred by the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee for the period 1 November, 1982 to 31 September, 1983. The month of October 1983 shows only a projection of disbursements as actual figures were not known at the time of printing.

In addition, the statement is an internal presentation of receipts and disbursements. An audited report will be prepared of this years operation and of the Annual Assembly and will be distributed to members in the ASWAC Newsletter.

### Reading between the numbers....

In the brief six month period that I have been privileged to sit on the ASWAC Board I have been exposed to a new way of communicating with women and of analyzing our purpose and action. Unfortunately I can not be more clear than that because my mind has not yet digested the many discussions that have transpired on the Board. Glimpses of understanding are illuminating,

brief, and fleeting. It has caused me however to re-evaluate my role as "treasurer" and the role of unseen and imposed financial structures.

First I am not, nor do I want to be, the guardian of the ASWAC monies, Big Daddy who distributes the pennies. We all share this responsibility. Given the reality of limited resources any new activity means our dollar commitment to other projects must be cut down, cut off, or refinanced. The role of treasurer that I have felt comfortable with has been providing the information that we might all share in these impossible decisions. Great in theory, but in practise this requires a strong commitment from the group. The Board has worked with this problem over the year. As expected it has not always been easy but slowly a comfortable space for communication about finances has grown.

From this space we have also come to recognize the way that

dollars can disrupt an organization and divert our energies. We have just begun to identify the structures and constraints that follow from our financial realities. Much unfinished business remains in this area.



*"...dollars can disrupt an organization and divert our energies. We have just begun to identify the structures and constraints that follow from our financial realities. Much unfinished business remains..."*

## Working with money cont'd

sary to address 'money problems'. But I think more than that it touches on the possibilities of other areas of authority, other areas of responsibility. On the board this year we have tried to use a very similar process in setting our agenda, thus removing the agenda process from a president or an executive with all the power, authority, and hostility problems that I have identified above in relation to money. We only began the process - but the pattern is the same. We have also tried to develop similar processes around the use of our time as another resource; to ensure that one woman does not determine how another woman spends her time. We have been partly successful in that regard.

Perhaps the term treasurer in the above comments should be read both concretely and metaphorically, for clearly it is a discussion about

more than money. It is a discussion of power, conflict, and negotiation. Any of the many words we use in organizational hierarchies could be plugged in to replace treasurer: president, vice-president, committee chair, chief assistant to the assistant chief. Each implies that power and authority are held by one woman over other women. Each, by its very nature, must create subordination and obedience or resistance and rebellion. The solution proposed then should also be read as a metaphor for the way we would like to work, a description of a process which frees each of us from being either a controller or controlled. Our liberation occurs first in the women's groups in which we work and invest most of our creative energies: if we can secure it there we may also be able to create it in other areas of our lives.

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# Alberta Status of Women Action Committee Statement of Receipts and Disbursements and Members Equity 01.11.82 - 31.10.83\*

## Receipts

Secretary of State	54,000.00
Memberships	3,508.00
Donations	2,181.00
Sales	648.50
Conference Evaluation	1,250.00

## Disbursements

Salaries	37,859.64
Benefits	2,965.42
Rentals	1,497.00
Telephone	2,589.38
Insurance	255.00
Office Supplies	2,422.28
Photocopying	347.86
Postage	3,673.55
Books and Subscriptions	154.50
Printing	3,416.23
Membership Dues	155.00
Travel	6,725.04
Meals/Accommodation	1,549.02
Repairs and Maintenance	135.00
	63,745.46

Excess or disbursements over receipts	2,157.01
Members' equity at beginning of year	34,282.41
Members' equity at end of year	32,125.40

\*Includes a projection of expenditures for October, 1983



RETELLING

OUR

STORIES...

## Using this booklet

At the Assembly "we will be working, planning and sharing in ways which are familiar to many of us, but unfamiliar perhaps to many others." We hope our stories will call up ideas, thoughts, and feelings about your work with women this year.

Please bring your copy of this report to the Assembly and use it in your own ways with the women you will talk with, work with. You may also want to share it with other women you know as a way of beginning new discussion and action among you. (Extra copies are available from the ASWAC office).

See you November 25.



## Quips and quotes

ASWAC board and staff members have produced some great quotable quotes and assorted pithy but to the point one-liners over the past year. We thought we'd share some of them with you as they also go a long way toward reflecting the essence of the thoughts and work that's gone on. We wish we could get them all in, but some have slipped our minds, while others are omitted because they simply lose a lot in the translation (you had to be there to appreciate it).

- "Ah yes--back to those good old days when men were men and sheep were nervous..."

- "Hey--suitcase it..."

- "I just don't want to take the path of least resistance..."

- "We don't need to teach the RCMP about women--we need to teach

women about the RCMP."

- "I just don't know...but lately I feel like a feminist looking for a place to happen."

- "Don't take prisoners...If you do then you have to feed them and exercise them and look after them--a real drag."

- "The dribble effect. It's the same as the trickle down effect, except it never gets there."

- "...from trying to excel in their world to understanding our own..."

- "At first the ideas in this (position) paper were too much for me to cope with emotionally so I said I don't understand--but I do."

- "It's almost as though action gets in the way of my learning-- I can't continue to take action

if I don't know exactly what they are at."

- "Women should stop having babies until men stop killing them."

- "Everything is anarchy..."

- "Heaping technology up technology, fission upon fission..."

- "At some point, if you allow violence to be done to you, you are condoning violent action..."

- "Nobody's going to follow orders in this organization..."

- "That's just Robert's Rules in drag..."

- "Exclusion is a description of women's lives; feminism is a way to look for the solution."

- "If we don't see barriers, we can walk through them..."

# “Stories don’t have ends, only breathing spaces...

“The government has enfranchised you,  
but it cannot emancipate you; that is  
done by your own process of thought.”  
(Nellie McClung - 1917)

...it is pointless to write off the  
anti-feminist woman as brainwashed, or  
self-hating, or the like. I believe  
that feminism must imply an imaginative  
identification with all women.... and  
that the feminist must, because she can,  
extend this act of imagination as far  
as possible.  
(Adrienne Rich - 1972)

“Women have often felt insane when  
cleaving to the truth of our experience.  
Our future depends on the sanity of each  
of us, and we have a profound stake,  
beyond the personal, in the project of  
describing our reality as candidly and  
fully as we can to each other.”

“Women have been driven mad, ‘gaslighted’  
for centuries by the refutation of our  
experience and our instincts in a culture  
which validates only male experience.  
The truth of our bodies and our minds  
have been mystified to us. We therefore  
have a primary obligation to each other;  
not to undermine each other’s sense of  
reality for the sake of expediency, not  
to gaslight each other.”

“Honesty in women has not been considered  
important. We have been depicted as  
generically whimsical, deceitful, subtle,  
vacillating. And we have been rewarded  
for lying.”

“And so we must take seriously the  
question of truthfulness between women,  
to lie with our bodies, as we cease  
take on faith what men have said about  
us, is a truly womanly idea of honour  
in the making?”  
“It isn’t that to have an honourable  
relationship with you, I have to under-  
stand everything, or tell you everything  
at once, or that I can know, beforehand,  
everything I need to tell you.”

Quotes from Adrienne Rich, *Women and  
Honour*; Some Notes on Lying, 1975.

All Things Confine  
All things  
Crowd me in!  
I am so wide!

After the unshapen  
Have I grasped  
In everlasting time  
I have caught it  
It has cast me  
Wider than wide!  
(Hadewijch - 13 Century)

you are what is female  
you shall be called Eve  
and what is masculine shall be called  
God  
And from your name Eve we shall take  
the word Evil, the word Good  
and from God’s, the word Good  
now you understand patriarchal morality.  
(Judith Graham - 1978)

## ...Use this breathing space to conspire.”

(Mair - 1983)

# WHO IS ASWAC, WHERE HAS SHE BEEN AND WHERE IS SHE GOING?

ASWAC grew out of an attempt by Alberta women in 1975 to bring feminists in the province together to work on issues of common concern. Four regional workshops in Grande Prairie, Calgary, Edmonton and Lethbridge resulted in a brief, *Joint Initiatives: A Goal for Women and Government in Alberta* which proposed structures to deal with status of women issues within the provincial government. This work preceded the first province-wide conference (October 1976) at which time women from all over Alberta agreed to form a permanent organization. Early ASWAC efforts concentrated around lobbying the provincial government for an advisory council and permanent minister responsible for the status of women, affirmative action, increased representation on provincial boards/commissions, changes to the matrimonial property act and so on. Around 1979 the beginnings of a trend appeared which would lead the organization gradually away from lobbying as its primary focus and toward a focus on Alberta women themselves: their work, strength, skills, needs, fears, anger and activities. Along with this change came an emphasis on our own knowledge and an analysis of our world. We have a resource centre and extensive ASWAC herstory files. We have two permanent staff, Mair and Frances, who do a lot of the communicating with members, the daily operating and the planning in conjunction with the board. The board is responsible for the management of ASWAC and for setting direction. However, all members of ASWAC are involved in some way in feminist work, and may or may not choose to use the structure and resources of ASWAC to help them in this work. This year, with our six regional conferences and one provincial assembly taking the place of one central provincial conference we feel that ASWAC has come around and up the spiral a whole turn since our first four regional workshops in the spring of 1976.

## BACKGROUND TO THE ASSEMBLY

This past year we have been able to hold regional meetings and activities throughout the province because of our provincial development project. These activities have addressed various concerns of women and some of the educational or informational goals of ASWAC. Therefore, our annual meeting/conference has been reshaped. Rather than primarily doing workshops, this assembly will encourage reflection on what has been happening with women in Alberta over the past year and encourage planning for the coming year. We hope that his newly named 'Provincial ASWAC Assembly' will capture the flexibility, freedom and sense of participation which has been developing these last few years. We will be working, planning, and sharing in ways which are familiar to many of us, but unfamiliar perhaps to many others. Hopefully these are ways which are more in keeping with women's effective participation. Together we will be expected to take responsibility first of all for ourselves and for our concerns, but also for each other and for ASWAC's future. This responsibility will be clearest in the small working groups on Saturday and Sunday. It will however, continue during the Saturday assembly times in which we share the results of our small group work for the interest and support of other women present. In short, this provincial meeting is a chance to reflect on our past and take one more step into a future we partially shape. Welcome to you from the planners: we know that you will turn to the woman next to you and welcome her.

# ASSEMBLY REGISTRATION FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (Res) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (Bus) \_\_\_\_\_

Women's Group Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

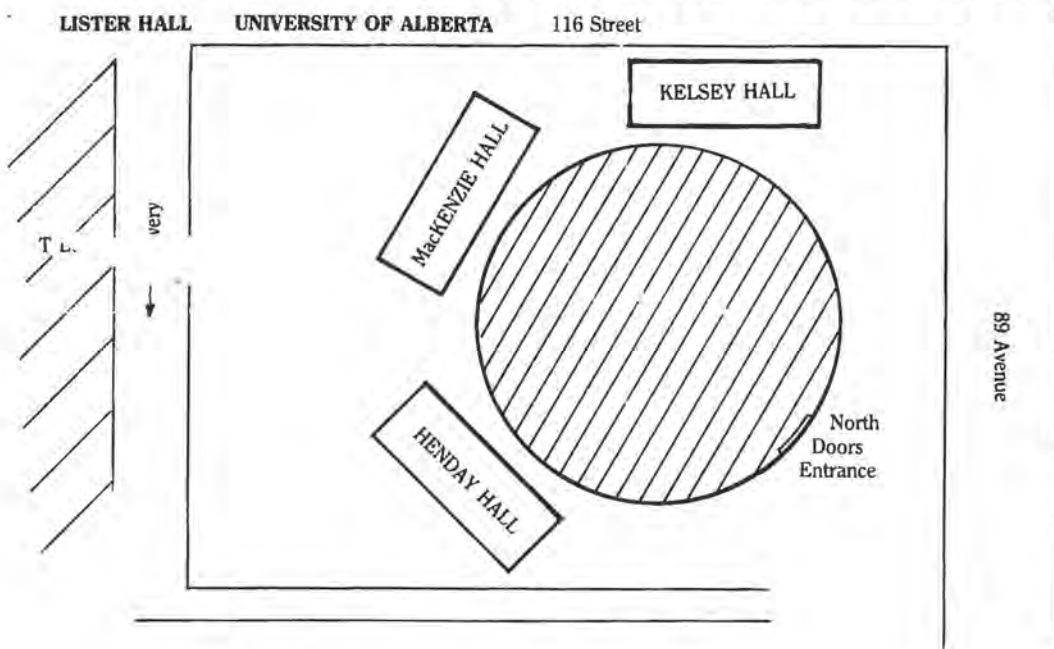
ASWAC Member \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee enclosed (\$20.00) \_\_\_\_\_

Do you need billeting? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you willing to billet? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

*\*\*Travel and child-care compensation application forms will be available at registration.*



## ASWAC MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership\* in ASWAC will help you stay informed of women's work and issues around the province through our Newsletter and special mailings. Joining ASWAC or renewing your membership now will last you through 1984.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  Membership

Address \_\_\_\_\_  Donation

Phone: (Res.) \_\_\_\_\_ (Bus.) \_\_\_\_\_

*Make cheque payable to Alberta Status of Women Action Committee,  
P.O. Box 1573, Edmonton, Alta. T5J 2N7. Telephone 424-3073.*

*\* We suggest \$10.00 membership per year.*