

# STORIES OF A YEAR

Alberta Status of Women Action Committee

1984 Annual Report

# What

Stories of A Year is just that. It is a description of the actions, events, issues, changes and much of the other work around ASWAC during the past year as experienced by each member of the ASWAC stoard (staff/board collective).

Using this format to report to the membership was done for the first time at the 1983 ASWAC Assembly Response was generally positive. We also had requests for copies from various women's groups across Canada who wanted to consider using the format as a model for their groups.

One piece of feedback we got about last year's report was that it would be helpful if there was more specific, itemized information about what ASWAC has done. So, this year we have devoted a larger portion of Stories of A Year to filling this need of some members.

We have stayed with the Stories of A Year format because we feel it much more clearly and accurately conveys to members not only the what and how of ASWAC's work but the uniqueness of each stoard member's style and the effect the work had on them, individually and collectively. This format, of course, is also more fitting to the collective way the stoard aims to work.

So, in the spirit of providing ASWAC members with as much and the best of information possible, here are Stories of A Year 1984.

# This Is

# All

# About

# Who

# We

# Are

Board: -Marilyn Assheton-Smith  
-Shelagh Bouttell  
-Debra Carnat  
-Diana Chown  
-Meaghan Dean  
-Donna Gibbons  
-Marilyn Guille  
-Amanda Le Rougetel  
-Suzn Morgan  
-Judy Moynihan  
-Almira Nicol (past)  
-Marty Whitesun  
Staff: -Frances Adams (office manager)  
-Mair Smith (organizer)

## Who Did It

Cover graphic - Marg Reece  
Layout/production - Meaghan Dean  
Typesetting - Resistance Graphics  
Printing - Webco West

Aethetic Relief



# Wondering about what we've "done"?

The following is the Interim Report ASWAC made recently to Secretary of State Women's Program. It contains a run-down of some of the work ASWAC did between April 1 and October 1, 1984. It gives you as good an idea as any as to what ASWAC has been doing. In other words, take all that is listed here and multiply it by at least two and you have an idea of the type and volume of work ASWAC carried out over 12 months...

The past six months have been, as usual, busy and productive for the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee staff/board and membership. For the purpose of this report our activities will be divided into several sections, with the understanding that our work is never so black and white, or easily defined. It is simply easier to report.

## DIRECT ACTION

### 1. Planned Parenthood/United Way

An information kit was produced and distributed to members, concerned public and women's groups. Since this action was typical of the way in which we are working recently, and contained elements common to many actions, it will be described in more detail here.

- a) The "issue" comes to us and demands immediate attention. There is only time to "react".
- b) Still, the background and complexities must be researched and understood in order to arrive at an analysis of the situation such that our action will be appropriate; in this case, a United Way/Catholic Social Services split over funding of a Planned Parenthood Project.
- c) We are contacted by members, concerned public and the media. (And the unfortunate individual who happens to answer the phone that day is expected to "take a stand" on behalf of ASWAC, a huge provincial organization--but that's another story!). We also make contacts and watch the media reports;
- d) Ultimately a natural "committee" emerges made up of one or more women who are concerned and who have the time and energy to do the work. This stage of the process is almost always reached within days of the issue coming to our attention (and the "committee" may or may not include ASWAC staff or members though we will have done the coordination to this point);
- e) The information is then collected and written into a format, (either collectively or by one person taking that responsibility); steps b, c and d are still happening simultaneously, such that there is room for deeper analysis, debate and feedback;
- f) The information is appropriately distributed--if there is time, through the newsletter; more often through direct mailings, pick-up at the office or delivery in person. The information is also generally put together in such a way that further action on the part of recipients is still possible and appropriate.
- g) Finally, when the dust has settled (and if there is time before another "issue" comes to our attention!) we attempt to do an analysis/evaluation of the action we took--either the "committee" assesses itself, or we discuss it at staff meetings, or we write about how we felt for the newsletter. Thus, even though each

action or issue may vary in form and content, we are in a better position over a period of time to determine what "works" and what doesn't work.

The process for most of the following "actions" of the past six months is generally similar to the description above:

- . Miss Universe Pageant - which was to have been held in Calgary
- . pregnancy firings - in Alberta, women can be fired (or not hired) due to pregnancy; we see this as direct discrimination
- . Alberta Women's Secretariat - a newly created position in Alberta
- . Student Maintenance Loans/Grants - changes in policy particularly affecting single mothers
- . University of Alberta Library - funds have been cut, yet they can still afford a subscription to Playboy magazine
- . Woodward's "wife-Beater Bats" - found in a novelty department, which promoted violence against women
- . N.W.T. Sexual Assault Ruling - a 13-year-old girl's attackers received a one-week sentence in the courts
- . Federal Election - women's issues and the "gender gap" were hot ones this year
- . "To Fund Or Not To Fund" - a discussion paper created to "frame" our autonomy discussions around the province
- . Nancy Tinge's Walk - a native woman who walked to Ottawa with her children to protest Section 12(b) of the Indian Act
- . Charter of Rights - which comes into effect in April of 1985 and stands to affect women greatly

## MEDIA WORK

In addition to media contact on all of the above actions, other media interviews over the past six months included the following issues: affirmative action, programs for men who batter, abortion, wife battering, women's studies, human rights, Turner's bum-patting, sexist textbooks, rural family violence program, the wage gap, the new federal cabinet, court-ordered maintenance support, unsolved female homicides, the Indiana Jones movie, non-traditional employment, CN Tribunal and the Take Back the Night walks.

At the same time as requests for interviews around specific issues are granted, we see our role with the media as an educational one; a great deal of time and care is spent educating reporters about the complexity of women's issues and about the way the media affects and is affected by us and our work. In other words, we attempt to do "consciousness-raising" with media personnel, which has occasionally paid off in more sensitive reporting of our stuff.

## AUTONOMY PROJECT

We made a decision early in the fiscal year to focus on the survival of women's groups in Alberta. We chose the form of "hearings" to talk and listen to women about their goals and dreams, their financial status, their set-backs and their decision-making processes in regard to long-term autonomy and survival as organizations dedicated to the concerns of women. "Hearings" were held in Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge and Calgary

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## NETWORKING

"networking" is not an easily defined concept, but for us may include any or all of the following elements:

- . directly referring women and/or women's groups to each other;
- . visiting and/or maintaining telephone contact with other groups;
- . informing the membership of the existence of other groups through the newsletter;
- . promoting the causes or events of other groups through the newsletter;
- . actively co-sponsoring events, or working on committees with other groups.

Networking helps to increase our base of support, information, action strategies and expertise--hence, it gives us all more power to act on our own and each other's behalf to affect change in the status of Alberta women. We see this as a vital component of our work and over the past six months it has encompassed at least all of the following groups: Healing Images of Women (sparked the beginning of this group), Winnipeg Women's Festival, Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, Slave Lake Women's Network (workshop on feminism and isolation), Vancouver Health Collective (PMS workshop), Hecate's Players, Voice of Women (June Peace Conference), Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Edson Women's Association (assisted with health conference), City Limits Bookstore, Ontario Committee on the Status of Women, Peace River Regional Services, Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, Tools for Peace, Grande Prairie Pornography Action Committee, Charter of Rights Coalition, National Action Committee, MediaWatch, Coalition for Aid to Nicaragua, Indian Rights for Indian Women, Women's Disarmament Campaign, Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, Friends of Jezebel, Redwater women's group, Alberta Native Women's Association, Odyssey House and the Edmonton Women's Election Committee.

Also, the Women and Research Conference, Hromada Women, Alberta Human Services Association, Discovery House, U. of A. Women's Program and Centre, Edmonton Out-of-School-Care Society, Webspinner, Summer School Collective, Women's Association of El Salvador, Golden Women's Centre, Edmonton Sexual Assault Centre, Every Woman's Place, Red Deer Status of Women Action Committee, Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter, Red Deer Crisis Line Project, Edmonton Immigrant Women's Centre, Ukrainian Women's

Marty WhiteSun

The 1984 stoard year has almost reached completion. Already it is time to reflect--to review and assess the developments of the past year.

Personally, I've been in a condition similar to the economy--depressed. I don't really understand the reasons for this nor how to effectively alter it. I simply have to admit that it has been a year of very low personal energy.

As a result I also have to admit to feelings of guilt. I have not contributed, accomplished or performed to the extent I had hoped I would a



Association, Amnesty International, Common Woman Books, Drayton Valley shelter project and the National Film Board, Studio D.

## "INTERNAL" WORK

Meanwhile, life at the office goes on! In the past six months, our specific work has included:

- . hiring and training a replacement for Frances, who took a leave of absence;
- . updating the organization's herstory files;
- . creating a new membership brochure
- . publishing four issues of the newsletter (8 since November 1983)
- . planning, discussing and writing about the proposed evaluation of ASWAC by Secretary of State;
- . planning and attending a stoard retreat;
- . starting a "log book" to record all telephone calls, mail and tasks in and out of the ASWAC office (and there are hundreds!)
- . creating a Publications List, dating back to ASWAC's beginnings;
- . revision of our current by-laws to more closely reflect who we are;
- . planning for the annual assembly;
- . planning and submission of a job creation project to the C.E.I.C.
- . organizing a maintenance support action group

These things have been accomplished by various members of the stoard, alone or collectively, and the list does not accurately describe all the details of "a day in the life of the ASWAC office". The paperwork, the volume of correspondence, processing of memberships, calls from individual women, and drop-ins, etc. are all too numerous to list.

Finally, our up-coming plans include, of course, the assembly and selection of the new stoard, in addition to continuing the work, analysis and action already detailed in this report.

Compiled by  
Marilyn Guille

## It's time already to reflect...

year ago. For this I apologize to ASWAC and to her stoardship (ie. her staff, board and membership). The energy I have mustered has been put into a few main areas.

I am truly disturbed by events and trends that I witness in the world around me. I see past progress towards human rights being eroded--from slow slippages to crashing avalanches. The examples are numerous and at times overwhelming.

I have included elsewhere in Stories of A Year a story from close to home (in more ways than one since it has affected me very deeply). It is a

# ...Upon what the past year has meant

specific reflection of a more general situation that fills me with varying degrees of anger, frustration and sadness.

On a somewhat more positive note, I have continued to work for the improvement of our medicare system through local organizing, lobbying and letter writing, information-sharing, a submission to the Opposition Task Force on Health and Social Services and presentations at public forums in Grande Prairie and Peace River.

The passage of the Canada Health Act in April 1984 was an important victory but by no means the end of the fight. The inclusion of the "health care practitioner" as an insurable category of health provider "where the law of the province so permits" opens the door to the coverage of nursing, chiropractic and other non-medical services. It is now up to the provinces to take further action in this direction.

No one can now be denied access to insured services because of an unpaid premium. Universal coverage is defined as 100 percent of residence rather than 95 percent. Although the philosophy of premiums has been attacked, the provinces are still free to choose their method of raising funds. Rather than denying insured coverage, Alberta is now resorting to legal action to collect unpaid premiums.

The new legislation includes a financial penalty for provinces that allow extra-billing and user fees. Alberta nevertheless, has no intention of doing away with extra charges, choosing to pay the penalties and thus increase the already high cost of health care in this province.

The CHA continues the emphasis on curative medical services while ignoring strategies for illness prevention and the de-emphasis on expensive institutional care. There remains a great deal



of work to be done to ensure the successful implementation of the act and the future enhancement of our health care system.

The anti-choice force is also on the move in northwest Alberta. The Grande Prairie Pro-Life Association is actively putting out its message and seeking supporters. It is imperative that those of us who support a woman's right to choose and to have control over her own destiny NOT be silent.

The patriarchy (that nebulous thing which seems to have a life and a will of its own) must really be smiling over the creation of "pro-life" groups. How better to protect its own existence than by dividing women and turning us upon ourselves? What an insidious tool for hooking some women into working for their own oppression!

A major problem experienced by women is isolation— isolation from the support of one another and from resources and information that could enrich the quality of our lives. I am most grateful over the past year for connections I have made with other women both within and through ASWAC. These connections are life-lines, vital channels for the exchange of support.

Being aware of the barriers that isolate us, both internally and externally, is no easy task. Recognizing and identifying our needs and the means for fulfilling them likewise is not a simple process. One of the major functions ASWAC serves is to facilitate the making of vital connections and the breaking through of barriers. Perhaps that is what working for women, for ourselves, is all about.

## The story of just one woman

Marty Whitesun

Last winter the staff of the Hythe and District Pioneer Home began organizing to make changes and improve working conditions. The women were fed up with unfair policies, practices and arbitrary decisions of management. To address their situation, the staff chose to have Canadian Union of Public Employees represent them and form a union local at the Hythe and District Pioneer Home.

The application for union certification was delivered to the Labour Board around noon on Jan. 27, 1984. A few hours before the delivery of the union application, a staff member was fired. Without warning or explanation, Yrsa Stobo was met in the parking lot as she got off work at 7 a.m. on Jan. 27 and was handed a notice of termination by the administrator. Yrsa Stobo had been employed by the Pioneer Home for over three years and in that time had never received a verbal or written reprimand. The administrator, Arta Juneau, admitted Yrsa was a very good worker.

On March 22, 1984 the Labour Relations Board met in Hythe to hear evidence related to the union certification plus a number of associated charges. The major focus of the hearing was on the charge of wrongful dismissal levied by CUPE against the Pioneer Home for the firing of Yrsa Stobo.

Testimony revealed that the decision to dismiss Yrsa was made by Olive Stickney, chairperson of the home's board of directors. It was agreed to by Arta Juneau at a meeting consisting of the two of them the evening before (on Jan. 26); The

cont'd. p. 6

# Some year-end notes

What I want to tell you about are the feelings of warmth and commitment and support that exist between the women of the Stoard; I want you to recognize the importance of the process-oriented work through which we have ploughed our way; I want you to know that I believe political action work to be important but unappealing and unfulfilling if it is lacking a base of trust, of commitment, of support - things which take time and energy to develop. We have allowed ourselves to take the time to build that base with and for each other and I am proud of us for that. And above and beyond this we have "done things" which are concrete and visible and reportable to you, the members and to Sec State, our funding agency and to (and by) the press. (This tangible work is listed elsewhere in the booklet.)

We have cried and laughed with each other; we have celebrated together and have been angry at each other; we have challenged one another to go beyond the usual, the acceptable, the known and to begin to work on making our individual and collective visions come true.

Nothing is perfect yet - not the way the Staff/Board collective works together, not the way in which the work gets done (who takes the work, who ends up doing it, who is responsible for it - our guilt associated with all this stuff); not the media's relationship to us, nor ours to it; not the philosophy of funding/government funding which we have been discussing in think-tanks around the province ... we have a long way to go yet and we've been working hard to get to where we're at today - our commitment to this journey of discovery is evident to me. And I would like to pay tribute to each and every woman on the Stoard for her perseverance and her individual contribution to this painful, exhilarating process ... won't you join your sisters on this journey?

In Sisterhood,  
Amanda Le Rougetel



## A time to learn the important things

Meaghan Dean

"To pretend to be something you're not is to collude in the prejudice against you. Instead, we have to challenge that prejudice in every way."

Annette Kolodny, professor  
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Much of the underlying theme in my work with the ASWAC stoard over the past two years has been learning how vitally important this basic precept is to me. It has been learning that I must keep in touch with it if I am in any way going to be part of making real change for myself and other women.

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## ...Decided by the two of them

board of the Pioneer Home was not informed of the decision and subsequent action until a board meeting on the evening of Jan. 27. At that time, they agreed to ratify what had already been done. No explanation was given for deciding on and executing the dismissal within the 24 hours prior to the scheduled board meeting where the entire board could have participated in the decision.

Evidence was presented that persons opposed to unions had been aware of the union activity. Both Olive Stickney and Arta Juneau, however, denied any knowledge of the union organizing in the home or that Yrsa Stobo was a positive force in it. "It was strictly coincidental that she was dismissed just when they were forming a union," said Mrs. Stickney.

Olive Stickney and Arta Juneau claimed that Yrsa Stobo was fired because of statements she was rumored to have made against the administrator and the board. No evidence was presented to substantiate that the alleged statements had been made.

Yrsa had been fired a matter of hours prior to the Labor Board receiving the union certification application. Therefore, the onus was on the union to show that Yrsa had been fired for her union activity in order to win the wrongful dismissal charge. Although circumstances and evidence indicated otherwise, the LRB accepted management's claims that they knew nothing about the union organizing and Yrsa's involvement in it. The charge was dismissed. The union local in the Hythe and District Pioneer Home was certified but the unfair treatment of Yrsa Stobo was not corrected.

Thus far, conditions at the home have not seen improvement. The staff have suffered harassment, intimidation and continued unfairness. Union supporters are being squeezed out and replaced with non-supporters. The decision of the LRB shattered faith in the administration of justice and left the staff disillusioned with the effectiveness of the union. Morale is consequently very low. The women have not yet given up, but the outlook for the future is not hopeful.

# ...Real change for me and others

If I and ASWAC did nothing else in two years, to have learned that much is a monumental feat and an immeasurable contribution to improving the "status of women" (whatever that is). Of course, that was not all I learned nor was it the only element in my grounding from which the many activities I took part in sprang.

I don't feel it is necessary to go into the details of what has been happening around ASWAC, especially in the past year. Most of this has already been shared with you through the newsletter. Even going into my feelings around the work we've done does not rest well on this page. It has been too rich, too varied, too complex and ever-moving to translate clearly into a written report.

I have been doing some thinking lately though over what has changed for me and the part that working closely with ASWAC has played in it. Here are some of the observations that emerged:

-Most of what I have been taught in my life about what constitutes and "effective, representative, credible organization" is a load of violent, manipulative bullfeathers.

-Finding alternative ways of working together as women is no longer an abstract concept--it is a concrete reality for me now. For instance, I now know it is possible to have a highly productive, non-violent meeting without Robert's Rules or a chairperson--even without an executive and a pre-planned agenda. It feels good to be able to share this learning with other women.

-It is possible to be totally honest with other women or angry with women and not instigate World War III or produce a hopeless split. By working with women, who each in her own way is committed to beating the violent ways of the patriarchal rap, I've learned that we can and do emerge from the rough and painful times capable and willing to respect one another's choices and fears.

-Taking risks is scary--and worth it.

-I trust women a lot more than I use to. I still have things to learn on this one, but I'm much farther along than I was.

-I am getting really good at knowing a lie when I see or hear one. I'm getting braver at (and more support for) calling those lies.

-A lot of women fear and mistrust these ideas and changes. A lot of women don't. Somehow I am becoming more gentle and stronger at coping with this often painful and frustrating reality.

There are lots more, but those are some of the key ones for me.

I've decided not to go on the ASWAC stoard again. My work with ASWAC however, will not end--it will just be different. I plan to continue working as an active member, particularly around the proposed evaluation of ASWAC by Secretary of State Women's Program and what I hope will also include an evaluation of Women's Program from a feminist perspective.

I sense the next year for ASWAC is potentially a challenging one that may produce some major changes. For instance, the future of ASWAC's Secretary of State funding is far from clear. Also, if the evaluation takes place, ASWAC members will be asked to assess and make decisions about their relationship with ASWAC; it will be more important than ever that ASWAC members do their share in keeping informed about ASWAC's work and what it means to them. It could be a year when the value of all that ASWAC has done in nine years, and especially over the last several years, will be put to the test.

Whatever happens, whatever the fears, whatever the challenges, my greatest hope is that the women who are ASWAC will not choose to pretend to be something they are not.

## Fascinated, challenged and hooked...

Suzn Morgan

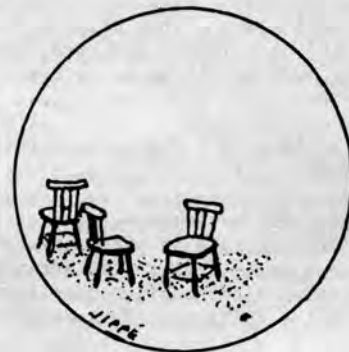
For five months last year I worked for ASWAC organizing a women's health conference in Calgary. My involvement with the project was both very very exciting and very very hard. Certainly by the end of the project I was feeling torn and tattered. On the other side, I was also astonished by the deep and varied analysis of women's experience by many members of ASWAC. It took me quite awhile to believe that I had stumbled upon a group of women who devoted themselves, intellectually and emotionally, to understanding our experience as women. I was fascinated! I was challenged!! I was hooked!!!

With lots of gentle encouragement I decided to become a member of the board. I put myself through agonies at the thought I would be uncovered as an imposter among these strong powerful women. I really feared that I didn't have the depth of understanding that other women seemed to

have. Perhaps I wasn't feminist enough. I faced the first few stoard meetings with incredible trepidation.

Well, this year things have certainly been different than my expectations.

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# ...We all started with our own fears

We all came to the stoard with our own set of fears around how this year's work would affect us and the women of Alberta. And it certainly has done both--on many levels. I am, in some ways, unable to draw tidy little divisions between my work and our work. Certainly my small presentation to the Fraser Committee on Pornography and Prostitution I cannot see as only belonging to me. Nor the birth of the International Feminist Forum project can I personalize. I remember the media work around the Miss Universe Pageant, reports to Media Watch, the autonomy hearings in Lethbridge and Calgary, the work with the incest victims and families and presently, the maintenance support enforcement group. These too I do not own. These are pieces of work that have been acted upon by many and affect many.

Perhaps a piece of work that was done by me for me was a tour of six battered women's shelters throughout Alberta. This was entirely a self-education project though even it may eventually take on an extended use. Certainly every area of my life has been drawn upon and affected by my participation on the stoard.

Aside from my "work" as an ASWAC stoard member I have a number of things I do under the name of "fun". This year some of my fun things have been participating in a NFB film animation workshop, writing for and creating Webspinner, attending the Women and Research Conference, enjoying the sun at the Women Celebrate the Earth Festival, writing for the ASWAC newsletters, supporting the IWD committee, sharing knowledge with the young women doing Teen Horizons and singing feminist songs.

Interesting to me how much my work and fun have in common. No wonder I have as much problem as I do trying to draw tidy little divisions between the two. I love to learn and to share what I learn and this I cannot compartmentalize!

As much as the work and play draw me to the stoard there is one other aspect which keeps me here. An excitement rises in me as each stoard meeting draws near. A feeling much akin to a religious fervor. A feeling that emanates from deep inside me; perhaps it is part love (love for the women I work with), perhaps it is part commitment (commitment to the integrity of how we work together), perhaps it is part of a sense of going home (being spiritually part of this community). Or, perhaps it is all of these and more.

The stoard is a place where my personal growth has been nurtured and where other women have consciously opened themselves to me. I have been supported in my growth and part of that support has been to offer me honest challenging. A support that comes of a recognition of the work I have done (am doing) through despair, on to my own personal empowerment. I am doing both. I am working with and through despair (of suffering of sexual abuse, of nuclear war) toward personal power. Only by doing this am I able to work and play with honor and integrity and strength.

Along the way I have been able to take the risk of openly examining myself and my work (with the ever-present fear of exposing the imposter) and seeing clearly that I too am a strong, powerful woman. The work I do has actually been a small price to pay for the gift of being able to acknowledge my own power.

# What's been given and received...

Marilyn Guille

In May or June of this year, Amanda wrote a story for Webspinner about ASWAC stoard meetings, and she said "The year's half over already..."

Well, I was sitting in the Women's Resource Centre in Whitecourt (where I live when I'm not escaping to Edmonton) when I read that article and it was a real jolt! Half the year gone, and I had only just got my feet wet!

So I "took stock" then, thinking in terms of taking and giving from the well, that marvellous analogy Almira coined at last year's AGM, what had I given to ASWAC half-way through the year, and what had ASWAC given me?

We'll, on the surface, I had done some things--I wrote the necessary final activity report for Sec. State for 1983; I wrote a paper about government funding to aid our autonomy discussions with women around the province; I wrote an article or two for the newsletter; I put together what I felt was a long-overdue ASWAC publications list (terrified all the while that someone would hear

me cluck-clucking in the background that any organization worth its salt has a publications list!); I perused the correspondence file regularly, answering some letters and delegating the rest; I attended a few meetings about dreary stuff like the budget; I attended a much more interesting autonomy "hearing" in Grande Prairie with Mair, and the NAC AGM in Ottawa; I raised a few good ideas that we acted on.

Well, it does add up, doesn't it? I also participated intensely at every meeting of the stoard, adding my voice to the rest. ("Oh my goodness, am I talking too much again?")

Now the year is over and it's time to take stock again--the list is shorter for this half year, for several reasons. Oh, I wrote a bit more, attended a few more meetings, but nothing spectacular. But a funny thing happened on the way to November of 1984. As a matter of fact, several not so funny things happened. You see, as all the ASWAC goings-on were going on, I also did "life" as Lisa Walter puts it!

For one thing, there was a crack in the cosmic  
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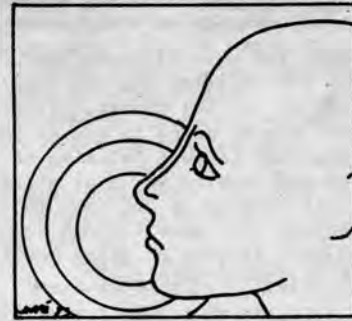
# ...During an eventful, painful year

relationship and a great deal of my time and energy has gone into assessing and rebuilding a life with my husband and children, no easy task when damage has been done.

And on April 1, my father died--a hurried trip back to the coast with my sister to be with our family, and to say goodbye. Words will fail me here, because I cannot describe the complexities of that experience, but I can say that the impact of ASWAC on my life was never more clear to me than during that time--breathing in the new life of spring on Vancouver Island while bidding adieu to an old one; supporting my mother in a way I never thought I was capable of; and coming home with much sadness, but new appreciation for the woman I've become. The hardest stuff was not the death of my father per se, but coming face-to-face with the value system in which I was raised (and clearly, finally, rejecting it, yet not rejecting the very people who taught it to me); the pain in the lives of other members of the family (whom I don't see often, so it's easy to forget); the subtle but powerful destructiveness of alcoholism on the people I love.

Well, I mentioned earlier that the last half year has not been as productive for me and that I wanted to talk about what ASWAC has done for me--now I'm wondering where to start? How to do justice to it all?

Within a few weeks of coming home from the funeral we had a stoard meeting. No one said much when I quietly announced in the round where I'd been, and why. No one had to say much--my fragile spirit was surrounded by positive, healing energy the entire weekend. The amazing thing for me was that this was an "effortless" energy--if I asked members of the stoard now if they consciously attempted to nurture me that weekend, most would likely say no. But nurture me they did. And they have since--when I missed an important meeting with Marc Arnal and Karen Schwartz at Sec. State because I could not get out of bed at Mair's; when I arrived at the retreat burned out and feverish and spent the first day flat out on the couch at Barbara's; when I got a cold that lasted forever; when I let the correspondence file go for nearly two months because nothing mattered enough to attend to; when I just simply didn't do half the things I said I would do; when



Marilyn A-S said, "Don't be so hard on yourself. Being ill is probably a very normal, natural part of the grieving process." (Well, maybe that's not exactly what she said, but that's what I heard.)

So I am talking about support, and I don't know what the dictionary definition of that word is and I don't much care, either. I only know that that's what ASWAC's done for me--not just in the actions of individual women, but so many things. The arrival of the newsletter through the fog, for instance! The sure knowledge that I was being carried by the tide of a strong, directed organization and that I also made up a part of that tide. The commitment I made last November that gave me some direction and got me busy doing things when nothing else seemed real or important enough. And knowing, through it all, that no one was judging my unpredictability or confusion as I worked through these "personal" things.

Sp my work for the ASWAC stoard has suffered somewhat, but I am healing. And if Mair stopped in Whitecourt and drank tea with me on her way to somewhere (which she did), that was far more important to me than anything she might be doing (which she was). (Oh, oh, a bit of defensiveness here--okay).

Of course, I am thinking now about those vague charges last year that ASWAC wasn't doing anything. And I am also thinking about a dear old friend who used to talk about "ripples" alot--how every action creates a ripple which cannot be measured but which joins with all other actions (ripples) to create a wave, a tide, an ocean...

I believe in ripples. And I believe that every single act on the ASWAC stoard this year, no matter how seemingly trivial, was a ripple that will ultimately move us one step closer to our goals. Some of those ripples were consciously created; others simply flowed.

I am stronger now and have the energy to get back to the tasks at hand--and I know why. And I want to lay those charges to rest. I know what ASWAC has done this year--and I am only one woman.

So this is my story of a year. Reading over what I've written now, it turns out to be more of a tribute than an accounting--so be it.



## STILL AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

# WHO ARE YOU TO YOU?

In a *Room of Ones Own*, of 1928, Virginia Woolf wrote the following to an aspiring novelist:

Above all, you must illumine your own soul with its profundities and its shallows, and its vanities and its generousities, and say what your beauty means to you or your plainness, and what is your relation to the ever-changing and turning world of gloves and shoes and stuffs swaying up and down among the faint scents that come through chemist's bottles down arcades of dress material over a floor of pseudo-marble.

For me, these words speak to all women and just as clearly in 1984 as they did then--who are you, she seems to demand of the reader, what do you stand for, what is your honest interpretation of yourself? Not his interpretation or that of others. And not based on the hedonistic self-image promoted by the cosmetic and fashion industries.

During this past year on the board, I came to feel that it is this--the growth towards personal autonomy--that is at the centre of the feminist movement. And this year, in particular, ASWAC has been looking at this question of autonomy at an organizational level. How to grow as a feminist organization, with its risks and experiments and search for new paths, without relying on good interpretations from others such as government funding bodies or the media.

Sometimes this goal was missed completely but when we did succeed in working autonomously, it seems to me, we did so by a process of individual analysis and mutual support. The creative potential of individual analysis taken on by each person seemed to be strengthened by the support and encouragement which she received and, conversely, the respect engendered by this individual analysis often increased the support.

It seems to me that this process works as well as it does due to the fact that the ASWAC board tries to consciously work as a collective. This belief in the ability of a feminist organization to work collectively, regardless of the pitfalls, is one of the foundations of the organization called ASWAC. Out of this collective process can come a feeling of personal power combined with an ability to support others' opinions and to compromise. This has been referred to as "strength through collective bonding". For me, being on the ASWAC board is to discover that a collective feminist organization not only can work but is the best, most creative and productive means towards feminist goals. It simply is not enough to think and ask questions alone and in isolation from other women, nor, I have learned, should one expect creative thinking in a group where ascendancy of certain individuals is presumed beforehand. It must be a sharing process, in contact with others who are taking the same road. This is what I came to understand through participation in the ASWAC board.

This collective, or sharing process, I found, is not a strange or alien situation in which to find



oneself. On the contrary, it seems a natural transition once a woman begins to intuit the bonds that she shares with other women. These bonds seem to be based in common experiences and overlapping attitudes like resistance to violence and pornography. Out of this realization comes mutual support.

I wish that more members of ASWAC could share in this process. I also wish that more members understood how important is their support of the ASWAC board. Sometimes the silence from many members is disheartening. There are diverse ways that members can communicate with the board--through sharing a network of their own with ASWAC's network, or by using ASWAC's resources to further their own interest in feminism, or supporting the action that an individual board member has taken or writing an article for the newsletter. These are merely some possible examples. Some members who find a particular issue difficult to deal with might discover that a visit to the ASWAC office not only clears up some of their confusion or apprehension, but provides the ASWAC staff with needed contact at that time. It is this individual analysis and mutual support, it seems to me, that will create the atmosphere for both the individual autonomy of which Virginia Woolf wrote sixty years ago, and the organizational autonomy for which ASWAC has been striving. I deeply appreciate having been part of this process for the past year.

Diana Chown

The ASWAC Office Manager/Community Organizer (a new title that more accurately describes the work) position will soon be open and applications from ASWAC members are invited. We will be hiring a feminist who is:

- knowledgeable of the women's community in Alberta;
- experienced in organizing and working with women on a variety of issues;
- skilled in office work (typing, filing, correspondence, etc.);
- experienced in working with media (not mandatory);
- full of initiative.

This is a full-time position located in Edmonton with a salary of \$19,000/year.

We have already received two applications from board members. Please call Frances at the ASWAC office for more information.

# You don't have to know all the answers

Judy Moynihan,  
alias, Jude Moonberry

The last time I sat down to record herstory was writing a report for the Provincial project in 1983. The progression from the project to the stoard was almost inevitable for me (and for 3 other women). But, as usual, I put all kinds of blocks in my own path. I felt I was "not knowledgeable enough", "not feminist enough", "incapable" - all those judgemental things. In fact - these were all the same reasons I had for being very afraid of taking on the Fort McMurray portion of the Provincial project. However, in this decision (to go on the board) I had the advantage of having already experienced working with ASWAC women. And in that experience I found I had received tremendous support to do what I had believed I was incapable of. So, I phoned Mair and asked "Is there still room for another woman on the board?" There was, so I dove in.

I felt like an imposter at the first stoard meeting. Work? Who wants to work? I just went to spend time with women I had grown to treasure very much from working with them on the project. I learned that when I'm in a secure environment, work gets done. And the work was not separate from just being with those other women. I've also come to appreciate that each of us works in different ways - and I've learned to trust that my way of working is alright for me - for right now.

So much learning - in the way of knowing - has happened for me this year. We have struggled with the concept of structural violence - continually looking at the way we work - and making sure our structure does not perpetrate that violence. Altho' our ideas are not homogenous, we have treated ourselves and each other with a great deal of respect and caring. I have learned to not only look at the issues - but under, around and through these issues. Analysis has never been a strength of mine - but I'm certainly learning.

In the course of the past year I've had to miss three board meetings. And each of these occasions were also part of my work. In February I had the privilege of supporting a friend as she was giving birth. That put me in immediate touch with the pain that is inflicted by the medicalization of childbirth. Some I day I will be a mid-wife.

In March I travelled to Ottawa to attend the NAC

## Organizing somewhat less lonely now

Mair Smith

This time last year in *Stories of A Year* I told you about the loneliness of my role as organizer - both 'doing the work' and defining/planning it. Well, I don't feel quite the same way this year. The change in stoard structure, although no one could say we work perfectly as a collective yet, means that I feel more in touch with individual stoard members at all times - we know what's going on in each other's lives, where we're going, what we're doing, and why. When travelling this

annual assembly. I returned with stacks of papers, pamphlets - all kinds of resource material which required me to finally get a filing system organized. I had to - I was completely frustrated at not being able to find anything! And these files have been valuable sources of information for many women in Fort McMurray.

In August I missed another meeting as I was mourning the death of my mother. I have been able to share the grief I feel with other stoard members. Grief shared does become easier. My mother has always given me the feeling that I could do whatever I want - be whatever I want - and stoard members reinforce that for me.

On the physical side - I've always found the weekends of the stoard meetings to be a marathon of endurance. Exhilarating and exhausting at the same time! I can never bring myself to be "sensible" and go to bed at a decent hour. I inevitably hang in for those late night talks (where even more "work" gets done). Fly in Sat. morning and out Sun. nite - and my creative energy is flowing the whole time. Then comes the re-entry shock. That has varied from just being simply tired - to having a very difficult time dealing with the "real" "cruel" world. Feeling disoriented, angry, and burnt out. I want our new society to BE HERE NOW.

When I consider my year on the board, I feel the most tangible work I've done is create a network of communication from Fort McMurray to the other parts of the province. I always come home with Webspinner, news of upcoming conferences, extra newsletters. All kinds of information that may otherwise not make it up here. And the other less tangible work I've accomplished is learning to trust myself.

I have decided that I would like to be on the board for another year. (I think - altho' I still have some small nagging doubts about my own abilities!) My experience is that you don't have to know the answers to be on the stoard - and we all help each other and encourage ourselves to look for the questions.

We've planned a great gathering for the ACM in Calgary - thank you Suzn! I look forward to talking to any woman who is considering a leap onto the stoard - I recommend it highly. We can meet in the sauna!

year I have frequently travelled with another stoard member and worked with her, and I believe my trips around the province have been for more 'concrete' purposes - to meet with an identifiable group with whom I have an identifiable role. I don't know that this is all good - I haven't spent much time calling and dropping in on members around the province - I really miss that, and I believe our feeling of connection and network has suffered somewhat.

cont'd. p. 12

# ...Been to fewer places this year

I've been to fewer places this year, too - 15 as opposed to 25. I've been to: Wetaskiwin, Lethbridge (3), Magrath, St. Paul, Fort McMurray (2), Redwater (20, Grande Prairie (3), Hythe, Coronation (2), Vermilion, Peace River (2), Calgary, Valleyview, Whitecourt (3), and Bonnyville (4).

I've also been involved in organizing or participating in several events and groups:

- . the United Church Task Force: Women in Crisis
  - . The Fraser Committee (porn and prostitution)
  - . an Affinity group in Edmonton
  - . a group of adults molested as children: Edm. Sexual Assault Centre
  - . Concerned Citizens on Prostitution & Porn
  - . Women for Women - Lethbridge
  - . an 'animation workshop': Nat'l Film Board
  - . International Women's Day in Fort McMurray
  - . Redwater Women's Network
  - . An emerging Women's Health Collective in Edmonton
  - . 'Women and Non-Violence in Alberta' conference
  - . Positive Images: Women by Women
  - . Charter of Rights coalition
  - . 'A Regional Approach for Women in Children Workshop'
  - . Assn. of Human Services in Alberta
  - . GALA (Gay and Lesbian Awareness), Edmonton
  - . Celebration of Women and the Earth
  - . Feminist tour of Edmonton for a B.C. feminist and Esther Ramirez, El Salvador ♀'s Assn.
  - . New women's group in Peace River
- and many more! Details of these and others have been in the newsletters this year.

In particular, I've been at three Webspinner workshops - in Lethbridge, Bonnyville and Grande Prairie. Webspinner is not officially an ASWAC project (whatever that means); however, I believe Webspinner is the best method I've found yet of meeting women in different places, working intensely with them, getting to know them and their local

issues intimately. I believe, therefore, that my involvement in Webspinner workshops increase our network and our knowledge of each other.

And, I've been involved in three of our five 'autonomy' hearings - in Calgary, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. (Other stoard members organized hearings in Lethbridge and Red Deer.) In Calgary we met with women from the Women's Emergency Shelter and the Women's Health Collective. In Grande Prairie, with South Peace Regional Council of Women, the Business and Professional Women, Odyssey and interested individuals. In Fort McMurray, with Women of the North, which included women from Business and Professional Women and the board of the Women's Crisis Centre Society. Each of these 'hearings' involved a discussion which lasted about 2½ hours on the topic of autonomy, our work, our resources, what we need to do our work, how we can cooperate better, and so on. Written reports are available from the Grande Prairie, Fort McMurray and Lethbridge hearings and contain much creative thinking. Please ask for these if you would like them. We hope that the discussion can continue at the Assembly in the workshop called 'How Will We Survive?' and that next year's stoard will pull together our assembled creativity into a form that will help us all.

I'm going into next year with great hope and excitement, despite my usual panic about starting to work with a new group of women. More of this stoard than ever before have chosen to remain on stoard for another year - we must be doing something right! I'm excited by the knowledge that more and more of us are understanding the rudiments of working collectively, and that it will be increasingly possible to do solid feminist work with a minimum of structural violence.

## Some thoughts on well-being

Mair Smith

We started the year, as many other women have mentioned, with the inspiration of an image given us by Almira Nicol. What she said was - 'going to ASWAC is like going to the well'. As a result, Sunday morning at last year's Assembly consisted of all present (about 50 women) telling what they needed from ASWAC's well and what they were able to put into it.

The well image has stayed with us all year and I think has grown and been re-interpreted several times. I found myself having some trouble with it - seeing it in purely practical terms, all these trips to and from the well with heavy pails of water seemed like a pretty exhausting way to spend my year. In my mind's eye, the well was like Jack and Jill's - way up on a steep hill - and I started abandoning the elevator at the office so I could get in training. Getting water out of the well, and carrying it downhill was bad enough (I have memories of girl guide camp in England and the cold squelchy feeling of a shoe-full of water) but carrying water uphill? So we could pour it back into the well? You have to be



kidding; besides, what about pollution - the last thing we want is a polluted well. Besides, the image didn't feel a bit like ASWAC as I experience her.

So, I need to go deeper. How does water get into a well anyway - not through the efforts of individual women with buckets! While no expert, I know that that particular piece of mother earth's bounty happens underground, and words like spring, stream and water table start taking shape in my mind. Now, that feels better. cont'd. p. 13

# Leaving a piece of myself

Frances Adams  
Office Manager

"I Have Learned so Much ...": the headline of my report a year ago. That won't do for this report because now I know everything of course! Knowing everything could be the first item in my job description. It would describe the range of my work very well. "What is ASWAC's policy on affirmative action?; Is the National Task Force on Child Care going ahead?; Where is the bank statement for August?; What are you going to do about Barbara Amiel's column?; How many feminists does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

One thing about working for ASWAC is that you have the space to be yourself, pursue the interests you are most keen on. Unfortunately, in my position, there are so many issues and demands coming my way that it is often difficult to devote large blocks of time to individual projects.

Some of the work that I've done over the past year has been visible to you. I've worked on all of the newsletters, writing, typing, lay-out and mail-out. I've talked to a lot of you on the phone and in person. I've written many of you and sent you the information you requested. I do most of my work from the office but in the past year managed to get to Slave Lake, Redwater, Calgary and Red Deer to meet with women's groups.

## ...Feeling better

Our well is fed by springs, and streams and is affected by the level of the water table. (My mind's eye has moved it down from the hill, you'll be glad to hear, and into a cool, shady spot in a peaceful green garden.) The water now becomes a metaphor for our women's energy - well, that's not new - as it works its way underground in various configurations and confluences, and some of it will run into the well called ASWAC - and out again.

What is a well? Its a place where the underground water becomes available and where people have intervened to make that water more accessible by building a structure which will hold it for a while. We have to drill for a well, we have to know when and where to find the best place for a well. Much of the water will not even flow through the well, but will continue finding its own paths and joining with other streams. A well which demanded that all water flowed through it would not meet with much success; likewise, a well which insisted that all water not presently contained by it was not really water would be subject to great ridicule.

O.K., so ASWAC's a well, and some of the water (women's energy) flows into her and is made available for a while. What else is happening? Springs are bubbling up all the time; new wells are being drilled; underground streams are running together, becoming bigger and more powerful; the earth is nourished, and, THE WATER TABLE IS RISING!

I've been working with a group of women on the maintenance support enforcement system and we're planning a public forum in December on this issue. The Sexual Assault Centre is still high on my list of priorities. Although I finished my year as chairperson, I continue to be a board member. I'm still doing some public work on pornography from time to time (media interviews and workshops) and, for the first part of the year was a 'walking, talking expert' who gave a lot of energy to this issue. I, too, needed healing and chose, a few months ago, to redirect some of my energy. My major 'healing' came with a two-month holiday in Europe this summer. Goofing off once in awhile is great therapy!

One of my favourite pieces of work last year was organizing the Edmonton portion of Esther Ramirez' (El Salvador Women's Association) cross-Canada tour. She was a delight to spend time with and sent me a letter saying that we had organized her time here better than any other group. That's nice feedback. We have since become involved in a raffle for a trip to Nicaragua with the proceeds to go to daycares in the liberated zones of El Salvador.

At the beginning of this reporting period we were in the final throes of our provincial outreach project and now we are about to begin another temporary project through the CEIC, UIC enhancement program. We will be hiring two women to do financial and resource/information work. Both will be working out of the Edmonton office for five months and I'll be working closely with the resource worker, getting our library in shape and designing and distributing key-issue kits.

I've enjoyed working with this year's board, a group of really wonderful, creative women. We have become more confident this year of our new ways of working and direction. The tension that existed a year ago when we 'reported to the membership' has largely dissipated. I feel that we have the support and understanding of the majority of our members.

I have had difficulty deciding what to do with this report. I am leaving ASWAC and Edmonton before Xmas and feel that I should 'put it all together' for this, my last report. I can't do it though. My work and learning has been too great, too wide-ranging to be able to summarize it in a few lines. And, of course, it is not complete or over. I will be working in the women's movement for the rest of my life, wherever I work and live. I really have "learned so much" and I leave here feeling good about myself and ASWAC. I think we've been good for each other. I leave a piece of my heart and soul with ASWAC and all of you who have given me so much.



# Some stories of some years

Marilyn Assheton-Smith

When did I first become interested in the status of women? I think as a small child, the first time I complained bitterly that something was "not fair" because it was different for boys and girls. The earliest occasion I clearly recall was age six or seven, my mother and I talking as she worked in the kitchen. I discovered to my amazement she had not always been called "Smith", she had taken my father's name. I remember my emotion, what I would now call a sense of injustice, and I cried out "that's not fair". My mother's gentle amusement did nothing to change my feeling.

My life did not easily lead me to address that injustice, to do anything to try to change it. There was one occasion, when the Federal Government appointed a Royal Commission on the Status of Women. I lived in Yellowknife and I presented to them a short, painful brief that documented the experience of two Indian women I had met. I tried to ask one simple question: what is wrong with our culture and its view of sexuality, male and female sexuality, that women can be destroyed willy-nilly through sexual violence from "perfectly normal men"? Their answer was mostly embarrassed silence, then a turn to talking about how women needed to change and especially Indian women. I did not feel good about presenting briefs when that experience was over.

Sometime in the seventies, back home in Alberta, I joined ASWAC. Far too busy to do anything, it relieved my guilt a little to pay an annual membership fee. I seldom went to conferences, had no idea how a member might become more involved, and in any case had other priorities. I was very much a peripheral dues-paying member, someone with a minimal commitment to ASWAC but nevertheless a continued concern about women. My time on the board has taught me not to downgrade the importance of such members in any organization, and I no longer apologize for those years.

Three years ago, in the fall of 1981, Sandy Susut asked if I would give some help with the annual conference. I agreed to do a small task called facilitating at a conference devoted to the issue of women organizing for change. It was a great conference for me, as I had an opportunity to meet and talk with many women. When volunteer time rolled around on Sunday I volunteered to work on the next conference; after all I had to give something back to ASWAC now. The next year it was the ASWAC board, then one more year on the board because I had learned so much the first year I had to return a little again. But this, my third year working with ASWAC will be my last for I must now turn to other women's work.

What has the experience been for me? Unbelievably good. To paraphrase an old expression, three years ago I didn't know how to spell feminist, now I am one. My paid work-life is as a university professor, I am one of the privileged of this world who is paid to read (among other things). Now as I read the academic literature on feminism I can fully understand it, for I have lived the concepts,

struggled with them in the daily work of ASWAC. When I debate with my colleagues, or discuss with my students, I bring a confidence grounded in a wealth of knowledge that could never have been garnered from reading alone. My research for the rest of my academic career will, I am quite sure, be women-centred. A few years ago, I would not have even known what that term meant much less how to do such research.

I have met and worked with women on the ASWAC board from all over Alberta, with widely differing experiences and understandings of women's work. We have argued, fought, disagreed politely, agreed, laughed, cried, analyzed and theorized, and planned and done so many things. This year we began without an executive, we could get right to work planning and doing our work. We decided to talk with at least some women not on the board about the women's work they were doing, about how we could support each other better, about the problems of money and resource autonomy.

Those meetings, in Calgary and Red Deer and Fort McMurray were highlights of the year for me. Two specific moments stand out in my mind. A woman in Calgary, putting her heart and soul into working with battered women in a shelter, sharing with us her anxiety and pain and hearing our challenges to some of what she was saying. We asked, how can we support and she replied, "don't ask me to be a better feminist; you must understand I am doing all that I can simply to face day in and day out the pain of where I work." I thought, how could we ever imply to such a woman that she was not a "good feminist". But also how can we honestly challenge each other so that we may better understand our reality and still support each other in our work? Is there a time when some woman's work should not be supported, perhaps when it hurts other women? Such questions remain with me, for much of our hurt comes from each other as our differences continue to divide us.

The other moment was much different, but also very painful. We were again meeting with women and again shelter work was the centre of much of the discussion. A judge had recently commented on a Calgary court case in which a woman had been battered, saying that the woman was a shrew and it would take an angel not to beat her. The anger I



# It's hard to know where to begin

Debra Carnat

It seems like a very long time ago that it was suggested to me that I partake in the ASWAC stoard of this year. I reacted in some not uncommon ways, with uncertainty, and fears regarding the inadequacy of my skills and my wisdom. Nevertheless, people and my own interest persisted and I chose to sit on the stoard.

Working in a collective structure appealed to me. I have worked in such structures before and it is my preferred way of working. I think this served as an advantage to us this year, in that the shared structure was already in place and we didn't have to go through a major transition. In many ways a collective structure feels very natural to me; it is possibly the oldest working structure that exists. Yet in this society, choosing to work collectively is frequently interpreted as a very revolutionary act. It also poses some difficulty, when two of the members work full time and receive a salary and others are scattered throughout the province. Work does not necessarily get equally divided, and Mair and Frances do carry a lot of the load.

My own work over the last year is a continuum, some old projects and some new ones. My women's work is never ending. By this I am NOT referring to housework, although that seems never ending also, but rather I am speaking of the work that I do as women working for social change, whether or not it is done under an ASWAC banner. My work around battered women continues, in the form of public education, workshops, facilitating a support group, and in June I represented ASWAC on a panel with Neil Webber at the Alberta Conference of Women's Shelters. I attended some of the Fraser Committee hearings on prostitution and pornography, largely with the intent of listening and to support a board member who was presenting, and wound up myself presenting a brief brief regarding the con-

## So much anger

felt at that remark, anger at a judicial right to decide when women deserved to be battered or raped or violated in any way, was multiplied a hundred times as I found the remark had many consequences. The story here was of a woman who heard the judges remarks, as she rested in the local refuge from her husband's violence. Frightened, beaten, a family woman raised to believe in the sanctity of marriage, she said softly I guess I better return to my husband. If the judge says that, perhaps my husband is right and it is my fault. Surely, much of our hurt also comes from outside of us, from institutions which still forget that women are persons, from institutions that renew our energy and anger simply by being what they have always been.

I do not leave the ASWAC stoard with sadness. I am happy, anxious to go on with women's work in a different place. I leave it with many memories that will sustain me in future years. And of course I do not leave ASWAC herself at all. I will continue to buy my membership regularly to express publicly my commitment to the cutting edge of the women's movement.

nection between sexual violence and pornography. I played a small role in helping to organize Esther Ramirez' (a sister from El Salvador) visit to Calgary. I networked with other groups in planning our stoard meeting in Calgary, inviting them to come and partake in our autonomy discussion. And I left every stoard meeting with some new information, thoughts and ideas to carry back and integrate into my various forms of work in Calgary.

I find it difficult to assess my own and our collective actions and achievements, and to acknowledge the amount of action that we do generate. Rather, like a vulnerable individual, I/we remain acutely aware of the actions not taken, issues not addressed, and sometimes it overwhelms me, because there exist so many issues to be analyzed and confronted, singularly and collectively. I know that we have worked very hard in our stoard meetings, and that our work takes many forms. In trying to work in positive and non-violent ways, we spend some time analyzing and working through how we process as a group, our personal interactions. This is sometimes difficult and scary work, and we don't get through all of it, but I believe we approach it with a real commitment to honesty and integrity, and for this I love my fellow stoard members. Some magical things happen when we come together every six weeks. Feelings of safety, daring and strength, courage and solidarity. We struggle with many issues that are not popular, not welcomed in a larger world, and we are committed to extending our ideas beyond the stoard. We have the comfort of knowing that we are not alone, that there are many women in Alberta and across the world who are in struggle with similar issues.

I have decided with some reluctance not to sit on the stoard for a second year, although I have found this year invaluable. When I actually reflect on my work of this year, I am able to see that I've done and do a lot of "ASWAC work", yet that never-ending women's guilt that I haven't done enough persists. So I've chosen to let go of "ASWAC work" but continue with my "women's work" (the differences are not always clear to me) in the hope that I can let go of some of that guilt. I carry with me though the wisdom and confidence that I have gained, and the shared love of many wonderful women, who I shall truly miss getting to see regularly.

For anyone contemplating joining the new stoard, it can offer growth and fulfillment, strength and occasional frustration, wit, humor and learning. Boring its not!



