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# breaking the silence

a feminist quarterly



## THE CHANGING FAMILY - PART 1

Rethinking the Family/La famille en transition

Les femmes francophones aînées

Renaming ourselves

Family Structures/Structures familiales

C'est toujours maman qui fait tout: Le piège de la super-femme

From Chile: The myth of the male provider

Battered but not beaten:

A Harmony House resident speaks out

What the numbers don't tell us

Plus fiction . . . and more



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### about Breaking the Silence

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

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

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

### we love hearing from you

We invite all women to write  
about their experiences or to submit  
original graphics. Please send us  
letters, too. Include your name,  
address and phone number and just  
tell us if you don't want us to use  
your name. We can't return  
unsolicited manuscripts, so be sure to  
keep a copy. Submissions should be  
typed and doubled spaced, if  
possible.

Send material to:

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## from the collective

Mama Bear, Papa Bear and 2.4 Baby Bears: this is what we  
so often think of when we hear the word "family." But most of  
us know that it is far from reality — that there are in fact many  
forms of "family," most of which do not resemble this so-called  
"normal" structure.

The "traditional" nuclear family, centred around a male head of  
household, his wife and their children, is so central to women's  
oppression that it has become a major focus of feminist struggle.

Women have proved that we're not content to be the victims  
of family oppression. Instead we're working actively to re-create  
and re-imagine the family in more positive forms, forms that are  
good for everyone instead of being bad for women and children  
while protecting the privileges of men.

Some of us explore ways of changing our roles in relationship  
to men, while others work at creating woman-centred families.  
Some of us prefer to live alone, or alone with our children. Some  
are forced to do so; in all cases, we have to find ways of managing  
and surviving.

We see the spectrum of family power relations as a problem  
we must deal with when we look at the family. This includes  
violence such as wife beating and incest; psychological abuse; and  
simply the way we relate to each other and share domestic  
responsibilities, be it in heterosexual or lesbian relationships. In  
particular, we're concerned about moving beyond a model of the  
nuclear family towards a more equitable arrangement.

We are also concerned with examining our roles and realities  
as mothers. One aspect of this is the big question of who looks  
after our children and who pays for it: what are our child care  
options? who gets the kids after a divorce?

Because of the wealth of questions involved in the issue of the  
"family," we realized that we couldn't possibly cover all of them in  
one issue of *BTS*. We present here about half the material we've  
received; the remainder will appear in the June issue.

We in Canada are not the only ones who are analyzing the  
family and struggling with misogynist structures. In this issue,  
Alma Estable has translated an article by Adriana Santa Cruz, a  
Chilean feminist who writes about "The Myth of the Male  
Provider." The article shows that, in Latin America as in North  
America, statistics often hide female-headed households because  
there's an assumption that if a man is present, he is the primary  
breadwinner, when in fact the opposite is often the case.

Joan Holmes' article, "What the Numbers Don't Tell Us,"  
reveals how gaps in statistics tend to support conservative  
impressions of family arrangements and to mask the reality of  
women's family lives.

Olivette Falardeau writes a retrospective on the family from the  
point of view of an older, francophone woman, while Denyse  
Côté discusses the pressures of a mother working both inside and  
outside the home.

A Harmony House resident writes about the importance of  
second-stage housing to women struggling to rebuild families  
shattered by their husbands' violence.

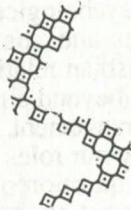
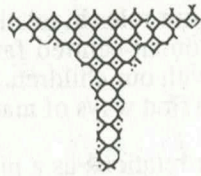
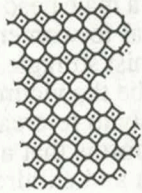
d.i. huron looks towards one way that women can seize  
control in the family: by re-naming ourselves and our children.  
Her article stresses the importance of names as symbols of our  
oppression or freedom.

We gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance provided  
for this issue by the Secretary of State Women's Program.



# L . E . T . T . E . R . S

Breaking the Silence would like to encourage women to write—to make this a forum for your ideas, engage in dialogue on the issues that affect you, or respond to the articles published in BTS. We welcome your input!



Dear BTS,

*Breaking the Silence* is all that I expected it to be — you certainly can add me to the list of promoters of your quarterly.

I work as a Probation Officer here in St. Catharines and have been specializing in incest (the perpetrators) for several years. Sandra Butler's article, "Breaking the Silence on Incest," started a spiralling of thought for me as a professional, regarding public education. Thank you.

Virginia Repei  
St. Catharines

Dear Sisters,

You may have heard that 11 women working at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce here in Antigonish are on strike. It looks like they will have a long difficult time through the winter, earning on average \$45 a week strike pay and keeping pickets up all day every day in all kinds of weather. They have a lot of local support but will need

support from all across the country to be successful in this very important struggle for all workers and all women.

The Women's Strike Support group here would like to ask individuals and groups to:

- contribute to the strike fund and send letters of support to The Union of Bank Employees, 195 Main Street, Antigonish;

- write letters pressuring the Bank to R.B. Fullerton, President and Chief Executive Officer, Commerce Court, Toronto, Ontario M5L 1A2;
- withdraw any savings from the CIBC explaining why;
- picket and demonstrate at CIBC branches;
- spread the word about the strike and its importance.

The workers and their support groups here are hoping to organize some more systematic cross country support through union and women's networks. So, please, if you are interested in participating and/or know the names and addresses of possible support groups and networks please send that information (as well as news about any support action you undertake) to The Women's Strike Support Committee, Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, 256 Main Street, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, B2G 2C1

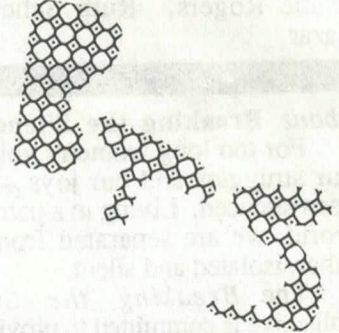
*In sisterhood*  
Angela Miles  
for the Women's Strike Support Committee

Dear Sisters,

Not long ago, I met with Bonnie Diamond who has recently joined Elizabeth Fry. She suggested *BTS* should be approached as a potential ally in building some public awareness of the situation of women at this prison in Kingston.

I would not be very surprised if many of you reading this very letter had never even heard of Canada's only prison for women!!

You may be aware that various



governmental bodies are presently exploring the whole issue of sentencing — particular interest is being paid to the matter of sentencing individuals for life. Past legislation appears to have given little thought to some very real problems of incarcerating individuals for very, very long periods of time.

The television program *Man Alive* aired an interesting overview of the situation, but in the entire program not one mention was made of women!! We are very desperately in need of support just to bring the circumstances of our incarceration out of the 19th century.

I would appreciate a simple acknowledgment of receipt of the enclosed material. Suffice it to say that mail service out of this place is not totally reliable. If you would prefer material with less personal and more "formal" content, I would most certainly be prepared to write it.

In the meantime, please do at least scan your exchange copy of this prison's magazine, *Tightwire*.

Your interest and help will be greatly appreciated. I will look forward to hearing from you.

Jo-Ann Mayhew  
Kingston

*Editor's note:*

Jo-Ann has sent us a very moving article about the situation of women in Canada's Prison for Women. Look for it in the June issue of *BTS*.



# El Mito Del Padre Proveedor

## The Myth of the Male Provider

by Adriana Santa Cruz

translation and introduction by Alma Estable

This article shows that it is not only in Canada that women are examining, analyzing and criticizing the family.

In this article, which originally appeared in a Chilean publication, Adriana Santa Cruz expresses the concern that the myth of the traditional Latin American family has obscured a very different reality. By masking the way women and men actually share (or don't share) economic responsibility for dependents, the myth of the male breadwinner has led to incorrect social policies and mistaken solutions for social problems.

Santa Cruz's concerns have relevance for Canadian feminists for two reasons, I think.

First, the similarities in the way the problem is formulated by feminists in both countries (i.e., the dichotomy between myth and reality about women; the significance of internalizing certain perceptions of the norm; the role of media and education in promoting a certain vision of family) is important, because we become more aware that many women's concerns, and the feminist response to them, are in fact global.

Second, the article shows us women in other countries do not

necessarily live "more traditional" family lives, an assumption which often influences the way that Canadian-born women relate to immigrant women, as well as influencing the types of programs provided for immigrant women by the Canadian state and by community organizations.

This article is an introductory editorial for a special issue on women heads of household, prepared by the Fempress/Ilet collective, which includes clippings, interviews and articles from 12 countries. The themes Santa Cruz raises here are developed and substantiated in these items.



Design: Wendy Gordon



"Woman head of household." This sounds like a contradiction in terms in a culture which nurtures the myth of a single type of family: the breadwinning father and the mother at home, or perhaps with a part-time job to "help out" with household expenses.

Each of us has internalized this particular image of the family. We not only hold it as an ideal, but believe in it as a given fact. It is the only version of "family" found in school books and the media, and the political, social, economic, cultural and religious structures that guide and govern our lives are based on the same myth.

The reality, however, is different. In Latin America, women head over 50 per cent of families in some countries, and not less than 40 per cent in any country.

The gap between myth and reality has enormous physical and emotional costs for these millions of women. Women who head families bear sole responsibility for household work, as well as facing great obstacles in the job market. As we all know, women generally work in the lowest-paid jobs; they earn less than men for the same work; they are the last hired and first fired.

Women who work as domestics — or in the informal work sector as laundresses, street vendors, small farmers, seamstresses, piece workers or prostitutes — are especially vulnerable. More privileged women employ domestic help, but to some degree also experience disadvantages.

Despite their numbers, female heads of families (most of whom are separated or have been abandoned by their spouses) are practically invisible in their many roles and are totally ignored by society. Although they form a massive group, most women heads of family feel they are living outside the norm (the norm being that mythical family with father as breadwinner). They are isolated and they feel their situation as a single parent is unique. They believe they are living an exceptional and individual problem, rather than a collective fact.

It is essential to bring to public view the fact that there are millions of women who head families.



This reality is not reflected in the economic and social policies of our countries. For example, labour market policies are biased towards obtaining employment for men, who are seen as providers for their families. Similarly, social security policies assume that the husband's job will supply old-age pensions and the costs of medical care for his dependents. In law, married women are still seen as minors, *patria potestad* remains in the hands of men, and divorce is still taboo.

But it is the cultural dimension which both masks and justifies all the other practices. The myth of the family with the woman "at home" also says that her duty is to care for and satisfy her husband (after all, he comes home tired from work). She also must be a good mother who constantly watches over her household and children. If she does not do this — if the reality does not match the myth — she sees herself as a personal failure. The failure of her mythical family becomes her fault, and she is blamed by society.

Because women heads of household are not believed to exist in significant numbers their reality is invisible, and governments do not undertake as a priority policies to facilitate the lives of these women. This invisibility also explains why the women themselves do not organize to lobby for their needs and put pressure on the state.

It is time we understood that the breakdown of family life, the crisis in marriage, and the problem of abused and drug-addicted children are not the result of women's liberation, as is often claimed.

On the contrary, these social problems have resulted from a

continuing series of economic crises, in which the weight of the burden is unequally distributed in our societies. The famous "feminization of poverty" is a reality. Women carry the major responsibility for the care of our children, not only in their traditional role as mothers, but also in terms of economic support.

Far from creating these problems, feminism is the force that draws back the veils which have hidden the reality. Feminism insists that men begin to take responsibility in their homes, including economic responsibility.

All our assumptions about the Latin American family must be carefully considered, analyzed and reformulated — not only because the pressure exerted on women by traditional family roles is unfair and unjustifiable, but also because, if almost half the homes of Latin America have a woman at their head, we are not living in the world we believe we are living in.



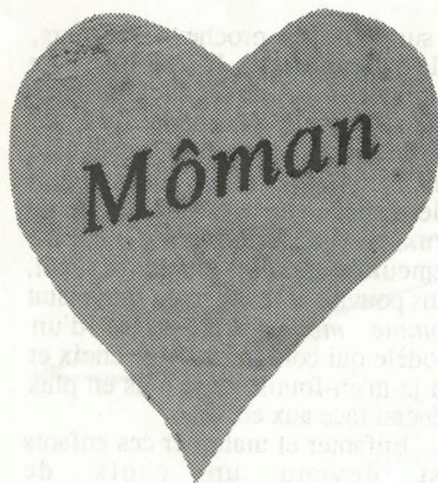
We are therefore making serious mistakes in diagnosing and proposing solutions to social problems. It is time we realized this, and began to build based on this new reality.

bts

From: *Fempres/ilet, Especial: Mujeres Jefas de Familia*, Santiago, Chile, 1987

*Alma Estable is an Ottawa feminist researcher/ consultant who is currently coordinating community programs for immigrant women.*





# Mais, de quoi je me mèle?

**ou: plainte sur  
un air maternel  
ou: encore une qui joue  
les *mater dolorosa***

par Denyse Côté

Bon, ouff, oui, voilà, je suis tranquille. Le soleil brille dehors, je le vois, là, à travers la fenêtre. Je suis seule, enfin, seule, et je n'ai pas de souci à me faire : pas de surtemps à faire, cette fin de semaine, pour la «job»; aucune urgence dans mon entourage proche, en fait, ai-je été libérée à cause de moi... ou d'un concours de circonstances?

Conjoint à l'extérieur, le «petit» a été invité chez des amis; j'ai réussi à dire non à deux invitations auxquelles je ne tenais pas, le travail domestique n'accuse aucun retard sérieux, et j'ai pris une journée pour m'assurer que je prévoyais ce qui était à prévoir : marché, anniversaire d'un proche, réparations au logement.

J'ai même été au cinéma et j'ai lu un (court) roman.

Je prends du temps pour moi, pour moi, pour moi seule. Pas d'horaires, pas d'obligations, pas besoin de couper mon temps en 56, pas de rôles contradictoires. La sainte paix.

J'aurais dû faire ça bien avant. Oui, vraiment. Mais pourquoi, pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas fait avant? N'avais-je pas compris que la vie ne vaut que ce qu'on peut en apprécier?

J'ai appris à tout faire et à tout faire arriver. Quelle folle j'étais, prise au piège de la super-femme. Il faut vraiment être inconsciente pour faire ce que j'ai fait. Heureusement que les plus jeunes que moi ne referont pas cette erreur. L'erreur de vouloir avoir un milieu de vie potable, un enfant heureux, qui recevrait autant ou plus qu'on m'a donné, du temps et de l'espace pour

une vie amoureuse, une vie sociale et intellectuelle, des revenus suffisants, un emploi (si possible un emploi que j'aime et avec avancement), et des rapports égalitaires autour de moi.

Quelle idée que de vouloir tout cela. Quelle erreur d'avoir des rêves. Ambitieuse, trop ambitieuse, voilà ce que j'étais.

L'autre jour, j'ai vu à la télé une annonce d'un produit anti-grippe. J'étais ahurie : «Non c'est pas possible, non c'est pas possible», répétais-je tout haut.

Mon fils, dressé très tôt à l'école de la critique féministe, me demande alors : «Mais qu'est-ce qu'il y a, est-ce qu'il manque de femmes dans l'annonce?» De toute évidence, la leçon sur l'absence de femmes dans les bandes dessinées avait porté fruit.

Mais là n'était pas la source de ma stupeur.

L'annonce régurgitait : «Si vous n'avez pas le temps d'être arrêtée par une grippe, prenez xyz, notre produit miracle»... Vous pourrez continuer à tout faire malgré votre grippe... Vous êtes une femme moderne (gros plan de l'image de la mère de deux enfants qui part travailler), vous n'avez pas le temps de vous soigner, notre produit vous permettra de passer au travers.

Voilà que le chat sort du sac : la mère moderne n'a plus de temps à elle, et on érige cette situation en modèle de liberté et d'efficacité.

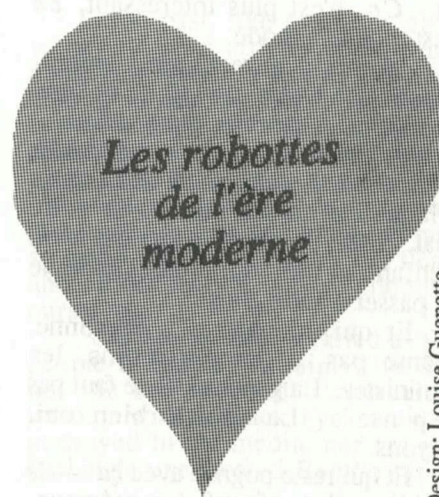
Pourtant, tout porte à croire que les femmes, quel que soit leur statut, sont plus libres (ou plus égales?) maintenant que par le passé. Elles ont acquis un meilleur accès au

marché du travail. On reconnaît volontiers la discrimination qu'elles subissent.

Demandez à des adolescentes ce qu'elles en pensent. Elles vous répondront sans aucun doute, et avec raison, qu'elles n'auront pas à revivre la discrimination que leurs mères ont subie.

On reconnaît aux femmes le droit de conserver un emploi. On exige même des mères qu'elles subviennent aux besoins économiques de leur famille : à preuve, les pressions faites sur les assistées sociales, et les jugements actuels portant sur les pensions alimentaires. Tel est notre choix de société, en 1988, les travailleuses au foyer vous le confirmeront. Finie la valorisation de la mère au foyer. La mère moderne conserve un lien continu avec le marché du travail.

La femme n'est plus avant tout une mère, mais une travailleuse. Elle





a conquis, nous font croire les médias, son égalité : à 60 pour-cent du salaire des hommes, dans des ghettos d'emploi, avec accès privilégié au harcèlement, aux abus sexuels et à la violence familiale, bien sûr. La femme est vue maintenant comme individu, comme une personne à part entière. Quel long chemin a été parcouru, depuis le temps de ma grand-mère.

Et pourtant. Pourtant, les femmes continuent à enfanter. Les femmes font moins d'enfants qu'avant (il y a moins de grosses familles), mais plus de femmes font des enfants, au moins un.

Et puis, les femmes ont-elles jamais cessé d'être des mères d'emprunt? Mère pour des parents âgés ou malades, mères-substitut pour un ami ou parfois, une amie, belles-mères, mères pour un-e patron-ne, pour des patient-e-s, pour des élèves, pour des client-e-s pour un groupe de femmes, communautaire, politique...

Mère un jour, mère toujours. Mais arrêtons-nous aux femmes qui ont la charge quotidienne d'un ou de plusieurs enfants. Des mères dans le sens habituel du terme. Mômman. Quel sujet platte, hein? Pourquoi en parler?

Si on pouvait simplement l'oublier, oublier tout ça. On le sait, la maternité opprime les femmes. Il y en a qui continuent à la glorifier. Mais pourquoi en parler? J'aimerais juste m'en défaire... me reposer, continuer ma vie sans y penser.

Mais c'est justement là le problème. *On* s'en défait. *On* ne veut plus en parler. *On* a déjà tout dit. *Ce* n'est plus intéressant, *ce* n'est plus à la mode.

Parlons d'autre chose, voulez-vous? De votre travail..., de vos ambitions..., de vos états d'âme..., de vos vacances..., de vos derniers achats..., de l'avancement de la cause à laquelle on travaille..., de votre chat. Moi, j'ai choisi de ne pas avoir d'enfant, et moi, qui en ai, j'ai envie de passer à autre chose.

Et qui en parlera? Personne. Même pas, et encore moins, les féministes. La gauche? Il ne faut pas y penser. La droite, bien oui, voyons.

Et qui reste pognée avec ça — le problème des enfants? Les mômman.

Les mômman toutes seules. Les robottes de l'ère moderne. Les bonnes à tout faire de notre société.

Mais ce n'est pas sérieux... quelle amertume...

Oui, et bien, voici pourquoi. Nous, les femmes, avons gagné le droit d'être des personnes sociales à part entière. Mais à quel prix?

Au prix de demeurer des mères dans l'ombre. Et ce prix, si nous l'assumons toutes, comme femmes, les mômman sont celles qui voient leur quote-part doubler ou tripler.

A preuve, la dénatalité : les femmes ne sont pas folles, elles ont compris le prix à payer, en 1988, pour être mère.

Mais est-ce que c'est vraiment si



difficile? Ne vivons-nous pas mieux maintenant que nous avons conquis le droit d'être indépendantes? Certaines femmes sans doute. Les mères en emploi exercent ce droit au travail; en échange, elles ont contracté l'obligation de *tout* faire : travail rémunéré (dans les conditions que l'on connaît), travail domestique (accru lorsqu'il y a présence d'enfants), travail de mère (y inclus la formation du père), et... travail communautaire (école, garderie, voisinage, groupe de femmes, etc.). Quatre aires d'activité qui possèdent leur logique propre, et que la mère doit faire concorder.

Elle peut couper, direz-vous. Vous avez raison. Pourquoi viser la perfection? Mais à elle seule revient la responsabilité de décider où, pourquoi, comment couper. Toujours, elle demeurera la seule responsable de ce travail nécessaire à

la survie de ses proches. Toujours, elle demeurera la *première responsable* de l'éducation des enfants dont elle a la charge, quel que soit le temps dont elle dispose avec eux, et malgré la faible emprise dont elle dispose sur le milieu de vie de ceux-ci (garderie, école). Elle demeure tout aussi isolée qu'avant, sans pouvoir et maintenant sans statut *comme mère*, prisonnière d'un modèle qui confond le libre choix et un je-m'en-foutisme de plus en plus général face aux enfants.

Enfanter et mater ces enfants est devenu un choix de consommation, associé à la sphère privée, au choix individuel. Résultat: ce choix est vécu dans l'isolement par les mères. On ne reprochera plus à la mère sa vision écourtée par les quatre murs de la maison; on lui reprochera son manque de temps, sa fatigue, ou, plus subtilement, son «éparpillement».

Vous comprendrez alors pourquoi je ne bondirai plus de reconnaissance lorsque vous arrangez les horaires d'une réunion en fonction de mes obligations maternelles.

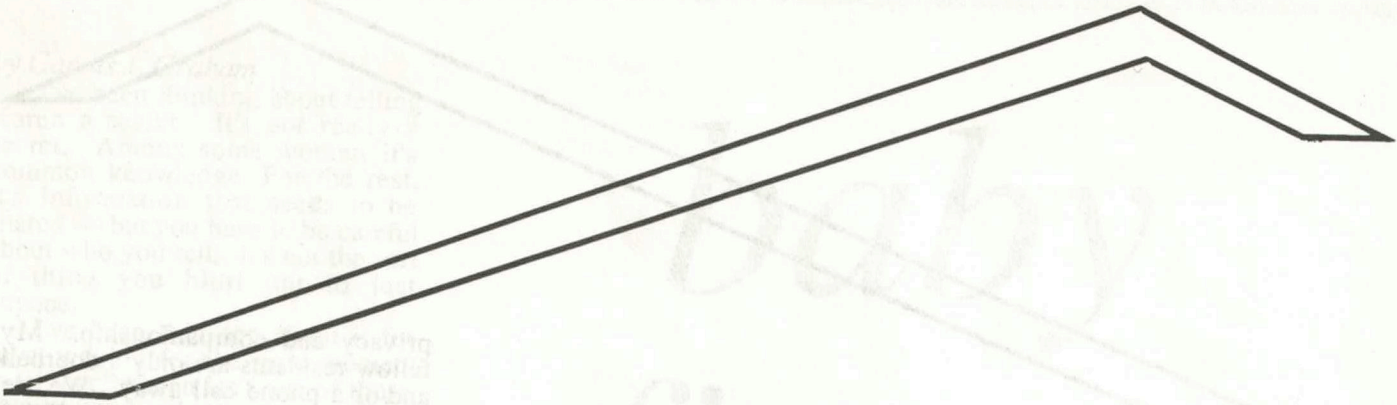
Vous comprendrez pourquoi je resterai amère tant et aussi longtemps que je sentirai que le poids de ma maternité, je dois l'assumer seule. Tant et aussi longtemps que je me sentirai obligée de déguiser ma fatigue, mon isolement. Tant et aussi longtemps que je serai considérée comme l'égal(e) d'une non-mère (mais quoi, tu devrais être capable de le faire, tout le monde le fait...), ou, pis encore, tant que je susciterai la pitié de personnes bien pensantes et bien intentionnées.

A quand la collectivisation des responsabilités maternelles? Faut bien rêver en couleurs... Le plus tragique, c'est que ce rêve, comme un arc-en-ciel, est très beau, mais aussi très éphémère.

bis

*Anciennement active au sein du mouvement des garderies et de comités-femmes syndicaux, Denyse Côté s'intéresse présentement, à titre de chercheuse, au travail maternel des femmes à la maison, en emploi ou dans la communauté. Elle est professeure en travail social à l'Université du Québec à Hull.*





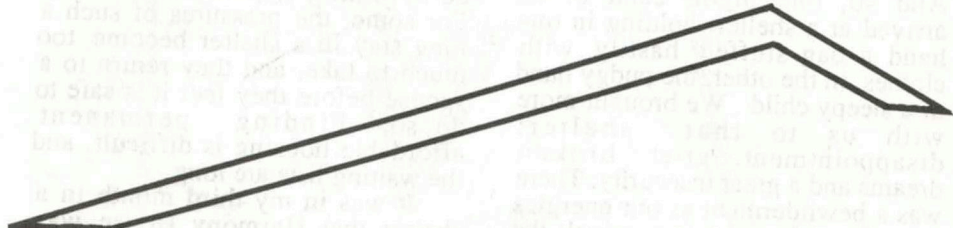
# Harmony House: A Second Stage Home for Abused Women and Their Children

introduction by Simone Thibault,  
Program Coordinator

Harmony House offers supportive second-stage housing in a complex of ten one-bedroom furnished apartments for abused women and their children. The term "second-stage" means that Harmony House residents have been referred from Ottawa's three "first-stage" shelters (Interval House, Maison d'Amitie and La Presence), and that it offers medium-term (6 to 12 months) housing and support for families needing a longer period in a protective environment than the shelters normally provide. Simply put, it serves as an intermediate step between the transition shelter and complete independence.

The premise behind Harmony House is twofold: we believe that all individuals have the right to live without fear of violence in the home, and that family violence is not a private matter to be resolved by its victims alone, but rather a problem of society which deserves the support of the community at large. Harmony House tries to provide a supportive environment where women will feel encouraged to make their own decisions as they move toward fully independent living in the community.

Design: Louise Guenette



## Living in Harmony House

by a Harmony House resident

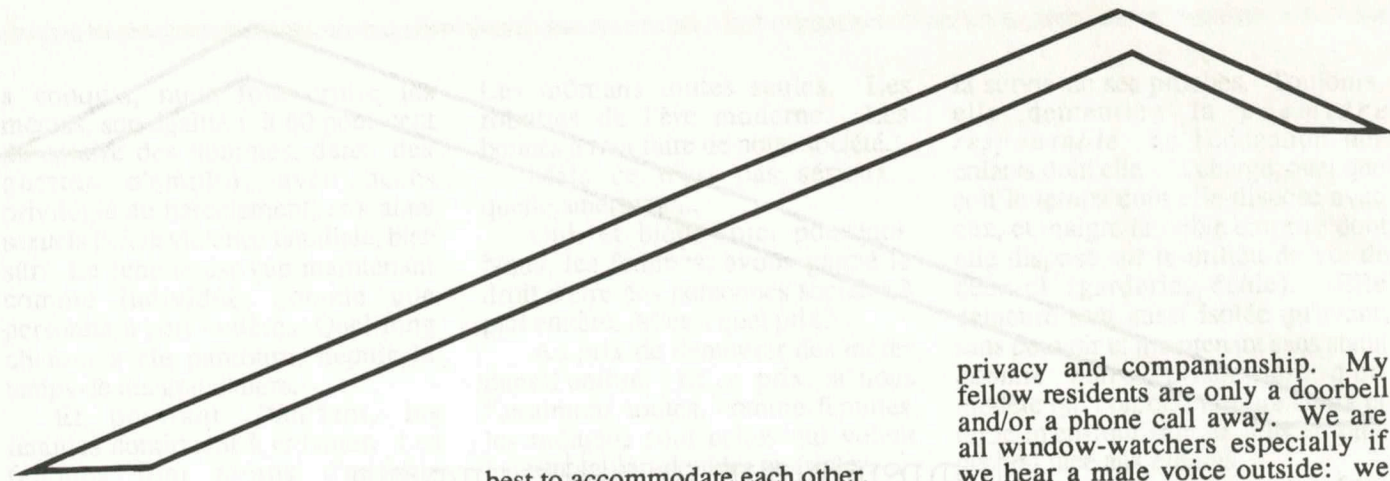
Living in Harmony House is like being "Alice in the Looking Glass," except that Alice stepped through the mirror from her world into a new one: but for us it is more like staying in the mirror — deciding between past and future, known and unknown, pros and cons of a safer but lonelier life, or a familiar life with its known dangers. It is a pause in time that gives us a chance to reflect.

If Harmony House is the looking glass abode between past and future, how can I tell what it is like to be here, without speaking of the past? We have carried the past with us to this place.

In the past, like everyone else, we would read articles about wife abuse and battered wives. Hidden among so much other news about wars, bombings and economic crises, those articles probably meant no more to us than to anyone else. Yet suddenly, one day, here we are, and those we read about are not just so many words on a page, but flesh and blood people, our neighbours, ourselves.

Our stories are as varied as the people in them. Certainly, we are not the stereotyped "cowering woman with a black eye" we see portrayed in the media, nor are our husbands uneducated Rambo types





with a sadistic streak. However, this we have in common: we were put down or made afraid, abused verbally or physically; we usually blamed ourselves for what was happening to us. "I will just have to try harder," we would say, and so we tried and tried until peace in the home became the sole focus of our energies. No energy was left for ourselves or our children.

Even so, it was not enough. And so, one night, each of us arrived at a shelter, holding in one hand a bag stuffed hastily with clothes, in the other, the pudgy hand of a sleepy child. We brought more with us to that shelter: disappointment, grief, broken dreams and a great insecurity. There was a bewilderment as our energies were freed from basic survival: the feeling of a newly released prisoner finding herself suddenly in a free world.

The bewilderment subsides, the self-confidence increases. We become used to our new (temporary, one hopes) welfare status. Some vitality has returned, and we are ready to try it on our own, establish a home, find a job or finish our education, to take the time to think through so many important decisions.

That is when we wake up to a new reality. We are surrounded by women and children who have been in a shelter designed for short-term emergency accommodation for weeks and months. They too are experiencing all the heavy feelings associated with abuse and battering.

We're sharing a kitchen, bathroom and living room with six families of very different backgrounds who are trying their

best to accommodate each other.

At a time when a mother wants to establish a normal life for herself and her children, she is surrounded by, and constantly reminded of, where she is! Someone's husband has threatened suicide, another a custody battle; the preschooler of a new arrival announces "Daddy doesn't love Mommy anymore." Raw emotions abound and there is too little space for privacy.

Someone's child will not stop crying because of what she has seen or experienced. Her own children are constantly ill because of the crowding.

This temporary shelter seems to be becoming a permanent home. For some, the pressures of such a long stay in a shelter become too much to take, and they return to a spouse before they feel it is safe to do so. Finding permanent affordable housing is difficult, and the waiting lists are long.

It was in my third month in a shelter that Harmony House was completed. Coming from the shelter, my new apartment seemed the purest luxury. One bedroom with double bunk beds, a crib for the baby, and a dresser (at the shelter a bookshelf had served as a dresser). I would have accepted it if all of us had to sleep on the floor, just in exchange for the privacy. A bathroom for us alone. A kitchen with stove and fridge, and complete with donated dishes which some kind soul had matched according to colour. A small living/dining room with tables, chairs, drapes and a sofa bed, which becomes my bedroom at night.

When we moved in, the baby crawled gleefully about the apartment and stopped being afraid of losing me when I took a bath or left the room. The preschooler stopped being sick and settled into his new routines like bedtime.

Harmony House also means

privacy and companionship. My fellow residents are only a doorbell and/or a phone call away. We are all window-watchers especially if we hear a male voice outside: we look out for each other. At the same time, I have a place to myself where I can reflect and plan. I have the simple luxury of speaking about private matters to a counsellor or friend without being overheard, as was the case with the shelter's public phone in the dining room.

Harmony House has given me back my self-respect and dignity. It has given my children a place of security. "There's my house!" the oldest shouts as our apartment comes into view. I can invite the new friends I have made for a cup of tea and home-made cookies, and thus not always be dependent on their hospitality. If I budget carefully, I can make those cookies.

But Harmony House is a temporary home. It is time to think of the future.

Already some have left this haven. A few have returned to their husbands. Returned, but stronger, with new self-confidence, new experiences and the knowledge that if things go wrong they have a place to go. Returned after their husbands sought help to find new ways to express themselves without verbal or physical violence. Most importantly, their return was a well thought-out decision, and not a choice between two impossible choices: a crowded shelter or a violent home.

We wish them well. Some of us have found homes of our own and are building new lives. We wish them well also. Neither is an easy choice. After all didn't every marriage begin with love?

bts

**You can support Harmony House by sending donations to:**

Harmony House  
c/o 217 First Ave.  
Ottawa K1S 2G5



by Candis J. Graham

I've been thinking about telling Karen a secret. It's not really a secret. Among some women it's common knowledge. For the rest, it's information that needs to be shared — but you have to be careful about who you tell. It's not the sort of thing you blurt out to just anyone.

I've been thinking about it for days, waiting for the right moment to tell her. Karen isn't one of those women you need to be careful about telling things. People trust her. It's amazing, really, the way women confide in her and tell her anything. I think it's because she listens carefully and always has something to say. That is, she used to, until two months ago when she lost her job. Since then she's become a different woman, depressed and irritable. She's worried about money and says job hunting is the most demeaning experience on this earth. It certainly is getting to her.

That's why I've been wondering if I should tell her the secret. These days she has a negative response to Everything. But I've been thinking this secret might change her mood. See, I'm going to tell her how to tell if a woman is a dyke.

I know how to tell if a woman is a dyke. I haven't done any scholarly studies or handed out questionnaires or anything like that. My research is based on personal experience, that's all. Some things you just know. Without having some government committee study the matter for two years, while staying in the best hotels and flying first class across the country. The government's always doing that.

It spends a small fortune to send a committee across Canada to study something like day care. Such a waste of money, I think. If you have to look after a small child or three, and if you have a job outside your home or want to get a job, or even if you want to work at home in peace and quiet, you don't need a study to tell you about the lack of good day care in your neighbourhood. Do you need a bunch of politicians to figure out that the day care centre down the road has a waiting list? If there is a day care centre down the road.

I didn't always think like this about day care. It comes of getting involved with a feminist. I swore I'd never get involved with one.

# *baby fingers*



Illustration: Catherine Horogan

Design: Yvonne Van Ruskenveld



Everyone knows you're asking for trouble. Me, involved with a feminist. It's hard to believe, I know. I can hardly believe it myself.

My life sure has changed since I got involved with Karen. For one thing, I know more about day care than I ever wanted to know. No self-respecting dyke wants to know about day care. That's for the hets.

Now, before you say anything, some dykes have kids. I know that. Some had kids before they realized they were dykes. That, I can understand. But some had kids after knowing they were dykes. That amazes me. I mean, it's just copying the hets. And who wants to do that!

I have some sympathy for them. Life's not easy for hets, anyone can see that. Which is a good reason, if you happen to need one, for not copying their ways.

Anyway, if dykes have kids, that's their problem. They had the kids, not me.

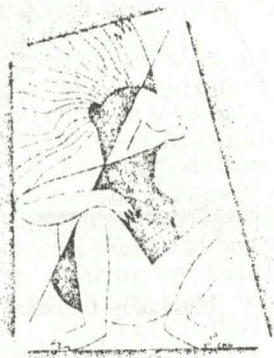
Karen disagrees. If it affects one woman, she says, it affects all of us. That's the feminist way of thinking. Have you noticed?

Yeah, I got myself involved with a feminist and my life's just not the same. I knew, from the moment I set eyes on Karen, I knew she was a feminist. I should have known better. I couldn't help myself, that's all. I liked her smile.

Karen's got a smile that makes me melt, like banana nut ice cream on a hot July day. That's me, whenever she smiles, a puddle of banana nut ice cream.

But do you know what scares me? I'm starting to think like a feminist.

It sort of happened gradually at first, and I didn't notice. Then one day, just a few weeks ago, it hit me. I'm starting to think the way they do. I'm still in shock, let me tell you.



Like me caring about day care. You give me one good reason why I should care about day care. And don't say it's because what affects one woman affects all of us!

My best friend Maureen agrees with me about this feminist stuff. She's a dyke, too, and we go back a long way. She has two kids, had 'em before she figured out she was a dyke, and they're in school, and after school they go to a program at the community centre until she gets home from work. Maureen doesn't make enough money to have to pay for the program. She's fully subsidized, which is a relief for her. She says if she was making enough money so she had to pay for the after-school program, she couldn't afford it. Life is strange.

Maureen's all for good day care. She agrees with the feminists about that. She says she could have used good day care when the kids were younger, after her ex left and she had to go out and earn some money to pay the rent and so forth. She got by, but she had to live on welfare for quite a while, which is no picnic.

I've been worrying about Maureen. She's so excited about day care that she joined one of those women's groups that's trying to get the government to improve day care. That's how it starts. Next thing you know, she'll be thinking like a feminist too.

But honestly, can you imagine the Prime Minister setting up a committee to study ways to tell which of us are dykes? He'd appoint all his old friends as members, men, of course, with maybe a token woman or two, and they'd stay in nice hotels while they interviewed people across the country.

I bet it would pay good money, but they'd never ask someone like me to be on the committee. I could tell them a thing or two. And they'd never ask Karen, though she sure needs a job and she knows a lot about dykes, having been one herself for years. But Karen doesn't know everything, which is why I'm tempted to tell her this secret.

Come to think of it, maybe that committee on how to tell if a woman is a dyke isn't such a crazy idea. Something like that happened in the

'50s, didn't it, in the States with McCarthyism, when they hunted for communists and homosexuals and called it unamerican activity. I remember that from history, when I was in high school. It was spooky.

I'm getting off the track here. I'm supposed to be telling Karen how to tell if a woman is a dyke. I'm going to do it.

First, she needs to know another secret. All women are dykes. So, you see, the trick is, how to tell the ones who *know* they are dykes.

Karen was not impressed. She got that annoyed look on her face when I told her. "All women are not dykes!"

"Ssh! The neighbours might hear you. It's a secret."

"Elizabeth, many women are not dykes."

I had to smile. For all their high ideals and funny way of thinking, feminists can overlook some basic realities.

But now I didn't know if I should tell her how to tell the women who know they are dykes. I mean, feminists think they know everything. She might be offended and think she should have known. But I've never heard one talk about how to tell a dyke. And let me tell you, lately I've been spending a lot of time with feminists. Karen and her friends.

My Aunt Susan, she's a feminist too, and she approves of Karen. They stick together, those feminists. Aunt Susan was all smiles when I introduced her to Karen, and she was very pleased when she saw we were getting friendly. I think she figured Karen would be a good influence on me.

I've never told Aunt Susan this secret. Although she's a feminist, one of those militant ones, always raving about some injustice to women, she's not a dyke. At least, she doesn't think she's a dyke. Such a shame. But I'm off track again.

Karen. She's full of surprises. I thought she'd agree that we're all dykes. Feminists can be very unpredictable. That's another thing I've learned lately.

I like to live dangerously, so I decided to go ahead and tell her how to tell if a woman's a dyke. It was



bound to be interesting, whatever her response. These feminists have an opinion on everything. I just knew she'd have something to say. And it's a handy thing to know, how to tell the dykes from the hets. From the women who *think* they're hets, I should say. It's the sort of information a dyke needs to have in the world. And it's my way of being a good influence on Karen.

"Do you know how to tell a dyke?"

She shook her head, no. "Is this a joke?"

"No, it's not a joke. This is serious. And don't you yell it out, either, for the neighbours to hear. It's a secret."

"Okay, tell me."

"You can tell if she's a dyke, I mean if she knows she's a dyke, by her pinkie ring." I wiggled mine at her. I bought it for myself shortly after I came out, when I was 19. It's yellow gold and has my initial engraved on it, a fancy "E" with loops and swirls.

Karen stopped staring at the shopping list and looked at me. "Are you crazy? I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life."

This is not the way to talk to your girlfriend. But I knew she didn't really mean it. She's just defensive 'cause she's a feminist and here's something she didn't know. And, as I said, she's a little irritable lately about not having a job.

"It's not crazy and it's not ridiculous. It works. Try it sometime. You'll see."

And then I told her what happened to me last year, when I started my job with Findley's Furniture Store downtown. I'm a bookkeeper. I'm good with figures, you see. The owner's daughter is the buyer. My first day on the job we were introduced and I knew right off that she was a dyke.

So the next day, I wore my pinkie ring on my baby finger. When she came to check the file of invoices to be paid, which we call accounts payable in the business, she looked at my ring and then she grinned at me. An ear-to-ear grin. She knew and she knew I knew and I knew she knew I knew.

"And that's how you can tell if a

woman is a dyke."

Karen stood up and shoved the shopping list in her back pocket. "Elizabeth, you live in a world of your own." And she left to get the groceries. She didn't even kiss me goodbye.

That's what I mean about her being irritable lately. Some girlfriends might be offended, but I understand. It won't last. She'll find a job soon and go back to being her lovable self.

I don't know why they're called pinkie rings. I've wondered about that. Pink is not a dyke kind of colour. Lavender is something else. Especially if you believe in that lesbian and gay liberation stuff. Lavender is popular with some dykes, have you noticed? Perhaps we should call it a lavender ring.

I must remember to tell Karen this doesn't always work. Some dykes don't wear pinkie rings. Some

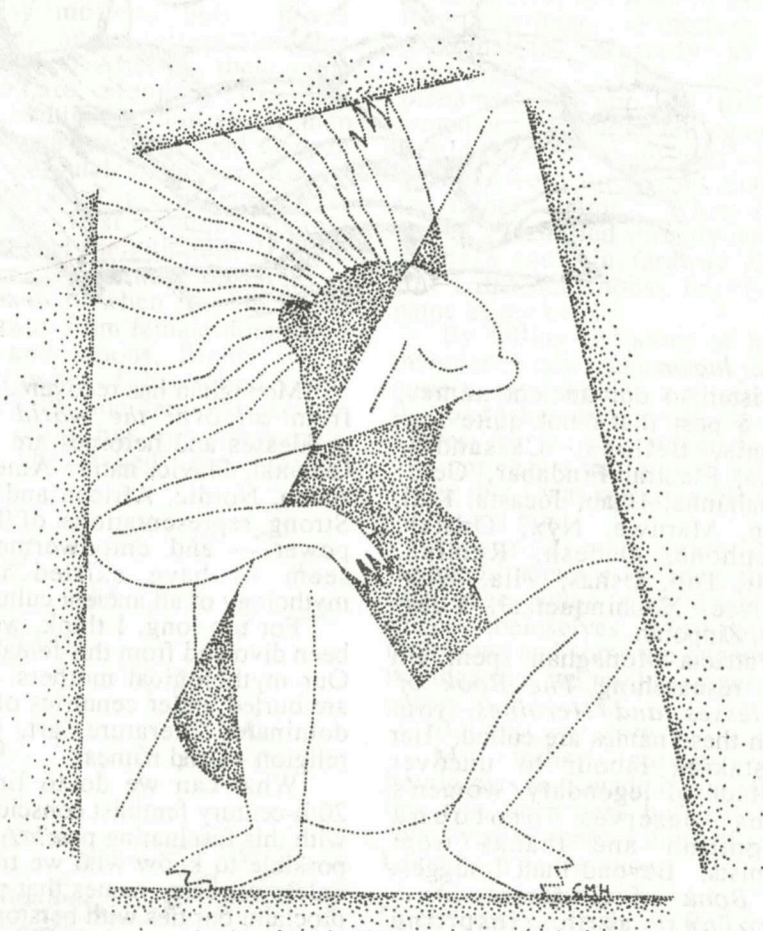
don't wear any jewellery at all.

I've even noticed that some dykes wear pink. There aren't any hard and fast rules about this. You'll even see, occasionally, a non-dyke wearing a pinkie ring. I haven't figured that out yet, but I think it may be a subconscious gesture. You know, a cry for help.

I decided, while I sat there waiting for her to come home with the groceries, to get Karen a pinkie ring for her birthday. So she can try it out for herself. There's no better way to test something than to try it out for yourself, don't you think? So watch for Karen and when you see her, with that pinkie ring flashing on her baby finger, give her a wink and a nudge to let her know you know.

bts

*Candis J. Graham is an Ottawa writer and feminist.*





# What's in a name?



Illustration: Andréé Pouliot-Nair

Design: Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

by d.i. huron

Listen to our ancient names, from a past that's not quite lost: Artemis, Bellona, Cassandra, Damia, Electra, Findabar, Gerd, Hannahanna, Ixtab, Jocasta, Kali, Lorop, Maruwa, Nyx, Onatah, Persephone, Qadesh, Rumina, Shakit, Tuli, Ushas, Vila, Wah-Kah-Nee, Xochinquetzal, Yuki-Onne, Zipporah.

Patricia Monaghan spent ten years researching *The Book of Goddesses and Heroines*, from which these names are culled. Her painstaking labour to uncover hundreds of legendary women's names deserves profound recognition and thanks from feminists. Beyond that, I suggest *The Book of Goddesses and Heroines* as an inspiring sourcebook for a whole new feminist craze: renaming ourselves. And our children.

Monaghan has recovered names from *all over the world*; her goddesses and heroines are Celtic, Oriental, Slavic, native American, Asian, Nordic, African and more. Strong representations of female power — and empowerment — seem to have existed in the mythology of all ancient cultures.

For too long, I think, we have been divorced from this female past. Our mythological mothers' names are buried under centuries of male-dominated literature, art, music, religion — and names.

What can we do to link our 20th-century feminist consciousness with this fascinating past? And is it possible to know who we truly are unless we carry names that proudly proclaim our ties with herstory?

If feminists are to create a future that resonates with women's voices, I believe we must begin now to

reclaim the magical names of mythological women. Their stories are our stories, rooted deep in a cosmic female imagination. Those of us who decide to tap into that imagination can choose names that already exist or we can invent our own names. And by giving our new names to our children, we are shattering a tradition which has seen women passing on our fathers' and husbands' names to children.

When I was a child, my Spanish-Canadian relatives filled our house. My mother was proud of her Spanish heritage. I grew up with a bias in favour of the Spanish side of my family, believing it represented well-being and sanity. My father's side of the family — Métis — was nightmarish by comparison; it was filled with drunken aunts and uncles, nasty rows and violent death.



A decade ago, I travelled to Spain with the names of some of my mother's relatives in my pocket. I tried to find them in Madrid but couldn't. It was just as well. By that time, I would have had to tell them that their bull-fighting sickened me, that their Catholic church had tried, but failed, to strangle my sexuality/ spirituality and that they were all crazy to be eating huge meals at ten o'clock at night!

In my late 20s, I began to feel the immediacy and relevance of my father's Métis heritage. After all, I was born and live close to the same geographic areas where my great-grandmother, a full-blooded Indian, lived her life. Although much of my father's family legacy was ugly, it was undeniably real. And it existed for reasons that I came to understand more as I read history and learned how Indians had been oppressed, poisoned and killed by Europeans intent on making money from the fur trade, converting the heathens to Christianity and colonizing the land.

For a while, I was torn between my mother's and father's ancestry. I knew that the Spanish conquistadors, in search of gold, had vanquished American aboriginal cultures as heartily as the British and French to the north. And I was stunned by the contrast to this carnage presented to me by visions of a native hunter offering prayers to a great spirit for having taken the soul of a deer or moose lying dead in a quiet forest. These are fragments of the psychic space I whirled in until, with time, I felt whole again.

That's when I chose a surname that wasn't my father's or my mother's but my own. It's a name that honours both my Indian heritage and the great lake on which my ancestors fished and lived.

That's my story. What's yours?

Some feminists have already cast off the names of the fathers. Many who have done so are lesbians for whom a man's name is an oppressive burden. Others are women whose spiritual journey involves seeking out female archetypes and incorporating them into their lives.

Renaming ourselves — and our children — is more than a symbolic way for us to liberate ourselves from "rule by the fathers." It provides us with a concrete means to loosen the chains of patrilineal custom — a custom which

reinforces the patriarchal bias of recent centuries.

We all know that ten years ago, Canadian women began "keeping their own names" upon marriage. By doing so, they were making a feminist statement. Sort of.

By refusing to become Mrs. Ken Campbell, a newly-wed woman was, in fact, asserting her right to live with her *father's* surname for the rest of her life. Some women, unable to decide between daddy and hubby, compromised by melding both names into a hyphenated tongue-twister.

In the 1980s, something more disconcerting but no less uninspired is happening. Feminists are having droves of children (collectively, not individually) and droves of feminists are naming their children with their husbands' surnames. Even where no legal marriage exists, some feminists are giving little Whitney or Samuel the father's surname.

Lately, I've been unable to avoid the question: why aren't feminist mothers being more creative, and vigilant, in this department? After all, these same women are planning to raise heartfelt, mindful, non-sexist men and women who will lead Canada into a non-nuclear future. Among their progeny are likely to be Canada's first woman prime minister and the hundreds of male nurses who will make headlines in the year 2020 when they decide to break away from female-dominated nurses' associations. Right?

But when I broached this subject with one feminist mother whose child has her husband's name, she asked me, rather

peevishly, "Well, what's your solution?"

Inherent in that question, born of frustration, was her deep acknowledgement that there is a problem. That, at least, is a beginning.

And we know that the "problem" is surnames, not our "given" or "Christian" (a term that makes me cringe) names. It's no surprise, either, that one's surname is also referred to as one's "family" name, a semantic reality that reflects the male-dominated nature of the family in our culture.

The search for a dynamic solution will challenge the family's patriarchal roots. It will also lead us on a journey whose goal is the discovery of what feels right for each of us. A new name doesn't always emerge easily or quickly; each of us must dive into the ocean of our spirit, rising to the surface only when we find a title we can bear proudly.

For women, what's in a name?

Although the surname we were given at birth ties most of us to our father's heritage, our mother's roots tug just as strongly at our heartstrings. Our mother's surnames are not lost to us. I remember my mother telling me she would "always be a Casas" — the Spanish word for houses that was her father's name. When I was young, I identified strongly with my mother's roots in faraway Spain. But I did not choose her family name as my own.

By telling the story of how I invented a new name for myself, I hope to give women a glimpse of the road taken by one individual on a quest for female authenticity. It was not easy explaining to a loved father that I was rejecting his name — but not him.

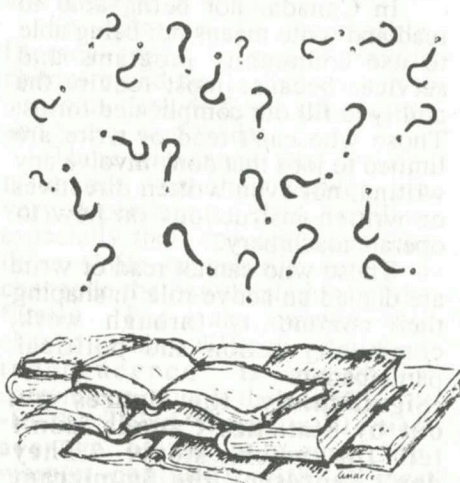
Feminists who share their husbands' names may face a similar challenge when they decide to rename themselves. Most men are threatened and some are angered by the idea that we might tamper with patriarchy's names.

But first, my story.

My mother's parents were immigrants to Canada in the 1920s. She was born here but had been conceived in Spain; I think of her as being born on the cusp.

Your surname may be Quebecois or Irish or Polish or Jewish. Chances are you are proud of it. Have you ever wondered why

*continued on page 28*





# Living

by Joan Holmes

Do you enjoy living alone?  
Want to live alone?

•Living alone is a growing phenomenon, especially among women.

Between the 1971 and 1981 census the proportion of one-person households more than doubled. In 1981, 20.3 per cent of all private households were made up of one person. The majority of people living alone were women — 60 per cent.

•Which women lived alone?

If you're a woman you are most likely to live alone if you're young, single, well-educated and well-paid (for a woman); or if you're old and not quite as poor as your elderly sisters.

•Being widowed was the surest

route to solitary living.

Almost half of all women who lived alone (47 per cent) were widows. Single women comprised the next largest group (36 per cent), followed by divorced and separated women (16 per cent). A small number (1 per cent) were married women.

•Almost half of all widows lived alone (48.9 per cent).

Widows are usually older women who have chosen the peace and privacy of solitary living or who, after years of isolation, have no friends or family with whom to live.

•Divorced women were somewhat less likely to live alone.

Less than one third of divorced women (30.7 per cent) lived alone, probably because so many of them

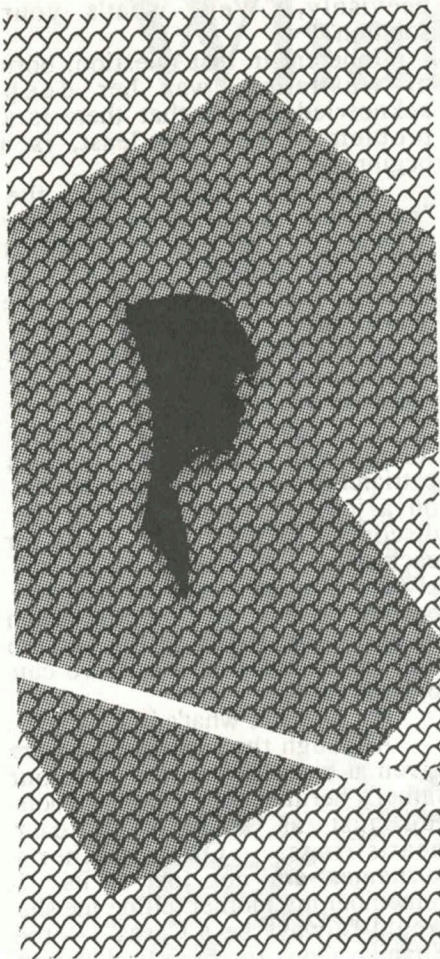


Illustration: Alyson Huntly

## Women and Literacy

by Louise Guénette

•In 1985, 68 per cent of the world's adult women were able to read and write, compared with 78 per cent of adult men.

•According to Statistics Canada, two million Canadian women have difficulty reading and writing.

Five hundred thousand of these women cannot read or write at all. The other million and a half have limited reading and writing skills, meaning that they have trouble reading a city map, a bus schedule, instructions on medication and labels on grocery store products.

The figures do not represent the women who have made it past grade nine, but who still can't read and write well enough to get by (1). These women have fallen through

the cracks of the educational system. They have been left behind.

In Canada, not being able to read and write means not being able to use community programs and services because most require the ability to fill out complicated forms. Those who can't read or write are limited to jobs that don't involve any writing, not even written directives or written instructions on how to operate machinery.

Those who cannot read or write are denied an active role in shaping their community through work, community action and political participation.

•Significantly, the figures put out by Statistics Canada don't tell the whole story. They don't represent the immigrant women who have trouble

reading and writing.

Many immigrant women who cannot read and write do not speak either of Canada's official languages. In addition to the feeling of powerlessness associated with the inability to read, write or speak English or French, many immigrant women must also surmount the obstacles of a non-supportive spouse. The difficulties range from lack of encouragement and reluctance of partners to take on child care responsibilities which would enable women to attend classes to outright refusal by men to allow their wives and daughters to attend classes (2).

Even if these obstacles are surmounted, standard language classes assume an ability to read and write. Therefore, women with



# Alone

Design: Virginia Howard

are left with children to raise and are thus heads of multi-person households.

•Single women made up a large proportion of all the women living alone, but only 14.9 per cent of all single women choose to live alone.

Single women living alone are "richer" than their sisters (in 1980, they earned an average of \$16,000, compared to single women living with others, who earned \$12,300). Still, their average earnings were 15 per cent lower than their male counterparts. It's expensive to live alone and few women can afford it.

•Older women were especially likely to live by themselves.

Over the age of 65 three times as many women as men lived alone; between the ages of 55 and 64 twice

as many women as men live by themselves. This is because women live longer and tend to outlive their husbands.

•Women can look forward to spending their "golden years" poor and alone, or very poor and not alone.

Six out of ten widows living alone had 1980 incomes under \$8,000 (their average income was \$8200). These figures suggest that a lot of them are spending their final years in poverty. The fact that elderly widows living with others had an average income of \$6500 paints a pretty bleak future for women.

•What are the policy implications if living alone continues as a choice of lifestyle?

Clearly women need quality affordable housing designed for safe solitary living. Because living alone is both lusciously private and peaceful and dangerously isolating, women will increasingly need centres, drop-ins and common spaces where they can meet and socialize with other women, and support services they can depend on in times of physical or emotional sickness.

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Data taken from:

Statistics Canada, *Living Alone* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1984, cat. no. 99-934).

*Joan Holmes is an Ottawa feminist and writer, working as an independent researcher on women's issues and native history.*

## Tipping the Balance in the Family

limited literacy skills cannot benefit from them (3).

•In developed countries, there isn't a wide gender gap among those who cannot read or write. According to a September 1987 Southam News Survey, illiteracy is higher among men (53.5 per cent) than women (46.5 per cent) (4).

However, literacy means more than learning how to read and write. It also means changing a situation of powerlessness and failure. It means acquiring the ability to criticize the social system, to look at our individual realities and to try to change them.

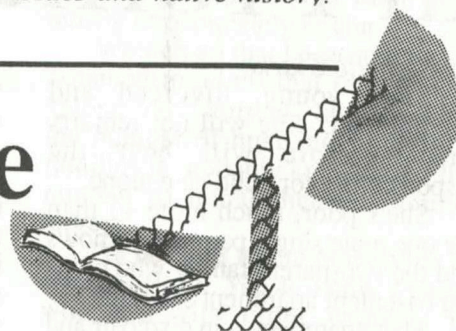
In order to be effective, literacy programs must be relevant to the learner's life. For women to truly

benefit, literacy programs must be developed with women's interests and concerns in mind.

In order to be accessible, literacy programs must provide childcare and be flexible enough to accommodate difficult scheduling and heavy workloads.

Those who cannot read or write, no matter what their gender, are very dependent on their families, especially their spouses. Learning these skills necessarily entails a change in the power relations of the family. For many women, this change is more difficult when their independence is already a contentious issue in their family.

•In the Third World, a literacy average of 50 per cent for women contrasts with 68 per cent for men (5).



•In India, opposition to women's education is strong.

In the State of Tamil Nadu, women learning literacy started to challenge their husbands' alcoholism. Village opposition was manifested through excluding these women from community festivals and events, damaging their school and finally, beating them in the streets (6).

•In West Africa, women usually work from 4:30 in the morning to 10:30 at night. Literacy programs run from 7 to 10 at night.

Afotec, an organization concerned with training and appropriate technology, brings women together in two- to three-week intensive programs, preferably in another village. Away from their



day-to-day preoccupations, women can then learn.

**•In South Africa, the problem of illiteracy is mixed up with the system of apartheid which denies adequate education to the black majority.**

Literacy organizations that view literacy as learning how to analyze the situation and change it have become the targets of the South African government.

The English Literacy Project (ELP) in Johannesburg provides literacy training to women office cleaners. In addition to the work in their homes, the shift work of women office cleaners only allows them two to three hours sleep. Special consideration is given to finding a convenient time and to dealing with the short attention span in class because of the women's exhaustion.

The ELP also works with domestic workers. The very little time off that black domestic workers have is sometimes subject to the whims of their employers. Those

who live in use their time off to visit their families in the townships. Therefore, these women tend to take on literacy only if they can see immediate benefits such as improving their working conditions or their chances of getting a higher income (7).

All around the world, literacy means much more than reading and writing. When literacy programs truly reflect women's needs and concerns, the power and knowledge women acquire change their position in the family and in society.

bts

#### Notes

(1) Janis Wood Catano and Mary Breen, "Can She Read It?", *Healthsharing* 8, 3 (Summer 1987).

(2) Jennifer Horsman, "Literacy for Women: Problems and Prospects," *Participatory Research Newsletter* 2, 2 (Dec. 1984).

(3) Alma Estable, *Immigrant Women in Canada — Current Issues* (Canadian

Advisory Council on the Status Of Women, March 1986), p. 45.

(4) *Worldlit* 78 (Fall 1987), Newsletter of World Literacy of Canada, p. 2.

(5) Ruth Leger Sivard, *Women... A World Survey*, 1985.

(6) "Opposition to Women's Education," *Women's Program Newsletter*, International Council for Adult Education, Fall 1986.

(7) "The English Literacy Project," *Voices Rising. A Bulletin about Women and Popular Education*, International Council for Adult Education, May/June 1987.

*Louise Guénette works for the ABC Line, an information and referral centre for literacy in Ottawa-Carleton. She is a feminist and a member of the BTS collective.*

# In Profile: Single Mothers

by Michelle Clarke

She's young, divorced and unemployed. She will not remarry and therefore will bear the responsibility for child care alone.

She's poor, much more so than the one male single parent she knows and the two-parent family who owns the basement apartment she rents.

That apartment is in disrepair and is too small for her and her two-year-old daughter, but she can't afford to move.

It is quite a distance from shopping centres, playgrounds, laundromats and most businesses. She doesn't own a car, so tasks such as buying groceries, doing laundry and looking for work take a long time, and must be planned well in advance. She is seeking employment, but the logistics of finding and paying for child care, getting her daughter to a day care centre in one part of the city and herself to a job in another, and performing all the other household tasks necessary to maintain her family have interfered with her ability to obtain paid work.

This profile of the Canadian

single mother comes from the facts set out in this article.

As the figures to come indicate, single mothers can no longer be ignored as an aberration. In fact, they make up a substantial and increasing percentage of the Canadian population; these women and their children experience a variety of problems which limit their ability to participate in, and contribute to, Canadian society.

A country such as Canada, which prides itself on humanity and social justice, and which needs to maintain a productive and creative citizenry in order to move smoothly into the next century, will soon have to come to grips with this population group and its unique difficulties.

**•The percentage of single mothers in Canada is steadily increasing. It rose 27 per cent from 1976 to 1981.**

In 1976, there were 464,340 single mothers in Canada. In 1981, there were 589,830. By contrast, there were only 124,180 single fathers in Canada in 1981 (1).

As the *Report of the Task Force*

on Child Care (Cooke Report) points out, the last time single-parent families formed such a large part of the population was during the 1930s.

However, the reasons for it were quite different then. Three-quarters of lone parents in 1931 and 1941 were widowed. By 1981, 57 per cent of lone parents were separated or divorced; another 10 per cent had never married. The remaining 33 per cent were widows or widowers (2).

**•A mother who becomes a single parent while her children are still young is increasingly likely to have the sole responsibility for raising them during their formative years (3).**

Canada's lone parent families tend to be younger today than in previous years. Between 1951 and 1981, the percentage of single parent families headed by someone under 35 doubled, from 14 per cent to 28 per cent (4).

In 1980, less than half the women divorced at ages under 35

continued on page 27



# What the Numbers Don't Tell Us:

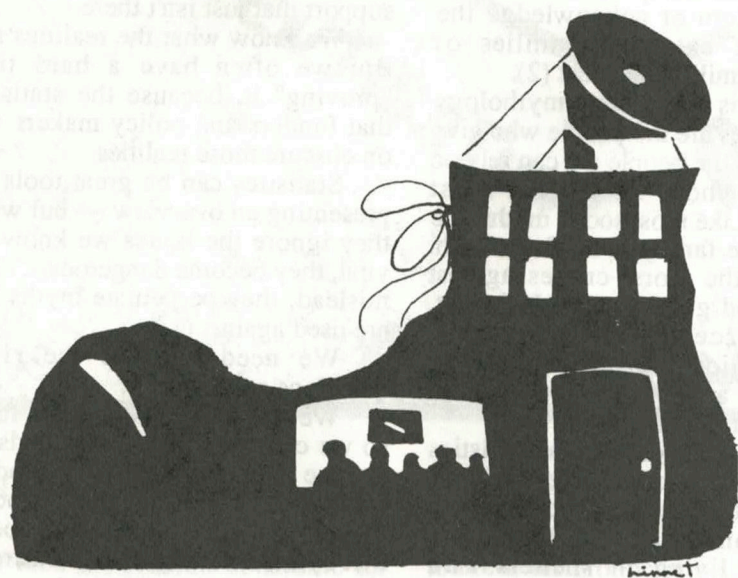


Illustration: Linnet O'Connell-Graham

by Joan Holmes

Christian tradition tells the story of Mary, great with child, travelling to Bethlehem on the back of a mule and delivering her first child in a stable. Any woman who has walked a few miles in the final month of pregnancy can imagine her discomfort — all for the convenience of Caesar's census takers.

For modern-day Canadian women being counted by the bureaucrats is not so grossly inconvenient. It's rather the resulting census that can be a real pain when it comes to documenting the situation of Canadian women, particularly the

position of women in the family.

A quick look at census publications gives one the impression that they say a lot. They list, for example, endless tables of types of economic households, average numbers of children per woman, and the number of women in the workforce — all neatly categorized by the age of their youngest child.

But the closest statistical reflection of the composition of the Canadian family, economic families in private households, is deplorably inadequate for gaining an understanding of the variety of family

structures in this country.

The 1981 census of the Ottawa-Carleton region, for example, revealed that:

- half the private households consisted of a wife and husband living with their children (these are the famed nuclear families that are supposed to form the backbone of this country);
- 30.1 per cent were wife-husband couples living alone;
- 9.2 per cent were headed by a woman raising her children alone;
- 4.5 per cent were made up of a male-female couple and additional persons, which may or may not have included children;
- 1.8 per cent were single fathers with their children;
- 1.0 per cent were lone parent families which included additional adults; and
- 3.2 per cent were "other economic families" (1).

Exercise caution before you believe these figures. They indicate that about half of all households are nuclear families when, in reality, there is a tendency to state that a husband is present even when he is mostly or completely absent.

Women do that because they are ashamed to admit that they do not belong to a "normal" family. Thus the number of husband-wife-child families is probably smaller and the number of female-headed families larger.

I'm not sure where other types of families fit in. We all know women who live with other women, as current lovers, long-term committed partners or in asexual communities.

These women-centred families are hidden in the category, "lone-parent families with additional persons" or "other economic families." Thus, women who consciously choose these alternative family structures are hidden by the census takers.

The fact that many of us count people with whom we don't live as an important part of our family is not reflected at all. The existence of effective extended families is simply not considered to be important to the bureaucracy.

I suppose that the support of an extended family is only important to women faced with the daily challenges of raising small babies,



copied with old age and infirmity, scrimping by on inadequate incomes, or escaping unbearable situations.

I'm not suggesting that we should be required to reveal the full nature of our living arrangements to the census takers or that census reports should have a category for every existing family structure. We must be aware, however, that statistics give glaring prominence to what is considered to be the family norm and minimize or even hide all other forms of families upon which women depend.

Last year, I tried to find out what percentage of Canadian women were actively raising children and how many were mothers at home. These statistics are not available. The Statistics Canada officer I spoke with suggested that I could obtain the information indirectly by looking at the total female population, the average number of children born to women, the number of women in the work force, etc., etc.

Besides the fact that this is a very time-consuming and inaccurate process, it is insulting to women that our role as mothers is ignored and that full-time mothering is still not recognized as a unique and valid occupation.

Furthermore, this indirect process of juggling figures does not really yield the required information. Just as women who have borne children are not all playing the role of mother, many women are mothering children to whom they did not give birth.

Women who are not in the work force are not necessarily mothers at home. They may be childless full-time homemakers, or women unable to find work because of lack of opportunity or skills, or because of psychological, mental or physical disabilities. They could also be retired women (although we all know only very privileged women really retire).

A specially commissioned census study does reveal some additional information on Canadian families.

The 1984 Family History Survey indicated that 67.5 per cent of the women surveyed had raised natural children compared to 60.3 per cent of men, indicating that fathers are more frequently not involved in raising

their children than mothers.

Compared to 4.4 per cent of men, 2.1 per cent of women had raised step-children. This shows that children tend to remain with their separated mothers and often subsequent male partners play a role in raising them.

Approximately the same number of women and men reported raising adopted children, which shows children are adopted primarily by female-male couples.

What the figures don't reveal is that even when both parents take part in raising children the mother's involvement is generally much greater than the father's. This study is totally heterosexist and nuclear family focused. It doesn't even mention that many lesbian couples raise children or acknowledge the variety of extended families or alternate families that exist (2).

There is a common mythology that families are the people who give us support, the people we can rely on and with whom we are the most intimate. Like most social myths, the ideal of the family is far from truth. Some of the worst crimes against women and girls — assault, incest, rape, forced childbearing, psychological torture, domestic slavery — are committed within the confines of the family.

These are pictures that statistics don't even hint at, let alone elucidate.

The statistics don't tell us how many women and children are currently living in shelters and temporary accommodations after having fled the mythical sanctuary of the marital home. Nor do they indicate that these shelters have turned away thousands who are often forced to return to their dangerous homes.

They don't tell us how many girls and women are entangled in a day-to-day struggle to preserve their lives and dignity in oppressive situations.

So what difference does it make whether or not we know all these facts about women?

For one thing, the way statistics are kept and reported presents a misleading image of women. These false pictures are then used by governments as excuses for not providing necessary financial and

program support to women. They also allow conservative anti-rights groups to perpetuate inaccurate beliefs by hiding the reality of family life.

False pictures obscure the existence of women in alternative families that they have consciously chosen to create. In many cases, women have created these family structures because conventional families have failed to provide for the needs of women and children.

Women who are active in the women's movement or who work directly with women in social services are acutely aware of the lack of family support for women. The false pictures painted by inadequate, inaccurate statistics allow our society and government to assume we enjoy support that just isn't there.

We know what the realities are. But we often have a hard time "proving" it, because the statistics that funders and policy makers rely on obscure those realities.

Statistics can be great tools for presenting an overview — but when they ignore the issues we know are vital, they become dangerous. They mislead; they perpetuate myths that are used against us.

We need to have the right questions asked.

We need to know the real facts, so we can back up our demands for change and, especially, for funding for services that are vital to the needs of women — needs that are not being met by other family and mainstream services.

bts

## Notes

(1) Economic Families in Private Households for Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and its Eleven Component Municipalities, 1981 (Special statistical run by Statistics Canada).

(2) Dr. Thomas K. Burch, *Family History Survey: Preliminary Findings* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985).

*Joan Holmes is an Ottawa feminist and writer, working as an independent researcher on women's issues and native history. She is a long-time member of Breaking the Silence.*



# Perspective des femmes aînées

CONSCIENTISATION RÉCONCILIATION  
AUTONOMIE

par Olivette Falardeau

Design: Evelyne Guindon-Zador

*Place à l'évasion constante du rêve, la conscientisation de la femme face aux réalités de sa condition de vie, la dévoile à elle-même, la sensibilise à ses besoins et lui permet de développer les mécanismes nécessaires pour opérer des changements.*

L'évasion par l'alcool, la drogue prescrite ou non, les romans à eau de rose et la télévision font oublier les problèmes pour un certain temps. Cependant, cette évasion dans l'imaginaire du rêve néglige la nécessité plus vitale de faire face à la réalité des problèmes et de chercher par tous les moyens à trouver une solution aux difficultés multiples et complexes apportées par les conditions de vie d'aujourd'hui.

A l'automne 1986, je me suis

jointe à un groupe appelé Le CAR (Conscientisation, Autonomie et Réconciliation). Ce groupe a été amorcé grâce à Place aux femmes où ont eu lieu les rencontres de l'année 1986-87.

Les activités du groupe Le CAR ont pour but de rendre les femmes aînées conscientes de leur situation dans la pyramide sociale. Ceci fait, nous pouvons prendre notre destin en main et donner de l'essor au mouvement des femmes.

Le CAR invite les femmes aînées à réfléchir et à agir sur leur condition de vie. C'est à travers des discussions avec les participantes et par mon propre cheminement que je me suis conscientisée à mes besoins et à ceux des aînées francophones.

Dans notre société de consommation où l'argent prime, le

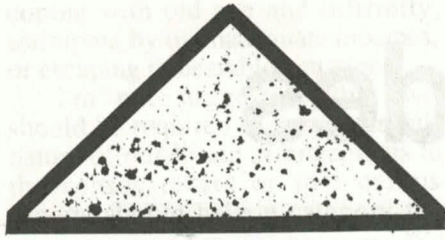
travail des femmes au foyer étant non rémunéré est par conséquent dévalorisé. Quand vient la retraite, elle ne bénéficie pas d'un régime de pension à son nom.

Aline Génier, un membre du groupe Le CAR, maintenant décédée, a dit :

*La femme aînée ne se valorise pas, ce sont ses enfants qui passent avant, c'est la femme de Monsieur un tel. Elle n'a aucune identité propre. Comme elle ne reçoit pas de salaire, elle n'a aucun crédit, il lui faut la permission du mari pour acheter.*

Cette attitude sociale envers la femme mariée la traite comme une extension de son mari et non comme une personne à part entière. A cause de ce manque de statut social, économique et politique elle est bafouée par la société.





Yvonne Obonsawin, coordonnatrice du groupe Le CAR, le résume ainsi :

*Sauf aux occasions spéciales d'anniversaires de naissance, de la St-Valentin et de la Fête des Mères, la femme âgée dans la majorité des cas est ignorée, diffamée, discréditée et même attaquée par la société dans laquelle elle vit. Si nous espérons changer cet état de choses, il faut que nous nous efforcions chacune d'entre nous, d'une façon uniquement la nôtre, de dénoncer de vive voix ce traitement injuste.*

Les femmes âgées font face à des conditions de vie parfois très difficiles. Plusieurs femmes seules (divorcées, séparées, veuves ou célibataires) sont obligées pour subsister à se réintégrer dans le marché du travail, passé la cinquantaine.

Ces femmes, comme tout le monde, font face à la pénurie d'emploi et en plus aux préjugés contre le vieillissement. Elles sont trop vieilles pour le marché du travail mais trop jeunes pour les programmes de sécurité du revenu. Celles qui acceptent du travail à temps partiel ont des salaires très bas.

Ce manque d'autonomie financière crée un état d'inquiétude très stressant. Les tracas au sujet de la nourriture, du vêtement et du logement affectent leur santé. L'impuissance de la femme âgée à pouvoir changer sa condition de vie économique et par conséquent sociale et politique, cause des maladies physiques et psychologiques. Elle est dans l'impossibilité de faire face à la réalité et à réagir contre son isolement.

A cause de leur longévité, le nombre de femmes du troisième âge s'accroît de plus en plus. Elles composent 85 pour-cent des conjointes survivant la mort de l'autre. Elles vivent dans la solitude et l'isolement.

Une vie passée à vivre pour et à travers le mari et ses enfants cause une perte d'identité. Au lieu de s'accommoder de cette situation elle doit prendre du temps pour elle-même et réaliser qu'il est bon et même essentiel de retrouver son moi. Ces femmes ne doivent pas seulement survivre mais elles doivent aussi vivre, être.

Au lieu de l'isolement à la maison une rencontre avec d'autres femmes du même âge, de la même langue et de la même culture est très stimulante et enrichissante. C'est en se joignant à des groupes francophones de conscientisation qu'elles peuvent s'aider elles-mêmes en aidant les autres.

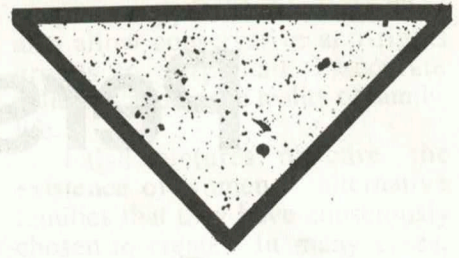
Ayant le même âge, elles se comprennent mieux l'une l'autre. Elles se sentent plus à l'aise pour exprimer des émotions dans leur langue maternelle. L'effort intellectuel requis pour parler une langue seconde est éliminé. En somme, plus on se ressemble plus il est facile de communiquer.

Les membres de ces groupes partagent les expériences vécues qu'elles ont en commun telles les problèmes de pension, la pauvreté, l'isolement, l'ennui, la dépendance économique, les relations conjugales difficiles et d'autres encore. Ces groupes de support qui accueillent les femmes contribuent à leur développement et les aident à grandir ensemble comme l'a témoigné Aline Génier :

*La femme âgée veut autant que possible se maintenir dans une atmosphère positive pour rendre sa vie plus plaisante et ainsi jouir d'un tas de choses qui l'entourent : mais elle est si souvent prise dans son affaire qu'elle n'en voit même pas clair. C'est grâce aux ateliers et aux rencontres de groupes qu'elle remonte la pente.*

Les groupes comme Le CAR amorcent des conversations, des discussions et des recherches de soi très valables.

La dynamique de groupe redonne la confiance en soi, et développe des outils adaptés aux besoins des femmes âgées conçus par elles et pour elles. Les rencontres et les ateliers au moyen de thèmes, de conférences, de discussions, de conversations, de jeux révélateurs et



de chants connus et aimés (avec des mots adaptés à la circonstance) permettent à la femme de s'épanouir.

C'est à travers ce cheminement principalement axé sur ses besoins qu'elle se dévoile à elle-même.

A l'automne 1986, j'ai participé à onze sessions de formation personnelle et d'animation communautaire du groupe Le CAR. La formation personnelle consiste à s'interroger à se fouiller pour mieux se connaître. Ces recherches de soi font ressortir d'innombrables souvenirs oubliés ou refoulés.

De ces bribes de vie qui refont surface émerge un portrait de notre vie. Cette révélation libératrice de soi redonne un sens à notre quotidien et nous permet de mieux fonctionner.

A l'hiver 1987, nous avons passé à l'action en organisant trois ateliers ouverts à toutes les femmes, sur les thèmes de l'amour, de la relation fille-mère et sur les problèmes tels que le faible revenu, le retour au travail et les problèmes de couples, exposés dans le film *Chacun sa vie* de l'Office National du Film. Chacun de ces ateliers a réuni au moins douze personnes et a été très apprécié.

C'est ainsi qu'en s'aidant nous-mêmes, nous avons aidé les autres, car après la réflexion des rencontres de l'automne nous avons pu agir. C'est un changement libérateur qui influence nos attitudes et nos comportements et qui se communique à tous les gens qui nous entourent.

bis

*Olivette Falardeau est une franco-ontarienne, résidente d'Ottawa. Elle est dans sa trente-cinquième année de mariage et a quatre enfants. Elle contribue à un périodique pour la première fois.*



# The Dublin Women's Congress

Design: Ellen Adelberg

by Gwenda Lambton

Maybe someday the International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women will achieve its aim and become truly international.

The third congress, held in Dublin in July 1987, attracted more than 1100 participants — twice the number at the last congress in the Netherlands in 1984 — but 400 of these were from the United States, while there were only a few delegates from Latin American countries, and even fewer from Eastern Europe and Africa. Even the Irish participants numbered only 89 — a scant 20 more than the 69 delegates from Canada.

The Irish organizing committee had performed wonders, accommodating such large numbers and finding space for seminars and workshops — often 17 at a time! — on the campus of Trinity College.

However admirably organized, this large congress had its share of unforeseen mishaps — the chairperson for my particular session, for instance, didn't turn up!

A vast range of topics was covered: from law and politics, to gender roles, to religion, the arts and science, to the nuclear threat, women and peace. In addition, there were book displays, an Irish arts festival, poetry readings, theatre, and spontaneously arranged meetings of all kinds.

The stately 18th-century halls of Trinity College were not large enough to hold the crowds during plenary sessions, which were open to Irish visitors as well as to participants. The organizers had arranged to use the National Concert Hall and the Olympia Theatre, both a short walk from Trinity through downtown streets familiar to some

of us only through James Joyce's descriptions of them.

The first speaker in these sessions, Norwegian activist Birgit Brock-Utne (author of *Educating for Peace*), set a tone of universality with her passionate words about peace. This tone was reinforced by American activist Helen Caldicott, the last speaker (and author of *Missile Envy*).

Independently from one another, both referred to the remarkable woman, Bertha v. Zuckner, whom they regard as the true originator of the Nobel Peace Prize because of her great influence on Alfred Bernhard Nobel (whose fortune, by the way, was made in explosives and the exploitation of the Baku oilfields), most particularly through her book *Die Waffen Nieder* (*Down with Arms*), once translated into many languages but now largely forgotten.

At no time was the huge National Concert Hall as packed as it was during Mary Daly's speech on "Recovering the Archimetical Powers of Women." She received a standing ovation, as did most of the plenary session speakers.

But for me, the smaller, more intimate workshops and seminars were of particular value.

It was in these sessions, too, that many Canadians excelled: Lisette Girouard, with her paper, "From the Love of Women to Lesbian Existence" (in novels by three Quebecois); Margaret Gillet, on higher education for women in Canada; Akhtar Naraghi, on Iranian poet Furrugh Farrukhzad (1934-1966); Barbara Freeman, with her paper, "Kit of the Mail," about an Irish-Canadian woman journalist at the turn of the century; and many others.

For me, the most memorable contributions were those of Irish women and of Indian speakers like Kamla Bhasin. The former are still fighting for rights we take for granted (divorce, legal abortion); the latter warned against the pitfalls of technological development (cash crops instead of food farms took food production out of the hands of women).

While abortion is illegal in Ireland — even for women with AIDS, whose children are bound to have the disease — in India, where abortion is legal, some physicians derive the majority of their income from "aborting the female fetus."

Kamla Bhasin also warned of using cerebral approaches to women who are illiterate and need help most. Instead, she communicates with peasant women in her country through music which, like the visual arts, breaks through language, class and educational barriers.

Both music and visual arts were scantily represented in the planned sessions, but outside them there were many examples of the latter, most notably an exhibition of art by Irish women.

Only the contemporary part of the exhibition seemed truly remarkable to me: it preserved a special idiosyncrasy but could also be readily perceived as part of world art. Witty and competent were the postcards drawn by Irish women, which were on sale during the congress: they stated women's problems far more succinctly than many verbal statements.

If giving women an opportunity to state their problems, ideas and opinions is the aim of this event, the attendance figures make me wonder why the next congress, scheduled for 1990, is going to be held in New York.

Wouldn't it be better to organize this and future congresses in countries that can't afford to send representatives? Otherwise, I think we're in danger of turning this congress into a cerebral centre for self-congratulation, rather than a true centre for interchange among all women of the world.

And if we've ever needed such an exchange, we need one now. I came away from the congress with the deep impression that we need to use all our energies and all means at our disposal to bring this about.

After hearing Helen Caldicott talk about "Feminism and the Challenges of War and Peace." it



also struck me that for all this we have very little time.

bts

### Resources

The book of abstracts from the Third International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women is available from:

International Congress Secretariat  
Trinity College  
44 Northumberland Road  
Dublin 4, Ireland

Gwenda Lambton is an artist living on a farm in Western Quebec, where she belongs to a craft co-op. She is writing a Master's thesis on Canadian women in Canadian public art.



Rush Hour = Morning session

Trinity Universt  
Campus

III: International Interdisciplinary  
Congress on Women  
Theme = Visions & Revisions.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## Being Pregnant: Conversations with Women

By Daphne Morrison  
Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987

reviewed by Patricia File

Daphne Morrison is ambitious in trying to capture what being pregnant meant to a cross-section of women. Unlike many other books about pregnancy, this book is not confined to the experiences of white, middle class, educated, heterosexual women. The fact that these conversations are with women of different cultures, races, physical abilities, sexual orientation and ages, yet speak to all women, is a testament to a common bond of female experience.

Stories of pregnancy in youth, of abortions and miscarriages, of giving children up for adoption, of being abandoned while pregnant, of pain in labour, touch the lives of most women. Reading the accounts of the 15 women interviewed touches your own feelings and experiences and stirs many forgotten memories, tempting you to write a 16th account of your own experience of pregnancy.

The interviews are essentially stream-of-consciousness answers to the question, "What was it like for you being pregnant?"

You definitely have the impression that only one interview was conducted for each woman.

By the seventh conversation, you are struck by the matter-of-fact nature of the stories. With the exception of a few, they are too chronological; generally, they lack depth of emotion, which conveys to me a sense of ambivalence. The lack of feeling is especially noticeable around miscarriages. For example, Pushpa, a woman from India, says:

*Then I got pregnant. There was no question of going to work then,*

*because I had had a miscarriage before that. My specialist, she didn't want me to work. She said, "Take rest this time." So I didn't try to go back to work because I wanted very much to keep the baby in any way. I was disappointed when I had the miscarriage; even my husband was. But then I got pregnant again.*

Disappointed? That is the only comment she makes about her miscarriage. One wonders whether different questions to these women might have brought out some of their deeper feelings.

The conversations only record the actual words a woman used, while the sadness in her face, changing tone of voice and body language, which may say much more, are not captured. One wonders how much was lost, especially for the women who spoke English as a second language.

A number of the women had had abortions and now were pregnant or had subsequently had a child. None of them discussed the difference between their feelings for the baby they kept and the unwanted pregnancy. I would have liked to know how other women in this situation felt.

Only Theresa, a Native woman, spoke of the spiritual and historical aspect of motherhood:

*Pregnancy is a time when women are very powerful. Women don't earn this powerfulness and wholeness; the ability to create and carry life demonstrates that we are born with it. We have it. Childbirth itself is such a tremendous lesson. You can imagine the activities, the tasks, that men have to go through to get anywhere near the understanding that women get with that one event that we do naturally.*

I had hoped that more of these conversations would have touched on pregnancy as a part of women's strength and nature, which helps us to reclaim our own mythology.

None of the women spoke of the miracle or the wonder of having a baby. Perhaps it is a luxury to be able to think about it in this way.

Many of the stories are sad accounts of being abandoned, of

losing a job or a home, or miscarrying because of a vicious beating. The anxiety and unhappiness of their experiences stole excitement and joy from these women.

I would like to have read more about the wonderful feeling of anticipation, of waiting for the baby to arrive, of the magic moment when you finally meet this little person you have been talking to, apologizing to, and sharing the odd experience with.

What emerges from the book is the empowering knowledge that through much adversity women survive pregnancy and childbirth, and have children they want and love.

For this reason I would recommend it to any pregnant woman or woman contemplating pregnancy, especially if she is living in a difficult situation or having ambivalent feelings about her pregnancy.

Reading about the 15 women offers the reassurance that she can pull through.

bts

Patricia File was seven months pregnant when she read and reviewed *Being Pregnant*.

## Feminist Philosophy Revisited

by Germaine Greer  
London: Picador, 1986

reviewed by Martha Muzychka

With *The Madwoman's Underclothes*, feminist philosopher Germaine Greer has released a fascinating, if uneven, collection of articles written between the publication of her two landmark works, *The Female Eunuch* (1969)



# BOOK REVIEWS

and *Sex and Destiny* (1985).

In this book, Greer covers subjects as diverse as Norman Mailer, with whom she engaged in a raucous series of debates in the early 1970s, abortion, Roxanne Pulitzer's scandalous divorce trial, drought in Ethiopia, and even PMS and criminality.

This collection is like an onion: the reader must peel back many layers to discover inner meaning and understanding. And like an onion, it can sometimes provoke tears, for it is easy to see how little some things have changed for women.

However, the book is less a retrospective look at the female condition than an attempt to chart the progress of Germaine Greer's personal development as a writer and philosopher.

As the link between Greer's major books, *The Madwoman's Underclothes* is important in illuminating the changes in her feminist analysis.

When *Sex and Destiny* was published, many critics believed Greer was recanting her philosophy as stated in the earlier *Female Eunuch*, and rejecting wholesale certain tenets of feminism concerning reproduction.

Yet this collection of essays reveals what most feminists already know — that feminism, like society, is not static, but changes in response to the needs of those who are part of it.

*The Madwoman's Underclothes*, while it is a personal window on the world, also reflects shifts and changes in the feminist agenda, moving back and forth from female sexuality, advertising and male domination, to pornography, contraception and the world of politics.

Greer's introduction to the collection is provocative and honest; she recognizes in herself a middle-class phenomenon, privileged with the added assets of an excellent education and an exceptionally keen intelligence.

Greer also establishes the connections between the woman she was in 1967 and the woman she is now.

*The Madwoman's Underclothes* demonstrates Germaine Greer's growth as a writer of audacity and talent. Her earlier works in underground journals now seem raw and unfinished, shocking the reader as much as providing an inside look at the temper of society in the radical 1960s.

In contrast, her columns for the higher-brow *Sunday Times* are measured discourses, introducing for a mostly intellectual audience the burning issues of feminist analysis.

Throughout this collection, though, Germaine Greer remains forthright, and never appears to compromise her principles. We can only hope we have not heard the last of one of the most colourful and outspoken writers of our day.

bts

## Irish Women and Mysticism

### The Grey Horse

By R. A. MacAvoy

New York: Bantam, 1987

reviewed by Martha Muzychka

Fantasy writers must do several things if they are to succeed: create realistic characters, present a good plot, and weave together real and "other" worlds tightly and neatly.

R. A. MacAvoy, in her latest book, *The Grey Horse*, provides all of these elements, and delivers a highly entertaining and engrossing read.

Readers of MacAvoy's earlier books, which include the critically acclaimed *The Book of Kells*, will recognize the continuing influence of Irish mysticism in *The Grey Horse*. While the mysticism is central to the story, MacAvoy wisely avoids using too much of it.

By fantasy standards, the plot is straightforward: the puca, or fairy, Ruairi appears in the village of

Carraroe to woo his love, Black Maire, who is half-fairy herself. Ruairi also appears as a horse, who meets with a renowned horse trainer. These two need each other, but for rather different reasons.

The time is the mid-19th century, in the early days of the Land League; Ireland is beginning to assert herself to the English overlords. Add a wastrel son, a renegade Catholic priest, a tax collector and a landlord, and the result is a powerful mixture of love, pride and swelling nationalism.

The book is memorable for its characters, who make the story quite real. Anraí, Aine and Tadg O Murchu represent different ideals, but together they are a symbol for Irish culture, fighting against both political and social assimilation.

Their conversations and discussions describe a people who are proud, but not foolishly stubborn — except in the case of Maire, the half-fairy who is not her father's child and knows it.

Maire prizes her independence and autonomy, even as she knows she has no legal rights as a woman. Her attempts to reject Ruairi as a suitor are linked with her attempts to reject her fairy self.

While Black Maire eventually learns to reconcile her two selves, the Irish landlord cannot do the same. James Blondell has become too English with his money and his power. Although he wishes to be Irish, he cannot see himself as a "native," and this blindness leads him to destroy the thing he loves most.

In MacAvoy's hands, the Irish influence colours the pace of the story and adds a rich texture to her language. The reader is doubly rewarded, as the book is a pleasure to read, for the story as much as the imagery and fantasy.

bts

Martha Muzychka, a former member of Breaking the Silence, has returned to her native Newfoundland where she works as a researcher for the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.



continued from page 18

had eventually remarried. Among women, at least, this means many years of raising children alone (5).

•Single mothers are poor, much poorer than their male counterparts.

The poverty rate for single mothers was 49 per cent in 1983 compared to 21 per cent for single fathers (6). An even harsher contrast is apparent in the comparison between these women and traditional two-parent families: only 18 per cent of single mothers had incomes over \$25,000 in 1980 compared to 53.7 per cent of husband-wife families (7).

In 1981, only 49 per cent of single mothers, compared to 88 per cent of single fathers, owned cars (8).

•Three-quarters of young female single parents (under 35) spent more than 30 per cent of their incomes on shelter in 1981, compared to about one-third of males.

•Single mothers often have less stable housing conditions than men.

They usually rent their homes, as compared to men and two-parent families, who are likely to own. In 1981, over three-quarters of young single mothers rented, compared to only half of males and one-third of traditional families.

Single mothers also have the highest rate of dwellings in poor condition (32.1 per cent in 1981) (9).

Over 20 per cent of the people living in public housing are single mothers. Only 0.7 per cent are single fathers (10).

•Compared to married mothers, far fewer single mothers with young children were employed in 1984.

In 1984, of all single mothers with children under the age of three, only 29 per cent were employed. Another 14 per cent were unemployed, while 57 per cent were not in the labour force.

Among married women with children under three and working husbands, 46 per cent were employed, 7 per cent unemployed and 47 per cent were not in the labour force.

The percentage of single mothers with school-age children who were employed was comparable to that of their married counterparts. That is, of single and married mothers, respectively: 58 per cent and 59 per cent were employed, 10 and 6 per cent were unemployed, and 32 and 35 per cent were not in the labour force (11).

•Among single parents with infants or school-age children, there is a strong preference for working part time, while those with preschoolers would prefer full-time work.

The Cooke Task Force found that only among single mothers with infants did a significant proportion (33 per cent) believe the best choice for themselves and their children would be to remain at home with the child (12).

## Notes

(1) Statistics Canada, *Canada's Lone-Parent Families* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1984).

(2) Status of Women Canada, *Report of the Task Force on Child Care (Cooke Report)* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1986), p. 12.

(3) Ibid.

(4) House of Commons, *Sharing the Responsibility: Report of the Special Committee on Child Care* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1987).

(5) *Cooke Report*, p.12.

(6) National Council of Welfare, *Poverty Profile 1985* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985), pp. 1-5.

(7) Janet McClain and Cassie Doyle, *Women and Housing: Changing Needs and the Failure of Policy* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development / James Lorimar and Co., 1984), p. 32.

(8) Ibid., p. 56.

(9) G. E. Priest, "The Family Cycle and Housing Consumption in Canada: A Review Based on 1981 Census Data," *Canadian Statistical Review* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, September 1984), pp. ix, x, and xviii.

(10) *Women and Housing*, p. 26.

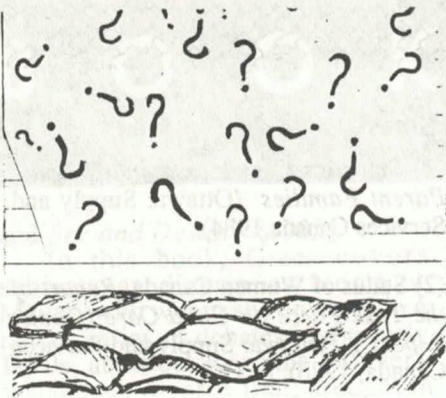
(11) *Cooke Report*, pp. 10 and 12.

(12) Ibid.

Michelle Clarke is a member of the Breaking the Silence collective. She is currently writing a Master's thesis on public policy for female single parents for the Institute of Canadian Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa.

bts





you are attached to your father's name?

And why do men seem more devoted to their surnames than women? Is it that they identify with the ethnic roots embodied in that name? Don't we too? Or is it that they feel it's their duty — taught by a patriarchal upbringing — to preserve that heritage by carrying on the "family" name?

These are the issues which need to be discussed within the families we are creating today. Men can change their names, too. For the sake of continuity in a family, it's often better that everyone have the same last name. Some feminists who "keep" their birth surnames upon marriage begin to feel so uncomfortable (or encounter legal complications) as a result of having a different surname from their children that they, too, eventually adopt their husband's surname.

We can reverse that trend: feminist mothers, in conjunction with male partners, can negotiate new names for themselves and their families.

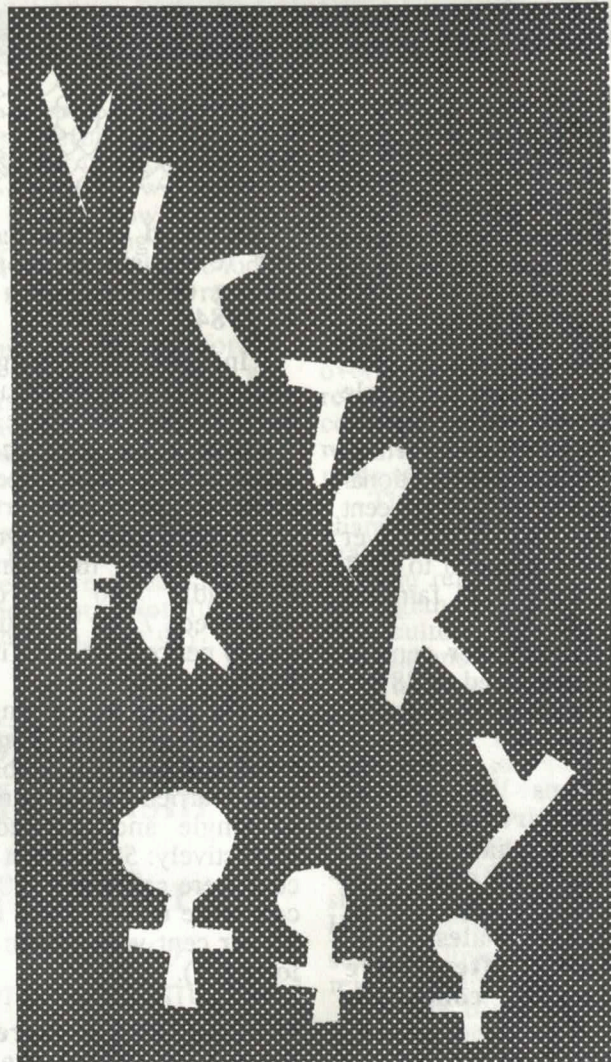
By renaming ourselves and our families, we are bequeathing a heady legacy to the next generation. We are breaking a patrilineal pattern, sloughing it off like an old snake skin.

When the process ends, we will emerge gleaming, in a transformed world born of our imaginations. We have the time; do we have the energy we need to do it?

bts

*The Book of Goddesses and Heroines* is out of print, but can often be found in public libraries.

*d. i. huron is an Ottawa feminist and writer.*



The *BTS* collective applauds the recent Supreme Court decision declaring Canada's abortion law unconstitutional. Bravo to all the women who have dedicated so much of their time and energy to this issue over the past decades!





# RESOURCES

***Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada*** is the title of a study released this year by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Written by Linda MacLeod, author of the Council's 1980 groundbreaking study on wife battering, it reviews progress in such areas as shelters for battered women and criminal justice initiatives. To obtain a copy, free of charge, contact:

CACSW  
110 O'Connor Street  
9th floor  
Box 1541, Station B  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1P 5R5

(613) 992-4975.

***Maternal Health News*** is a quarterly newsletter published by a west coast group called the Maternal Health Society. It provides information on hospital policies and practices, homebirth, midwifery, caesarean prevention, consumer advocacy groups and other issues of concern to childbearing women. This publication is available by purchasing a membership to the society for \$15 or \$30, or by purchasing a subscription for \$9 which includes 4 issues. Make cheques/money orders payable to Maternal Health and mail to:

Maternal Health  
P.O. Box 46563, Station G  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6R 4G8

(604) 438-5365.

***Une Maison de Naissances*** est un tout nouveau vidéo qui questionne l'approche médicale de la grossesse et de l'accouchement. L'histoire suit la grossesse de Chantal ainsi que sa naissance à Montréal avec l'assistance de sage-femmes. Pour obtenir ce vidéo ainsi qu'une game d'autres vidéos qui reflètent la vie de femmes, communiquer avec :

Groupe Intervention Vidéo  
718 Gilford  
Montréal, Québec  
H2J 1N6

(514) 524-3259.

***Feeling Yes, Feeling No*** is a sexual assault prevention program produced by the NFB. Divided into four parts, it is designed to teach young children skills to help keep themselves safe from sexual assault by strangers, family members, or other trusted persons. The program is available in both film and video formats to educators and helping professionals. An adaptation of the program for use in the home is available in VHS and BETA formats for \$24.95. Both are available from NFB offices across Canada.

The National Women's Studies Association is holding its **10th Annual Conference** June 22-26, 1988, at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The theme is "Leadership and Power: Women's Alliances for Social Change" and is expected to attract over 1500 women from around the world. Three plenary sessions highlighting International, American Indian and Lesbian issues are scheduled for the

conference, as well as 250 workshops. For more information contact Sally Gordon at (612) 625-8803 or write to:

NWSA '88  
University of Minnesota  
217 Nolte Centre  
315 Pillsbury Drive S.E.  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455  
U.S.A.

***Income and Employment Review*** is a publication released in September 1987 by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton. The study analyzes labour market developments in Ottawa-Carleton by providing a detailed statistical profile of trends in the region. Although not a policy document, it represents a first step in the formulation of more effective labour market policies for the region. To obtain this document contact:

Social Planning Council of  
Ottawa-Carleton  
256 King Edward Avenue  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1N 7M1

(613) 236-3658.



Illustration: Lily Mah-Sen



# back issues

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- Sexuality and the State
- A look at conflict and change in feminist organizations

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- Women and Learning: breaking down the barriers of illiteracy and sexism.

## **Spring 1985 Vol 3 No 3**

- Feature on the Ottawa Women's Credit Union: economic power for many or few?
- Sexual Harassment: the Bonnie Robichaud case

## **Summer 1985 Vol 3 No 4**

Special issue: **Our Bodies, Our Control**

- The new reproductive technology: Canada and the Third World
- Lesbians speak out on the trials and pleasures of living and loving

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Theme issue: **Critical Questions for Feminists**

- Racism, REAL Women, parenting, "political correctness"

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- Nairobi notebooks, feminism in Latin America

## **Spring/Summer 1986 Vol 3 No 3/4**

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- Poor women, moms, older women, clerical workers

## **Fall 1986 Vol 5 No 1**

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- Young feminists
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- Custody and Family Law, Man in the House Rule, young offenders

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- Feminist youth
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