

VIRAGO

VOLUME II, Issue 4

Guelph, Ontario

MAY, 1974

BETTY CRAUSE



Betty and friend

-an autobiography

CHILDHOOD

near Birmingham England
Armistice of First World
War

Two and a half years old
My mother holding me at
the window

strapped dummy of Kaiser
backwards on a
donkey
crying

ten foot drop on each side
of the sidewalk
men with different furnaces
making chains

Mother and her sisters were teachers--privileged class. They started as soon as they left school as "pupil teachers" age 13 years and were expected to teach classes of 30-40 children, many as big as themselves. No sort of training was done except by experience as they worked. My aunt eventually went to the first teacher's college to be founded in the county of Yorkshire. She took a year's training and then took a job as head teacher at age 20. My father was clerk at a foundry and later had a job playing double bass in an orchestra at a silent movie house. He lost this when "talking picktures" came; never got another job and died of discouragement a year later. Women got the vote at age 30 then --until the age was changed to 21 at the ending of World War II.

I hated high school and refused to work as I knew I could never catch up with brother who was clever. Went to a "school of cookery" at 16. This was in a "mental" hospital and was a cheap way of getting kitchen staff since we were not paid, living in--food and uniform in lieu of money. I was glad to get away from home and was never homesick. At 17 I was accepted as a nurse at another "mental hospital" since I had already worked with insane patients at the "school of cookery". Three years training there--12 hours a day, two days off one week, one the next. Night duty six months at a time.

Through this period I had a succession of temporary boyfriends and moved them out of the way when "George" was due to come home. He worked in Nigeria for 18 months and came home for six months holiday from 1936-1940. I kept this association up but let it slide when George had to stay in Africa because of the war. We slept together when possible so it is easy to see that life was

(CONTINUED PAGE 2)

(Betty Crouse, continued)

just the same then as now.

In 1937 I moved into a General Hospital to train in General Medical and Surgery. Much of this time I seemed to spend mainly in Gynaecology wards and the number of victims of illegal abortion which had to be admitted suffering from septicaemia was appalling. Anyone who saw those poor women, so mutilated by illegal and clumsy "operations"--this was before the days of antibiotics--would never say that abortion should not be legally and surgically done, instead of this wicked butchery. Any woman who is so desperate that she would have an abortion done the worse way, should be helped to have it done properly.

During this time--extending up to 1941, I also had need to abort two pregnancies but for me it was easy since I had access to the proper abortifacients. There was no such thing as the Pill in those days--and although condoms could be easily obtained in England most of the men preferred not to wear them--it spoiled their pleasure, forsooth!

Britain was being badly bombed at this time and all the major cities had "blitzes"; the city I was in getting two major attacks. I was with a friend at the movies in the city the first night--we were told to go into the movie-house basement and sit under the pool tables when the bombing started, but later had to leave the movie-house as it was burning. We were the last to leave--the nearest Air Raid shelter was full so we had to run up the burning street for about a quarter mile to find another shelter. We later heard that the other shelter had a direct hit and all were killed. After the all clear we had to walk 3 1/2 miles back to the hospital among burning buildings, bomb craters, etc., my friend was a blonde to start with but we were both black as sweeps when we got to the hospital. The second blitz we were the only hospital able to function since the other two had been damaged and had all the admissions--most of us worked a full 24 hours that time, without thinking or feeling tired--until it ended.

Following the general training I took a post at a home for retarded people and took a further year of lectures and examinations. With the qualifications I then had I went to a large school for retarded boys on the South Coast, in Devon, as Assistant Matron (Head Nurse). It was work I loved and I was very fond of the children. We were still subject to Nazi "hit and run" air raids and one time the boys brought in spent cannon-shells that had fallen in the playground as Spit fires chased low-level raiders over us. I worked there for 18 months and then moved on to a special nursing home for early psychiatric disorders and neuroses. We did prolonged sleep treatments, electro-shock, therapies of various kinds and had a good per centage of cures--but the patients tended to relapse when discharged to the same home conditions.

Throughout this early period, there was too much study and training to be politically minded--but I was always socialist in outlook partly by conviction and partly because the area where I lived as a child was strongly "Labour".

At the time I was doing general training I had found I could not reconcile so much suffering with a God "who watches every sparrow fall" and became a convinced atheist. At that time I felt lost--to whom could I pray now? I soon realized that I had only myself to depend on. No one, god or man, could be blamed for what happened to me--only myself. I have since found that philosophy quite a help--you cannot be self-pitying when only you are responsible for your actions.

I met my husband when he was an engineer in the Merchant Navy--suffering quite a strain because of his wartime experiences, which were tough since he was mostly on oil tankers. It soon proved that our quick marriage was not a success--he was at the edge of mental breakdown and various stresses and divided loyalties to me and to his family soon pushed him over the edge. He could see no way out but suicide and to prevent this the doctors prescribed what is rarely done now but was all the "fashion" then--a lobotomy. It reduced him to a vegetable, though for a number of years he was able to do simple manual work. He was difficult and at the mental age of about five years, but until he was committed for hitting a workmate with a shovel and nearly killing him, we struggled along together. At first I had thought I had "love enough for two" but love needs to be reciprocated and for a number of years it was merely "an existence".

He went into hospital for good in 1963 and soon was in such a poor state that he did not even know me though I visited twice weekly.

In 1968 the opportunity came for me to take a job looking after an elderly gentleman in Canada. I applied for emigration papers--only to find that as a married woman I could not be accepted for emigration without my husband! Strange! Apparently they do not question the marital status of a MAN! So since I felt such an opportunity would not arise again, I applied for a divorce. It was straightforward on account of my husband's psychiatric state--but even that took nearly two years to complete! When it was completed and the estate divided, I came to Canada. Ten months later my ex-husband died of a heart attack.

I spent four very happy years living in Hamilton--in complete rapport with my employer until he died.

Since then I have worked in Guelph. I like Canada very much and doubt I would ever go back to England.

NOTE:

Betty's poems appeared in the January issue of VIRAGO under the pen-name Elizabeth Evans.

Morning Milk

The police siren yodels
 across my egg yolks
 in the pan. YAHOO!
 I am ZAN
 I am an egg plant
 I am an out-bleeding,
 Up-side-dine
 bottle of wine
 I read in a book about Fallopiian tubes
 And I know how I taste.

Jude and I exchange
 Thin little
 Smiles-in-a-cup.

To my old flame

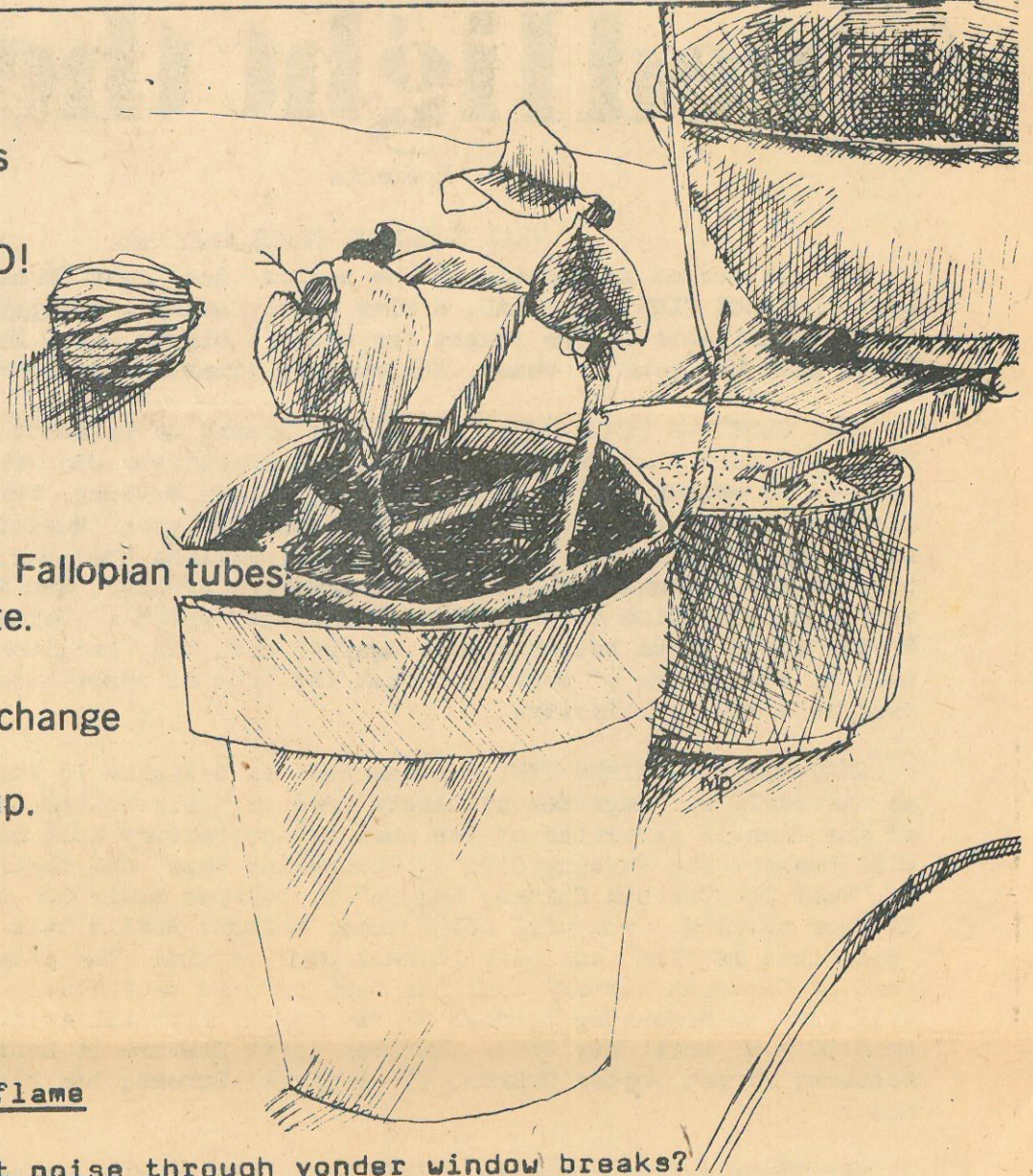
hark! what noise through yonder window breaks?
 it is the popping sound of sweetmanmeat
 being roasted over a revolution of their
 own unmaking
 being basted with their own epithets for us
 until their flesh melts into a
 deep
 golden
 Playbody
 puddle.

hey sugarlips, honeybunny, money-maker
 you were crooning last night
 bringing in the bacon
 smacking your lips on my back seat thighs
 -you're almost as good as my mom, you sigh-
 -o oedipus, you're so complex, comes the reply.

well now
 the farceur's foiled
 it's your turn to be burned
 you look good in red
 why didn't you tell me
 you could make such a good meal?
 didn't i always say
 i'd carry a torch for you?

still i don't hate you
 we come from and wear the same flesh
 but i just believe in poetic, culinary justice
 and have passed the foreskin conclusion
 that the meat shall inherit the earth.

Maureen



red light theatre

Presents

WHAT GLORIOUS TIMES THEY HAD

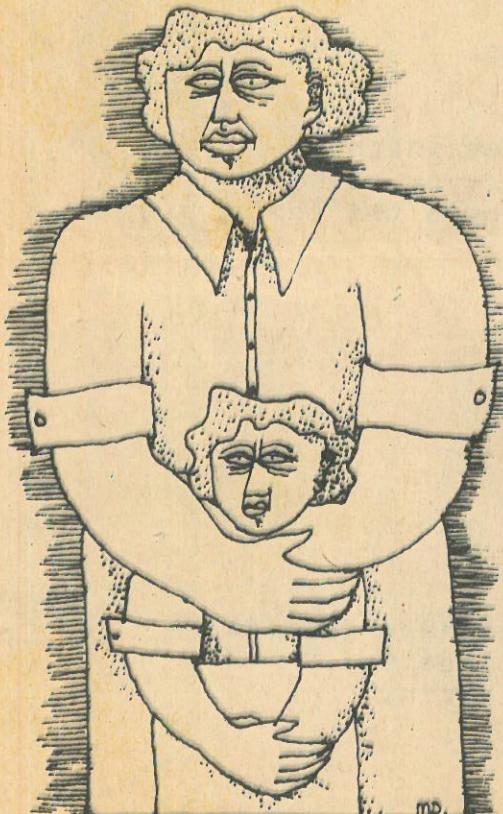
For its second production of the season, Red Light Theatre presents WHAT GLORIOUS TIMES THEY HAD, a play about Canada's scrappy suffragettes. These indomitable ladies fought for women's rights until Manitoba, in 1916, gave the vote to women, followed by Alberta and the rest of Canada.

WHAT GLORIOUS TIMES THEY HAD centers around an incident in 1914, when humor was used to defeat the Manitoba Conservatives who were firmly opposed to enfranchising women. Led by Nellie McClung, the Political Equality League staged a women's parliament to spoof Manitoba's obstinate stand, by refusing the vote to men! Mrs. McClung took the part of pompous Sir Redmond Roblin, the Conservative Premier, who had told the suffrage delegation that politics "unsettles women". Using Premier Roblin's own words and attitudes against him, the "parliament" created such an atmosphere of merriment that the tide of opposition was swept away on a sea of hilarity.

WHAT GLORIOUS TIMES THEY HAD has several delights in store for you, as the early suffragettes of Canada tune up their voices to sing some of the classic favorites of the turn of the century such as "Heaven Will Protect The Working Girl", "Whispering Hope" and their own version of "Wait Til The Sun Shines, Nellie" to bolster their own cause as well as your spirits. You will see Premier Rodmond Roblin talk to his "political machine" and hear it talk back to him! The play presents a part of Canadian history that has been ignored until now. This show will play on Wednesday through Sunday nights with all evening performances at 8:30 p.m. until May 26th. The Red Light Theatre is located at the Bathurst Street United Church, 736 Bathurst Street, one block below Bloor.

For their third production, Red Light Theatre will present TRIPLETS-- an evening of three one-act plays written by Megan Terry and directed by Marcella Lustig. This show will open on June 1, 1974. The performance schedule will run through June 23, 1974.

Matinee performances may be booked by groups upon request. For further information, please contact Janice Stanton at 536-2597.



HOME FOR UNWED GRANDMOTHERS

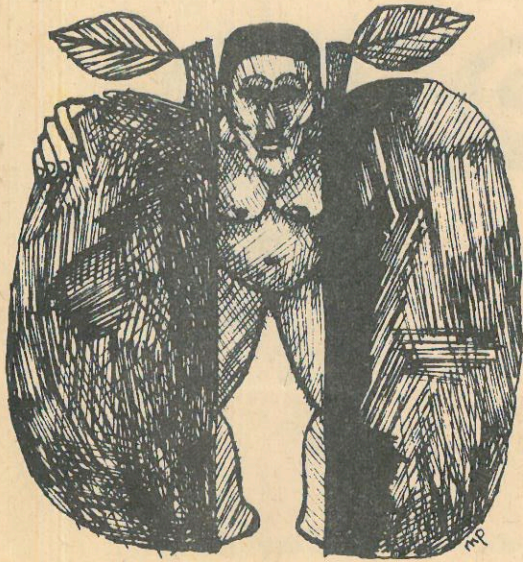
Corridors of closeted grannies
are folded neatly away here
amidst brooms and dust pans.
Years are rewarded with television companionship
and once a sunday guilt visits.

But women live longer than men -
I cling to my vestige of physical supremacy -
live longer
to be folded away conveniently
by the family
and industrial necessity.

A once frightened child
shy of dim rooms and
blue-gray granny smells
I extended my cheek to a kiss
my arms to a hug --
my arms cannot reach far enough.

-Marilynne

The Sabine Women Return



those barren white winters
hide undreamed-of growing
and the undreamed of slowly
gathers substance and colour
and slowly the frozen hoary mouths
trade warm words and finally
loving with couchant earth
and warming sisters and
suddenly
warring with a winter
that knew nothing of or
ignored their discontent.

the raped have come back.
solstice laugh heals the hymen
fills all cavities
hollow spaces and contrived interludes
calamities natural and unnatural.

EVE

conscience of my sex
manmade creation
you were betrayed by gods
and lonely men
who sought comfort
in power
and the mystification
of our womanliness

your sisters
fared better
one giving breath to the wind
the other
begetting woman of woman

misrepresented
your enlightenment
disclosed the tragedy
of pandora's box

enclosing my mind
guarded by superstition
and presumed morality.

Marilynne

enter those angry, hurt, subjugated,
humiliated,
those cossetted, adored and adorned.
leave icy pedestals by the door
the lady of lourdes bids you good health
and the walking do not need mysterious crutches.

and beware, you
unctuous patriarchs and hired sons
for your falcons
are being routed from cultural eyrie.
most of your number
choose to leave glowering
and without dignity
so silly dickie birds
you leave with your holy bums pinched
foreskins tied in knots
salt on your tall, erect tails.

old man winter
the joke unfolds with the seasons.
we are back again
and our strength multiplies with memory.
our vigilant fires will put a chill
in your skull and your bones
you will learn to cross yourself
before passing this thawed threshold
for the earth's benediction is not
on those who have bled it
or who have violated its recesses.

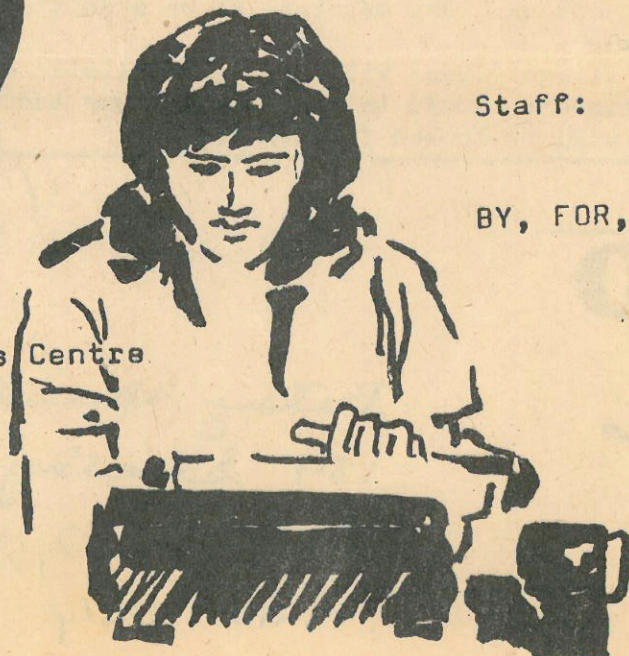
Maureen



The Guelph Women's Centre

35 Priory Street
823-5450

Send mail to:
P.O. Box 1162,
Guelph



Staff: Betsy, Marilynne, Arlene,
Lizzie and Maureen.....

BY, FOR, & ABOUT WOMEN

VIRAGO

P.O. Box 1162,
Guelph

CALENDAR of events

AN EVENINGS ENTERTAINMENT

Woman: to
Hey! Have you heard about June 1st?

We're going to have AN EVENINGS ENTERTAINMENT.

Well there will be a play by the HAMILTON FEMINIST THEATRE, poetry read by ZAN, and songs by Cindy MICHENER and some others.

At the Guelph YM/YWCA in the All-Purpose Room.

Saturday June 1st at 7:30 pm.

Well we've made arrangements for child care in the building that evening.

There's going to be a bar and some of the women are getting some goodies together.

Woman: No. What's happening?

Oh ya--what kind of entertainment?

Where's this going to be?

When did ya say it is?

Well I usually have the kids Saturday you know.

Oh well, if I can get out on Saturday night I like to relax and be social.

Sounds fine. Hey maybe I'll see you there!

STATUS OF WOMEN TALKS:

Friday, May 24th.....AN HISTORICAL LOOK AT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY. Dr. Mary Rogers, speaker.....8:00p.m. at the Guelph Y..

Tuesday, May 28th,WOMEN AND THE LAW.....Margaret Black, Barrister, Streetsville...main speaker.....8:00 p.m. at the Guelph Y.

Friday, May 31st,...WOMEN AND LEGISLATIVE ACHIEVEMENT...Clara Merritt, Spker., 8:00 p.m. at the Guelph Y...

Tuesday, June 4th...WOMEN: PRESENT AND FUTURE.... Dr. Norma Bowen, Speaker.... 8:00 p.m. at the Guelph Y....

This current issue of Virago is a presentation solely of the literary, graphic and artistic work of women in Guelph. Every other month, a literary issue of Virago will be published; it is hoped that any and all women who have created poems, short stories, graphics or anything else will share them with us. Any material to be submitted can be sent to P.O. Box 1162, Guelph.

The next issue of Virago (June) will be a journalistic one. Any articles, ideas or opinions should be sent to the same address. Your work is welcomed and will be looked forward to.

virago

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