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# Northern Woman Journal

March 1990 Volume 12 No. 3 Thunder Bay, Ontario

**REFLECTING**

**RECOLLECTING**

**RE-COLLECT-ING**

## EDITORIAL

On December 6, 1989, fourteen women were murdered in Montreal. Bursting into a classroom at L'Ecole Polytechnic at L'Universite de Montreal, ordering the separation of women and men, a man shouted "I hate Feminists" and opened fire on the women. The carnage continued throughout other areas of L'Ecole Polytechnic, and when the man finally turned the gun on himself 14 women were dead.

The violence against women did not stop in Montreal. In Thunder Bay, the feminist community was subjected to a more subtle form of hatred.

Throughout the country Canadians mourned the Montreal tragedy. Privately and publicly vigils were held. In Thunder Bay, at least three vigils were held - a public vigil organized by the United Church, a University sponsored vigil, and a woman-only vigil coordinated by Northern Women's Centre.

The decision of Northern Women's Centre (a necessary and important decision that we support absolutely) to hold a woman-only vigil unleashed a vitriolic and sustained women-hating attack by some local media, unmatched in recent memory.

The need for women to gather in a safe place to mourn, to share our grief, to sustain ourselves and each other, and to engender the strength to carry on without fear, was denied to the women of Thunder Bay.

Our attempt to quietly honour the Montreal women whose lives were taken was invaded by the greed, avarice and sexism of some local media. The relentless need of capitalist patriarchy to invalidate, diminish, invade and control women - battered us - but left us much wiser.

Now weeks after the Montreal tragedy our grief is not abated.

The healing process is only beginning. To assist this healing process this Northern Woman Journal provides a vehicle for women to articulate our pain, our grief, our rage. Many of the submissions are written anonymously as we believe while our feelings, our responses, are unique to each of us, they are also universal. We offer this Journal to the women of Northwestern Ontario to break our isolation and to empower all.



Grief Links Us.  
Drawing by  
Gayla Chernovsky

In recent weeks we have been painfully reminded that we live, not only in a sexist society, but also in a racist society.

Those of us who strive to make Thunder Bay a more just and humane community feel a deep sense of shame that our City Council (by a 9-4 vote) chose to pass an "English only" resolution. The Northern Woman Journal commends Councillors Kennedy, Miller and Laakonen and Mayor Masters, for their opposition to this repugnant and regressive action.

The claim that the resolution was motivated by economics defies logic, as Ontario's Bill 8 does not require municipalities to provide (or finance) bilingual services.

While only the individuals involved can define their particular motivation in supporting this resolution, the effect of Council's action has been to give credibility and licence to the bigotry and intolerance that is now being verbalized - in the workplace, in school, on the street - throughout our community.

That great damage has been done to our community, its reputation, and our psyche, cannot be discounted. A very thin veneer lies over the ugly face of racism.

We can only hope that the Thunder Bay experience will encourage us, individually and collectively, to examine, confront and eradicate, the racism within our society, our community and ourselves.



I am a woman committed to a politics of transliteration, the methodology

of a mind stunned at the suddenly possible shifts of meaning - for which like amnesiacs

in a ward of fire, we must find words or burn.

-Olga Broumas,  
"Artemis"

## WHY?

WHY did fourteen women have to die in the prime of their life: because of a time? a place? a choice of career? WHY?

As the pain numbs, I am left with the question WHY. Not why Marc Lepine chose to murder 14 young women; he left that message in the wake of his destruction. But WHY society chose not to believe him. WHY would they not hear his vengeful blaming of women and feminists for his failures? WHY they chose not to question further? Simply to label him mad. Close the book. WHY the fear in examining his hateful motive? Could it have been that to enter the debate may have caused a floodgate of other such blame and hate. A hate that society does not want to acknowledge could exist.

WHY did men and women alike struggle so hard to distance this act from other acts of violence against women? Isolate it; not acknowledge it in the spectrum of violence; so horrendous, so unbelievable, impossible that it happened; impossible that it could ever happen again.

WHY the backlash against the women's vigil? WHY did many assume that men had a right to invade women's private grief and prayer? WHY was the energy spent attacking the women's vigil and not spent supporting and comforting at the other vigils which were held? WHY was gaining control of the women's vigil more appropriate than sharing the loss; each in their own way? WHY were some of us frightened for the vigil; for the women in the circle of grief?

WHY do we believe that we have exposed violence against women and children, that attitudes are changing and that society is responding? WHY when we look for answers, do we find only questions?

## WHY?



## REFLECTING

Why is there such hostility to feminism?" she asked me. "Why?" There is pain in that question, and I search for the best way to answer. Feminism makes such good sense to her - my bright and happy young friend.

It is mid-summer and we are enjoying our annual visit. My friend is full of news. She has just completed her Masters degree; several years of summer employment has resulted in a permanent job, an interesting career, with opportunity to enhance her creativity; and she is soon to undertake a permanent commitment with her much-loved partner. Life is good - the future looks rosy.

"What really bothers me" she says "is the sexism I find at work. I didn't expect it out in the 'adult world'. It was really bad at university, from both the students and the faculty, but I thought I'd be done with it when I finished school."

How do I tell her gently that sexism is universal? How do I explain that a commitment to feminism is a struggle

that she is just beginning a struggle that will absorb her strength for the rest of her days. How do I empower my beautiful young friend? For indeed, feminism is a life long commitment. A commitment that is hard --- is bone wearying. But, that it is the only life worth living.

In the difficult weeks since December 6th, I have thought many times of my bright, young feminist friend.

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I don't normally watch television before 10 p.m. But this evening I am doing craft work - making Christmas presents - and I switch the tv on, paying it only casual attention. Programming is interrupted. News bulletin. A mass murder has occurred in Montreal. A man with a gun has stormed into a university classroom - separated the women and the men. No further details presently available. More news will be forthcoming on the National.

I don't need the National to know who has been slaughtered. I know.

The news details the massacre, I listen calmly. I am totally without emotion. It is the same emotional void I experienced when I got the call to tell me my closest friend had died. I had known for some time that the call would come ... much as I tried to block the knowledge. And here it was.

Only much later did the grief and rage erupt.

A friend calls. I find it almost impossible to talk about Montreal. I can't ease her pain. I can't find the words.

My panic erupts at 3 a.m. A startling nightmare shattering my normally peaceful sleep. (The panic nightmare continues nightly for many weeks.

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I am in my kitchen preparing breakfast. Suddenly, tears flow down my face. I let the tears fall gently -- until it is time to force myself to leave for work. So I wash my swollen eyes, and with halting steps leave the (relative) safety of my home. (This unexpected breaking into tears happens every morning until I leave town eighteen days later.)

At work, the phone is ringing as I walk in the door. It is a local media representative wanting to know what is being done about a vigil. I later learn that every feminist organization in the community received similar calls. The local media are quick to explain the Montreal massacre as a random act of an insane man - to suggest a connection to societal violence against women is "overreacting". Did the same media ask themselves why they assumed the feminist community would organize a vigil?

I face a heavy work load - have major responsibilities to carry out. It is enormously difficult to tackle even the simplest task. I barely go through the motions. A colleague comes by. "I can't do any work" she admits. "I just can't do anything." I know. I know.

I receive a call from a local minister informing me of the vigil being held at Westminster Church. I help publicize this information.

I learn the Women's Centre is coordinating a woman-only vigil. I feel so relieved. Even though I still find it enormously difficult to speak about the massacre, even with my best friend, I have a tremendous need to mourn this tragedy with other women.

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I relive and relive incidences of violence I have experienced. Memories long buried leap unexpectedly to the forefront of my mind.

I feel, again, the slap across my face from the teenage date who I refused to "obey".

I hear again the ugly words - bitch, broad, cunt - from men who were threatened by my strength, my competence. I hear again, the venom in their voices.

I relive, I relive,

I feel the cold - cold knife against my throat.

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I worry about the women who, while still grieving the Montreal tragedy, must face hostile male environments. Especially the young women, the university and high school women.

Daily we hear about incidences of threats ... at universities, at work places, at the offices of women's organizations, women's centres. I talk to a friend, a woman who has displayed courage in publicly challenging men to examine their violence. She has been harassed and trashed. She tells me of her friend who has received a death threat. She mentions the shit that was dumped on her door-step. And her refusal to allow a national television crew to film her reaction to this. The weariness in her voice overwhelms me.

So many women are hurting. I am hurting so bad I cannot help anyone.

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The stress settles in my back, restricting my physical mobility. I decide I need therapy. I am lying naked, electrodes probing and pulsating my aching back. Trying to maximize the healing process, I am jolted to hear doctor pronounce "I do not approve women holding a woman-only vigil. This is a man who would proclaim an abhorrence of violence. Does he or does he not understand the violence has just imposed on me?"

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Sunday's paper contains front page headlines of our woman-vigil. A reporter, playing the role of a grieving woman, invades our grief, our healing. Her article, awkwardly, attempts to sensationalize. It is hard to believe I attended the same event.

I think of the dozens of times over the past fifteen years that we have asked this newspaper to cover a woman's event/issue, and their regular refusal ... their dismissal of women's issues as 'news'.

The hatred oozing from the newspaper's editorials wears me down. Why do I stay in this misogynist town? I must not let depression overcome me. I must take action.

I write a letter to the editor. I point out men's hatred of women, both subtle and overt, and the promotion of this hatred by their editorial privilege.

I do not mail this letter.

I rationalize and rationalize my decision not to send the letter. Eventually, I force myself to acknowledge my fear.

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I was over 40 years of age when I first faced life-threatening violence. I survived - without serious physical harm. But I - my life - was changed irrevocably.

It was the first time I experienced intense physical fear. The kind of fear thousands, millions of women around the world endure as part of their daily lives. Can you understand it without experiencing it? I doubt it. My danger lasted minutes. Many women's danger lasts a lifetime. The potential of such danger faces every woman every day of her life.



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I know I must take action, somehow revive a strength to go forward. And so I begin to write. For me the greatest healing process. I pick up the pen. The words begin to flow. And the healing begins.

And then, the Americans invade.

**"Every time we fight for a basic human right for ourselves, a right that should be ours simply because we exist, we are told that we are infringing on someone else's rights - that WE are morally corrupt for wanting a decent life, control over our own destinies, and freedom from exploitation and violence. We must recognize this as a patriarchal tactic to keep us on the defensive - to intimidate us, to send us home, to silence us." Kathleen Barry in Take Back the Night**

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## NEVER SAFE!

When they were young girls, I seemed always to be telling my daughters to call home to let me know where they were, who they were with, where they were going and when they would be home. Secretly it was to be sure they were 'safe'. They complained but they called and they were always 'safe'.

On December 7, 1989 at 9:00 a.m. my daughter called me from her campus terrified and devastated. She was no longer 'safe'. As a student she was horrified at the killings of young women at the University of Montreal campus. She was scared the same thing could happen to her and other young women on her campus.

"Why? What do I tell young women who are coming to me? What can we do?"

We talked about the history of male violence against women and girls in the home, at parties, on the street, in the workplace, on campus. All horrendous acts of violence performed one at a

time, every day, over hundreds of years and if not condoned by all of society certainly never legislated against. Montreal was a personification of this violence.

How can a saddened mother, an angry feminist quietly talk to a terrified daughter? How can a grieving mother for those 14 other mothers assure a daughter 1,500 miles away?

How can we justify years of protecting our daughters as children only to send them off as young women to a world of violence?

How can we justify telling them they are as good as their brothers and male friends - they can become whatever they want to become - only to have them experience harassment in their workplaces and violence in their lives?

We must continue to tell them they are wonderful, capable and now courageous women.

We must also retell them of the work and struggles of their mothers and our mothers' work and struggles against male violence against women.

We must encourage - demand - that they join us collectively in this struggle so that hopefully they will not have to worry the same worries about their daughters in a new generation.

We must continue to be patient and loving and hopeful and courageous and allow them to spend their lives as normally as possible; when we allow them to spend the night with friends from elementary and high school, when we send them off to campuses at the beginning of a new life or the end of the holidays at home, when we say goodbye to them when they leave with a new career or husband to begin their adult lives.

Must we instill a new fear in their lives that they will never be 'safe' again?

I think of a poster I have. I have always pondered the meaning of it.

The poster says:

I saw a woman sleeping. In her sleep she dreamt *life* stood before her and she held in each hand a gift. In the one hand LOVE and in the other FREEDOM. And she said to the woman, "Choose". And the woman waited long and she said, "Freedom". And *life* said, "Thou had'st well chosen, if thou had'st said love I would have given thee that thou did'st ask for and I would have gone from thee and returned to thee no more. Now the day will come when I shall return. In that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand."

I heard the woman laugh in her sleep. Olive Schreiner

I wonder when the day will come that *life* returns to bear the gifts of FREEDOM for and LOVE of women.....



### 1990 YEAR OF THE GIRL CHILD

At a recent international congress, seven South Asian governments declared 1990 The Year of the Girl Child. The governments of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives will undertake a year long campaign to educate their populations, particularly men, on the value of daughters. This campaign will stress the need to educate girls, feed them properly and recognize their important economic contribution to family and community life. In these countries there is a high rate of female infanticide. Girls are often viewed as a liability, partly because of dowry obligations upon marriage and are not held in esteem. This campaign is a bold step forward for women in these rural developing countries.



### FIGHT BACK

As odd as it may seem to some people, I deal with many things in my life through music. Because music is such a big part of my life, when I am faced with a crisis, when I am struggling or celebrating, I often use music as a way to access my own feelings. As many "fans" of womyn's music have done before, we all identify with the songs which identify with us at our own particular points in time. The songs that touch us most perhaps we have heard at a time when we really needed to hear them written and performed by other women. Such songs affirm our experiences and serve to bond many women who are experiencing similar feelings.

My reaction to Montreal was one of shock and horror, although I am never thoroughly surprised at the scope of men's actions when it comes to violence against women. I was quickly able to see beneath the surface and discover the deeper significance of the shootings. The aftermath of explanations, justifications, etc. that women had to provide in order to have women-only vigils and in general do what was necessary to survive further discouraged, frustrated and angered us.

Like many other times before in my life when I have listened to songs for their healing power, my feelings

crystallized on one song. Out of this horrible tragedy, I have re-discovered an empowering song which I can "tap into" for strength and then use as my own. Holly Near's FIGHT BACK (from *Imagine My Surprise*, Redwood Records, 1979) is that song.

The Montreal tragedy and the reaction to it are blatant examples of the woman-hating society we live in. What is even more tragic are the daily, "less noticed" examples - perhaps not even reported in our local newspaper or reported to anyone. Rape, battering, pornography are all part of this tragedy.

The lyrics to FIGHT BACK reminded me, at the time when I needed it most, that I as a woman have strength. We as women are empowered.

FIGHT BACK (Holly Near)

By day I lived in terror,  
By night I lived in fright,  
For as long as I can remember  
A lady don't go out at night  
A lady don't go out at night.  
But I don't accept the verdict,  
It's an old one anyway,  
"Cause now-a-days a woman  
Can't even go out in the middle of the day  
Can't even go out in the middle of the day.

And so we've got to FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers  
FIGHT BACK  
We can't make it alone  
FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers  
Together we can make a safe home

Women all around the world  
Every colour, religion and age,  
One thing we've got in common  
We can all be battered and raped  
We can all be battered and raped

And so we've got to FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers  
FIGHT BACK  
We can't make it alone,  
FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers  
Together we can make a safe home

Some have an easy answer,  
Buy a lock and live in a cage,  
But my fear is turning to anger  
And my anger is turning to rage  
And I won't live my life in a cage

And so we've got to FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers,  
FIGHT BACK  
We can't make it alone,  
FIGHT BACK  
In large numbers  
Together we can make a safe home

had heard of the community vigil to be held that night at the United Church. One replied he never would go to a church anyway.

That evening the abusive and threatening calls started at Anna's house. At the University four men approached her and called her a "fucking bitch". The women at the Centre were under incredible stress from being the target of so much rage. They were dreadfully hurt and angry at the misrepresentation on the radio and later on local talk shows and television.

#### SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

The local newspaper expressed it clearly. The shootings were caused by "the divisions created in Canadian society by the mere presence of the women's movement". By insisting on barring men from their vigil the Northern Woman's Centre "invites the very negative attitudes against women it strives to erase".

The story made the national media. Almost all reports omitted the fact that there were two other vigil services in Thunder Bay much less describe the Centre's involvement with the other services. The impression created was that in Thunder Bay the women had decided not to allow men to mourn. The language used was instructive. The men were "barred", "denied entry" or "not welcome". The impression created was that there were dozens of men who wanted to attend the Woman's Centre vigil but were unable to do so. In fact we received no calls from men who wanted to attend our services. Nevertheless, the Sault Star headlined Thunder Bay Vigil Excludes Men (once again no mention of other services. No Men Allowed at Ontario Vigil thundered the Toronto Star also carefully omitting any reference to the other memorial services and forgetting their editorial approval given the day before to women holding memorial services. Men were "actually barred" a later Star article stated leaving the impression that men clambered to get in at the door as women organizers barred their way. These impressions were absolutely false and showed a shameful lack of responsibility on the part of the media not to mention a shameful forgetting of what the vigil service was supposed to be about.

"Even if Brian Mulroney were to turn up in Thunder Bay he would be turned away", said the local paper. Others carried on in the same vein, one letter writer saying if the husbands and fathers of the dead arrived, they too would be barred.

A spokesman for the 'other side' was soon found. A local alderman was quoted as saying that our actions were "mind terrorism". He was quoted (without further explanation) by almost every major newspaper and news broadcaster.

Although Anna's explanations were usually quoted correctly, it was as if she hadn't spoken. She might as well have wrapped her words in a rock and thrown them into Lake Superior. No credence of any sort was given to women's desires or needs. We were thundered against in the press and on the radio. The local talk show host claimed he had thirty five male callers who were angry that men were excluded. The men objected: "Why must we be associated with the crazed killer?" And there is the nub of the matter. The callers to the talk line were not interested in attending a service; they believe the very fact of women getting together indicated they were being accused of the crime. They interpreted not being invited as an insult. Clearly, they believed it was their right to go wherever they wanted.

We now began to get calls from feminists across the country wanting to know what was going on. Again the patient explanations and again almost all women said that by talking to us they had a different picture from the one they had picked up in the media. But in general, by now, the shift in focus from women's pain to men's perception of loss of rights was complete. As the same media mentioned just a day previously on December 8, we do indeed live in a very misogynous society.

#### THE BACKLASH

I do not want to give the impression that a memorial service in Thunder Bay created a backlash. As I have mentioned at the start of this article, the backlash was building from the beginning as shown by Barbara Frum's interview and the Montreal talk show.

Incidents - some of them terrifying were happening across the country. University of Toronto employee brought a handgun to work and made favourable comments about the killings. The virulent reaction to our memorial service was caused by the building backlash, not visa versa.

The elements in the backlash shifted rapidly from 1) Frum's contention that women were not the target to 2) suggestions from many media sources that the murders were just the work of an irrational madman without wider significance to 3) the contention that radical feminists were using this tragedy as a platform against men.

By December 13, The Star, again forgetting their previous commitment to fighting misogyny wrote an article about 'the confusion' caused by the killings and stated some men "find the entire feminist analysis of the mass murders irrelevant, if not personally offensive".

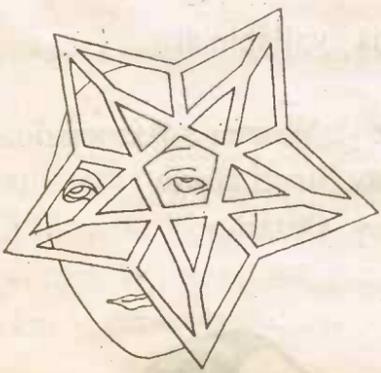
The same article mentioned a memorial service without comment (Star, Dec. 13). As one Centre member so wisely put it, when men get together is accepted it is for a serious purpose when women get together it is to exclude men.

I want to make only one more comment on the backlash. That was Mike Duffy show aired on Sunday, December 10 and taped in Thunder Bay Friday, December 9. This show reveals a further mutation in the backlash. Anna agreed to be the Centre's representative and be televised at the local TV station and answer Duffy's questions through a telephone hook-up. I went with her moral support.

The show opened with the usual questions about why Thunder Bay had decided not to allow men to mourn victims of the massacre. Anna patiently explained once again that there was a community service open to all on Friday night. This was passed over in silence. (After the taping, Duffy said he was not aware of the other service in Thunder Bay and said it was a shame that this fact had not been more widely publicized!)



Once again as she had done for newspapers and radio hosts, Anna reiterated the reasons for a woman only vigil as well as a community vigil. I knew that in her mind, as in my mind, was the memory of the emotion and distress that women felt and were still feeling; but how to make people understand, believe it, want to help. She talked about emotional scarring and how people, both men and women, tend to underestimate it. She talked about how the slayings had triggered intense fear in women who had experienced violence. She talked about the need to be supportive of women in pain and that if men really



want to be supportive they should do that in a way women ask them to do.

Again it was as if she hadn't said a word. No response came from Duffy. Instead he called Thunder Bay the "emerging symbol of polarization between the sexes". He noted that we had been labeled mind terrorists. At one point he said something very revealing. "Surely the object of this whole exercise (the vigil) was to draw men and women together." Having created polarization, having heightened misogynist tendencies around us, the media now was expecting us to readjust our mourning to fit in with their definition of what mourning should be in order to solve the problem they had created. No better example of the power of the media and the power of definition (the power to create) can be found.

Duffy's questions became more and more aggressive and these aggressive questions (but not all the answers) were edited out for the showing. Wasn't Anna doing what Marc Lepine did by separating men and women? (So absurd and insulting a question! We hope to heal women; Lepine wanted to kill them. There seems to me to be a fundamental difference here.) Aren't your actions paralleling those of Lepine, Duffy asked. And so on.

## AFTERMATH

The memorial service at the United Church was well attended by the people of Thunder Bay. Many Centre members attended, many with husband and boyfriends. It was a beautiful and dignified expression of grief.

The next night about sixty women attended the candlelight vigil put on by the Woman's Centre. Because of the intense feeling of powerlessness and silencing some women had experienced in their past and others were experiencing in their present, it was decided to let women speak. However the facilitator, Gwen O'Reilly, cautioned that the negative publicity should be left aside and the participants should concentrate on the purpose of the vigil. We sang. Candles were lit around the circle. One woman read a beautiful poem she had written for the occasion, another sang *The Lord is My Shepherd*, another read the names of the dead women. Like many others I sobbed. Letters to the editor were read. A collection for a memorial was started. We sang again - *We Shall Overcome* - which seemed to fit exactly.

About three quarters through the ceremony a slight young woman slipped out of the door. I was in the last row and because the ceremony was emotional and many women were crying, I decided to go after her and make sure she was all right. I met her on the front steps. She said it was a moving ceremony and that she too had suffered from abuse. I asked her again is she was feeling all right and she said she was fine and that she was a reporter from the local paper. Then she walked away.

Her article was misleading and negative. It was a collage of details (some of them false) which in sum made the ceremony seem to be both ludicrous and hostile. Reverend Prinselaar of Nipigon protested the Chronicle Journal's coverage. He wrote "the critique of the Northern Woman's Centre's decision to have a vigil....points to a situation far more grave than even the slaying of the 14 women in Montreal. Behind the article lies the assumption that men know better, even when it comes to the expression of grief. To make the participation of men an issue of 'justice' or 'rights' is a serious

distortion of the issue". He went on to describe the newspaper's description of the service as lacking "in the most basic ethical standards". He concluded that "the patent male chauvinism, paternalism and need for power even in a situation as tragic as this one illustrates how deep the roots of violence go". The editor followed this letter with a long defence and stated the reporter at our vigil could not ask questions because she was "concerned for her safety". Sometimes the mind just boggles. Nevertheless, our lovely gentle vigil was misrepresented as some kind of belligerent rant against men.

Fortunately, we received many supportive letters in the press. Also the local men's groups supported us by holding a supporting vigil outside the hall at the same time.

As the days went on, a spate of articles appeared blaming feminists for 'using' the killings. For example, Jeanni Read in the Vancouver Province (Dec. 10) claims that, although feminists were "impeccably correct in their societal critique". we were "using" the dead women as symbols and so dehumanizing them. There seems to be little real logic in that stance.

One also sees the constant attempt to differentiate between women and feminists. According to this definition, feminists are extremists while women, on the other hand, are not extremists because "they don't make an issue of things" ie they are silent.

Melanie Randall (Globe and Mail, Dec. 12) related the mechanisms of reaction. She noted among other examples that as early as the day after the killings CFPL-TV (London) termed a rally at the university as a "feminist diatribe". She says conditions have been created in which it is now "inappropriate" or "extremist" to view the killings as an act of violence against women. "How can we possibly account for this chilling display of threatening and hateful behaviour.....? Nevertheless Randall is optimistic and hopes that feminists, progressives and pro-feminist men can work together towards an equal, peaceful world.

I hope she is right.

**BREAKING FREE: A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE TO ABORIGINAL FAMILY VIOLENCE**

Ontario Native Women's Association has recently released the above report. The results of the study reveals the depth of violence and the serious deterioration of the embodiment of the Aboriginal Family over the years.

In summary:

>> eight out of every ten Aboriginal women have been abused or assaulted or can expect to be abused or assaulted

>> children are also highly victimized at a rate of four out of every ten

>> the batterer was identified as mostly the husband at an incidence rate of 84%

>> in 82% of the cases, it is the woman who leaves the home; seldom does the batterer leave

>> there is a serious lack of specifically trained personnel and resources in the area of incest, sexual and physical abuse counselling, especially at the community level

>> 82% of the respondents said that the abuser should be charged; only 4% said "no" to the charges being laid

>> there are no distinguishable, culturally-appropriate services in Ontario directed at the batterer and only a few native-run crisis shelters that exist for native women and their children.

A quote at the beginning of the report speaks to all of us, in all cultures.

"Woman is the centre of the wheel of life. She is the heartbeat of the people. She is not just in the home, but she is in the community, she is the Nation.

One of our Grandmothers.

The woman is the foundation on which Nations are built. She is the heart of her Nation. If that heart is weak the people are weak. If her heart is strong and her mind is clear then the Nation is strong and knows its purpose. The woman is the centre of everything."

From The Woman's Part, Art Solomon, Ojibwa Elder.

The report is available at:

Ontario Native Women's Association  
101-115 May Street North  
Thunder Bay, Ontario  
P7C 3N8

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**A Tribute to Liz**

An Inspiration of growth and maturity  
She will live in me for eternity  
Through her I will stand strong  
No longer will a man do me wrong

Roses nodding in the breeze stemming her strength.  
Her accomplishments we all know at great length  
The velvety red petals glimmering in her flame red hair  
The leaves growing out, the kindness she had to share  
Thorns revealing tribulations she had to fight  
She stands in a meadow, such a beautiful sight.

Her stance, poise, smile, her face  
No one more beautiful could take her place

In her last weeks, she had freedom, respect and pride  
Dignity was something she'd never hide

In the wee hours of the night  
She bared her soul, I felt her fright  
There's peace in me knowing we're  
Determined to no longer live in fear.

Rita Henley

Elizabeth was a Northwestern woman who was killed by her husband in 1988.



# BUSINESS AS USUAL

By Josie Wallenius

At about the same time that the 14 women in Montreal were brutally killed because they were simply women, thousands of women, men and children were killed in Panama because they were simply 'the other'.

Both terrible events should have brought Canada to a halt, but neither did. Business went on as usual.

However, a shudder did pass over Canada because of the massacre in Montreal, while the deaths in Panama caused only a ripple.

Why?

And I ask this question to women in particular.

Was it because we FELT more for the women in Montreal? Was it because it might be more dangerous to shudder about Panama, or have the M16s\* done their job more effectively than we care to understand?

(\*television propaganda)

Trying to come to grips with this question, I remember a paragraph in Maria Miles' book Patriarchy and Capital Accumulation on a World Scale. She writes, "In the course of time it became clear to me that the confusions in the feminist movement world wide will continue unless we understand the women question in context of the global divisions of labour under the dictates of capital accumulation. The subordination and exploitation of women, nature AND THE COLONIES (my emphasis) are the pre-condition for the continuation of this model."

So I wonder about this great lack of protest among the feminist movement on the subjugation of the colonies.

Talking to a friend about this, I was told that a lot of women sincerely don't understand the connections. I would like to believe this is true, that it is this simple. I remember a Chilean woman telling me that after she had spoken to a group from Amnesty International she had a bizarre experience. She had explained very well the reasons why Allende was overthrown, and after a woman came up to her and said, "Never mind dear, now you live in Canada."

So I've written a story. It sometimes works when facts and figures don't.

## THE THREE NIECES

AND

## THE PLANTATION OWNER

Once there was a street with many houses. Of the houses in the street, some looked drab, some even drabber, and some were being curtained off because it seemed as though the drab had got to them. However, the house I am going to tell of looked apparently not drab at all, or so it seemed to many.

In the house apparently not drab at all, lived a white woman with a lot of children. Most of them were hers, daughters and sons, but some were nieces and nephews, children of uncles and aunts. In this house also lived adopted children from the drabber houses.

The woman was the wife of the Plantation Owner and all the children of the houses his children. The adopted children of course had different mothers, but they had the same father. The adopted children also knew about their father, at least most of them did, but they kept quiet about him for several reasons. However, the daughters and sons, nieces and nephews knew not about their father, and they knew not for an important reason. More of that later.

This house was kept apparently not drab by the Plantation Owner because this house above all was where he wanted to keep some semblance of order. It was his home after all, and he came home nights, though very late, usually when his children were in bed.



The wife very cleverly kept this semblance of order because of course it was in her interests too, this semblance of order. Her main ploy to keep this order was to put M16s in all the rooms of the children for them to watch when they weren't playing. Well, that was a very clever ruse too. From infancy her children were taught to feel that play was work, even struggling work, and at that time, if anybody had told them their work was really play, that anybody would have had a punch in the face.

Now, the big reason that the children of the apparently drab house were forced to work so hard at play and watch the M16s was that they were to be kept too busy to think. Above all, to be kept too busy to wonder what their ancestry was, and who their immediate father was. Both of these questions were questions never, never to be asked, because if asked, it would be highly dangerous to the Plantation Owner.

Now, the first two groups to get uneasy in the house were, one, the daughters and nieces, and two, the adopted children. At that time, not realizing they had all things in common, they got uneasy for different reasons.

The adopted children still had this sneaky love for the house where they had been born, even if it had been centuries ago, and watched the goings on in the drabber houses with sinking hearts. The daughters and nieces were uneasy for a different reason. Something was going on in their own house. It was becoming clear to the daughters and the nieces that their mother favoured the sons and nephews, and what was worse that the sons and nephews seemed to drink this favour up without a qualm.

As they began to get more and more fed up at this state of affairs, they felt something curious stir in their bones, as though there were memories actually in their legs as well as their heads, and they began to speak up. The sons and nephews and the mother got frightened and one day a son killed a daughter because he was so terrified of what the daughters and nieces were becoming and going back to.

Now, coincidentally or not (and you all know about coincidences) the same night the daughter was killed, the Plantation Owner visited the mother. He was very busy at this time and only had time for fleeting visits. The daughters saw him because they were up late grieving for their sister. Usually they were too exhausted to be up late; exhausted from their forced play, or in front of their M16s or sitting haunted-like at meetings wondering why things were getting worse, and wondering why they felt like a bunch of cells that would disintegrate if they STOPPED. Of course the daughters and nieces KNEW about the Plantation Owner, but they had no idea he had any relationship with their mother. Actually, they quite liked their mother, give or take a Trade Deal or so, because she had this uncanny knack of keeping the house apparently not drab.

However, the memories were stirring in their bones as I said, and the next day three of the sisters decided to go and ask their mother who the Plantation Owner was to HER.

The next day the three sisters were not around. They had disappeared, something that up till now had only happened in the drabber houses as far as the sisters and nieces knew, though of course that was a mistaken idea as the Black Panthers and AIM could have told them.

The rest of the daughters and nieces noticed these missings and because these memories stirring were making them fearfully strong they sent a delegation of two daughters and two nieces to the mother.

"Where are our sisters," they enquired, more coldly than their mother had ever heard them speak before.

The mother was alarmed, she knew the old heritage of the young women and she became really terrified that they would ask now about their father, so she said, "Your sisters were terrorists and narco guerrillas, and of course communists, and this house does not need them any more than those houses out there", and she gestured out of the window with her jewelled fingers to the drabby houses. She thought that that would do the trick, as these children, like all of her children, had been brought up with the M16s.

However, bone memories are bone memories and bone memories always know a lie, so the daughters and the nieces took a day off from their struggling play and went to visit an adopted son in his room. He was in his room because adopted children had difficulty in this house even getting paid play. They went to his room where he was lying on his bed and reflecting, and said to him, "Who exactly IS the Plantation Owner?" He answered, "he is all of our father."

That night all of the nieces and daughters went into a room to plot. They argued. The M16s had done such a good job they couldn't come to any consensus at all. So they decided to keep watch and get more proof.

On the next full moon, three nieces, bold young women, stayed up late while the rest of the family were lulling in front of the M16s. They hid behind the back door and peeked out of the back window. They heard a whir and a Huey helicopter helped the Plantation Owner to the ground with great reverence. He was wearing a pinstripe suit with gold fountain pens sticking from all of his pockets. He was very fat. He walked around to the front of the house to the front door. He was very bold, very confident. One of the sons answered the door.

The nieces could see all this down the long corridor. They saw the Plantation Owner start up the back stairs. They heard his steps go straight and sure to their mothers bedroom which was right above the back door where they were hiding and they heard the bed begin to creak. It went on creaking for a long time.

The nieces threw up on the carpet, they just couldn't help it, and what's a bit of sick after all. The three nieces knew they could no longer pretend to not know what they knew, so they went to report to the other nieces and daughters.

This time there was no disagreement. They waited till the next full moon, like their great grandmothers used to do because this had always been the best time and there was too much at stake here and they had no intention of being burnt a it. The same three nieces went because that had heard the bed creak and felt the betrayal more keenly.

This time they waited behind the front door. The wife was waiting upstairs, they would deal with her later.

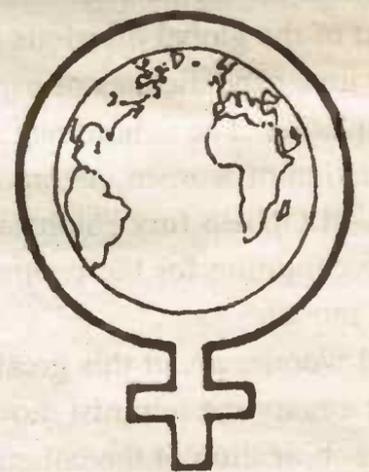
They heard the whir of the helicopter.

They waited.

They heard the marines laughing.

They heard the ponderous unmistakable steps of the Plantation Owner. He knocked. They opened the door, and the smell of blood from the drabby houses preceded him as he walked in.

The nieces stepped forward, their honed daggers lifted high, their mind and bodies at last in perfect harmony.



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Hone them on a stone,  
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**ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE**

The Conservative government has spent \$11 million on the Goods and Services Tax (a dangerous tax that is opposed by 80% of Canadians). Currently, \$14 million is being spent to advertise the GST. In 1990/91 the government had increased CSIS's budget by almost \$33 million and has allotted \$2.5 million for a guided missile project. As well, \$1.5 million has been provided in this year's budget for the Senate to build new committee rooms.

Yet, according to this Conservative government, they must cut \$1.6 million from women's programs "to reduce the deficit". Quite frankly, boys, we do not believe you.

Rather, we believe, this particular budget cut is clearly designed to silence our voices. Voices raised in criticism of the patriarchal system that oppresses women, that dismisses women's needs, that strives to ensure the continued subjugation of women.

80 women's centres across the country had their funding cut 100%.

Another focus of federal grant slashing, which we insist was deliberately chosen, was the elimination of grants to three outstanding Canadian feminist periodicals. Healthsharing, Canadian Women's Studies/Les Cashiers de la Femme, Resources for Feminist Research/Documentation sur la recherche feministe. Cut 100%. (a lead up perhaps to the GST which will destroy the majority of Canadian book and magazine publishing.....see NWJ Vol 12 #2.

The only magazine of its kind, Healthsharing gives voice to women's health issues, empowers women to reclaim control of their health, their bodies, their lives.

RFR/DRF - an important resource for academics, students and general readers alike, providing comprehensive information on new research, new insights, on the gamut of feminist issues.

And Canadian Women's Studies - an important magazine of great depth and quality. Published quarterly, each theme issue includes analysis, herstory, resources and literary work. A recent Native Women issue was wonderful and with many Northern Ontario Native women contributing has particular meaning for us.

The federal grant cuts place these magazines in a serious dilemma. It is our understanding that each of these vital publications is determined to survive. But we know the scenario they face. In order to maintain staff, office and quality of their production, new monies must be found. So the energy is diverted to fund-raising. Diverted from the planning, the analysis, the writing! (How adroit our governments are in diverting us from the essential task at hand.)

We say to our sister magazines **WE NEED YOU TO SURVIVE**. Do what you must. If you have to revert to a tabloid, put together in someone's basement - do so. But keep our **VOICES ALIVE!**

Northwestern Ontario women's groups, while not amongst those whose funding was totally abolished will also be hurt. Decade Council, Regional Day Care Committee and local women's organizations, which have received their prime funding from Secretary of State women's programs, all experienced grant reductions of 15 - 25% in 1989 and fear further reductions again this year. This erosion of funding forces groups into the merry-go-round of the "grants game" with other funding sources, and again diverts us from our real work.

That the government is determined to silence voices of its critics is further evidenced with the serious slashing of funds to Native groups. We are appalled that the Conservatives eliminated the Native Communications Program (NCP). We are particularly distressed about the implications these cuts have for Wawatay.



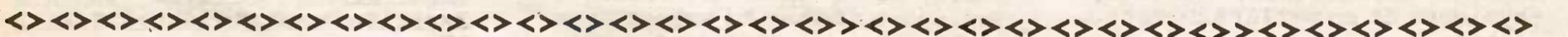
HEALTHSHARING

Wawatay Native Communications Society not only is an essential service in North-western Ontario, but is a nationally respected communications network. The loss of the NCP not only will silence Native VOICE, but according to Wawatay's executive director Lawrence Martin the elimination of Wawatay's life-saving trail ("bush") radio service also threatens lives. There is documented evidence that the trail radio program does save lives. To sever this life-saving program is absolutely reprehensible.

Northwestern Ontario will suffer from the present cuts to Secretary of State programs - in the case of the NCP disproportionately so. But behind our worry for the effects of these budget eliminations, reductions, lurks an even greater concern. There is cause to fear that the Conservative agenda is calling for the complete dismantlement of the department of Secretary of State. It is, of course, the Secretary of State department that supports disadvantaged groups.

Are we being too cynical when we suggest that the Conservative government is quite prepared to abandon any commitment to women, to Natives, to disabled people, to ethnic groups? We think not.

But, we are here to tell you, boys, **WE WILL NOT BE SILENCED.**



**A new decade to decide through:**

how we go on now  
must be better thought out,  
not fought out or  
bought out;  
with all the intuition and wisdom  
we have left out  
of our visions  
for so long.

*"Progress affects few. Only revolution can affect many." - Alice Walker (1979).*

*"I am a feminist because I feel endangered, physically and psychically, by this society and because I believe that the women's movement is saying that we have come to an edge in history when men - insofar as they are the embodiment of the patriarchal idea - have become dangerous to children and other living things, themselves included."*  
Adrienne Rich (1979)

arja lane

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