

**We Dreamed of
Another
Way of Being**

**Report of the
Lesbian Memory Keepers
Workshop**

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**Saturday Afternoon
November 13, 2004**

**Universalist Unitarian Church
on Inglis Street, Halifax**

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Preface

Weathering the Storm

Despite the first heavy snowfall of the winter, the Halifax Lesbian Community Memory Holders workshop brought together 45 women. As women came through the door, brushing snow off their parkas and stamping their feet, one person commented, “It’s just like the old days when women were ready to face all kinds of bad road and weather just to spend a few hours with a bunch of dykes.”

The afternoon passed quickly. Women had no difficulty connecting with the topic, or each other. Women joyfully greeted others they had not seen for a long time, in some cases, years. The long absence proved to be no barrier to having animated, laughter-filled discussions. The women who attended the workshop were visibly excited at making so many re-connections, and seemed very ready to reflect on what happened in the lesbian community in the 1970s and 1980s. The conversations throughout the afternoon were non-stop, energetic. The old Unitarian Church resonated with laughter.

Throughout the afternoon, women shared stories, stories, stories — and more stories. The stories



were spiked with phrases of affirmation (“Oh, I remember that!”), questions (“How *did* we find out about that?”) and (often) hilarity (“Remember when...?”). Women spoke openly and listened thoughtfully to each other, intent upon learning what they had “forgotten, or never knew.” As women moved from one discussion group to another, they wove together their memories — stitching together their individual recollections into the broader collective story of “what happened?”

Women remembered that lesbians contributed significantly to the early feminist movement in Halifax. As well, they remembered that lesbians were key in shaping the vision and political direction of many left and progressive organizations. Despite their vital political role, and often their leadership, lesbians in the early days were often invisible within these organizations, and lesbianism itself was feared. Women remembered publications that were distributed in brown paper bags because they included mention of “lesbians.” Events sponsored by mainstream organizations that mentioned the word “lesbian” were sometimes cancelled.

Given the fear surrounding lesbianism, it is small wonder that the lesbian community formed and came to play such a vitally important role in supporting women who were coming out. Growing numbers of lesbian events gave women a place to meet others socially and an opportunity to connect politically with other like-minded dykes. Over the years, a rich lesbian culture and community evolved.

Some who attended the workshop said it was difficult to separate their memories of “what happened” organizationally or politically from their personal coming-out stories. As one woman noted, “the personal was — *still is* — political.” Many affirmed that their coming-out was made possible because the lesbian community was so welcoming. The lesbian community was dynamic, creative, political, gutsy, and caring; women remembered growing together through times that were both painful and fun.

The women who attended the workshop remembered that the lesbian community of the ‘70s and ‘80s was a place of much activism. They also reflected back on it as a time of rich learning, both individually and at the level of the social movement. The wisdom of hindsight makes it now possible to see the valuable lessons learned in the midst of these early struggles. These lessons and skills — how to network, collective decision-making, creating a welcoming environment, and much more — are important and timely to reflect upon now, to assess if, and how, they might be of use to today, for the present and future generations of lesbians.

You are a part of us all — we are a part of you.

We are one — we always were. We always will be.

You have all shared who I am today — thank you!

We were once young together — with dreams — with anger — with passions — with fears — with hopes.

What we hoped most for was a place, a world where we could be — where we could love — where we could create a life for ourselves and the women we loved.

We have achieved that! Now we work for that for all people of the world and the world itself — there is still time and work to be done — dancing to be had.

Introduction: “Just Remember What You Can”

Diann Graham, a member of the Halifax Lesbian Memory Keepers Project, introduced the afternoon by welcoming participants and thanking those who made the event possible. Diann thanked the Dalhousie Women's Centre for providing a grant to assist with the rental of space, facilitating communication with participants, and preparation of a final report. She introduced the other members of the Committee: Brenda Richard, Shelley Finson, Ann Manicom, Bethan Lloyd, Diann Graham, and Debbie Mathers. Diann also thanked those who had volunteered to be recorders for the discussion groups and Carol Millett for video-recording the session. Diann thanked Debbie for contacting women by email to invite them to be part of the workshop.

Diann explained that approximately 75 women had been invited to the workshop. A number declined for a variety of reasons, including distance (some women are now living as far away as California and London). Ten who were not able to attend agreed to be interviewed by telephone. Diann readily admitted that the Committee had probably, inadvertently, forgotten some individuals and apologized in advance. She invited the women who were present to look at the list of invitees posted on the bulletin board in the hallway and urged them to write down the names of other women who should be included in the history project.

Diann provided a brief background to the workshop. The first discussion about the need for a history of the lesbian community in Halifax took place more than a year ago. *30 Years of Halifax*



Pride: A Souvenir History Magazine was produced for the 2003 Gay Pride Day, ostensibly offering a history of Halifax's gay community. However, as Diann explained, this booklet failed to offer any detail regarding the history of the lesbian community. In fact, little was said about the lesbian community, which played a key role in the wide variety of social and political activities that contributed to the gay movement. Diann reflected with several other lesbian friends at the time about the book's oversight and the need for an accurate accounting of the many contributions of lesbians to the community. Diann explained: "There was general agreement that if we don't write the lesbian history, it won't be there."

Six women involved in these early conversations were determined to get a history in place. They met regularly since January 2004 to organize in a collective manner to document this history.

Diann thanked the many women who had come to the workshop for helping to “do it together.”

So often we ran around and didn’t take the time to acknowledge the incredible work that was done. It’s fitting that we should start the workshop by saying thank you for your work, for all you did 20–30 years ago, for all the work, the tears, the anger, the healing. Thanks for all you created and gave then. If you weren’t there then, thank you for coming today. Thanks for sharing and coming today.

Bethan explained the format of the afternoon’s discussions. Two sessions of four small group discussions (at 2:00 and 3:15) were organized to maximize women’s opportunity to give input. Unfortunately, given the short time, women would have to choose which small groups to go into.

The format of the small group discussions was intended to facilitate as much information-sharing as possible in the limited time. Bethan encouraged those who might not have a chance, or feel comfortable, in expressing everything they wanted to say in the group, to put their ideas on paper and into the envelopes provided. She encouraged women not to get bogged down in clarifying details, such as when a particular event happened: “Don’t be concerned if you don’t have the exact date,” she said. “Ball park date is good! We can check on the exact dates later.” A facilitator was present in each group to help move the discussion forward. She made it clear that participants could request the recorders to stop taking notes at any time if they wished.

Bethan explained that recorders in each small group and the plenary session would take notes on flipchart and in detailed note-taking. The recording is important and serves several purposes: to capture the information women shared, to provide an archival document for future use, and to identify suggestions for follow-up. The notes would also be used by Janice in writing the final report.

Ann outlined the hoped-for goals for the afternoon workshops. Given the limited time, the Committee suggested that participants “focus on events and organizations — not the date I fell in love with someone.” Ann asked participants to devote the first ten minutes to going around the room to write on the brown paper posted on the wall particular dates or events of significance (from the late ’60s/early ’70s to present). Likewise in the small group discussions, Ann encouraged participants to “remember what you can” of events and organizations.



Defining a Community for Wild Womyn through Music, Art and Film

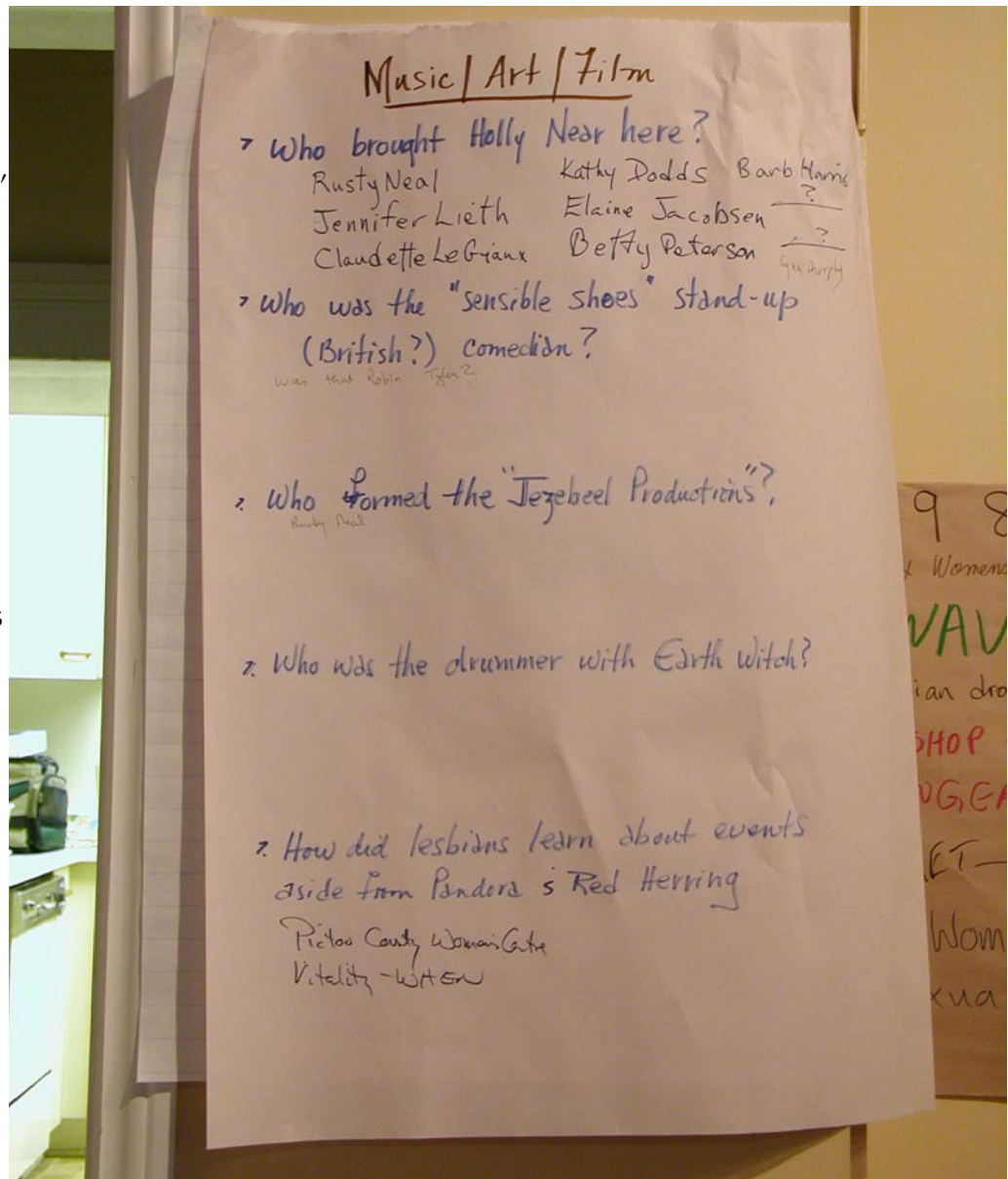
*Debbie M, Sara A, Darl W, Lois, Bethan L, Sue A. and others remember...
(based on notes taken by Jen D. and Jeanette S, Diane T., Lois L.)*

There were so many music and cultural events in the Halifax lesbian community over the years that it is difficult to remember them all. However, the topic "Organizing through Music, Art, and Film" spurred animated discussion among a large group of women who came together to talk about events they had attended, helped to organized, and heard about from others. They remembered the events being significant great fun at the time and significant to the building of the lesbian community.

Women in this discussion group raised a number of interesting questions regarding how events

were advertised to let women know what was happening. Women commented that, given the lack of email, information about upcoming events was circulated with remarkable efficiency. The myriad ways in which information got passed along was "an interesting phenomenon." Several women emphasized how important the network of communication was — both formal and informal — to lesbians who were both active in the community, and in the process of coming out.

Cultural events, music festivals, dances, and other social events were instrumental in providing women a space and opportunity to meet. Women



remembered the welcoming nature of these cultural events and felt this quality was vital in many women having the courage to come out. The sense of support and cohesion in the community was instrumental in helping those who were coming out to feel less isolated. One woman recalled how powerful this sense of welcoming was:

When I was coming out, I walked into a completely welcoming environment. There were all these things happening and that was really nice. A lot of people probably had to search for that in other places. But — it was all here! So for me, there was no transition. It was like, one day I was on one side — and the next day I was on the other.

Remembering the Secret Furies and Sensible Shoes

Although women said it was difficult to remember names and events that happened so long ago, each person's memories helped to trigger another's, thus helping to piece-together a patch-work picture of people, groups, and dates. Each question led to another, so that the questions themselves help to provide a snapshot of the events that took place:

"Who brought Holly Near here?"

"Who was that 'sensible shoes' stand-up comedian?"

"Wasn't that Robin Tyler?"

"Who formed the Jezebel Productions?"

"Who was the drummer with EarthWitch?" [Susan Helpard]

"How did lesbians learn about events?"

As the recorder jotted down notes on a flipchart, women brainstormed their memories of the cultural and social events that helped to shape the early Halifax lesbian scene.

"Reel Women"

"Secret Furies"

"The Heather Bishop Concert in 1983"

"Starhawk — late 80s/90s"

"1985. Connie Caldor. There was a big turn-out of lesbians!"

"Judy Small. 1985."

"Holly Near at the Rebecca Cohn. 1984."

"And Holly Near, 3 years later with Ronnie Albert at MSVU"

"Mary Daly at MSVU in the early/mid 80s"

"The Sensible shoes" stand-up comedian. (Wasn't she British?)"

"Lesbian drop-ins — women brought their own music cassettes for dancing."

"A variety of dances were held at Veith House, many organized by Pandora."

"Secret Furies — warm-up act for Starhawk."

CTV televised (a sound-bite) of Secret Furies. I think December 1990."

"It was our '3 seconds' on national TV!"

"Women's New Year's dances at a hotel, dressed in tuxes."

"Women's Night at Rumours, etc — mid 80s."

The Clichettes. 3 women who did lip synching satire."

"KD Lang at the Middle Deck in 95/96."

"I remember dances at Veith House — 80s — with lesbian conferences"

The Mystery of Holly Near “Who Did Bring Her Here, Anyway?”

Many women recalled the significance of Holly Near’s performance in Halifax. Although, as one woman pointed out, she was actually here on more than one occasion. In addition to her performance at the Rebecca Cohn in 1984, she also came three years later with Ronnie Albert and performed at MSVU. Those on the ground floor responsible for bringing Holly Near to Halifax were:

Rusty Neal
Jennifer Lieth
Claudette Legault
Kathy Dodds
Elaine Jacobsen
Betty Peterson
Barb Harris
Lynn Murphy

How Did We Spread the Word?

“How *did* I find out about what was going on in the community?” asked one woman. Many others nodded their heads in agreement with this question. “How did we find out what was going on on??” One woman was puzzled: “I remember connecting with things that were going on as soon as I moved here — maybe even knew about them *before* I moved here. But I don’t remember how!”



One woman speculated how word was circulated: "If you went to a dance, there would always be announcements there about other upcoming events." "Word of mouth" was definitely the most important channel of communication. Several women commented on the importance of calendars that were circulated, advertising what was going on: "That was how we got information before there was email!" One woman remembered the "personal touch" of the calendars: "It was a feminist calendar, but it had lesbian stuff in it. It had the 'L' word in there. And it was done by a lesbian."

Other women said that word about upcoming lesbian events happened through:

The Red Herring Bookstore

Pandora

Bulletin Boards at the art college and universities

Announcements at other events

At the drop-in at the Y, women would bring in music cassettes and dance

Announcements at the dances

The Pictou County Women's Centre

Vitality (WHEN)



Remembering (Among Other Things) “An Unidentified Black Door”

Lois Loewen

The *Reel Women's* film festival was from the 90s, although it may have started in the 80s. Films were screened at the Art Gallery. I remember that Kim Vance was involved. (Reel Life—late 70s)

In 1983 *Heather Bishop* came to Rumours on Granville street — behind an unidentified black door. In 1984 or 1985 *Holly Near* performed at Rebecca Cohn; and then again at MSVU in 1987 or 1988. In the late 80s' *Mary Daley* came to the Mount. And *Starhawk* was at old repertory theatre on Gottingen Street [was that Wormwoods?]. I remember *Lucie Blue Tremblay*, and the Comedian who did “Sensible Shoes.” Also, *Silver Frith* did performances.

I remember one event being held on the bottom floor of a local hotel. ‘Women nights’ were featured at various gay bars, like Rumours, although that was usually just one night per week.

EarthWitch was a lesbian singing group/band that used to perform a lot. The group included Joanne Bond, Kathy/Cathy Burke, Sylvie Rorade/Silvie Larade, Pam Mason, Susan Arenberg/Aren-



burg (from the Pugwash area), and another woman drummer. They mostly performed here. At one time they called themselves the Three Helens.

Pam Pike had an art show in the 80s at NSCAD. I remember a lesbian theme and lots of lesbians at the opening. I can no longer remember specifics, but have a general memory of lesbian-organized events and shows at NSCAD in the 80s.

A Time to “Check-out the Women”

LC: The New Year’s dances were quite formal and some women would come dressed in tuxes.

LL & SF concur: The events were times to ‘check out’ who was there. Check out the women!

SF: Seeing who was there was as important as the event itself. The dances were always opportunities to get together. I can recall some tension in the washroom when cross-dressers were applying their make-up and straightening their stockings.”

E: *Jezebel Productions* brought performing groups from elsewhere and organized events at the church. But maybe this wasn’t until the 90s?

Pam Mason was a bass player in various women’s bands.

“I Should Have Kept a Diary”

Lynn Murphy

LM: *Reel Life* was a film collective whose proudest moment was the production of a film on Anna Mae Aquash, which I think has totally vanished. Then there was a project based on Dawna Gallagher’s *The Cheese Song* which was supposed to bring in new people. There was a lot of philosophical discussion and some actual film was shot. Only ...when the new recruits discovered we weren’t full members of the collective, we kind of got turned off the whole thing. This was in the late 1970s. Some participants I remember were:

Gert Maybee
Jay McLean
Charby Sleeman
Dawna Gallagher

LM: *Women in the Arts* was around 1977 (?) It wasn’t exactly a group. It had two parts, and was an exhibit or festival, or something like that, organized chiefly by Brenda Bryan. There must have been 25 or 30 artist-participants, but I don’t remember many names. Some I remember being involved are:

Jeannie Robinson (dancer-writer)
Sarah Jackson did the poster
Sandra Levin

Sandy Rubinfelt (?)
Charlotte (a potter)?
Bernice Purdy
Anita (an architect)

After the event was over (it was held at the YWCA, and I think there was a little kaffuffle with them over lesbians 'dancing too romantically,' or something like that.) Some of us didn't want to stop when the conference was over.

Then Brenda and Sandra and I worked up a cable TV show called "Women of the Arts," which was produced on Dartmouth Cablevision for 6 or 7 months. Besides doing interviews with women artists, we provided (i.e., the station provided) workshops on production and camera work, etc. I think I have a couple of folders and posters and files on this stored at home in a high cupboard I can't reach any more (hint, hint).

There was lesbian content in both the festival and the TV show, but mostly unspoken. Actually, I think maybe we did a second festival a year later that was more performance-oriented, and *Four the Moment* was at it. But maybe that was something else. I should have kept a diary.

To Men: "You Might Not Feel Too Welcome Here"

The issue of lesbians, or those coming out, feeling comfortable and safe was an important aspect of early social and cultural events. On the rare occasions when a man did show up at an event, he was surrounded by several large women who suggested to him: "You probably won't feel welcome here," as they slowly backed him out the door. In other words, "bugger off."

Defining a Lesbian Culture and Lesbian Identity

Women said it was very important that there were "lesbian only" events in the community. They were key in helping to define lesbian culture. They provided opportunities for lesbians to do social and political networking, and for those who were not "out" or were in the process of coming out, to reduce isolation and find affirmation. Many women agreed these social lesbian events were "important defining moments." One woman remembered, "When I came out, I was welcomed into a thriving lesbian community."



Remember Being Wild Womyn?

The participants in the *Being Together: Learning and Playing* discussion group recalled a variety of women who were associated with early conferences and cultural events. Although memories are rusty, one person's recollections sparks others. "How about Wild Women?" one woman suggests. "Let's start with the Wild Womyn." And so, the circle gathered round as women shared their stories. It feels like the group wants to bring back the good times. It's OK to contradict — to add — to the memories and all the stories. There is respect for all those who speak:

"I think somebody saw Wild Womyn and said 'Let's do this in Nova Scotia!'"

"I remember the first session with Wild Womyn was at New Annan, at the women's farm. It was June 24, 1983 and there were 150 women in attendance. It was very warm. There was lots of nudity."

[Much laughter and holding up pictures, saying, "well, let's see"].

"Over the years there were lots of workshops: butch and femme workshops; lesbians with tools."

"I remember the woman playing the guitar — topless. And the walkie talkies. There was difficulty with security. There was security at the first one. I remember we had to sign a release form regarding the use of names and mailing stuff. It was a big issue. We had teachers there who would take the film out of cameras. It was a fearful time."

"It was a lesbian-sponsored women's event. It was a mixture of straight/lesbian."

"The 2nd year it was a smaller group. It was raining. Much of it took place indoors at Alex and Bernadette's farm."

"In the 3rd year, I remember women yelling 'men on the road,' 'men on the road' — and women taking up brooms, arming themselves to confront them."

"The 3rd and 4th years were at Alex and



Bernadette's. The rest were at the Campbell Farm."

"As time went on, we worried less about security. We figured we would be able to handle whatever came up."

"My best memory is of our planning sessions. That's when we worked out our lesbian politics. We could talk it out. It was a time for us to work out our lesbian politics — we were developing theory through all of this. Time was always allowed to go back to a point that was raised before."

"It was also a time when we were labeling each other, made assumptions. In our politics we decided if boy children would be allowed or not. Where was the line drawn around male children? At what age?"

"Wild Womyn was a safe, wonderful place to be, to be supported and nurtured. There was an exchange between rural and urban women, rural women inviting the urban crew. I remember feeling it was very important to go."

"I remember how I always had to manage it so that I was not working that weekend. I had to be there!"

"Relationships started and ended there. Noisy and quiet campsites. There was always the rowdy tents, but also the quieter area. Megan was in charge of the mailing list."

"I remember a time when we wanted to go skinny dipping and there was a guy fishing. There were more of us. So we all stripped. He left — couldn't fish anymore!"

"We should have a 25 year reunion at Mermaid & Cow. That would be great!"

"Did it end in 1995? Why did it stop?"

"Energies shifted and the person who own the land wanted to use it in other ways. Needs changed. At the beginning, there was a need for security. For workshops. But later, women wanted to go camping in a safe lesbian environment."

"Now there's a lesbian and gay campground down the road in Pictou County."

Remembering Lesbian Conferences

The first organizing meeting was in Truro at a restaurant 21 years ago. Debbie M, Jo S, Scarlet P, Alex and Bernadette — were the first organizers.

"1987 was the first *Coming Together*. There was always lots of help. We always created the conference that included workshops, a potluck, a talent show and a dance."

"Finding a location for the 1st Lesbian Conference was difficult. We tried to have it at the School of Social Work but they said 'no.' They just couldn't say the 'L' word."

"The Lesbian conference led to many homophobic issues being raised."

"The 2nd conference was March 1988. I remember that Anita cooked."

"Speakers, and authors, were paid for by Canada Council. Everyone fell in love with Sheila [Gilhooley]."

There was Anne Cameron: *2 in 20* Soap Opera, close captioned. And lots of women. 150?"

"There was this question about 'How do we get a lesbian author to attend?'"

"There was the man-hating lesbian workshop."

"The conferences were like a dating service — a place where a lot of women met partners. Some women found partners. There was networking between city and country dykes, and deaf and hard of hearing lesbians were included. The conferences were inclusive — the deaf and hard of hearing women joined the community and were invited in."

[Silence and an "ahh - a warm feeling" moment in the discussion]

SF: I wonder what impact Ginny Green's death had on the community? On November 1985 there was the memorial service that many women came to. It was important to have a woman give the memorial.

Remembering Dances

Women remember dances being important occasions not only for social contact, but as places where important feminist and political issues were debated. Many women remembered smoking was a contentious issue at dances. Women raised feminist political issues related to accessibility and inclusion. The choice of location for dances and their "mood" was determined by considerations such as safety, comfort, familiarity — where meeting and being together as lesbians was easy. Memories of dances at Veith House, IWD dances and others triggered many memories:

"Remember when Rose Johnson took her shirt off?"

"Remember when Robin Tyler was brought in?"

"Remember how packed Tuesday nights were?"

"I remember how I felt part of the whole thing."

"There were lots of lesbian dances, first starting at Veith House then to the Church. Pandora did fundraising women's dances, IWD dances. IWD had variety shows and dances to follow."

"We used to do line dancing — "slap leather" — at Veith House on Friday nights!" *[Laughter erupts]*

"Veith House had the best dances. Veith House made a difference. It was great. It was cozy. The Turret did not have women's dances. Then the room at Veith House was divided, so the dances moved to the Church on North Street."

"Veith House was very supportive. It felt familiar. Smoking was always a contentious issue. They had a ramp but it couldn't be used independently. Some dances were held at the YWCA because it was accessible."

"Truro had women's dances."

"Coming in from the country, I remember we would pack the cars,"

"Faith Nolan, Anne Bishop — Judy Small..."

"Having Brenda [Bryan as manager] at Rumours made a HUGE difference. She insisted that the gay bar be lesbian-positive."

"Tuesday night [women's night] was packed. Being there felt great. Even if you weren't partnered you felt included."

"AlAnon groups for the gay-lesbian group were held at Radclyffe Hall. It's interesting how most people don't remember Radclyffe Hall."

"I remember the Lesbian Drop-in at Forrest Hills for one or two years."

"And, the Stepping Out of Line Workshop."

"There was lots of sports going on; there was a lot of fun happening. We had softball games and weekend tournaments."

"Who remembers the Lesbian Log Rolling in 1984? And we did shirt and skins football."

"And, there was a Curling Club in the 90s."

"We had lots of fun through activism and work, too. A lot of the work was fun."



[There's agreement in the group that the work at the time didn't feel like work.]

Looking at the photos and hearing these stories from the past, women remember the intensity of the time. It is impossible to stop the conversation even when it is time to move back into the plenary circle. As they get up to leave, two women suggest ways to continue the conversation:

"It would be good to look at the Lesbian History Project from New York."

"Maybe we should do an issue of Pandora about today's conference!"

Remembering a "Friendly and Supportive Community"

Andrea Currie

Wild Women Don't Get the Blues

In 1983 and subsequent summers, an annual *Wild Women Don't Get The Blues* camping retreat was held in Pictou County. Workshops were held on issues such as coming out, women's spirituality, etc. and an evening of lesbian talent that was always a treat. Many of the women who were living in the country extended open invitations to city dykes to visit anytime. Many of us really

benefited from this opportunity to get out of the city when we needed to, and it provided the country women with the company of other lesbians. There was a sense of community that extended from metro to the country and included all of us.



Demonstrations to Support Inclusion of Sexual Orientation in Human Rights Act

In 1983? 1984? there were public education, demo's, and lobbying for the inclusion of sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination (is that the way you say that??) in either a federal or provincial Human Rights Act, or whatever the process was leading up to the proclamation of the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms which came into effect in April of 1985. I remember Darl Wood and a handful of gay men, and I and others, holding a public demonstration down near the waterfront.

A Very Small but Important Newsletter in 1983

In 1983 there was a very small (11" by 17" folded once) newsletter for the gay and lesbian community. I forget its name. I helped work on it and wrote for it. Another main person involved in it was a transvestite who was just a lovely person. I wish I could remember his name.

Lesbians Giving Leadership to *A Woman's Place*

1983. Like many things that I remember, *A Woman's Place* on Barrington St. was a place for all women, yet the lesbian presence in both leadership and participation was central and strong. It was intended to be a drop-in space with info and events. I remember coffeehouses where I had the chance to play original material in a friendly and supportive context.

A Workshop at Rumours on Lesbians, Gays & Militarism

1983. Brenda Bryan, then manager of *Rumours* on Granville St., invited David Hope-Simpson and I to do a workshop on lesbians and gays and militarism. Although not widely attended (!) it was a very interesting and worthwhile evening!

United Spinsters Affinity Group

1983–1985. Three of our eight members were lesbians and we actively challenged heterosexism in the group's process in which we strived for integrity and consistency in our commitment to equality and justice.

The Pentagon Party Poopers

1985. A benefit was held at Rumours (still on Granville) for the Pentagon Party Poopers (to support those of us who committed civil disobedience at a meeting which was to market American military contracts to small businesses in the Maritimes). I sang, right after the drag queens.

"Finding the Community" through a Women's Centre

198? There was another women's centre on — I want to say Macara Street — but maybe not. But, somewhere in that area north of North Street, off Novalea, and before the Hydrostone. Again, Darl was a major worker on this project, and there were drop-ins for lesbians who needed to get hooked up to the community, meet people, etc. I recall one time when a woman came in because she had heard about it somehow, and it was the way her need to meet other lesbians and "find" the community, was met.

Getting the PWA Coalition Off the Ground

198? I was at the GAE meeting, in the basement of the new Rumours on Gottingen (Barb Sawatsky was the president or chair at the time), when Dale Oxford, bless his soul and his bright red beret, brought forward the request for a donation (I think it was \$600.00) to help get the PWA Coalition off the ground, which was approved.

GAE Becoming GALA

198? GAE becomes GALA as a result of the efforts of lesbians to educate the men regarding the fact that we did not feel included in the term "gay." We wanted the name of the organization to reflect us, as well.

Support Committee for GALA Community Organizer

198? GALA hired Chris Aucoin as a community organizer, and a few of us formed a Support Committee for Chris. Darlene and Gail were part of this and we used to have wonderful pot-luck suppers where Chris could talk about what he was working on, and get ideas and encouragement (his formal line of accountability was to the GALA Executive but we were more a resource group for him).

Singing Tracy Chapman's "For My Lover"

198? There was a performance night at the club on Gottingen (I think some may have taken place when it was still a performance venue and not yet the gay bar). I remember singing Tracy Chapman's song 'For My Lover' with Lynn MacKinlay at one of these evenings.

Turning Off the Fridge to Hear the Poetry

In the late 80s Robin Metcalfe and I organized a number of evenings for lesbian and gay writers to read from their work. The readings were held at the club on Gottingen, when there was a second bar halfway down to the dance floor, and we had to turn the fridges off because they made too much noise!

A Pride Week Workshop on Alternative Insemination

In the late 80s, as part of Pride Week, a workshop was held on alternative insemination.

A Women's Rep on GALA Executive

In the late 80s GALA had a Women's Rep as part of the executive. I know Julie Lewis held that position for one year (I forget who else did) — I didn't. But I participated in many meetings, discussions, and event planning sessions.

The Shirtless Protest in the Club

In the late 80s and early 90s, the issue of 'shirtlessness' arose. Many women were offended by the habit some of the men had of taking off their shirts when they were dancing. A number of women began to take their shirts off in the club. I remember the management at the time trying to placate the women by attempting to disassociate from the issue by citing liquor commission regulations.



Sometimes women would come with stickers of tassels that covered just their nipples, since exposing the nipples was part of the legal definition of whatever it was they were trying to define.

Remembering “Whoever Came Were Members” — “No Leaders”

Lynn Murphy

Here are a few of the gay/lesbian or gay-lesbian-positive groups with which I was involved from the 1970s to the 1990s. I have files on most of these in my personal archives which I would make available to an organization likely to preserve them (they are now in a very high cupboard which I couldn't get into while throwing these notes together)."

Groups I remember but was *not* a member of included:

APPLE

Pandora

Calendar Collective

I think there might have been a reading group (which Andrea Currie was part of)

The old Brenton Street Women's Centre

Women's phonline (correct name?)

but some women worked on the

Gayline, too

Religious groups like Dignity and

Metropolitan Community Church

I also remember a few groups and people who were/are not necessarily lesbian or gay.

In the late 70s, there was the *Anarcha Feminist Reading Group*: Ginny Green, Ray, Peter, Lynn Murchy, Sandy Rubingelt (?). Peter really was the moving spirit behind this. He was English. There were about 8 or 10 regular participants. We read a lot of Emma Goldman; there was an article about 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness' followed by a counter-article on 'The Tyranny of Tyranny.' Being anarchists, of course, we had no leaders.

We organized the first *Take Back the Night* march in Halifax. We marched on the sidewalk because it would not be anarchist to ask the police for a permit. Although it was a mixed group, only the women marched, the men did child care.



We used to get an anarchist paper from Vancouver called *Open Road*. The Vancouver people were very much involved in environmental issues, but we really focused on sexual politics. At that time I thought the NDP were communists, so heaven knows how I met up with anarchists. We met, I think, weekly and at each meeting an article was distributed for discussion next time. I don't know that there was much gay content, except that the group was gay-positive. There used to be a science-fiction conference known as HalCon, and I was invited to speak at it re anarchy-feminist science fiction one year.

The *Lesbian Brunch group* met (monthly?) for about a year, sometimes in public places and sometimes in homes. Must have been in the 80s — Jane Kansas was in it. It kind of consisted of whoever came. We once got so organized we got Canada Council to send us a lesbian writer (a playwright from Cape Breton who was living in Toronto—was her name Audrey something? Audrey Butler?)

Our most special thing was that we were very strong on interpreters for the deaf and we generally had a turn out of about six deaf women, of maybe 20 participants in total.

You all remember Red Herring bookstore? Very large gay and feminist selection (or so we thought then!). They also had a meeting space that was made available free to the annual Gay and Lesbian Conference (not sure that was its actual title). Don't know why we didn't use the Turret. I don't remember any actual gay members — the people I worked with included: Valerie Mansour; Doug Meggison; Jane and Steve Hart; Paul; Daniel; and, Jim Sharpe. I think the store folded around 1995.

[Deb M. "Red Herring bookstore also kept a bull-horn, which was lent out to many, many marches and demos."]



The Sisters Lightship Collective was going to be the great lesbian newsletter/magazine, but we only put out one issue. Anne Fulton was in it—I think we probably had about 8 members.

Subversive Action

Fighting for Every Inch of Space

Bernadette M, Deborah T, Diane G, Sandra N, Lynn M, Georgina C, Lynn M, Brenda R, Lynn M, Cathy M, Kathy D, Diane L, Sandra N, Darlah P, Diane C, Deb T, Shelley F, and others remember

(Based on notes taken by Brenda R, Diane T and Leah C.; Jeanette S and Nora K)

The Personal IS Political

Women participated in two “Subversive Action” discussion groups and shared their memories of early political activities lesbians were involved in. Despite the passage of time, the women did not forget their stories of their political involvement, nor did they forget what it felt like to be a lesbian at a time when “to be a lesbian was practically illegal.” As women talked about their memories, others leaned-over the shoulders of other women to hear what was being said. It was sometimes hard to hear what women were saying because of the hilarity and laughter. Women recounted the humour and irony of many situations, but also the pain and anger they felt at feeling excluded, silenced, and taken-for-granted.

Women’s involvement was so intense that their memories remain strong to this day. Many recalled how important it was to “really feel part” of the political work. Political work, by its very nature, was all-consuming. Many said that the political groups and campaigns they were involved in were “my life.” They remembered throwing themselves into the work with a passion.

Between 1976 and 1982 there was a great deal of spontaneous political activity and mobilizing: “If there was an issue that needed action, you just needed to make a few calls and next thing you knew, there was a demonstration happening. There was always lots of support.”

In the 1970s and 1980s lesbians worked alongside straight women in both feminist and left organizations, although these “progressive” organizations still harboured considerable fear and mistrust of lesbians. Lesbians were not just feared by mainstream society, but by feminist groups such as Bryony House, despite the fact that lesbians made up a considerable part of the organization and were often the ones “making things happen.” “Those wearing plaid shirts” were often greeted with suspicion



at Forrest House, although it considered itself “very feminist.” Lesbians constantly faced the overt and subliminal message: “We don’t want people who are lesbians.” Despite these sentiments, lesbians were often the ones in the leadership:

When you think about it, if it had not been for the lesbians who were really involved, a lot of things might not have happened. Or not happened in that way. Lesbians took things on. Politically, they were the ones who took on the voice. So many of the issues we were involved in were very far-reaching.

Straight people in both alternative and mainstream organizations feared the word “lesbian.” Mentioned the word “lesbian” was like putting up a red flag. One woman remembered a panel at St. Mary’s University that was cancelled at the last minute when planners realized that the words “lesbian” and “abortion” were going to be used (and not just “gay”). Women also remembered the endless debates about the use of “lesbian” vs “gay.”

Women remembered moments of sweet victory when they “walked” in order to show homophobic organizations how critical they were. One woman recalled that the Y who, at the time had a very “no lesbians” sentiment, was forced to make changes when they “suddenly discovered they didn’t have anybody on their committees because we were the ones doing the work.”

One woman reflected: “More and more, I realize that the personal is/was political.” Political organizations were arenas of struggle where lesbians grappled with “sorting out various parts of your life.” To draw strength to continue the political struggle, lesbians sought out other lesbians as



allies, comrades, and lovers. A number of women recalled their “coming out adventures” taking place in the context of political work. One woman said: “I’m so grateful to the women who were there, no matter what happened to that particular group.”

In retrospect, it is no wonder that lesbians flocked to the bars at night, especially on “women’s night” after their political meetings were over. They needed a place to unwind and to debrief everything that was happening. Many recalled how important it was to be able to go, as lesbians, to gay-positive or lesbian bars and to be openly out, to socialize and to be with like-minded women. Political struggles were often painful, but led to indelible lessons that women have taken into the lesbian community and future political commitments: “As lesbians, we were not going to be silenced.”

Brainstorming Early Feminist Organizations

Women started their discussions by brainstorming early organizations they remembered and were part of. The organizations included:

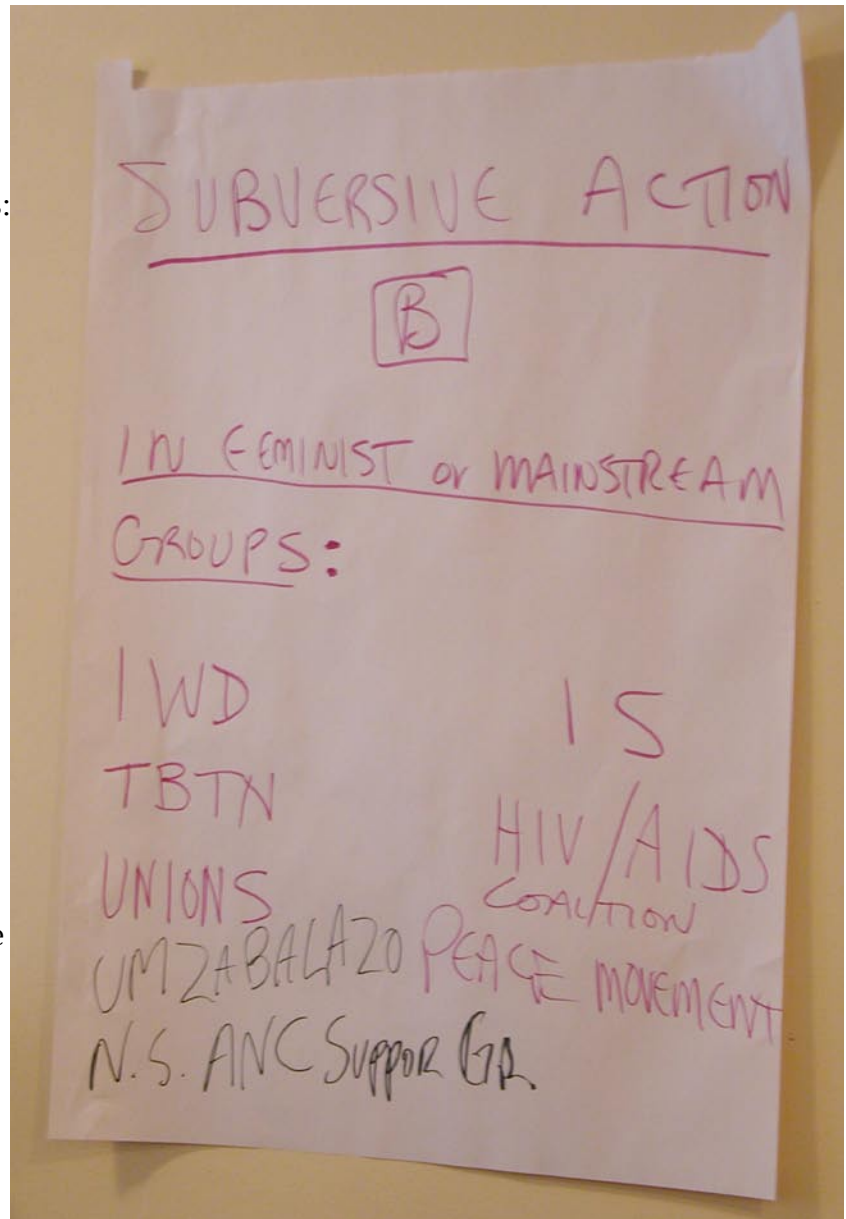
APPLE — the Atlantic Provinces Political Lesbians for Equality
 WAC (Women's Action Coalition) [DT, DP, DC]
 WAC — Second Story Women's Centre — Bridgewater [DT]
 Women's Centre Forrest house [SN, DG, KD]
 A Woman's Calendar — out of Forrest House [KD]
 WHEN (Women's Health Education Network) [DL, DP, DC]
 WAVAW — Women Against Violence Against Women [KD]
 Reclaim the Night [KD]
 Brenton St Women's Center [LM]
 Rape Relief [LM]
 Morgentaler clinic escorts [DG, BB]
 CARAL (Canadian Abortion Rights Action League)

Women tried to remember the dates of some key early political initiatives:

1975 Year of the Woman

1977 "Forrest House" Women's Centre
 First march (Meredith Bell; Kathy Tetlock; Carol Millet; Georgina Chambers);
 TBTN (Sexual Assault)
 A huge struggle took place around sexual assault. A male professor (Ed Renner & Ann Keith) got funding to do a study on pederasts, whereas women couldn't.

1979 International Women's Day dances, involving a real mix of lesbians and straight women. The 1st big IWD was in 1979. (e.g. Tina Simmons, Barbara James, Susan Ashley, Toni Laidlaw). There was a film fest and workshops. Brenda R remembers "a huge joyous party."



Take Back the Night — Carol Millet.
1st WAVA march.
WENDO (later on)

Dances at the YWCA, Bloomfield Centre, and Grafton Street Café. Meredith Bell, Four the Moment, Georgina performed at Grafton Street Café for Abortion Referral Service.

Remembering APPLE

DT: In the Fall of 1976 APPLE (Atlantic Provinces Political Lesbians for Equality) was formed. We were thrilled with the name APPLE. We thought it was such a radical name."

DT: A *National Newsletter* was produced on a Gestetner. I remember that APPLE started out with five people, although there was nothing "Atlantic" about us.

"We went to a conference and felt that the news needed to be shared. In 1976 our work was still done on a Gestetner. Only a few papers (bulletins) were printed. Not sure if there was more than one bulletin written."

GC: I can't remember the date. Was the National Gay Conference in 1978 or 1979? I remember going to my first "out there" meeting and realizing how important it was to be there and to be a part of these beginnings.



"I remember one conference out west in the late 70s. We traveled by train, it was an important activity. Things were still kind of illegal.

[A short silence in the group as participants remembered important people, important times and place.]

DT: In 1973 it was a brave thing to do.

"There was APPLE and GAE-IS (International Socialists)."

LMac: There were multi-issues, some lesbian, some women, some others.

Remembering GAE

LM: GAE & GALA was a mixed organization from the start, often driven by what was

going on in the club, rather than politics: "Pride Week," drag politics; home for non-separatists

GC: The IS was not a gay/lesbian organization, but was entirely supportive (along with other left organizations, such as In Struggle)

"I remember how we used to have to fight with the boys to get a dance at the Turret."

DG: Yes. We used to have to fight for every inch of space"

"I remember Alexa [McDonough] coming into the Turret. This was supportive."

"I remember someone asking Alexa if she was gay!" *[Laughter erupts.]*

DT: Within GAE we had a class struggle within the group. I remember us asking, "Where are the working class women?" It was more than fighting with the boys. It was the struggles amongst the women of the 1970s, because the 1970 saw class struggle within the women's community.

SN: I was struggling with raising a family where boys were being raised in a lesbian family. I remember, in 1977 and 1978, the struggles going on. I always had to be so careful with a family. I was a lesbian but lived like a straight parent.

"I became involved with GAE." The Gay Alliance for Equality. In the 1970s 'gay' included gays and lesbians."

GC: Lesbians wanted to have lesbian identity more a part of the GAE organization. It is difficult to separate these things from our personal lives. You cannot separate the personal from the political. Because I do think of who was I with while I was doing the political work.

Remembering Brenton St Women's Centre

LM: The Brenton Street Women's Centre, which sponsored Rape Relief, was across from the back door of Park Vic. It was open about 5 years, from 1970-75ish.

DG: A lot of women went to early consciousness-raising groups there.

LM: We had a speculum and looked at somebody's vagina.



Remembering WHEN — Women's Health Education Network

DC: WHEN started around 1978, doing research and movement work to start well women's clinics throughout Nova Scotia. Yarmouth had the first. It didn't last that long. WHEN had a funded coordinator in Truro. [Nancy Brister? Coordinator] Held annual conferences. Had Sec State funding. Toward the end we refused their money because they didn't allow us to the words "lesbian" or "abortion."

DP: The most important thing we did was the annual conference. There were always quiet lesbians meeting over lunch. But by 1988 it just blew wide open. It was huge. We were rural women.

DL: There were 200-350 women all in one place. That was mind blowing for me.

DC: There was always a women's dance at the conference. Straight women would come up to ask "Who are we going to dance with?" (*laughter*) Funding was a big issue. WHEN mattered to a largely rural group. Funding got harder and harder to get. Women started to spin-off in more focused groups. More rural women's centres opened.

DT: Funding dried up when Mulroney was elected.

DL: When funding was cut, it was harder to travel around the province. It went with the federal election bringing in the conservatives (1988-90). When we were fully funded our travel was paid and we held meetings all over. Then the funding dropped. I came out with WHEN.



DG: What was going on with WHEN for lesbians?

DL: What everybody feared! (*laughter*)

DC: WHEN was way ahead of its time for sexuality issues.

DT: The communication network was amazing. It was province wide.

"Vitality information, was an opportunity to get information to women around the province."

SF: I found WHEN open to stuff on spirituality, which was great.

Remembering Forrest House 1977

SN: I remember the Junior League was downstairs. Forrest House was very feminist, but scared of lesbians. Margo Pierce/Pearce [??] was an employee and she scared people. She eventually left. She had done a women's newsletter. Held meetings there for International Women's Year. I started working there, but they didn't know I was a lesbian. When they found out they didn't know what to do. "Will we fire her or keep her?" "Are you an anarchist?" "I don't know, what's that?" (*laughter*) They hired Gail/Gayle Cromwell and Linda Roberts, who started calling on me when they needed to deal with lesbian issues. We did lots of feminist events and services like assertiveness training and financial planning. I left in 1980.

DG: I started there around 1980 with Women's Employment Outreach. There was good lesbian visibility by then, like Lesbian drop-in nights. Planning meetings for Take Back the Night, IWD etc.

CM: But that's where the tensions around lesbians and straight women always came out. There was always discussion about women-only events or not. About women's versus lesbian dances. Women would say, well that's okay, but we don't want any lesbians kissing! They became "women's" dances. The last year the Y supported the dances was 1981.

LM: After a while the lesbians stopped putting their energy in, stopped going to things, stopped organizing. Forrest House no longer had women to do the work, so they had to get the lesbians to come back.

KD: Forrest House had a library and a book on *Our Right to Love*. I read it. One day I came in, and I had rehearsed this in my house, and I told the women I was a lesbian and they pointed to the top of the stairs and said 'See Diane Graham!'" (*laughter*) A Woman's Calendar was published from Forrest House. It was very important for feminists and also had lesbian content. That's how you found out what was going on. People involved in that were Kathleen/Catherine Tetlock, Kathy Dodds, Pat Dingle, Brenda Bryan.

Remembering WAC — Women's Action Coalition

DT: WAC grew out of something that happened when Francine Cosman was Director of NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women. She was a political appointee, but wanted to be able to speak freely about issues affecting women's lives — and couldn't. Cosman resigned in 1985/86? Women across Nova Scotia rose up in rage. 800/300 women went to a meeting in Truro enraged. Out of that came a com-



mitment from the NS government to provide some support for grassroots women's groups. There was a steering committee. The first council meeting was in New Glasgow and all women's organizations were invited to have a delegate. Bernadette M coordinated, and Deb T, Diane C, Cheryl Aucoin, Marilyn Keddy were there. We were a lobby group to govt.

DC: It was during a time when Advisory Council (NSACSW) was ineffective.

DT: For a time WAC was very effective. The women doing the work were mostly lesbians. It was province wide and addressed a huge range of issues.

DP: In 1988-89 WAC sent a pamphlet around the province with "questions to your politician" for the election campaign. It included gay and lesbian rights issues.

DC: Fem Gep [??] just re-did that pamphlet. The only issue they dropped was the lesbian one because it has been accomplished.

DT: WAC had a Lesbian Issues Committee that advocated on all the relevant issues. WAC did the lobbying.

DP: WAC had annual city and provincial conferences with women's dances etc: two per year — one in Halifax, and then one rural (six months later). It was important because it gave rural women a lot of contact with political issues.



Remembering the Morgentaler Clinic

DG: The Morgentaler Clinic opened late 80s. It needed women to escort patients across the lines of protesters. Two women would walk across with a "fake" (decoy) woman. Most of the escorts were lesbians. We did all that even though the chances of our needing to go to the clinic were slim. But, where were the feminists supporting us when we needed support? At CARAL (Canadian Abortion Right Action League), too; there were a lot of lesbians active in abortion rights. There was this strong sense of the need to control our own bodies.

DM: Marie was incredible at finding innovative ways of getting women through the crowds of protesters.

Remembering WAVAW — Women Against Violence Against Women

KD: Lots of lesbians were involved in WAVAW, and in the transition houses.

Remembering the Churches

LM: Lots of women were active in various church groups and other spirituality groups in the 80s.

SF: There weren't lesbian caucuses in the United Church until the 1990s. We had lesbian students at AST, but... They didn't know what to do with us.

CM: That's right. The women's caucuses were a good place for the lesbians.

Working in the Left: Inspired Awareness of Class Issues

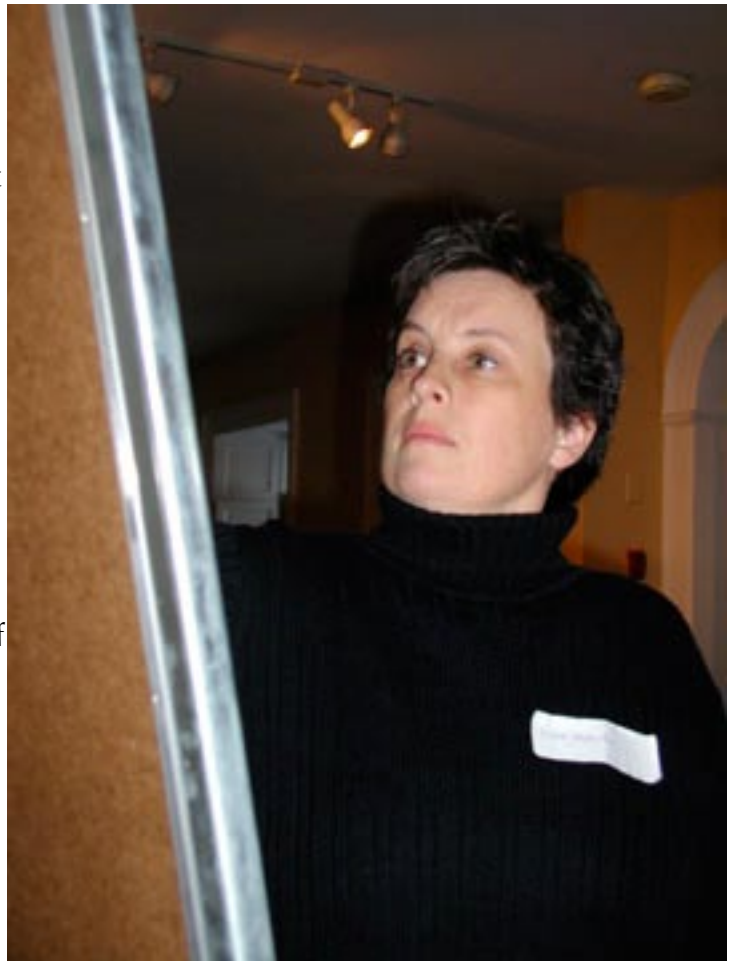
A number of lesbians, or those who later became lesbians, were active in leftwing political organizations such as the International Socialists, In Struggle, and the Canadian Communist Party. Women took the class awareness inspired by these political organizations into feminist groups. Women who were involved in these organizations remembered having to “put energy into finding your place” and having to defend oneself to survive. Working in these organizations, collaboration was not always easy.

International Socialist (IS): The IS still exists. Even in 1977 it was pro-gay. The IS was developing a stance on Gay Rights when Georgina came out in the organization. She remembered that “women were the strongest ones in the organization.” Also, interestingly, the IS was ahead of the women's movement on lesbian issues.

In Struggle: Was disbanded in 1980 because women protested the male dominance within the organization. Carol Millet remembers: “Women were stepping up and pushing issues. There was an intense struggle within the organization. We were active in the union movement (Canadian Linen Supplies), CLV, anti-racism. But there was a lot of in-fighting.

GC: Coming from a position of defense is fractious and exhausting.

BR: Energy required in mainstream work was replicated within groups.



CM: Looking back, I feel there is a real lack of political analysis now. There is a lack of analysis today, compared to then.

DG: There was a lot of criticism then about race, class privilege. People were politicized through the discourse. A lot of politicization.

"What is the impact of this history?"

Younger women felt patronized and welcomed by elders. What's this referring to?

LMc: I never felt heard in unions regarding harassment, race, feminism. Joining into a Black family, I had very little to do with the women's community because the women's movement is White.

BMac: I remember the introduction of Women's Studies into the Academy.

"Women's studies at Mt. St. Vincent (mid-70s) and then Dal were, and are still, important. Dal Women's Centre is now organizing Take Back the Night."

"There was a gap between university students and working women."

"We were influenced by the US and Black Women's Movement."



"In the Peace Movement, the issue of being a lesbian has become a 'non-issue.'"

"The women who were organizing 20 years ago are longer doing it."

"The loss of Forrest House was devastating."

Breton Street Women's Centre 1973-74. Judy Wouk.

"Women's Action Committee. Judy Volk."

"In 1984 the Debunk Debert Actions involved Atlantic Action, Voice of Women, and the Pictou Women's Centre.

The Organization Was Home for Me

LM: The organization was a home for me when there was no other place to go.

Many agree that it was their only place of support as well. It is an emotional moment as memories surface among those whose lives were impacted by working with the organization.

BR: I remember the phones were tapped.

Others recall the phone taps, the struggles, being kicked out of dances, the intimidation of the police within the political organizations. Some look down in silence. It was a time of exhilaration but also a time of fear. But being a member of these organizations also , but also a time of fear.

GC: I feel [felt?] completely supported.

"There were other organizations that were gay positive."

[Many stories are remembered, interjected by much humour.]

BM: I remember in 1985 in Pictou County, Supporting Lesbians. The Pictou County Women's Centre came out in support of lesbians. There was a huge discussion. That year of discussion really shifted us to be 'political.'" But there was a lot of backlash for doing this.

"Isn't that where Roseanne Skokes lives?"



Biggest changes—was what is made for women's rights—the great strength from LGRNS—pulled together many other organizations to fight for the same issues. [JA don't understand??]

[Always, as the stories are told, there is nodding of recognition—a respect for the “talker” and an ease in asking questions to confirm what is being said. One woman comments on where some document is located. Another responds: “Ah, that’s where that is. It’s good to know it is still around.” Group members are intrigued and impressed that actual archival material has been saved.]

“Was her daughter Ingrid?! She was cute!” *[More laughter erupts.]*

“I never slept with her!”

The GALA archives have gone to the NS Archives. DG still has a memo from a meeting dated 1/13/79 to support APPLE proposal. Group members listen to a reading from this memo/letter. At the end there is a sigh of “Oh!” — memories shared. GAE and GALA are gone, but women remember them having produced offshoots such as “Pride Week” and WAVES.

Always one story brings forth a name—another story—pointing to memorabilia that elicits a memory walk through where people are now. Women also remember those who are not here in the discussion indicating there are some important gaps in the story.

[People leave the discussion group thanking each other for the knowledge/for the sharing.]



Lesbians Opened Up Ideas

“Lesbians brought a perspective to the larger groups that helped to open up ideas. For example, their involvement in CARAL was “huge.” They ran the information and referral service. A kaffuffle at the VG created the information and referral service. It was interesting that the abortion issue was so important; their connection to it made sense.”

“There was a lot of discourse around being straight versus gay.”

“There was a lot of controversy about lesbians with children (especially male children). And issues of privilege, for example, the privileges of married women.

“Lesbians were very political about AIDs. Lesbians were politicized and took on work in AIDS organizations”

I’m Proud of the Work We Did

DM: We eventually learned to reach out to the deaf and hearing-impaired community, and so we often hired sign language interpreters. There was one in particular who was so wonderful — Linda Frankie. She didn’t shy away from any subject matter and really connected with all the women.

DG: We forged good relationships with the straight women in those groups.

DC: We converted most of them! *(laughter)*

DT: I remember women saying “We never thought we’d meet a lesbian, let alone work with one.”

SN: Our work with transition houses.... Look where we are now.

DC: I’m very proud of the rural work that WHEN and WAC did. I could regularly meet with like-minded, like-hearted women in my own place. It gave me consistency in my life.

DP: I’m really proud of the work we did. Our world has changed and that work is no small part of it.



Pandora Was a Lifeline

*Bethan L, Alex K, Debbie M, Darl W, Anita M and others remember
(based on notes taken by Brenda B and flipchart notes by Jen D)*

Participants in the *Pandora* Group started their discussion by leafing through old issues of *Pandora*. Debbie said that she still has copies of all issues in her basement. One person remarked that the page on women's books was "always great." Another woman hooted when she discovered an article she had written on "Dormant Genitals a Natural Side Effect: Depo Provera Decision Pending." She exclaimed: "I don't think I'm going to read it!" (*followed by much laughter*)

Pandora placed a great deal of emphasis on the aesthetics of the paper — on how the paper looked — both inside and on the cover. Many women remembered "there was lots of great art stuff." Photos were a key part of the newspaper's design, so that when copies of the paper were circulated around the table, the photos in particular elicited comment. Pointing to one photo, a woman remembered: "I was behind the camera!" Others affirmed her having been a "mainstay" for many of *Pandora's* photos: "You went to everything and took the pictures." Another woman remembered seeing Frith's masks featured in one issue. Another woman remembered that most of the paper's photos were returned to the photographer.

Each person's memories triggered others' recollections. One participant in the group discussion said: "This must be what people feel like at a high school reunion! — *when* they fit in at high school!"



Pandora's "Office" was a Wall at My House

BA: The first issue of *Pandora* came out in September 1985. I'd been working as a journalist at CBC. I remember saying that I wanted 2 things before I died: (1) "To start a women's newspaper; and, (2) to shave my head!" (*Laughter*) It was Bethan, Brenda Bryan, and Carol Millett. Carol said, "Just do it." Carol looked after logistics, Brenda did photos, design etc. I was teaching at Kings Journalism School so I had access to facilities. We had to typesetting on a KayPro computer. Production took place at Kings. There was a Judy Small concert a month before first issue. *Pandora* was announced from the stage at Neptune (concert got moved from the Cohn due to a fire at the law school).

We used to meet at Satisfaction Feast. The "office" was a whole wall of corkboard covered with stories etc at my house on Black Street. It did help that I had the journalism background. I remember at one point my son Jacob was having a lot of emotional problems. The counselor said it was due to a "new baby sister" — *Pandora*. I took the job at Kings so we could do *Pandora*. When I left Kings, Debbie got that job so we could continue.

It Was a Lot of Work, But I Was In 'Til the End

The work involved in producing *Pandora* was dauntingly labour-intensive, especially when one considers that all the work had to be done without the aid of computers. Prior to Mac computers, all of the copy had to be waxed on the back and laid out manually.

DM: I think I was involved in the second issue. I'd always been interested in journalism. We had a meeting at the library on Gottingen. I was in it from then till the end"

So Many Women Found a Voice

BA: When Debbie first came to *Pandora* — we had at least 50 volunteers in the first year. Some said not a word for months. Then Debbie did what so many women did — found a voice. Then you couldn't shut them up for a while! So many women were coming to voice through the paper.

Far from being male-bashing in orientation, at the beginning *Pandora* actually involved a number of straight women journalists, such as Valerie Mansour, Sharon Fraser, and



Eleanor McDonald. In addition to the involvement of several professional journalists, many were involved who had no experience in publication: “We had more women who weren’t writers than were writers.”

It Was Really, Really Important to Me

DW: I came to one meeting, then did some writing for a while. I then went to Greenham Common, and then to Toronto. When I saw *Pandora* at the Toronto Women’s Bookstore it was really really important to me. I just sucked it up. It was important across the country. I was involved at a distance through photography. I never helped produce it. It overlapped with *Vitality*, put out by WHEN. *Vitality* got a lot of support from *Pandora*. I remember you named a layout after me: The Darl Wood layout.” (laughter)

D: I returned to Halifax in 1984 and went to occasional meetings, wrote a few articles for the paper and distributed the paper where I went. Was the editor of *Vitality* for several years. I hosted *Pandora* for a weekend retreat in Yarmouth. Mostly on the fringes.

I’m Sure the Paper Saved Lives

Pandora always included a list of events. This was very important in providing lesbians with information about what was going on, telling them where they could meet other lesbians. Several women agreed that this was one of the most important functions of *Pandora*.

AM: At Bryony House people were dumping it at first. Slowly some of us came out. After a while it was displayed openly and everyone was taking it. *Pandora* had a real value and played an important role in many women’s lives. You would see stories there that you wouldn’t see anywhere else. I’m sure that paper saved lives!

BB: *Pandora* was a lifeline between ’85 and ’87. I was just coming out.

Lesbian and gay rights in Nova Scotia spread in 1990. *Pandora* was important in that.

First Kiss — and Struggles Within and Without

DC: Megan’s first kiss was on the way to a *Pandora* meeting at King’s College.”
[Notetaker’s comment:
“I’m not sure I caught this



accurately. *There was a lot of laughter*"]. I had just returned from Vancouver. I hosted a weekend retreat for *Pandora* when BA was leaving for Toronto for a year. I would take it to Yarmouth to distribute. I remember struggles from within and without, like most feminist organizations.

Lesbians Refused to Be Silenced

BA: *Pandora* was part of the National Feminist Periodicals organization. At the first meeting outside Toronto, *Pandora* was the “darling.” We had so many volunteers. We weren’t tied into funding because we didn’t want anybody telling us what we could or couldn’t write. That was key. We had a principle about not going for funding. The second year *Pandora* sponsored the National Feminist Periodicals conference, and we needed to go for Secretary of State funding. At that time no one with Sec State money could use the word lesbian. The Toronto women wanted to hold the conference anyway. The *Pandora* group voted and refused to be silenced. Shelley and I went to a meeting at MSVU, where the President said, “those women can be very aggressive.” We spoke up as “we,” referring to lesbians. The Mount also insisted that all information had a disclaimer on it that the Mount does not agree with the views.

A Model for Collective Work

Working collectively was “very much part of the lesbian culture.” *Pandora* operated as a collective and the nature of that collective was something that “we talked about constantly for years.” However, there was a great deal of misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about what was meant by “collective”: “The collective was what we wanted and yet a lot of people just didn’t get it.”

AM: The “collective” at *Pandora* informed other groups here and in other cities. At Bryony House we used the notion of ‘collective’ for years after, because of *Pandora*.

DM: They took to it well! (*laughter*)

Pandora Had Regional Representation

AK: It was very good at getting regional representation. It included rural women. Many women wrote columns or stories (e.g. Anne Derrick wrote a legal column). It included unions, art, mothers, regions.



A “Brown Bag” Distribution System: Controversy Over Lesbian Content

As mild as it may seem now, *Pandora* was considered very subversive by many in the mainstream at the time — enough to force its distribution underground in several instances. The Antigonish Women’s Centre, for example, was not allowed to distribute the paper because of the pressure of the church. Even at Bryony House, *Pandora* at first (1984/85) was kept “under the shelves.”

BA: It was very much lesbian culture at *Pandora*. There were straight women involved, perhaps more in the later days, but... it was hard sometimes for the straight women to be there because their lives were not the norm there. There was a controversy over there being too much lesbian content. Much of the content pertained to all women. There was a small group that met to decide on content, and to established an editorial goal for there to be a minimum of “something like 8% lesbian content.” We had to do a line count. But we still thought it was too little.



AK: There was distribution through subscribers and bulk distribution. We used to collect money in the beginning, but then dropped this. We did larger runs for the March IWD issues. We used to have great distribution meetings. Somehow we always had it at Pictou County Women’s Centre. We called it “Brown bag delivery.” We put the paper in a brown bag for anonymity, and that’s how it went across and outside the country. Because of the lesbian content, it was hard to get it into the Antigonish women’s centre.

DM: We had to drive to Kentville to get the papers, mailed it to subscribers, distributed it in bulk all around the Atlantic provinces. We had great distribution meetings. All sitting around the table. Putting them in brown paper bags in case people took offense. It was a lot of fun. We had subscribers across the country. Occasionally a group would put an insert in.

BA: We did the distribution at Veith House, too. We had *Pandora* coffee houses at Veith House. Jane Wright did stand-up comedy — Mrs Beasley. It was meant to be an alternative for women who didn’t have access to mainstream media. I remember the Secret Furies was announced at one of these.

The Human Rights Case: We Won But Ran Out of Energy

In 1990 *Pandora* was taken to court by a man who protested that his human rights were being violated because the paper refused to publish his letter. *Pandora* eventually won the court case, but it was a costly victory: “Our energies were so depleted we couldn’t fight anymore.” Within the group discussion, women went back-and-forth debating the role of the court battle in the

demise of *Pandora*. One woman admitted that “we were getting pretty tired, even without the human rights case. If it hadn’t been for the human rights case, we probably would have given up much earlier.”

BA: There was controversy over calling it a women’s paper, not a feminist paper. *Pandora* was a publication that was “by, for, and about women.” While I was in Toronto March 1990 a story was printed about fathers, by Jo and Scarlet. A man [Gene Keyes] wanted to reply to the story. He was not allowed to reply in print, because it was a paper by women. I opposed it because it was so negative. It wasn’t that we were against things. We weren’t into bashing men. It was that we were *for* things. The paper’s focus was about celebrating women, supporting women — not fighting against men. But this man took the issue to the NS Human Rights Commission in 1990. Ann Derrick was our lawyer.

DW: The human right case was a very important decision all across the country. It set a precedent and they were facing the same issues.

BB: The testimony was really important. I remember sitting in the audience and all of us starting to clue in to how much the lawyers for the other side simply could not “get” what the *Pandora* women were talking about day-after-day.

BA: They just didn’t get the concept. It highlighted the real difference in the cultures.

DM: A lot of us also got tired. Doing the same thing over and over often without a lot of positive feedback.



BA: We won the case but ran out of energy and *Pandora* folded. We probably shouldn't have done the case.

DM: We were getting pretty tired anyway. In some ways the human rights case gave us an impetus to continue. We couldn't stop publishing during the case; that would mean he had won.

BA: The paper also became more narrowly feminist, with less outreach to women who would not identify as lesbian or feminist. It took a lot of time and energy to do that outreach.

What Happened?

BA: Did *Pandora* fade away because it was no longer needed?

AM: I think the community has faded. There was less lesbian energy going into it.

DC: WAC, WHEN and other organizations were umbrella groups that spun off more specifically focused groups. Energies were diverted to more local and specific groups.

BA: There was more mainstream stuff for women by then. Or, the mainstream media was becoming more alternative.

BB: The *Gaezette* also became more lesbian-friendly.

DB: It's an awesome paper!
Even now, looking at it!

BA: The last issue came out in 1993. It lasted 8 years! And it never received funding in those 8 years. That's a lot of energy.

Women Are Still Using Skills Learned at Pandora

BA: It was my life. I had taken a technical job at journalism school so that I could do *Pandora*.

DM: There are a lot of women still making their livings out of skills they developed at Pandora, for example, Bev Rach, Brenda Conroy, and others.



Women's Housing Co-op: About More than Houses

*Kathy D, Cathy M, Carol M, Sara A, Diann G, and others remember . . .
(based on notes taken by Ann M and Sue A)*

The Dream of Another Way of Being

The Halifax Women's Housing Co-op (HWHC) project began as "a personal thing." Discussions about creating a housing co-op began when four women tried to find house that was big enough, and affordable enough, for them and their children. The group included nine women, four of whom were mothers. During the summer of 1981, they began to talk seriously about forming a co-op. Frustrated at their inability to find the kind of house they were looking for, one of the founding mothers remembered: *"Eventually we said, 'We'll start our own housing co-op and live in the goddamned thing.'"* Shortly thereafter, the first actual co-op meeting took place. Original members of the Halifax Women's Housing Co-op included: Jackie, Susan, Naomi L, Sara AvMaat, Cathy Mellett, Diann Graham, Vicky Wood and Brenda Bryan. Carol Millett joined soon after.

"In the summer of 1980, four of us (Jackie, Susan, Naomi and I) talked about wanting to live together. We needed a large house, but knew the rent would also be huge. So we decided to go to the Cornerstone Housing Society to get their help in setting up a housing cooperative." (SM)



As the women remembered the process, it was clear that several factors entered into the decision. One key factor was the availability of low cost housing for these women, most of whom were in their late twenties and none in high paying jobs. At the time, a situation of less than 1 percent vacancy rate in apartments and an 18 percent mortgage rate made it impossible for women to buy their own homes. One founding woman remembers *"We thought we'd never be able to own a house."* (DG)

Another key factor was to have control over their own housing at a time when lesbians were not yet protected under the Nova Scotia Human Rights legislation. *"We felt as lesbians we'd be at risk of losing out on rental opportunities, because there was always the worry that a landlord would refuse to rent if they found out we were lesbians."* (DG)

For some women, sharing housing enabled them to do things they always wanted to do. "For example, it gave me the security of a house so that I could work part-time." (SA)

The final factor, and the one that shone brightest in the remembering, was that it allowed the women to bring to life a dream. As one of the women remembered, *"We had the ideal of community, of sharing life and holidays together. It was a dream of a different way of being."* (SA) And another said, *"We also talked about when we grew old, how we'd need a community of women."* (KD)

"So many of us were in the same phase of our lives, coming out, trying to create a culture, a community of women. We were building more than houses." (KD)

Forming the Co-op

In the 1980s, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) had a Co-op Program which provided opportunities for low-income people to, as a group, buy or build urban homes. The Cornerstone Housing Society was the organization in Halifax funded by CMHC to act as a community based resource to provide expertise and advice to prospective co-op groups. However, this new feminist housing co-op operated in non-hierarchical ways, and as Cathy Mellett, one of the original group, remembers, *"Working with CMHC was interesting. They could not get their head around us. We did not fit into the mold. We operated by consensus."* A further complicating issue was the fact that the group did not have the suggested mix of low /moderate/high income.

The founding sisters asked Anne Derrick to be their lawyer. She explained that the name they wanted – the "Halifax Women's Co-op" – might be a problem because it could be seen as discriminating against men. She suggested that if anyone complained, to say "It's named in honour of the four women who founded the co-op." They knew Anne was the right lawyer for them when she gave them that subversive advice.

Buying Four Co-op Houses

"Unable to solve their own housing problems individually, a group of women decided to form a housing co-op that would provide homes for up to twenty members and their children. Using a combination of their own incomes and grants from CMHC, these women, mostly in their twenties, mortgaged and renovated, managed and maintained properties in Halifax which today are valued at over half a million dollars." (Diann Graham, in Trainor page 28)

Since it was the Cornerstone Housing Society that had to approve properties for CMHC support, the process of selecting which properties the Halifax Women's Housing Co-operative would buy included both the members of the Women's Housing Co-op and Cornerstone Society itself. The women decided that those who were going to live in the house had to pick the house and bring it to the whole group for approval, then Cornerstone inspected it. One of the women remembers: *"All the decisions had to be OK'd by all women and also by CMHC. This involved week after week, and year after year of work."*

Over a period of three years, the HWHC women bought four houses. The first house was on Fuller Terrace (1982). Susan Holmes and Carol Millett decided to live together, and they picked this house. To the best of women's recollections, the house cost about \$45 000 with a thirty year mortgage. Carol lived in the lower flat, Susan in upper flat.

The second house was on Robie Street. It was one place where efforts were made to establish a *"true communal house."* To accommodate the five people who wanted to live communally (Diann Graham, Vicky Wood, Cathy Mellett, Elaine Jacobsen, Brenda Bryant and sometimes Kathy Dodds), the women converted the house from flats to a single family type dwelling, with the idea that it could be converted back again if desired. The Co-op bought the house in 1982 for \$63 000 with a thirty year mortgage.

The third house, on Creighton Street, had six flats. The Co-op bought it in 1983 for \$80,000, taking out a mortgage of \$120,000 to carry out the major repairs that were needed. People in this house were: Sara AvMaat, Naomi L., Kathy Dodds (and Kathleen Tetlock), Ginny Green, Darl Wood, Heather Dawkins. It was women-only and a few straight women lived in it.

The fourth house was on Windmill Road. It was purchased (in 1983) for \$50,000 or \$60,000. Joanne Osborne, Cheryl Payne, and Brenda Sharpe were the first to move in.

In seeking properties, the group had decided to find locations where they would have easy access to downtown. The houses they bought were in bad shape. They did all the work themselves with the help of grants from Summer Student Works projects –tearing down walls, stripping floors, putting up gyp-rock, painting. The women remembered how much they learned, -- about mortgages and house buying; about meeting processes and organizational skills; and about carpentry and repairs. *"It gave us a chance to learn how to do repairs, and to learn about mortgages."* (CM). *"We learned about contingency funds for maintenance, and how to take a mortgage out. We demystified the process of home*



ownership and ripped down walls.” (DG) “We learned that it was important to take minutes of meetings.” (SA) “We learned carpentry skills – and about group process.” (KD) The women remembered frustration and pride: “There were moments of great frustration, living with studs and no gyprock. Moments of not being able to face it anymore... But, before, I was so daunted by all this construction stuff.” (SA)

Creighton was one of the most visible houses. Older residents on the street found it interesting. The lesbians were very visible, carrying gyp-rock etc. Kids asked “Is it true that there are only women living here?” So I gave them a great spiel about CMHC! (SA)

It was not always easy. We did whatever it took. We made terrible mistakes with one another. (CM) There were debates and discussions about many things. In the mid-1990s, there was a debate about male to female transsexuals being allowed in. (SA)

“When the co-op started in 1981, it was, and still is, hard work. But if it wasn’t for the courage, vision – and economic necessity – of the four founding members, we probably wouldn’t have a co-op.” Carol Millett (in *Herstories* booklet)

Almost 25 years later, in 2005, the Co-op still owns three of the four houses (the Windmill Road house was sold), and the mortgages will come due within the next decade. None of the original members still lives in HWHC houses; they have gone on in their careers, moved and/or purchased their own homes. Over the years, other women have moved in and then moved on. The HWHC has provided safe and affordable housing for a couple of generations of women in Halifax

“It gives me great satisfaction to drive by the HWHC houses and think about how the present day co-op members are carrying on the work that I helped to initiate. I think about the hours of ‘sweat equity’ I did in repairing, doing carpentry, tearing down, and rebuilding the houses. I think with joy about the optimism of the young women who took possession of the run-down properties in 1981-82 and built life back into them. The audacity we had to think that we could do what we did as a group of six women! It is said that “To know women’s personal lives is to know the politics of their situation.” The Halifax Women’s Housing Cooperative is one tangible example of how the “personal is political.” (Diann Graham, in *Trainor*, page 28)



Why It Had a Lasting Impact? It Was Politics in Action

The stories remembered at the Lesbian History Project gathering brought into view how in the 1980s a group of lesbians, who wanted to work collectively to provide themselves with quality housing, formed the first women's housing co-op in Canada. The Feminist Movement taught that "the personal was political." The Halifax Women's Housing Co-op is an example of that theory in action. In the 1980s a group of young lesbians in Halifax became empowered. They chose to reject the fear of being "discovered" with the consequent societal sanctions. They banded together to claim a pride and confidence in themselves, in their lesbian lifestyle and community.

Unlike most of the groups talked about at the Lesbian Memory Keepers' Workshop, the Women's Co-op is still in existence. Participants in the discussion group talked about the impact the Co-op has had, and why it has lasted.

- *The reason it still exists is that it is about OUR housing. You don't just break up something like that. We had a vested interest in keeping it together. (CM)*
- *The personal is political. For lesbians to be in control of our own housing is a very political act. (DG)*
- It gave a lot of people security. It provided safe, secure, affordable housing for many women.
- It enabled women to do things they might not have been able – or brave enough – to do otherwise.
- It gave us a chance to act out our philosophy of how the world should be. It was politics in action.
- It was a hotbed of lesbian organizing. There was a big enough space for meetings on a whole range of things.
- It was a chance to build and create community.

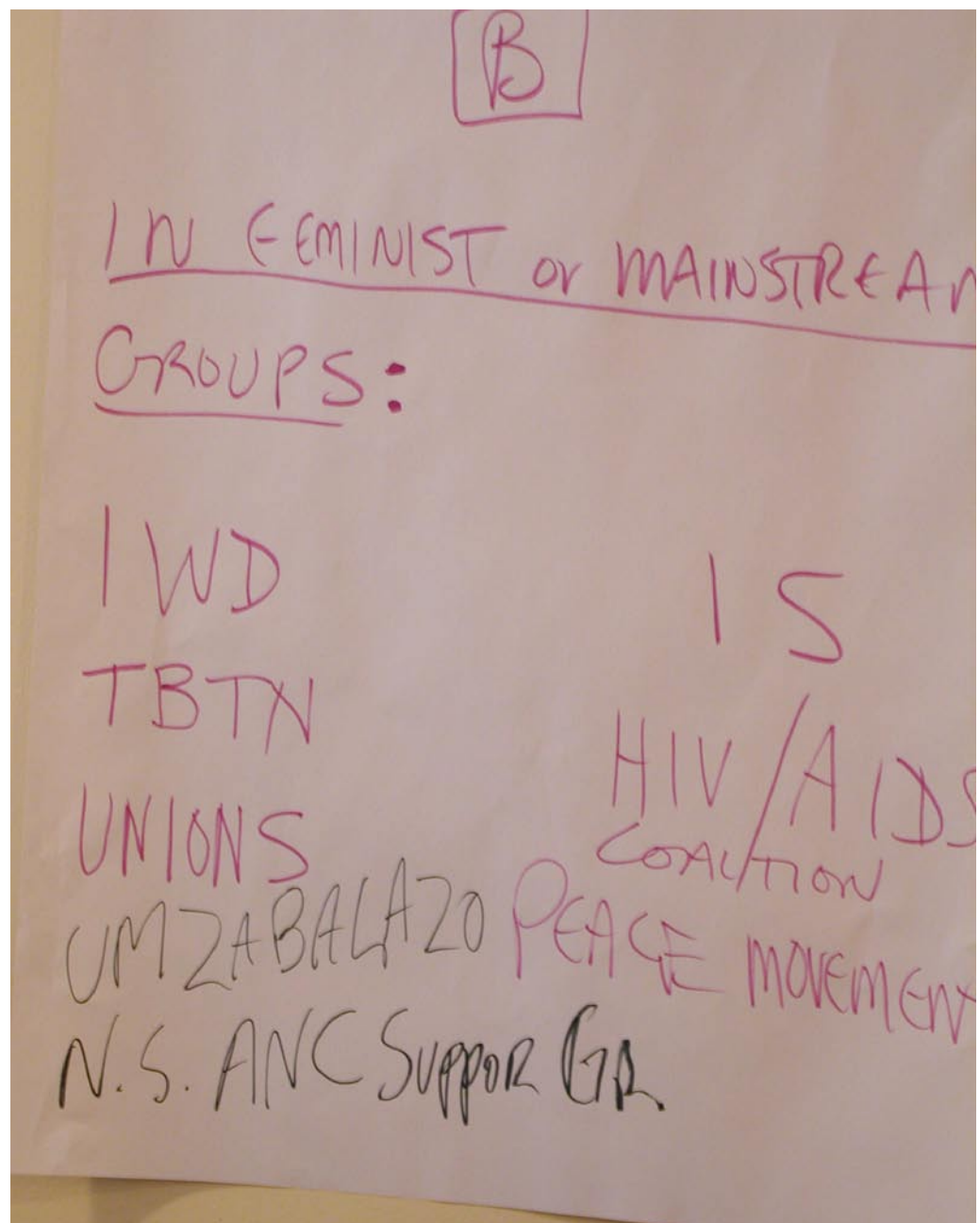
The Halifax Women's Housing Co-op (HWHC) was a remarkable collective effort that remains today a testament to the tenacity and optimism of the early lesbian rights movement. The women who initially formed the Society and built the Co-op were all



friends between the ages of 25 and 35. All had been active in the feminist movement, involved in issues like stopping violence against women, abortion rights, and organizing events including Take Back the Night marches and International Women's Day celebrations. The Lesbian and Gay Rights Movement was just at its beginning stage. In 1980 discrimination based on sexual orientation was not prohibited by a human rights code. Neither had equality rights for lesbians and gay men been defined under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This was a time when discrimination, prejudice, violence, hatred, and social and religious intolerance were part of the social and psychological experience of lesbians and gay men. The twenty five-year journey that the Lesbian and Gay community in Canada took toward establishment of equal protection, tolerance and inclusion started in the years of the seventies and early eighties. In every community across Canada lesbians and gay men dared to take the first tenuous steps to unity, to educate, and to provide safe spaces for themselves. The Halifax Women's Housing Co-op was one of these stepping stones to equality and an example of a turning point in the way lesbians viewed their lives and how they would be in the world.

Major political statements that were made by the HWHC were:

1. Lesbians would control their own housing and thereby have the freedom and the safety to live a lesbian life style.
2. Lesbians would begin to be open in their neighbourhoods and communities. By "coming out" lesbians were part of the process of acceptance that allowed the majority to exchange mistrust and prejudice for inclusion and tolerance.
3. Lesbians would take advantage of government programs and



services available to the general population in order to secure stable housing. This marked a point where lesbians saw themselves as Canadian citizens who deserved access to the same level of service as everyone else. The development of these philosophies in the Lesbian and Gay community would eventually lead to the securing of pension and health care benefits for their families.

4. Lesbians who had worked “in the closet” in the feminist movement and other social action movements developed organizational skills and supportive connections which empowered them to take on tasks to improve their own lives and reflected a lesbian culture.

Carrying the Co-op's Legacy Into the Future

Twenty-two years after forming the Co-op, there have been many changes, and in some ways the legacy of what the Co-op is, or was meant to be, is changing. It is at a critical stage. In less than ten years most of the mortgages will be due.

An Advisory Committee for the Co-op needs to be formed to ensure that it goes into the future holding onto the spirit of the original. To retain its legacy, early members may need to put energy back into it: Maybe it's time to go back to the original view of a place for older lesbians. We're talking about it and we're still so connected to it that we want to carry it on into the future. (CM)

I'm proud of how we stuck with the process. There were a few rocky years – how did our dreams fit together? What was practical? For a few years we knew how to deal with conflict. We grew through it. We got to a point of agreement. (SA)

We built it and it's still there!! Laura just moved into it. It's still a living community; it still exists for



younger lesbians. (CM)

It was wonderful to be part of it. It gave us a sense of accomplishment. (KD)

Names of Those Who Lived in the Co-op

Women in the discussion group tried to remember all those who had lived in the Co-op. They brainstormed names until they ran out of time. *[Originals are indicated by *]*

At Creighton Street

*Sara AvMaat
*Naomi L
*Kathy Dodds (& Kathleen Tetlock)
*Ginny Green
*Darl Wood
*Heather Dawkins
Pat Dingle
Fran Isaacs
Betty Peterson
Brook Hill
Nancy Hay
Pam Leeming
Carrie Melsom
Jane Kansas
Carmelita Robertson
Marie Paturel
Cathy?

Robie Street

*Diann Graham
*Vicky Wood
*Cathy Mellett
*Elaine Jacobsen
*Kathy Dodds (sometimes)
*Brenda Bryant
Leah Caitlin & Irma Bourgeois
Maureen Shebib
Claudette Legault & Janice Acton
Saundra Levin
Jane Wright

Fuller Terrace

*Carol Millett
*Susan Holmes
Lara Morris
Cathy Mellett & Nancy McKinnell
Sue Atkinson

Carrie Melsom

Windmill Road

*Cheryl Payne and Brenda Sharpe

*Joanne Osborne

Nora Kerr

Pat Dingle

Darlene Young??



So Many Memories: “Like Being Dipped in Rich Chocolate”

Following the small discussion groups, women were called to a final plenary session. Sitting in a circle, women reflected on the afternoon, and thanked the organizers for pulling the event together. Some confessed to having mixed feelings throughout the afternoon — but how could this be otherwise when they had been part of relationships and political work involving so much passion for so many years! Most commented upon how much they loved seeing women they had not seen for many years and on how much wisdom they realized they had gained from their struggles in helping to build the lesbian community. Each woman reflected on the significance of the afternoon to them:

- “I went from group to group. I have pieces of everything everybody is talking about.”
- “I think it’s just wonderful. What I loved was that it was not just Halifax, but to see my lovely friends from all over the province. I’m so happy about the women who took the initiative to plan this event. I haven’t seen so many women for so long — sometimes life gets in the way. What I liked was it is our herstory, not only past herstory, but about the future, too. Thinking about the role of the women in the housing co-op makes me wonder if there’s a role we can play in the future, too. To me, that’s a real strength of who we are and what we can do.” (Carol Millet)
- “2 snippets. Carol and I played softball against each other. Carol played 3rd base. We were never lovers, but we were sometimes mistaken for one another. We’d both graduated from MSVU together. And were in the very first all-women’s hockey team. I remember we were the only 2 lesbians on the team.” (?)



- “Some things don’t change. Like, women still are happy to go out in the snow and plow through bad weather for a change to spend 5 ½ hours to see a bunch of dykes. I’m very excited ... it’s kind of like a high school reunion. I wish it could have been longer.” (Diane Crowell)
- “It was wonderful to see so many people I haven’t seen in so long! I hope that something will come out of it. It was good because I find my memory is failing. Maybe another time we could do something about the ‘90s, like “What happened? A lot happened in the 80s but I want to see what happened in the 90s.” (Debbie Mathers)
- “I’m filled up to here. I’m trying not to cry. I am so honoured to have been here. Thanks to all the people who planned it.”
- “It was an invigorating afternoon. I never sat down. It reminds me of the enthusiasm and energy of those times. But then, the void that happened later. What happened after that? Nothing was ever so exciting as that time. Now I don’t seem to feel that same spontaneity or politicization. I loved all the stories I forgot — or never heard before. Thank you.”(Diane Gilbeaut)
- “It reminds me of the things I was involved with at the time — the many organizations were born, floundered, died — reminds me of that time period.” (?)
- “I wasn’t here in the 70s and 80s but everything today reminded me of what was going on where I was in Vermont and other places. Same kinds of organizations were born, flourished,



reborn — and still going on.” (Nora Kerr)

- “I’m about to move out of my home of 24 years. I have six boxes of stuff. GALA archives from my basement have moved to the NS Archives. It’d be great if we could follow up to get this stuff we all have saved into somewhere safe, for posterity, where they will be available for others. I constantly hear people say, ‘Oh, I shouldn’t have thrown that out.’ It would be good if a group could follow-up on the issue of materials — this is especially important “while we know where all the stuff is.” There needs to be a “suitable repository for future lesbian generations. MSVU maybe?” (Lynn Murphy)
- “I was really excited to be here and to see people I haven’t seen for a long time. It was a great excuse to get together. Like WHEN — we got to travel all over the province together. We got to be such dear friends — and how great to be stuck together in a snowstorm! I came out through WHEN. This has reminded me how much that organization meant to me. Sometimes, I think, ‘Well, maybe it’s just that I’m not on the right mailing lists and everyone else gets together and I don’t!’” (laughter). (Diane LaRue)
- “This has been great. Thanks to all the wonderful organizers. I learned a lot today. I would love to have heard more about the ‘70s. One favourite story: When I first came out in the community you all thought I was an RCMP officer spying on you! (laughter) Lots of lesbians from the 70s are not here today. Groundbreaking work was what we did.” (Kathy Dodds)
- “I had few memories before I came here today. You all sparked my memories. It reminded me of how much we laughed. There were painful times, but there were so many good things as well. Damn. We were good!” (chorus of “Oh yeah!”) (Cathy Mellett)



- “It was delightful to listen to the collective memories. It’s really a tribute to all of you. It makes me wish that I had been more a part of what went on at that time.” (Jeanette Schletmann)
- “As a recorder, thanks for inviting me. It made me think about what’s happening now in the lesbian community. It seems like there isn’t much going on today, but the right I have today have a lot to do with the work you all did.” (Jen Davis)
- “It feels like being dipped in rich chocolate. (laughter). I’m amazed to learn about the work you. In awe of that. I think that we should be proud that we were able to just hang in there through all of the slings and arrows.” (Diane Tingley)
- “I could go on about all the things I feel. But one thing I wanted to say was I’m thinking about all the other women who were so involved, but who are not here. But I kind of feel that they are here in spirit. I was reminded that as lesbians we always have to do things for ourselves. Capturing our history is so important.” (Brenda Richard)
- “I was thinking about my own journey, coming from the big city, not ‘out’ as I wanted to be. I was involved in the church and there weren’t a lot of out women at the time. I was thinking about the power of having some straight women who were companions to me, who journeyed with me — like Barbara Rumscheidt — who stimulated and supported me in my own private journey. It made possible for me to do the work I did. I’m awed by the huge of amount of work lesbians did. And to think it’s repeated across the world, isn’t it?” (Shelley Finson)
- “I think I’ve known everyone in the room. I frequently think of what it was like when I was in



my '20s, and now what it's like in my '50s. It has been a really positive journey. You women in this room are really the women who really brought me up and I really appreciate and want to thank you for all you have done to support me." (Diann Graham)

- "Time is passing. I wonder if it's possible to return to any of that past. Should we produce another *Pandora*? And then part of me thought: 'I'm not that young anymore,' but still, it's interesting to think about all those levels of energy — so much energy spent on righteousness (at the time) that could be replaced now with our wisdom from what we have learned. Don't be surprised if I call you for some money to publish another *Pandora*!" (Bethan Lloyd)
- "I remember how exciting the 80s were! (laughter) I don't know if it's completely gone now, or if it is just different. Whatever, it was really neat to relive that — that first lesbian drop-in in August 1981 where Diann Graham was the welcomer and met me — all nervous and scared. I had just moved here. Then I met 2 or 3 people there that I worked with! (laughter) — and they were great. It was very exciting, a great time." (Lois Loewen)
- "There's a lesbian dance on November 27 at the Church! I think this looks like a group of women who would like to see each other again. I came out before I went to school here in the 80s, but didn't have a community. So many people here that I've known since I came, in different capacities. As women came through the door today, all those connections over the last 10–15 years kept arising. You're all wonderful and I thank you for existing." (Sue Atkinson)
- "It felt like being with family today, like family is supposed to feel. When I first came out, it wasn't because I fell in love with a woman, or in lust. I just knew I was lesbian. And when I found community with some of you women, I felt 'Ahh, THIS is where I belong.'" (tears) It felt like that again today. (Brenda Beagan).
- "I'm so happy that so many people came today. As each woman came in the door this afternoon, I thought to myself, 'Oh good, there's ...' I have a greater appreciation of ... I remember like someone else said, I was welcomed! When I got divorced, I received flowers and a kind of WICCA card that said 'Good for you!' (laughter) Isn't that magnificent. I feel I was peripherally involved. What I discovered today was how rich that community was that I absorbed so thirstily. I appreciate it. I also never thought then how White we were as a community. Whatever I do next, I want to include that awareness." (Leah Caitlin)
- "I was just a feminist! I swear, I think I missed the most fun! (laughter). It wasn't for lack of trying. I feel as though I missed all the richness of what was going on then. I kind of regret it. Now I'm sad that I didn't listen more at the time to Barbara and Diann. About this workshop, we haven't really thought through where it will go, but we were hoping it would be ongoing in some way. Diann was the one who really got it going. It's so important. What will it become? How can we inform our future out of this part of our past?" (Ann Manicom)
- "Thanks to the women who organized this. I hope there is something beyond today. I went to small group sessions where I thought that I'd been most involved, but now I would like to have been more part of the sessions where I hadn't been, because it's so easy to forget. I was reminded of that when I got together with some people and when we got together people would say, 'Do you remember this? Do you remember that?' And they were two different sto-

ries! Its' really important to remember the story before we lose it altogether."

- "I hope this continues beyond today. I want to hear more about all the groups I *wasn't* involved in! I remember going to the lesbian drop-ins at Forrest House in the early 80s and discovering I had a sense of humour! Nothing others found funny had ever seemed funny to me before! (laughter) We had a lot of laughs. I remember those drop-ins and those dances and how we used to bemoan at the time 'How come there are no *older* lesbians?'" (laughter) (Sara AvMaat)
- "I'm so honoured to be here. I went to the Vortex and there were younger women there. Gay men there love me. They think I'm so 'cute'! When someone says to you that you're 'cute' you know that you're getting a little older. Today was so important. I feel like I've got a little something from all of you. And what I learned, I have passed on to my children and to my grandchildren. And the pieces I have passed on to them are greater for my having known each one of you." (Anita Martinez)
- "It was such a political time. As dykes it's all been so political. We had all that analysis within us and we were able to share it with health, with gay men, with ... We had a lot to give and we gave a lot." (Bernadette MacDonald)
- "Getting a sense of what women were doing. Hanging in through all the hard times. Wow! And what *fun* we had! We've made a difference and we've had fun doing it." (Darlah Purdy)



- “I thought this project was important enough to come from Toronto for a few days. I’m doing a PhD on lesbians in the 40s, 50s, 60s. It’s so important to do this work. I feel such an urgency about it. I’m so excited about getting women’s stories. I came here today with much trepidation, thinking I didn’t really do much in the 80s. But I did! In my mind still is Ginny Greene. (Darl Wood)
- “Some of you are my intimate family. This is that chosen family thing. There’s always somebody in the family who keeps track of that. ‘What’s our genealogy?’ (lots of laughter, someone says: ‘We don’t want to go there!’) You have enriched me.” (Alex Keir)
- “Last night I pulled my box of memories out. There’s a lot of pain and a lot of happiness in that box. It’s time to get going on the dykes old folks home. There’s still work to be done. This is our family. Opening up that box last night, our world is so different from the world of the 70s. We all had a part in that. We should pat ourselves on the back.” (Deb Trask)
- “It was hard and scary, but energizing and empowering. A lot of hard work has been done with the promise of getting together and dancing!” (Sandra Nimo)
- “My life feels so squeezed today. I had mixed feelings about being here. People know me in a lot of mixed ways. There were some painful moments sitting in this room. It’s impossible to talk about these events without the personal relationships being right there. I was 23 then. We didn’t do everything perfectly. The energy that was anger has turned into something more embracing.” (Georgina Chambers)



Some Parting Thoughts: There is Still Time

(based on notes prepared by Debbie M)

Prior to leaving the workshop, women were given an opportunity to write any final comments they felt they did not have time to say in the small groups, or found too difficult to say verbally. These are the responses women left:

QUESTION 1: What would you like to add to the recording of the day that you didn't have a chance to say, or felt you could not say?

We Were Too Busy Accomplishing Things on Everyone's Behalf to Document Our Work

I would have said what Darl mentioned regarding not realizing how much she (we) had done over the years. That is probably because no one ever told us we were accomplishing important advances on everyone's behalf. While we were too busy to document/recognize all our own work, there was no one else to honour, name our efforts either. Let us take our place now.

We Were Tough and In Touch

WHEN was really important to rural lesbians—or “might-be” lesbians. The annual conferences and quarterly magazine. Kept us in touch and allowed us to be in touch with ourselves and other dykes. The Secretary of State Women's Program—Kathy Moggeridge was/were instrumental in the networking for the Pictou County Women's Centre—and WHEN. The size of our conferences—mailing costs—all sorts of stuff.

We Refused to Be Invisible, But We Were Hard on Each Other

Talk about ways we refused to be invisible in the organizations and groups we were involved with. How we developed theory/feminist and lesbian at our meetings and our table-kitchen gatherings:

How much pain we caused each other, how hard we were on each other.

How much forgiveness it takes to come to an event like this.

The gap between academia and grass-roots actions.

Much of My Experience Was Like Others'

It is too bad we can only be in one place at a time. But in the end, my 70s and 80s were much the same as other peoples', and it was good to remember them and to get to know these women better now.

We Lived the Personal and the Political

That we lived the personal and political. Thanks.

A Lesbian Heritage: Involving the Past and the Present

In 80s the connections/communications seemed easy—much more of community than now: WHEN, *Vitality*, *Pandora* (or maybe this is just me). Mostly, thanks for this day. Many here I haven't seen in years; I thought everyone would look older, but everyone looks the same; so feels

like being right back in the 80s. So the continuity of past and present. Love it all and love you's all!! I miss Helen Vila; was the same age as me, but out her whole life, so was in Toronto in the 60s—the heritage there, being lesbian at that time. I feel full of love.

Please, We Have to Do Something

Archives—Please we have to have something. Let me know. I have many books filled with photos and other archival stuff. Videos, pins, etc. (Anita Martinez)

Those Experiences Still Sustain Me

How lucky I feel to have had these experiences, good and bad, as part of my development as a lesbian. Those years in Halifax 1978-89 formed a part of my foundation; they continue to sustain me.

You Are Part of Us — We Are Part of You

For those women who are not here today because they are busy or life has moved them in a different direction or they are no longer in this life. You are a part of us all—we are a part of you. We are one—we always were. We always will be. You have all shared who I am today—thank you! We were once young together—with dreams—with anger—with passions—with fears—with hopes. What we hoped most for was a place, a world where we could be—where we could love—where we could create a life for ourselves and the women we loved. We have achieved that! Now we work for that for all people of the world and the world itself—there is still time and work to be done; dancing to be had.

QUESTION 2: When you think back on lesbian organizing in the 1970s and 1980s, what images and feelings stand out most for you?

Learning that Being a Lesbian IS a Political Act

I wouldn't fully understand how being a lesbian was a political act until the 80s. I had thought of it more as a preference, but would learn that it is so much more.

Let's Remember Others: We Were Family

One thing we never brought up were the personal relationships. It was a big part of the dynamism and energy. The lesbian community was very small. We often had same partners/bed mates at some point, good and bad, made for tense meetings. But we moved on, got past the animosity to realize there were too few of us, we were family. It would be nice to list those who have died—to remember them—give them special mention. Keep us informed—and maybe finding out where other women are presently living who were a part of those years.

A Time of Passion and Intensity, But Also Anger and Judgment

It was a time of great passion, sometimes wrong-headed but probably never “wrong-hearted.” Challenging each other to make connections, to see the many-tentacled reach of oppression. For me it was also a very lonely time, feeling misunderstood for my politics, seen as too angry, too judgmental, too intense—and perhaps I was all of these things to varying degrees. Still it was hard to be part of a community where I felt myself to also be an outsider. How Humbling is life! And... wasn't the music just fantastic!!!

Our Lives Depended On Forging New Ground: Needed to Be Part Of, Not Apart

The strength, foresight and the determination of women who realized that all of our lives depended upon our forging new ground. We were living out an expression of our, in some ways, desperate need to find “a home” as some of the women here said today. We needed to be a part rather than apart in order to be who we knew we were. Our survival depended upon it. **And we made it.**

Life-Changing Events

I met my first partner at Wild Womyn—a life enhancing-life changing annual event. A safe place to be a lesbian for four days a year. When I left on Monday afternoons I would re-enter the other world—always a bit jarring.

It Was Fun: We Need to Remember Those Not Here

Remembering how much fun we had doing the work—every meeting a party and every party a meeting. Remembering the women who were not here today.

We Were Always on the Side of the Underdog

Always being on the side of outsiders and underdogs then—and now.

Women Being Together in Many Ways

Women dancing/listening and singing women’s songs

Women talking/analyzing

Women walking/marching

Women nude/swimming together

Women sharing space

Women sharing books/articles

Women coming together/challenging the status quo

Women sharing a bed

Women coming together/coming apart

A Time of Richness: Wonder and Agony

richness—wonder to agony

Family/belonging

So much fun

The love—of each other; of purpose

(was I angry then?)

Understanding Others So Much Better

Entering a lesbian home and feeling so at home and comfortable and thinking what a wonderful way to live, even the cat appeared calmer, the household more organized or at least people were communicating. I had no contacts with lesbians’ internal life before this as I had one daughter of four daughters who announced @ 15 years old she was lesbian and until entering this “lesbian home” I had shut her personal life out—looking back it was my own homophobia—I spent much time blaming myself for her severe disability. Now we are buds to the end and certainly understand each other so much more. Thanks to all the women I’ve met here.

So Many Beliefs, Issues, Ideologies We Felt So Deeply

Connecting with other women/lesbians around so many beliefs/issues/ideologies we felt so deeply. Being reflected in others, groups, events. So much fun, laughter, food, love

I Found Community, Family — and Adventure

I came to Halifax in the early 80s to go to school, and although I was already out, I didn't yet have a community. By becoming involved in lesbian feminist organizations/activities, I found community and family. That time is filled with wonderful feelings—a time of adventure, friendship, purpose, fun. Wild Womyn, women's dances, lesbian conferences, etc. etc.—special formative times!

The Music — Always the Music

the dance—so many venues

Always intense.

Breaking up in public

An ex—with her new lover

A new lover in your arms

Someone to flirt with—friends dancing in groups

Dressing in our dyke best—damn we looked good

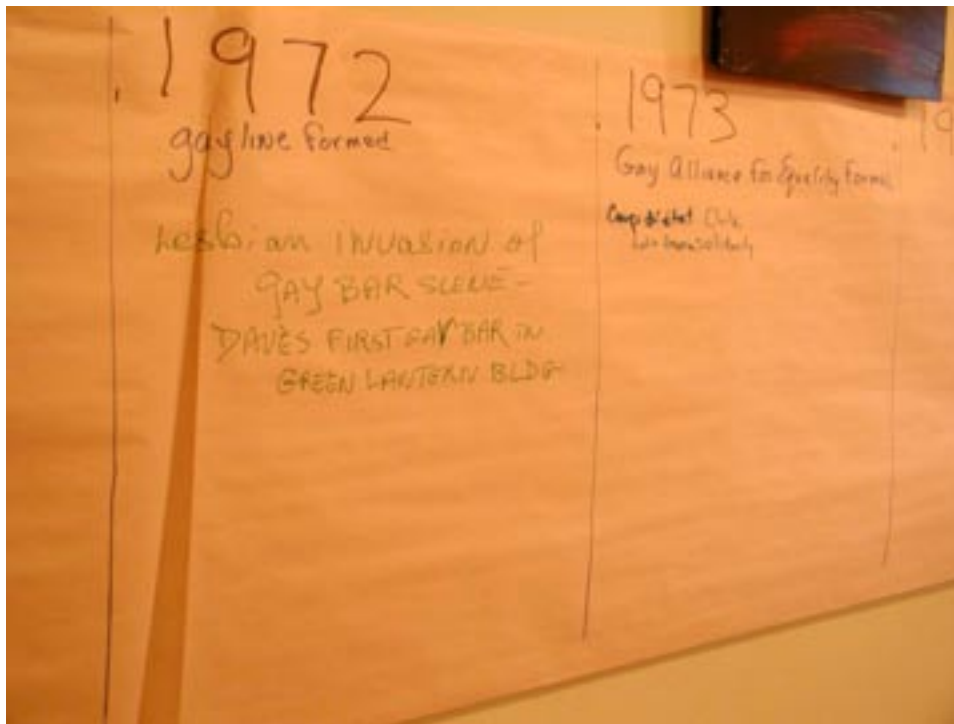
The music—always the music



Time Line

1985–March 1990

Information Culled by Debbie Mathers from Pandora



Questions: when did GAE become GALA?

1969 Trudeau introduces changes to Criminal Code "There is no place for the State in the bedrooms of the nation"

1969 Raid on Stonewall

1970

1971

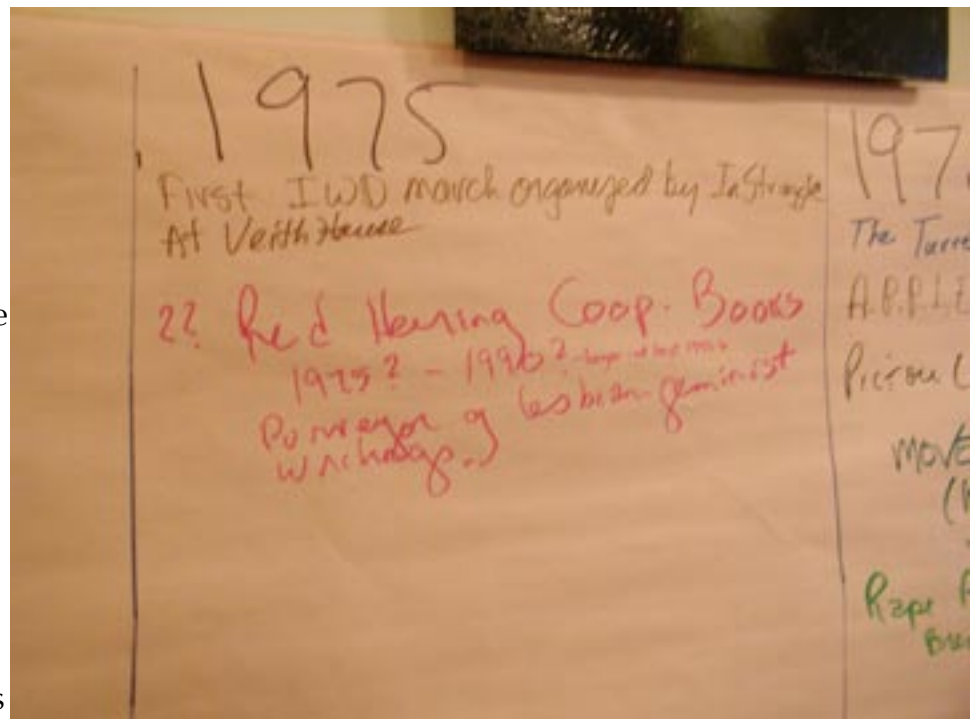
1972 Gayline formed
Lesbian invasion of gay bar scene
Dave's first gay bar in Green Lantern Building

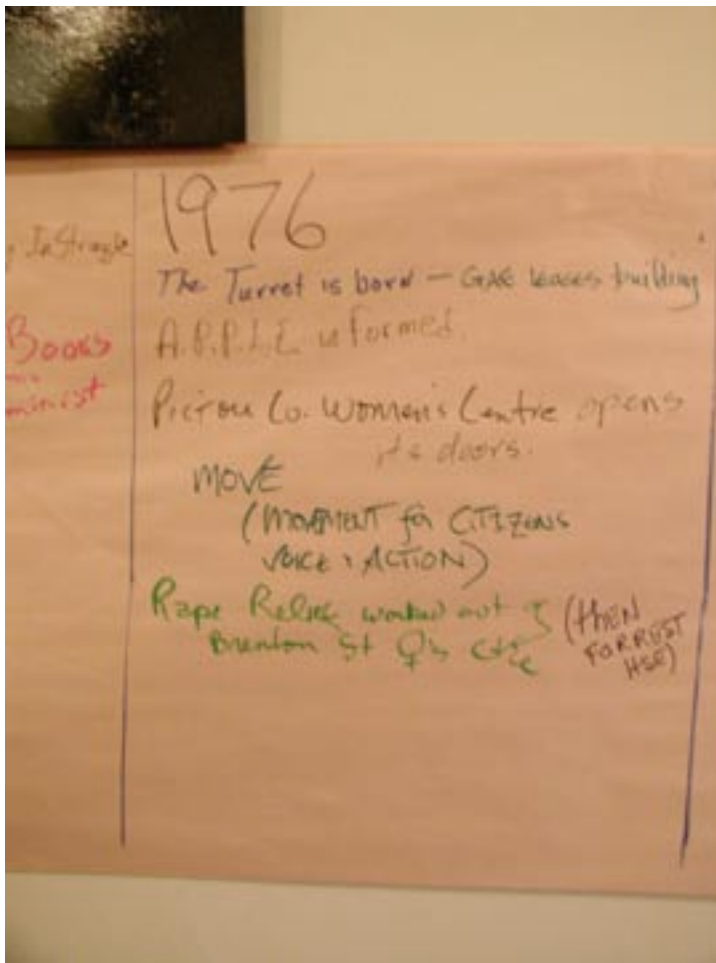
1973 Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE) formed
Coup d'etat Chile, Latin American solidarity

1974

1975 First IWD march organized by In Struggle at Veith House
Red Herring Co-op Bookstore, purveyor of lesbian and feminist writings (1975-1995?)

1976 The Turret is born, GAE leases building
APPLE is formed
Pictou County Women's





Centre opens its doors
 MOVE (Movement for Citizens Voice and Action)
 Rape Relief worked out of Brenton Street Women's Centre (then Forrest House)

1977 First Atlantic Gay Conference
 GAE gets liquor licence (first in Canada)
 Jury Room march
 Forrest House Women's Centre (A Women's Place)

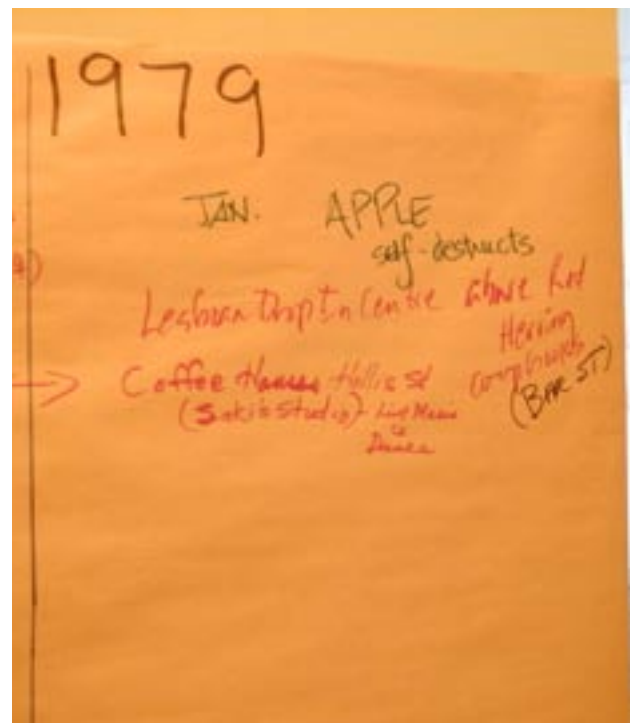
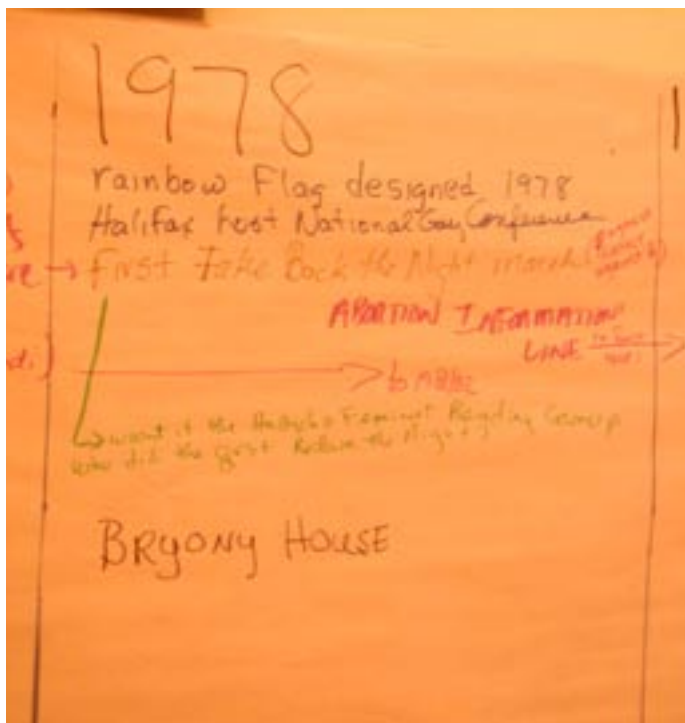
1978 Rainbow flag designed
 Halifax hosts National Gay Conference
 First Take Back the Night March (against violence against women)
 (wasn't it the Anarcha Feminist Reading Group who did first Reclaim the Night?)
 Abortion Information Line (in Forrest House)
 Bryony House

1979 APPLE self-destructs
 Lesbian drop-in centre (Red Herring Co-op Books, Barrington Street)
 Coffee houses, Hollis Street (Saki's Studio) live music and dance

1980 Lesbian drop-ins,
 Forrest House
 "Dressed to Kill"
 (movie) protest

1981 Halifax Professional Women's Network founded
 Greenham Common (?)
 Halifax Women's Housing Co-op formed
 WAVAW (Women Against Violence Against Women)
 Lesbian drop-ins on Fridays
 Bishop Street parties

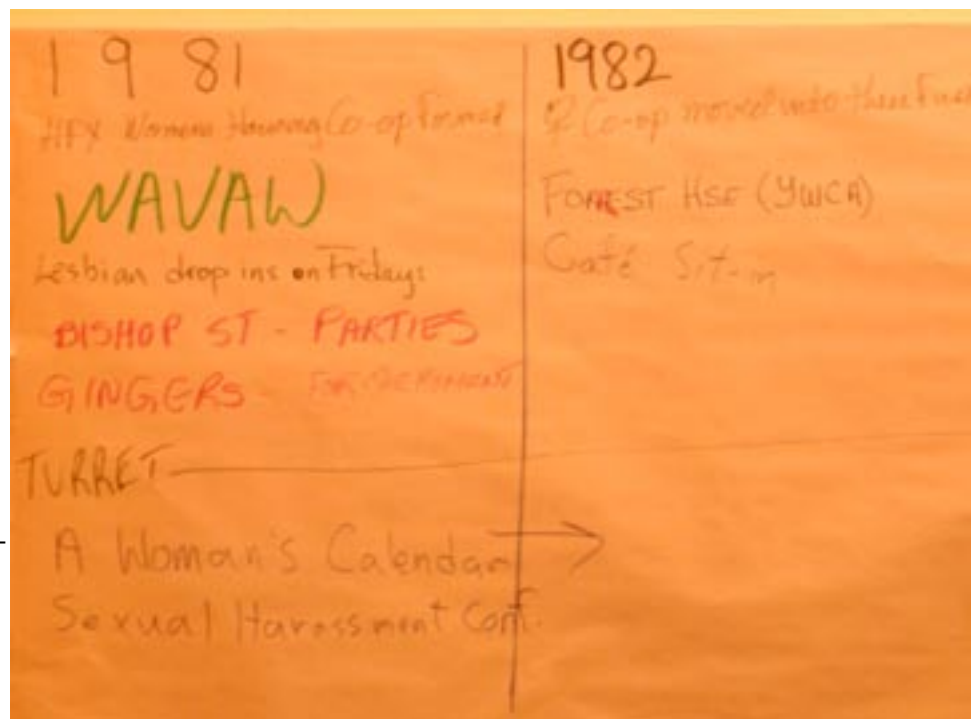




Ginger's-Four the Moment
Turret
A Women's Calendar
Sexual Harassment Conference

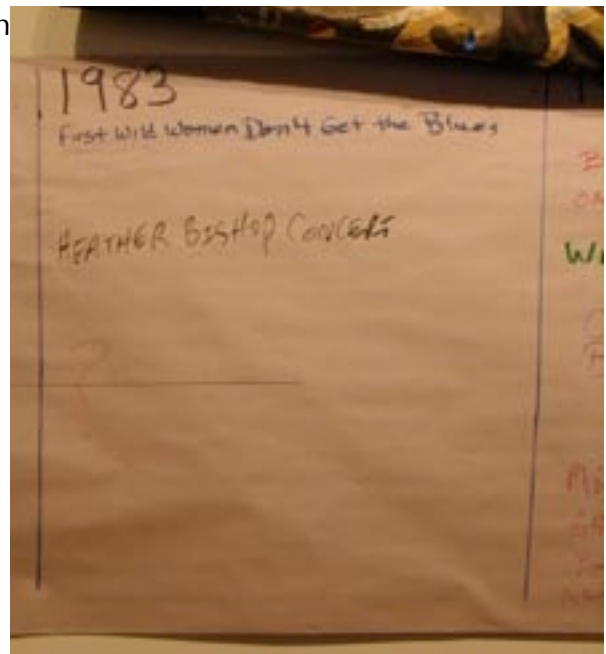
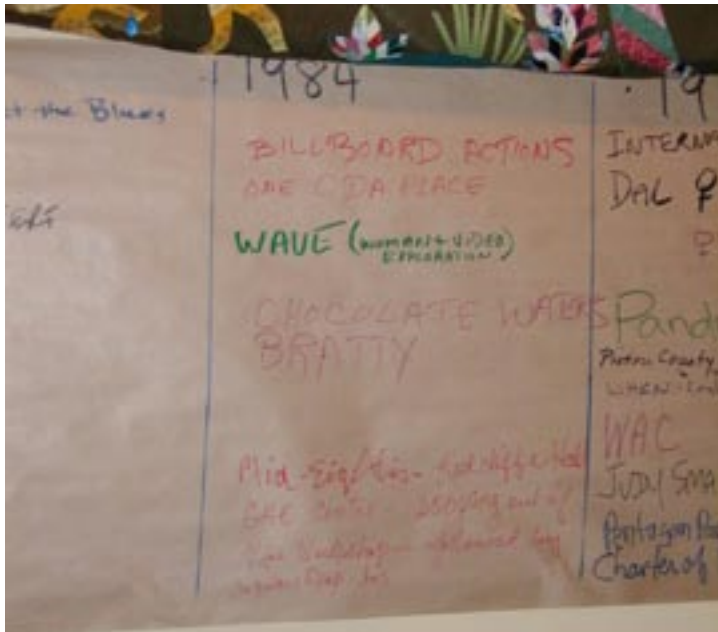
1982 Blockade the Bombmakers at United Nations Disarmament March in NYC
Women's Co-op moved into their first home
Forrest House (YWCA)
Café sit-in

1983 Nonviolent Direct
Action workshop
NAGS formed
No More Hibakusha
street theatre (NAGS)
Remembrance Day
vigil at Stadacona
(NAGS)
Coalition for Immigrant Women in NS
formed
First Wild Womyn
Don't Get the Blues
camping weekend (annually until 1996)
Heather Bishop concert



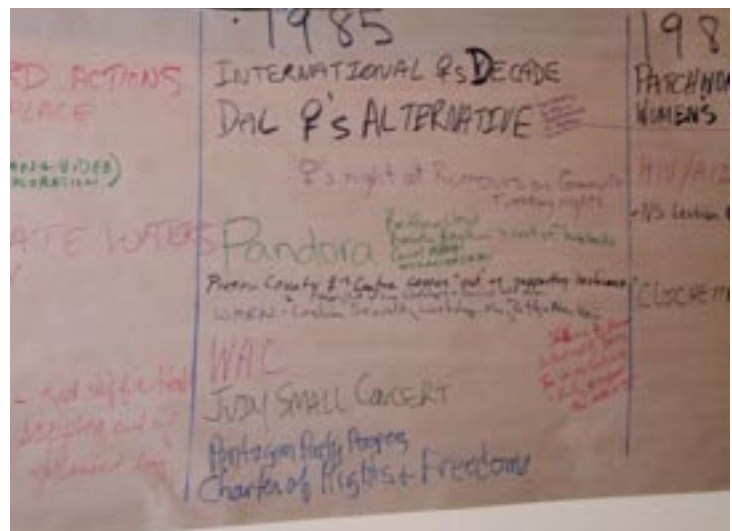
1984 Women and Militarism workshop at Wentworth
 (NAGS-Never Again Affinity Group)
 United Spinsters
 Debunk Debert
 Pentagon Protest
 Morgentaler found not guilty in jury trial
 Billboard actions, One CDA Place
 WAVE (Women and Video Exploration)
 Chocolate Waters
 Bratty

1985 International Women's Decade
 Pandora started (September): Bethan (Betty-Ann)
 Lloyd, Brenda Bryan, Carol Millett, Megan Ar-
 dyche, and cast of hundreds. Continues until July



1993.
 Nairobi
 Publication of "No is Not Enough: Helping Teenagers Avoid Sexual Assault"
 Radclyffe Hall (GAE community centre on Macara Street)
 Youth Action Pact
 MUMS (Mothers United for Metro Shelter)
 Tent City (MUMS)
 Housing for People
 Judy Small concert at Neptune after fire at Dal
 Women's International Peace Conference
 NAC conference in Ottawa

Wild Women Weekend (third)
 WHAM (Women's Health and Medicine) founded
 Women and Peace: Visual Art of resistance exhibit
 Toronto conference: Is There Sex After Feminism
 Morgentaler's acquittal appealed and new trial ordered
 Dionne Brand workshop on racism
 Halifax Poster Project
 "Understanding the Law" 2nd edition
 Women and Pornography Project
 WASP (Women's Alliance for Support of



Prostitutes) forms

Conference on women and violence in PEI (REAL women cause problems)

Dal Women's Alternative: Lynne MacKinlay, Sue Atkinson, Juanita Montalvo, Liz Donovan, Alison Brewin)

Women's Night at Rumours, Granville Street, Tuesday nights

Pictou Co Women's Centre "comes out" as supporting lesbians

WHEN (Women's Health Education Network) Lesbian Sexuality Workshop (Mary Petty, Alex Keir)

Shelburne women kicked out of Armed Forces for being lesbians (Rally to support them in March). Protests, petitions, etc., meetings at GALA

WAC

Pentagon Party Poopers

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

1986 Electra productions: Dawna Gallagher, Sara Newman and Laura Huffaker

Making Time for Making Art at MSVU

IWD: Shelter, Health, Employment

IWD: Arlene Mantle at YWCA

IWD: Clichettes at Misty Moon

"Open More Doors: MUMS speak out against the housing crisis" is published

Dal women's centre forms (?)

"Stepping out of Line" workshop (or 1985?)

People's University of NS forms, awards Muriel Duckworth honorary degree

Patchwork Women's Centre at Dal opens (closed 1988?)

Cdn Assn for Advancement of Women and Sport conference in Charlottetown

NS attorney general told police chiefs he would support any municipal force that wanted to discriminate against lesbians and gay men; outrage ensues

Feminist Lesbian Caucus formed (NS Lesbian Coalition?) in name only to have a lesbian name

as sponsor for IWD and lesbian group as part of WAC and to respond to above-mentioned attorney general comment:

Bethan (Betty-Ann) Lloyd, Brenda Bryan, Jo Sutton, Scarlet Pollock, Alex Keir, Bernadette MacDonald, Debbie Mathers)

Trial of Canada's abortion law

Four the Moment performs on Halifax

Natal day's Concert on the Hill

Public forum on Advisory Council on

Status of Women at Henson College

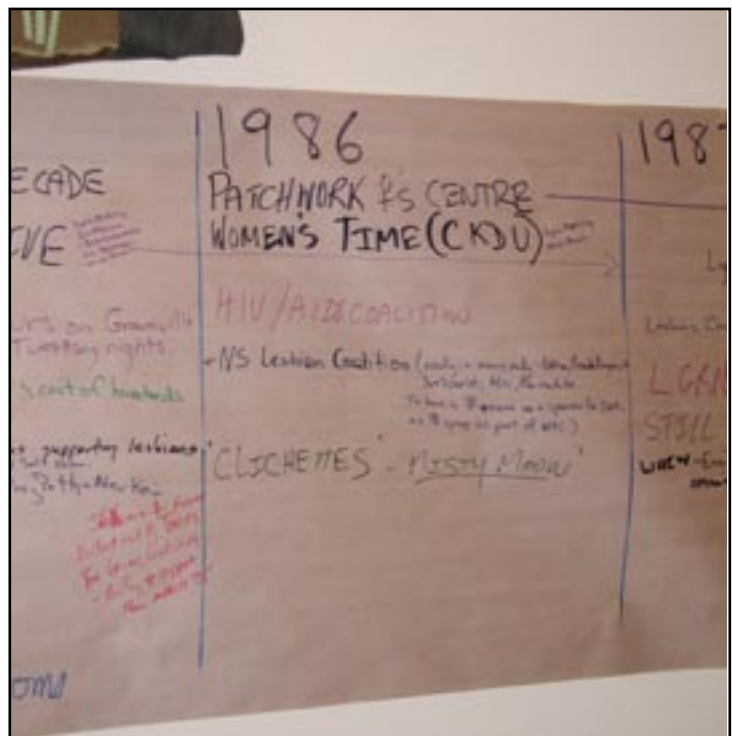
Connie Caldor, Doris Mason, and Lulu

Keating perform at QEH

Women's Time, radio show at CKDU:

Lynn MacKinlay and Alison Brewin

HIV/AIDS Coalition



1987 Women's Action Coalition forms

Black Women's Congress forms

WHEN conference on Our Environment, Ourselves at Acadia, organized as a lesbian meeting
 REAL Women and Secretary of State funding hearings
 Lesbian Conference: "Coming Together" with Sheila Gilhooly, Veith House. Dec 4-6: Alex Keir, Bernadette MacDonald, Jo Sutton, Scarlet Pollock, Debbie Mathers
 Still Sane (as part of Lesbian Conference)
 Children's Aid Society workshop: "Gay and Lesbian Adolescents: Issues and Concerns for Service Providers"
 Conference: Making Connections: Finding our Power (Women Unlimited and WAC)
 Women's Dance and Social Society has dance
 Pornography debate with Susan Cole and Al Goldstein at Dal
 Mediawatch panel discussion: "How Women Make the news: Bias in the Canadian media"
 Lesbian and Gay Rights NS forms (LGRNS)
 Lysistrata singing group forms: Sue Atkinson, Anne Bishop, Sue McKay, Brenda Beagan (to 1988)

1988 Women's Committee at NSCAD re-established

Supreme Court struck down abortion law as unconstitutional

Public Gathering for Choice

WHEN Conference: Women as Care Givers at NS Agricultural College, Truro, lesbian lunch-time meeting

- Mary Daly talks at MSVU

Third International Feminist Book Fair, Montreal

LINC (Low Income network) forms

MUST (Mothers United for Social Transformation) forms

WAC conference: "A Time to Stand Together" in Stellarton

Lesbian and Gay Rights NS lobbies to include sexual orientation in Human Rights Act

First Halifax Pride March

WAC pamphlet: human rights for lesbians

"Forbidden Love"

screened at Rumours

(1987?)

1989 Lifesize: film and

production workshops for women

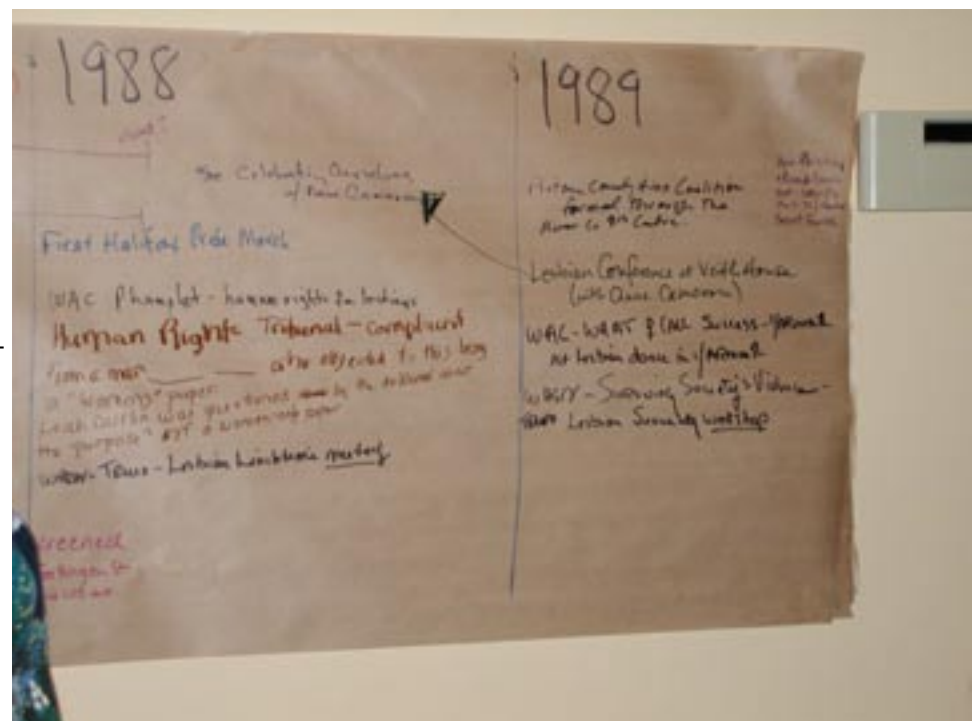
Second Lesbian Conference held "Being Ourselves" with Anne Cameron at Veith House: Jo Sutton, Scarlet Pollock,

Alex Keir, Bernadette MacDonald, Debbie Mathers, Lois Loewen,

Anita Martinez

IWD theme: In Halifax:

International Peace begins at Home



Gay and Lesbian Video Exhibition at Centre for Art Tapes
LEAF Roadshow performs at Cohen Auditorium
6th annual PEI Women's festival with Helen Fogwill Porter, Lucie Blue Tremblay and Sonia Johnson
AIDS quilt comes to Halifax
Lesbian Support Group forms
CCLOW conference on Women and Learning at SMU
"Goddess Remembered" screening premiere at SMU
Pro-Choice Action Group forms
Anita Martinez's 50th birthday party at Veith House
Halifax Morgentaler Clinic opens
Marc Lepine kills women in Montreal
"Single Mother's Survival Guide" is published
Pictou County AIDS Coalition formed through the Pictou Co Women's Centre
WAC: What Women Call Success (Yarmouth); First lesbian dance in Yarmouth
Lesbian Sexuality Workshop in Truro
WHEN: Surviving Society's Violence
Anne Bishop and Brenda Beagan meet, later (March 1990) start Secret Furies singing group

MediaWatch

CARAL

CCLOW

CRIAW

IWD

Take Back the Night

Lesbian/Gay Pride week/march

NFB very supportive of women/lesbian issues

Also Centre for Art Tapes and Red Herring Co-op Bookstore

Final Thoughts

This is an exciting day! It's a day that brings an official close to the "Lesbian History Project," a day that makes available to the community the thoughts and remembrances of over forty women.

The Lesbian History Project began in 2003 with the coming together of six women (Shelley, Ann, Diann, Bethan, Deb, and Brenda), who shared a common interest in recording experiences of the Nova Scotia Lesbian Community from 1970–1990. This was a period of tremendous political and social change for Lesbian and Gay Canadians. The Nova Scotia Lesbian community was a catalyst for the development and evolution of this powerful social movement. The Lesbian History Project felt that the recording of this information was necessary to preserve it for future generations.

In November 2004, lesbians from all over Nova Scotia gathered for a day of remembering, discussion, and facilitation of the recording of information. In many ways, this history workshop turned out to be a day of great celebration and affirmation of their lives and accomplishments.

The women who gathered had been a part of a tremendous social force that shaped a changing national view of the Lesbian and Gay minority. Their political efforts were but part of the story told. By developing a network of social activity and communication, the community formed a safe, exciting, affirming place for Lesbians to live their lives.

These women had, for the most part, grown up in a society where homosexual activity was still banned in the Criminal Code and was considered a psychological disorder. Over the course of their lives, political and social enlightenment have brought the protection of their human rights, and legal and legislative inclusion. These women not only experienced this whirlwind of change, they were active forces in creating the climate of understanding and/or defiance that brought about these changes. There was no climatic moment nor a specific date when the Lesbian Movement won the victory of understanding or the inclusion by a nation. It was a victory achieved slowly over decades and brought about by any number of lesbians and gays across Canada. For



the forty lesbians who gathered to take part in the Memory Keepers Workshop, it was with a sense of pride that they recorded their participation and initiative in this great change.

One of the aspects we learned from the wonderful day was that lesbian work has been rendered invisible. This is probably the result of 1) women/lesbians working as a collective without individual credit; 2) women's work being traditionally devalued, 3) gay male organizations being more prominent than lesbian ones. This phenomenon is part of our history and younger folks who did not live through these times might be baffled in trying to account for why so little was known or why so much of the struggle has gone unrecorded and unnoticed. If we do not bring it into the light, then not only are women's efforts ignored and unknown with history lost, but a further replication of our historic invisibility ensues.

Memories are always partial. Even though we might have been in the same organizations at the same time, our accounts, more than two decades later, are often different, capturing different angles, viewing events from differing perspectives. And we often have trouble remembering exact dates. But what shines through in the wonderful collection of memories in the Lesbian History Project Report is a sense of shared insights about why certain organizations were founded and what was important about the wealth of lesbian feminist activism at that time.

Dalhousie University Women's Centre gave the Lesbian History Project a grant of \$2,000 to hold a workshop to gather the stories of the Lesbian community. We want to thank them for their financial support and encouragement.

Thanks is extended to the women who volunteered to act as research recorders. This information was written from their notes taken over the course of the day.

Janice Acton wrote the Memory Keepers Report. She compiled, organized, and in general made sense of the piles of notes that were generated from that day. She wrote the report in a way that reflected the high-spirited, multi-faceted outpouring of information. Both the information and mood of the Memory Keepers are captured by Janice's writing.

Debbie Mathers edited and distributed the report. Her attention to detail and dedication to the positive outcome of the Lesbian History Project was a constant.

Thanks to Anita Martinez who photographed the day. Her photos are an important part of recording the day. You can access the complete set on-line at <<http://picasaweb.google.com/diann.graham/MemoryKeepers?authkey=Q3pss79MQ48>>.

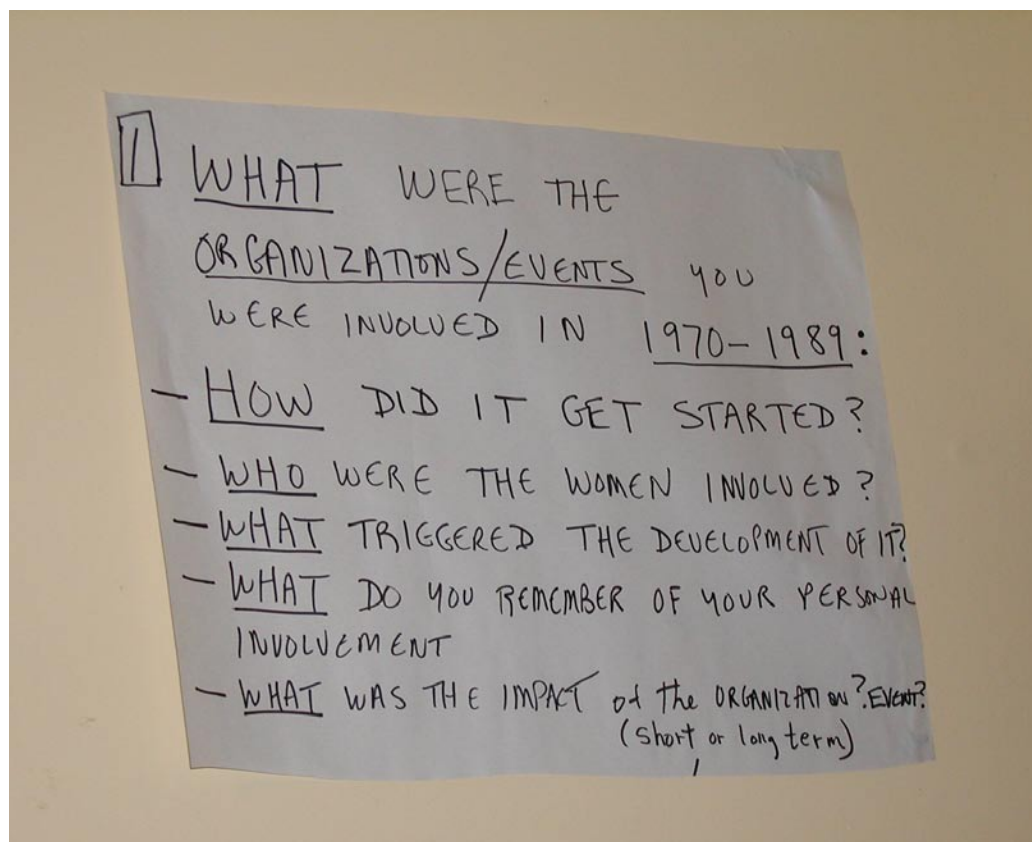
The women who made up the Lesbian History Project Committee view the release of this report as their last piece of work. It is their hope and expectation that other women will take on other historical and archival projects to continue this important work.

Sincerely,

Shelley Finson
Diann Graham

Bethan Lloyd
Ann Manicom

Deb Mathers
Brenda Richard



This report has been compiled from the notes and flipcharts written by volunteer recorders who participated in the Lesbian Memory Keepers Workshop. The reporters' task was heroic, considering how many stories were told by so many womyn in such a short period of time. As much as possible, comments made by women are verbatim and are shown by quotation marks. The introduction for each section is comprised of my own and/or the recorders' reflections or comments about the feelings or dynamics within the discussion groups.

Given the impossibility of capturing everything everyone said, and the imperfection of memory at the best of time, there inevitably are errors. Please consider this report a beginning point. We hope other women will take on other historical and archival projects to continue this important work.

— Janice Acton