



ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF
WOMEN

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

25th ANNIVERSARY
1980 - 2005

WOMEN SPEAK II

November 24th, 2005

In Memory of Nellie Nippard

Women Speak II is dedicated to the memory of Nellie (Murphy) Nippard, who survived horrendous abuse and became an advocate for women everywhere who were disempowered by violence and the justice system.

Nellie began her fight for victims' rights after surviving a brutal knife attack by her estranged husband in 1990. Nellie went from victim to survivor to advocate, and fought tirelessly for more than a decade so that victims of crime would have the right to attend National Parole Board hearings.

In October of 2005 the federal Department of Justice announced that victims of violence can now apply for financial assistance to attend parole hearings, as well as access a new National Office for Victims. However, this was a victory that Nellie never lived to see.

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a Genesis
Ann Bell

I have been invited to write an article on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, so I have chosen to write about the genesis of the Council.

The establishment of an Advisory Council on the Status of Women nationally and provincially was one of the recommendations of the Bird Royal Commission, which reported in 1970. However, in the early years of what we now call the current women's movement, the early to mid 1970's, there were many issues that consumed the energy of the volunteer women's community. One of these issues was the dearth of women appointed to government boards, commissions and crown corporations. The Premier of the day, Frank Moores, inadvertently gave women the opportunity to focus on this very issue. When asked why there were so few women on government-appointed boards and commissions, Premier Moores stated that he didn't believe there were qualified women in Newfoundland available or willing to fill these positions.

Lynn Verge of the Corner Brook Status of Women Council launched a brilliant campaign to show the Premier that what he believed was, in fact, nonsense. She drafted an advertisement for the local papers that was a clip-out addressed to the Premier. There was space for women to fill in their names, addresses, education, community involvements and areas of interest, and send to the Premier stating

that they were qualified and available to serve on government boards and commissions. Members of the women's community then printed hundreds of these ads and distributed them at network dinners, nurses' conventions, teachers' conventions, and any place where large groups of women gathered. To the surprise and chagrin of the Premier's office hundreds of responses were received from women and, as a consequence, government appointments of women became a media topic.

The efforts of the women's community to increase the participation of women appointed to boards also coincided with the resignation of Premier Moores from public life. This presented a fabulous opportunity for the women's community to establish our priorities and lobby the candidates for the newly-announced leadership campaign. We made a short list of priorities which included matrimonial property legislation, a Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the appointment of women to boards and commissions.

During the provincial campaign for this all-important leadership, one of the leading candidates, Brian Peckford, made a commitment to some of the members of the Corner Brook Status of Women Council that, if he was successful in his leadership bid, he would introduce matrimonial property legislation as well as legislation leading to the establishment of an Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

ever been one woman on Council, and that had been more than twenty years before, just made it all the better for the challenge it presented. Fortunately for me, the first place I went to look for help was to an office down on LeMarchant Road called ... the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

There, I found pamphlets and booklets and all sorts of materials on women in politics. More importantly though, I met a woman who very generously gave me her time, imbued me with her enthusiasm and encouraged me with her confidence. She was a bit outrageous, some might say a born radical, but her goals were laudable and her enthusiasm infectious. Many of you know her well – the founding President, Ann Bell. And thus it was I started down the path to becoming a feminist politician. I still didn't know it yet, though!

On the night of my first election when I topped the polls in Mount Pearl, I did the first of what was to be many media interviews. I don't remember who the interviewer was, but I do remember the loaded question he asked me, "Are you a feminist and what can women expect from you in terms of advancing their issues?" Having an aversion to being labeled so early in my political career, I went to great lengths to explain the things that I stood for. Of course, I never did answer the feminist question, rationalizing that people would figure it out for themselves! Radical I wasn't!

It has since occurred to me that ending up in provincial politics serving as the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women for

five years was no small irony. I remember when we went to Government House for the first time to be sworn in to Cabinet, some of the other women there asked me, "Do you have the Status of Women?" "Not me," I answered with authority. "I'm the Minister of Works, Services and Transportation." You can imagine my chagrin when the Status of Women portfolio was announced and my name was called! Many times since that day it has occurred to me that combining the Status of Women portfolio with the male bastion of Works, Services and Transportation was a stroke of genius on the Premier's part.

And so began what was, undoubtedly, the most challenging, enjoyable, frustrating, rewarding and sometimes downright vexing relationship of my political career – my relationship with your current President, Joyce Hancock, and the Board of the Advisory Council. By this time, eleven years after my first foray into politics, I was feeling fairly comfortable in my feminist shoes. I felt at one with the aims of the Advisory Council. I had grown to believe strongly in the work being done by women throughout the province to address social justice issues and achieve equality for women.

Many people will remember the mid nineties as a time when huge deficits, both federal and provincial, were driving massive changes in the role of government and its agencies. Funds were extremely scarce and budgets had to be cut accordingly. The relatively tiny budget allocated for the Advisory Council and Women's Policy Office was no exception. If we were to even come close to addressing the needs in both areas, it

meant making a major shift in how we deployed our resources. This required a new way of working that neither the Advisory Council nor the Women's Policy Office had a lot of experience in. Complete openness, trust and cooperation became the order of the day. We had to do away with "us" and "them" and become "we."

For the Women's Policy Office, this meant bringing the Advisory Council into the planning, sharing information that had never been shared before and trusting that they would respect government's confidentiality needs. For the Advisory Council, it meant taking a leap of faith that they could work on the inside with government in this way, without being co-opted or having their advocacy role stifled. The "cone of silence" became code for everyone agreeing that nothing said in the room would leave the room without the other party's consent. I can't think of one single instance when this trust was breached.

In retrospect, I believe that perhaps the main reason we were able to do what we did was that Joyce and I both were so new to our positions. Without the experience of past practice to fall back on, we were free to make up the rules as we went. I soon learned that Joyce was the perfect person to take on this challenge. Powerful within the women's community, she combined integrity, courage, hard work and compassion with a delightful measure of fun-loving irreverence. We hit it off immediately and what followed was an ever-deepening appreciation of the very

different worlds in which we operated. That is not to say that we did not have differences of opinion – we certainly did and most likely still do. But we have always found a way to air our differences respectfully and usually find something...eventhe smallest thing to have a chuckle over.

I have no doubt that while I was trying to explain her actions to some of my colleagues, to defend her or sometimes to just take the flak in order to deflect it from her, she was doing exactly the same thing for me with her constituencies. We both came to understand that preserving capital within our respective spheres of influence was essential to achieving the progress we sought on women's issues. We also very quickly realized that this was an extremely delicate balancing act somewhat akin to those "elephants dancing on the head of a pin." But more often than not we were able to find that balance resulting in some remarkable successes that women still benefit from today.

So what of the future? What do the next twenty-five years hold for the Advisory Council? I am sure it will continue to grow and change as it has in the past, for the work must continue. I am reminded of how my children would always ask when we were headed off across the province on a trip, "Are we there yet?"

Unfortunately, despite all of our best efforts, we're not quite there yet...there is still a ways to go. So more women, from all walks of life, must take up the challenge and carry the work forward. In order for the Council to continue to be a driving force for women's equality, it will have to "morph" as needed,

just as it has in the past. I am sure its work will also still require a delicate balancing act. At times advisory, at times advocacy, at times adversary – the real challenge is knowing which role has the greatest chance of achieving the goals for equality that we all believe in. At the very least, I hope we can get to a place where the next generation and the ones that come after will be able to say with the same confidence and conviction I feel today, “Of course I’m a feminist!”

Congratulations on achieving this milestone, and best of luck for every success in the next twenty-five years!

P.S. This is a quote from Marlo Thomas I enjoy. “A feminist is a man or woman who already knows for a fact that men and

***The 25th Anniversary of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women?
Ha! Just a baby.
Terry LeDrew***

Thirty years ago, on a dark and stormy night, I shuffled up a steep staircase to a cramped room on West Street in Corner Brook. For what? I knew not. Only that I was there in answer to an obscure ad about a gathering to talk about the rights of women.

We were so new to all of this, a young nurse still in uniform, a young lawyer probably not long past her bar exams...a journalist assigned to the “Women’s Page” of the local newspaper. But we knew enough even then to suggest to the one man who showed up that perhaps he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. From that tentative first night came the Corner Brook Status of Women Council, and

women are equal and wants the rest of society to wake up to that fact so the world can stop operating at half strength.”

Julie Bettney served as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women in Newfoundland and Labrador from 1996 - 2001.

before long we were dealing with how to remain united when even our own personal opinions varied. On abortion for instance. On being militant versus taking the more genteel path to change.

That young nurse was Ann Bell. She became the President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, political candidate, and successful entrepreneur. The young lawyer, Lynn Verge, became Leader of the Opposition, and then both Education and Justice Minister. Thanks to her we have a Matrimonial Property Act, and an agency that guarantees child support payments are enforced.

And me? Well, I became a real journalist with the guts to ask anyone anything....even the guts to challenge Madame President Hancock every now and then. That would be Joyce, of course. I think we offered her a bit of help in starting the Bay St. George Status of Women Council. Little did we know. You may have heard of it. The most militant, loving, proactive, inclusive, political and relevant group you'll ever encounter. The stamp of Joyce Hancock. Someone once described her as "a fist in a velvet glove."

As the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women is a gift by women, to women, everywhere in this province, it is only fitting that on its silver anniversary it is led by a woman who is a gift to humanity.

Happy Birthday.

Terry LeDrew is a Journalist

The Women's Movement since 1970
Dorothy Inglis

When the Royal Commission report was released to the Government of Canada in 1970 it itemized a list of injustices faced by Canadian women. It also gave specific recommendations and offered strategies that could lead to increased understanding on the part of people in power.

Women needed, the report said, to have a Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women, able to advise Members of Parliament on the true status of women in Canada. It would make a link with Provincial and Territorial Women's Advisory Councils to reflect women's issues. Councils should be funded by the

two levels of government, but it was essential that they would operate at arms length from both, under the direction of a woman's equality-activist chairperson and board of directors.

The thinking was that if male-dominated governments heard from women on a regular basis on issues of the day, they would understand the arguments and want to increase women's participation in policy making. In our province that intent has borne fruit, at least a good part of the time.

In Newfoundland and Labrador we have been served well by three individual

Presidents: Ann Bell, Wendy Williams and Joyce Hancock and their Councils. Their leadership in democracy and involvement in portraying the concerns of women across the province has proved enormously beneficial. Governments with members willing to learn have realized that not only is it just for women to have an independent voice, but it is also helpful to governing.

I have heard responses from government members that “We didn’t know these issues before and appreciate your advice on improvements that can be made.” And I have heard from recalcitrant ministers who wished we would go away. Smart governments respected the process and gained by listening and acting upon that advice. Weaker ones have sometimes used bureaucrats to dilute the process by judging any advice as adversarial. In some provinces Councils were appointed to echo the party line, and ones that did that lost all credibility.

But for women in this province, the major breakthrough came when Lynn Verge was elected and became first the Minister of Education, and later Attorney General and Minister of Justice. Her influence is responsible for the radical changes in laws and practices. Her choice of Ann Bell as the first President of the Provincial Status of Women was inspired. Between the two of them, women’s rights were nowhere more protected nor sought after than in Newfoundland and Labrador.

And NDP women like me had to admit that you can be a Tory like Lynn or a Liberal like Doris Anderson (the first President of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status

of Women) and also a great leader in defense of women’s rights.

We have stood together in this province, across our normal divides, thanks in large part to the role of our Provincial Advisory Council that continues to reach out to all women.

But there is nothing static about the women’s movement in our province or country. We have always known that what is “given” can be taken away, and we can be thankful that in Newfoundland and Labrador that has never been allowed to happen. In the past ten years the Provincial Advisory Council has been a relentless force in stimulating public understanding and government attention on issues of concern to women. Rural and northern communities especially have had their women’s voices reinforced and reflected under the guidance of the outgoing President, Joyce Hancock, and we are all the stronger for it.

For over two decades the Advisory Council in Newfoundland and Labrador has done what the Royal Commission intended. There is much more to be done and, even from as far away as British Columbia, we’ll be watching. Here’s to 25 more years of steady progress.

Dorothy is a feminist activist, founding member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the St. John’s Status of Women Council / Women’s Centre, and 1989 recipient of the Person’s Award.

An Argument of Two Firefighters: Thoughts on Being a Young Feminist
Hope Jamieson

I can honestly say that I don't remember a time when I wasn't a feminist. I'm one of the fortunate ones who are becoming more numerous as the years go by, fed the defiant spirit in the quest for equality from our mothers' sore breasts.

It was this upbringing, the knowledge that it was okay to challenge someone who told you that you were less, that you were unable because you were female, that led me to answer an unhesitant yes when Mary called from Women in Resource Development Committee during my first week as a summer student at the Advisory Council and asked me if I was a feminist. "Why?" she asked.

Why am I a feminist? I thought, I am a feminist because I am female. I am a feminist because no one has the right to tell me no based on my reproductive organs.

We argued, Mary and I, for a few minutes.

"So, if your house was on fire and there were two firefighters, a man and a woman, there to save you, who would you want to save you?"

"Whoever was more qualified."

"Well, wouldn't the man obviously be the better choice?"

"Not necessarily. It's not a matter of gender, it's a matter of ability!"

"Okay. You passed. Is Joyce around?"

That was the first time at the Advisory

Council that I found myself in awe at the gumption of these women, but it was certainly not the last. There is enough moxie contained in this one building to sink a ship, or better yet, change a mind, argue with a Minister, write a letter to the Premier telling him that 80 million owed to an entire union of women is not something that can be ignored, always tactfully and with (tongue-planted-firmly-in-cheek) respect.

While working as a summer student at the Advisory Council I did a lot of reading: accounts of "Stand aside, sister, we are going to the front;" reports of successes and disappointments; and endless reams of letters and faxes reminding leaders at various levels that women's equality as a mere afterthought is simply not acceptable. All of this has not only taught me about the issues that face us as women in an age where inequality still exists, but inspired in me a stronger-than-ever urge to do something about it.

At sixteen years of age, I am only starting to experience the discrimination that goes beyond the colour of your socks or whether or not you do wrestling in gym class. It's now that I see equality issues within labour, employment, violence, health and justice, amongst a demoralizing number of other areas.

I worry that as I see more and more young women of my generation afraid to call themselves feminists we as women will begin to accept injustice and discrimination.

Putting Women Back on the Map

Rebecca James

It is very fitting that the word “home” is often informally attached to the Advisory Council. Yes, it is an office and place of work but, like a home, it is also a place where one feels welcomed and supported. The Advisory Council has been just as much of an education to me as it has been an employer. Although my time here extends just beyond a year, it has opened my eyes to issues and concerns with which I was never really familiar. Women treated unequally? At a disadvantage? In Canada? Maybe years ago, I thought, but not now. Needless to say, I was uninformed. Perhaps the most eye-opening experience of mine was last year’s “Re/Claiming Our Feminist Voices.” This was a day when we, as women, decided that exclusion was simply not acceptable, and simply not going to happen...

Walking and singing our way up to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial meeting of Status of Women ministers caused me to have anxious feelings as I wondered what awaited us. I found the actual walking and singing very liberating and was honored to be involved in an event similar to the ones I have heard about from working at the Advisory Council. While standing outside the meeting, happily singing my heart out, it suddenly dawned on me what a sad state of affairs women in Canada are in. Here it is, the 21st century, and we are left with no choice but to sing, lobby and interrupt a Ministers’ meeting: a meeting about women, for women, but without the input of women.

As we awaited the reaction of the Ministers to this blatant interruption, I felt as if we were outsiders looking in.

It seemed like great lengths were taken to ensure that women understood that this was intended to be a closed-door meeting and that women in the community were simply not welcome to participate or share their views. Women should be working with each other - not literally shutting the door on each other! After hearing the five speakers at the media conference I realized that the Ministers, who traveled to this province, missed an opportunity to hear from women representatives of local, provincial and national organizations.

As a woman from Newfoundland and Labrador the overall event filled me with pride. My province, often considered to be lagging in many areas when compared to the richer provinces of Canada, has paved the way for women’s groups nation wide to raise their voices...even if they are not asked to do so...especially if they are not asked to do so!

As the Advisory Council continues its 25th year advocating for women, I think about how lucky the women of this province are, especially those who are younger or still new to their own feminism. We have great examples to follow and big shoes to fill! In a time when it appears that women’s issues have “fallen off the map,” we have women who will not only put them back on

The Ancient Feminine
Helen Murphy

As I began to reflect on the 25th anniversary of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, I pulled from my shelf an old book with curled corners and grease stains called *Circle of Stones: A reflection on a Woman's Journey to Herself* by Judith Duerk.

I've had the book for 15 years now and I take it out from time to time to reflect on the same challenging questions:

"How might your life have been different if there had been a place for you, a place for women? A place where other women, somewhat older, had reached out to help you as you rooted yourself in the earth of the ancient feminine....a place where there was a deep understanding of the ways of women.... a place of women to help you measure and know your own stature...."

There is something about *the ancient feminine* that has always rattled my bones and invoked in me images of strength and power. It may have to do with a need to be connected to the spirit or energy that stirs women to question structures lacking in creativity and compassion. I suspect it's the same energy that drives women to take action when something has gone amiss in the world around them. The Advisory Council has been a place where I have experienced this energy on a collective basis.

I have seen the power of *the ancient feminine* at work around the boardroom table, particularly during those times when we were grappling with the politics of the day, trying to understand the decisions being made and the confusion it stirred when we were came to terms with the

impact those decisions had on our lives. Feminine energy responds to that which matters, and over the years women have gathered at the Advisory Council to respond to that which is important in their lives and in their communities.

What matters to women?

During the years of my work as Coordinator for the Provincial Association Against Family Violence, what mattered was: the rape shield law; pay equity; violence against women; child custody for women in violent relationships; becoming familiar with the manipulations of the fathers rights movement; and many others. In short, equality mattered, and feminists understand inequality to be at the core of all oppression.

The Advisory Council had been for me an underlying force for moving energy into action on issues of importance to the Provincial Association. It was provincial in scope, and this was what was needed. It was the place where I could rediscover my collective voice, and gain support on issues and legislation affecting those women dealing with violence in their everyday lives.

Many social issues connected to women's lives are complex and require discussion, debate, analysis, and often a good dose of soul searching. Many times I was welcomed into that discussion with others from similar, and sometimes not so similar, organizations. The Advisory Council became a forum for me to obtain more

clarity on issues and take the steps needed to move forward. The Council, because of its network and its analysis, helped me remain grounded in the big picture, where the vision is to seek creative action that will benefit all women.

I have felt *the ancient feminine* energy at work many times at the Advisory Council and have sensed a personal connectedness to the voice of women during those moments when:

& We “Explored Common Ground” with hundreds of women around the province, walked in the World March of Women against poverty and violence, and connected with the feminine power of women around the world who were responding to the same issues.

& The Provincial Association partnered with the Advisory Council to challenge and develop a feminist analysis on the mediation process, which was making headway across the country as a solution to child custody and other issues within violent relationships.

& We participated in the home-cooked meals that gathered government and community representatives alike in the spirit of collaboration to build bridges and respectful relationships. It was during those home cooked meals that I felt *the ancient feminine* working at its best.

How would life have been different without the Advisory Council? In short, we would not have had a place for the Ann Bells, the Wendy Williams and the Joyce Hancocks of the world to say, “Hey! The emperor has

no clothes!” Women will not be silent. Isn’t silence the greatest offense against human rights? Women connected to *the ancient feminine* know and trust their collective voice.

Helen Murphy is a member of the Feminist Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador.

realize that we can be a part of this movement in our own daily lives, in our own struggle for equality. Although we are still judged on our appearance and we still hear sexist jokes, we learn to challenge this by speaking out.

The Advisory Council allows us to hear in our heads the voices of a thousand women who stood before us, telling us to be strong and stand tall, giving us confidence to question anyone that makes us feel inferior just because of our gender. The young women of Newfoundland and Labrador need an Advisory Council because they set a strong example for us. They remind us not only that we are as significant and as strong as men, but most importantly, we have every right to speak up to anyone who challenges that.

Amber Milley worked as a summer student with the Advisory Council in 2002 and 2003 and the Corner Brook Status of Women Council / Women's Centre in 2005. She is currently substitute teaching on the West Coast.

Women's Strength and Wisdom **Ruth Flowers**

I have been on the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women (PACSW) for several terms over the last twelve years, and have enjoyed it tremendously. I believe the Advisory Council is a good avenue to get women together from all over the province to address the varied concerns we have in our different regions. It helps promote women's concerns. It also helps encourage women to speak out and fight harder to address issues we believe are important in our communities.

I remember the dedicated women in the early days who worked at the Advisory Council.

Women like Wendy Williams, Linda Williams, Kay Anonsen and Jennifer Mercer, just to name a few. Joyce Hancock has always been a very strong voice, and has always encouraged women on the North Coast of Labrador to be vocal and active.

The Advisory Council helped make me a stronger woman by including me and I have learned much in working with them over the years. So many women have contributed to my strength and wisdom, and for that, I am both thankful and grateful.

Congratulations to the Advisory Council on your anniversary! Many you have many, many more years of success.

Ruth is one of the founding members of Tongait Inuit Annait (TIA), which translated means Inuit Women of the Torngats. She has spent her life working and volunteering in community to promote women's equality and end violence against women and children, and is a 1995 recipient of the Person's Award. Ruth is from Makkovik, and is currently is retired and currently living Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

Making a Difference in the Lives of Women

Lana Payne

During the early 1990s, the people of the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery were devastated when the federal government closed down fisheries. Overnight, tens of thousands of people were thrown out of work, communities were left with little hope, and women were left with much of the burden. Struggling to survive, women leaders in my Union came together. We knew the moratoria represented hardship for all those concerned, but we also knew that it required a gender response – that the fisheries closures would have a different impact on women.

Once the federal government announced its response - compensation, adjustment and training programs - we began to realize women's needs were often not reflected in these programs. The women's committee of FFAW/CAW decided we needed to talk to women in the fishery about their experiences with the moratoria, and the adjustment and training programs. This project was funded by Status of Women Canada.

What we found, and what women often find with public policy, is the federal response had not undergone a gender-impact analysis and, in many cases, the adjustment programs did not meet the needs of women. Women were facing economic and societal devastation and a bureaucratic response that compounded their anxieties.

It was at this time that the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women opened their space for women from unions,

community and other equality-seeking organizations to come together around the fishery and the crisis facing our coastal communities. We met regularly and, while these were not always easy meetings, it was a place for women to come together to debate the horrendous social and economic problems facing families and communities. Providing this safe place to discuss, debate and work out potential responses and solutions from a woman's perspective was critical. Women from the fishery felt supported through what was a very difficult time.

Wendy Williams was President of the Advisory Council at the time, and I remember her calming influence at these meetings. I also remember her advice. She talked about how women work in different structures, and that we need to respect that; not all of us experience the same freedom. It is a lesson that I have taken with me throughout my years of coalition work.

Coalitions can only work if they are built on a foundation of respect, understanding and inclusion: understanding that we all come from different places and spaces, and those structures influence what we can and cannot do; and respect for what women can contribute to the process. Our language is important, but so is what we practice. Inclusion can sometimes be difficult. It takes time. It takes effort. It means sharing space and, most of all, it means sharing our power. Some of the most enjoyable and rewarding social justice work that I've been a part of has been working with women in coalitions.

This is how we will build a social movement of change. It starts with respect. It ends with respect. As feminists, we know that change is possible.

And as Anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

PACSW: Activism, Analysis and Networks of Women

Glynis George

As a researcher and feminist who lives outside of Newfoundland, I have made frequent stays at the Advisory Council over the last several years. The house on LeMarchant Road is rarely still. There is always a new issue: a turn of events to consider, an analysis to develop. When *The Young and the Restless* airs at lunchtime, however, visitors and residents alike are expected to hold their tongues. I always found it difficult to stop talking.

I became aware of the importance of the Advisory Council some 13 years ago when I conducted research on Women's Councils, the Bay St. George Women's Council in particular, on the west coast. Although the Advisory Council and St. John's felt far away, there were stories and strategies to learn from. The distinctive leadership of Ann Bell and Wendy Williams inspired women in the area. There were also opportunities. Provincial conferences brought women from around the province to share experiences and tackle the issues that charged the 1990s: the Charlottetown Accord; sexual abuse and violence against women; legal aid and women's access to justice; and the devastation of communities

Happy 25th to the Advisory Council, and here's to at least another quarter century of making a difference in the lives of women!

Lana is a feminist columnist who writes for The Telegram. She presently works in research and communications for FFAW/CAW.

after the cod moratorium.

The importance of such gatherings and the Advisory Council itself was echoed recently by women who serve on Women's Councils and other organizations scattered around the province. It is crucial to be grounded in women's lives when doing feminist work. This is an enormous challenge, given the size of the province.

But the Advisory Council has managed, in my view, to make greater strides in this direction over the last decade, including efforts to include Labrador and aboriginal women.

Although funding cuts have limited the frequency of provincial conferences, the Advisory Council has extended its outreach over the last ten years under Joyce's leadership to include workshops to promote women's leadership and visits to Women's Councils to work through feminist principles.

The listserv itself, a fairly recent medium,

The Advisory Council as an Employer

Wendy Williams

From January 1990 to February 1995 I was President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. When people think of the Council, most do not think of it as an employer. Yet, it is.

Many people worked at the Advisory Council while I was there. We had four staff whose positions were funded by the provincial government. As well, women worked out of our offices on federally funded projects such as: a project coordinating works to prevent violence against women; a project to lobby for the provision of licensed childcare; a training course to educate women to find work as painters and plasterers; an educational course to support women to get work during the construction phase of the Hibernia project; and a film project to create ads aimed at young women and their future paid work.

One of my fondest memories of the work we did as a group of employees was to create a respectful and safe workplace. This was a very deliberate project that we undertook throughout the five years that I was President. I remembered being told by a woman from St John's that she had not spoken during the two years she was on the board of a national feminist organization because she did not feel safe to speak. I wanted to make sure the Advisory Council was a safe place to speak.

When I started working at the Advisory Council I met with all of my colleagues to see what they liked about their work, as

well as how to support them and what they would like changed. The women asked that we meet to talk about how we work together, as well as to share information about our work. Thus began our regular staff meetings. We set a specific time for these meetings. We valued this time and protected it. No outside appointments were made. The phones were put on hold with a message asking people to leave their name and phone number. The kettle was boiled for a pot of tea and fresh coffee was made.

Everyone was given time to speak during these meetings. When a person spoke, others were quiet. It took time to develop trust; to know that if I spoke others would stop talking and listen. This was not easy work. Many women do not feel safe in our world. Many women did not feel safe in the women's movement. As our trust grew we took more risks with each other. I remember being challenged by my colleague when she told me I raised my voice when I got excited. This rise in my voice frightened her. I did not even know I raised my voice when I was excited. She grew up in a home where a raised voice could be a precursor to violence. I had to become more aware of how I spoke.

We worked hard to make the Council a place where women would want to work. I know we succeeded, as many women have told me this time was their best employment experience. We tried to honour what was happening in people's lives. One way we did this was to celebrate each other's birthdays with cake.

Many women came to the Advisory Council for meetings. We tried to be a place where people would feel honoured, not just a place where things got done. As a feminist, the process of how work is carried out is as important to me as the results. This was a lesson I learned while at the Council. I am proud that this process allowed us to get to know Linda Williams (no relation), the only employee who began with the Council's inception and was still with us for the fifteenth anniversary. Linda wrote the first history of the Provincial Advisory Council.

It was during this time we put in print the feminist principles that the staff and board had been using, but had not formally adopted as our way of working. Part of my reasoning for writing this article is that the web site of the Advisory Council does not acknowledge this work on feminist principles and the many workshops developed to allow people to use these in their organizations. We, as women, have had to work very hard to rediscover our work from the past. I am disappointed the Advisory Council has not placed work that reflects the Council's long herstory on their web site, as if that work did not exist. So, I am writing to put some of our herstory in print and hope the web site will be expanded to include written material from earlier staff and board members.

Wendy served as the second President of the Advisory Council from 1990 to 1995.

Note: Thanks to a new women's herstory project, "Let's Teach About Women," the original PACSW publications will be available on the web site in 2006. Presently, these are all available at the Advisory Council home at 131 LeMarchant Road. - PACSW

I Am Woman

*I am woman, hear me roar
In numbers too big to ignore
And I know too much to go back to pretend
Cause I've heard it all before
And I've been down there on the floor,
No one's ever gonna keep me down again*

*Oh yes, I am wise
But it's wisdom born of pain
Yes, I paid the price
But look how much I've gained
If I have to I can do anything
I am strong, I am invincible, I am woman . . .*

*You can bend but never break me cause
It only serves to make me
More determined to achieve my final goal
And I'll come back even stronger
Not a novice any longer
Cause you've deepened the conviction in my soul*

*I am woman watch me grow
See me standing toe to toe
As I spread my loving arms across the land
But I'm still an embryo
With a long, long way to go
Until I make my brother understand*

Helen Reddy

PACSW: A Retrospective

Nancy Peckford

I am sitting in the kitchen of Ann Bell's Bed and Breakfast on Gower Street. It is late September 2004. She is reciting a story about how she, Lynne Verge and some other determined friends and colleagues organized around the Progressive Conservative Leadership convention in Corner Brook in the late 1970's in order to advance a progressive women's agenda.

They agreed to back the candidate who was most amenable to their platform. Their organizing proved successful. When the PC's were elected a few months later under the leadership of the candidate that these women supported (coincidentally, my uncle Brian Peckford), the new government immediately began the process of reforming the province's marital property laws, as promised, and moved to establish a Women's Policy Office within the senior ranks of government. I am riveted by this history, and amazed that I have never heard it in such detail before, despite having worked with Ann for a number of years before leaving the province.

I have returned to St. John's for the annual meeting of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women. I now live in Ottawa and work with an organization called the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA). At the invitation of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, FAFIA is delivering a workshop on the subject of Canada's human rights obligations to women under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women (CEDAW). We are also here, along with the Provincial Advisory Council and other groups, to bring attention to the fact that thirteen Status of Women Ministers are meeting in St. John's to discuss the status of women's equality, but no one has bothered to consult women's equality-seeking organizations.

This state of affairs is not a simple oversight. For over a decade now, opportunities for dialogue among equality-seeking women's organizations and governments in Canada have become ever more fleeting. With the elimination of federal core funding for women's groups through Status of Women Canada's Women's Program, the survival of many women's groups has been threatened at both the national and local levels, including the once robust National Action Committee on the Status of Women. Women's Centres, once vocal and politicized advocates for women's interests, are increasingly becoming consumed with social service provision to fill in the gaps created by government cutbacks to social programs. In addition, in the mid 1990s the federal government axed the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, thereby eliminating a key mechanism through which women's organizations communicated their interests and priorities.

Nonetheless, the Provincial Advisory Council and FAFIA are determined to have women's voices heard at this annual meeting of Status of Women Ministers. We have been working together for some months in the lead-up to the meeting.

There is a plan to 'crash' it if in fact Ministers will not allow us to meet with them prior to the start. During this crash, two notable Newfoundland women, Nancy Riche and Dorothy Inglis, will deliver a set of *Five Demands* that speak to the on-going discrimination confronted by women throughout the country and how it can best be addressed.

This collaboration between FAFIA and the Advisory Council is particularly momentous for me. I first met Joyce Hancock, President of the Advisory Council, as a teenager in Stephenville, Newfoundland and Labrador, when she was coordinator of the local Women's Centre. I then crossed her path several times while doing a Masters in Women's Studies degree at Memorial University. Subsequently, just after I was hired with FAFIA in the fall of 2003, I was asked to present at a meeting in Ottawa of the Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women, of which Joyce was Co-Chair.

During that meeting, we discussed our collective frustrations about how governments in Canada have actually gone backwards on many of their equality commitments to women. This can be seen in the radical changes to Unemployment Insurance and other income supports on which women rely, among many other things. As a consequence, despite enormous wealth in some parts of Canada, women still do not enjoy fundamental equality in wages, employment and access to many services. Aboriginal women remain unequal under the law. And it is not simply women in Canada who have noticed this situation. Under various United Nations treaties, to which Canada is a

party, the UN has remarked in fairly clear terms that Canada is not living up to its human rights and equality rights commitments to women. Clearly, this is unacceptable.

Our action is successful. We never get a formal meeting with the Ministers, but with the tenacity of Dorothy and Nancy, and a particular savvy volunteer of the Advisory Council who persuades a security guard to let them slip past the doors of the closed meeting, the *Five Demands* are presented to the Ministers, and herstory is made. This action proves to be instrumental in helping the Coalition of Advisory Councils and FAFIA win an official meeting with F/P/T Status of Women Ministers the following year in Regina, Saskatchewan (September 2005).

This meeting proves to be ground breaking in beginning a dialogue among women's organizations and multiple levels of government in Canada. The work of the Advisory Council during the F/P/T meetings in Newfoundland and Labrador has helped to breathe life into a fundamental principle that women's activists across the country hold dear: governments must directly hear and heed the voices of women, if women are to be full and equal participants in society. In order for this to happen, women's organizations need to properly resourced by governments, governments must be serious and determined to eliminate discrimination, and there must be a strong commitment to on-going dialogue and respect.

Nancy works as Program Director for the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA).

Twenty-five Years Later

Lorraine A. Michael

Twenty-five years ago I returned to St. John's after three-and-a-half years of masters studies at the University of Toronto. My return coincided with the creation of a Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. During my time in Toronto I had deepened my understanding of the barriers that women faced in our society, and was delighted to know that our government was giving priority to the struggle for women's equality.

During the eighties I was aware of the Advisory Council's work, though my work at the time wasn't intricately involved with that of PACSW. Because my workplace wasn't connected in any way to the women's movement, I was involved more on a personal level with the Women's Centre in St. John's.

From 1990 to 1999 I was outside of the province once again, and missed out on a lot of the exciting work of the Advisory Council during that time. While living "away" I heard wonderful things about the Council's work. So, I was quite pleased to learn upon my return to work in Newfoundland and Labrador that PACSW was a key partner in the new initiative I was hired to work on – Women in Resource Development Committee's (WRDC) *The Untapped Resource*.

In the early days of WRDC, when there was no staff, the Advisory Council was able to bring very concrete support to the fledgling organization by sharing its resources and expertise. Meetings took place at the LeMarchant Road offices and the very first WRDC office was housed there. As well,

the Council had a network that was important for WRDC to be able to access.

Personally, it has been a great six years working closely with the PACSW both in the work of WRDC and in the larger picture of the work of the women's community in this province. The involvement of the Council was key to WRDC's fitting in with the rest of the women's movement. Invitations to make presentations to the PACSW Board facilitated getting our message of the need for women's economic equality out to the women's community. PACSW agreed with our analysis that economic equality for women is basic to everything from violence against women to women's ability to care for their children.

The Advisory Council was also able to facilitate WRDC's efforts to promote its message within the provincial government. The close working relationship between PACSW and the Women's Policy Office was key, especially in WRDC's developmental years. It was very important that both of these organizations were represented within WRDC and had been involved with its formation.

The Advisory Council plays a significant role in the women's community. While it is a government-appointed body, it is at the same time the voice of women within the province.

Its role is to bring that voice to the government, and to advocate to government for measures to increase women's equality. Ultimately, its accountability is to the women of Newfoundland and Labrador. Awareness of that accountability is what put PACSW at the heart of the work of WRDC.

I know that I can count on the Advisory Council for support, whether out in the community, at the government table or within its own structure. I know that

PACSW is a champion of women's equality and therefore, of WRDC. Conversely, PACSW can also count on the support and networks that WRDC now has to offer.

Congratulations on the first 25 years, and best wishes for an even better next 25!

Lorraine is Executive Director of Women in Resource Development committee (WRDC).

PACSW: Guardians*
Shirley Squires

How can anyone put into words how important this organization has been to our province over the past 25 years? Both directly and indirectly, it has influenced not only the lives of our *women*, but through those women, the lives of *every other family member*. Parents and children, both male and female; governments; media; work places; schools; medical and legal professions; churches, etc. All have had to take a long look within themselves, and have not always liked what they have seen. Changes have been made, but more must yet be made - this is an ongoing struggle.

One of the highest points for me in my association with the Advisory Council took place in Gander in 2000 during the *Exploring Common Ground Conference*. Women, both young and old, from all over Labrador and the Island, came together to discuss the realities of women and girls in their home communities. It was a magical time to see that someone really *did* want to learn about the lives of women *everywhere* in this province!

This particular event was especially important to Labrador women - we believed it to be the biggest gathering of us ever to have taken place. Labrador is very unique in many ways, especially with the difficulty of getting together. Getting into a vehicle and driving a few hours over a paved road is just not an option in this great, rich land of ours.

It did one's heart good to see the faces of women when they met so many other Labrador women - some of them their own relatives whom they had never seen before. Many were the hugs and tears! The stories of their lives and problems were quite eye-opening to our sisters from the South!

Having a Board of Directors made up of women from every part of this province has been a godsend - important exchanges of information have been made about the realities faced by women from all over. What and why are there such problems? What can be done about these seemingly unsolvable problems?

Why are females being molested, abused and even murdered? Why are so few women in positions of authority? Why are women in positions of authority being replaced by men? Why are women still being paid lower wages than those of men, even after having been promised parity?

Much has been done, but much more needs to be addressed. The Advisory Council is dependent on Government for funds, yet the relationship with the government of the day is oftentimes challenging. Hopefully, governments will keep an open mind regarding the issues raised, and continue to support the work of our Advisory Council under the untiring leadership of our dedicated, self-sacrificing

President, Joyce Hancock, and her equally dedicated staff.

Keep up the good work everyone. May the Advisory Council continue to exist to see its 50th!

* *Roget's Thesaurus*: Guardian: Friend, Confidant, Backer, Upholder, Advocate, Champion, Friend at Court, Mediator - (to name just a few.)

Shirley is a staunch supporter of women's rights and a former member of the Labrador West Status of Women Council and Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Collective Knowledge, Leadership and Strength

Elaine Condon

The single most important reason why we still have an active women's community in Newfoundland and Labrador is because of the determination of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. We are a very small province, with minimal financial resources and fewer and fewer people in our rural communities. We have been able to sustain our own energy and commitment only in tandem with women's groups in other communities, and largely due to the leadership and support of the Advisory Council.

The Council has always been there to add strength to our efforts and our words. We, at the Gander Women's Centre, and I, as an individual, have had so many supportive connections over the years that I was a little hesitant to 'pick one' memory to share. But in all honesty, the one that stands out in my most the most is the Health Forums, back in the late 90's.

Remember when the provincial government was doing its travelling road show to discuss with 'the important' residents what should be done with health care? And of course, although the final planning meeting was held in Gander, we at our little Women's Council were not deemed among the worthy to participate. Did we let that go unnoticed? Defiantly not! A call to the Advisory Council and the brains were spinning. Eventually we came up with an interesting enough intervention that we in fact temporarily usurped Government's agenda and stole the media!

The Advisory Council, through discussions with women's groups throughout the province prepared a document entitled *15 Feminist Reminders*, which detailed women's concerns for our health care system.

Women at the Gander Women's Centre rewrote the lyrics of classic Christmas carols (this was mid-December, after all!) to sing about the lack of democracy, and the *abysmal* state of health care. Dressed as elves and Santas we held a press conference (the Gander Women's Centre, Provincial Advisory Council and Council of Canadians) in the lobby of the Hotel Gander, sang our songs to 'prominent and worthy' citizens as they made their entrance, and presented the Minister of Health with our *15 Feminist Reminders*. And you know what? We had a ball! We created new understanding of our health care, our democracy and our power. And we felt such a sense of belonging to something bigger. We laughed at our audacity, and we enjoyed our empowerment!

Through the dedication of the Advisory Council there have been many occasions when people with power were stopped from ignoring us, when we forced our voices and knowledge into the debate.

Through the commitment and support and leadership of the Advisory Council we have pulled together our collective strength, and we remain a force to contend with.

Advocates for Change

Cheryl Bennett

Growing up in today's world, young women are often faced with a multitude of situations and experiences that leave them with a feeling that something isn't right or just about the way they are treated. I was no exception. While I had some sense of the

These times bring new challenges for our women's movement. It is difficult to know who to lobby. Is it the international market making social policy, or is it Government? Are they the same? The tendency for those who own and control the media to attribute all social, economic and political decisions to the 'natural' consequences of globalization is frustrating to those of us who know that globalization is really only 'new speak.' Globalization could as easily be a good thing; an easier sharing of resources, an ability to know the plight of other people and respond to help not to exploit. It does not mean that we have to cut social programs. If we reflect on George Orwell's *1984* we will see that Big Brother is watching and dictating what we are allowed to know and how we are allowed to know it! But big sisters still have passion, dedication and a different truth on our side.

Congratulations to the Advisory Council on a very successful 25 years! The challenges ahead are immense, but so were those behind us.

Elaine is the former Coordinator of the Gander Women's Centre / Status of Women Council, now studying at Carleton University.

fact that I faced inequality, it was not until I became involved with the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women (PACSW) that I was able to name my experiences and place them in the context of the larger society.

The impact that the Advisory Council has had in my life has both practical and personal layers. On a practical level, PACSW provided me with opportunities to learn about the history of the women's movement in Newfoundland and Labrador, what has been accomplished, the inequalities that still exist and the work still left to be done. From listening to women's experiences both past and present, I learned about the things that textbooks cannot teach: the meetings, the struggles, the friendships, the challenges, the successes and the celebrations.

On a personal level, by becoming involved with Provincial Advisory Council, I learned about myself and my place in the world. I met new friends, and I knew I always had a place to talk about and debate relevant and challenging topics and issues relating to women's inequality. At the Advisory Council, I always felt respected and nurtured to explore my beliefs. I developed a sense of community and learned about how I could become involved as an advocate for change.

One of the favorite sayings that I remember from visiting the Advisory Council and participating in activities is, "Make every meeting a celebration, and every celebration a meeting." Every opportunity to gather together was a celebration of the accomplishments and dedication of the wonderful women of Newfoundland and Labrador. But every gathering was also a chance to brainstorm and information-gather, and share insights and experiences. It was sitting around the table in the kitchen of the Advisory Council that I was challenged to consider the first time I felt discriminated against because of my gender. It was there that I first heard about the empowering events that have taken place in the past, and that I shared much food, laughter and friendship with countless numbers of fascinating, compassionate and dedicated women of this province.

Cheryl Bennett, former Coordinator of the Regional Coordinating Coalition Against Violence (Eastern Avalon), is currently a Social Worker with Eastern Health.

Policewomen as "Change" Agents

Connie Snow

"We" are still only numbering approximately 11% of the policing community across the country. This is hardly in keeping with a true representation of the general populace. Studies have shown that women in policing have much to offer . . . if given the chance. One of the most significant findings - there are fewer public complaints - is an aspiration every police department in the civilized world has already spelled out in its strategic plan.

Victims of violence have repeatedly responded in a positive manner to female investigators because of the sensitivity they have shown. It has often been said that women go above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to the "optional" follow-up in these types of cases. Without generalizing, many victims indicate an additional layer of compassion is evident when a policewoman is involved.

What an opportunity policewomen have to make a difference! To work on the front lines at the grassroots level, putting a face on "the system." Caring and compassionate actions do ultimately change the system in a positive way. The police department is the only 24/7 mobile social service game in town - that is an awesome responsibility. Recruitment and training for such a task must be first-rate. Encouragement and fair evaluation processes also factor high in the equation. The community must participate in helping to shape the kind of police service it envisions.

The high value that women place on relationships bodes well for them in building safer work environments and more peaceful communities. The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women helped me become a change agent. I remember the first day I walked into the Advisory Council office on LeMarchant Road. It was 1988, and a definite turning point in my life. Immediately, I felt at home and like I was 'home.' What was most striking and refreshing was the openness, the honesty, the lack of facades and the freedom to speak. These approaches were new to me and served as an eye-opener that I have never forgotten. There were no preconceived notions or judgments about what my role in the system was or had been...a system that had disappointed so many marginalized women in need of assistance.

The Advisory Council became a sanctuary for me, a safe haven where everyone was freely offered a platform for their voice and where everyone was always included.

I could discuss my own concerns about inadequate protocols, policies and strategies without fear of reprisal. People actually wanted to offer helpful suggestions without blaming. It was in that office and in that supportive environment that I really learned about brainstorming and problem-solving.

Naturally, most people cannot relate to issues that do not concern them. By admitting there is a problem or that someone is the victim of a crime, one may actually have to do something about it.

But this is the very reason that makes it *more* incumbent on policymakers to do 'the right thing'...they must represent the entire populace. Instead, delays are created in the system so victims will just give up and go away. This is when we need louder and stronger voices. Positive changes must be made even if they do result from 'complaints.' Many times we are paralyzed by our fear but I believe living in fear is not living at all. The Provincial Advisory Council promotes fearlessness in our words and actions to achieve what is 'right' - I wish the same were true for other agencies.

My hope is that the Advisory Council will continue its quest for equity, fairness and justice. Congratulations on 25 years of truthful, genuine service to the people of this province. NEVER GIVE UP!

Connie is a retired police inspector.

Dialogue, Strategize, Mobilize and Celebrate

Kim Dreddy

It is hard to believe that twenty-five years have passed since the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established. Although gains have been made to advance women's equality in this province, there is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done to improve the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (formerly the Provincial Association Against Family Violence) was established in 1987 as the umbrella organization for the provincially funded Transition Houses and Shelters in Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the main focuses of the Association's work is to provide training to board members, administrators, staff and volunteers of shelters throughout the province.

Recently, I had the opportunity to work with the staff of the largest Transition House in this province. On one hand, it was a very empowering session. Staff members from this, as well as every Transition House in our province, have such a strong commitment to helping women and children who have made a decision to flee abusive relationships. On the other hand, it was disheartening to hear about feelings of isolation and powerlessness of staff members. We also talked about the risks associated with the work they do, and the lack of resourcing commitments they have grown accustomed to.

One of the main issues emanating from this session was the fact that there are still significant challenges to being an equality-seeking feminist organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially for the women who work within these organizations. The need for a collective voice to respond to those challenges is obvious.

The Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador depends on the Provincial Advisory Council for guidance and support.

Their commitment to working with us has been invaluable. The Advisory Council has worked tirelessly by responding to, and challenging, the systems that hold power in this province.

I am always energized when representatives of our sister organizations come together to dialogue, strategize, mobilize or celebrate. The Newfoundland and Labrador Advisory Council has always made sure that there is a forum for each of these to happen.

Congratulations on your twenty-fifth anniversary! I look forward to continuing our mutual work toward improving the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Kim is Coordinator of the Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (THANL).

Reflections on Working with the PACSW

Michelle Morgan

There is so much I can say about the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, its President, Staff and Board. In this article I will share my experience of working with the Council as a woman new to the feminist movement.

In January 2002 I began my position as a facilitator for the *Taking Our Places* project of the Bay St. George Status of Women Council. Through this project I have had many opportunities to work with the Advisory Council, but my very first experience was participating in a conference call. To say I was nervous would be an understatement! What could I possibly contribute to this discussion? I was the “new feminist on the block” and not sure how I could make a difference. I was incredibly nervous about what I was going to say, and when Joyce, as the conference call chair, asked if each of us had a burning issue, “I felt my stomach roll.” With a lump in my throat I timidly said, “Yeah, I do. The Department of Human Resources and Employment is holding a consultation to review its legislation, and I feel they are trying to take the ‘social’ out of social services.” Then my mind went blank. I couldn’t explain further, but I listened as other women picked up on these concerns.

My next experience of the Advisory Council was when I was getting ready to present our project findings to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, Joan Burke. I had invited Joyce as the Council President to attend the meeting. As a new feminist, I was extremely nervous to finally meet Joyce in person, but she suggested

we connect before the meeting with the Minister to “strategize.” I was a “bag of nerves!” In came the President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women - Joyce Hancock. We greeted each other and got to work.

It was at that moment I realized that she was not meeting with me to criticize, and that she did not work for Government. Not only did she provide a wealth of background information on the issues I was researching, but much support and encouragement in my work on behalf of the women of Bay St. George.

As I reflect upon my early meetings and the events coordinated and hosted by the Provincial Advisory Council, I remember unity, laughter and feminist discussions. The Council Board and Staff are a pleasure to work with. Michelle and Melanie are always ready to discuss and support my work, as well as my growth as a feminist.

As a woman working for women’s equality I know the importance of having the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women remain arms length from Government. Advocating for women’s equality sometimes requires challenging government policies and directions to better meet the needs of women, children and families.

The Advisory Council's work of facilitating conference calls, meeting with women's equality-seeking organizations and directing our concerns to government must continue.

Congratulations to the Advisory Council on its 25th anniversary! This organization has been successful, and must continue to exist

until women in Newfoundland and Labrador reach true equality.

Michelle is a researcher / facilitator with the Bay St. George Status of Women Council project initiative "Taking Our Places."

Exploring Common Ground (and Differences) with the Advisory Council

Phyllis Artiss

Since I joined the Board of the Provincial Advisory Council almost six years ago, I've had regular opportunities throughout the years to enjoy the bright, welcoming atmosphere at 131 Lemarchant Road, and the stimulating discussions and laughter. In addition, I've become better informed about differing feminist perspectives on current issues, and become more of a feminist activist than ever before.

Joyce Hancock has been President during my entire time on the Board. She has always ensured that every board meeting educates us on current policy issues and debates important to women. Visitors from governments, unions and grassroots organizations bring us up-to-date on topics already in the news, as well as ones that need to be. We have opportunities to ask questions, make suggestions, challenge policies, examine practices, and develop strategies for advancing the status of women.

We learn from each other, as well as from the presenters. Between board meetings, we study copious material sent out by Joyce and the wonderful Advisory Council staff, Michelle Smith and Melanie Parsons,

including reports, background information and analyses of current "hot topics," along with some obscure ones. Also invaluable are the conference calls, organized and hosted by the Advisory Council every month or so, when staff and volunteers from feminist organizations across the province connect by telephone to discuss issues and strategies for change.

As President of the Advisory Council, Joyce takes the entire province as her beat. She has met with groups of women on the northern Labrador coast, in most of the larger communities of the province, and in many small, remote communities as well. She assists women and women's organizations by facilitating and taking a leadership role in: workshops, focus groups, anniversary celebrations, roundtables, strategy sessions, International Women's Day banquets, annual general meetings, marches, demonstrations, consultations, media interviews and press conferences. And, more often than not, Joyce combines two or three or ten of these functions in one trip, writing animated early morning emails to those of us not travelling with her.

This year we have held board meetings in Corner Brook, Grand Falls-Windsor and St. John's, which were followed by celebration dinners and a day of productive roundtable discussions with women from the area.

For me, and I think for many who attended it, the most rewarding event hosted by the Advisory Council during the past six years was the 2000 *Exploring Common Ground* provincial conference. Between February and October of that year, Kathy Dunderdale and Joyce held forty-two community forums with more than seven hundred women around the province to hear women's ideas and concerns. In October, on Thanksgiving weekend, more than four-hundred-and-fifty women from around the province, including 60 women from Labrador, converged on Gander for the largest provincial women's conference ever held. We marched in the rain, waving banners and singing lustily as cameras rolled during the *World March of Women*, which we held on the same weekend to protest violence and poverty.

Elizabeth Penashue and other Innu women launched, in their own language, *It's Like the Legend*, the first-ever collection of stories by Innu women. One young woman acknowledged how nervous she felt speaking to that audience of women, which was larger than her entire community. In response to a question posed to a panel of women in leadership roles, Marie Ryan said, "I do what I do because I have a passion for justice: seeing wherever there is something wrong and doing what I can to fix it." These words, spoken without drama, but with quiet determination, have stayed with me ever since. Other prominent feminists told their own stories of both the barriers and

rewards they encountered in education, policing, unions, politics, family resource centres, anti-violence work, business, and more.

Dorothy Inglis reminded us of the words of Nellie McClung: "Yesterday's successes will not do for today."

Judy Rebick, in her keynote address, declared her belief that she was witnessing that on very weekend in Gander the birth of the third wave of feminism, in which women and men would move forward together to redress the inequities of the past. We ate, sang, danced, debated and networked with old friends and with new. As we wound up the weekend, I felt a consensus among women present that we needed to continue exploring common ground together, reaching across our differences in geography, ethnic origin, political affiliation, personal preference, physical circumstance, sexual identity and more. "Yes!" I said to myself as we sang together the final song of the weekend. "All women's voices will make the mountains move...Together we CAN move mountains."

The 2000 conference continues to live on beyond the hearts and minds of the women who participated. Memorial University's Distance Education and Learning unit filmed the entire conference at no cost to the Advisory Council so that the Women's Studies program could use the video as part of required course work.

I viewed the conference video once again

as I prepared this piece for the 25th anniversary of the PACSW, and found it just as inspiring and relevant today as it was five years ago.

*Exploring Common Ground...*the very title of the conference, and the vision it encompasses, represent what I value most about the Advisory Council. I agree with Nellie McClung: we must press forward. For me, that means exploring together not only our common ground but our differences as well, and looking honestly at those which are most divisive. This is the hard work ahead. It has always been the hardest work - and the most crucial. We can listen best and be heard most clearly when we remember our common ground as feminists, and not allow our differences to divide us.

Finally, I want to say how grateful I am to Joyce for creating opportunities for us to explore connections with women from other cultures, and to also examine our differences. The Advisory Council has opened its doors, for example, to feminists from Pakistan and Indonesia when they visited Memorial's Women's Studies program, and is now helping me organize the visit of up to six Gungalu women from Australia when they visit St John's in 2006. And there are others. Our province and our world need to make the most of such opportunities.

Phyllis retired from Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2002, but continues to take part in the Women's Studies Program, especially community outreach. She is a member of PACSW board, the St. John's Status of Women Council, the "Let's Teach About Women" herstory project, and an international project on women's experience of reproductive health. She has a particular interest in issues affecting aboriginal women.

A Snapshot in Time **Michelle Smith**

As a feminist now in my mid-thirties, I grew up during the seventies and eighties, a time when the women's movement was vibrant and active and making great strides in our collective fight for equal rights.

I was born in the same month that the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was tabled in the House of Commons, setting a new, progressive agenda for women's equality in Canada. I turned one when the first federal Minister Responsible for the Status of Women was appointed, and was three when the

National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) were created to give voice to women around the country.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the equality rights clause, came into force when I was twelve, and the Canadian Human Rights Act when I was fifteen.

After I turned eighteen, abortion was finally decriminalized and removed from the Criminal Code of Canada. Within my own lifetime, women in this province saw the establishment of many organizations, programs and services for women, such as Women's Centres and Councils, Rape Crisis / Sexual Assault Centres, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Women's Policy Office and the Morgentaler Clinic.

While growing up, I absorbed one message with absolute clarity from the many feminist women who helped make my world a better place to live: full equality is our *entitlement* as women and girls. But, by the time I entered my twenties, the ground women had gained quietly began to erode. During the nineties the Canadian government cut funding to the national umbrella advocacy voices for women, including NAC and the CACSW. It also eliminated federal standards for social assistance as well as core funding for grassroots women's equality-seeking and anti-violence organizations. The gap between the rich and poor continued to widen, and women are now experiencing the highest rate of women's poverty in twenty years.

Within three-and-a-half decades, I have witnessed women's equality advance and slide backwards again.

However, the plain fact remains that women *are* entitled to full equality in our province and country. We are entitled through our provincial and federal human rights codes, through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and through international conventions, including the United Nations Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). We should make no apologies for challenging governments to fulfill their obligations – such as when women “gatecrashed” a Federal/Provincial/Territorial meeting of Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in St. John's September 30, 2004 and presented the *Five Demands for Women's Equality in Canada*.

The *Five Demands for Women's Equality in Canada* reflect the very best of everything I associate with the Advisory Council: the best advice our feminist foremothers; the best of the work we enjoy with each other and our provincial and national sisters; and the best of what we hope to create for our collective future as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, as Canadian women. Working on the compilation of the *Five Demands* with our provincial and national women's communities will remain one of my favorite memories of working with the Council.

At its very best, working at the Advisory Council is exciting, uniting, soul-inspiring. At its very core, it reflects the heart and soul of women, and our quest for women's equality. As a feminist, as a woman, I choose this work because I passionately believe in it, and am proud of it.

But mostly, I am ferociously proud of the women on our staff and board, and the women we work with around this province every day for the courage and strength to demand our entitlement to women's equality. Every time we meet with our feminist sisters around the country, I am now reminded that we are known and applauded throughout Canada for doing what we do with grace, style, spunk and gumption.

Heather Davis

Warm. I want to add “and fuzzy” but the touchy-feeliness of that much-maligned phrase doesn’t really fit. Warm and fuzzy does not reveal the intricacies or depth or power of hundreds of women gathering in a hotel lobby just happy to be together, unapologetic and free of work and family and female obligations for a few short days. I remember feeling warm. Giddy. Excited about absolutely not knowing what would unfold at a *provincial women’s conference, a world march of women*.

I was, then, a warm, perhaps fuzzy, definitely giddy, excited, new-to the-scene of activism as paid work, uncertain woman about to be embraced by what I know now to be a women’s community as vibrant and active and close as a strong family - whose matriarch is the Newfoundland and Labrador Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

The 2000 *Exploring Common Ground* Conference in Gander was my introduction, literally, to so many women I now count as friends. Most of my memories are faded, coloured by sights and smells and sounds - the feeling of the then-favoured soft orange sweater I wore, the trays of bright berry desserts made lovingly (had to have been lovingly!) by a local woman, the beautiful halting strangeness of the language spoken proudly aloud by our Labrador sisters, the rainbowed sea of what could have been a *million* women perched eagerly on pink hotel chairs. Ask me about particular sessions and I cannot recall the details - the content of the conference has long been incorporated into my

consciousness. What I remember is feeling embraced.

I felt the same heated excitement this year at another gathering of women in Terra Nova. Fun, fabulous, feminist women, including the girlfriends I was driving with: one “seasoned” sister and one neophyte feminist friend. My life had changed in many ways since 2000, most profoundly by becoming a mother. This conference was different; my thoughts were on how two-year-old Gabe was doing without me, how the baby in my belly would tolerate the travel, and how much packing was waiting for me as a move of household loomed.

My friends and their feelings, though, flashed me back five years. Their perspectives were so different than mine in the moment, but we shared a fundamental sense of purpose that brought us to this gathering. It occurred to me finally that our experiences were not created by chance, and I wasn’t the only woman to cherish them.

It was a moment of clarity that allowed me to understand exactly why the Advisory Council is so important. They are the driving force behind these gatherings. As leaders and mentors they bring women together and allow the important conversations to happen. They orchestrate the big events that are memory-making for so many reasons.

They provide the time and space for

women to connect, and nurture these connections in the aim to make our homes and communities safe, supportive and equitable.

The Advisory Council is a group of larger-than-life women representing our interests in big dramatic ways; the flamboyant mother group making sure her provincial family of women is respected and treated well. Of course their public presence is only the tip of the iceberg. The vast amount of work is done behind the scenes: planning, organizing and strategizing, working with friendly and not-so-friendly governments, linking us nationally and internationally to other groups committed to peace, equality and justice.

Keeping vigilant. Working from a truly grassroots perspective. Working with women, for women, fearlessly.

I remember first visiting the Advisory Council office months after the *Exploring Common Ground* Conference and (to my surprise) seeing the letter of thanks I wrote to the organizers posted on their bulletin board. One small thing cementing my connection. I feel thankful for these women, for their work, for their immense ability to promote closeness for the cause. I feel warm.

Heather is a feminist, activist and mother of two sons. She is currently on maternity leave from her position as Coordinator of the Corner Brook Status of Women Council.

Reflections on Our Provincial Advisory Council

Frances Ennis

For 25 years now I have had cause to visit 131 LeMarchant Road ... to pick up resources, plan special events, develop strategies to address inequities, meet with elected politicians to voice issues and concerns, support individual women and organizations in distress, discuss similarities and differences with women from Afghanistan to Australia, and to celebrate victories both large and small. So to say the Provincial Advisory Council has been an important part of my life is an understatement at best, and one that I hadn't quite realized until I began to write this article.

At the Advisory Council, I remember...

...meeting the then-President of Iceland, a vibrant, feminist leader who talked passionately about how important it was for women to have political power. And to do that, she told us, we needed to "create our own Women's Party and run for political office." This was an idea that captured the interest of many of us and inspired the formation of the 52% Solution, a group whose purpose was to encourage women to become part of the political process and, of course, run for political office.

... sorting the brilliantly coloured purple and green 52% Solution t-shirts and preparing

press packages for the upcoming bus tour that would cross the province and meet with women in communities from St. John's to Stephenville. We slept in classrooms, gymnasiums, community centres and town halls. We met with hundreds of women and had hours of discussions about the barriers women face in becoming part of the political process, and how we can overcome them. Our oldest daughter Sheila, who was eight at the time, was the youngest on the tour. My husband Bill, and our other two daughters, Laura and Jennifer met up with us for a public meeting at a school in Gander. It was indeed a time of great enthusiasm and commitment for change.

... developing the framework for a project about women's work that included a series of workshops designed to explore the kinds of employment opportunities that were available to women, and the kinds of opportunities they wanted to have available. There was definitely a difference! This project took place when oil and gas development was in its infancy, and there was a lot of talk about the potential for women's involvement in that sector. The project was an impetus for a delegation of women to travel to Norway to learn about women's involvement in the oil industry in that country. The information gathered was developed into another workshop.

It was called "Learning from our Sisters," and it served to generate discussion in

many communities about the implications of women's involvement, or lack thereof, in oil and gas development in this province. This work began under the leadership of Ann Bell, the Council's first President and continued with Wendy Williams, the second President. It is not surprising, then, that under Joyce Hancock's leadership the Council was instrumental in the formation of the Women and Resource Development Committee in 1997. WRDC is a province-wide feminist organization whose primary objective is to create opportunities for women's involvement in trades and technology - an organization that I am proud to say I co-chaired with Joyce for several years.

...the heartbreaking stories told by women, at FishNet meetings held in the Council's boardroom, about how the collapse of the fishery affected them personally and the impact it had on their families and communities. These meetings helped spawn two books of women's oral histories: *Women in the Fishery*, where 86 women describe the effects of the moratorium on their lives and their communities; and *Strong as the Ocean*, where nine women describe their lives and their work in the fishing industry.

...the excitement of hearing about discussions with women in every corner of the province in the lead up to the *Exploring Common Ground 2000* Provincial Women's Conference.

...and the power of being in a room with

PACSW: Democracy in Action

Susan Hollett

When Premier Danny Williams addressed the 2005 Conservative Party convention, he made reference to how the Advisory Council had raised the recent issue of female government leaders being dismissed. His reaction was, “These people should do their homework — the opposition and the Joyce Hancocks of this world who selectively criticize when women are replaced, but who conveniently forget to support us when women are appointed.”

I wish he had said, “I’m delighted the Advisory Council on the Status of Women is holding us accountable on this very important issue – they do our entire province a service by making sure these issues are always in the public eye, and that is why they are there. Now here is how we do promote women in the public sector... and we will continue to do so by...”

The PACSW is funded by the provincial government to provide advice on the status of women in the province, and to hold government accountable. The Advisory Council was created by government legislation and its mandate is determined by that same legislation. By operating at arms-length from government, the PACSW is able to give good advice and raise issues on the status of women - whether those women are at the helm of the College of the North of Atlantic or residents in a transition house.

Having independently funded institutions like the Advisory Council, who are

empowered to critically analyse and advise, is an essential part of democracy. It demonstrates our belief in free speech and in advocating for those not adequately represented in government decision making.

By raising the issues it does, the Advisory Council is not taking a political path or “selectively criticizing.” It is raising issues of concern to the women’s community. It is worthy to note that the Council does work hard at recognizing when advances have been made, and is always supportive and responsive when asked for its advice. This does not always garner the same amount of public and media attention as more critical comments, however.

Our Advisory Council’s status and existence can change with the stroke of a pen and a vote around a Cabinet table.

To keep it going strong for another 25 years, it must be seen as an important and integral part of our democracy – enabling women’s voices to be heard!

Susan is (delighted to be) Vice President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1996 – 2006.

Susan Hollett (with much help from others, including PACSW Staff!) ☺

Where to start when trying to do justice to Joyce Hancock? She has:

- & solidified the Advisory Council
- & motivated the women's movement
- & taught us to laugh at the absurdity of inequality and find joy in our women's movement.
- & opened the eyes of the public
- & shared her insights, experiences and sense of humor
- & startled senior officials
- & collaborated with other "not overtly feminist" groups
- & reminded us to value every woman's contribution
- & cooked us delicious meals while teaching us feminist songs
- & mentored new and nervous feminists
- & comforted the down and out
- & challenged the status quo
- & challenged herself, and others to "build bridges, not burn them, and to make points, not score them."
- & envisioned a better future for us all
- & put her face and voice out there for all of us while always while casting the widest net possible.

No conversation with Joyce lasts for more than five minutes without it eventually touching on some feminist issue. So, I thought I'd pen a little verse to express my reflections on a great woman – with apologies to all poets out there!

An Ode to Joyce

Our inspired leader, a feminist true, where would the Board be without you?

Setting the tone, altering the mood, and always providing delectable food.

Each meeting starts with a "And how are you?" before we go to business

So we remember the issues are big, but the personal is what cements us.

Her President's Reports seem impossible – it can't be true

That she has been in Nain, Stephenville, Ottawa and Gander too?

She met with who? And protested what?

The strategy for which? There are so many things in her "pot."

Media seek her out – and why not?

She gives them the truth – not a lot of rot.

*Her road is the high one, and her analysis spot on
No one would ever accuse her of being anyone's pawn.*

She earns your respect, whether you be judge, politician, or activist

By ensuring there is no consciousness-raising opportunity missed.

*Always there when you need her; she never fatigues
And knows our history from NGALE to Women's Leagues.*

*Around the office, her specialty is practical jokes
Whether it is with gum or duct tape, holy smokes!*

*So here's to Joyce Hancock, may she live long and
prosper
And never, ever think she has to do anything proper!*