

Wanepuhnud Corporation

In its twelve years of existence, Wanepuhnud has been many things to many people. The organization, which gets its name from an Ojibwe word meaning “reasonable,” has been first a second-hand clothing store, then a retail training outlet and finally a Working Skills for Native Women program affiliated with George Brown College. Hundreds of women have come through its doors — as customers, as trainees, as employees or as interested members of either the Native community or the field of education.

Wanepuhnud was established in 1977 by the Ontario Native Women’s Association with the mandate of providing training and employment opportunities in retail sales for economically disadvantaged Native women. Known then as “Portage,” it was located first on Dundas Street East near Parliament, then at 265 Gerrard Street East. Trainees were required to sort and price large shipments of clothing which had been received from the Mennonite community, Help the Aged and private donors. What was not chosen to be sold in the store was, in turn, either sent to various Northern reserves or to Goodwill. The women were further taught how to wait on customers, how to ring up a sale and how to open and close for the day. There were also classes in Life Skills, Math and English. To enhance the training they received at Wanepuhnud, the women did job placements at other stores, such as Bi-Way. Other Native organizations would write letters of referral if they had a client who was in need of assistance and qualified to get clothing free.

Response to the program was so positive that it inspired Wanepuhnud’s logo. It is a picture of a Native woman in traditional dress standing on an outline of a map of Canada. Her arms are out stretched to span the distance from the east coast to the west coast. This symbolized Wanepuhnud’s hopes to serve as a model

for other Native organizations in Canada. With the larger than anticipated number of customers and trainees accessing its services, the organization soon had to move to a larger facility at 1114 Queen Street East.

It was at this location that the staff and board of Wanepuhnud identified the need to help Native women acquire skills other than in retail sales. It was felt that office skills would give them a chance at better-paying jobs with opportunities for advancement.

Therefore, the decision was made to teach keyboarding skills (first on typewriters, then on computers), Life Skills, and Business Math and English. The course, which was twenty-six weeks long and known as Working Skills for Native Women, was offered in conjunction with George Brown College. The college provided a qualified teacher for the program and issued certificates for successful “employees.” To make this program truly community-based, the teacher, who was also Native, developed the curriculum in consultation with other staff at Wanepuhnud. In particular, the Life Skills component focussed on reinforcing Native identity and culture. As with the retail sales training, the women went out on job placements. This time, the very Native organizations who were referring clients for free clothing were now phoning to ask for “employees” to assist them in their day-to-day operations, such as answering phones, filing and typing. Some of these placements resulted in full-time jobs. To this day, former Wanepuhnud students are working at Chiefs of Ontario, the Ontario Native Council on Justice, the Indian Inspectors’ Unit and the Native Women’s Resource Centre. Wanepuhnud’s store manager and the secretary were also students in the program.

News of Wanepuhnud’s success spread and groups of students came with their teachers from out-of-town to visit. Nokee



Kwee, a similar program in London, but with a focus on bookbinding at that time, spent an afternoon with the women, as did a group of students from the Native Department of Fanshawe College. Similarly, the students from Wanepuhnud went out to visit other Native programs and organizations. They went as a class to the Native Sisterhood Social in Kingston and did a return visit to the Nokee Kwee program, where they were billeted by the women in the Native Co-op Housing. While there have been successes at Wanepuhnud, there were also some concerns. For many of the women, this was the first time they participated in a course that recognized their heritage, and the bonding that took place was heartwarming. They now no longer felt afraid because they were able to share honestly some of the issues they thought they were experiencing alone — struggling as a single parent, being Native in a largely non-Native environment and learning to believe in themselves. However, was twenty-six weeks enough of a foundation? For some it was. It was that incentive they needed, that stepping-stone to achieving independence.

Glenda Snache, a graduate of Wanepuhnud and currently the Family Worker at Native Women's Resource Centre, shared her views of the program. She says that Wanepuhnud opened a door for her. She found it helpful learning to write resumes, watching videos on job interview techniques, and viewing films on culture. She found that the staff provided opportunities for the students to express their views, and that the women gave each other a lot of praise and encouragement. It was energizing seeing each

other's personal strengths and sharing concerns. She appreciated the excellent introduction to microcomputers and felt that Wanepuhnud motivated her to work in the Native community. Glenda is just one example of many women who came to the program with the potential to realize their goals and who simply needed a little encouragement. She is the ideal person for her present job because she provides an excellent role model. It is to be hoped that Glenda's success will be the incentive to those she works with to follow suit.

For other women, Wanepuhnud was a necessary bridge, a welcome reprieve from the systemic barriers that held them back. Affordable and flexible daycare was a constant concern, which often resulted in the women either missing work or even leaving the program altogether. Turbulent relationships were another factor which affected attendance and on-the-job performance. The women definitely had potential but needed guidance in prioritizing the issues that were affecting their lives. How could these concerns be best addressed?

Recommendations were made to lengthen the program to forty weeks. It was felt that this would give the women enough time to learn both the technical and the life skills to secure and maintain a job. However, program funding was discretionary — that is, Wanepuhnud had to apply for each new program through Employment and Immigration Canada. There were often gaps of a few months in between programs. Unfortunately, these gaps had a ripple effect. Staff found it difficult to go without a source of income while waiting for the next program to

begin, and often found permanent employment elsewhere. Potential trainees did not like to be told that the program was waiting for funding and that they would be notified when everything was confirmed. They either enrolled in other programs or could not be reached when everything was in place. In the meantime, another program with similar objectives was funded in the Toronto area — the Native Skills Unit. While the intent of the Native Skills Unit was not to duplicate what Wanepuhnud was doing and, indeed, was to be a complementary program, this created further funding problems and delays for Wanepuhnud.

The board then made the very difficult decision to close Wanepuhnud for the time being. All of the furniture and equipment was put up for sale. People came from far and wide to purchase computers, electronic typewriters, desks and books. Needless to say, there has been a variety of reactions to Wanepuhnud's closing, mostly sadness. Former customers who found great "deals" will now have to shop elsewhere; trainees who found comfort in coming back to Wanepuhnud to visit with their former teachers and classmates will need to find another support system; staff who lost their jobs for reasons out of their control will be making use of the very Creative Job Search Techniques they were teaching; and members of the Native community and the field of education will be ever hopeful that Wanepuhnud can resurface.

After all, twelve years of making a positive contribution to both the Native and the non-Native community is something that cannot be easily forgotten.

Wanepuhnud Trainees: Personal Narratives

Cheryl Lawson

My first experience was when my brother and I were staying with our aunt and uncle in Haney, British Columbia. One day they told us that our grandparents were coming to see us and take us away to the reserve. We went to see our mother who was working in the cannery at that time. She told our aunt that our grandpar-

ents were coming that day so we sat in the car and waited for them. They were supposed to come at 2:00 p.m. and we waited until 2:30 p.m. We saw two people coming along the road. We started crying and we tried to hide on them so that they couldn't take us away from our aunt. They argued with them and our grandmother took our hands and we started walking. The thing that was exciting was when we

got on the train. My father recently told me that our aunt and uncle were very sad and started drinking lots after our grandparents took us and our aunt and uncle got into a car accident from drinking and driving. That's when they passed away. I cried when he told me this because I really didn't want to leave them in the first place.

I was asked to go to Windsor, Ontario.

I was only seven years old and our grade one teacher wanted two children to go with her to her home town and visit with her parents. I got to see a lot then and it was great. My friend Clyde and I were chosen. We were the ones who missed the less school days and when I was asked to go, I told her to ask my grandfather because my grandmother was working in the cannery in Cassiar Cannery, and he told her to ask me. I was excited and didn't want to show it so I told her that my grandmother would be angry but I really wanted to go. I said yes and when we got to Windsor we had a great time. We went everywhere. I met her grandmother and she liked Clyde and I. She told us to call her granny. We didn't want to leave there but summer was over. Leaving was the hardest part, we started to cry and everyone said good-bye.

I was driving home one morning, about 2:00 a.m. and everyone was sleeping. I wasn't tired at all and I seen lights coming from the other direction so I simply thought that it was another car coming from the other direction. There was a mountain ahead of me that's why I didn't see the other car. There was a curve to where all I saw was the lights and the train tracks. I slowed down and tried to wait for the car to come around the bend and it didn't. So I pursued the corner and in reaching the corner I met the coming train, it made the horn sound and that scared me. I took my hands away from the wheel for a split second. In realizing that it was the train I grabbed the wheel and I was very nervous. I came to a long stretch and stopped for a while and went to the back of the truck and asked my grandfather if he was awake. He wasn't so I went into the front and took a deep breath and drove home. I didn't tell anyone what had happened.

One Christmas my cousin and I really got drunk and we didn't remember any thing. I lost her and the next day we found each other and she was angry with me. I laughed and we went home to her parent's place and they asked us what we did and we told them that we got drunk and they laughed

at us. We had drank Vodka straight. Oh, I won't forget that Christmas.

I was going to school at the Vancouver Indian Centre and every month we would change the class rep. and I was the class rep. in December of 1985. So it was the teacher's birthday and I had to start the class off with the birthday song and I couldn't do it. I would get up and just say "ha" and sit down again and try again and the same thing "ha" everyone started to laugh and I told them that I was shy and asked them to help me start the song. In the restaurant we had a Christmas dinner and I had to throw a pie into the teacher's face and that part was great. I enjoyed that part. We almost didn't get him to sit down beside me though. He wanted to leave right away after the meal. We told him just for a second and so he agreed. We took a picture of this and he laughed and said that we were his favourite class.

I came here to Toronto in 1985 and lived here for 9 months. I had a boyfriend then and when we got here he started to see his ex-girlfriend so I got fed up and left him. I stayed with a bunch of friends in this abandoned house and lived there for two months and one evening when we were drinking upstairs, two of our friends came jumping into the open window and ran into the next room. I couldn't figure out what was going on and then I saw a bunch of white guys at the window. I still couldn't figure out what was going on. Then I started asking the white guys what was wrong and nobody answered me. One of them was swinging a bat at my ankle. He didn't hit it but I told him if he was going to hit my ankle I was going to

go after him with a 2-by-4 and he just jumped, just so that he would nick my ankle. I then picked up a 2-by-4 and went out the window. The boys followed me and we started fighting. I was really angry then and we fought all of them until they left. I ended up with scratches on both of my elbows. I went to work the next day and I couldn't even type.

I was 9 months pregnant and I had to stay in the hospital because I had gestational diabetes. That was great for me, I didn't have to worry about my diet. My grandfather passed away and I had to go home. I couldn't believe it and I started crying. I didn't have any money at that time. My mother was going in her car. She didn't want to wait for me and so I asked St. James Social Services and they gave me one way bus fare home. It was Victoria Day 2 years ago. The doctor told me that if I was ever to go into labour I had to go to the nearest hospital and take a mercy flight back to the hospital. I made it there and even before my mother did. My grandmother really looked good when I seen her and nobody recognized me. I was really big. I told them about my condition and every one watched out for me. But they even got me to drive to Hazelton and back. My uncle was scared of my driving and being pregnant. Everything turned out o.k. I made it back to the hospital in a lot of time. Before leaving the reserve my aunt told me that when my grandfather was in the hospital he said that I had my baby and it was a boy and he wanted to see him but the nurses told him that I wasn't there. I was still in Vancouver, I was still pregnant. He got angry with them. I had my son June 17, 1989 he was 10 lbs. 3 ounces. My grandfather was right.



Pauline Carrierre, store manager (left), Kathy Mattei, executive director, and Sylvia Polson, secretary at Wanepuhnud. Pauline and Sylvia have both completed employment training programs at Wanepuhnud.

I went to Penticton in June and there were four of us and we were going there to pick cherries. We made it there alright and we got to the farm and started picking. We left Vancouver at 10:30 p.m. and got to Penticton at 6:30 a.m. We got hired at 8:00 a.m. and we worked for two hours and the police came and took my friends away because they thought that they were

the ones who came across the boarder illegally. They weren't. I was on the farm all by myself and I was getting worried and so I wanted to back to the town and look for the three guys. The guy who was there, he drove me to the farmer's house and I waited for him to come home and asked him to take me to town. He was great about what I was going through and he took me to the police station and he asked about what was going on about the guys. They were going to release them later on in that day, so I asked to wait for them and I was allowed. I had waited for them and waited for about four hours. I finally asked again about the guys and the police told me that they were released about 20 minutes ago. I asked them how come I wasn't told that they were released. I asked where did they go, they told me that they went to the bus stop. I went there and bought my ticket. I thought that they went back to Vancouver and left me there. I sat in the bus stop and waited for the next bus. They came along and we went to the park and sat and waited for the bus schedule time to go to Vancouver at 11:30 at night. It was an exciting day for the four of us any way. We called it a two day adventure.

In Vancouver I saw a stabbing take place. I was walking from the bar to the park and I saw two friends of mine. They took me for a beer and they started to come on to me. I didn't want them to. I told them that I was going to the park to see some other friends. When I left the bar they started to follow me. I told my friend P_____ that they were following me and he confronted them about it and they talked in Spanish and I didn't understand them. Then they were fighting each other. P_____ then left with W_____ and returned and the man who was following went after W_____ and P_____ took out his knife and stabbed him. I couldn't believe it and my stomach started turning. One week later I moved to Toronto.

My first scar on my face. I was drinking with my so called friends and one of them took my money and we started fighting. I tried to get my money back and no way, he didn't want to give it back. I fought with him and he hit me with a bottle and I was bleeding like crazy and that's when I really got mad. I grabbed him and literally threw him down and started really beating

on him. He ran away and I never saw him for three days. After he left that night I went to the hospital and got 10 stitches over my left eye brow.

Bernice Lush

I was born in a town called Red Lake Ontario and grew up in Ear Falls south of Red Lake.

My family consists of six sisters and two brothers.

Our father was a pulp cutter until he had an accident and went to work as a guide in tourist camps. In the winter we stayed in our trapline until the spring.

I went to school when I was seven years old and never spoke a word of English. All I knew was Ojibway. When I went to school I had these boots that were red with ducks on them. I would never want to take them off because my mother told me not to lose them and I'd wear them in class. I had cousins, who had to translate for me.

Most of my life was in Ear Falls until I left there and came to Toronto. I had my oldest daughter Patricia Ann here in 1968. I kept in contact with my mother, who since remarried and lives in Kenora. I use to visit with her and my stepfather who lived in the reservation with my grandmother. One evening after a day in the town we were walking home, my mother, stepdad, my grandma, me and my baby. These four white boys came out of the bush and were gonna beat us up. My mother had told me these things happened and I didn't really think they did, not in this age. My stepdad was carrying my baby and these boys were on us and I thought we're gonna get it. I felt kind of angry and was thinking these damn white boys. So I asked them "What do you want." One of them, looked at me and said "Smart eh!" "Yes!" I told him and said "Don't hurt my baby." My grandmother, stepfather and mom were scared for they had been beaten before. I told them "Go ahead and beat us up, I think you're cowards picking on a old woman, a defenseless baby." The one guy said to his friends "let's go" and just then a car came around the bend of the road and they took off back into the bush.

My father had taught me never to be afraid of anyone or anything, but to face it. When I came back to the city, I told some friends and they couldn't believe it. It was some experience.

I never did go back to Kenora for some-time after, until I went to bury my mother, but then I didn't stay too long. I don't know if it is the same.

Mary Ann Morningstar

My brother was telling me about a time when he was picked up by the Police.

It all started at his own place. He was living with one of my other brothers. (They shared the main flat in a rented house.) They were both drinking and already pretty drunk, and some one had phoned the Police on them.

My younger brother told me, he didn't know what the Police were told, or why, but they came barging in with their guns out. It really scared him and he almost sobered up.

Then he heard my older brother say, "alright you guys drop your guns." The Police just froze in their steps and looked at both my brothers. My older brother had a gun in his hand, and pulled the trigger, then he said (BANG).

It was a toy gun, but it looked so real. One of the Policemen almost shot my brother, and they were so angry. Anyway both of my brothers were taken to jail, and accused of killing a person that they did not even know.

They were both beaten up from the Police, because they would deny everything the Police were trying to accuse them of. My brothers were both separated, and put in different cells, and questioned and beaten up over and over again.

My brother was telling me they had put handcuffs on him, and cuffs around his ankle. Neither of my brothers would admit anything the Police wanted them to, so they pricked them with a needle that made them hallucinate.

The police told them that I was the one that told them, everything. They said I was sitting in the office and pointed me out to my brother, and they said that I was there. I was living about four hundred miles away from where my brothers were being held.

My brothers told me that they tried to call my name, and I did not even turn around. Then without even looking towards either of my brothers, I got up and walked out. The Police brought my brothers to the window to watch me go, and they were trying to call me again.

They were both given a needle again

and sent to their cells. My younger brother told me the cuffs they had put on his ankle were attached to the bars, and so was his handcuffs. He was not allowed to lay down at all.

The Police scared him by saying, there was big spiders climbing all over him, and if he would not confess to the crime, they would make it worse for him. He said, he did not want to yell, but just stayed quiet, this made the Police really angry.

Well they took both cuffs off him and let him loose in the cell, then they called someone else over and said, he isn't going to speak, so let the rats go. This made my brother yell and the Police just laughed. He said, there was rats all over the place.

They got scared, my brother hurt himself really bad, they could not make either of my brothers admit to something they did not do. They finally let them go, after they were so hurt. They both hallucinated quite a few days after that, and never complained...

My story will have to begin when I was a very young girl. I can remember when my father and mother were both drinking pretty heavy, and they had friends over. Everyone was laughing and talking very loud, and out of balance when they walked around.

I heard someone say, the cops are outside, and everyone fled out the back door. My father always seemed so brave to me, especially when it came to dealing with the Police.

I was right behind my dad when the Police pushed their way right into the house. My dad asked them "Where is your Search Warrant? You have no business here." Before my father could say another word, the Police would just yank him out the door.

Outside there would be about three other Police, who really beat

my dad up. I can remember watching two Police holding my dad while one would be kicking him in the stomach. My dad was putting up a pretty good fight, they just could not hold him.

The Police were flying all over the place, all over the place! They must have known my dad was going to put up a fight. I can remember crying as I watched my dad get hit on the head with a billy and fall over backward.

His face was all bloody, he had an open cut on the side of his face, his nose was bleeding and so was his mouth. It sounded like he was choking, as the Police still kicked him, while he was knocked out on the ground.

They took him away, and I could not stop crying. About two weeks later they let him out of jail. The Police had broken his jaws and his nose, plus he had two black eyes.

Well that went on and on year in and year out. My dad even had a broken leg from them one other time.

My four year-old daughter and I were

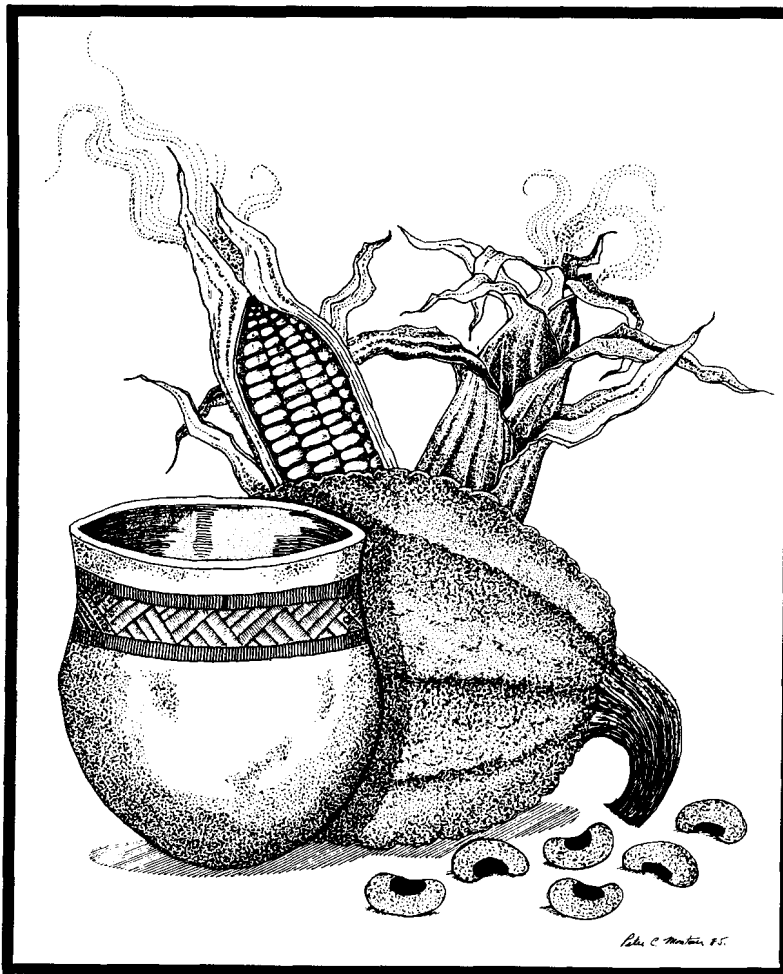
walking down Parliament Street. There was two Police men walking in front of us, so I was telling her about, how the Police help everyone.

I noticed this Indian man passed out, he was sitting up leaning against a building, a little ways ahead of us.

One of the Police gave the poor guy such a hard kick on the foot, that his shoe flew off. The man woke up and fell over on his side. The other Police started to kick the Indian man, on the hip and on the back. Just then the Police told the guy get your shoe and put it on, so he tried to reach for it, and his fingers were stepped on. My little girl started screaming and crying, and she just took off on me, down a lane way.

Two elderly ladies were coming from the other direction and saw what was going on, they told the Police to leave the poor man alone, or else they would report them.

My baby was running so fast I could hardly catch up to her, I was more afraid that she would get hit by a car. I had such a hard time with my baby, a long time after that she kept getting nightmares.



Suzanne Polson

I once knew this girl, she was 11 years old, and she was put in a foster home. She was taken from her reservation and the only family she ever knew.

She lost her parents when she was 5 years, she was staying with her grandmother ever since her parents died. Her new foster home was in a French town. Even though it was her cousin who she was staying with, she was badly treated.

I got to know her by going to school with her. She was a very shy and lonely person. She never played with the other children, she was quiet and listened to everything that was to be done.

She was a good student, and always was interested in her courses. She took her classes very seriously. She tried to show how Native People can do things just as good as Non-Natives. Everyone laughed at her, teased her, and made fun of her.

She never liked to play with

the others. They always made fun of her and of her way of playing some games. When school was finished for the summer, her work wasn't. She was forced to work on the farm and watch the children.

Her cousin did not like her, and tried to live her life the way she wished to have lived hers. Her cousin tried too hard to protect her but she went too far. She never listened to what she wanted and decided to make her decisions for her.

I was the one she would always come and see when she wanted a friend. I never pushed her away and I always was there whenever she wanted to talk. I just wish she would have opened herself more to me. She was scared to talk, she said that she had to keep everything to herself.

I seen her cousin a few times. I seen how hard she was on the girl, how she used her for her house work. The poor girl never had a time were she could go and visit friends, her cousin claimed that her friends were no good for her.

When she finally left that fosterhome she was about 17 years old. She convinced the child worker how she was mistreated. The child worker never believed her before, but he did not have a choice now. She was going to leave even though what they said. She just couldn't take that life anymore and she thought there was a better life for her somewhere else.

It has been a while since I seen her. I don't know where she is, but she must be happy to have her life back to her...

One thing that happen to me was that I was going with this French guy. He said he wasn't racist, I believed him. I met a lot of new friends when I was with him, but they never seemed to accept me because I was Indian.

Oh! they'll talk with me but they will

always have to make jokes about Indians and they say they didn't know that I was there. Well I let them be, saying it didn't matter.

I was going with the guy for two years, but every year we'd break up. He was drinking a lot. What I hated the most is that he always said that the Indians were always drinking and never taking care of their children. He was doing just that himself.

See we had a child, and I was the one to take care of him. He always said that a woman's place was in the house. I never agreed with him. We worked together in the forest cutting wood for fireplaces. Most of the time he will take the day off and make me go in to do his work.

I always spoiled him. I used to get up with him at 6:00 in the morning just to make his coffee. He never will let me sleep or get my rest. He never said thanks or will even notice what I did around the house.

He never liked to visit my relatives, saying they were always drunk and will try to fight him. I told him that they weren't like that but will he believe me? Of course not. Oh! it was O.K. when it was my turn to visit his relatives, but never mine.

Every time we broke up it was never because of his drinking but because of my selfishness. When I will go back to him he will make these promises he'll stop drinking. But you'd think he meant it. He'll just start all over again.

What will really bug me is that I was brought up with my grandparents and my grandfather was a heavy drinker. I lived through all that all my life that when I started to go with him I thought I was finished with booze. When I started to drink he will always blame my relatives.

Saying that it was their fault. He wouldn't admit it was his fault.

After two years being with him I had enough. He started to get brutal. Once he hit a door counter on my head. Well I left that night and went to my reserve. When I got back he was mad at me. He said that he never did do a thing like that.

A few weeks after that he pushed me against a tree. That was it. I pushed him back and he pushed me even harder. I told him I was leaving him and I did. Of course he blamed me and my relatives for that. He will never see what he was doing but what I was doing.

When he realized that I was never coming back, he finally looked at himself, and how his drinking problem was getting worst.

This time he promised to quit for good, I believed him but I told him it was too late. I said I will never go back and get hurt another time. I told him about the other times, and the promises, but he said it was in the past.

I told him that what we once had was in the past too. The only thing I had left was the memories and scars. I could remember the nights I sat up waiting for him. The nights I spend with our son just hoping he wouldn't come home drunk again.

I found it hard at times. I felt alone, no one was there for me. When I left him, all the friends I once had never wanted to talk to me anymore. To them I was only a stupid Indian. They all turned their back on me.

Just when I thought people started to accept me, they all turned their back. The only reason they used to talk with me is because I was going with their friend.

All that hurting and frustration is all in my past now. I started a new life for myself. I will never look back.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Women: A Cultural Review is a new journal due to be launched by Oxford University Press in 1990. It will appear three times a year. **Women** will examine the fundamental importance of sexual difference in cultural formations and will be concerned with all forms of theatre, poetry, novel, criticism, history, philosophy, education, law, anthropology, psychoanalysis, psychology, the sciences, music, sculpture, painting, dance, film, video, record production, television, journalism.

Contributions will be welcomed from all with an interest in gender, in particular women in the arts, professional and academic life. A style sheet for authors is available on request. Please send papers to: The Editors, **Women: A Cultural Review**, Dept. of English, Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1 7HX, England.

For further information or to request a free sample copy of the first issue, write to: Journals Publicity Department, Oxford University Press, Pinkhill House, Southfield Road, Eynsham, Oxford OX8 1JJ.