

Pulling It All Together

by Bertha Ann MacLean

In case of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing.

—Catherine Parr Traill

Carol Gibson-Kennedy is an artist living in the North Shore community on Cape Breton Island. The North Shore is a largely rural area where traditional crafts and folkways are still the norm. The area is charming and beautiful, the people warm and friendly. Gathering together to help each other through hardships is a long-standing practice. Sharing one's harvest through the making, sharing, and

selling of jams, preserves, and pickles is commonplace among the people of the community.

While reading a *Mother Jones* magazine one day several years ago, Carol came upon an interesting idea. She recalls:

I saw a picture of a peace quilt a group of American women made and dedicated to a group of similar women in Russia. I thought what a marvellous idea, especially for a community like mine where there is a long-standing tradition of milling frolics and quilting bees.

As well, Carol felt that, "The people here are aware and concerned about global issues. All it takes is a spark of interest."

Carol herself showed, through her life and activities, that she was interested in peaceful solutions to various problems facing humanity. She had, for instance, presented briefs on behalf of rural women to the Commission on Childcare and to the Liberal Task Force on Issues of Concern to Women.

Having decided that the creation of a peace quilt was an activity worth pursuing, Carol approached Peace Fund Canada for some financial support. With a \$300 cheque in hand, the next step was to



The Cape Breton Peace Quilters

Photo: Carol Gibson

solicit the help of the people of the North Shore.

In March 1986, Carol sent a letter to her neighbours, outlining the global issue of peace and the need for action. People were asked to be active by contributing to the peace quilt. Individuals interested in contributing were to design their own personal peace symbol on a 12" by 12" square of paper. The designs were to represent their own interpretation of peace.

A wide variety of designs were submitted and accepted. For some, the concept of peace was best represented by showing peaceful moments in their lives: walking in the woods on a starry night, happening upon a patch of wild strawberries, watching kites and butterflies gloriously alive in the sunset.

Other people designed peace symbols that showed their hopes and dreams for a better way of life. One square shows children dancing around the shared tree of life. Erin Schneers' design showed two continents (trees) joined together by a baby in a hammock. Ann Morrell, a re-

nowned Cape Breton quilter, worked on the centre piece which has a circle of multi-racial children holding hearts between their hands.

Individuals were provided with the materials necessary to create a square for the quilt. It was decided that three techniques would be used in making the quilt squares: appliqué, embroidery, and dye painting. Since many were not familiar with these techniques, workshops were organized for instruction. In all, 49 completed squares were collected; the contributors ranged in age from five to eighty and included both sexes. According to Carol, "Putting it all together took the longest time. We wanted to make sure each piece was in the right spot — that it somehow connected us all."

By early 1987, the community was ready to sit down at the first quilting bee. Mary MacInnis co-ordinated the bees. Seven sessions later, at the North Shore Community Hall, the work of art created by the Quilters for Peace was completed.

A color poster of the Cape Breton Peace

Quilt was made possible by funding provided by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Atlantic Division. All proceeds from the sale of the poster go to "Tools for Peace."

About the time the Quilters for Peace were putting away the tools of their trade, the International Popular Theatre Festival, "Standin' the Gaff," was held on Cape Breton Island. The festival included popular theatre groups from a variety of cultures. One such theatre group, the St. Ann's Bay Players located on the North Shore, had decided on involvement in the festival. To create a play, a workshop stretched over two weeks was organized. The goal of the workshop was to use introspection to come up with a theme around which a story would be based for performance in the festival. The St. Ann's Bay Players developed a play entitled, "The Tide is After Shifting," focusing on the lives and dreams of people living in a rural fishing community, not unlike the North Shore.

Carol is a member of the players and



The Cape Breton Peace Quilters

Photo: Carol Gibson

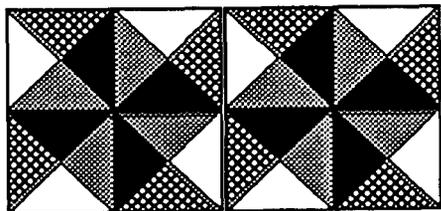
indicated her concern for peace. The central character of the play, Jessie, a wife and mother, embodies this concern. Suffering from marital and family woes, Jessie involves herself with the quilting of a Peace Quilt. The play shows the women of the community at a quilting bee — a “stitch and bitch” as it was known to those attending. Through the conversations, the audience comes to realize that even though the characters are caught up with their own problems, by coming together they are provided with the strength and support to work for personal, communal, and global peace.

The play made its debut in “Standin’ the Gaff” and subsequently was performed at one of Cape Breton’s annual festivals — Festival Bras D’Or — held in the summer. The play not only incorporates messages of working for peace on every level, but also provided opportunity to display the Cape Breton Peace Quilt.

The prospect of touring with the play and the quilt has been put on hold, so for now the quilt hangs on a wall in a church on the North Shore. However, the quilt itself is available to women’s groups and peace groups who wish to display it. For more information on displaying the quilt and/or purchasing a poster, contact: Carol Gibson-Kennedy, Quilters for Peace, R.R. #4, Baddeck, Nova Scotia, B0E 1B0.

The Cape Breton Peace Quilt, as seen on the back cover of this issue of *Canadian Woman Studies*, is a stunning work of art. More than that, however, it is concrete evidence of the creativity that can develop when ordinary people gather together, support each other, and work together for social good.

Bertha Ann MacLean, who is married with two daughters, lives in Leitches Creek, a small community just outside Sydney, Cape Breton. She is the President of Women Unlimited, a local feminist group, and is a founding member of Cooperative Effort for Social Action.



Bomb-Fire for Peace

by *Bertha Ann MacLean*

I was walking through our local mall during this past holiday season, trying to find last minute items and figure out what my children wanted for Christmas. As usual it was my Saturday off, time to spend with my kids. I love our week-ends together when we can share our time. We had all grown bored, though, waiting for the snow to arrive and make the cold weather seem worthwhile.

This particular weekend, Santa Claus was due to make his first appearance in town; a parade was planned for his arrival. The prospect of watching my children’s eyes fill with wonder and hope had me planning our venture into town for days in advance. We would go to the parade and then on to grandmother’s. Finally, we’d go to the mall to see what attracted my daughters’ attention.

The very thought of the day had me grinning from ear to ear, for I am one who looks to Christmas as a time of reflection, a time when I feel love and give love. Memories would overwhelm me when I caught the mere glimpse of Christmas wrapping paper: my grandmother steam-

ing her prized plum puddings and my mother whipping up a batch of hard sauce; my father always surprising me with a present I failed to find before Christmas.

I badly wanted to show these times to my children and somehow make them see more than the glitter and tinsel. I wanted them to feel the love and peace that surrounded them and draw strength from it. We awoke Saturday morning to a down-pour of sleet and rain, but were not disheartened. When the parade was postponed for an hour, I took the opportunity to sit down and watch a Saturday morning television show that had my children’s undivided attention. It was a new show — something to do with a futuristic superman who fought against evil forces. I didn’t like the show. I wanted my children to be able to look to the night sky and see beauty and mystery, not battling spaceships, so I voiced my concerns and rose to shut off the machine.

And then I saw it. A commercial for a revolutionary new toy. One that brings you inside the TV set and allows you to take part in the action. You, too, can now



Paul [left] and Tessa Kendrick, Michael Aucoin and Ben Goetz

Photo: Ted Rhodes