

ship. Those of us who work in transition houses know that by teaching these women how to create strategies and build alliances while confronting the system will advance their success at leading their own lives. As they negotiate their way through the system these will be their tools of power—the ones they will use after leaving the transition house, the ones they will use when they group with other women for political change. As frontline workers we know that it becomes easy to slip into “servicing” women by infantilizing them when we professionalize the work. To actively achieve her autonomy, a battered woman must be in the lead and see us, the frontline workers, as standing beside her. When we set up a hierarchy of power, by placing these women only in the hands of those with professional degrees, these women fall to the bottom of the ladder and we are reenacting the power dynamics they had to endure while living with their abuser. Our commitment to the autonomy of each woman who comes into our transition houses must be foremost in our theory and practice.

A call to action

It is important to realize that the battered woman who must establish a new life for herself and her children will have to use her time and energy to care for her children, find housing, take training, and look for employment. She must be encouraged and supported by us to participate in the women’s movement. The grouping of ex-residents for support, education, and action can lead to these women becoming a political force. They can come back to work in the transition houses, take part in political actions, and lobby the government for change. In feminist transition houses these women have found their voices through the collective sharing of power and in recognition of their equality. The mobilizing of ex-residents for political action can come about effectively when we nurture our relationships with them. The potential for political change is seen by the battered women in the short time she stays with us *if* we hold ourselves to feminist practice in the transition house.

Pauline Funston is a collective member at Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter. She is a transition house worker and an activism for over seven years. She has worked with many battered women over this period of time. She has travelled and lived in many parts of the world on her own for extended periods of time, most extensively in North Africa and Asia. She is of a working-class background, was raised in rural Ontario, and has spent the last four years concentrating on making women’s liberation happen.

NANCY C. FARQUHARSON

Flowers

I got flowers today. It wasn’t my birthday or any other special day.
We had our first argument last night,
And he said a lot of cruel things that really hurt
I know he’s sorry and didn’t mean the things he said
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today. It wasn’t our anniversary or any other special day.
Last night he threw me into a wall and started to choke me.
It seemed like a nightmare.
I couldn’t believe it was real.
I woke up this morning sore and bruised all over.
I know he must be sorry
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today and it wasn’t Mother’s Day or any other special day.
Last night he beat me up again.
And it was much worse than all the other times.
If I leave him, what will he do?
How will I take care of my kids? What about money
I’m afraid of him and scared to leave.
But I know he must be sorry
Because he sent me flowers today.

I got flowers today. Today was a special day.
It was the day of my funeral.
Last night, he finally killed me.
He beat me to death.
If only I had gathered
Enough courage and strength to leave him.
I would not have gotten flowers today.

Nancy C. Farquharson lives in Mississauga, Ontario.