

dresses the topic of creating peaceful learning environments while specifically emphasizing the youth population and the role of community stake-holders and schools within this context.

Understanding Abuse clearly depicts the tensions and endless possibilities associated with partnerships in the broadest sense, and more particularly with collaboration among the social service sector and academia. It provides a great depth of information about the everyday nuances of collaborative work. The reflections and evaluation summaries shared are particularly noteworthy, especially for communities and academic institutions that may want to embark on similar partnerships.

Most often, academic research on family violence focuses on the compilation of information about the issue within the broader social context. This book illustrates the power of collaborative action research, which moves beyond simply the building of knowledge, to using information to develop and implement strategies to bring about social change. Over and over again it emphasizes that this approach is only made possible with the participation of women who have been impacted by abuse and the community partners who serve them.

The majority of Canadian studies on family violence take place within an urban context. The findings associated with urban research are simply not sufficient when determining and responding to the needs of women living within rural communities. This book is a much needed resource because it offers sound research and insights into the unique challenges faced by abused women residing in rural communities within Atlantic Canada.

Despite the fact that each chapter is based on academic-based research, the writing style and content selection allows the information to be accessible to a general audience. Each chapter is introduced with a poem, which is an excellent way to link the

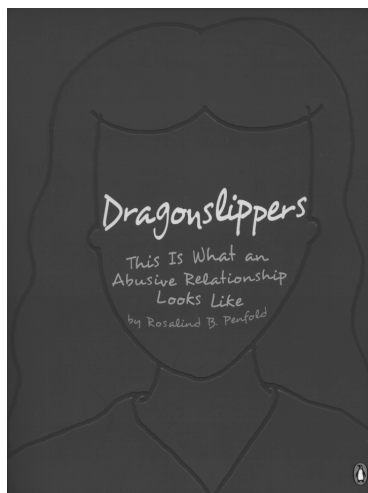
research areas with the real life experiences.

Overall, in a very inspiring and esthetically pleasing manner, this book successfully demonstrates the impact that a shared vision and commitment can have on eradicating violence in communities.

DRAGONSLIPPERS: THIS IS WHAT AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP LOOKS LIKE

Rosalind B. Penfold
Toronto: Penguin Group, 2005

REVIEWED BY VESNA ILJIC



Dragonslippers is a graphic memoir of an abusive relationship. The narrator, “Roz,” a successful and independent business woman, guides us through the romantic beginnings of her relationship with “Brian,” a wealthy widower with four children. Roz is (literally) swept off her feet by his overwhelming attention. Brian’s disregard or intentional erosion of Roz’s boundaries by intrusive, premature intimacy has a quality of discomfort, but also excitement and thrill for the woman.

We usually let our boundaries down when we know and trust someone. Such acts bring psychological

closeness. With violation of personal boundaries a false sense of intimacy is achieved. Adrenalin-producing energy, infusing these early and later surprise transactions, has an addictive quality and is a marker in establishing psychological dependency. The stage is set for Roz’s emotional descent. What follows are the escalating incidences of Brian’s infidelity and cruelty towards Roz, children and a family pet. Roz attempts to leave, but always returns, persuaded by Brian’s profession of love and promise of change.

Overwhelmed and at loss for words or explanations, she takes the snapshots of these bewildering events by drawing what has happened. With that, she establishes an objective witness to her experience. Years later she reviews the hidden collection of her drawings. Seeing the whole volume of abusive content of her relationship with Brian leads Roz to understand the magnitude of the abuse, giving her the strength to seek counseling and to break her dependency.

The main contribution of *Dragonslippers* to the literature on woman abuse and domestic violence is in telling the story in pictorial manner. *Dragonslippers* illustrates the progression of the abuse in a relationship, highlighting the actions of the abuser and the effects of the abuse on the partner. Most abused women complain about memory and concentration problems, wishing there would be a way to document, to witness the abusive events, to help them recall and make sense of what happened. Out of disbelief and self-preservation they start to forget, dissociate, repress, normalize, rationalize and self blame.

Dragonslippers provides us with much needed visual testimony that has direct emotional impact on the reader. It documents the elusive process of seduction, abuse and depletion of woman’s independent faculties. Visual representations of the abusive episodes, accompanied by crude verbalizations, produce close simu-

lations of abusive events.

The cyclical nature of abusive behaviour and the emotional instability it creates in the receiver are both illustrated. Captured is the process of brainwashing through isolation, degradation and crazymaking (creating inconsistencies); depicted is the process of conditioning and shaping of the behaviour (walking on eggshells) by intermittent reward and punishment. The abused woman enters a state of memory fragmentation and learned helplessness as a survival adaptation. Most of her energy is focused on the perpetrator as a function of self-preservation. This leads to loss of the feeling of the self and dependency on the abuser.

If you have ever worked with the abused woman, you know that when you offer her literature on abuse, she will report that she forgets what she has read before she finishes the page. According to Bucci (1997, 2001)¹ we process and store experiences in two channels: nonverbal (sensory) and verbal (linguistic). Painful, unacceptable emotional experiences are stored in their original, mainly non-verbal form, before they are referentially connected to the verbal mode, contextualized and named/translated into language. Therein lies the difficulty of verbal therapies. Abused women struggle in trying to access painful, repressed emotions and the scope of their experiences of abuse. They have never translated and memorized most of these experiences in a linguistic form.

Dragonslippers presents visual cues, triggering any survivor's own fragmented and repressed memories. It also offers language for the unspoken, providing validation and making the abuse (especially emotional abuse) visible and "real." Recognition, confirmation and validation by the witness are crucial steps in recovery.

The book also provides a rare glimpse into abuse across the class fence. Availability of resources that money and higher social class offer guarantee socioeconomic protection

and privacy. Only shocking extremes of the abuse, the ones resulting in death, reach the media and the public domain. In contrast, lack of resources and high economic stressors in poor families make them subject to public visibility and scrutiny. Because they seek or are approached by public agencies for intervention, their privacy is relinquished. Despite the class differences, this book confirms that partner abuse is universal. It follows predictable patterns and escalates on a continuum, generating universal psychological defense mechanisms as strategies for survival in the abused women.

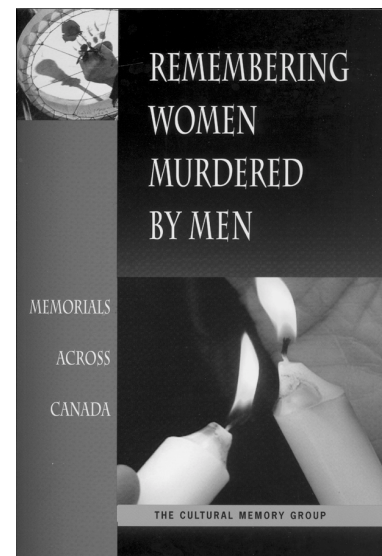
Dragonslippers strings the abusive events together, representing the unsightly, unseen narrative of the abuse. Like Ariadne's thread it leads Roz out of the labyrinth of the abusive relationship, into the light of seeing and understanding. Such narrative is an invaluable tool for Roz and any abused woman out there. By reclaiming memories and establishing a survivor narrative, healing and transformational change can occur.

References

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Vesna Iljic has over sixteen years of experience of working with abused women at frontline agencies in Toronto. She has taught Feminist Counselling at George Brown College for eight year. She was an instructor in Art Therapies Coursrs at York University for one year. Presently she is a psychotherapist in private practice in Toronto and Clinical Manager for Kids Help Phone Canada.

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REMEMBERING WOMEN MURDERED BY MEN— MEMORIALS ACROSS CANADA

The Cultural Memory Group
Christine Bold, Sly Castaldi, Ric Knowles, Jodie McConnell, and Lisa Schincariol
Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006

REVIEWED BY SUE BUCKLE

When it comes to memorializing women murdered by men, how do individuals and communities balance the tension between the need to remember, the desire to forget and the yearning for an end to violence against women?

Remembering Women Murdered by Men – Memorials Across Canada is a significant analysis of more than 30 such memorials and the needs, desires and yearnings that brought them into existence, often despite compelling odds and seemingly monumental challenges.

The *Cultural Memory Group*¹ has accomplished much in this book, creating a literary memorial that is both historic and dense with social