

# Marion Lynn and Shelagh

## *An Interview with*

Marion: I had a six-month-old baby and I was pregnant with the second when I was doing the Status of Women research at Centennial College. I had to go before the board of governors to get approval to do the research and here I was, looking very maternal and quite harmless and the man heading up the committee just looked at me and said, "well if you promise not to create any dissension," and I said, "oh no, we won't create any dissension to produce this Status of Women report." I was working in a very supportive environment because we had a president at that time, Doug Light, who was a very forward-thinking person. He believed in fairness and he believed in justice and he believed that things should be the way they ought to be. In 1977 Doug Light wanted to have a conference on women and so we did and we invited people from various places to come and discuss women's studies and women's place in the community college system. The women speaking were dynamic, witty, and outrageous; they knew their facts and by this time it was post-International Women's Year and there was such a vibrancy, energy, and passion around all of these things and this conference was just explosive, it was mind-boggling, and exciting. Doug Light was so thrilled and he said: "wouldn't it be interesting to start a journal?" and "I said, I guess so." Then he said, "Go back to your committee, and have them look at some of the people around who might help us start a journal. Maybe that Shelagh Wilkinson who I understand just left her job at Sheridan might be interested in coming." And that was the beginning. Shelagh and I met as mature students at Atkinson College at York University in the early '60s. Our lives intersected as students during those years, so it was interesting when I started to work at Centennial in 1968 and Shelagh started to work at Sheridan in 1974, the year before International Women's Year.

Shelagh: I went back to school at 35 years old, with three children under six. I did it to save my sanity. I didn't go to get a degree. I fell into a degree. I never meant to do any of it. When I finished my degree, I passed a professor in the library and he said, "well, what are you going to do now?" I said "I don't know. I want to go on." And he said, "will you teach for me?" "Teach?" I went home to Dave and he said to me, "what does that mean?" "Well, I've got to do all my graduate work." David was very leary of all of this. After my masters at the University of Toronto, I went to Oxford in the summer of 1974 and I got very radicalized. Oxford completely changed my life. I went there studying misogynist Swift, Locke, and Pope, and was very happy doing this, and all of a sudden I just *saw* all the male privilege and couldn't believe it. My brother said to me, "well if you had a status quo like this would you give it up?" And I said, "no, but I'm bloody well going to take it off you!" That's how my career started. I came back home to Canada a little bit early and I said to David, "If I can get a job working for women, I'll do anything." There was an ad in the paper for Sheridan College. I went to see the president and he said, "well, okay, you can be the director of the Women's Centre. We'll put you out in an office in the main office." He didn't have a secretary for me because he knew I knew how to type. I asked him what my budget was. And he said, "\$3,500 a year." The Toronto Women's Bookstore had just opened so I went down there and ordered \$3,500 worth of books. They delivered them to me at Sheridan and there were boxes piled all around me. Then I called the Fire Marshall and I said "I think I'm a fire hazard in this office," so he came and he said, "yes, you are!" So then the president said, "well we've got to get her an office!" We then got a great space for the Women's Centre. Helen Lucas was there. She was teaching in the art department doing these radical, very political black and whites. I said, "you're an artist and feminist, let's see some of your stuff." I bought one of her paintings. I had this budget so why not?



# Wilkinson

## *the CWS/cf Founders*

M: When Shelagh came to Centennial, we had an established Women's Centre and I was the women's advisor and director of the Centre and Shelagh was hired to be the first editor of the *Canadian Women's Studies/les cahiers de la femme* Journal. One of the criteria from the very beginning was that it had to be bilingual. Centennial was very very big in French at that time. I had a budget supplied by the president's office as well as \$10,000 a year and a computer from the Ministry for the francophone portion. We had space, we had secretaries, we had printing, and the Journal was produced out of the Women's Centre at the same time as we were doing all these other things—teaching, putting on workshops, organizing conferences, doing outreach. There was a real concentration of women's issues in the various communities—doing these research reports in the 1970s was really fundamental. They really showed the inequities in women's and men's salaries, terrible inequities, and until that time, no one knew what the inequities were. Everyone assumed that if women earned pin money, no matter if they had their masters or doctorates, it was just that, pin money.

S: Johanna Stuckey was great. She came to Centennial and she said, "well, we found out that a penis is worth between \$500 and \$4,000" (that was one of her great lines), and then she asked me to do the part-timers report and I said that it would cost the university \$250,000 to bring the women's salaries in-line with the men's. All the men said the university hasn't got such money. I said, "well, there is a simple answer, we could easily bring all your salaries down to the same level as ours and we would all be equal." The university put up \$250,000 and we were equal. And Johanna followed it up again in 1985, and we were back to the same place we were in 1975.

M: We had all been working in community research, in political organizations organizing for daycare, for equal pay, for abortion on demand, establishing rape crisis centres—the '70s was such a time of ferment, passion, and belief in what we were doing. The Journal never started as just an academic journal, it started as a political journal—it had to be French-English, it had to be based in the community, the goal had to be for social activism, and it had to represent all women. We went and sat on a floor in a library and talked to women who worked as waitresses, and in the factories, and in offices, and needed daycare. They were just as important to what we were doing as the courses that we were teaching to university and college students. I think that set the tone for the Journal from the very beginning, not only in terms of the content but in terms of how we worked. We began as one of the first collective organizations—we didn't even know what a collective meant—none of us believed that we knew what we were doing, we just had a vision of what had to be done. We all got together, we all mucked in, and we all contributed what we could, whether that meant editing, or writing, or carting boxes around. We licked envelopes, we licked stamps, and we used to have a chair with wheels on it so that Shelagh could cart boxes around. When we started gathering information for the first issue we didn't have any particular themes so we just started asking people to write and we had such a response—hundreds of articles. Shelagh and I had cottages just down the road from each other up in Muskoka and the summer of 1977. We had all our stuff in Dominion Store and Loblaws shopping bags. We used to walk back and forth from one cottage to the other and we'd sit at the deck editing papers and sheets would fly off the deck and into Lake Muskoka and we'd have to jump off the dock and rescue them. Neither one of us had done anything like this before! And none of the women on our board had ever done this before!



S: When we started off it was 50 per cent French. I went to Sherrill Cheda and said to her "I don't know what to do about the francophone part." She said, "I've just finished working with Maïr Verthuy and Jeanne Maranda and they are brilliant." So I said to Marion, I'm going up to the Simone de Beauvoir Institute at Concordia—Maïr was at Concordia and Jeanne was her student—and this rowdy francophone group listened to me. I did it bilingually in my very best, and they said, "non merci, nous sommes féministes, séparatistes, marxistes—pas d'anglais—no, we don't want a bilingual journal." But a woman lawyer who pointedly said to me "je suis *un* avocat" gave me the first \$8 for a year's subscription and she said, "I agree with this." After that we started getting subscriptions. We got 800 before we published a word. And then people would say to us, "how many issues a year?" and I would blithely reply, "oh, four issues." When I thought about it I didn't know how we were going to get our four issues that first year, it was impossible. But we did! We got four out! And then, after awhile, it went dark.

M: What happened was that my budget got cut. Doug Light had left. They were having a budget crunch and he decided that our office would have to go. We were left not knowing what was going to happen to the Journal.

S: I was working very steadily part-time at York so I had this connection to York. I went to Johanna Stuckey and said, "we've got to do something. This journal will die unless we find some funding. The funding's been cut." And Johanna said, "York will never fund it." I said, "don't worry about the funding. Give me an office, give me a place, and I'll go after funding from the government." And Johanna said, "you'll never, never do it!" and I said, "give me an office, and I'll do it." So we went to see the president, Ian MacDonald, and he agreed to give us space but that's all. He said, "I will not pay for telephones, I will not pay for portage (if you needed to get someone to carry your stuff), but you will get an office." So Johanna said, "I'm a Fellow at Founders, so come to Founders." Johanna got us an office in Founders College. What I did then was go around to all of the colleges to see if they would give us money and they wouldn't and that's when I started going to the government for funding. And that transition was very difficult until the Women's Directorate agreed to fund us and they gave us funding that would see us out for almost a year. I went to India in 1983, so I said to Johanna, "I'm going to India, so you'll have to look after it." Then it was Johanna's turn to go around with shopping bags.

M: Johanna and I then worked on it together for a year. And Kathleen Martindale was hired to work with us that first year at York. We had a wonderful time. It was so exciting. We had such support. Our subscriptions were up to about 2,000. Those were the days when there was money around to fund things like this. People could get money for things like this and for their schools. And the subscriptions were only \$8 per year. And Johanna was wonderful, because when we got to York in 1983 she said we must have a dolly (it never occurred to us we didn't have to push things around on chairs!) and we're going to hire an editor. Once we got established at York we put an ad in the paper for an editor. That was Johanna pushing us on. Instead of doing this all ourselves we became much more of a business. And that's how we hired Liz Brady.

S: I was hired full-time at York in 1983 to start a women's studies program at Atkinson and Ron Bodessa took into account that I was working very hard for the Journal because by then Johanna had stopped doing it. I went to Ottawa when I got back from India and got funding immediately and that's why Johanna said we could hire somebody.

M: By 1985 we were established. Shelagh had acquired funding from Ottawa (core funding), and we had Liz Brady in place as the managing editor and we went to the United Nations Conference on Women in Nairobi. Shelagh went as a member of the official Canadian committee, and I went representing the Journal. When Shelagh returned from India in 1983, she brought with her material for the "International" issue. We gave 2,500 copies of that issue out in Nairobi. Then when we came home, we put out the "Post-Nairobi" issue.



S: The fact that we were at York gave us a feeling of stability along with the core funding from Secretary of State Canada. We were finally anchored somewhere.

M: When I look back over the history of the Journal, I see it in decades. In 1975, I was appointed to do the Status of Women report for Centennial College and out of that work and a women's studies conference came the idea for a journal. It was the first United Nations year for women and that was when the seed for the Journal was planted. Then in 1985 we had come so far from our little room in Scarborough on Warden Avenue, to being sent to the United Nations International Conference on Women in Nairobi as the official journal representing Canada. Because of Shelagh's travelling we were becoming recognized internationally. When I look back, we had small times of stability, of being grounded and being secure, and then, in between, incredible turbulence. After 1985 we lost our funding again and we went for a long time thinking that we were going to have to close. We went for a long time where we couldn't produce anything and then we went back to a time of getting fairly secure funding from a variety of sources. That was when we hired Luciana Ricciutelli, and that was interesting because we then began, once again, to move into different areas. In 1995, we were once more on the international stage and one of our editorial board members was selected as part of the official Canadian team that went to the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing. I went representing the Journal and we distributed over 1,500 copies of our issue on "Women's Rights are Human Rights." And if I think of myself sitting on the floor of the YWCA with kids sitting in my lap, lobbying for daycare, and moving from that ... to thinking that we ended up in Africa in 1985 and then in China in 1995, it is the epitome of thinking globally and acting locally. Because as we moved onto the international stage, it didn't detract from the grounding we had at the local level from the very beginning. The Journal has always adhered to the fact that we are a "Canadian" women's studies journal and we have always—regardless of how broad, international, and global the issues were—we've always come back to the way these issues impact on the lives of Canadian women.

S: I would like to see the Journal funded more confidently, really funded so we didn't have to worry about where our next issue is coming from and I would like to see a much broader board. I would also like to see a much more active francophone unit, I don't think we ever really pulled that off, and I think I would like to see it keeping that sort of excitement.

M: We started the Journal with absolute and total institutional support. They paid our office space, they paid for help, they paid for whatever had to be done and now, 20 years later, we're in a different institutional structure, and we are essentially begging for financial support. What I would like for the Journal is a bit of the institutional support which we had 20 years ago when we hadn't proven ourselves and people believed in us in spite of that. All of the work that we've done, all of the hours that people have put into the Journal, all of the attention we've gotten over the years, locally, globally, nationally, internationally, and we still don't have any institutional support. Haven't we proven that we have a product that people value? We're in libraries, in classrooms, in bookstores across the country, in many places around the world. Haven't we proven ourselves yet?

S: I wish we could get a broader distribution. I think we create a brilliant product and everyone who gets the Journal and reads it is really impressed. I think a journal that has lasted this long, of this quality, should be producing many more copies and distributing many more copies. There are still people today who read it for the first time and are dumbfounded. We should be printing 50,000 copies and distributing it everywhere! I think if we could move into publishing for women's studies courses in a big way then we could make enough money to stay afloat.

*This interview was conducted by Luciana Ricciutelli over a very pleasurable dinner with many glasses of wine.*

