

AWAIRE



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WOMEN AND GARDENS



"I know I am made from this earth, as my mother's hands were made from this earth, as her dreams came from this earth, and all that I know, I know in this earth . . . all that I know speaks to me through this earth, and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us."

—Susan Griffin, 1978



WOMEN AND GARDENS

Shall we return to life?

Hastening forth from Winters icy grip to the delirious sensuality of Spring green - grass blowing in the wind, buds bursting forth to proclaim life anew.. Return to our gardens to cheer our hearts and lighten our spirits with the fragrance, beauty and rich fecundity of our mother earth.

When I think of gardens what springs to mind are images of sun drenched arbour, fragrant roses, sumptuous smells and rich velvety textures. The mouth watering taste of fruit plucked fresh from the vine, herbs crushed underfoot on trailing paths emitting pungent smells on the hot Summer air. The heavy smell of tomato vines as they are pruned and staked. These images are associated with women that I know and have known to whom growing gardens and gardening constitute a vital part of their existence. Gardening has so many rewards for women...It produces the staples of life...it is a leisure activity par excellence bringing quiet harmony and groundedness to ones life... To coin a phrase "Nearest to God/ess in a garden".

For women these images echo way back on our ancient past. Marija Gimbutas, historian, and anthropologist has widely documented ancient cultures where women were shown to have domesticated grains herbs and other plants for healing and sustaining life. In these early cultures where women were more powerfully represented in all aspects of life they were also shown to have a civilizing influence bringing peace beauty and harmony to the home and public and political life. Figurines and pottery depicting images of women holding sheafs of grain or carrying corn appear in many cultures showing the predominance of womens involvement in procuring food for families and clans. To the present day we know that women produce two thirds of the worlds food and own but a fraction of the land. Women have been intricately connected with producing food and growing herbs for healing.

Within the cycles of Nature we have learned the greatest wisdoms of life-endurance patience, abundance and the constancy of change.

What could be a more pleasurable way to unwind after a stressful week than to spend a day pottering in ones garden where everything is put in its proper perspective again as we step off the treadmill of work-life.

WOMEN Healers of the present and the past have been deeply connected to the life of the spirit through nature as were mystics throughout the ages. Hildegard of Bingen one of the most renowned mystics of Medieval Europe lived in Germany in the Twelfth Century and was famous for her herbal and apothecary skills of which she wrote many books. She was known throughout Europe for her knowledge and learning. She was abbess, poetess, prophet reformer artist, musician, healer, scientist and mystical theologian. She was said to have presented a holistic cosmology that dared to speak of the complex interweaving of the cosmic, the divine and the human in many splendoured and deep oneness.

In recent times I have heard healers like Elizabeth Kuebler Ross who has worked extensively with death and dying say her time in her garden and in nature replenishes her spirit to return renewed to her demanding work.

I can think of women writers recording their rich experiences of life and nature. May Sarton in her journals has with stunning imagery described her

gardens, cut flowers lighting up a room, the rich smells of the earth.

Collette Ayscough writer of "La Belle Epoch"

who wrote with a rich sensuality of her childhood home in rustic burgundy particularly her mothers garden. Her memories of her mother are passionately described in a gem of a book called My Mothers House I shall include an extract to refresh and revive our spirits.

by Barbara Hayes

GARDENING AND RITUAL

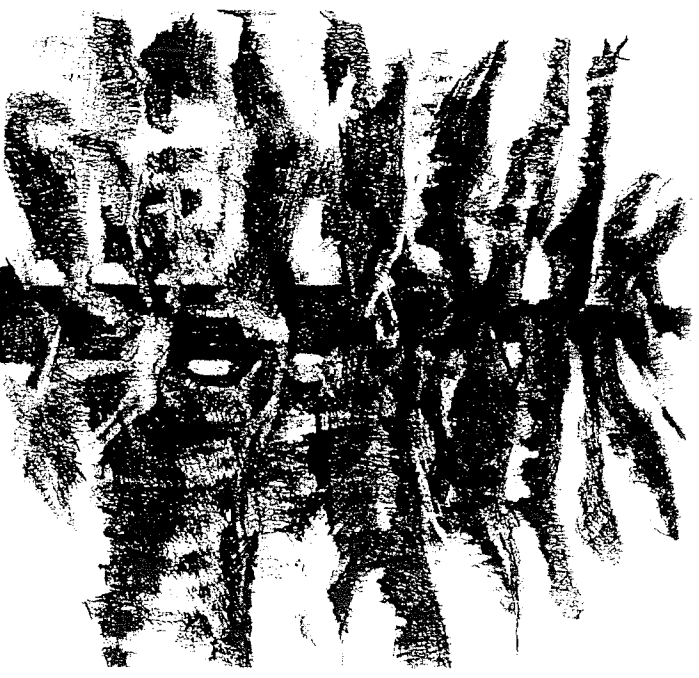
Gardening more than any other activity reflects for me my understanding of what is meant when we hear the spiritual saying that 'beings unite heaven and earth'. Through gardening one experiences the fundamental elements of life: the fire of the sky; the dirt and manure of the earth; the water, or lack of; the air in its coolness, stillness or wildness. The fruition of one's garden is dependent upon the mindfulness one applies towards these elements.

The sun is the pivot point for the garden, with the earth's cycle around it making the seasons. The first awakening of the sun starts for me when the days start getting longer. So that my first ceremony starts with the winter solstice as a time of revisioning and rebirth.

Since moving to Nova Scotia, I have experienced the seasons as they revolve around one's garden. Through this experience I have developed a reverence for the magic in this cycle. The garden becomes life's cornerstone - with food we are able to manifest in the world. Using ritual we can express our appreciation of the earth, sun, water and food. As a friend and buddhist nun once said, "Heartfelt ritual is beyond time and space and connects us with something much vaster."

My visions are first tickled by the pictures in the seed catalogues which arrive in January. Thinking back on past year successes and failures and what was never tried. Mailing the order form and cheque becomes a ritual, and when the seeds arrive there is a celebration. The first seeds I plant are always indoors - soaking up the heat from the large south windows. Once again, I'm trying a Tibetan poppy which I haven't yet succeeded in germinating but the delphiniums are just as thrilling. So my first seeds are flowers and food for the soul, followed by tomatoes, more flowers, broccoli, cukes and squashes.

Then comes the day when I can touch my hands in the earth. Preparing the garden for the first seeds is a day of celebration and dance and if anything gets planted it's always my feet. Acknowledging the four directions and seasons, the spinach, lettuce, peas and onions start their



cycle in the earth. As the 21st of May approaches the pace steps up. With the planting of seeds the whole family joins in and the journey begins.

As with any journey, the one in the garden is fraught with disappointments - sparse germination, black flies, no sun, no rain, weeds, bugs and sore backs. The natural obstacles coupled with my patterns of procrastination or lack of exertion give me much to work with. The cultivation of patience is always needed - both patience with myself and the process of growth. So now I must join vision and obstacle. Ritual enables us to join our visions with each of our own unique ways.

The harvest is always a time of careful attentiveness as the season can change quickly. It is with much gratitude and gratefulness that I fill my freezer and root cellar. The garden is harvested by Thanksgiving and we feast on its fruits. This is a feast to be shared with family and friends in heartfelt thankfulness that we once again can nourish our bodies for yet another year. And in those long winter months every time the root cellar gets shovelled out or the freezer opened I feel amazed and thankful for the abundance.

So if you feel inclined to acknowledge the union of heaven and earth, perhaps your garden will be your springboard. You appreciate the hoe, the heat, the soil, the seeds and even the black flies. Together they make something that's nourishing and lifts one's spirits. It is ritual in the sense of doing things fully and properly. So Pray, Sing, Dance and Honour.

Janey Humphries

MAY CAMERON

What are the pictures that come to mind when I think of May? Sitting in her kitchen with the wide pine-board walls painted startling blue, watching the tea bubble on the Kemac stove. Listening to her tales of times long past, of horses and wagons and milk cans - her fingers never missing a beat as the crocheted dolly grew. But mostly I see her standing in her garden - in later years leaning on a stick - wiping the sweat from her proud face.

May could grow anything, and did. Her Olympic-size vegetable garden was practically a tourist attraction! Her berry patch yielded the largest, the tastiest, the most of everything. Even her flowers seemed brighter than others' - peonies, bleeding heart, and Chinese lanterns were willingly shared with friends and neighbours.

I remember the annual buildup to the Fall Fair. Her mountain of vegetables was stored in the cow barn. Every cucumber, every squash was given the same serious consideration as a possible candidate for the competition. She even asked the opinion of the uninitiated (like me) as to which tomatoes made the best matching set. She lugged the heavy boxes of vegetables in to the exhibition, always with the help of her daughter Diane and jovial son-in-law Don, and when all was said and done she swept the prizes. Every year. For decades. The ribbons would be on display in her living room for a month or so, and then would disappear into some jam-packed repository of her gardening history.

May was, in fact, a compulsive record keeper and taller. Years after the fact she could recount, from the unassailable authority of her diary, that on June 26th of '71 she picked 93 quarts of berries. The diary settled many an argument (and started not a few!) with Diane. And a trip to town with her always gave new occasions for her penchant to

count everything in sight. "Well, Georgie's got 46 lambs out today," She'd say as we flew by. "There was only 42 on Monday."

May was not a fast worker, but for sheer stamina and perseverance I've never met her equal. I see her still, patiently watering each of her 143 tomato plants ("And THAT'S just the Tiny Tims") with an old battered dipper and a bucket. Then she would sit for hours on end in the raspberry patch, methodically picking it clean while the mosquitos ate her whole. Sunburnt and blood-streaked, she'd struggle to gain her feet as the light finally faded to black. "Ach," she'd say as she failed to heave herself up, "call the wreckin' truck then!"

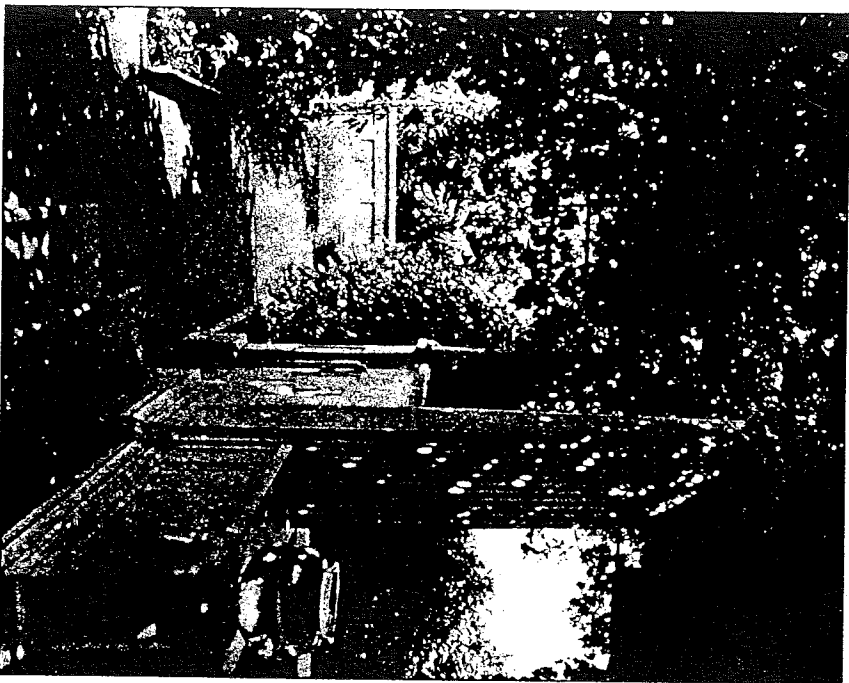
I sometimes wish I'd learned all she could have taught me about gardening, but May wasn't one to impose her ideas. Her restraint and patience with new gardeners was amazing. One day as I was struggling, in my obstinate way, with some half-baked idea to keep goats and garden separated, she came slowly down the road with a basket of cucumbers. "What're you doin' here now?" she asked politely, after the preliminary discussion of weather and neighbourhood doings. "May, I'm trying to fence this little patch of garden." She looked away for a moment, and I think I saw the placid and laconic. "Well..." She drewled, and drew a breath. "I suppose that's ONE way"

by Sue Adams



CONNECTION TO THE EARTH**

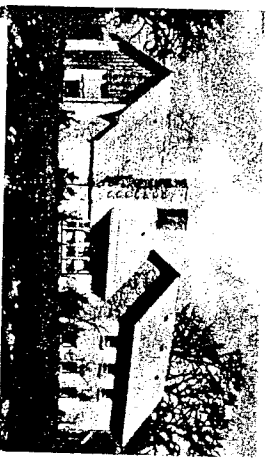
From: A PATTERN LANGUAGE



A house feels isolated from the nature around it, unless its floors are interleaved directly with the earth that is around the house.

We shall understand this best by contrasting those houses which are sharply separated from the earth with those in which there is a continuity between the two.

Look first at this house where there is no continuity.



*An average house—but look at it closely.
It lacks this pattern utterly.*

The inside and the outside are abruptly separate. There is no way of being partly inside, yet still connected to the outside; there is no way in which the inside of the house allows you, in your bare feet, to step out and feel the dew collecting or pick blossoms off a climbing plant because there is no surface near the house on which you can go out and yet still be the person that you are inside.

Compare it with the house in our main picture, where there *is* continuity. Here, there is an intermediate area, whose surface is connected to the inside of the house—and yet it is in plain outdoors. This surface is part of the earth—and yet a little smoother, a little more beaten, more swept—stepping out on it is not like stepping out into a field in your bare feet—it is as if the earth itself becomes in that small area a part of your indoor terrain.

When we compare the examples, there seems little doubt that some deep feeling is involved, and we are confident in presenting this pattern as a fundamental one. But we can only speculate about its origins or why it is important.

Perhaps the likeliest of all the explanations we are able to imagine is one which connects the earth boundness and rootedness of a man or a woman to their physical connection to the earth. It is very plain, and we all discover for ourselves, that our lives become satisfactory to the extent that we are rooted, “down to earth,” in touch with common sense about everyday things—not flying high in the sky of concepts and fantasies. The path toward this rootedness is personal and slow—but it may just be true that it is helped or hindered by the extent to which our physical world is itself rooted and connected to the earth.

In physical terms, the rootedness occurs in buildings when the building is surrounded, along at least a part of its perimeter, by terraces, paths, steps, gravel, and earthen surfaces, which bring the floors outside, into the land. These surfaces are made of intermediate materials more natural than the floors inside the house—and more man-made than earth and clay and grass. Brick terraces, tiles, and beaten earth tied into the foundations of the house all help make this connection; and, if possible, each house should have a reasonable amount of them, pushing out into the land around the house and opening up the outdoors to the inside. Therefore:

Connect the building to the earth around it by building a series of paths and terraces and steps around the edge. Place them deliberately to make the boundary ambiguous—so that it is impossible to say exactly where the building stops and earth begins.



A garden which grows true to its own laws is not a wilderness, yet not entirely artificial either.

Many gardens are formal and artificial. The flower beds are trimmed like table cloths or painted designs. The lawns are dipped like perfect plastic fur. The paths are clean, like new polished asphalt. The furniture is new and clean, fresh from the department store.

These gardens have none of the quality which brings a garden to life—the quality of a wilderness, tamed, still wild, but cultivated enough to be in harmony with the buildings which surround it and the people who move in it. This balance of wilderness and cultivation reached a high point in the oldest English gardens.

In these gardens things are arranged so that the natural processes which come into being will maintain the condition of the garden and not degrade it. For example, mosses and grasses will grow between paving stones. In a sensible and natural garden, the garden is arranged so that this process enhances the garden and does not threaten it. In an unnatural garden these kinds of small events have constantly to be “looked after”—the gardener must constantly try to control and eradicate the processes of seeding, weeds, the spread of roots, the growth of grass.

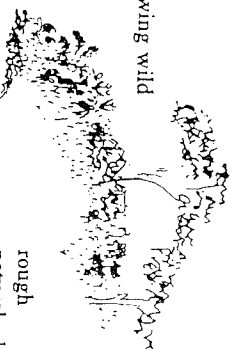
In the garden growing wild the plants are chosen, and the boundaries placed, in such a way that the growth of things regulates itself. It does not need to be regulated by control. But it does not grow fiercely and undermine the ways in which it is planted. Natural wild plants, for example, are planted among flowers and grass, so that there is no room for so-called weeds to fill the empty spaces and then need weeding. Natural stone edges form the boundaries of grass so that there is no need to chop the turf and clip the edge every few weeks. Rocks and stones are placed where there are changes of level. And there are small rock plants placed between the stones, so that once again there is no room for weeds to grow.

A garden growing wild is healthier, more capable of stable growth, than the more clipped and artificial garden. The garden can be left alone, it will not go to ruin in one or two seasons.

And for the people too, the garden growing wild creates a more profound experience. The gardener is in the position of a good doctor, watching nature take its course, occasionally taking action, pruning, pulling out some species, only to give the garden more room to grow and become itself. By contrast, the gardens that have to be tended obsessively, enslave a person to them; you cannot learn from them in quite the same way. Therefore:

Grow grasses, mosses, bushes, flowers, and trees in a way which comes close to the way that they occur in nature: intermingled, without barriers between them, without bare earth, without formal flower beds, and with all the boundaries and edges made in rough stone and brick and wood which become a part of the natural growth.

cultivated plants growing wild



rough
natural edges



The Earth is My Mother, I Will Take of Her.

The garden is our personal microcosm of cultivated land. For people who occupy land the garden is where we can tend and "keep house" in our small portion of the mother, the earth. The garden is a vessel for creative, productive and spiritual energies, it is safe, it is home.

The garden is both personal and political. As land stewards we have a huge responsibility for the future while we reap enormous benefits in the present. While the kitchen garden nourishes our bodies the ornamental does likewise to our souls and in the midst of all this is a complicated process of life, death and regeneration. Since we are in partnership with mother earth and our influence is so strong we must undertake in every way possible to care for her integrity. We must walk softly.

As I understand it the soil is alive. It is one of the organs of the mother. It harbours life - our life - and it needs to be nourished in certain ways to maintain health. When we garden or farm we interfere with nature, we disrupt a balance that has been perfected over billions of years, so we have to be very careful in the methods we use for cultivation. Organic methods will ensure continued cultivation. To grow vegetables, fruits, grains, flowers, herbs, trees and shrubs using organic methods is to state very clearly that you care about the earth.

When chemical biocides and fertilizers are applied to the soil or the plants and animals that live in the soil a slow death takes place. This death takes many forms with the end result being a diseased organ. Denatured soils produce denatured foods and denatured foods produce sick people. We must remember that the soil system is only one of many organs within the body of the earth. All these organs are in jeopardy through human interference. And all of these diseased organs affect our health and well being.

Most of us probably garden using organic techniques. Unfortunately the produce we consume from these gardens is a small portion of what we actually eat throughout the year. If we don't buy organic when we purchase the remaining major part of our diets - through the food chains or even natural food stores - we are still contributing to the demise of the earth and our environment. We further contribute to the destruction of our planet if we don't buy locally produced foods and eat according to seasonal availability.

Our consumer dollars are a political tool. We need to be careful and wise in our choices. Food is the most essential need we have and our survival depends on purchasing and management practices which favor sustainability. Buying locally grown foods ensures food security and local employment. Buying lettuce from Florida, broccoli from California, pears from Chile or carrots from Ontario removes that money from the local economy and supports a myriad of multinational corporations including oil companies, chemical companies and the World Bank. Buying cheap food supports the exploitation of migrant, landless farm laborers. Buying non-organic foods supports the exploitation of mother earth.

Our personal choices at the supermarket are very political whether we like it or not. By paying a fair price for food we ensure that those who grow it can be responsible and the earth remain viable. By buying organic we send a healthy message to growers and policy makers. By buying locally and eating seasonally we can stop the erosion of self reliant communities and we support a diversified, sane, mutually beneficial economy at home.

by Sir Miles

LIFE AT THE WOMEN'S CENTRE

Life at the Women's Centre carries on at a hectic pace. Along with our ongoing work on sexual harassment, we recently made presentations to the Town and County Councils informing them about our work and requesting \$1,500 donations to the Centre.

Along with other women's groups from the Highlands-Canso riding, we met with our M.P. Francis LeBlanc. We expressed our concerns about Bill C-49, the new rape legislation. We also discussed dropping the universality of family allowances, pay equity, the CFC leak in Canso, unemployment and poverty in our area, housing, the peace tax fund and the need to increase Secretary of State funding for women's organizations.

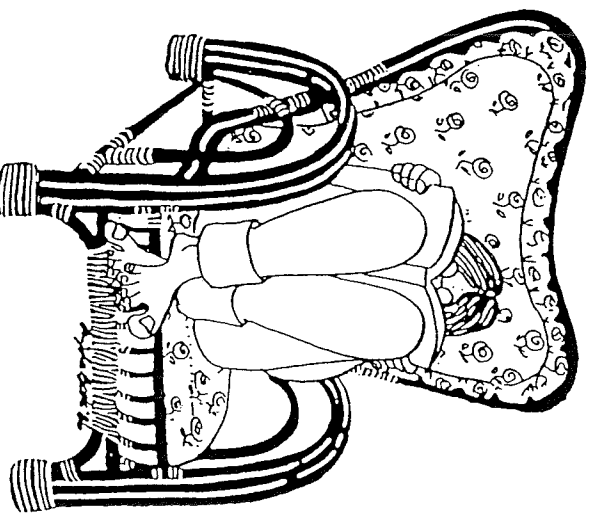
We met with the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women in a round table format with the Naomi Society, Women for Social Awareness (St. F.X. student women's group), GLOW, Antigoneish Single Mother's Association, and the Adolescent Health Project. The panel's goal is to develop a national action plan to eliminate violence against women. We focused our comments on economic violence against women. We talked about the need to broaden the usual definition of violence to include poverty which is a form of social violence directed primarily against women and children. In developing the idea that violence against women is a systemic problem in Canadian society we made the case that a culture which objectifies women and closes doors of opportunity for our education and economic independence not only facilitates and reinforces the abuse of women, but is in itself, abusive to women.

We left the panel with mixed feelings of hope, frustration, futility and sadness. Hope that the somehow our voices would be heard and that our children would be spared the abuse and violence we know too well. Frustration that after twenty years we are still saying the same thing, still struggling with the same issues. Futility, knowing that the government is spending \$10,000,000 to fund a panel to regather information they already have been ignoring for years when that money could have been used to fund women's work against violence. Sadness that women and children continue to live under seige in a society that permits sexual abuse, sexual assault, woman battering, child abuse, pornography, and poverty to destroy their lives and spirits.

On another note, our International Women's Day Cabaret was a wonderful celebration of women's marvellous strengths, talents and joie de vivre. The feeling of connection among the women in Somers Hall that night was at once comforting and inspiring. It made me feel that everything is possible when we work together in a way that honours all our sisters.

It's wonderful to see the sun returning. It's warmth quickens our blood and lightens our step, revitalizing our energies for the tasks ahead.

Lucille Harper



WORLD WOMEN'S CONGRESS FOR A HEALTHY PLANET

Women from countries around the world met in Miami, Florida last November to voice women's concern for "the health and well being of our living planet and all its life forms".

The 1,500 women came together in recognition of our exclusion from participation in the United Nations' 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where (male) world leaders will debate global environmental laws. As Michele Landsberg, a Congress participant notes, "Women founded the environmental movement, are its backbone everywhere in the world, suffer most directly from environmental devastation - and yet have virtually no decision-making power in the councils and corporations that rule the globe."

The Congress received very little media coverage. A copy of "Women's Action Agenda 21" is available at the Women's Centre. It is a compilation of the work, ideas, and values of the women who attended the four day conference. It is a wonderful document and worth reading.

The following is a copy of the preamble to the North American Regional Caucus Report presented by Dianne Dillon-Ridgley to the Plenary.

"We North American women are living in nations in which over-consumption by some co-exists with poverty and social deprivation for many, and ecological degradation for all; and in which women and children everywhere are threatened physically as well as economically.

We welcome the North-South dialogue and dialogue among social movements as a means of deepening our understanding and developing our alternative visions and values; movements such as feminist, green, environment, development, anti-racist, anti-militarist, anti-colonialist and others.

We join with our sisters from the south in rejecting the

world market economic and social order which is promoted, protected and sustained by both military might and military production.

We support reforms that limit the damage the existing system is doing to people, all living things, and the earth. These reforms must challenge the dualistic and destructive logic of this system.

We particularly support changes which contribute to:

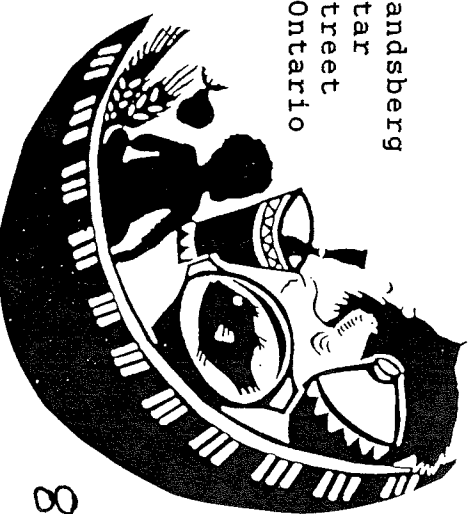
1. an equalizing redefinition and redistribution of power and resources within and between nations and regions;
2. a shift in the exploitative and hierarchical relations among and between people and the planet;
3. a basic redefinition of such concepts as power, human rights, wealth, work and progress, in terms which recognize and reaffirm the value of women, nature and indigenous peoples;
4. the demilitarization of our economies and our cultures in order to free our creative genius for a more humane and renewable planet.

We see all these as necessary parts of a process in which the knowledge, values, wisdom and vision of women around the world can shape the priorities and ways of being in the world."

For further comment on North American caucus statements contact:

Elizabeth May (IPAC)
Cultural Survival
Suite 420, 1 Nicholas St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 7B7

Michele Landsberg
Toronto Star
1 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5E 1E6



SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE:
DAY OF ISSUES

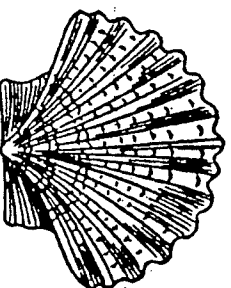
Have you been wondering how to have a voice in the AWA decision making process? Well here's your opportunity!

We will also set aside time for members to raise other issues.

Please come to the Alumni Lounge, Sunday, April 5, noon-4pm. Finger foods will be appreciated.

The AWA Social Action Committee is inviting all AWA members to attend an afternoon gathering. We will discuss and develop policy statements on a number of issues including:

- IWD and Take Back the Night
- Inclusion of men
- Condom machines in school washrooms
- Pornography in the Community



Antigonish Voice of Women for Peace

The Antigonish Voice of Women for Peace has had its first meeting!

In that meeting we discussed our options for structuring the group, topics that we'd like to focus on, dates that are convenient for people to meet, and the history and organization of the national organization, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace.

A number of themes emerged. We would like to have monthly meetings.

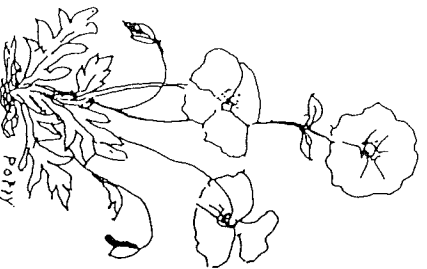
The next meeting is planned for March 26, Thursday, 7 pm, International Lounge, Coady International Institute. We would like to spend the first while discussing topics that a couple of members have researched. In the March meeting we will focus on the Peace Tax Fund (or, not paying for war) and War Toys (or, how to foster cooperation, not competition with children's toys). Other topics that interested members included:

International peace (East Timor, Yugoslavia, China, Tibet, Kashmir, Central America), Free Trade and its impact on peace and social justice, Peace Education, Arms trade, Aftermath of the Gulf War on Iraqi civilians, and the list could go on.....

We talked about encouraging participation for women who find it difficult to attend evening meetings. There are a number of women interested in having an afternoon 'moms and tots' meeting to discuss peace issues within the VOW framework. First meeting will probably be in April (Contact women are Gail Rebbeck 863-1440, and Heather Mayhew 863-5300). We also felt the need to have a visit from long time VOW members and we are working out the details of a visit from one of the Halifax women. Look forward to a wonderful spring pot luck to learn more about VOW!

There was a need expressed for a space for library resources. We have lots of info accumulating already and want to find a space that is accessible so that we can all drop in to look up info, borrow books, videos etc. Sue Adams and Tara Callaghan are working on that.

The support and enthusiasm for a local VOW group has been very exciting. Come and see what we're about, learn about the issues, work for peace! Bring friends!!!



"Help us to be the always's
hopeful gardeners of the
spirit who know that without
darkness nothing comes to birth,
as without light nothing flowers."

