

# Between Friends



FRIENDS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES NEWSLETTER . [www.uwindsor.ca/wsvisor](http://www.uwindsor.ca/wsvisor)

Volume 6, Number 2 March 2010

## ***The Personal, the Political, and the Academic***

*by Anne Forrest, Women's Studies*

Many readers of this newsletter will know that Women's Studies programs are being publicly criticized for being too political. This is the view of journalist Barbara Kay aired on the CBC's *The Current* and in print, and affirmed by the editorial board of the *National Post*.

Kay dismisses Women's Studies as 'nothing more than political activism with a blackboard, not objective scholarship' (*National Post*, February 2), and claims students are wise to this and are turning away. Under the mournful heading, 'Women's Studies is still with us,' the *National Post* (January 26) is clearly irked that academic activists have helped broaden the rights of women in divorce law, campaigned for universal, high quality day-care, and raised awareness about the need for diversity training of judges and others in positions of power.

This is censure we can live with. To be faulted for our community activism demonstrates that Women's Studies is part of the solution to the long-standing concern that universities are elitist, ivory towers, living on the edge of cities that faculty know nothing about. Today's university administrations are aware of this disconnect and have in their missions a more prominent role in community life.

Community connectedness is what we strive for in Women's Studies at the University of Windsor. We are not neutral; we are purposeful and we are activist: we choose to wear our social justice politics in public, on campus and in the Windsor-Essex community. Indeed, that's what the Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies program is all about.

This connectedness may explain why our courses are growing in popularity. We promise to help students 'find their voice.' We want them to develop a sense of purpose and their own point of view. This is an active educational process informed by rigorous engagement with scholarship. In this way, we connect the personal, the political, and the academic.

This newsletter highlights the various ways Friends of Women's Studies, students, and faculty use their voices to demonstrate why and how feminist education is important. *Our Students Say* includes some of the voices from our *Speaking Up, Speaking Out* project for the redesigned Women's Studies website that we hope to launch in the spring.

## ***Our Students Say***

*"Returning to school after a workplace injury was both exciting and intimidating, to put it mildly. I was leaning towards Social Work as a profession when I came across the combined program of Social Work and Women's Studies. I was really excited because women's issues have always been of great interest to me. I really feel as though I have found the perfect program."*

— Kerry Thorne, Social Work and Women's Studies

## ***A Nettie-gram***

*by Joan Tinkess, 250 member*

I spent Sunday, February 28 at Nettie Wiebe's farm, and I want you at Women's Studies to know that she is still reliving her days in Windsor. She described them as "a high point in her life;" said she had never been treated like that before. She brought out the pictures and went through them again. Nettie had every last scrap of paper — invitations, programs, cards, newspaper — she had collected. It was a joy to see how much she appreciated her time with us.

## ***Remember this photo?***

Your 250 group needs you NOW!



CAPTION WINNER: Carol Reader  
VOLUNTEER LOCATOR: Pat Noonan  
HIDDEN VOLUNTEER: Melinda Munro

***Nettie Wiebe and the Community Dinner 2009***  
*by Carol Reader, Friend of Women's Studies*

This year our Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies focused on food. Dr. Nettie Wiebe challenged us to think about what we eat, where it comes from, who produces it, how it gets to our plates, and the multiple women around the world who make it all happen. She offered insight and hope for change.

A mother, organic farmer, and social and political activist, Nettie does not list feminism as a self identity. Rather, she considers feminism to be a given, embodied in the culture and experiences of rural women who have a long and proud history of working for social change. Her roots are Mennonite: family, community, caring, spirituality, and pacifism are the foundation that first roused her to activism and it is these roots that shape her vision.

Nettie concentrates on food because we all eat it, enjoy it, need it to survive, and have a daily relationship with it. Yet, food production is central to our current environmental problems.

Nettie challenged our assumptions about the sustainability of the current food production system. She described the damage to land and water caused by our intensive, mass production methods. Right now the Global South is most affected, she said, but we cannot long be exempt.

We were urged to think about food diversity – false diversity. When we go to the grocery store and see apples, pineapples, avocados, and figs year round we see variety and choice. But these are the products of monoculture: we get just one sort of pineapple, one variety of banana, two or three choices of apple. This is choice without diversity. It is an interesting and unsettling juxtaposition.

Nettie believes we will make different choices if we understand how the food system works. She challenged us to find out where our favourite food comes from: what is in it, where it is grown, who farms and harvests it, how far it travels, how often it is processed, and who profits from it. Even our simplest foods are “international” and “multi-processed.”

Nettie unashamedly places feminist action firmly in the home. She champions the women-centred culture of food. Not for her the second-wave western feminist resentment against the kitchen, instead the reclamation of a feminist space. She sees women's ability to set the table for family and friends, to build community around events and celebrations which all require food, as steps to activism.

For Nettie food is the catalyst. This is where the personal becomes political, where ‘woman’ finds her collective and ‘women’ become activists for change. Regardless of ethnicity food is something all women, worldwide, have in common.

***Thank You from the Well-Come Centre***

The Board of Directors, staff, and clients thank all who donated during the Distinguished Visitor in Women's Studies week and at Take Back the Night .

These two events raised \$650 which will help the Centre support local women who are experiencing homelessness.

***Taking Action***

*by Rita Haase, Women's Studies*

I am a passionate environmentalist and a biologist/ecologist by training. These two parts of myself come together in *Women, Power, and Environments*, a course I teach for Women's Studies. It is through teaching this course that I rediscovered ecofeminism and encountered Nettie Wiebe.

Both convinced me that it is not sufficient to discuss environmental devastation and social oppression in the classroom. Both inspired me to take action. I realized that the best way to stop the environmentally unsustainable practices of modern agriculture is to work with others to change our food system.

The Campus Community Garden Project (CCGP) offers an alternative to corporate food production and distribution. It promotes urban, sustainable permaculture (permanent agriculture). Another goal is to foster collaborative efforts towards food security in our city.

Our two meetings brought together students, faculty, staff, and community members who aim to become skilled at growing food organically and sustainably for themselves and others in need. We plan to learn about soil and air pollution in our neighborhood, enhance the ties among communities in Windsor, and become self-sustaining.

We face three main challenges: poor quality soil, neighbour-friendly composting, and sustaining our commitment through the summer. Possible solutions to the soil problem are to exchange the topsoil completely if it is too polluted for food production; sow selected seeds for green manure and phyto-remediation in the major area of the plot while growing food for consumption in smaller enclosed spaces with uncontaminated, nutrient-rich soil; or amend the soil with compost, animal and green manure, and organic fertilizers. To compost responsibly we could use green waste only and use composters that do not attract vermin and raccoons.

Sustaining our commitment may prove to be the biggest challenge. Why don't you join us?

Leave a message at 519.253.3000 ext. 3722.

Help transform the University campus and its vicinity into a greener and more sustainable community place.

## **Take Back the Night**

by Charlene Senn

Talk given November 6, 2009

We gather here tonight as women, after dark, without male escorts, to start by saying loudly and clearly, “The night belongs to us.” We demand change so that we can live in a society where our movements need not be constrained by fear of male violence against us.

We have a right to study on campus at night and not be afraid to walk back to our homes afterward. We have a right to consider taking the night shift that is offered to us without having to consider whether this is “safe” or not.

We have a right to stand or walk anywhere on this planet at any time of the day or night and not be subjected to harassment or abuse by men. We have the right to show affection to our female friends or lovers in public and not be targeted for abuse. And in all of these situations, and all the others I haven’t named but that you can think of, we have a right not to be blamed for the acts of violence and abuse committed against us.

And these are only just a few of our rights and wishes for a world that respects women’s rights. In 1979 Andrea Dworkin told us:

*“The truth is that men do experience freedom of movement and freedom in action and that women do not. We must recognize that freedom of movement is a precondition for freedom of anything else. ... So when we women struggle for freedom, we must begin at the beginning and fight for freedom of movement, which we have not had and do not now have.”*

So, tonight we walk together and say, we reclaim this one night and are free to move where we choose because we are together, but we will keep fighting to take all nights back for all women whether alone or together.

But this is not all we say. We know deep in our hearts and minds that it is not only at night that we are at risk. Bertell said “statistics are people with their tears wiped dry.”

There is truth in this. We see and hear those tears in the 1 in 4 women in Canada who will be raped by a man, by the 1 in 5 girls who will be severely sexually abused by a man before they turn 16, by the 1 in 4 women who will be physically abused by a male partner, by the almost 1500 women within a ten year period murdered by their current and former male partners, and the women who are sexually harassed, stalked, sexually coerced and assaulted, subjected to obscene phone calls and emails, and so on.

And these are not for the most part crimes against us by strangers but rather crimes committed by men we know, who are our friends, our neighbours, our bosses, our brothers, uncles and fathers, and our sexual and romantic partners. These are crimes that happen not on

## **Our Students Say**

*“I had always been interested in and questioned things like double standards and the way women are treated globally. I had always had an interest in issues such as racism and poverty, so I chose to do a double major in Social Work and Women’s Studies, and I’m incredibly glad I did.”*

— Sapphire Wood, Social Work and Women’s Studies

the street but rather in homes and workplaces, and they happen in broad daylight and in the early morning as well as the night.

So we march tonight to also Take Back The Day, to reclaim a safe place for women at all places and at all times. When we march tonight, holding our picket signs, chanting and yelling our frustration and our pain and our rage, we are acknowledging that we are all as women at risk of male violence.

But if you are standing here tonight as a non-aboriginal woman, as someone who completed grade 12, as someone who has not been forced or tricked or coerced or pushed by economic necessity into prostitution, as someone who is able-bodied and who does not have an intellectual impairment, as someone who knows that you will have a roof over your head and food on the table for the next few months, you, like I, must face the fact that while many of us are survivors of male violence, violence against women is acted out most ferociously and often against women who do not have our privileges.

Aboriginal women in Canada are seven times more likely to be murdered by a man than other women in Canada. Young women, poor women, prostituted women, women with disabilities, and women in prison suffer abuse at the hands of men at higher rates than other women.

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So when we walk tonight, we walk for ourselves and our female relatives and friends, but perhaps more importantly we walk for the daughters, mothers, grandmothers, and sisters, who are not related to us. Every woman counts in this struggle. We will not stop marching, protesting, speaking up, acting out, working and struggling, until every woman is safe from male violence.

When we are talking about male violence against women it is important to keep the focus on who is responsible, and that is the male perpetrator. Women cannot control the behaviour of men. But as women there is more that we can do, that we need to do, than protest on a single night or in just one way to work toward a world free of male violence against women.

As feminists, as women of conscience, we must not make it easy for male predators to pick off the most vulnerable women among us. We must take a stand privately, personally, and publicly, that 'those women over there' exploited in the sex industry, or homeless, or abused by their partners, or addicted to drugs and alcohol, or in prison, could but for some cruel twist of fate or birth or history, be us. And we must mean it.

When we empathize with other women, when we consider them to be our sisters, when we do not allow clothing, or sexual behaviour, or the chemicals we ingest or not, or who we love, or where and how we live — when we do not allow these things to separate us emotionally each from each other, and when we say this aloud and repeatedly when other women are ridiculed, or hated, or dismissed as unimportant or stupid or described as getting what they deserve — we are joining hands and arms in a DAILY Take Back the Night march against male violence against women.

We ARE more powerful together and we are saying to these men, NO, we will not let you do this. We WILL get in your way daily. You will not harm another woman on our watch and go uncondemned. She is me and I am her and when you harm her you harm me.

I end tonight with the words of the late brave Andrea Dworkin, who at a 1979 Take Back the Night March said:

*"It is time to cry "Enough," but it is not enough to cry "Enough." We must use our bodies to say "Enough" — we must form a barricade with our bodies, but the barricade must move as the ocean moves and be formidable as the ocean is formidable.*

*We must use our collective strength and passion and endurance to take back this night and every night so that life will be worth living and so that human dignity will be a reality. What we do here tonight is that simple, that difficult, and that important."*

Thirty years later, it is long past the time when women first cried "Enough." We join in this tide of women across the years and across continents to move and march together until there is change.



Radical Cheerleaders at Take Back The Night

### ***For Every Woman***

*by Rania Ibrahim, Psychology*

In Dr. Charlene Senn's course, *Victims Survivors, and Warriors*, we learned how so many women have been victimized by violence with no blame placed on the male perpetrator. I know when people are reading this they will automatically think this is a male-hating, biased, feminist perspective; I too believed it was until I got a rude awakening.

I learned that 95 percent of all violence against women is by males. This is not exaggerated. I learned that much of the language used to describe these cruel actions shifts the blame to the victim. You do not have to be female or a feminist to know this is wrong.

I wanted to do something that would remind us of the tragic implications of violence that calls into question our humanity. As a student I have participated in many Remembrance Day ceremonies over the years honouring the sacrifices of men. This year I wanted to honour and remember women victims of war. During times of war, violence against women and girls is used as weapon; I cannot even attempt to describe their nightmares.

With the help of Carol Reader and Women's Studies we created buttons that had a poppy with the words, *For Every Woman Raped In Every War*, surrounding it.

This project was an opportunity to bring the realities and injustice experienced by women to people outside Women's Studies classrooms. Everyone needs to understand the seriousness of these crimes.

While attempting to raise consciousness, I received support from many but pretty disheartening comments from others. These comments made me very sad and so angry at the ignorance of some people. At what point did violence against women and girls become so normalized that we forgot to see their faces?

Here is a pretty good reality check: in Windsor, our city, 1 in 4 young women will face abuse before the age of 30. These women are your sisters and friends.

See their faces and feel their pain.



***Hijab: A Canadian Woman's Right  
A Discussion With Young Hijabis, January 7, 2010***

***How I Came to Women's Studies***

*by Arij Elmi*

My journey began in high school when I took a course on world issues. I was excited by this class because it gave me the opportunity to explore issues I had never even heard of from honour killings, to female infanticide, to genital mutilation, and rape as a war crime. These topics disturbed, infuriated and impassioned me.

I remember excitedly questioning my teacher if there was a program in university that would allow me to further study these topics. I wanted to understand the larger forces that allowed these things to happen. But, my teacher did not know and I made an eleventh hour decision on what program to study.

One of my options was a combined major of Social Work and Women's Studies. Wow, I thought, two majors for the price of one. But at what cost to me, I wondered.

Somehow, I knew Women's Studies would not fit with my religion, period. I believed the outward signs of my Islamic belief such as wearing a hijab and the way I choose to dress would make me a walking target.

How could I study female oppression if the first lesson on the docket would be how wrong my oppressive beliefs were? And how would I answer to my fellow Muslims? They would be sure to point out the hypocrisy in the situation with me claiming to devoutly believe in one thing and then studying something that contradicted it. I decided to avoid Women's Studies.

What I didn't know was that by entering the School of Social Work, I entered a program that is very interrelated with Women's Studies, both in the courses offered and the values promoted. The program I had tried to avoid was now almost inescapable.

I signed up for a course and hoped for the best. Looking at my classmates I knew it was only a matter of time until my hijab or attire was addressed or someone would bring to my attention that this was a place I did not belong.

But that never happened. Instead, I was made to feel welcome, me and my beliefs. I was able to balance my religious beliefs with the coursework, never once feeling that I compromised on either front.

Women's Studies classes have been a place of self-discovery for me, a place where I am allowed to define myself and my reality. I explored fascinating issues through a woman-focused lens including globalization, religion, race, sexuality and health. Today, I am proud to say that I am a Women's Studies minor and a teaching assistant for the program.

For anyone who is on the brink of taking a Women's Studies course my advice is to give it a chance. If your experience is anything like mine, you will be surprised by how many of your expectations will be humbled by these wonderful and integral classes.



***My Short Career in Women's Studies***

*by Sheza Khurshid*

It may seem odd that I am participating in this event. I have never actually taken a Women's Studies course. In fact, I was determined to never take one if I could avoid it!

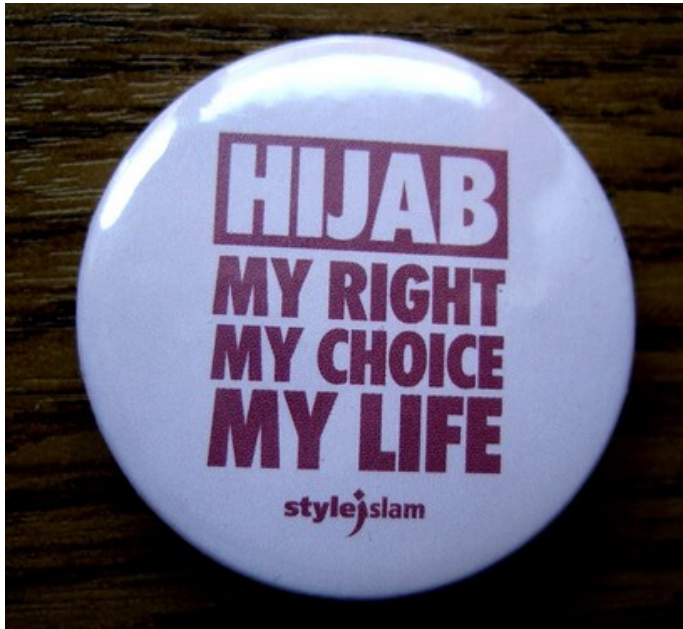
My interaction with Women's Studies began just a few months ago, when I was assigned as a graduate assistant for a second year Women's Studies course. My first reaction was, "Oh no! After all these years of avoiding them, I have no choice but to deal with these 'crazy feminists,'" as I saw them. On top of that, since I'd never taken a Women's Studies course before, how would I be able to help students and mark their papers?!

This was all going on in my mind as I attended the first class to listen in. I was shocked. Everything the professor discussed was stuff I agreed with! Not only did I agree, it was all information I had always thought about, but never knew how to articulate properly. Now she was explaining it all in words that put my thoughts in order.

After that first day, attending that class became one of the highlights of my week. I enjoyed doing the readings and marking papers so much that it almost didn't feel like work!

I can truthfully say that my interaction with Women's Studies has impacted my life. It has changed the way I view myself and society around me in a subtle, yet fundamental way. When I was deciding on a topic for my master's major paper, I had originally chosen a topic related to women, but after talking to some professors in my department, I was really discouraged from doing it. However, after talking to Dr. Anne Forrest my eyes were opened to a different way of approaching the same topic, and in a way that suited my research preferences.

I have to say that I am very happy that I was assigned as a G.A. for Women's Studies. If I hadn't been, I might have gone my whole life being afraid of something I knew nothing about. I think many people share the views I once held, and that is why I am here, sharing my story with you today. I hope each of you gives Women's Studies a second, or even a first glance. I guarantee that there is something each one of you can take from Women's Studies if you give it a chance.



### ***Here's what the young women had to say—***

- For me, wearing hijab is religious; for others it is cultural
- How the hijab is worn tells us whether it is a religious or cultural obligation
- For me, hijab is a choice not an imposition
- Being Canadian means making my own choices, including wearing hijab
- Women wearing hijab achieve respect; we are valued for who we are, not what we look like
- Some women choose hijab because they are living in Canada and want to be recognized as Muslim
- Some parents discourage wearing hijab because they worry we will be harassed on the street
- I am proud of my decision
- Wearing hijab is part of who I am

### ***Our Students Say***

*“Women’s Studies classes motivated me to enact my interest and passion for women’s issues as opposed to merely writing about them in other courses. In my third year, I joined the CJAM Women’s Radio Collective, a group at the university radio station that hosts a women’s issues spoken word show and a music show featuring female content. This year, I became a volunteer at the Womyn’s Centre in order to help maintain this welcoming space on campus and help plan the December 6th memorial.”*

— Kate Hargreaves, English and Creative Writing, Women’s Studies minor

## ***The Women’s Studies Student Association presents our new annual feminist publication: Are We There Yet?***

*by Sonia Nizzer, President*

As Women’s Studies students we are often encouraged to see our personal lives as having political meaning. You may have heard that the personal is political. This common theme in feminism has paved the way for a new initiative we are introducing this year.

Far too often are the voices of women on campus unheard. We are opening the doors for all women on campus to say it loud and say it proud! Who are the women of today? We want to know.

The Women’s Studies Student Association presents our new annual feminist publication entitled: *Are We There Yet?* We ask, Where do we want to be? How are we going to get there?

This anthology will attempt to address these questions through stories, essays, art and poems written by women on campus.

You’ll be surprised to know that this idea was concocted on a hot summer day hanging around a University of Windsor parking lot. A few up-to-no-good Women’s Studies students planned and brainstormed a way to keep the zest of Women’s Studies alive on campus.

This program is important to us, and we thank them for the opportunities and experiences that we have been given. This publication is a direct product of the education we have gained thus far.

*Are We There Yet?* is as much for the faculty and staff of Women’s Studies as it is the students. We hope that this publication will spark interest within the faculty and students and that this initiative will progress as the program grows.



Carly Nicodemo and Lillian Gallant  
at the *Are We there Yet?* bake sale and fund-raiser

*A special thank you to Rachel Kovach for helping design, edit, and format this issue of the newsletter.*