

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Links to Breast Cancer Exposed

BY JEANNE JU

The Nova Scotia premiere of the documentary film *Exposure: Environmental Links to Breast Cancer* topped off events held for Breast Cancer Awareness Month at Mount Saint Vincent University last Friday, October 24.

Produced by Martha Butterfield and Francine Zuckerman, *Exposure* describes how toxins and radiation in the environment affect women's health, with a focus on breast cancer. Possible approaches to prevention and reduction included phasing out toxins linked to breast cancer.

Eva Johnson — environmental health program coordinator of the Mohawk Nation, Kahnawake, Quebec — was invited to introduce the film. Johnson, who was featured in the film, addressed the occasion by reciting a Thanksgiving Ritual through which she gave greetings and thanks to Mother Earth, and all forms of nature.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," Johnson said. "We are living longer lives, but are we getting quality of life, or just longer life with illness after

illness?"

The incidence of cancer, among other diseases, has become prominent in her native community — in the 1990s, six people were diagnosed with diabetes and ten were diagnosed with cancer. The four toxic landfills and St. Lawrence Seaway, both near Mohawk Nation land, are possible factors influencing the growing incidences of illness.

"One out of ten women develop breast cancer by genetic-related causes, while nine out of ten are perfectly healthy women who have developed breast cancer from something else," said Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, co-producer and principal research consultant. "[Females] inherit relatively the same environment from their

parents. Genes and environment combined are the most common cause of breast cancer — inheriting the gene which is more susceptible to the environment is a factor as well.

"In the past, our efforts used to be telling people to get rid of the hazards.

We tell people not to smoke, but now, it's to stop using deodorant and refrigerators," Rosenberg said, referring to the complexity of understanding the causes of cancer.

Radiation, pesticides, organochlorides (which get stored in fat cells), zenoestrogens, temoxifen and plastics are all potential environmental links to breast cancer which were touched upon by the women

featured in the film. Proper diagnosis, risk factors and treatments were among other topics discussed.

"Research has been focused on finding a cure for breast cancer, while prevention of cancer has largely been ignored," Rosenberg said.

The film featured 12 women who have closely dealt with breast cancer — as researchers, activists, sufferers, and survivors. Olivia Newton-John, featured as a host, brought forth insightful narrative as a breast cancer survivor.

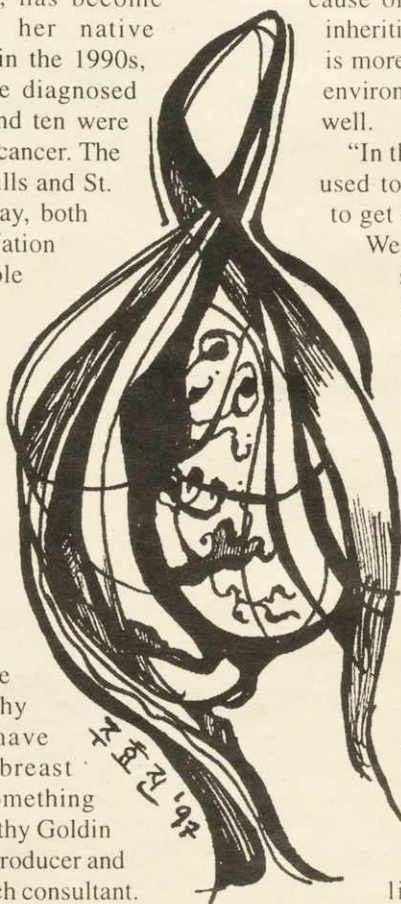
Rachel Carson, author of *Silent Spring* (1962) was documented in her plea for pesticide bylaws. Disturbed by the common use of synthetic chemical pesticides after World War II, Carson warned the public about the long term effects of misusing pesticides. Testifying before Congress in 1963, Carson called for new policies to protect human health and the environment — Carson died in 1964 after a long battle against cancer.

"Breast cancer is a serious women's issue and also an issue for the entire population," said Bella Abzug, former congresswoman and president of the Women Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), New York. *Exposure* shows that breast cancer is just as much an environmental, social and political issue as it is a women's issue.

A reception and a performance by the Halifax Raging Grannies — a group of women who sing about social and political issues — followed the guest speaker and film presentation.

The event was jointly sponsored by Mount Saint Vincent University, Breast Cancer Action Nova Scotia, Canadian Cancer Society of Nova Scotia, and the Grail Women Task Force U.S.A.

The 48 minute colour documentary film is available on video with an accompanying education resource action guide from the Women's Network on Health and Environment.



There's a Lump!

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY THE HALIFAX RAGING GRANNIES

(to the tune of "There's a Hole in My Bucket")

There's a lump in my breast — dear doctor, dear doctor.
 There's a lump in my breast — dear doctor, a lump.
 It's probably nothing — dear patient, dear patient.
 It's probably nothing — dear patient, don't fret.
 What about my premarin? — dear doctor, dear doctor.
 My hormone replacement? — dear doctor, my patch.
 Oh don't be alarmed — dear patient, dear patient.
 Oh don't be alarmed — but take off your patch.
 Could it be from the bomb tests? — the chlorides, the pesticides?
 Could it be zeno-estrogens — they're all everywhere.
 Who produces carcinogens? — dear doctor, dear scientist.
 Who produces carcinogens? — dear doctor, please tell.
 Is it the military? Pulp and paper mills? — pharmaceutical corporations?
 Spewing chemicals that accumulate in our bones and our fat.
 But doctor, oh doctor, don't think you're immune;
 Do you have two balls? — or are you down to one?
 How long is your penis? — is your prostate okay?
 Count your own sperm — dear doctor, toxins affect us all.
 Let's stop it together — we'll clean up our environment.
 Clean water, clean air — and a government that cares!

In Canada:

- * approximately 18,400 Canadian women will develop breast cancer in 1997; 5,100 of those women will die.
- * This means that one in nine Canadian women can expect to develop breast cancer during her lifetime and one in twenty-five will die from this disease.
- * Breast cancer is currently the leading cause of death among women between the ages of 35 and 55.
- * Early breast cancer detection has a survival rate of 87%.

From: Fifty facts from the World Health Report 1997

- * About half of the more than 6 million deaths from cancer in 1996 were due to cancers of the lung, stomach, colon-rectum, liver and breast.
- * Breast cancer killed 376 000 women in 1996.
- * In 1996 there were an estimated 17.9 million persons with cancer surviving up to 5 years after diagnosis. Of these, 10.5 million were women, 5.3 million of whom had cancer either of the breast, cervix or colon-rectum.

Jann Arden
 Sun. Nov. 30, Halifax Metro Centre, 7:30pm
 Tickets available at Metro Centre Box Office, Sobeys-HIX, Shopping Ctr., Clayton Park, Windsor St., Bedford, Penhorn Mall, Forest Hills, Lower Sackville, Tantallon and Elmsdale
 or Charge By Phone at 902-451-1221
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