

SPECTRUM

The Wimmin's Room

A night on the Rape Crisis Line

WOMAN ALONE! *Fighting back against the violence and believing that all women are survivors.*

by Rita Boudreau

I was working the all-night shift on the Saint John Rape Crisis Line one weekend in August. To help fill the hours, I rummaged through the stacks of pamphlets on the book shelves to see if there were any I hadn't read yet.

There was one. It was a pamphlet called *Woman Alone*. It is a glossy, two-coloured pamphlet put out by the Solicitor General of Canada. It offers safety tips on what to do as a woman alone.

It seemed straightforward enough and the information certainly was not telling me anything I didn't already know. But something about this deceptively simple pamphlet disturbed me in a way the other pamphlets on rape, sexual assault, wife battering, incest and other topics on violence against women, never had.

As I sat staring at the phone in our small office, I tried to figure out what it was about his pamphlet that was nagging at me and giving me that knot in my stomach. I read the English, then I read the French. I stared at the pamphlet as if I was waiting for it to speak to me and tell me what was in it that was terrifying me.

The hours passed. I watched a bad seventies movie on the late, late show on our black and white TV one of the volunteers donated. I watched the minute hand more slowly on the wall clock with the ugly nature scene that another volunteer happily donated just to be rid of the thing. I turned on our decade-old radio and moved it close to the phone so I could be ready to shut it off the second the phone rang.

And I sat by the phone with a part of me hoping it wouldn't ring because no one was being raped or sexually assaulted that night and no one was in pain and just needed to talk. And, at the same time, the realistic part of me hoped it would ring so at least one woman out there would know that she was not alone and that she was not to blame for anything that happened.

As I waited for the sun to rise above the dark, gray building that blocked our view of the open space, I read the pamphlet for the final time.

I read:

AT HOME:

- Your door should be equipped with a door viewer and deadbolt lock.
- All windows should be secure. Draw window shades or drapes after dark.
- All entrances and garages should be well-lit.
- Never remain alone in an apartment laundry room, mailroom or parking garage.
- Avoid feminine identification. Do not put your first name on your mailbox or in the telephone book. Use two initials and your last name.
- Unknown persons should not be admitted to your premises unless proper credentials are presented.
- Should a stranger request use of your

phone, do not allow the person to enter. Offer to make the call yourself.

ON THE STREET:

- Plan your route and avoid short cuts through parks, vacant lots or unlit areas.
- Do not overburden yourself with packages and a bulky purse.
- Walk near the curb and away from alleys and doorways.

IN YOUR CAR:

- Always lock your car when entering and leaving it.
- View interior of vehicle before entering to assure no one is hiding inside, even if the doors were locked.
- Have your keys in hand so you do not have to linger before entering your car.
- Travel on well lit streets and keep your purse out of sight.
- If you have car trouble in a dark area, raise the hood of the car, lock yourself in, and wait for the police to arrive. If a stranger offers to help, do not get out of your car. Ask the person to call for assistance.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION:

- Try to avoid isolated bus stops.
- Sit near other women or near the driver.

PUBLIC PLACE:

- Use caution in conversations with strangers. Avoid giving your name, address or place of employment.

There was more in the pamphlet, but it had finally hit me. There, neatly typed and packaged, were all the unwritten rules that I lived by. There were all the rules that I, and all other women, lived by both consciously and unconsciously. They weren't a guarantee of safety, they were simply a way to cut the risk.

There they were and seeing them written and distributed by the government terrified me.

I wondered what a pamphlet for "Men Alone" would be like or how there would ever even be a need for one.

I wondered why it had to be like this for women.

I thought about our crisis line...funded by money, throw-away furniture and appliances, and prays from its volunteers. I thought about how I jumped at every little noise in the building and how I checked the deadbolt twice.

I thought about the one million dollars the McKenna government has been hoarding for the past three years...money that is collected from criminals through a victim-surcharge...money that the law says is supposed to go to victim services like the rape crisis line and that the McKenna government refuses to distribute.

I thought of the report released by the national committee on violence on women that said it is critical that the government give permanent funding to services like transition houses and rape crisis centres.

I thought about how the McKenna government has cut off funding to the Fredericton Rape Crisis and other organizations that help victims of violence and the millions of dollars the federal and provincial government have cut from women's programs in this year alone.

I thought about how the McKenna government has deliberately and systematically cut off funding to this province's

silent but most vulnerable victims - young teenage mothers, street kids, rape victims, incest victims, the handicapped, abused women and children and the list goes on.

I thought about the young woman on the Miramichi who was sentenced to three years in prison because she killed her rapist. I wondered what "tips" the government thought she should have used when finally faced with a rapist?

And I thought about the damn pamphlet put out by the federal government listing all the rules women are supposed to live by. I wondered if anyone ever questioned "WHY do we have to live like this?"

And I realized this pamphlet terrified me because it all seemed so concrete, so "normal." This was just the way women are supposed to live - in fear.

And I realized that the pamphlet made everything seem "official" now - even though I had always lived by these rules. And that the government or society wasn't going to do a damn thing to change it. Instead they would just put out a pamphlet to warn women that this is what you must live with.

And it terrified me that society seemed

to be accepting this as normal - that woman will just have to live with fear and threats of violence - rather than society taking responsibility and trying to change it.

I realized I could handle the knowledge that we live in a society where violence against women does happen and it is a problem. I could handle it because when you realize a problem, then you can work to solve it.

But I realized I could not deal with a society that says "this is normal and women must learn to live this way." And that its what that pamphlet said to me when I compared it to everything the government and society does to women. It terrified me and I didn't know what to do or think.

I sat there trying not to think.

Later, the next volunteer came to start her shift. Another woman came to fight back against the violence. And this made me realize something else I live by - the belief that all women are survivors. That knowledge balanced my world and I could cope again.

Positively Pink Reviving GALA at UNB

ACTIVITIES! *James Whitehead offers some activities which a new Gay and Lesbian Association at UNB could provide.*

by James Whitehead

Well, here we are again. It's the start of a fresh new university year, heralded in by orientation, other frosh events and avid recruiting by societies and sports clubs. But what has UNB to offer the lesbian and gay student community? Besides positively pink and the black triangle in the Bruns there are the radio programs "Fruit Cocktail" and "Dos Lesbos" which air alternately on CHSR on Mondays at 7pm. These have been an excellent medium for conveying news and information on events both nationwide and worldwide, as well as a source of entertainment, but obviously cannot provide a means by which gay and lesbian students can meet, socialize and support one another. As Adrian mentioned in last weeks Bruns, there was, up until a year ago, an organization on campus called GALA (Gay and Lesbian Association) which did provide such opportunities to meet 'kindred spirits'. This died and was buried on graduation of the former committee but plans are now afoot to exhumate and revive it.

What follows are a few ideas of activities the new GALA could potentially provide at

UNB and are based, in part, on what other university groups in Canada offer. Ideas for any other activities which you think are important and should be considered are extremely welcome. These can be submitted either in writing to GALA (see below for address) or at the first scheduled GALA meeting at the Alumni Building on Monday 7 28th September at 7pm. Unfortunately GALA has no office as yet.

1. Weekly meetings in which discussion of future events is open to all. These events would also offer an opportunity to socialize and reading material by way of the extensive FLAG library may also be present.
2. Feature films, documentaries and educational videos (eg. self defense, health films etc.) can be shown at these meetings.
3. Talks by invited speakers are a potential activity. Experts in the fields of adoption, human rights and the law, AIDS, and womens issues could be invited.
4. Outside group events such as canoeing, hiking, camping expeditions or skiing are feasible.
5. Organized coffee-shop meets or weekend barbecues.

The possibilities are endless but the services GALA ends up providing depend primarily on the interest shown by the lesbian and gay student community. Remember this organization is for you, now is the time to stand up and take a hand in shaping it into something worthwhile. Future meeting times and location will be discussed at the first GALA meeting in the Alumni Building on the date stated above. Besides this, the future course of GALA will be discussed followed by an opportunity to socialize with the meeting participants in convivial surroundings. Coffee, tea and snacks will be available. We look forward to meeting you!

For further details phone the FLAG hotline.

CONTACTS: FLAGLINE 457-2156 Monday & Thurs. 6-9pm. GALA, Help Centre, Student Union Building (Mail Only)

CORRECTION: Last week's gay and lesbian column contained erroneous information about FLAG's Gayline. For future reference, the Gayline can be reached at 457-2156, and it is staffed by volunteers between 6:00 pm and 9:00 pm on Monday and Thursday. At other times there is an answering machine on which messages may be left.