

Women filmmakers

This summer a group of four young women were funded by OFY to write and crew a film on women. Anne Wheeler 26, acted as director, Lorna Rasmussen 22, did camera work, Toni Johnston 33, a doctorial candidate in Ed Psych, and Lorna Jackson Dub 26, handled sound. The film, entitled ONE WOMAN, is in the final stages of editing by the crew. It will be ready for release on October 15th.

We would have coffee at the College Grill. The waitresses there were two very thin women, aged beyond their years who rarely smiled. We smiled a lot. We were full of the satisfaction and excitement that accompanies pioneering, four young women setting out to research and produce a film about a woman.

Two of us were single, one married and one divorced. We had seen what had happened to those women who bought the whole bag; our friends who told us, "I AM liberated, George would let me go right out and buy a mink coat if I wanted to." We knew the stories of abandoned mothers working at pitiful wages in order to support their families. We had talked to starry-eyed high school girls who hoped to drift into marriages made in heaven and live happily ever after. We were given money and the

use of 16mm equipment. What could we do?

A few weeks after our initial meeting, a rough script was drafted. The Journal ran a small item explaining the film to some extent and outlining the kind of women we had in mind to play the roles. Call at Filmwest, the item read, between such and such hours for auditions. No experience necessary.

Auditions as such were not planned. We expected to interview a handful of young women interested in playing one of the roles. Instead we were greeted that morning by a flood of women, young and not-so-young, some of whom were interested in acting, but most just wanted to talk. Those who didn't come down to our offices, telephoned their encouragement.

They were a very diverse group, these women. Some were middle-class housewives smartly dressed. Some found getting the necessities of daily life a struggle. A young French Canadian housewife drove from Cold Lake to see us. She had read our item in the newspaper and came, impassioned, to tell us her story. She told us of her mother, married in Quebec without a contract, who became a virtual slave to her wealthy husband. Since the age of four, she continued, she knew she must insist on a contract upon marriage. Married now for eight years

she has wanted to leave her husband each day of those years. The welfare of the children holds her back. She would have to leave them with her husband, she told us, because she could not support herself and three children. This sensitive bright young woman had only the training of a supermarket check-out girl.

A divorced woman in the entertainment business told us of her eviction from a rented house because "there were too many men around and besides, she kept such odd hours". She was just too tired and too busy trying to feed, clothe and spend time with her children and the child of her ex-husband's first marriage to fight the eviction on legal grounds. She was an oddball, a female bandleader whose work required arrangements and rehearsals and unorthodox working hours. Her work and the care of her family kept her mind from dwelling too much on the double prejudice she endured.

There were these stories and more optimistic stories. We met a vivacious young married woman who was undaunted by going to law school and having a baby at the same time. Baby in a kangaroo pouch she trundled off to law school.

From these outpourings we built a film script that we hope will point out a few of the legal and cultural problems a woman who is trying to change her self-image will encounter. We are, as women, still provided with the model of the weak women whom society must "protect" through its laws. If we challenge the normal role of mother-wife-homemaker we are suspected of bitchery and whoredom. This is what we have been told, but women working together are finding new answers and ideals to replace the old stereotypes.

Working together on the film brought many rewards. Refusing to accept the traditional patriarchal hierarchy common to film makers, we made all our decisions collectively. We have had problems both technical and ideological; we worked through them together, learning a lot about film and a lot about ourselves in the process.

We often go back to the College Grill for coffee and the waitresses are still there, still tired and unsmiling. We made a film about a young woman in circumstances not far removed from our own-middle-class, university educated. But the waitresses made us know there are many more films to be made.



Downtown Centre

If the guy next to you makes a hundred dollars more than you for doing the same job--what do you do?

If you find you want to build your life with another woman--what do you do?

If you become pregnant and you don't want a child--what do you do?

"Come down and meet other women with the same problems" is the answer from the group which is soon to open the Edmonton Women's Centre downtown.

According to a pamphlet produced by the group, the centre, located in a large old house at 9623-103A Avenue, will focus on women's problems in five specific areas. The centre, says the pamphlet, aims to provide space "for women already involved in feminist activities to meet and talk", and for women not involved in a group "to come and find the kinds of activities that are already happening or a space in which they can start groups of their own."

There will be room for gay women--presently without a place to go in Edmonton--to meet other women, whether straight or gay.

Referral services for abortion, welfare, and legal aid problems and a library of women's liberation literature will provide information which may otherwise be hard to find.

Finally, the centre will "provide a social meeting place where women can drop in for coffee." In order to encourage mothers with young children to stop by, the group is setting aside and furnishing a play room.

Other rooms will be allocated to organizations such as the Edmonton Coalition for Abortion Law Repeal.

The centre has been a long time coming--at least one year of thinking and planning which is only now getting off the ground.

According to Dorothy Jackson, one half of the centre's finance committee, the present group's determination is a direct result of the government's refusal to provide OFY money for a similar project in the city last spring. Thinking about the OFY proposal "solidified ideas, and intensified our desire to have a centre," said Mary Moffat, another group member.

Over the summer, a changing group of between 20 and 30 women who had supported that project met periodically to discuss plans.

By the end of August they were ready to declare themselves a society (by which manoeuvre no one individual would be left with financial responsibility for rent, telephone and other expenses), and to find a location for the centre.

The Edmonton house follows a recent but highly successful tradition of women's centres in Toronto and Vancouver. In Toronto, the Women's Caucus centre has blossomed into a "gigantic thing," says Jackson. Perhaps 300 people are involved, she said, with the result that the house is too small for the demand on meeting space.

Right now volunteers are busy cleaning and painting the place. Opening date is roughly scheduled for two weeks from now.



Women's Program(me) Centre