



WE NEED TO DO THIS: A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S SHELTER MOVEMENT IN ALBERTA AND THE ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Alexandra Zabjek

ISBN 978-1-77385-493-9

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY:**

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY NOT:**

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

Epilogue

LISA

Lisa Morgan was having a rough week. She was a long-time staff member at the Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Centre in Cold Lake, whose thirty-one-year career began as a shelter volunteer. Morgan loved working with women and children, first as a child support worker, then as the centre's assistant director, and then as a coordinator for second stage housing. At times, however, the stresses of the job and the trauma she witnessed weighed on her.

On that day in the early 2000s, it all felt like too much. So, Morgan sat at her desk and penned a resignation letter.

She was mulling over what she had just written when a colleague told her someone was at the door to see her.

I go to the door and there's this young man there—and he's, oh, six foot two, six foot three—and he goes, "Hi. Remember me?" And then, from behind him steps his mother, who I recognized. So I say, "Oh! Of course I recognize you. But you're in a way bigger body than how I remember you." So, his mom's looking at me and she's mouthing, like, "Calvin." So I say, "Is it Calvin?" He turns around and says to his mom, "I told you she'd remember me."

Back in the 1990s, we took a group of kids on camping trips in the summer. And one of the young boys that came was a young Native boy. He biked for forty-five kilometres to get into Cold Lake to go to the camp—on a bike that had no seat! And at night he sang in his language until the kids went to sleep.

He used to be a scrawny kid, and now he was this tall man. And he says to me, “I just wanted you guys to know what a difference you made in my life, right? Going to that camp, canoeing with you guys, the campfire stories,” he says. “I just needed to let you know that.” And his mom says to me, “You know, Lisa, in the years since that camp, Calvin says to me all the time, ‘We need to go to Cold Lake. We need to go to that shelter. We need to tell the women what a good job they’re doing. And you know, say thank you and tell Lisa I appreciate her.’” Then she says, “I hope it’s okay.” And I say to her, “Okay, this is my story. I was sitting at my desk with my letter of resignation—it was written and it was on my desk. And then I just looked up and I said, ‘Okay God, this is it. I need a sign.’ Then, *ding dong*, you guys rang the doorbell. It was like a sign from somewhere that I should keep going.”

Morgan went back to her desk and tore up the resignation letter.

—Lisa Morgan retired from shelter work in 2017, but she still calls her thirty-one years at the Dr. Margaret Savage Crisis Centre her “most favourite job in the world.”

Afterword

This book came about as the result of an observation made by Jan Reimer, executive director of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, in 2015. She noted that the founders of Alberta's women's shelter movement had started their work in the late 1960s. More than fifty years later, these trailblazers were aging and Reimer wanted to ensure their stories were preserved.

In the years that followed, ACWS organized interviews with dozens of women, and some men, who played a role in shaping the province's shelter movement. ACWS extended invitations to former and current shelter workers and board members from across the province.

Those interviews form the basis for this book. Women involved in the shelter movement offered anecdotes and general recollections about their work, along with analysis of the social and political context in which it was carried out. Their stories are an important part of Alberta's history and contribute to our broader understanding of the feminist movement in this province.

The stories presented in this book represent only a small sample of the many women who played a role in advancing the women's shelter movement in Alberta. Regrettably, not every person who participated in the interview process could be quoted in the text. But whether quoted or not, every interview helped to shape the overall narrative.

In addition, there were several shelter leaders who passed away before they could be interviewed. In some of these cases, their colleagues paid homage to them in the stories they chose to share. Still, it is inevitable that the good work of some women has not been represented fully here.

Women's shelters in Alberta have been shaped by the work, dedication, and convictions of hundreds of women over the past five decades, be they staff, volunteers, or board members. It would be impossible to capture all of their individual accomplishments, but this book is an attempt to highlight how the sum total of that work became a powerful feminist social movement.



A woman sweeps in the kitchen of an early shelter house.

Material republished with the express permission of: Postmedia Network Inc.
and the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

Author Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the knowledge, guidance, and vision of the senior leadership team at the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters. This project was conceived and driven by their conviction that Alberta women's stories deserve to be recorded and celebrated—I couldn't agree more.

I am equally grateful for every person who agreed to be interviewed for this project. I appreciate how candidly they shared their stories, and I wish I could have quoted every participant in the text. I am so very lucky to have been entrusted with their personal stories, which helped me to understand how individual actions and convictions can build a society-changing movement.

I would also like to thank my editor, Rachel Hertz-Cobb. Her critiques and edits of my manuscript made this book infinitely better. I feel lucky to have worked with such a talented editor, who put such immense care into working with my writing. I am also grateful to Brian Scrivener and the University of Calgary Press for their support in publishing this book.

And finally, I want to thank my family—Tej and Arjun. They listened to me think out loud about the flow of my text and offered suggestions on the wording of many sentences. But most important, they believed that I could write this and told me they were proud. I'm not sure I could have finished this book without them.

Sources

- Annual Report*. Edmonton: Alberta Social Services and Community Health, 1985-1986.
- Annual Report*. Edmonton: Alberta Family and Social Services, 1988-1989.
- A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence*. Thunder Bay: Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989.
- Bielski, Zosia. "A Simple Hashtag Reveals the Complexities Facing Women Who Experience Domestic Violence." *Globe & Mail*, September 9, 2014.
- Brautigam, Tara. "Aboriginal Issues: Women Gather to Devise Anti-Violence Plan." *Daily Herald-Tribune*, June 21, 2007.
- Boyce, Jillian, *Victimization of Aboriginal People in Canada, 2014*. Ser. 85-002-X201600114631. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2014.
- Cairns, Kathleen, and Irene Hoffart. "Keeping Women Alive – Assessing the Danger." Edmonton: The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, June 2009.
- Calgary Herald*. "Gerri Many Fingers Community Service." June 19, 1994.
- Calgary Herald*. "Women could set own political rules." June 18, 1973.
- Calgary Herald*. "Women's Lib helps Black Men Too—MLA Rosemary Brown." April 12, 1973.
- Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*. 2016.
- Canada, House of Commons, Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, *Wife Battering: Report on Violence in the Family*. May 1980. https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.com_HOC_3201_19_5/1.
- Canada, Privy Council Office, *Report on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women*. 1970. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.699583/publication.html>.
- Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, *The Role of Housing in Dealing with Family Violence in Canada*. 2012.

- Chapman, Arlene. "ACWS Brief for Presentation to the Senate." September 20, 1995.
- Cobb, Chris. "Women's Funding Unfair, Men Say." *Edmonton Journal*, October 5, 1998.
- Collins, Erin. "Alberta's Dirty Little Progressive Secret." *CBC*, December 17, 2015.
- Cooney, Roman. "Fight begins on violence." *Calgary Herald*, April 24, 1990.
- de Lesseps, Suzanne. "Women Push for Rights." *Calgary Herald*, June 21, 1975.
- Edmonton Journal*. "Shelter for battered women opens." December 6, 1978.
- Edmonton Journal*. "Time for Review of Equity Funding," July 19, 1998.
- Fateaux, Nicole. "Jackie Campbell: Creator of the Danger Assessment," *American Journal of Nursing* 121, no. 10 (October 2021).
- Ferguson, Eva. "Out from the shadows." *Calgary Herald*, March 11, 1993.
- Garrett, Rick. "Order of Canada Recipients Well-Deserving." *Anishinabek News*, January 5, 2018.
- Green, Peter. "Joyce Smith." *Calgary Herald*, January 20, 2008.
- Gold, Marta. "Time for a Change, WIN House Director Says." *Edmonton Journal*, July 2, 1988.
- Goodhand, Margo. *Runaway Wives and Rogue Feminists: The Origins of the Women's Shelter Movement in Canada*. Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2017.
- Goyette, Linda. "Gov't Pays Women Less, Report Says." *Edmonton Journal*, October 15, 1979.
- Harder, Lois. *State of Struggle: Feminism and Politics in Alberta*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2003.
- Heidinger, Loanna. *Intimate Partner Violence: Experiences of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Women in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Statistics, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00007-eng.pdf?st=rnnvytbZ>.
- Hoffart, Irene. *Walking the Path Together Evaluation – Phases I and II. Report to Safe Communities Innovation Fund 2014*. Edmonton: The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2014.
- Janovicek, Nancy. *No Place to Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women's Shelter Movement*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

- Klein, Colleen. "I Never Look Back." In *Standing Together: Women Speak Out About Violence and Abuse*, edited by Linda Goyette. Edmonton: Brindle & Glass Publishing, 2005.
- Koenig, Wendy. "Price of Peace at Home May Be Too Costly." *Edmonton Journal*, January 4, 1979.
- Livingstone, Barb. "Battered women's shelter urged for immigrants." *Calgary Herald*, April 21, 1990.
- Locherty, Lorraine. "Violence 'Joke' Sparks Furore." *Calgary Herald*, December 17, 1988.
- MacFarquhar, Larissa. "The Radical Transformations of a Battered Women's Shelter." *New Yorker*, August 2019.
- MacLeod, Linda, and Andrée Cadieux. *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle*. Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Hull: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1980.
- Maracle, Lee. *I am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Richmond: Press Gang Publishers, 1996.
- Menzies, Heather. "Liberation in Low Gear." *Edmonton Journal*, December 30, 1975.
- Mildon, Marsha. *WINning: The Trials, Tribulations, and Triumphs of Opening a Women's Shelter*. Edmonton: Housing for Women Book Society, 2020.
- National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. *Executive Summary of the Final Report*. Vancouver, 2018.
- Nickel, Sarah A. "I Am Not a Women's Libber, Although Sometimes I Sound Like One." *The American Indian Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (Fall 2017): 299-335. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.
- Novick, Tasha. *Seeking Parity Between On-Reserve Shelters and Shelters Funded by the Province of Alberta*. Edmonton: The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, February 2005.
- Ottawa Citizen. "Male MP's Guffaws at wife beating query enrage female MPs." 1982.
- "Proposal for Women's Interim Aid," Nagisawayway peygamak (no date). Document courtesy of WIN House Archives.
- Rebick, Judy, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*. Toronto: Penguin Press, 2005.
- Reid, Mark. "Shelter Crisis Grows." *Calgary Herald*, March 18, 2001.

- Scalp Lock, Ruth and Jim Pritchard. *My Name is Shield Woman: A hard road to healing, vision, and leadership*. Charleston: Day Time Moon, 2014.
- Speirs, Rosemary. "Lacklustre hearings dull and repetitive." *Calgary Herald*, September 19, 1968.
- Supreme Court of Canada, *Murdoch v. Murdoch*, [1975] 1 S.C.R. 423, 1973.
- Sweetman, Keri. "Male MPs' Guffaws at Wife Beating Query Enrage Female MPs." *Ottawa Citizen*, May 13, 1982.
- Trimble, Linda. "The Politics of Gender." In *Government and Politics in Alberta*, edited by Allan Tupper and Roger Gibbins. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992.
- YWCA Alberta Action Committee, *The Mossman Report on Housing Needs in the City of Edmonton for Homeless Girls 15-25 Years of Age*. Edmonton, 1969.

About The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters

Together, The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) and its members work to end domestic violence—in our homes and throughout our communities.

A registered charity, ACWS is the provincial network organization of domestic violence shelters in Alberta. We bring close to four decades of experience and knowledge to serve our 39 members operating over 50 shelters across the province for women, their children, and seniors facing domestic abuse. We advocate for ACWS members and work with them to end domestic violence through culture-shifting violence prevention programs, collective data and research, and front-line training. With support from ACWS, Alberta shelters are helping to provide safety, support families, and improve communities.

Domestic violence remains a serious and urgent problem in Alberta. Collectively, we are challenging the harmful beliefs and actions that perpetuate domestic violence in our communities.

For more information, visit acws.ca.



Founders of the Edmonton Women's Shelter gathered at All Saints' Cathedral in 1995, 25 years after it opened and housed the first shelter beds in the city. Sitting, from left, Jessica Hanna, Lynn Hannley, Phyllis Ellis, and Ardis Beaudry. Standing, from left, Daisey Wilson, Lucille Ross, and Betty Nigro.

Material reproduced with the express permission of: *Edmonton Journal*, a division of Postmedia Network Inc.

In Canada, a woman is killed by her intimate partner every six days. Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. Starting in the 1970s, Alberta women's shelters have assisted women in crisis. Much more than a safe place to sleep, shelters work to prevent violence through education and training, connect people and communities, and support the complex needs of survivors through a multitude of services.

We Need to Do This is the story of Alberta women's shelters. Based on dozens of in-depth interviews, it traces the evolution of a progressive social movement in a traditionally conservative province. These are the stories of women whose voices may otherwise never have been heard: entry-level workers at fledgling shelters battling the assumption that their facilities would create crime, small-town shelter directors forced to self-censor or lose community—and financial—support, Indigenous women fighting to serve their sisters in Indigenous spaces.

Beginning with the women who founded the first shelters, and continuing through the establishment of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to the present day, *We Need to Do This* is a story of hope and survival for the women's shelter movement and for the mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, and daughters it continues to serve.

ALEXANDRA ZABJEK has worked as a staff writer at the *Edmonton Journal*, and as a producer for national radio programs, including CBC's *The Current*. She also co-produced and co-hosted *The Broadcast*, one of the first podcasts in Canada focused on women in politics. Alexandra lives in Edmonton with her husband and son. *We Need to Do This* is her first book.



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
LCR Publishing Services

press.ucalgary.ca