

# ISSUES THEN, ISSUES NOW



## Some Historical Perspective on Women's Equality on PEI

Past Chairpersons of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of women faced significant issues that women are still facing today, more than thirty years later.

### **Politics. Poverty. Participation. Violence. Justice. Choice.**

These issues just won't go away, as long as women are treated unequally. (See the back page for an overview of how we're doing in 2008.)

If an issue is missing on one Chairperson's list, it isn't because it wasn't important — it's because it was more than one person, or one Council, could take on.

1975-76

#### **Beatrice Reeves**

*Beatrice Reeves died in 2006.*

- **Politics.** Need for women appointed to decision-making bodies
- **Poverty.** Need for employment equity, pay equity, economic and property rights after divorce, unpaid work
- **Participation.** Need for child care
- **Violence.** Need for solutions on violence against women
- **Justice.** Need for legal rights after marriage break-up
- **Choice.** Need for abortion access, sexual health education

**"It really became something for us to see women appointed to higher positions; it showed other women that this was possible."**

**- Beatrice Reeves**



1976-77

#### **Andrea Wood**

*Andrea Wood died in 1996.*

- **Politics.** Need for Aboriginal women's status to be recognized
- **Poverty.** Need for housing options, pension provisions for women's unpaid work
- **Violence.** Need for a crisis centre for women and children
- **Justice.** Need for access to divorce, property law amendments, children's rights, sexual discrimination in human rights legislation
- **Choice.** Need for equal treatment for women and men in elective sterilization

**"In a society which continues to value a person according to their economic worth, women certainly had, and still have, little equality."**

**- Barbara Currie**



1977-78

#### **Barbara Currie**

- **Poverty.** Need for women's unpaid work to be recognized
- **Justice.** Need for continued work to improve new Family Law Act

Sources: Quotations and issue summaries to 2000 are from the PEIACSW publication *A Baker's Dozen*. More recent material is from issues of the *PEIACSW Activities Update*. Statistics from Statistics Canada.

"Sunflower" by Sandy Kowalik



**Politics. Poverty. Participation. Violence. Justice. Choice.**

1978-80

## Elizabeth Percival

*Beth Percival died in 2001.*

- **Poverty.** Need for employment equity, pay equity, redistribution of household work
- **Participation.** Need for accessible child care, access to education (including women's studies)
- **Violence.** Need for real solutions and real preventions
- **Justice.** Need for equality of property rights under the Family Law Reform Act
- **Choice.** Need for abortion access

"Have [things] improved? The answer is 'yes' — certainly for women who have better education, better jobs, better pay, access to reproductive health choices, etc. For others, including those in minimum wages and/or seasonal jobs, or those on social assistance, the answer is certainly 'no' — not for women who cannot find jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing that is decent or affordable quality child care; not for many women who still face discrimination and limited opportunities like women with disabilities, lesbians and immigrant women, among others."

- Beth Percival



"If I had one wish for women's equality, it would be that we would not be having this discussion about women's equality. I would wish that equality was so ingrained in everyone's lives that it would no longer be an issue."

- Eileen Wilt



"Women's concerns must not be placed 'on hold' until economic times have improved."

- Margaret Ashford



"I recall one particular presentation when the Province took the position that to adequately fund child care would not really be appropriate as such a policy would only serve to compensate those individuals who had created the need in the first place!"

- Dolores Crane



1980

## Eileen Wilt

- **Politics.** Need for women in politics and decision-making
- **Poverty.** Need for pay equity
- **Violence.** Need for Anderson House, set up "in the hope it would eventually no longer be necessary"
- **Justice.** Need for equal access to the justice system

1981-83

## Margaret Ashford

- **Politics.** Need for better representation of women in unions
- **Poverty.** Need for better working conditions, improved pay levels, better job protection, more part-time work for women, better employment standards

1983-86

## Dolores Crane

- **Politics.** Need for less politicization of appointments, funding for research and analysis on women's issues
- **Poverty.** Need for employment equity
- **Participation.** Need for child care, recognition of women in the historical record
- **Violence.** Need for violence prevention, less objectification and sexualization of women's images in pornography
- **Choice.** Need for freedom to debate abortion in a way that supports women

1986-89

## Dianne Porter

- **Politics.** Need for women in decision-making, national and international policy and agreements to support women's equality
- **Participation.** Need for accessible and affordable child care
- **Justice.** Need for women's access to family law (civil) legal aid

1989-92

## Linda Gallant

- **Politics.** Need for women's equality in national agreements such as the Meech Lake Accord
- **Poverty.** Need for women's equality to be recognized in unemployment insurance and GST, addictions services (*continued*)

1989-92

Linda Gallant (continued)

- **Participation.** Need for child care, more women in math and sciences
- **Violence.** Need to mourn, then work for change in the wake of the Montreal Massacre; need for violence prevention, actions to address child sexual abuse
- **Choice.** Need for legislation on reproductive technologies

### Colleen MacQuarrie

- **Violence.** Need for action to prevent violence in light of the murder of women, prevention of sexual abuse and assault
- **Choice.** Need for abortion rights and access

### Anne Nicholson

- **Politics.** Need to stem backlash against women's progress towards equality
- **Poverty.** Need to stem backlash against affirmative action and employment equity
- **Violence.** Need for effective prevention of relationship violence, elimination of double standard for violence of women and men, prevention of sexual abuse and assault, regulation and monitoring of College of Physicians and Surgeons
- **Choice.** Need for abortion access

### Sharon O'Brien

- **Poverty.** Need for adequate supports for women and their families, across the board

### Patricia Roy Ballem

- **Poverty.** Need for living wages and supports to keep women out of poverty, equitable access to pension benefits for senior women
- **Participation.** Need for attention to women's health and women's access to health care
- **Violence.** Need for solutions to violence against women and an end to murders of women
- **Justice.** Need for reform to federal Divorce Act to support women

### Kirstin Lund

- **Politics.** Need for more women in government, electoral reform
- **Poverty.** Need for economic security for women inside and outside relationships, equitable access to services such as maternity and parental benefits
- **Participation.** Need for accessible child care
- **Violence.** Need for effective prevention of violence against women
- **Justice.** Need for safe options in the justice system for women who have experienced violence, supports for women offenders
- **Choice.** Need for abortion access

"During my term as Chairperson of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, one of my 'pet' issues was women's access to legal aid in PEI — it still is."

- Dianne Porter

"The issue of access to reproductive choices, including abortion, is situated squarely on the continuum of violence and control over/against women."

- Colleen MacQuarrie

"Of course there are women and men who don't 'get it' [women's equality] yet. They will probably figure it out soon enough when they or someone they know gets battered or sexually assaulted."

- Anne Nicholson

"My simplistic plan to eliminate child poverty, thus helping them to develop into healthy, well-adjusted adults would be to see that mothers have enough money to provide proper nutrition and clothing for their children."

- Sharon O'Brien

"Unless gender is taken into consideration when governments are formulating policies, women are not going to be treated equally by the system."

- Patricia Roy Ballem

"Canada's federal Minister Responsible for the Status of Women in 2006 went so far as to say that the federal government believes women in Canada are equal. That statement is staggeringly unbelievable."

- Kirstin Lund

1992-93

1993-96

96-00

2000-2003

2003-2008

## A 2008 snapshot of the issues we've heard about for more than thirty years:

### Politics.



The new PEI government has opened up appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions and has reduced patronage in hiring — two very positive steps. However, while research has shown that voters do not discriminate against women at the polls, women continue to have trouble getting their names on ballots. Women continue to make up less than a third of provincial and federal governments. Prince Edward Island has still only ever elected two female MPs.

### Poverty.



The gap in wages between women and men continues to be enormous in Canada: 64% of men's wages overall, and 70% for full-time, full-year work. Still today, 40% of all children living in poverty live with a single mother. Social assistance incomes for single employable persons fall 65% below the poverty line; lone parents with one child receive social assistance at 38% below the poverty line. Meanwhile, 52% of seniors in PEI receive Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and an unattached senior with only Old Age Pension and GIS receives an income 16% below the poverty line. Women continue to struggle to have equal access to government services — more than 40% of women have trouble meeting basic eligibility for maternity and parental benefits administered through the EI system, often because they are self-employed or work part-time or seasonally or in non-standard work arrangements.

### Participation.



Despite more than thirty years of effort by women, there is still no publicly supported national system of child care to support women's participation in the workforce — even though women make up 47% of it (and 49% of the PEI workforce)! Meanwhile, low family incomes mean many parents must find family and other unregulated caregivers for their children from their earliest days. Early childhood

educators continue to struggle to make ends meet with low incomes as they struggle to keep existing child care centres open. They have little hope of offering more options to rural families, to shift workers, or to particular cultural communities. An aging population means that demand for caregiving for older adults is steadily increasing. Much of this caregiving will fall to women as unpaid work, and many community supports for seniors will rely on women's volunteer efforts.

### Violence.



Violence against women continues on PEI as a means to control women and limit their choices. Eight women have been murdered by men since 1989. Anderson House, set up for women as a "temporary measure," is still needed; in 2006, Anderson House alone sheltered 67 women and 75 children. Outreach services were offered to hundreds of women and children across the province by Transition House Association. It is never a question of "if" another Island woman will be murdered in the coming years; it is always a matter of "when."

### Justice.



Access to family law legal aid is improved but is essentially limited to women who have experienced violence. Meanwhile, collaboratively developed recommendations on justice options for women who have experienced violence, including a recommendation for a domestic violence court for PEI, continue to be stalled.

### Choice.



Sexual health education is available in schools, and emergency contraception now provides women with more choices in the 72 hours following intercourse. Meanwhile, abortion is legal in Canada but is still not available on PEI. The issue is still considered so controversial that decision-makers avoid bringing it up at all and feminists who bring it up risk backlash that could derail progress on all the other issues so central to women's equality.