

Adeline Miron

AM: You want to know all about my beginnings with the women's movement and Womanspace and all about myself? I just can't think of anything to say right now.

Q: What were some of your earlier influences?

AM: We talked about some of experiences from our childhood, feelings of repression or whatever. I never thought I was that way. But when I reflected back I could see maybe there was some of that in my past too as a child. Not horrendous things, just stuff about how we were to be appropriate in our speech and manners and all that stuff.

Q: Can you give us an example of that?

AM: We weren't supposed to use words like "sweat", we were supposed to say "glowing". You weren't supposed to say you were hot. Just a whole bunch of things along those lines. We were supposed to be very ladylike and very appropriate in our mannerisms. Not that we were ever inappropriate, it's just that it was considered inappropriate. We were repressed in our language and movements. I can remember one time when I was a little girl, my mother did let me run around all over the place, I was free that way. Some relatives came to visit. They came in a buggy and horse, and they had three rowdy boys with them. When they drove up I had a rim of a wagon wheel and I was running around pushing it with a stick. The lady said to my mother, isn't she a little old to be running around like that with that wheel? Suddenly I felt like I was doing something wrong, but I never would've thought of that. I guess she was referring to me being a girl and here I am running around like a tomboy. She herself was also indoctrinated to think that way. I don't think people tried to make you feel bad, it's just the way they thought. I don't know why I remembered that all my life, not very often, but once in a while I do.

Q: So those kinds of experiences led you to become more active as an adult?

AM: Not consciously. I don't think I ever thought about those things as being repressed. I didn't have any conscious feeling of being held back all my life. It was more the feelings when I became older and became more aware of some of these things. I became aware of some of the things that held me back. It must've been a strong feeling, because I joined the women's movement. I learned all these things and it seemed very appropriate and we don't want to live that way anymore, being put down and having to be repressed all the time.

Q: What was it like being involved in the women's movement?

AM: It was fun. It was fun to feel freer to express yourself. Then other women would say things, maybe their husband was really bossy or controlling. He probably thought that the man should be the head of the house. When women started talking about their experiences, some of these things may not have been my experience, but it made me angry or aware, and feeling really badly for these women. Young girls telling stories about how, this girl in her summer boss, her boss touched her inappropriately or pulled out his penis and showed it to her. She was a shy girl and wasn't aware of these things. She was so shocked she went home and cried and cried. She told her mother and she was going to quit her job. Her mother made her go back to work. I remember her telling that story on a conference on women and madness. It was a conference in Calgary, a really big conference. It had Phyllis Chesler there and some women from the States and Canada, some feminists. I cannot remember their names anymore. And some psychologists from the women's movement from Calgary and Edmonton, all over Canada. This girl was giving a testimony on what happened to her, and other women were giving testimonies too. The women's movement, I hadn't belonged to it that long yet. They don't have to be my experiences, but because of these experiences it made me really aware of these things.

Q: You said in the early '70s you went to a course called "What is a Woman?"

AM: That's right. I looked in the newspapers and saw this title. It was a course being held at the university. I remember thinking, ya, what is a woman? I can't remember what the ad was about anymore, something about making us aware of what women need to... if you're interested you can take this course and learn about... it didn't talk about repression but it gave me the idea. I said, I'm going to find out what is a woman, and I took the course at the university. I don't think I realized what it was going to be all about, but it was nice to take the course and have these experiences with all these other young women and the odd man in there who was resentful... We'd try and argue some of these things we talked about when we were being put down and the ways we were being treated in society. Some of these people could not see that. But most of the women who took the course took it for the same reason I did. They wanted to know more about why they feel repressed and what they could do about it.

Q: What happened after that?

AM: When the course was over, I made some friends and we used to go out for coffee after and sit and chat. We decided to start a women's movement in Lethbridge. We applied for a grant the fall of '73. We received our grant in '74 and we opened up a women's center. I think we used to meet at each other's houses for a while. There was a building downtown where the birth control center was, that was a new place too, and we rented a couple of rooms in there. It was nice when we got a house all to ourselves. We became quite active, even before we had a place all to ourselves, we gave courses at the library on things to do with women, like women in male oriented jobs, women in female oriented jobs, women in health, and so on. We gave quite a few of those presentations but I can't remember them all right now. Probably women in religion, but I can't remember that one. I can remember now how we talked about most of the world's religions are all male oriented. God's always a man, and so forth. The United Church sometimes called God she, and that upset some people.

Q: In the early years how many women were involved?

AM: Anywhere between 35 and 75 at the beginning. They were people that would come to our meetings that didn't necessarily belong but they would come once in awhile because they liked coming.

Q: One of the issues you thought was really important was around child care?

AM: Yes. We lobbied city council. They didn't seem to fall for it to begin with but eventually we talked them into allowing us to open up a public daycare in Lethbridge. After awhile I worked there for about five years. Some of us that were lobbying were also running the daycare and helping with the children. The children were between two and six. We also had a kindergarten. I didn't have a course in early childhood but I worked there anyway. I looked after handicapped children for a bit, and I looked after the toddlers, 19 months to three years of age, for two or three years.

Q: What were the wages back in those days?

AM: When I started it was \$4.75 an hour. Shortly thereafter it was \$6.95 an hour. Then after that it would be around \$8. Even though it was a poor wage, it was better than the people got in the private daycares. I started working there around 1980 and by about 1985 the wage would've been around \$8 an hour. Nowadays you'd starve to death on that. It wasn't a lot but it was more than the minimum for those that worked in the private daycares. Being a public daycare, we got to take children that the private daycare wouldn't have to, like children with behavioral problems or mentally or physically handicapped children. Private daycares might take them too, but that's what we were supposed to do. There's people that just worked with a handicapped child, their wage was \$6.95 an hour. They didn't get the same wages as the regular staff that worked with the so-called regular children that didn't have handicaps. Wages haven't improved a lot, have they? I know they'd be higher than that now but so is everything else.

Q: Can you tell the story about the course you taught on women in male oriented jobs?

AM: You want to hear the story about the jackhammer? There was a girl, she had a male oriented job. She worked for the City of Edmonton doing physical work in the streets, breaking up streets so they could pave them. She brought her jackhammer with her for this orientation; she came all the way down to Lethbridge to give a presentation. She sat with one leg crossed over her knee like a man. This really upset the women and it also upset some men. They weren't trying to be mean but they tried to talk her into being more ladylike. What are the other male oriented jobs? Doctors and lawyers. We had Dr. Lacy give a talk about how you can be anything you want. She actually was a lady doctor. That reminds me of this horrible thing that happened. We wrote into our newsletter every month about experiences we had with doctors. Some of us wrote about how the doctor was trying to get us to lose weight. It didn't have to be negative experiences but a lot of them kind of were, about doctors being ? when it came to how they treated women. We sent a copy to every doctor in Lethbridge and they took great offense to this. One of the women that worked at the Herald came and gave us some talks sometimes. Some of us were crying because when they went to visit the doctor for their appointment he told them that he didn't want to see them again. Of course it was the board members, all their names were in the newsletter. The doctors were having cat fits. Lynn Vanlucken said, what did you think you could expect when you wrote those articles in your newsletter and then you sent a copy to every doctor, what were you expecting. You should've asked me, I could've told you what to expect. We didn't expect that. We just wanted to inform them to become more knowledgeable about the ways they could treat women more normal. I'd forgotten all about that, but that was a real fiasco. So a few months went by and Lynn did make a reply to do with another incident, then she mentioned the one about the doctors and how little it took to get them all worked up over nothing. So she did reply, but she didn't reply right away. I was a little disappointed in her because she just told us, what could we expect? She was just waiting for the appropriate time when she could answer the way these doctors behaved. A lot of them told their patients they didn't want to see them again. I sounds kind of silly now, doesn't it?

Q: You were involved with ASWAC. Can you tell us a bit about that?

AM: We went to conferences. They had a yearly conference. We also talked about women in poverty a lot, women in education. They were educational type things where we tried to improve the status of women throughout the province. These conferences were heavily oriented toward that kind of stuff. We had women who would be running these conferences who had more knowledge about these things. Women would come from all over the province who didn't necessarily belong to the women's movement. They would come and see what they could find out about these things. We had a lot of fun at these conferences also. They would have some Wiccans and some spiritual, I don't know what they call it. They would have a service with female goddesses, witches and Wiccans and whatever. Those of us that wanted could attend these services. Some would attend and some wouldn't. You got a better idea of what women could be and what they might be capable of doing. I bought some books on some of those topics about what witches were all about. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be; nobody was flying on a broomstick.

Q: Did the work you and the other women were doing in the area create any kind of backlash, besides that of the doctors?

AM: In 1969 women were allowed to have birth control. Before that it was illegal to practice birth control in Canada, although some doctors over the years had already been given ???. There was no birth control pill before that. Birth control was legalized, imagine that. Also in 1969, I'm not too sure when abortion became legal, but I think it was around the same time. That was really a backlash from men and women and churches and the like, especially the Roman Catholic church. That was a real serious thing that made a lot of people angry. I don't think we gave any workshops on abortion. I've heard for a long time now that Lethbridge is in the heart of the bible belt. Lethbridge is the buckle of the bible belt, or some darn thing like that. So you can imagine if you talked about things like that in a place like Lethbridge at that time, that would not be a good thing to do. I don't think we did this in Lethbridge all by ourselves, but I think the women's movement had a lot to do with legalizing abortion. Changing the marriage laws – remember the Murdock

case? – so that if a man and women got divorced, she didn't get thrown out on her ear with her three kids and staved to death. She was entitled to half the property.

Q: Do you remember what year that was?

AM: The marriage laws changing? If I would've been active in the women's movement and coming to meetings, but our place actually closed down for a while. I just can't remember. I think it was after 1975. I know that Quebec was years behind us in that kind of stuff. When they came out with their laws, they were the most advanced laws in North America, to do with property rights and stuff like that. I don't know what year that was either. It was in the '70s, I'd say after the mid-'70s.

Q: Do you think the women's movement in Lethbridge had any other impact on laws or attitudes?

AM: I know they have. There needs to be a lot of improvement but things have really become better. There's still room for a lot of improvement, don't you think so? There's an attitude that hasn't gone away completely anywhere – it's still a male oriented society, more or less. There was a woman that came to Womanspace and she wanted her twin girls to take this wendu course, but they were only 10 or 12 years old. Alice McPherson said, they're too young, she doesn't take children that young for the wendu. She kept phoning. She'd had a problem having been raped when she was young, and it was never going to happen to her girls. She bugged us so much that finally we allowed the girls to come. It was getting close to the time when the course was going to be held. When I told her she could bring her girls, she said no she can't, because her son is taking karate and it was costing her so much a month. I think the course was \$20 and we were even going to lower the fee, and she couldn't afford it because her son was taking karate. I thought, isn't that strange, she isn't worried about him being assaulted sexually or anything. And the karate course cost way more money than this \$20, but she changed her mind. That's an attitude that, even though you could get raped and stuff, she was worried that her children get raped but she couldn't afford \$20 so they might be able to defend themselves, but she

could afford more money for her son, who was also maybe a little older than the girls. That's the kind of attitude that, I don't know if it's prevalent today, but I think up to a point it is.

Q: Tell us about the connection between ASWAC in Lethbridge and Womanspace.

AM: Womanspace closed down in 1980. We closed it up in 1980. About six years went by, about 1986 some women got together and wanted to open up a women's place again. I don't think we called it ASWAC Lethbridge right from the beginning. But we applied again, got a grant. We never did lose our grant in the first place, it's just that our membership petered out in the late '70s. People didn't seem to be that interested anymore so we closed it down. Then we were opening this place up again. I was invited to come to the meetings and stuff, also before they got the grant and everything. If I'd known I was going to have to say something about it, I'd know more about it. At the time I knew a lot about it but I've forgotten. We also met Terry-Ann Marco, she's one of the ones that got it going. I would go to these meetings too that they held at people's houses at the time. By the following year, in '85 or '86, it started. It didn't take us long to get a grant from the government. Also I think that ASWAC, Alberta Status of Women, came down and talked with us to help us with all this stuff. I wasn't maybe at all the meetings, but we must've decided it was a good idea to be an affiliation of ASWAC. Right from almost the beginning it became the Lethbridge Alberta Status of Women Committee. I figured maybe we would have more clout being part of the provincial organization. We were sort of like a branch. We were autonomous and had our own ways of doing stuff, but we followed the same philosophy. That's about the way I see it. It became defunct in about 1992 and got reorganized and became Womanspace, with similar but not identical philosophy. I wasn't in on all the stuff that was going on so I can't say too much about it, as much as I'd like to. But Dorothy could tell you about that. She probably could tell you what I'm telling you now also, about ASWAC Lethbridge. I saw her at the meetings shortly before ASWAC Lethbridge stopped being. I don't know whether she was a member or not. She didn't come around a lot but she'd come around once in a while and have a little say about something. When ASWAC Lethbridge closed down we wanted to

have another similar organization again. I don't know whether it happened right away or whether it took a few months, I can't remember. But Dorothy would remember all that stuff really well.

Q: Are there any other thoughts you'd like to share, as a feminist activist in the bible belt?

AM: It was very interesting at times and sometimes it was kind of funny. When you get together with a bunch of women and you tell these experiences, you have a good laugh. But when you're by yourself you feel more like crying at the time. At the time when some of these things happen you feel really sad, but as time goes by you can just kind of laugh, even though it's not funny. I've had some good experiences. We had really good experiences going on picnics together in the summertime. We had parties together at the YWCA. And we had an International Women's Day party every year, and we had Take Back the Night march for years. That was really neat. We'd have a party afterwards and have fun and music. We had four things that we did every year, and those are the two that spring to mind. Not everything was a bad experience. When we had the Take Back the Night march the police would, we had a motorcade with them driving in front of us so we could march without getting run over by cars. We'd always have a lot of fun at the Y. We'd have parties afterwards. I can't remember the four things we did. We did many things, but four big things that we did every year. One of them was International Women's Day celebration and party and awareness type stuff. The Take Back the Night march was for women not being safe in the streets at night. Oh yes, the polytechniques thing. I should have my name on one of those plaques. If I have, I'll give you part of it. A long time ago before they had the documentary, how they got about to making that memorial thing in Vancouver, in Stanley Park. When they were talking about how they were going to do it I thought, what's the matter with those women, that's not a very good way to go about this. God knows what we'll have here. But it turned out really nice. They were trying to raise money and anybody that paid \$25 would have their name put on one of the plaques. That's not really why I sent the money; I wanted to help them. One day I thought, oh I'll have my name on there somewhere. One of these days I'm going to have

to go to Vancouver, not just because my name's on there, but that'll make me feel better to go to Vancouver and see if my name's on there. There must be thousands of names. Anyway, that was a horrible thing. Every year now we stop and have a serious thought about how this horrible thing could've possibly happened, and honor these poor parents and families of those girls. Their life ended like that just because they were wanting to be, what were they studying, engineering? Sad. Was there 14 of them or 12. Twelve would've been enough but it was 14, and they were all young.

[ END ]