



From Victim to Survivor

ONE WOMAN'S
BRAVE ACCOUNT





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Celebrating the Women of CUPW

Two years ago, we were asked to put our lives on hold for a few weeks in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Those few weeks have now turned into two years and whether we like it or not, our lives and our work have been shaped by the pandemic.

We all know that women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. We've been pushed out of the workforce to care for children as daycares and schools shut down, we've taken on caregiver roles for sick family members, women make up a large portion of nurses who have been overworked, overburdened and overwhelmed but continue to show up to care for people every single day.

While the pandemic has caused havoc in our lives, women continue to face many other issues.

The Rose has never shied away from discussing tough topics, and this issue is no different. In this year's Rose, you will read about pension precarity between men and women, the fight for our reproductive health and rights, and how the effects of climate change affect women. You'll also read a brave account of one woman's experience of sexual harassment and assault in the workplace and how she fought back against her abuser, as well as a round-table discussion celebrating the 25th anniversary of CUPW's Child Care Fund.

This year, we're also proud to include the Trailblazing Women of CUPW in the Rose. Started in 2020, as a way to honour many Sisters for their dedication and service to advancing women's rights in the Union, the labour movement and beyond, it's now become an annual tradition. In this issue of the Rose, you will read the inspirational stories of seven Sisters from across the country who helped shape the history of our Union.

Lastly, we want to thank everyone for the wonderful comments and feedback we received after publishing our first Rose magazine edition last year. The magazine format allows us to give you more stories, visuals and contributors. A big thank you to all the contributors who made this magazine possible. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we do.

The National Women's Committee

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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The Rose is a newsletter from the CUPW National Women's Committee, sent to all Sisters and those who identify as women of CUPW.

Communication is a two-way street!

We want to hear your stories and concerns – what do you have to say to your CUPW Sisters? You can submit your letters to the editor, opinion pieces, feature ideas and other thoughts to feedback@cupw-sttp.org or to CUPW *The Rose*, 377 Bank Street, Ottawa ON, K2P 1Y3.

CUPW THE ROSE

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LETTERS POLICY

The *Rose* welcomes letters to the editor. We will print letters from a CUPW member provided it:

- is 400 words or less. Union members may submit longer items for consideration as commentary pieces.
- does not violate CUPW policy opposing discrimination and harassment against women, people of colour, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people, lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender individuals, people with different abilities, and/or CUPW policies and principles.

- is typed or written neatly.
- includes the author's name, address, local and a phone number where they can be reached if there are problems.

The *Rose* will withhold the author's name if necessary. Otherwise, the author's name and local will appear.

The *Rose* will contact authors if there are problems with their letters.

We accept letters by mail, fax and electronic mail.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCTION



The Rose is printed on Rolland Enviro Print (70 lb). This paper contains 100% post-consumer fibre, is manufactured using renewable energy - Biogas and processed chlorine free. It is FSC® Ancient Forest Friendly™ certified.



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ATLANTIC REGION *Ruth Larsen*

ATLANTIC REGION: *Nath Larson*
 QUEBEC REGION: *Cathy Verret*

QUEBEC REGION: *Cathy White*
ONTARIO REGION: *Susan Markham*

MONTREAL REGION: *Lise-Lyne G lineau*

TORONTO REGION: *Barbara A.S. Reddick*

PRAIRIE REGION: *Susan Denis*

In 2020, the National Women's committee launched an annual campaign to recognize and show gratitude to some of the trailblazing women whose expression of feminism and trade unionism have made a lasting impact on our union.

Since then, every year, we have showcased a Sister from each region, sharing their experiences and achievements which helped make the Union what it is today. While the next generation of women leaders emerge, they too will face challenges and many of the same barriers we've fought for years. It is only by celebrating our victories against patriarchy and advancing women's rights and gender equity that we have claimed our space over time.

We are proud the present to you the Trailblazing Sisters for 2022!



Ruth Larson

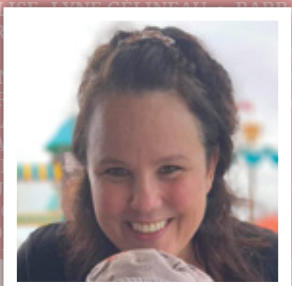
Atlantic Region

Ruth Larson began her career at Canada Post in 1972 as a part-time postal clerk, and retired in 2006. During her 34-year career, Sister Larson paved the way for women to participate in the Union and its committees and activities, and helped create the National Women's Committee.

Long before the National Women's Committee was formed, Ruth was exchanging letters with Sister Marion Pollack in Vancouver, about the need for women to have a bigger voice at CUPW. This was before the days of email and affordable long-distance phone calls, so Sisters Larson and Pollack crafted resolutions about women's issues via letter writing from one coast to another to submit to CUPW's National Convention. They, and other Sisters, had a dream of creating a National Women's Committee, and in 1990, that dream became a reality! Ruth was proudly elected a member of the first ever CUPW National Women's Committee.

Throughout her career, Ruth held numerous positions in the Labrador City-Wabush Local in Newfoundland and Labrador, including Secretary-Treasurer, Vice-President, and President, and she was also a member of the Regional Union Education & Grievance Committee. She was a member of delegations to Brazil, Colombia and Cuba as part of her international solidarity work.

She credits her success in the union to the many Sisters and Brothers who inspired and guided her to become the best activist and person she could be. She has said that she "never walked alone." Sister Ruth spent most of her life advocating for women and social issues within the Union and calls it her "life's calling."



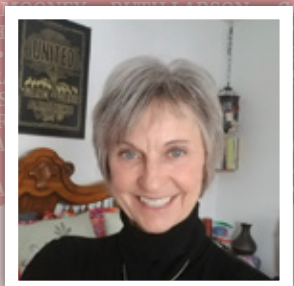
Cathy Verret

Quebec Region

Sister Cathy Verret is a trailblazer in the Quebec region. At the local and regional levels, she is a committed activist for women and is actively involved in their education and participation in the Union, notably through a leadership training program designed by and for women. She has gone beyond her duties during her various union mandates and her involvement in the community.

For several years, Cathy has been managing a sharing and information channel on social media, where women can express themselves in a safe and violence-free space. Her support and encouragement of her sisters have increased women's involvement by giving them a voice, both on the work floor and in the Union. The improvement of the status of women has always been her priority.

Through her example, she inspires us to give our best and never give up or settle for less. In short, to do our best, because we are all unique. Cathy always knows how to make our talents shine so that the strong points that distinguish us are recognized, helping us become strong and fulfilled women, despite the hardships and trials of life.



Sue Markam

Ontario Region

Sue began working at CPC as a temporary letter carrier in 1987 in Ingersoll, Ontario. By 1993, she was working full time for Canada Post. Sue eventually settled in Kingsville in 1997, where she would end her career as a letter carrier in 2018. Over the course of her career, she held the position of Vice-President and President of the Amhersburg Local.

In 1992, she took her first union course through the Ontario Labour College, learning about the Occupational Health and Safety Act. She soon realized that Canada Post managers either had no concept of health and safety, or simply didn't care, and this drove her to become active in the Union. Sue developed a passion for education and teaching, as well as health and safety. Over the years, she facilitated numerous trainings at the local and regional level, and became Master Trainer for the Joint Health and Safety Committee training, which allowed her to provide input in the training material.

She also worked on the Save Canada Post and RSMC organizing campaigns, and sat as an alternate member of the National Women's Committee, assisting with the planning, organizing and creation of women's conferences.

As a single parent of three, she recognized the struggles of parents to find good quality, affordable childcare. In 1995, she helped start the child care project in Windsor, securing money from the collective agreement to arrange a subsidy for child care through the City of Windsor for CUPW members.

Sue made a huge impact on countless lives, is an amazing person, and a great mentor.



Lise-Lyne Gélneau

Montreal Region

Shortly after joining Canada Post in 1978, Lise-Lyne Gélneau got involved in general membership meetings and became a shop steward in 1996. In 1999, she became the first woman elected to the full-time position of 5th Vice-President of the Montreal Local. In 2002, she became the first woman elected to the position of 1st Vice-President.

Over the years, Lise-Lyne quickly became an expert in workers' compensation and a formidable worker advocate in this field. She also excelled in internal staffing matters, achieving enviable results. Lise-Lyne also lent her expertise to the negotiation of the Urban Collective Agreement.

Although she was not re-elected in 2005, she continued to demonstrate her commitment by taking on the role of shop steward.

She was re-elected 1st Vice-President in 2008, a position she held until 2015.

Lise-Lyne never wanted to be in the spotlight, but in order to ensure continuity within the Montreal Local, in 2015 she became its first woman President.

She went on to a well-deserved retirement in 2019, leaving the Local in the hands of the next generation.

Lise-Lyne was an inclusive, outspoken leader with incredible inner strength. She was not afraid of anything or anyone. Her actions were always guided by the sole purpose of serving her Brothers and Sisters and looking after their welfare.



Susan Denis

Prairie Region

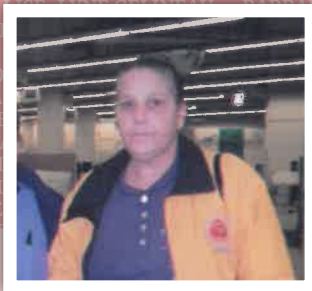
In 1992, Susan Denis was elected National Director for the Prairie Region, becoming the first Sister in CUPW history elected as a National Director, and the second Sister to sit on the National Executive Board.

Prior to becoming National Director, Sister Denis held several positions in the Saskatoon Local, including President. During her time as Local President, she became well known within the Prairie Region and the rest of CUPW. Sister Denis was not only a champion and an advocate of women's issues, she also fought for the respect and dignity of all workers.

When Susan was the Saskatoon Local President, it was a part-time position, which meant that Susan spent half her time working at the Local office and the other half on the workforce. Management at that time attempted to ignore and marginalize women in leadership positions, but Sister Denis would have none of that. She was relentless in forcing management to deal with her, and would do whatever it took to ensure all workers concerns were heard and addressed.

Susan held the position of National Director until 1996. Shortly after, she transferred to Ottawa where she worked until 1999, when she finally settled in Halifax.

Sister Dennis has been retired for several years now. CUPW members who know her will never forget two specific character traits about Susan: 1) her ability to work with others for the benefit of everyone, and 2) her great sense of humour.



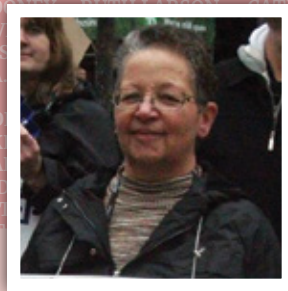
Barbara A.S. Reddick

Toronto Region

Barb started working in the post office in 1973, first as a temporary worker, until 1976 when she became a full-timer in Toronto. In the early 1990s, she was elected to the Toronto Local Executive, where she remained until her retirement in 2010. She also served on various committees as well. She represented our Sisters and Brothers at first level grievance hearings and at consultation, and investigated human rights complaints for not only the Toronto Local but other Locals within CUPW. She was a trained facilitator and taught numerous women's equality classes.

Most importantly, Sister Reddick was an advocate and defender of worker and human rights. Barb supported new Sisters in the Union, becoming a mentor to many of them. Always outspoken, she empowered and encouraged young members to become active in the Union, understanding that they were the future leaders of CUPW. Sister Reddick was a force to be reckoned with!

Sister Barb has since retired, however she continues to be active in her community, helping the elderly and working in a women's shelter – even during COVID-19. She continues to give us the best example of humanity and remains a fighter for the underdog!



Amber Mooney

Pacific Region

Amber Mooney was a long-time President of the Fort St. John Local in British Columbia. As far as we know, she is the first woman of colour elected president of a local in the Pacific region. Amber advocated for small locals in her region and worked to amplify the voice of those members. She organized separate caucus' for small locals to make sure their voices and their concerns were heard during regional conferences and the National Convention. She was also a regional facilitator.

Amber understood that in resource dependent towns, like Fort St. John, postal jobs were mostly jobs for women and she advocated for more women in leadership roles within the Union. Amber has a great smile, laughs easily, and treats everyone with warmth and respect.

FROM VICTIM TO *Survivor*

One woman's brave account of the sexual harassment and assault she endured at Canada Post, what happened to her, how she found the courage to stand up to her abuser and reclaim her life



It started with concern. When Jessica (*name has been changed to protect identity*) injured herself at work, her superintendent said he'd watch her more closely to make sure she was ok. Jessica had no reason to believe that it was anything more than a superior checking-in on a worker. But his concern soon turned into sexual and suggestive comments.

"He asked me if I was being good, and said if I wasn't, he'd have to spank me," says Jessica. The comments continued. The harassment escalated. She says he asked about the colour of her underwear, how much he liked it when she bent over, how he'd like to grab her ponytail. He asked about the kind of men she liked and followed her around the plant. "I was shocked," she adds.

As a mom of three children, two of them pre-school aged, who worked all night at Canada Post and took care of the kids all day while her husband was in school full-time, Jessica says she already had too much on her plate and didn't want to add more by filing a complaint.

"I tried to justify the behaviour," she says. "I told myself it wasn't that bad because he wasn't touching me."

That soon changed.

"One night, he told me I was being bad and needed a spank and he smacked my butt," says Jessica. Too shocked to respond, she looked around for help and realized that no one was around; that no one had seen what he'd done.

"After that, I planned my movements to avoid where he was and tried to make sure we were never alone," she says.

A Problem in Many Workplaces

Jessica's experience is not uncommon. One in four women (25%) and one in six men (17%) reported having personally experienced inappropriate sexualized behaviours in their workplace according to the 2020 Survey on Sexual Misconduct at Work¹. These behaviours include inappropriate verbal or non-verbal communication, sexually explicit materials, and unwanted physical contact or suggested sexual relations.

Women who work in occupations where men historically outnumber them – trades, transportation, equipment operation and related occupations – experienced more instances of inappropriate sexualized behaviour.

The survey also found that people with formal authority in the workplace such as supervisors and bosses were often the perpetrators of inappropriate sexualized behaviours.

Four Years of Hell

Despite her best plans to stay away from him, Jessica's superintendent continued to harass her and, eventually, sexually assault her numerous times over a four-year period. He meticulously planned his abuse, grabbing and touching her when her colleagues were on break, in blind spots where there were no workplace cameras, and in his office. He made sure she knew that he was in control; that she had no power.

That power was evident when his abuse led her to miss out on a career opportunity. She was asked to join the Local Joint Health and Safety Committee but the training was being held out of town at a hotel, and he would be attending. She didn't feel safe attending and turned down the position.

The consequences of the abuse and harassment seeped into all areas of her life, not just the workplace. "I was no longer my bubbly, happy self," she says. "I became paranoid, I couldn't sleep, I would jump out of my skin if my husband touched me unexpectedly, I felt scared and dirty all the time."

Despite the toll it was taking on her life, Jessica couldn't bring herself to confide in anyone. She felt ashamed, scared, and nervous. She also continued to downplay the harassment. "At the time, my sister was very sick, so I rationalized that what was happening to me wasn't so bad; at least I wasn't dying," she says. She also didn't have any physical evidence of the abuse and says she was afraid her word wouldn't be enough.

Anxiety and mistrust related to reporting keep most women from speaking out according to the Sexual Misconduct at Work survey. Nearly half of all women who reported sexual harassment at work chose not to confide in anyone. One in five stated that they feared negative consequences for their careers. Just over one quarter thought no action would be taken, and 12 percent didn't think they would be believed or could prove what had happened.

*"I'm not vulnerable anymore.
I'm stronger than I was"*

Enough is Enough

Jessica thought her nightmare was over when her superintendent was moved to another shift in 2020. No longer having to look over her shoulder or be hyper aware of his whereabouts, Jessica slowly began to feel like her old self. "I could breathe again; I felt like me again," she says.

By 2021, he was back on her shift, and back to harassing her. "It was the same abuse, nothing had changed," she says. But Jessica had changed, and as scared as she was, she confessed to a close friend and co-worker what she had endured. She also told her husband, and with their support, Jessica filed a report and an internal investigation was launched.

The investigation was much harder than she had imagined it would be. Every time she told her story, she was re-traumatized. "I wasn't eating, barely sleeping, having nightmares and flashbacks," she says.

While it was difficult, Jessica is glad she came forward. "It's hard, it's a lot, but it's worth it. I want to make sure that no one else has to go through this."

The investigators believed Jessica and her superintendent was fired. Jessica also filed a police report and the Crown charged him with sexual assault and criminal harassment.



Emilie Tobin is a Communications Specialist who has worked at the CUPW National Office for four years.

You're Not Alone

Once Jessica filed her report, the Union was with her every step of the way. A Union representative sat with her through every interview, helped her file a grievance against the Corporation and get in touch with the Employee and Family Assistance Program, so she could be referred to a counsellor.

In February 2021, she was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and has been off work ever since.

"It takes time to heal," she says. "This affected my whole life in many different ways. The repercussions go beyond the abuse I endured at work."

She wants other victims to know that they are survivors and don't have to go through this alone. She also wants people to know that there are many services for them. "You don't have to lose your income," she says. "There are resources and the disability plan will cover you if it's unsafe to be at work. I had no idea about these things."

She's been overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from her friends, family and Union. "I couldn't have come forward without my friend, and couldn't have gone through this process my amazing support."

Jessica will soon be returning to work. While she's still a bit anxious, she knows she's in a better place than before. "I was vulnerable when he was preying on me," she says. "But I'm not vulnerable anymore, I'm stronger than I was!"

1- <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210812/dq210812b-eng.htm>

25 Years of Research, Action and Creativity

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of the Special Needs Project. While we celebrate that, we want to take the opportunity to remember that it was made possible by the early efforts of postal workers to make child care an issue for their union and Canada Post.

It has also been thirty years since CUPW negotiated a jointly administered Child Care Fund with Canada Post, in 1991. After a few years and endless meetings with Canada Post that were going nowhere, the union won full control of the Child Care Fund's administration in 1995. Not long after that, the Special Needs Project got off the ground.

To celebrate this anniversary we got together for a fireside chat with a number of CUPW women who were key to making child care an issue within the union and putting it on the bargaining agenda with Canada Post. Shellie Bird (Child Care Fund co-ordinator) hosted the chat, and was joined by the following sisters who shared some of the stories behind the bigger story of winning the Child Care Fund:

Marion Pollack [MP], coming to us from Vancouver: I was a member of the CUPW Vancouver local executive and a local activist who pushed women's rights in the union.

Lynn Bue [LB], coming to us from Regina: I was shop steward and then VP of the Edmonton local and I was really involved in the women's movement. I didn't have children, but I would see people get called to the front when they got calls from home and the stress on their faces because they had no child care. And then working in negotiations starting in '87 and watching that development, as child care went from an issue that women were talking about to a union issue.

Cathy Kennedy [CK], coming to us from Winnipeg: In the early stages of all of this I was on the Winnipeg local exec. Like Lynn, I didn't have children. But working in the plant I could see the difficulty parents had when trying to

do shiftwork without suitable child care. Starting in 1994 I got involved in negotiations. And then ultimately the Child Care Fund was my file to work on.

Jeanie Campbell [JC], coming to us from London: I started in the London post office. I was a shop steward and one of the first things that bothered me was that one of our members, one of the women there, had a child with cancer. She needed to take two hours off every week to take her child for treatment, and the employer denied her that. So I told her to take it and we'd grieve it, and it took months to get the grievance settled. Her daughter had died by that time. And I thought, "Things have got to change!" So I became very militant about women's rights and especially parents' rights.

Shellie Bird [SB], coming to us from Ottawa: I started working at CUPW in 2015 to replace Jamie Kass [who sadly was not able to join us on this call because of her mother's passing] when she retired as Child Care Fund coordinator. I've been working to carry on the legacy that started more than 25 years ago and do my part to keep the fund uppermost in members' minds and to build confidence and pride about what CUPW has done in negotiating it.

Huguette LeBlanc [HL]: Coming to us from Moncton: I started my activism as a shop steward in the Moncton local and then later on the executive. And I guess I was like all the other women who had young children and were working shiftwork. Everyone could relate to



the stress that young moms had. So this is how I got involved. And my first strike was the six-week strike for paid maternity leave. That's how it all started.

What are your memories about how child care became an issue for CUPW? Do you have any memories of early negotiations around it?

JC: I started in the '70s and the first convention I was elected to go to had very few women. At the next one there were more. I remember one of the conventions that I attended in the early '80s. There was a discussion with a small group of women in a private room about how we should be pushing for child care. And it wasn't ignored. People spoke to it. But really nothing went on the table until 1984, I think.

HL: I think the union got to the point where they *had* to talk about it because there were more and more of us women. The union was already there with its policies, but the percentage of women started to be higher... more of us got hired, and more of us were talking about the problems, and everyone could relate. And even the brothers could relate, but it wasn't really their problem at that time. The women were responsible for the children back then.

MP: I'm a bit more cynical than Huguette and Jeanie [everyone laughs]. I was part of this meeting in '80 or '83 that a group of us organized on women's issues at national convention because there were no women's caucuses then. And one of the issues was child care. My sense is that the Child Care Fund came out of women in the union organizing. And it came from the union's national leadership seeing the success of the fight for maternity leave—I think that really impelled them to go further on child care. But I also think that in some ways some of the national leadership were scared about the growing power of feminists in the union. And so they looked at child care and women's issues as a way of trying to deal with our power and contain us. I also want to be clear that it was mostly white women who were doing this. While we had a lot of women of colour on the workforce in the Pacific Processing Centre, we didn't involve a lot of women of colour, and that's something I think we need to acknowledge.

CK: I think we can't underestimate the importance of Huguette and Deborah Bourque getting on the national executive committee. The brothers had to listen then because you had a lot of backing behind you. I think that's when they *really* started listening.

HL: I only went to the executive in 1992. From '88 to '92 I was a national union rep. At the time there were a lot of

militant women. It felt like what we said carried a lot of weight. Jeanie and Lynn and Deborah were there, and then you had all the specialists and all the researchers around the national office. Women's voices mattered. Remember? And as women gained more experience and more reassurance, they were speaking out more. When Jeanie first moved to the Atlantic region and went to Cape Breton, we'd go hear her and she was such a good speaker! Women went away from those educationals and conferences and felt like we wanted to turn our locals upside down—and we felt that we *could*.

MP: The union also started paying for child care for people going to those educationals. I think it was you who did that Huguette. And I think it helped so many women be able to go. It was critical.

LB: The first negotiations I was at, in 1989, there were 165 demands. And if you broke them down there were over 200. You could easily slide some things in. Things that the people who were going to get annoyed at them would hardly notice. And they would slide by some of the men! And we really had no sense of how much money that kind of a demand would cost. As we learned when we started costing things out, the only way to do this was a national child care program. But it was the beginning of the push.

CK: I think more locals submitting demands for child care helped spread the idea. You've got to remember the process CUPW had for negotiations. There would be a discussion paper that would come out from the board with ideas about what we need. And then there would be a push from some of the locals, the ones that had really active sisters, demanding a Child Care Fund. That would get into the discussion paper sent out to *all* the locals, and then the area councils would discuss these things.

The 1994 round of bargaining was when CUPW negotiated full control of the child care fund's administration. What are your memories around that?

HL: I think that when the employer first negotiated the joint Child Care Fund, for them it was something where they could say, "Look at us. We're a really good employer." But we had I don't know how many meetings about it, and nothing ever happened. And so it became the union's objective to gain control of the fund. I always thought hiring Jamie Kass was what did it for us. She carried the vision of the Child Care Fund, and where we should go, and talking to all the women out there—the researchers, the ones in the child care advocacy organizations. I think this is when it became

what it is today. I really believe that. We had a vision. And all these ideas. And we had this whole collective of women across the country. It was just amazing.

CK: I can't tell you exactly how the issue came to the table in '94, but that Collective Agreement, the '95 one, was negotiated before the expiry of the previous one. It was the only time CUPW had ever done that. And Canada Post was very eager to do that, so it was relatively easy for them to say "okay."

LB: That 1994 round of negotiations, I remember someone saying to me, "This is the first time you've ever seen *real* negotiations." Huguette and Jamie came in and blew them away. We had all the information about what *didn't* work. And Canada Post wanted a collective agreement. And in the end, that collective agreement had about the worst wage increase we ever had, and still the highest member approval! And that's because we got more vacation—do you remember? People were so happy.

MP: I agree about Jamie. But, also, Huguette was very fiery. She would go in and scare them! In a very good way—I don't mean that in a negative way. It helped.

CK: Huguette was scary! She was a tiny woman with dark, dark curly hair. And when she walked she floated. She was very intimidating. But I think that sent a good message to the employer that the union was serious. That's what they needed to know. And Jamie! Every round of negotiations we had her come and make a presentation. And every time Canada Post just ate up what she said. They were very proud of the fund. And so we just can't underestimate the power she also had, with the employer. It was my file and I had it easy: I just had to say, "And here's Jamie!"

As you know, this year is the 25th anniversary of the Special Needs Project. What are your memories around that project's inception?

LB: There was a lot of tension sometimes about where the child care programs were going to go in, but it helped that every local across the country has access to the Special Needs Project.

And the Special Needs Project meant that parents started talking about what it was like for them *in* the workplace. Most of the time we never even knew that someone beside us had these additional challenges. That was so important. There's just so much pride about this project. People are passionate about it. We would always highlight it at educationals.

MP: From people I've talked to, the Special Needs Project made them feel like they weren't alone. To me, if that's what the union can do, make somebody feel less isolated, then I think we've accomplished a huge goal. We also can't underestimate how the Special Needs Project activated a lot of people in the union. I remember Gwen Holmes, specifically. She had two children with special needs, and she couldn't be active in the union before, but the project motivated her to become active.

CK: Parents who have children with special needs need a lot of time off. We have something in the collective agreement called "special leave," where if there are circumstances beyond your control you can ask for time off. And people who needed this kind of time off were increasingly being denied special leave. And they were having problems. The union was struggling with how to get it for members and to understand why these members needed it more than most others. Having those discussions that Lynn mentioned really helped at the locals. But I think it was those videos we put out that *really* touched the hearts of the members.

JC: And still a lot of members are not aware of the Special Needs Project. I'd like more members to know about it, because I know that a lot of parents haven't made any use of it because they aren't aware of it. It's a wonderful program and it should be common knowledge that they're entitled to it.

MP: I really want to thank the four women on the call. Cathy, Huguette, Lynn and Jeanie were all involved in negotiations. I think people like me were behind you, but I don't think we could have done it without you. I think we all owe a debt of thanks to you. This conversation has reminded me that we may have had political disagreements but we're all sisters and we've all fought the struggle together.

CK: We had back-up. That was important. And it was wonderful seeing you all again. It's been so long.

JC: This whole conversation has been wonderful. We don't sound like militant women but we were in our days and we did it! I remember being on negotiations, way back when. We were sitting in the car coming back from a round of negotiations and Geoff Bickerton put on Billy Bragg singing The International, and we were all singing along. There was this writer following us and she asked, "Why aren't you people writing your history?" And I said, "Because we're too busy making it." And we *have* made it. And we should be proud of that. I'm very proud.



Women and Climate Change: Post-COP26

Women are disproportionately impacted by climate change in Global South



“Gender and climate are profoundly intertwined,” announced Alok Sharma, COP26 President, during COP26 Women’s Day¹. We are well aware that the climate crisis is beyond urgent, and that the effects of the crisis are being felt disproportionately by women and girls in the Global South. A staggering statistic reveals that women and girls account for 80 percent of people displaced by climate disasters.² What is worse, the WeWorld Index 2021 report showed that, since 2015, living conditions of women have in fact worsened around the world, which cannot all be blamed on the global pandemic.³

Climate related disasters and extreme weather events are “followed by periods of economic hardship, conflict for resource management and migrations.”⁴ Unfortunately, it is also well known that these effects are mostly experienced in the Global South even though the top six emitters of greenhouse gasses are high-income countries in the Global North.⁵

Sixty (60) percent of working women in Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia work in agriculture, which is highly climate-sensitive. Significant changes in weather patterns creating increased rainfall or drought make it difficult for women to support their families. When there is major flooding or drought women can be forced into harmful environmental practices for the sake of survival like burning wood to make charcoal.⁶

The 2021 WeWorld Index report recorded an eye opening statistic: “97% of migrants fleeing from floods in Bangladesh over the past 10 years were men, while women and children stayed in their homeland trying to

cultivate the land and make a living.”⁷ After an extreme climate disaster, it is often men who become migrant workers and send money home to their families. It is usually the women who are left at home to care for children and family members, and they are far less likely to have an opportunity to move when their home environment becomes inhospitable.

The COP26 Call

The science says we are still not where we need to be and that we are still not doing enough. There needs to be more urgency, more action, and more ambition attributed to climate pledges. As it stands, current pledges and National Determined Contributions (NDC) are not enough as “the world will only be shaving 8 percent off emissions by the end of the decade...[and] the pledges are generally vague [and] untransparent.”⁸

In preparation for COP26, an urgent call was made to prioritize women in climate emergency responses.⁹ This is especially important as gender inequalities worsened during the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For any true long-term gender and climate achievements to be made, meaningful and equal participation and leadership is required at the national and local levels, which includes active climate engagement with youth and Indigenous peoples. At this point, if we want to see a strengthened role of women as agents of change, there needs to be more effort put into integrating gender into our national climate change policies and action.¹⁰ Ultimately, the Women’s Day COP26 call is about climate justice.

Canada's COP26 Women's Day Commitments

The commitments made at COP26 were built on many past pledges and initiatives. At COP23, Canada adopted the two-year Gender Action Plan (GAP) with the goal to advance “gender-responsive climate policy and action, and for equal representation at the global climate meetings.”¹¹ The GAP was praised because it outlined many activities countries could choose to enhance existing gender mandates. While being a step in the right direction, it fell short because it did not offer any indicators of ‘success’ or outlined clear financial commitments.

In order to build momentum from COP23, a strengthened five-year Gender Action Plan was adopted at COP25. The new GAP acknowledged that there needs to be more done for gender mainstreaming at all climate events, especially at COP, which would help to “contribute to increasing effectiveness, fairness and sustainability of climate policy and action.”¹²

The COP26 Women's Day commitments will help to build momentum around gender action, strengthen the resiliency of women and girls against climate impacts, and empower women and girls within climate action. The commitments contribute to the existing pledges of

over USD 139 million made at the Generation Equity Forum in Paris in July towards the UN Women-convened Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice.¹³ The pledges and commitments will also continue to strengthen and build on the GAP.

The Canadian government announced its pledge to “ensure that 80% of its \$5.3 billion climate investments over the next five years target gender equality outcomes.”¹⁴ This will allow the continued support for women's leadership and decision-making in climate action. Canada is also pursuing investments that will link environment and socio-economic data, including gender, through a Census of the Environment; leading the Equal by 30 campaign to advance gender equality in clean energy; and has signed to the multi-stakeholder Gender and Energy Compact.

In response to the COP26 Women's Day recommendations and calls to action, Asa Regner, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, spoke about how women and girls are already part of the climate crisis solution and that they are creating the necessary and critical shifts in climate conversations. She also talked about how, while gender commitments made at COP26 are moving us in the right direction, this can't be it. The urgent focus now needs to be a change in reality.¹⁵



Photo by Debbie Molle Unsplash

Putting commitments to reality

While climate change was at the forefront of the last Canadian federal election, and climate change is also a top priority for Canadians, we still have not seen these concerns matched through concrete political priorities. In fact, the Canadian government continues to subsidize the fossil fuel industry despite 2050 emissions reductions goals.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Canada has yet to reach any of its set climate targets and since signing the Paris Agreement in 2015; Canada has actually increased its overall emissions – the only G7 country to do so. To make matters worse, Canada has restated its commitments to supporting Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous climate action, but the NDC fails to provide a plan to ensure this commitment.

These shortcomings have foreshadowed some negative post-COP26 opinions that this COP cannot be called a success. As written by Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, “where Canada could have shown real leadership – in supporting the developing countries that are least responsible for climate change yet most affected by its consequences, for example, or championing a global oil and gas phaseout – Canada instead settled for the status quo.”¹⁷

The commitments coming out of COP26 are worrisome when we think about women and climate change in the Global South as many campaigners believe that COP26 commitments on these issues are hollow because of unequal representation. While women and girls are among the most impacted by the climate crisis, it is unjust that they are not fully represented in places like COP. Representation virtually cannot be a guaranteed solution when people in the poorest countries struggle to have sufficient internet connection. An important example is Sierra Leon, where only two percent of its people were represented at the COP despite being disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis. Global leaders, like Canada, need to do more than talk about the role of women in combating the climate crisis.

The Global North must live up to obligations to the Global South to adapt to climate change. As the former Irish President, Mary Robinson, said, “Climate change is a manmade problem, that requires a feminist solution.”¹⁸

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Endnotes

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Do Not Be A Silent Witness

No one is ever ready to deal with violence, despite the fact that we all face it at some point, either as victims or as witnesses.

Violence is not limited to what is visible. In addition to physical violence, violence can be psychological, verbal, economic or sexual. Perceptible or not, it leaves a lasting impact on those who suffer or observe it.

The only way to stop violence is to speak out

We should not think that speaking out against violence is only the victim's responsibility. In fact, we all share this responsibility. Violence concerns us all, and we must be prepared to do our part to protect as many potential victims as possible. Violence rarely begins with a physical assault. It manifests itself in hurtful words, threats, intimidation, or ways to isolate victims. It is during these different manifestations that witnesses must intervene and voice their discomfort, indicating to the aggressors that they refuse to put up with this behaviour.



Looking the other way is not an option

Many witnesses are reluctant to intervene, thinking that violent events are private matters and that an intervention could be perceived badly. Perceived badly by whom? Turning a blind eye to a violent situation is to support the aggressor. By intervening, you are supporting the victim. So which side will you choose? Looking the other way should not be an option. And if you feel you do not have the tools to intervene, contact the appropriate agencies.

Every action counts

Make a difference. Do not be a silent witness.

Nancy Beauchamp has worked for Canada Post for almost 27 years and is a member of the Rural and Suburban Mail Carriers bargaining unit. She has been active in the Union since 2002, and was elected National Director for the Metro-Montreal region in 2019.



Our Bodies, Our Choice



Sarah Weddington, the lawyer who successfully argued the landmark abortion rights case *Roe v. Wade* in the United States when she was 26-years-old, died on December 26, 2021. She was 76. Her death comes soon after the Supreme Court of the United States heard arguments regarding two laws which severely limit abortions in the State of Texas and Mississippi.

In early December, Supreme Court Justices heard arguments on whether to uphold Mississippi's decision to completely ban abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy, and in mid-December, the High Court refused to block the implementation of a new Texas law which bans abortions after six weeks, even for cases of rape or incest. The Texas law has a unique enforcement mechanism that gives state officials no role. Rather, it leaves enforcement to the general public, by authorizing civil suits against not just anyone who performs an abortion, but also anyone who "aids and abets" an abortion, which could include those who drive patients to an abortion clinic or counsel them. Those who sue and win would be guaranteed damages of at least \$10,000. Opponents of the law call that a "bounty" to encourage people to sue their neighbors.

Will *Roe v. Wade* Be Overturned?

The anti-choice movement in the U.S., also known as pro-life, sense that victory is near now that the balance of power in the Supreme Court tips conservative and Republican-appointed. We've already seen State Legislatures limit abortion access, and in 10 Republican-led states, federal funds meant to aid the neediest families have been diverted to anti-abortion clinics.¹ While many so-called progressive Western countries are increasingly limiting abortion access, and trying to criminalize abortion, many global south countries, who historically oppose abortion, are working towards

improved access to abortion, as Argentina and Mexico recently de-criminalized abortion.

As access to abortion dwindles, a grassroots movement of pro-choice and women's organizations have taken to the streets in protest. In October 2021, over 650 marches in the U.S. were organized by women's liberation groups, and hundreds of thousands of protestors participated.

What's Happening in Canada

In Canada, while legal rights to abortion remain intact, there are many parts of the country with limited access to abortion. In fact, there is very limited access to abortion clinics outside of British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, and access is almost non-existent in rural, remote and Indigenous communities. Women living in these communities must travel out of town or even out of province, using their own funds to access safe abortions. Women in New Brunswick face another dilemma; they live in the only province that does not fund surgical abortions performed outside of hospitals.

The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC) is the only nation-wide political pro-choice group in Canada devoted to abortion rights and access. They have researched and gone over the platforms and positions of the major political parties on the question of access and legal right to abortion. Some of what they have discovered is concerning. Since 1987, 47 private member's bills to limit or eliminate abortions have been introduced.

Federal private members bills have included:

- Re-criminalize abortion totally, or at least by gestational limits;
- Giving rights to fetuses injured or killed during crimes against pregnant people;
- Restricting abortion for genetic reasons;
- Giving legal “personhood” to fetuses by changing the criminal code definition to ‘human being’ and;
- Restricting in vitro fertilizations using embryos.

Provincial private members bills have included:

- Giving full immunity to health care workers who, based on their personal or religious beliefs or conscience, deny care to patients or refuse to refer them;
- Pass parental consent laws for abortion;
- Blocking or repealing safe access zone laws and;
- Defunding abortion and delist as a medically required service

In addition to these private members bills, 81 percent of Members of Parliament representing the Conservative Party of Canada, are listed as anti-choice. While anti-abortion private members bills have never passed, they will continue to threaten legal rights to abortion in Canada and cannot be taken lightly.

The Past Struggle

On April 27, 1970, an abortion caravan – a Volkswagen van with a coffin on top representing the historic number of women who had lost their lives trying to access illegal abortions in Canada – led by a group of 17 women, left Vancouver and headed for Ottawa. Their very public, cross country campaign was in protest of then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s, Liberal Government, which had decriminalized contraception and allowed abortion only under certain circumstances. Abortions could only be performed in a hospital if a committee of doctors decided that continuing the pregnancy may endanger the mother’s life or health.

The caravan was met by hundreds of supporters. They arrived in Ottawa on Mothers Day, invaded Parliament Hill and shut down the House of Commons when 35 protestors chained themselves to chairs in the Gallery. It took another 18 years to change abortion laws, but the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects legalized abortion in Canada and prevents any changes that may contravene it.

1 - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/04/states-divert-federal-welfare-funding-anti-abortion-clinics>

2 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_Caravan

The Ongoing Struggle

In 2020, Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, created an initiative to continue the fight for equal access to abortions in Canada for all women in remembrance of *The Abortion Caravan’s* fiftieth anniversary. Through this project, Action Canada drew attention to numerous perspectives regarding abortion access in Canada.²

These perspectives include:

- Decolonize abortion care: reproductive justice for Indigenous communities.
- Expanding abortion care training and provision.
- New Brunswick must fully fund abortion: #SaveClinic554.
- International solidarity and abortion access.
- Abortion care includes trans and gender non-binary people.
- Comprehensive sex education and abortion care for youth.
- Countering opponents and destigmatizing abortion in Canada.

CUPW’s National Constitution (D-8 Abortion) supports the on-going work of it’s allies to protect legalized abortion rights and will continue to fight for better access globally and at home. It’s impossible not to be discouraged and enraged with what’s happening to abortion rights in the U.S., at home and around the world. Almost 50 years after Sarah Weddington fought to legalize abortion in the United States, it feels like we’re back at square one. The only way out is for us to organize, lobby, elect leaders who support access to abortion and maternal health care, and fight for our rights, just like Sarah did.



Julee Sanderson is a postal worker from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who has long been involved in the broader social justice movement. She was elected 1st National Vice-President of CUPW in 2019.

Retiring with Dignity

True pay equity includes pension equity

After we've given our time and bodies to our workplaces, all any of us want is to be able to retire with dignity, knowing that our pensions will help us transition to life without work. Unfortunately, most women receive less income than their male counterparts in retirement. Retired Indigenous, Black and racialized women face an even bigger income gap. This pension pay gap exists for many reasons, including getting paid less to do the same work as men, more women working part-time, and women leaving the workforce to have children.

Public pensions are important, but workplace pensions are crucial in keeping seniors out of poverty. However, less than 40 percent of workers have workplace pensions, and even fewer have Defined Benefit Pensions – the most secure type of pension.

All regular Canada Post workers in both the Urban and RSMC bargaining units have Defined Benefit Pensions. These are our deferred wages and they provide a dignified retirement. While the Corporation has tried to change our pensions, CUPW has fought long and hard to maintain our Defined Benefit Pensions, and we will continue to do so.

Prior to 1976, women postal workers paid less into the pension plan than their male counterparts. The reason: there were no survivor benefits attached to women postal worker pensions because their work was viewed as pin money, a small allowance to spend on inessential items.



In 2004, CUPW made several gains which enhanced our pension plan and helped women workers. The first was that all the hours worked (up to eight hours) for part-time Urban Operations workers became pensionable. Since historically women made up the bulk of the part-time workers, this improved the pensions of many Sisters. The second was that RSMCs became part of the pension plan. The RSMC bargaining unit is made up of about 70 percent women, and their inclusion insured that these workers would receive at least a small Canada Post Pension when they retired. The RSMC pay equity award also greatly improved RSMC pensions. Since our Canada Post Defined Benefit pension plan is based in part on your best five consecutive years of earnings, the wage increase, and increased monetary values given to RSMC work, means that more will retire with better pensions.

Still, many women postal workers will receive less Canada Post pension money in retirement than their male co-workers. If we want to improve the lives of retired women, and if we want to ensure that future seniors do not live in poverty, we need to continue to protect and enhance the Canada Post Defined Benefit Pension Plan.

Marion Pollack is a retired postal who was a member of the Vancouver local. She, along with other sisters, created the first Vancouver Women's Committee. In retirement, she continues to stand up for women's right in and outside of the Union.



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