

The beginning of a conversation between **Debra Barrett** of Kaslo and **Marcia Braundy** of Vallican, sparked by the news articles announcing kootenayfeminism.com :

March 21, 2010
Hello Marcia,

Thank you for assembling an important documentation of Feminism in the Kootenays. I am attaching a letter with further thoughts about the Kaslo Women's Group.

Debra Barrett

Dear Marcia,

I have met you before at NDP events, but will introduce myself again. My name is Debra Barrett and I was the person who wrote all those minutes by hand for the Kaslo Women's Group. I was pleased to see the article announcing your Women's Feminism in the Kootenays project and this morning I finally had a time to sit and look it up. I must say it is impressive in scope and I am happy to see what is recorded. Aside: I wish I had typed up those minutes! Such was the nature of life at that time...

I feel a need to validate and give an overview of what was done by our group in Kaslo, since very few of the women involved are still in the community. Though our group was relatively community-centred and short-lived compared to the Nelson group, we benefitted a great deal from what went on. A lot of bonding and community cohesion was started in our meetings. At the time we considered ourselves a consciousness-raising group and we had a lot of long and intense discussions. I was in the few years before birthing my son and I took in a lot of women wisdom about rolling with the ups and downs of childrearing, by people who were in the middle of it and trying to survive. We covered all the social issues of the time, reproductive health, violence in the home, rape and self-defense, childcare, work conditions and equity, and the evolutions of relationships.

Kaslo now is a very strong co-operative community and because of our relative distance from larger centres, this has served us well. The women of Kaslo particularly have a strong network of support for each other, that has been in place for decades.

What I find ironic concerns one of the outcomes of our original group actions. In 1982 we birthed a childcare centre out of our natural need to attend to other factors in life. Over the years it went through a number of evolutions, but the common factor was the site, the current Periwinkle Children's Centre near the lake and playground- a gorgeous spot. I went happily on my way through other stages of life and childcare existed mostly on a shoestring.

I have been very involved for several years in trying to meet community needs for a full day licensed childcare centre, from half-day preschool. Early childhood has become one of my 'causes' in life. This is why it took me so long to check out your project. Childcare seems still to be a subject under unacknowledged paternal attitudes which I won't go into further here. The centre is still mostly maintained by a succession of parents (mostly women) and the site is too small, and not equipped to work with today's practical needs. Obtaining funding to make things right has been a major effort, though we are getting closer. So there is a full circle in there somewhere.

I guess you can see I am deeply rooted here and the way we do things nourishes my soul.

Sincerely,
Debra Barrett

22 March 2010

Dear Debra,
How wonderful to meet you in virtual reality this way. Thanks for much for your reflections on the Kaslo group. May I OCR and publish them on the site?

How perfect to be thinking about full circles regarding child care...it has certainly been an unsung and long term struggle across Canada, and it would be great to see some effective resolution.

How about sending your letter into the Nelson Daily News? Just a thought. But please let me know if its ok to put it on the site.

Regards,
Marcia

Marcia,

Certainly you can put it on the website, that is what I had in mind when I wrote it.

About further publicity (Nelson Daily News) , I am going to look carefully at the timing of that because we are on the verge...

23 March 2010

Thanks Debra,
and it sounds like you are using your wonderful political acumen that was so prevalent in the minutes. Hopefully, I will get the rest of them through ocr soon. Several people have typed them in for us, and now we have to insert them on the proper pages of the

minutes. Its a big job.

Think you might want to write a piece reflecting on the demise of the Kaslo group? Pressures? from where? burn-out? who stayed? who moved away? etc, how it went, after such strength.

When I talked about that group at a Selkirk History class last week, I spoke about my vision of the 4 branches of Kootenay Feminism, and how each group manifested at least one of the branches: Status of women, in response to legal and social issues raised in the Royal Commission reports, which led to briefs, lobbying, letters, etc (Trail); the social support women needed as a result of the lives they were living due to the issues raised in the Royal Commission: divorce, violence, property, welfare, women's health, lack of child care, etc (Nelson Women's Centre); consciousness raising regarding reflecting on our lives, relationships, children, work, etc, women in literature groups, women's reader's theatre, etc (lower and upper Slocan Valley); and those of us who felt strongly the need to communicate about those issues to the larger world: (the IMAGES - Kootenay Women's Paper collective). And then I said, "and Kaslo tried to do all those things, each week of the month focusing in another aspect of that spectrum." Was that a factor in its demise?

in sisterhood,
Marcia

From Debra:
26 March 2010

Marcia,
I had a bit of time to write some more thoughts on the Women's Group in Kaslo; am attaching it.

Another person who was around when we were trying to keep the Kaslo Group going was Holley Rubinsky, and she would probably have some interesting comments on this subject. (Email copy sent to Holley)
Debra

Debra Barrett in conversation with Marcia Braundy, 26 March 2010:

It seems very relevant to be reflecting on the passing of time regarding local feminist activities. I just read that the World Economic Gender gap ratings put Canada at 25th last year, a big drop from 2004 at 4th.

Politics does indeed have a lot to do with the support of equalities all around. We just heard of the cutting of Success by Six, so it will be 'dead' by 2011. And then we are getting communities given government funding for studying how we are accommodating ageing comfortably. I can guess why. Seniors vote, children don't.

Our Kaslo group had a more diffuse and undefined purpose motivating it, and as you guessed, we touched on all four of the major areas you mentioned.

We were very much about social support for each other, one of the four 'streams' you mention. After I first wrote you, I had a memory of one of our defining activities. After each meeting, Wednesday nights, I believe, we marched en masse into the local pub (which still had the two entrances, but the old "ladies with escorts" sign was gone) and enjoyed some camaraderie which was amplified by the effect that we made on the population already sitting at the bar. We could feel the barriers falling because of our actions. I think there was a temporary sense of empowerment that we had done the work for liberation of women and were on the way upward and outward. That feeling or point of view, I think was premature, and I can state it proved to be a lot more struggle, personally and collectively. The concepts of equality set in strongly for me, but enlightening those around me took a lot of time. Some of the other women active then may have gone off with this energy we created and encountered their own difficulties. Consciousness-raising was only the first step to actualizing better lives.

I don't think we were so much involved with the status of women in a larger sense, nor communicating what was happening to us to a broader audience. Because of our relative geographic isolation in our concerns mostly stayed in the community. Later we did things like challenge the Village Council in court for an outrageous increase in lease payments after completely renovating the building that housed the daycare. The way I remember the ensuing years was that we mostly worked to establish careers that paid the bills, and used each other for moral support. One trend that provided some empowerment in my circle of friends was that working single mothers began to purchase their own homes.

In the latter years of the Kaslo group we moved to the third story in the Langham and a few steadfast members tried to keep it going, but turnout dropped drastically. I wish I could say what factors caused this, but its not clear to me even now.

26 March 2010

Dear Debra and Holley,

I sincerely hope that Holley will add her thoughts to this discussion, and indicate whether we may publish them as part of this current day conversation on such an important and unique time in our pasts. In several of the categories on the website, we have current reflections on past participations, and more coming. (Isn't it amazing that we can send these messages back and forth with such immediacy?!)

With honour for our work,
Marcia