

Speech by Marcia Braumay
Sat. Aug. 7/99 to open 25th ♀'s Festival

AS THE PERSON WHO ORGANIZED THE FIRST WOMEN'S FESTIVAL IN 1974 AT PASS CREEK PARK, AND LED THE ORGANIZATION OF THE WESTERN CANADIAN WOMEN'S FESTIVAL WHICH TOOK PLACE IN KASLO, IN 1975, DURING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S YEAR, THIS YEAR'S COMMITTEE HAS ASKED ME TO WELCOME YOU. ALSO, AS A CONTINUING MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF THE RURAL ALTERNATIVES RESEARCH AND TRAINING SOCIETY (RARTS), WHO BUILD, OWN AND OPERATE THE VALLICAN WHOLE COMMUNITY CENTRE, I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO WELCOME THE WEST KOOTENAY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION TO THE SITE, AND THANK THEM FOR ALL THE WONDERFUL ENERGY THEY PUT INTO THE BUILDING AND LANDS HERE EACH SUMMER AS WE READY IT FOR THE FESTIVAL.

THE PASS CREEK WOMEN'S FESTIVAL WAS SPONSORED BY THE KOOTENAY WOMEN'S COUNCIL, REPRESENTING TRAIL STATUS OF WOMEN, THE SLOCAN VALLEY WOMEN'S CONSCIOUSNESS RAISING GROUP AND WOMEN'S READERS GROUP, THE NELSON WOMEN'S CENTRE AND THE CASTLEGAR STATUS OF WOMEN' GROUP. IT ATTENDED BY BOTH WOMEN AND MEN, BASED ON THE CONCEPT THAT SO MANY OF THE STAGE PERFORMANCES WE WERE SEEING HAD ONLY MEN ON THE STAGE, OR IN LEADING ROLES AS MUSIC MAKERS, EVEN THOUGH WE KNEW THAT WOMEN PLAYED WITH THEM WHEN THEY WERE PLAYING IN THE KITCHENS OF THE COMMUNITY. AFTER ORGANIZING BENEFITS FOR THE BUILDING OF THE VALLICAN WHOLE, AND SEEING EVENTS LIKE MULTIFUSION TAKE PLACE IN NELSON, IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT WE NEEDED A PERFORMANCE SPACE WHERE WOMEN BECAME COMFORTABLE ON THE STAGE, SHARING THEIR MUSIC AND THEATRE IN PUBLIC PLACES. THUS, MEN AND WOMEN WERE WELCOME, BUT ONLY WOMEN WERE PERFORMERS AND CRAFTSPEOPLE PRESENTING THEIR MATERIAL.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR AT KASLO, THE KOOTENAY WOMEN'S COUNCIL FORMED A LARGER ORGANIZING COMMITTEE AND DECIDED TO DESIGNATE ONE DAY AS WOMEN ONLY, AND ONE DAY WHERE ^{men were} WELCOME TO JOIN IN THE FESTIVITIES AS LISTENERS. THAT WAS THE YEAR THE RITA MCNEILL CAME AND SANG, ACAPPELLA, THE BEAUTIFUL FEMINIST SONGS SHE HAD WRITTEN. WE WERE ALL QUITE SURPRISED AT THE QUALITY OF THE EXPERIENCE ON THE WOMEN-ONLY DAY, AND HOW MUCH WAS CHANGED WHEN WE WERE JOINED BY THE MEN.

THIS WAS THE FIRST YEAR THAT WE BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE SOME OF THE DIFFICULT ISSUES OF LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT. RATHER THAN ALLOW FEARS TO DIVIDE US AND DISMANTLE THE ONGOING WORK WE WERE DOING TOGETHER, WE BROUGHT A GROUP OF WOMEN FROM THE LOWER MAINLAND ~~TO~~ PILOT THE WORKSHOPS THEY WERE DEVELOPING AROUND THESE ISSUES. YVETTE MIMIUEX, YVONNE JOHNSON AND NYM HUGHES BROUGHT US "STEPPING OUT OF LINE" THAT YEAR, HELPING US TO BUILD BRIDGES OVER OUR FEARS, AND LEARN THAT WHEN WE RUN FROM WORDS AND ALLOW OUR SISTERS TO BE Demeaned BY THEM AND ISOLATE OURSELVES FROM SOLIDARITY WITH THEM, WE ENABLE THOSE WORDS TO BEGET VIOLENCE. BUT WHEN WE STAND TOGETHER, AS SISTERS, WITH RESPECT AND APPRECIATION FOR WHAT WE ALL BRING TO THE WORK AND PLAY TO BE DONE, WE BECOME A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE AND RECOGNITION THAT IN DIVERSITY THERE IS STRENGTH.

IN THE YEAR, 1976, RATHER THAN A "WOMEN'S FESTIVAL", IMAGES, THE OLDEST RURAL WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER IN CANADA, PUBLISHED OUT OF THE WEST KOOTENAYS, NEEDED A FUNDRAISER, SO WE HAD ^{ON} SOME DONATED LAND IN PROCTOR. IT WAS HERE THAT WE SANG OUR FIRST MEDLEY OF SEXIST SONGS...OH WOULD THAT WE HAD TAPED IT. BOTH WOMEN AND MEN WERE IN ATTENDANCE.

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF HAVING BOTH WOMEN'S FESTIVALS AND IMAGES FUNDRAISERS, MOST OF WHICH BECAME WOMEN-ONLY, WITH STRONG CONTINGENTS OF BOTH LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT WOMEN, WE MOVED THE SETTING HERE, TO THE VALLICAN WHOLE, WHERE MANY WOMEN HAD WIELDED TOOLS TO BUILD THIS BUILDING. WE HAVE ADDED WORKSHOPS AND DRUMMING SESSIONS, WICCAN UNDERSTANDING, AND SMALL P POLITICAL DIALOGUE ABOUT THE WAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES. THE WEST KOOTENAY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, THE GROUP THE RUNS THE NELSON WOMEN'S CENTRE, HAS TAKEN OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT AND USES IT AS A FUNDRAISER. IT IS THE ONLY MONEY THE ASSOCIATION RECEIVES THAT IS NOT EARMARKED TO VERY SPECIFIC PROJECTS, TYPE OF WORK. IN OTHER WORDS, IT IS THE MONEY THE ASSOCIATION CAN USE FOR MORE POLITICAL WORK. WE URGE YOU TO DONATE GENEROUSLY TO THE WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION, AND TO STOP ANY MEMBER OF THE COORDINATING COLLECTIVE AND ASK THEM TO TALK ABOUT THE WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION.

DURING ALL OF THIS TIME, WE HAVE CONTINUED TO HAVE WORKSHOPS DEALING WITH DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF OVERCOMING FEARS ON BOTH SIDES OF LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT WOMEN WORKING TOGETHER. DUE TO SO MANY EFFORTS GOING IN OTHER DIRECTIONS, THIS IS THE FIRST YEAR WHEN WE HAVE NOT HAD A SCHEDULED WORKSHOP FOR WOMEN TO ATTEND TO TRY TO UNDERSTAND AND ENGAGE WITH THESE ISSUES. WE HOPE THAT IF ANYONE HAS ANY CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS, THEY WILL FEEL COMFORTABLE TO TALK WITH OTHERS AT THE FESTIVAL, OR BRING THEM TO ANY MEMBER OF THIS YEAR'S ORGANIZING COMMITTEE AND WE WILL TRY TO WORK THEM THROUGH WITH YOU.

THERE HAVE BEEN RUMOURS THAT THIS WOULD BE THE LAST WEST KOOTENAY WOMEN'S FESTIVAL. THERE HAVE BEEN RUMOURS TO THE EFFECT BEFORE, AND EACH TIME, FROM SOMEWHERE, THE ENERGY CAME TOGETHER TO MAKE IT HAPPEN, EITHER THIS YEAR OR THE NEXT. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT NEXT YEAR WILL BRING. THE FESTIVAL TAKES AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF ENERGY, THOUGH WE HAVE ALL HAD A WONDERFUL TIME WORKING TOGETHER TO BRING YOU THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL. INSTEAD OF A LONG EVALUATION FORM, WE ARE ASKING YOU TO ANSWER THREE QUESTIONS: WHAT WORKED FOR YOU? WHAT DIDN'T WORK FOR YOU? AND WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN NEXT YEAR? IT COULD BE SOMETHING TOTALLY DIFFERENT, AND REQUIRE A WHOLE NEW GROUP OF PEOPLE TO ORGANIZE IT, AND IT COULD BE AS SPECIFIC AS A PARTICULAR KIND OF WORKSHOP OR EVENT. PLEASE ADD YOUR ENERGY TO THAT WHICH MAY BE THERE IN THE FUTURE, AND HAVE A WONDERFUL TIME MAKING THIS YEAR'S WEST KOOTENAY WOMEN'S FESTIVAL A MEMORABLE OCCASION FOR ALL.

IF YOU SEE SOMEONE WALKING OR SITTING WITH AN UNSURE EXPRESSION ON THEIR FACE, WELCOME THEM WITH AN OFFER OF HELP OR CONVERSATION. IF YOU SEE A FACE YOU DON'T KNOW, SAY HI! WHERE ARE YOU FROM? AND HAVE YOU BEEN TO THE FESTIVAL BEFORE? OR ANY OTHER KIND OF OPENER TO MAKE A SISTER FEEL WELCOME HERE. IF THIS IS YOUR FIRST FESTIVAL, DON'T BE SHY, THROW YOURSELF INTO VOLUNTEERING! WE CAN ALWAYS USE THE HELP, AND WORKING WITH SOMEONE IS A GREAT WAY TO GET TO KNOW THEM.

PLEASE TREAT THE VALLEY AS A WHOLE WITH LOVE AND RESPECT, AND IF YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE PICKED UP, TAKE CARE OF IT.
