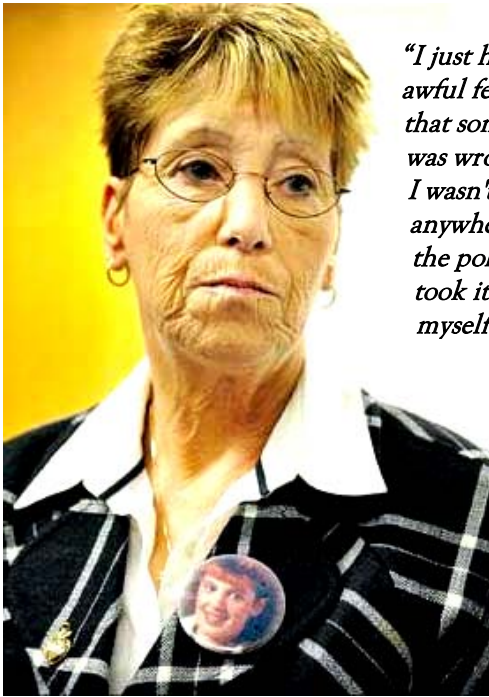


# SISTER OUTSIDERS

what you won't hear inside the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry

Issue # 2 November 14, 2011

## DAY 7: LYNN FREY - BOLD BRAVE AND DARING



*"I just had an awful feeling that something was wrong and I wasn't getting anywhere with the police so I took it upon myself."*

"A lot of the women that were looking for their daughters or their aunts ...we all sat together and had coffee and we would go to a restaurant and talk about it and try to get information, put our heads together and figure out where this place would be that had the wood chipper and why would our girls be there." Lynn Frey

On October 24, Lynn Frey of Campbell River, BC, took the stand at the Missing Women Inquiry. Marnie Frey, her step-daughter, disappeared in 1997. A decade later, Pickton was convicted of murdering Marnie and five other women.

We salute Lynn Frey – and all the other women who were out there looking for their daughters, cousins, nieces, sisters, mothers, aunts, and friends. We are inspired by your bold, brave and daring actions to find your loved ones, by your refusal to settle for the police response you got, and by your determination to hold the police accountable. Your gutsy actions in defense of the women you loved show us all how to get it done – and model the standard of care we should demand from the police.

Lynn, a care aide worker at a senior's home, started her campaign to find Marnie after the Campbell River RCMP refused to take her missing person report seriously. Between August 1997 and March 1998, Lynn, often accompanied by her sister, Joyce Lachance, made at least 15 trips to the streets and alleys of the DTES searching for her daughter. The police she met there told her she should go home, that Marnie could just be on a holiday, that they had nothing to offer her. She found other women searching for their loved ones and they began to share information and ideas.

On one of their late night searches of the DTES in September 1998, Lynn and Joyce learned for the first time about 'the farm' and a guy named 'Willie'. Joyce was from Port Coquitlam and immediately made the connection to the Pickton farm. It was the middle of the night when Lynn and Joyce, and two other women, including Bernie Williams, a long-time community activist and co-founder of Walk4Justice, drove out to Port Coquitlam – and found the farm. Lynn scaled the fence but was chased away by dogs.

On behalf of the Collective of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter – and in the tradition of women who have fought before us to expose and change police response to violence against women – we salute you Lynn Frey. You are the first recipient of Sister Outsiders' Bold Brave and Daring Award.

The next day Lynn told the VPD about the farm and challenged them to investigate. As Lynn told the Inquiry, "If I, a civilian, an old person like me who lives in Campbell River can figure out there's a farm, how come the police aren't checking out the farm?" The police treated Lynn like an "old lady worrywart" and told her not to go back to the farm. Like that would stop her. For the next three years, Lynn continued to search for Marnie on the DTES and returned to the farm on at least 12 occasions.

Lynn refused to give up hope even when the police dismissed her and treated Marnie like she was "some low life prostitute that did not matter". Lynn continues to speak out so no other woman is treated this way again. In 2008 when she became aware that her daughter's death was being used to promote legalization of prostitution in the name of 'safety', she and her husband Rick went public stating: "Prostitution should not be legalized and our daughter's name should not be used in support of this cause." No one at the Inquiry took note of this public plea – even as the Inquiry presented "contextual witnesses" who promoted full decriminalization in the name of the murdered women. For those of us who want accountability and justice for the women, Lynn's actions and her testimony at the Inquiry remain important and inspiring moments.

Louisa Russell & Suzanne Baustad

## CONDOMS AND NEEDLES – IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

On October 19, the Inquiry's "contextual witness", street-nurse Catherine Astin, described a version of Harm Reduction that has become standard practice in the DTES. No one in the Inquiry challenged the assumptions of this model. No one asked how these slender offerings could possibly address the violence the women faced on a daily basis. No one questioned if these inadequate stop-gap measures helped to keep women where they were – in harm's way.

It was disturbing to listen to the testimony of Catherine Astin on October 19<sup>th</sup> at the Missing Women Inquiry. Astin worked as a street nurse in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) for six years under the mandate of HIV prevention. Her testimony revealed how limited and naïve, not to say cruel, the Harm Reduction model is as it is applied to drug-addicted women in prostitution.

Astin clearly has a great deal of compassion for the women she's worked with. She understands (as do I) their drug use as self-medicating.

She described the male violence and other hardships these women endured from an early age: "often these women when they were children, their first experiences were of abuse; their first memories were of abuse. I've talked to women who've told me that their first memory is a man lying on top of them at the age of three or four... Often the women have been separated from their families for whatever reason and placed into foster care...these women have faced many traumas throughout their lives ... a lot of them have suffered early sexual abuse or physical, emotional abuse..."

Astin explained why the women have no employment options: "the women have led fractured lives ...a lot of them don't have a Grade 12 education. Some of our women can't read...some of our women ended up on the streets when they were like 12 or 13... A lot of the women are in what is known as the survival sex trade as a source of income. ...the women didn't really have – they didn't have an education that would allow them to access work".

She portrayed their living conditions in "horrible places" (the Single Room Occupancy "hotels"); dark, dirty, full of roaches and bedbugs with no locks on the doors. "Some women would choose not to stay in them because of the safety issues".

And although Astin didn't name "prostitution", she vividly described its manifestation: "I haven't spoken to a woman who's told me her story that hasn't been raped...Violence occurs on a daily basis for these women... now the women that are out there ...the abuses are still going on on a daily basis for them...they're using the drugs ... because it takes the pain away of their trauma – their multiple traumas and the traumas that they're still experiencing..." She avoided naming the men, the johns who are harming the women. Instead she said: "Sometimes the women would make complaints about events that **happened** to them" (emphasis added).

But these "traumas" and these "events" do not just happen – these are violent acts of rape and battering that are done to women by men, by the johns who prey on their vulnerability because of poverty and addiction. And Astin knows the pain and the effects of drug withdrawal, "So any woman that's coming off of drugs, if she didn't have correct supports in place then she'll do – she'll do anything to get the drug if she's in that much pain."

Astin's refusal to name prostitution as harmful is not unintentional. Speaking of "traumas" and "events" and not about the johns as the perpetrators of the violence against the women is not accidental. The deliberate erasure of the core harm in prostitution is crucial to the promotion of Harm Reduction. It can then offer nothing of what women really need and pretends their needs can be met by the slender offerings of Harm Reduction practitioners – condoms, needles and over-the-counter medications for headaches.

Harm Reduction in this version accepts violence and poverty as inevitable evils. Even if this is not the intention, Harm Reduction then collaborates with these forces.

To genuinely reduce harm one must reject the inhumane conditions in which DTES women are forced to live. One must not just bandage the women's wounds but demand and insist on state provision of livable income and safe housing, detox and recovery programs available on demand, and the protection of women from male violence and sexual exploitation by criminalizing abusive men – and then holding police accountable for the enforcement of these laws.

Ms. Astin, good intentions are not good enough and condoms and needles don't cut it. The women of the Downtown Eastside, like all women, deserve more, much more.

Hilla Kerner



Phillipa Ryan, VRRWS welfare protest, 2003

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# MANUFACTURING CONTEXT

## WHERE WAS THE STRUGGLE OVER THE BIG PICTURE?

Lee Lakeman & Suzanne Baustad

For its first two weeks, the Missing Women Inquiry presented evidence through two kinds of witnesses: "contextual witnesses" and family witnesses. This presentation of 'the big picture' was meant to set the stage for further testimony directly related to the Inquiry's narrow terms of reference.

Context is important. We need to examine the climate or prevailing atmosphere, and the major forces and players that surrounded and contributed to these crimes against women. But we also know that the Inquiry's presentation of "contextual witnesses" is highly political - their testimony will weigh heavily in determining the scope of the problem and whose ass gets held to the fire and for what.

Those "contextual witnesses" invited (by whom? through what process?) to paint the big picture set the stage for the Inquiry's findings of fact and final recommendations. With so much at stake, you'd expect to see a bit more courtroom drama as different voices and perspectives struggle to get heard. After all, we fought for a process to reveal though struggles the heart and truth of the matters at hand.

We remember that this big picture was deemed legally irrelevant during Pickton's trial. Another chance to expose the context for the mass murder of women was again scuttled when then-attorney general Oppal approved the decision not to proceed with 20 additional murder charges against Pickton. We have consistently been told that the full story would come out in this promised inquiry.

But when it finally happens, there are no public struggles over context. There should have been pitched battles. The murdered and missing women were failed by so many institutions and levels of government and individuals with the state authority to do something.

The provincial government's decision not to fund some of us has ensured the hardest questions won't be asked and important realities will remain hidden. As the Inquiry presents its version of the big picture, many of the women who lived the full spectrum context or who have frontline or specialized knowledge of that context are not even in the room to set the record straight. Those who are trying to attend without counsel have not been equipped to deal with the massive disclosure of documents or to ask the questions that could reveal critical information and realities.

One of the biggest elephants in that Inquiry room: There is a struggle raging within all police forces, international authorities, within local and provincial governments, within federal government, and between community groups, about the sexist and racist damage of prostitution and the destructive role of men's demand and the prostitution industry.

Whether the Inquiry wants to take sides on this issue or not, manufacturing such a one-sided version of the context ensures that critical truths will not be heard and layers of accountability will remain hidden.

# WHAT'S MISSING FROM THE MISSING WOMEN'S INQUIRY?

Narrow terms of reference. Adversarial process. Exclusion of groups who could set the record straight. It's no surprise that the Missing Women Inquiry is off to a bad start. *Sister Outsiders* surveys some of what's missing from the Inquiry's version of context.



*Why did the Inquiry's contextual witnesses go unchallenged when they separated the experiences of prostituted women from those of other women - or other women of her class or race?*

Frontline workers and feminist researchers know that few women report male violence, police rarely investigate, charges are rarely laid, few men go to trial, and fewer still are convicted. Prostituted women's experiences in relation to the state are a difference of degree - they are not qualitatively different from most women facing male violence. This is especially the case for poor, racialized, mentally ill, addicted, and Aboriginal women and girls - whether or not they've ever turned a trick.

We know that even where prostitution is fully decriminalized, few prostituted women ever report their attacks to the police and when they do, they still have to deal with poor police response - like other women of their race and class.

We want prostituted women decriminalized NOW but we do not want to see this Inquiry participate in the creation of a new status/identity of 'sex worker' and perpetuate the myth that she is fundamentally different from other women of her class or race - especially when it comes to policing.



*How did the sexism of police forces hamper the investigation into the missing and murdered women?*

At the last Oppal Commission in 1992, women raised the issue of sexism within police forces. Since this Inquiry began, we've heard testimony about police violence against women in the DTES - including sexual harassment and demanding sex from prostituted women. Police partied at Piggies' Palace owned by the Picktons. We've heard four cops are currently regular johns to the one sex worker who testified.

We've learned that RCMP officer Catherine Galliford was sexually harassed during her time on the Missing Women's Investigation and that she is now suffering PTSD. This 20-year veteran of the RCMP describes the force as "an old boy's club" and the male officers as "filthy, disgusting pigs". Since the inquiry began, a second female RCMP officer has stepped forward to describe her two decades of sexual harassment by male officers who planted porn in her desk, made sexist jokes, and touched her inappropriately.

How did the attitudes of individual male cops - and the institutional culture that allowed this behaviour - make it easier for men to prey on women with impunity in the DTES?



*Where were the experts who could detail the impacts of government cuts and other social and economic policies on the lives of these women?*

Between 1978 and 2002, over 65 women went missing from the Downtown Eastside. Over this period of time, every level of government gleefully adopted neoliberal policies and ideology.

What would have been different in the lives of these women ...

- **If her community hadn't been devastated by these policies?** Many of the women came from reserves or small resource-based towns. For Aboriginal communities, state abandonment and corporate plundering of their lands is not new and only intensified the ongoing damage of colonization.
- **If she or her family had been able to access affordable housing or battered women's shelters, living wage jobs, education, decent welfare, childcare, healthcare including detox and recovery beds, public transit - all severely cut or privatized or abandoned by the neoliberal state during these women's lifetimes?** Just one example: NDP Premier Mike Harcourt introduced BC Benefits in 1996 cutting welfare rates. Between 1997 and 2002, over 80,000 people were pushed off the welfare rolls (25% of everyone on welfare at the time) - this during a period of high unemployment.
- **If she was not criminalized for her poverty? If welfare ministries and the police targeted the behaviour of those who created the poverty and committed the violence instead of her poverty crimes and survival strategies?** When welfare is cut or harder to access or is simply not enough, women are put in the impossible situation of having to scrounge, scheme and partner with men they don't want to be with to survive or care for their kids. Women targeted for increased state surveillance have their children apprehended and their welfare cheques administered. The government takes control over her income deciding where she lives and how she lives - including which drug store and doctor to see. Yet those authorities take no responsibility for the consequences of her legislated poverty, or her increased dependency on and exploitation by landlords, drug stores, and hotel owners. And even as Ministries collected all this tracking information, when the women went missing none of them bothered to check on where these women were and if they were okay.
- **If she was not blamed for her poverty, addiction, and the sexist violence she endured?** Neoliberal insistence on the responsibility of the individual and the supremacy of 'choice' infuses all state institutions and leads to the kind of blatant victim-blaming described by many of the family witnesses. This made it easier for authorities to do nothing - it sure helps to reduce welfare rolls and keep reporting levels low. Victim blaming also creates a nasty undertow that promotes contempt for the poor, for Aboriginal peoples, and for women.
- **If crimes against her were prioritized over property crimes or the rights of property owners?** For decades, land values and speculation determined where the police moved the prostitution tolerance zones, regardless of the impact on the women. In 1997, then-mayor Philip Owen refused to offer a cash award for information related to the missing women but did offer a \$100,000 reward for information on a string of garage fires and home invasions in one of the wealthier areas of the city.

Women on the DTES continue to free fall through what's left of our social programs and bear the brunt of neoliberal contempt.

The missing and murdered women were the ones who ultimately bore the cascading effects of these cuts and ideas.

Lee Lakeman & Suzanne Baustad

## MONTREAL MASSACRE MEMORIAL

Saturday, December 3, 2011 - 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.  
The Cutch, Vancouver - 1895 Venables Street  
Free forum open to the public - Wheelchair accessible

- 11:00 a.m. Taking Up Space In a Man's World
- 12:30 p.m. Put Rapists On Trial - Not Women
- 2:30 p.m. The State Betrayal of Battered Women
- 4:30 p.m. Who is Missing from the Missing Women Inquiry?

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## Interested in understanding, exposing and ending prostitution?

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Prostitution and Trafficking in Canada**  
A Continuing Education Course  
Feb 1, 2012 - April 18, 2012  
6.30-9.30 pm Location TBA

Join local and international activists + guest lecturers to discuss international law, human rights, women's rights + activist practices. Weekly documentaries featuring global conversations on key issues.

Course Instructors: Lee Lakeman and other collective members of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter - Canada's oldest rape crisis center.

\$260 sliding scale (no one will be turned away for lack of funds). To pre-register: call 604-872-8212 or email us at: info@rapereliefshelter.bc.ca. Please note there are a limited number of available spots so call soon!

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