

**CONTROLLING REPRODUCTION**

**New Reproductive Technologies**

**and**

**Court Ordeal Obstetrical Interventions:**

**A Feminist Perspective**

**A Proposal for the**

**THIRD ANNUAL FEMINIST RESEARCH FORUM**

**September 21, 22, 1990**

**EDMONTON, ALBERTA**

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*received 19 June*

## CONTROLLING REPRODUCTION

### **New Reproductive Technologies and Court Ordered Obstetrical Interventions:**

#### **A Feminist Perspective**

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The purpose of this presentation is to examine the relationships between the new reproductive technologies (NRTs) and the increasing number of court ordered obstetrical interventions, supported by the State and implemented through the medical care system.

I want to explore the underlying assumptions about women that these procedures represent. As well I will examine the implications of these new reproductive technologies, if they continue to be developed without controls, and if obstetrical interventions become more common.

Because these procedures occur within the medical care system they are discussed using the language of health and well being. However, what is often forgotten is that the medical care system, as with any social institution, reflects the society in which it exists, i.e., a patriarchal one based on the unequal distribution of power. When one examines the NRTs and court ordered obstetrical interventions it becomes very clear that these procedures act to define and maintain the unequal position of women.

Using a feminist perspective I will examine the history of NRTs and obstetrical interventions. Finally I will discuss ways in which women can become involved in changing the current direction of these procedures, to move toward reproductive freedom.



June 15, 1990

Forum Planning Committee  
Women's Research Centre  
University of Alberta/Athabasca University  
11043-90 Ave.  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T6G 2E1

Dear Ms. Morouney:

Enclosed is a proposal for a presentation I would like to do at the Feminist Research Forum in September. I apologize for being late with the submission. I hope it will still be considered. The use of reproductive technologies and judicial interference in the lives of pregnant women are increasing at a frightening rate. Both of these procedures represent the increasingly pro-natalist view of society and governments. I believe that women need to become more aware of the implications of these procedures.

Thank you for your attention to this proposal. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Elizabeth J. Hage", is located in the bottom right corner of the page. The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "Sincerely,".

Phone log re: Forum

- 04 June Liz Hazel — Red Deer (Nursing)  
returned call 06 June
- 04 June Rosalyn Van Vleet — "Voices from Shadows" Slums-Nairobi  
♀ + children  
returned call 06 June
- 07 June Randi Warne — volunteered to chair session
- 11 June Rosalyn Sydnie — volunteered to chair a session +  
is organizing a session on  
"a generational dialogue"
- 11 June Debra Shogren — organizing workshop on  
feminist pedagogy

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION  
THE PROGRAM PLANNING COMMITTEE  
THIRD ANNUAL FEMINIST RESEARCH FORUM

Women's Research Centre  
11043 - 90 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB  
T6G 2E1

PRESENTERS:

Barb Schur, Hinton, AB (866-3782)  
Linda Tallas, Red Deer, AB (346-7287)  
Lucy Rachynski, Edmonton, AB (435-0165)

CONTACT PERSON:

Lucy Rachynski, Edmonton, AB (435-0165)

*Received 15 June*

**PROPOSAL TO THE PROGRAM PLANNING COMMITTEE**

**THIRD ANNUAL FEMINIST RESEARCH FORUM**

**FOCUS:**

While it is common knowledge that in traditional work settings women occupy positions of less power and lower salaries than their male counterparts, many women, in spite of their enthusiasm, inspiration, and creativity, hesitate to begin their own businesses. There is also evidence to suggest that women who do move into entrepreneurship or collective businesses often experience difficulties due to the inequitable socioeconomic system still surrounding their work efforts.

This research will explore the personal resources of a woman who, despite resistance from local businessmen and officials, is struggling to establish the Rainbow Junction Tea Room and Arts Centre in Hope, B.C. Her experiences will be analyzed in an attempt to determine why she has met such resistance and in what ways she reflects collective and supportive principles which are rare in the traditional business community.

The presenters will conclude by discussing their plans for further research and development regarding this woman's efforts and the efforts of other women trying to live out their unique visions in the marketplace.

**PRESENTERS:**

BARB SCHUR, HINTON, AB (866-3782)  
LINDA TALLAS, RED DEER, AB (346-7287)  
LUCY RACHYNSKI, EDMONTON, AB (435-0165)

**FORMAT:**

Narrative and discussion supplemented by multimedia resources (audiotape and slides)

**TIME:**

1 hour 15 minutes

9844 - 92 Avenue  
Edmonton T6E 2V5 Alberta  
433-4687  
30 May 1990

Re: Call for Papers for September 1990 conference.

I am enclosing a manuscript called "Pillars of Salt" which is a collection of Old Testament women's voices: Lot's wife, Tamar, Sarah, Dinah, and Jephthah's Daughter. I am finishing work on Miriam and the Levite's Concubine, which concludes the set. I think this 're/vision' of the patriarchal cast of Biblical story might legitimately come under "women's research" interests - though the ad in the Folio gave little indication of the nature of paper you are looking for in September.

I look forward to hearing from you.

*Eunice Scarfe*

Eunice Scarfe

*Received  
01 June '90  
- Am*

## THE WIFE OF LOT

Once I had a choice: to flee, to forget, to be gone.

Now I have none.

I looked back and was paralyzed, sentenced to look behind me forever.

Seeing, I remember. Remembering, I tell. Telling, I see.

Once I had a choice to forget. Now I have none. I stand by the road, a white witness: mute. I watch, immutable as a pillar, as indispensable as salt. Punished as promised - expect no exceptions with God.

I make covenant with memory. I redeem time. I mark the women who pass. I watch stories as silenced as mine. Dinah refuses to eat. Sarah's withered breasts suckle a child. Tamar shuffles in sackcloth. Twelve Marys carry a coffin. The Levite's Concubine drips blood in the dust. Miriam's white body refuses the dance.

Seven of us see and remember, remember and tell.

Of course I looked back, wouldn't you? How else can the story be told?



## JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

So we have come, I and all the other Marys, into the hills, waving branches and singing and carrying our sandals, all of us barefoot and happy and blithe.

We have been sent to the mountains for two months, they say. My father Jephthah has won another battle, they say. But why should that mean a holiday for us? You never know with my father. He is impulsive and extravagant. "I will send everything that you need," he said through his tears. "Just go now. Weep and wail." Weep and wail? Why should we do his weeping for him? Jephthah is better at weeping than we are. Jephthah does nothing modestly. Everything Jephthah does, he does to excess.

For example he said. "I will never love again" when my mother died but within a month he was captivated by her sister whose eyes and walk were the same.

For example he said. "We will have no more talking on the Sabbath! Anyone who is talking during the reading of the Law shall be sent into the desert without water," - but the next Sabbath he forgot. He forgot the threat, he forgot to read the Law.

He even forgot the Sabbath.

There is no wind in these mountains and the days are hot and dry. We are parched and sunburnt, seek shade, and long for the cool streams of the plain. A thin spring trickles where once a cascade of water poured down. We take turns wetting our faces and feet and our arms. We fan our legs with our skirts, billowing a breeze towards our knees.

Jephthah makes extravagant statements, we all are used to that. We won't be in these mountains a moment before he'll call us back. Or forget to send us provisions. Or inquire where we are. My father is like that, a man of uneven disposition, given to making generous gestures though so often he gets it all wrong.

Jephthah paid no attention to me when I was a child. He was off fighting battles. He had no time for children. But I had companions, all the young girls of my age in the village. I went everywhere with them and they with me. We sang and danced together, I and all the Marys as one.

A breeze from the west would be welcome tonight, something soft to make the olive tree sigh or something cool to lift our hair from the sweat of our faces. A wind is needed to accompany sleep. We wait for wind to blanket us with dream and offer release. But on this mountain the no wind blows and the grass never sighs; no dust drapes our bodies and no sand sears our eyes. At night the only sound in the trees is the breathing, quick and sudden, of deer. Their circle surrounds us, their eyes as watchful as mine.

In the day we sit with our backs against the holly oak and

narrate our nights. We have dreamt apples and poppies, fire and hot sunset, cherries and wine, carnelian and rubies, rouge and red roses. We have dreamt fountains of blood and rivers of bones; oceans of sadness and seas of sorrow.

on the mountain no wind

By the fire last night the Marys braided their hair, plaiting the right braid of one Mary with the left braid of the next, binding themselves in a circle. I braided the last and then I danced, my hair unbraided, free and unbound. My spirit rejoicing. A dance to magnify me and the rest of the Marys. One and another and another. I shook my castanets thilw the Marys circled me, slowly, their hands on each other's shoulders and their voice following mine.

on the mountain no wind

While I played I watched the eyes of the deer, white in the moonlight, watching us, silent and still.

Yesterday one of the Marys went alone to the town, sauntering along in no hurry. She went to tell Jephthah we are waiting for the tents, for the cooking pots and the oil lamps. We don't mind sleeping on moss under the stars for one night or two but when could we have the provisions he promised? We need fresh water, we can't live if our lives are in danger.

She came running back after dark. She could not speak, she could not catch her breath. Her feet were bleeding and cut. We rocked her while she sobbed. Twelve of us, six on a side, made a cradle of twenty-four arms. Holding her head towards the mountain

and her feet towards the valley, we rocked her body back and forth, the fire illuminating fear on our faces.

"He is going to kill you, Mary. Your Father is. Because he promised God! Because he wants to say 'Thank you Lord' for giving him the battle, your Father promised he would sacrifice the first person he saw. It could have been any one of us. But it was you, Mary! You! Coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dance. How could you forget? You are never to let a man see you dance.

All twelve of my Marys instantly began to wail, their voices climbing the night. I let them cry until they were spent. Then I spoke. "Remember how impulsive my father Jephthah is, and contradictory," I said. "There's that. But better yet. Remember the story. Remember Abraham and Isaac. Abraham's first-born and only son. His firstborn. Like me. Jephthah's firstborn and only daughter. The Lord spared Isaac. He will spare me."

"If your father can remember the story," the littlest Mary said.

I smiled. How could my Father forget the story? He is my Father; he will do what is good.

The Marys are easily excited, a little unused to night on the mountain but for me it is a comfort and joy. The white moon on the rocks. The linden leaves shifting. The deer moving like curtains behind small stubby trees.

Let them weep. Let them sleep. Their bodies are fallen pillars around the fire, milk-smooth in the moonlight, each one

touching another. They sleep, afraid.

Tonight I will neither slumber nor sleep. I keep watch. I see a Mary sleepwalking, her bones as fragile as fallen leaves. I see her climbing the path to my lookout. 'Remain here, Mary, and watch with me,' I whisper as softly as wind. She rests her head on my skirt and murmurs 'watch, watch, watch' as she dreams.

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I shed blood during those days in the hills. I sat on moss and let the lining of my body seep into the green. My womb stripped bare. The ache insistent. I gathered my skirts around me and pulled petals off flowers. 'He will he won't he will he.' I watched the yellow petals blacken.

To sacrifice is to take blood. The best blood.

My Father is good. He will do what is good. Let the Marys wail. Let them weep.

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When my Father raised the knife in determination and in thanks to god the wind began at last to blow. And I wondered how soon/how red the mound of stones would be, remembered how green the mountain moss had been.

## DINAH

I never could tell which was which. They both had beards and came in the night and said "Dinah don't tell" over and over again. One beard was soft and one rough but in the day how was I to know without touching their faces which I never would do, no, not even look in the eyes of my brothers Simeon and Levi who came to me night after night.

When Shechem saw me by the well he looked in my eyes, not at my ankles or waist or line of my breast. Some men know at a glance. "Who is hurting you," he said. "Who is he?"

"He?" I whispered. "They."

He took my hands.

"Come home with me to my village. Tomorrow I will go to your father and I will pay the bride price though you will not be my bride until you are ready even if that should be never. The difference between my village and your tents is that in our houses you can lock your door."

I went of course. I went for safety and comfort. I knew nothing yet of love. But because I went, Shechem died.

Shechem went to my father Jacob and my brothers.

My father and my brothers answered deceitfully because I had

already gone to Shechem's village.

*Shechem's great price*  
They demanded that Shechem and all the men of his city be circumcised. Shechem did not delay to do this thing because he had delight in me.

But the bride price was a trick. You cannot join the tribe of Israel by making a mark on your genitals. The tribes of Israel share a story. They are the Chosen People. You cannot join another people's story. You cannot borrow it. You cannot bargain it. You cannot buy your way in. You cannot write your way.

You cannot revise the story.

You know this. I know it. My brothers knew it.

Shechem did not. His story is now part of Israel's story, but he is not. Shechem didn't stand a chance. He didn't think to pray to God, which is just as well. God, although omnipotent, would not have heard a word. Even God cannot be on two sides at once. He stays on the side of Israel. That's the story.

This is what happened. I must tell you quickly, before they come.

My brothers sent the circumcisor with his tool: the shell of a polished bivalve, blessed and sharpened and adept. There were 427 adult males in Shechem's village. The screams went on for two days. I watched from my balcony, before I fainted. When I recovered I could not eat and I have fasted since.

They dug a hole in the middle of the village. Twelve men

stood in a circle around the hole, their arms fastened tightly around each other. Another circle of men stood behind them and covered the eyes of the men in the center circle. The circumcisor pulled the foreskin forward and sliced it off. Blood ran into the hole; the foreskin followed. Paste was put on the wound and corn stalks were wrapped around the penis. Cold dry air was needed for healing. On that day it was hot and moist in Shechem's village, entirely the wrong weather to slice the center from all of Shechem's men.

The men were told their circumcision was the bride price not only for me, Dinah - Jacob and Leah's daughter - but for any woman of Israel one of them might want to have in the future. All of them said they wouldn't want a woman - then or in the future. The cutter said not to worry. They would feel better in seven days.

In seven days the men of Shechem's village did feel better. In seven days they were dead, slaughtered by my brothers, the sons of Jacob, murdered by the men of Israel.

On the third day, Simeon and Levi found Shechem and his men on their backs, each with the mark of circumcision but none with the rights and privileges. If they had gained the rights and privileges, the God of Israel would have heard their cries. That's in the story.

They murdered Shechem in my arms. "Our sister will not be treated like a common whore," Levi shouted as he swung his bloody



sword. Shechem didn't have a chance, even though I prayed to God. Although omnipotent, God has no obligation to hear the words of one uncircumcised.

I spread Shechem's blood over my body and then I tried to kill myself. With the bivalve I sawed my wrists until the shell shattered in my hand but I could not cut the skin. I tied the corn stalk strips around my neck. I threw myself against the whitewashed wall of the room Shechem had given me.

My brothers, when they found me, were cross at my behaviour. They slung me on a donkey and rejoicing brought me home, their honour quite thoroughly avenged, and mine, in their opinion.

"And then all the sons of Jacob plundered Shechem's city. They took their flocks and their herds, their asses, all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured."

My father kept watch throughout seven days in case his sons' broken promise and excesses should be thought inappropriate by other uncircumcised tribes in the hills.

But no one came. No one lifted a sword for Shechem's honour or the honour of his village.

Or for mine.

I have cut my hair. I continue my fast. I refuse water and words. My body is wasting away.

But my honour, like a pillar of salt, is preserved.

TAMAR

Tamar, they said, be quiet.

Tamar, they said, sit still.

Tamar, they said, your breasts are flat and your mound is smooth.

If you don't settle down, the way of women will never come to you. How would you like that, Tamar? Let us assure you, we speak the truth, no man ever would.

Tamar, you run when you should walk; you catch moths when you should weed; you wade in the stream when you should wash clothes; you smile openly when you should lower your eyes; you talk when you should be silent.

Tamar, if you're not careful, the way of women will never come to you. When the rest of us are sitting content in the doorways of our tents you will be running alone, all by yourself, with no man beside you to guide you.

Tamar, listen to us. Look to see how a woman behaves, watch us, before it's too late.

Amnon, my brother, was watching me.

When the bleeding began they put me in a tent without food

to quiet my spirit. The tent was dark. They tied my fingers together to keep goodness from slipping out of my hands. They rubbed a stone on my lips to take away talk, and then they buried the stone deep in the sand. They took my clothes and burned them. They whispered outside the walls of the tent. They peered through the opening.

After eight days, when they saw me silent and somewhat subdued, they let me go.

Now you are clean, Tamar. Now you are pure. Now you are a woman, a virgin and the daughter of a King. You must wear this long robe with sleeves.

I refused. I ran from them as fast and as far as the wind, laughing.

I didn't want to be a woman. I wanted to run towards the horizon forever.

I thought the way of women came only once.

It came again, of course.

My father, King David, sent for me. Dress in your long robe with sleeves and go to your brother Amnon. He is ill and is asking for you.

I went to the house of Amnon. I took dough and kneaded it and made bread for my brother.

But Amnon wasn't ill. Amnon was evil.

Tamar, come here. You heard me. Put that dish down, surely you can see I'm not hungry for that.

Lift your gown Tamar, lie here beside me.

I begged him, I pleaded. Do not force me.

Such a thing is not done in Israel. Where would I carry my shame?

But Amnon my brother was stronger than I.

Now go, Tamar. Be gone.

Run, race moths, splash in the stream, smile openly at everyone you meet. Or they will know. And then where would you carry your shame?

Remember, Tamar. You are to forget.

And I put ashes on my head and tore in two the long-sleeved robe and, crying aloud, I walked towards the well where the women, like silent pillars, stood watching, waiting for me.

## SARAH

Sure I laughed. I'm not afraid to admit it. Whoever said I was? But I didn't laugh because of my age. I laughed because of the promise. I didn't want descendents as numerous as the sands of the shore, stars in the sky, and - what was the other one? Oh yes, the dust of the earth. As if a woman would forget that one. If you want to do something really fine by me, I should have said to the messenger, promise me will or wisdom, wit or knowing; grant me the ground of my being or show me the grace of the world. Something I can use. Or need. Or want. Not descendents, shaken like so many grains of salt from my body.

So I laughed. I knew what I wanted and it wasn't a child.

I never minded being - how do they say - barren. When the blood came I didn't think of the waste or notice the pain. At night I slept flat on my belly; in the day I walked tall, as lean as a pillar, a column of strength.

What I did mind was Abraham's cowardice and lies. 'The Egyptians will kill me in order to have you, Sarah,' he said to me. 'You are so beautiful, Sarah. I'll tell them you are my sister.'

Me beautiful? Well that's the first I knew it or he thought

it. A woman knows whether she is or she isn't and I'm not. Of course, I can laugh, I can even make a man laugh, and that's a gift as given as beauty. But it was of no interest to Abraham.

So he sent me to the Egyptians as his sister, in barter for his safety. Me beautiful? Abraham, you make me laugh.

Now Hagar. She has beauty. How do you say? Soft eyes, moist lips, full breasts, narrow waist, lean legs, slender ankles. And so on.

A body that sways, that sighs, that soothes and smooths.

That serves.

So, Abraham, you called her beautiful.

But did you also see she was as sturdy as an olive tree in the mistral wind? Did you hear the sorrow in her song? Did you meet her mind? Know her heart? Could you make her laugh?

You only wanted a child.

I was taller than Egyptian women, and not so lean. My face was tanned, not painted with grey and green kohl. My brown hair hung straight to my waist; theirs curled in shoulder-length ringlets of black. I wore brown robes of stiff wool; they dressed in white cotton.

But at court I soon became the same. On call. On loan. On demand. On display.

My robes were replaced, my hair perfumed, my body oiled, my sheets scented, my loins shaved, my name changed, my room enlarged. My maids were many and my food was spiced; my mirror was polished and my courtyard was cultivated. I walked in

circumscribed steps. Only laughter was left of the Sarah you sent.

I longed for the wide sky, the circle of our horizon, the silence of footsteps on sand. The cold of the desert night and the smell of our tent. I even missed you, Abraham: your swift and clumsy attempts, your heaviness, your snoring sleep. Your grunting silence.

Your fear.

At the court there wasn't anything we women didn't know about each other and there wasn't anything we knew that we didn't tell each other. We passed words while we were bathing, having our bodies oiled, or eating meals - those long evening feasts where we nibbled on fruit and sucked the juices of tender meat and drank wine so fine my bones shivered like crystal. What did we do with our time? Those hours and hours of quick twilight when we sat around the pool waiting for the breeze. Those long mornings in the hot baths and the oil rubs which followed? We talked, of course. We passed words.

We told stories.

Ones we made up, ones we had heard. Ones to make us laugh and ones to make us understand. I had the best stories, Abraham. I told stories about you.

The night the Pharaoh came for me he was disguised as a nomad, as a man from my tribe, and no one knew it was he.

"Get your sandals, Sarah," he said. "Wear the wool robes you came in. It's cold where we're going tonight."

Cold! We were going out unto the desert.

He walked swiftly ahead of me, until the distance we covered was counted in hours. He could have passed for you, Abraham, except he moved as gracefully as a gazelle, as sure as a woman in love.

You, Abraham, except for his restraint.

Except for his gaze.

"Look," he said, when he finally stopped and turned to me. "I don't want you as a lover. I have enough of those - too many for my taste if you want to know the truth; too many for my time. But I want to talk, and walk. Together, like this. I've never taken a woman out onto the desert before. What I need is a friend, someone to talk to after the dark."

A friend. For once I follow a man with hope in my bones and what he wants me for is a friend.

"I'm tired too," I said and sat down cross-legged on the sand. I looked at him then, as much in sorrow as in surprise. "A man and woman can't be friends. Can the Red Sea be parted? Can food fall from heaven? Can a bush burn without fire? Can a stick snake through the grass? Can..."

"With Pharoahs," he said, interrupting me, "nothing is impossible."

Well I had to laugh. He laughed too and our laughter echoed across the smooth steel of the sky, into time.

"If we were friends, Sarah, I'd give you words," he said.

"Words!" I said. "I have too many words already. I say too



many words. I hear too many words. What would I do with more words? They buzz like bees in my head. They sliver my skin like unsanded wood. They disappear the moment they're spoken. They evaporate like dew. They fade like the sunset. I want something solid and sure, like the strength of a pillar, like the power of a pyramid. Words are as impermanent as the swell of a wave, the warmth of sun, desire in the eye, the height of a cloud. They dissolve and melt and fade. And all you have is memory, mercurial and subject to invasion by hope and by cupidity. Keep your words. I don't need them."

"Well it's true, Sarah. You do have a lot of words." I turned on my heel. To hell with the Pharaoh; to hell with his offer of friend.

"Telling a woman she has too many words is like telling her she's a sorrow to the eye," I called over my shoulder. "Don't you Pharoahs know anything?"

"Wait, Sarah," he said, not like a command. An invitation rather, uncertain and even soft. "I've heard you laugh. I've seen you throw back your head in delight. I've seen you sober as a temple, playing a joke, and then I've heard you laugh like hands clapping approval. Your words are like your laughter, tumbling out like polished pebbles, and I like the sound of that."

I stood with my back to him, glaring at the eye-level horizon, wishing for a wind to remove him - or me - from this place.

"I meant I'd give you words to see," he said. And he sat down cross-legged in the sand.

Words cannot be seen. The Pharaoh was no different than any other man, promising what he never could deliver.

But I was wrong. Before the night was done he talked to me, and I to him, without making a sound. The words we used were written in the sand. Words to see, Abraham.

I told him on the second night I was the wife of Abraham and not his sister. It was a risky thing to do, to confide in someone who had such power and might. Wanting to prove conversation with a man was possible without our bodies being bonded made me careless. I had no guarantee of trust or loyalty or even of protection, only that our spirits were so at ease and felt at one.

Or so I thought.

A woman wears disguise as soon as she has learned to catch the blood and I didn't want disguise with him. The loneliness of being from another land made me careless, especially in the middle of the night, with a man who came to show me how to write and who pleased me, even made me laugh, by coming in disguise and taking me out into the magic of the night. It put me off my guard, and was, as you can see the reason why I'm home again and laughing now in this bitter open way.

I was wrong to trust. You never should. 9

On the third night a messenger came from the Palace, a man who had been in the Pharaoh's service since he had begun to rule.

"There's a curse on the land," the servant said. "None of the women are bearing children. Their bodies are sterile, empty, hollow - and they will not be filled. Someone has brought a curse on our land."

The Pharaoh turned to me. "You. You have a husband. You came under a lie. A lie has caused this curse. Your lie."

I saw you then in my mind's eye, Abraham. My husband. Coward is more like it. Weak. A wanderer. Your greying tangled beard, your eyes squinting in the sun, your robes stained and dirty. Leaning on your staff. Bartering with the border people who asked for me in exchange for your protection.

"The curse is caused by this woman's presence here," the servant shouted. "She's from outside. She has taught the women how to withhold the gift of life from you and from your people."

"I have done nothing."

"Yes. Nothing. You haven't even born a child for us," the servant continued. "They say you had a child that died - or did you murder it?"

"The child I bore was dead at birth," I answered slowly. "I nurtured it well past its appointed time. When delivered it was strangled by the cord. If a cord is dictated by a mother's will, then yes, I was my child's murderer."

"You see, she says it herself. 'I was my child's murderer'," shouted the servant.

"You didn't listen to my words," I said.

"We are not required to let you say a single word. You lie

about the death. Show us the child. Give it to us - or have you sent it home to be raised in another land? By your faithless husband perhaps?"

"I have not sent the child home. My child was dead at birth."

"You lie. It is written nowhere in our records that a child of Sarah, woman of a nomadic tribe of uncertain origin and destination, either bore a child in Egypt, or buried it."

"I do not know your customs, or where you write the records, or that I was required to write the birth and death. I did not choose my child's death. I mourn its death, and my own loss."

"Choose? We know about your tribe. The Chosen People. You chose to be here. You chose to kill your child. And you have chosen to advise our women against being vessels for our seed."

"I have advised none of your women, nor do I intend to."

"Nor will you have a chance," the Pharaoh said quietly, as if he were passing judgment. "You are free to go."

He meant I was required to go.

He climbed into the chariot of his peer, a chariot as lavish as the Pharaoh's. He settled himself in the soft leather and removed the wool robes that had made him so much like someone I knew, robes that disguised his rank. He was once again every inch a Pharaoh. And I was every inch cast out.

I had no one to walk across the desert with me. No one to help me find my way. No sustenance or companion for the journey.

No one who knew or cared about my whereabouts. No one to hold me in the unblinking eye of the mind.

With the Pharaoh I thought 'friend' might mean one bond not bound by race or sex or creed or speech. But 'friend' was not large enough for loyalty to me, a woman from another place. Loyalty was only for his people, for the people of his land. The bond of friendship has no contract, no court or code. You cannot raise a roof of sand; you cannot <sup>even</sup> make friendship with a man.

I'm home, Abraham, with the seed of writing hidden in my hand and an unwanted infant promised for my belly.

No one asked me if I wanted this child.

I don't suppose anyone will ask Mary either.

I'm not the one who's barren around here, Abraham. Hagar's child was not yours either. The child promised you will have to be made by someone else. Perhaps by God Himself. Now doesn't that make you laugh?

When Hagar went away, you thought it was jealousy, a man's only explanation for what divides one woman from another. Not jealousy. I loved Hagar like a sister. I insisted she tell you that Ishmael was not your child and she refused. Well, I don't blame her. You would not have been amused.

The point is, Abraham, do I have to spell it out for you? Even if I had been your sister and not your wife I didn't want to be bartered for your safety. To be sent to a foreign land so you could sleep soundly at home in your tent.

What kind of people are you, you chosen Men of Israel? Was  
the god of Abraham barren when he conceived of you?

924 316A

Rosalind Van Vliet  
Dept. of Secondary Education  
University of Alberta  
PH. 492-2902 of 438-7137

Women's Research Centre  
U. of A./ Athabasca U.  
11043-90 Ave.  
Edmonton T6G 2E1

Re: 1990 Feminist Research Forum

The title of my M. Ed. (Peace Studies) thesis is "Voices From The Shadows". I am using Feminist Participatory Research methods. This work cronicles a Canada/Kenya cooperative project which empowers the mothers of street children in Africa to become self-sufficient and legally employed.

Our agency in Canada, "Awareness Programs Society of Alberta" initially provides funds to enable women to gather into support groups and openly discuss their strategies for mutual cooperation. Once their strategies are identified training is provided to enable their plans to be implemented. Small amounts of financial assistance are provided until the groups can stand alone. Inter-group networking is encouraged. The various groups differ in tribal background but are similar in their struggle for survival.

This is a comprehensive program involving skills training, crisis counselling, emergency housing, health education, small business management, and care for handicapped children. My Kenyan partner handles the daily work on site.

If this study is of interest to you I am willing to provide a half-day workshop using audio-visual materials. If there is an honorarium involved I would request that it be donated to the project for the purchase of a grinding mill.

Sincerely,

*Rosalind Van Vliet*

Rosalind Van Vliet

*Received 21 June*

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY

CATALOGUING DIVISION 5TH FLOOR CAMERON LIBRARY

To: Marilyn Assheton-Smith

Date: 16 May 1990

From: Hope Olson

Subject: Third Annual Feminist Research Forum

Doris Badir, Pat Valentine and I would like to present a panel, at this fall's Feminist Research Forum, on the ghettoized, or female-dominated professions. Coming from home economics, nursing and librarianship we would be able to present the basic attributes common to our professions and the variations among them. We could also pursue the reasons and ramifications.

Our discussions to date have been to express a mutual interest in the subject and an eagerness to participate in the forum. Precisely what approach and what format we would choose has not been decided. It could be a traditional panel of three papers or something more interactive. In any event, the topic is one which has not been addressed on this campus to any great degree.

We feel that while the role of women in male-dominated fields is extremely important our situation is also significant in the context of feminism. It is also a topic of relevance to the many women in the community who are involved in our professions. I hope that this suggestion will fit into this year's forum and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

cc: D. Badir  
P. Valentine

*e-mail thanks/received  
of my 22/90  
ma*

*Hope*



## Rosalyn Sydie: "A Generational Dialogue"

- proposal for a round table discussion between feminists of the 50's + 60's ————— and feminists of the 90's.

- The group would consist of 5-3 ♀, perhaps professors/university staff, talking with 2-3 students/grad students.

- The round table discussion would develop then open up and embrace the audience.

- discussion would include issues such as "How radical is radical now?" (a clash of theory & practice)

Dr. Sydie has also offered to chair a session.

Received by phone  
11 June