

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[THE ACCIDENTAL SOCIOLOGIST](#)

*By Marilyn Porter*

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

*By Jack Ross*

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:  
[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2

### The Clipboard

*By Stephen Riggins*

The Medal for Academic Excellence in Sociology was awarded this year to Kimberly Gill, who has been accepted into our M.A. program in sociology. Kimberly also received The Canadian Tire Scholarship. [Read more...](#)

### Internship course

*By Stephen Riggins*

This one-semester internship course is a part-time, normally unpaid supervised field placement for academically strong third-year and fourth-year sociology majors. The goal is to help give students basic skills required for employment in nonprofit organizations in the social services or arts management. The course consists of 6 hours per week in worksite activities over a period of 8 weeks (a total of 48 hours of worksite activities) as well as classroom instruction during part of the term. The course is worth three credit hours and will be offered in the winter term. [Read more...](#)

### The Accidental Sociologist

*By Marilyn Porter*

I would probably not have dared to write this piece were I not a few months from retirement - so let's start with a confession. I am not sure that I am a "sociologist," and certainly my route into "sociology" was not conventional. [Read more...](#)

### Witness in Prison

*By Jack Ross*

Editor's Note: Jack C. Ross was born in 1921 in Arizona. He had a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Minnesota and was part of the link between Memorial and Minnesota, which was a prominent feature of our department in the 1960s. At Minnesota he studied with the highly-respected sociologists Arnold Rose and Don Martindale. Jack's academic specialty came to be the sociology of voluntary associations. His major publication is an historical and cross-cultural study of voluntary associations titled *An Assembly of Good Fellows*. [Read more...](#)



### MUN Sociology Jacket

*The new MUN Sociology jacket modeled by M.A. student Laurinda Tracey. Sweaters, hoodies, and jackets can be ordered through the Department of Sociology. Contact Audrey O'Neill at [aoneill@mun.ca](mailto:aoneill@mun.ca). [More photos](#)*

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[FRONTPAGE](#)

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[THE ACCIDENTAL](#)

[SOCIOLOGIST](#)

*By Marilyn Porter*

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

*By Jack Ross*

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:

[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2

### The Clipboard

*By Stephen Riggins*

The Medal for Academic Excellence in Sociology was awarded this year to Kimberly Gill, who has been accepted into our M.A. program in sociology. Kimberly also received The Canadian Tire Scholarship.

The Medal for Academic Excellence in the Sociology/Anthropology Interdepartmental Studies Program was awarded to Ashley Tuttle, who is presently working on an M.A. thesis in our department which is about gender and weight-loss programs.

&

Mark Day, who is a sociology minor and respite care worker, was chosen to appear on national television in Toronto as one of the top 24 competitors on Canadian Idol. Mark is the only competitor from Newfoundland this year. "I have come to the conclusion that your true calling is to become a comedian," one judge remarked. "But we all love a singer who can make us smile." Mark's motto as a contestant is: "Hey Canada, my name is Mark Day and even though I may look like the boy next door, I'm coming to ring your doorbell."

&

Bernie Hogan, a Doctoral Candidate in sociology at the University of Toronto and a 2002 recipient of the University Medal for Academic Excellence in Sociology at MUN, recently received a two-year appointment as a Research Fellow at the University of Oxford. Bernie will be working at the Oxford Internet Institute, an interdisciplinary social science department focused on the social impact of the Internet. Bernie's dissertation is an empirical examination of the various combinations of media (e-mail, Facebook, mobile phones, etc.) which people use in their everyday life. At Oxford, he will continue to do research about related topics. In the last couple of years Bernie has given papers at a number of professional conferences including the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York.

&

Tanya Dunphy Lopez, who completed an M.A. in sociology in 2004, has recently accepted a position with the College of the North Atlantic in Qatar as an institutional research analyst. The work includes planning, initiating and coordinating the development of statistical methodologies and analytical procedures for collecting and interpreting statistical data. For the past three years Tanya has held a similar position at the headquarters of the College of the North Atlantic in Stephenville.

&

Ailsa Craig is happy to announce the birth of her second son, August Kenneth Murray. He was born on April 10<sup>th</sup>, weighing 10 lbs., 4.5 oz. Labour began shortly after a sociology department meeting.

&

Cara Lewis began working this summer for CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) as an Assistant Youth Organizer. She will work, in Newfoundland and Peru, with CUSO staff and volunteers and local theatre groups to raise awareness of CUSO's Youth, Social and Economic Inclusion program through activities at community fairs, performing street theatre, and liaising with the media. She will spend 22 months in Peru.

&

Allison Catmur recently completed the requirements for an M.A. and will formally graduate in the autumn of 2008. Her thesis, which was highly regarded by both her departmental committee and the external examiners, is a case study of Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Social Plan (SSP) and its implementation through six regional coordinating committees which operated from 1998 to 2004. The thesis pays particular attention to the operations of the Strategic Social Plan Coordinating Committee in coastal and central Labrador, where Allison carried out extensive fieldwork in 2004. Allison examines the SSP as an innovative approach to a new form of governance in the province.

Drawing from the theoretical literature on civil society, governance and critical theory, she concludes that the SSP record was mixed. It was constructive and positive in bringing together officials from various departments and agencies of government to work together more effectively on regional issues. But the SSP coordinating committees failed to incorporate the voluntary, community-based sector in the way that had been intended. Allison contends that the approach needed to include a capacity-building component for the voluntary sector. Her findings have important practical implications for the development of the province's new Rural Secretariat.

Since completing her graduate work, Allison has found employment with the provincial government, first in the Office of the Provincial Development Plan and, more recently, as an Immigration Program Officer in the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, which has established a new Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism responsible for implementing the province's Immigration Strategy. *By Doug House.*

&

Katherine Piercey recently completed a research paper for an M.A. degree titled "Debunking Major Shoplifting Myths." Her research involved a critical review of sociological theory, methodology, and research on shoplifting - a type of property crime that has been the subject of very little academic research. Informed largely by such theories of deviance, crime, and social control as labeling theory, techniques of neutralization, routine activities theory, strain or anomie theory, Piercey's research outlines and

assesses four shoplifting myths: (1) most financial losses experienced by the retail sector are the result of customer shoplifting, (2) most shoplifters are fairly well-organized professionals, (3) most shoplifters are women, and (4) most shoplifters are poor and steal to cope with their economically depressed situation.

Contrary to popular myths, shoplifters comprise a heterogeneous group of offenders. Amateurs and professionals, the young and senior citizens, the poor and the well-to-do engage in shoplifting. Stolen goods are typically of little financial value, with the items often discarded or never used by amateur shoplifters. Piercey's research also emphasizes that formal social control measures associated with shoplifting, including criminal justice intervention, are directed towards catching one type of offender - the relatively small group of highly skilled thieves who target expensive items.

Her research concludes with a suggestion for more qualitatively oriented research on shoplifting in Canada and for social control measures to be better informed by sociological research. *By Anthony Micucci.*

&

M.A. student, Jennifer Henning was elected Atlantic Provinces Representation for the Student Concerns Subcommittee of the Canadian Sociology Association.

&

In the autumn, Allyson Stokes and John McLevey will be continuing their studies in sociology as graduate students at McMaster University. Both have received substantial funding packages. Allyson will be working with Professor Robert Story, and John with Professor Neil McLaughlin

&

Sociology / Anthropology minor Melissa Tobin has been accepted for the Bachelor of Journalism program at the University of King's College in Halifax this coming fall. This is a one-year fast-track program designed for students who have already completed a Bachelor's degree. Only 44 students are accepted into the program annually.

&

Recent Publications by Faculty and Students:

Ronald Schwartz and Robert Barnett (Eds.) *Tibetan Modernities*. Leiden: Brill. This 458-page volume appeared in the Tibetan Studies Library.

Ailsa Craig, "Practicing Poetry: A Career without a Job." In Craig Calhoun and Richard Sennett (Eds.) *Practicing Culture*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Stephen Crocker, "Citizen Kant: Flatness and Depth in the Image of Thought," *Deleuze Studies*, December 2007.

Stephen Crocker, "Sounds Complicated: What Sixties Audio Experiments can Teach us about New Media Environments." In Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord (Eds.) *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Stephen Crocker, "Noises and Exceptions: Pure Mediality in Serres and Agamben," *Ctheory.net*, March 2007.

Scott Kenney, "Ritual Actions and Meaning among Freemasons: A Sociological Approach." In R.A. Gilbert (Ed.) *The Cantonbury Papers: Freemasonry and Initiatic Traditions*. Vol. 4. Hershham, UK: Lewis / Ian Allen, 2007.

John McLevey, review of Shelley Reuter's *Narrating Social Order: Agoraphobia and the Politics of Classification*, *Canadian Review of Sociology*, online book reviews, 2008.

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[FRONTPAGE](#)

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[THE ACCIDENTAL](#)

[SOCIOLOGIST](#)

*By Marilyn Porter*

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

*By Jack Ross*

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:

[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2 ▾

### MUN Sociology Photos

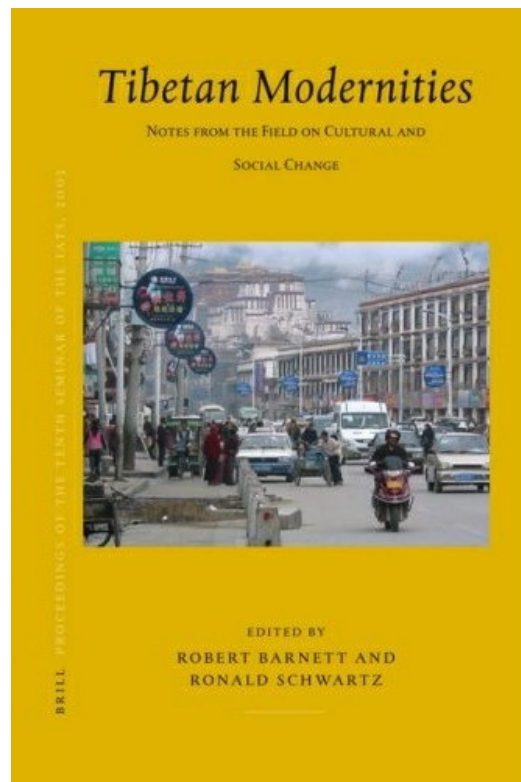


### Neis honoured in Norway

One of Memorial's most accomplished researchers has been recognized with a prestigious honour in Norway.

On March 28, Dr. Barbara Neis received an honorary doctorate award from the University of Tromsø, Norway.

This is the first major publication in the West to study modernity and its impact on contemporary Tibet. Based on field work by researchers from the fields of anthropology, sociology, environmental science, literature, art and linguistics, it presents essays on education, economics, childbirth, environment, caste, pop music, media and painting in Tibetan communities today. The findings emerge from studies carried out in Ladakh, Golok, Lhasa, Xining, Shigatse and other areas of the Tibetan world. It will provide important and sometimes surprising results for students of Tibet, China, Himalayan studies, as well as an important contribution to our understandings of modernity and development in the modern world.



**The cover of *Tibetan Modernities*, co-edited by Ronald Schwartz. The volume was published this spring by Brill Academic Publishers in The Netherlands.**



**Sociology Department, Memorial University of Newfoundland, October 2008.**

Front row, left to right: James Overton, Peter Sinclair, Audrey O'Neill (administrative staff), Stephen Riggins (Department Head 2005-08), Judi Smith (administrative staff), and Anton Oleinik. Back row: Susanne Ottenheimer, Rich Johnstone (retired), Stephen Crocker, Ronald Schwartz, Anthony Micucci, Barbara Neis, Nicole Power, Robert Lewis, Ailsa Craig, Volker Meja (retired), Linda Cohen, Karen Stanbridge, Leanne Lane, Anne Morris, Paul Ripley, Linda Cullum, Robert Hill, Scott Kenney, and Larry Felt. Absent: Judith Adler, Douglas House, and Marilyn Porter.





# Sociology on the Rock

## Sociology Department Newsletter

Winter 2008

Issue 2

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[FRONTPAGE](#)

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

*By Stephen Riggins*

[THE ACCIDENTAL](#)

[SOCIOLOGIST](#)

*By Marilyn Porter*

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

*By Jack Ross*

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:

[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2 ▾

### Internship Course

*By Stephen Riggins*

This one-semester internship course is a part-time, normally unpaid supervised field placement for academically strong third-year and fourth-year sociology majors. The goal is to help give students basic skills required for employment in nonprofit organizations in the social services or arts management. The course consists of 6 hours per week in worksite activities over a period of 8 weeks (a total of 48 hours of worksite activities) as well as classroom instruction during part of the term. The course is worth three credit hours and will be offered in the winter term.

In this course students participate in organized work activities which meet both their academic requirements and the organization's needs. By reflecting on their work experiences students should gain a broader appreciation of sociology as a discipline, strengthen their interpersonal and communication skills, and acquire an enhanced sense of how to apply academic knowledge in a work situation. The instructor will attempt to find suitable job placements in St. John's for students who apply before October 15.

If you are interested in taking this course, Sociology 4100, please contact Stephen Riggins immediately at [sriggins@mun.ca](mailto:sriggins@mun.ca). No applications will be accepted after October 15, 2008, unless the applicant can find his or her own placement. Admission is competitive and limited to fifteen students. Acceptance into the course will depend on the strength of the applicant's academic record, the amount of previous community service, and a suitable match between available work placements and the applicant's personal strengths. Applications should include a resume, a brief statement highlighting occupational skills, and the names and addresses of at least two referees.

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[FRONTPAGE](#)

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

By Stephen Riggins

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

By Stephen Riggins

[THE ACCIDENTAL](#)

[SOCIOLOGIST](#)

By Marilyn Porter

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

By Jack Ross

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:

[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2

## The Accidental Sociologist

By Marilyn Porter

I would probably not have dared to write this piece were I not a few months from retirement - so let's start with a confession. I am not sure that I am a "sociologist," and certainly my route into "sociology" was not conventional.

I can be partly excused because sociology as a discipline was not readily available when I chose my first degree, and certainly not at Trinity College, Dublin, in 1961. So I did modern history (starting in 485AD for reasons which escape me now but probably had something to do with St. Patrick, and ending before the outbreak of WW1) and political thought (which began with Plato and ended with the delights of contemporary Irish political bickering). After this entertaining but completely useless preparation, I took an education degree at Oxford, because it seemed practical. This meant doing Plato all over again and developing sufficiently robust teaching methods that I could make myself heard in a classroom lodged between the metalwork and woodwork shops.

I then fled to Africa and discovered my calling; and like Ivan Emke, it came through anthropology (see the first issue of *Sociology on the Rock*). In 1968 there was only one secondary school in Botswana and we were it. Revolutions of different kinds were breaking out all over the world and we band of young volunteer teachers saw it as our duty to invest our students with high-minded cooperative principles that led to dangerous confrontations when they returned to their traditional families. However, what really excited me was the diverse and changing society I found all around me. I devoured all the information I could find, the few anthropological studies and the more idiosyncratic and romantic Laurens Van der Post and spent time with a folklorist anxious to capture traditional Tswana folktales before they disappeared. I also heard about the even more interesting but remote and at that time virtually unstudied !Kung (or Bushmen). All of which should have led me to traditional anthropology.

However, some part of the American aid machine had decided that as Botswana had never had a census, it should have one. As a result, they gave the school 40 black, brand new, heavy duty (and heavy) bicycles. These were rather more valuable than gold in the local currency and the school delegated the task of keeping even nominal control over these machines to me and an American volunteer named Blair. If we could recapture enough bicycles and students at any one time, we were also supposed to collect some data. Thus I entered the world of sociological fieldwork.

We would cycle off across the arid bush to the "lands" where the Tswana grew their crops, and the cattle posts where they kept their magnificent cattle, and try to work out who lived where, with whom and when, and for how long and why, and who did what, and soon came to the realization that US census forms lacked the capacity to even envisage how a semi-nomadic society worked. (We did better with the income and expenditure survey, which involved assessing the goods in the shacks that passed as shops. As none of them had more than two shelves housing small bags of sugar, a few nails and a couple of other essentials, it did not take us long, and, even better, it fitted on the forms.) But the whole experience had whetted my appetite for the kind of study that I later knew as sociology (or maybe, anthropology).

A bit more than a year later, I was back in the UK in Bristol and looking for an Anthropology Department. Bristol University didn't have one; what it did have was a Sociology Department staffed almost entirely by Scottish anthropologists. Undeterred, I signed on for a one year "conversion" course, which essentially provided scads of reading lists and access to whatever courses we wanted to attend and other university resources. At the end of nine months, we sat the full-scale exams for the undergraduate degree in sociology. That's it; that's the full extent of my formal sociological training. Serendipity and a growing involvement with politics meant I read a lot of Marx, and for that matter, Gramsci, Lukacs, Althusser, Poulantzas, etc. I also read historians, like Edward Thompson and Christopher Hill and the emerging Ruskin scholars partly because they were radical but mostly because they were interested in the history of ideas (albeit male ideas). I also lucked into a class led by a pleasant drifty sort of man who introduced me to George Herbert Mead, social interactionists and social psychology. I had my first confrontation with statistics (if you don't count the American census people) in which we didn't do any statistics but fumbled around with some basic, but apparently relevant concepts like standard deviation. The man who taught us wasn't very interested either as he was going through a dramatic divorce at the time, which we students found much more educative.

Nine months, however, of more or less random wandering was not enough to quench my growing appetite for whatever this discipline of sociology might be. It seemed, in spite of its oddities, to have a commitment to analyzing and understanding the society around it. It even gave me permission to try to make sense of my growing radical political activity (though I learned rather more from well informed Communist friends and frenetic Trotskyists). Despite the arrival of my second child, I felt I had no choice but to go on and do a Ph.D. For this, I was provided with a (male) supervisor, and some regulations suggesting that I should produce an original thesis at some unspecified point. There was certainly no indication that I might also learn anything more specifically "sociological." In fact there seemed to be a general sense that to try to pin down the discipline more rigidly would be to go against its unstated mores and values. So, safely encompassed in an area called "industrial sociology" I would probably have been quite happy to study class relations, class consciousness, the ideological and repressive state apparatus and the general wickedness of capitalism, and duly emerge as trained and employable (or unemployable) as anyone else.

But at this point my story (and my life) became complicated because of the emergence of the Women's Movement and my instant involvement in it. It is difficult to remember now just what we were up against. Discrimination of all kinds was unquestioned; husbands were automatically heads of households; men earned much more than women for the same work; occupations, professions and senior positions were mostly closed; women had no control over their reproduction or over much else; if they suffered violence, it was their fault; they were sex objects and the butt of vicious "jokes." And women were as invisible in sociology as they were in every other discipline and every other part of life except for the designated roles of virgin, whore, actress and mother (and queen). As the first of the new breed of "feminists," we were beginning to ask a whole host of questions both inside



and outside the academy: questions ranging from "why are there no great women artists?" to "why can't we breastfeed babies on trains?" And, within sociology, why did all the texts assume that male experience was the only experience? Why did Talcott Parson's bizarre view of the sexual division of labour go unquestioned? Why, for that matter, even in "progressive" Marxist circles, was it assumed that the only true "revolutionaries" were working-class men and that only they could develop true working-class consciousness.

With my half-formed inkling that there was more to this than the current orthodoxy allowed, I wanted my Ph.D. to explore how "class consciousness" was developed in rather more ordinary circumstances and especially if it was true that women really were incapable of a political analysis, and if they did have an analysis, what kind was it. With such a far-fetched thesis topic and being a mere woman, I was not, of course, allowed to do my research in an approved male site (down a mine, in a car factory) but instead found myself in a factory that made cardboard boxes. I learned a great deal, produced a thesis that, probably inevitably, spent too long rebutting male arguments and establishing basic feminist principles. It also left me with a lifelong interest in trying to understand how "ordinary" people make sense of their world, where ideas come from, how they relate to "experience" and how and if "experience" changes their views.

Faced with an almost complete lack of written resources when we taught the first Women's Studies courses (outside the university), a group of us decided that we needed a reader - and thus was born *Half the Sky: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, the first such volume in the UK and, amazingly, still in print. In 1978, by now a single mother, I nailed my first fulltime, real, academic job - in the Sociology Department at Manchester University. Then, as now, the Manchester department was full of dazzling people and personalities and I relished it after rather stodgy Bristol. I don't remember that the department was especially concerned with my dodgy credentials as a sociologist, or with my increasing preoccupation with whatever was being done or written by or about women, mostly because with such a huge variety of intellectual endeavors all subsumed under "sociology" I seemed quite normal. With my fellow feminists Alison Kelly (who believed quantitative methods could work for women too) and Liz Stanley (just emerging from her deepest ethnomethodological phase) we put together possibly the least coherent and most challenging feminist course I have ever taught. It was one of the first such courses actually taught within a university department as opposed to a college, extra-murally, or as part of the Workers Educational Association.

Indeed, in the UK and later in Canada, sociology was becoming the "natural" home to both feminist scholarship and teaching as it has remained ever since. Our colleagues in history departments, for example, had a much harder time establishing the legitimacy of women's history. I would argue that this is as it should be. Sociology as a discipline *should* both be on the cutting edge of new ideas and trends and offer a home to as wide a variety of enquiry into social conditions as possible. At a time when Memorial University now has a full department of Women's Studies it is worth remembering how much and for how long the cuckoo of feminism depended on the friendliness of the sociological nest.

Manchester marked my career and possible identity as a sociologist in many ways, but one seed was planted that only flowered much later. At the time there were three senior professors in the department - Teodor Shanin, Peter Worsley, and Brian Roberts. They took it in turns to keep a genteel eye on the department and spent the rest of the time cruising the world, giving high-level lectures and collecting new graduate students. They would send these eager students back to Manchester where the rest of us were supposed to pick them up, integrate them into the program and supervise them. Coupled with the already heterogeneous student population, the graduates helped to make us the most ethnically and linguistically diverse department in the country. They were also passionately involved in the politics and development of their own countries and any of us who came in contact with them rapidly developed a more cosmopolitan and development oriented way of working and seeing the world than was usual in the UK at the time.

All this came to an end with Thatcher. Universities, along with much else, were slashed and most of us who had been appointed in the previous 5 years lost our jobs. Fortunately for me, one of Peter Worsley's many overseas contacts was with Memorial, and somehow this led to a one-year appointment in the Department of Sociology at Memorial. It certainly wasn't a planned move and it just as certainly changed my life. Barely able to find it on the map, I arrived here in 1980 and one look out through the Narrows did the rest. I was fascinated. Nothing was the same, not even the language. Here was another, distinct culture and way of living, another history, another way of living economically and an entirely different politics.

Clearly I had to start again and learn all I could about this new place and the people who called it home - and that imperative guided my work, play and research for the next decade. The women's movement in St. John's was just as vibrant (and much less divided) than the one I had left in the UK; women's studies was just getting started at Memorial University, and there appeared to have been remarkably little research done on women in Newfoundland and Labrador. I had colleagues, in sociology and other departments, working in related areas, who were generous with their knowledge and contacts. At that point the field was wide enough for all of us, and I had a joyful time roaming the province for work and pleasure, trying always to listen to and understand what women (especially) had to say about their lives and ideas. In many ways this period of work allowed me an ideal combination of all I had learned in history, anthropology and sociology.

And that was just Newfoundland and Labrador - there was also Canada to explore; another politics to understand and another way of doing things - and many new friends to make. I was fortunate that the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (now without anthropology, alas), the late National Action Committee and the New Democratic Party, among other organizations, made room for me and let me fast-track into my new country. I was even more fortunate to play a part in the NGO involvement in the glory days of UN sponsored conferences and the many intricate meetings in New York. Such interest in and involvement in international affairs was quite new to me; in the UK we were hardly aware of the process or the possibilities, especially for NGO intervention. Perhaps in the gloomy 90s and even more gloomy new millennium we tend to forget the passion of the fights we had then, and the conviction that the world could, and would change for the better as a result of our efforts.

Given all that, it was, perhaps, inevitable that I should be drawn into the field of women in development, but my actual entry was as serendipitous as all my other major moves. I first went to Indonesia in 1990 because an anthropology friend had said I couldn't miss it if I wanted to understand Asia. On her introduction, I met Saparinah Sadli, a psychology professor at the University of Indonesia. Hearing I was interested in women's studies she told me that the Rector had told her to start a graduate program in women's studies at the university. "Impossible," I said, "ridiculous; you don't even have an undergraduate program, or even any real courses, or faculty to teach them." With that sweet persuasiveness I later learned was so typical of her, she said "Well, we have to do it anyway, so why don't you just help us?" So we did, and that was the next ten years of my life, and perhaps the most interesting so far. A small group of enthusiasts developed and we brought students to Memorial University and took Memorial University faculty to Indonesia; we developed curricula and taught intensive courses in theory and methodology and developed joint research and helped them argue with their university administrators. And all the while, I learned a new society and a new way

of looking at things. I learned, especially, that feminist theory and practice, like all good sociological theory and practice, get made from the ground up, not inherited from some academic source in the economic north.

Since then I have been able to work in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania and Kenya on either research or development projects. Inevitably, much of my activity has primarily focused on what the bureaucrats at the Canadian International Development Agency insist on calling "capacity building" or "institutional strengthening" but is actually just working with colleagues in different social and academic situations in whatever ways seem most helpful. Some of these colleagues have been sociologists, and some have not, but in all cases our common agendas have led to close collaboration and consequently to collaborative research. Both kinds of "development" work are time consuming, grueling, intensely rewarding and often humbling.

So there you have it. Retirement knocks on the door and I have no idea what the next decade will bring. I have no idea whether I am looking back on a sociological career or not. I know that I am a feminist, and, at heart, still a marxist, and - maybe - a sociologist. I know that the discipline and institutions of sociology have given me the freedom to indulge my passion to understand whatever social situation I find myself in and a tolerance to stretch whatever boundaries have confronted me. I know that sociology, at least at Memorial University, has conferred a freedom and a collegial tolerance that would be hard to find anywhere else. Does this make me a sociologist? I don't know. Do I mind? I think not.

Before the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as President of Liberia, I used to call sociology "the Liberian flag of academia," a flag of convenience that could provide cover for all kinds of licit and illicit activities. This is another version of Ivan Emke's "intellectual gabion basket." So maybe I am not alone in valuing sociology as one of the few spaces in the academy with permeable boundaries and the imagination to give us our heads.

© Marilyn Porter 2008.

"Sociology is something that you do, not something you read."  
Erving Goffman

Issue 2 Winter 2008

[FRONTPAGE](#)

[THE CLIPBOARD](#)

By Stephen Riggins

[INTERNSHIP COURSE](#)

By Stephen Riggins

[THE ACCIDENTAL](#)

[SOCIOLOGIST](#)

By Marilyn Porter

[WITNESS IN PRISON](#)

By Jack Ross

[PHOTO GALLERY](#)

Editor:

[Stephen Harold Riggins](#)

Archives:

Issue 2

### Witness in Prison

By Jack C. Ross

**Editor's Note:** Dr. Jack C. Ross, who taught in the MUN sociology department from 1968 to 1983, passed away in December 2007. The cause was respiratory failure associated with Parkinson's Disease. His wife Dorothy and two daughters were with him when he died. He was buried in Argenta, BC, which became the family home after he retired.

Jack C. Ross was born in 1921 in Arizona. He had a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Minnesota and was part of the link between Memorial and Minnesota, which was a prominent feature of our department in the 1960s. At Minnesota he studied with the highly-respected sociologists Arnold Rose and Don Martindale. Jack's academic specialty came to be the sociology of voluntary associations. His major publication is an historical and cross-cultural study of voluntary associations titled *An Assembly of Good Fellows*. Before coming to MUN, Jack taught for five years at the University of South Florida in Tampa, where he was an activist in the Black community. He was a co-author of *Black Belonging: A Study of the Social Correlates of Work Relations among Negroes*. Jack was also the editor and translator of the writings of the Swiss sociologist Albert Meister.

During World War II, Jack served in the U.S. Army for three years. But while he was an undergraduate at the University of California at Berkeley he began to identify with the pacifist ideals of the Religious Society of Friends (more commonly known as Quakers). His engagement in the peace and environmental movements included running unsuccessfully for Parliament in 1993.

Jack Ross was arrested on his 42<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary near Nelson, BC, at a protest over the logging industry. He could have avoided prison if he had agreed to stop participating in anti-logging demonstrations, but he refused. The following is an excerpt from one of Jack's pamphlets in which he gives an account of spending ten weeks in a maximum security prison:

"I was aware in 1997," Jack wrote, "that I was going to a prison system that would be relatively benign. I would not encounter the hostility experienced by conscientious objectors. I did encounter some anti-environmentalists. But the most frightening thing about prison was getting there. The sheriff's van takes about seven hours to go from Nelson to Kamloops with an *en route* overnight stay in a city jail if the trip begins late in the day. Transportation in summer is inhumane: stifling heat, cramped seating, poor ventilation, little water, and guards who treat prisoners like containerized cargo. Doors are locked from the outside. There are no interior door handles and no safety belts in most vehicles. In case of a collision that disables guards, handcuffed prisoners have no possible way out...."

I treated the penitentiary like a monastery. I wonder what the superintendent would say if he knew he was an abbot substitute? I had the opportunity to study the *Bible*, to observe long periods of silence, read the *Christian Faith and Practice* of the London Yearly Meeting straight through for the first time, and read again the *Journals* of George Fox and John Woolman. I read Jim Corbett's profound spiritual autobiography *Goatwalking*. He was the founder of the Sanctuary movement. I had met him through the interchurch project, Borderlinks, in Tucson in which I played a minor part helping refugees seeking sanctuary from repressive Central American regimes. I read and reread several of the books of Buddhist Thich Nhat Hahn (especially *Being Peace*, *Touching Peace*, and *Peace is Every Step*). All helped me to have a good experience from lengthy confinement. As well as studying like a novice monk, I had time to rue my sins, which were sufficient to keep me busy.

Wilmer Cooper in his book *A Living Faith* writes that the purpose of the testimony of simplicity is "reordering our lives so that we become spiritually centred and focused." This describes what happened to me in prison.

The mental effect of coerced simplicity was unexpected. My thinking simplified. It became easier to turn my mind to what was vital....

My routine was simple. In my cell I would awake before the 7:00 a.m. lights-up time and quietly whistle hymns.... Thinking the words while whistling gave me a sense of unity with my home Meeting and with other Friends. During First Day meeting [i.e., Sunday church service] at home I frequently recall and hold in the light [i.e., pray for] Friends with whom I have worshipped around the world. I did the same in prison. In this mood I found the results of reading, studying and prayer coming together.

I studied fasting in the *Bible* and Gandhi's *Autobiography*, and decided to begin a week of fasting. I was aware of Biblical admonitions about privacy of devotions and fasting, but like Gandhi I knew that I was also in a political situation. I decided to use the fast to call attention to the ecological issues for which I went to prison. I informed Dottie, who told others of my "Week of Witness for Water." I later learned that hundreds of people were joining me. Forestry policies and practices did not change.

...After four or five days of fasting, I suddenly had a profound religious experience. I was overcome by powerful emotions. I read somewhere that the word "ecstasy" means "turned inside out" in Greek. Maybe that was it. All mystics say that the experience cannot be described, though some go on to try. Soon the cell block door rattled, the lunch rumbled in, and so I returned to the grim penitentiary world.

[At the Nelson city jail] the regimen was even more severe: no exercise and almost 24 hours a day lock-down, usually alone in a very small, bare concrete cell. It was essentially solitary confinement. Usually only visitors from a prisoner's immediate family were permitted and Dottie frequently came to see me. Erratic administration of visiting practices was part of the routine of anxiety and humiliation inflicted on prisoners. Sometimes they would allow Dottie and me to be together for half an hour and sometimes we could visit only through the glass partition for a few minutes. Her presence was a great morale builder. After one of her visits I returned to my tiny cell and was at once overwhelmed by the same transcendent joy....

I was prepared to encounter possible violence in prison, both because of the location of the facility in a logging area, and because the premier of British Columbia had been calling environmentalists "enemies of the people of British Columbia." This had already resulted in some attacks. There was some initial hostility by guards but most inmates readily accepted me. Their logic seemed to be that I was opposed to the government, that meant cops, and so I must be all right...

I was by far the oldest man in prison which may have played a part in the acceptance I experienced. Prisoners realized I had gone to jail for a principle. I found myself becoming a sort of counselor to some prisoners. Some just needed a listener. Some of them even offered to fast with me.

The initial hostility of some guards seemed due to the fact that because I was well-known I might therefore expect privileged treatment. When that phase faded, several of them took occasion to seek me out privately to express support. And some of them just needed to talk to someone in that highly regimented environment...

One guard had been particularly hostile from the start. He would talk to a fellow guard about us as if we were not there. I was a stone. We were not people. I tried to be pleasant without pushing, and he seemed to relax a bit. As mid-October came and it was getting cold in the exercise yard the young men played basketball for only a few minutes and then huddled together, smoking while waiting the end of the scheduled hour. That was when I could get the ball and shoot a few baskets.

The recommended technique for shaky Parkinson patients like me is to balance the ball on the dominant hand and push toward the hoop in the middle of the tremble. I occasionally made a basket and got rousing cheers from the onlookers and comments about the National Basketball Association looking for new talent. Then the big surprise. The same tough guard walked up to me and almost shyly asked if he could play. I assented. Soon we were just a couple of kids again, shooting baskets at the school playground after hours. He got cheers too, maybe his first as a guard. It was almost worth those weeks in prison for just those few moments....

Surprisingly, ten weeks in a maximum security prison released in me inspiration and intense spiritual feelings that had not occurred in Friends' meetings for 50 years. I have accepted the fact that voluntary disciplines are of little avail for me. Advance preparation in nonviolence, the prayers and support I received from family and Friends, and the memories of the affection of the young people with whom I was arrested sustained me through the rigours of prison. An Anglican clergyman wrote to me that I seemed to have found a ministry in prison. Now that I have been told that, it seems obvious. Reconciliation in difficult times and places opens in the measure that one dwells in the power of truth."

© Jack Ross, *To Dwell in the Power of Truth*. Argenta, BC: Argenta Friends Press, 1999.