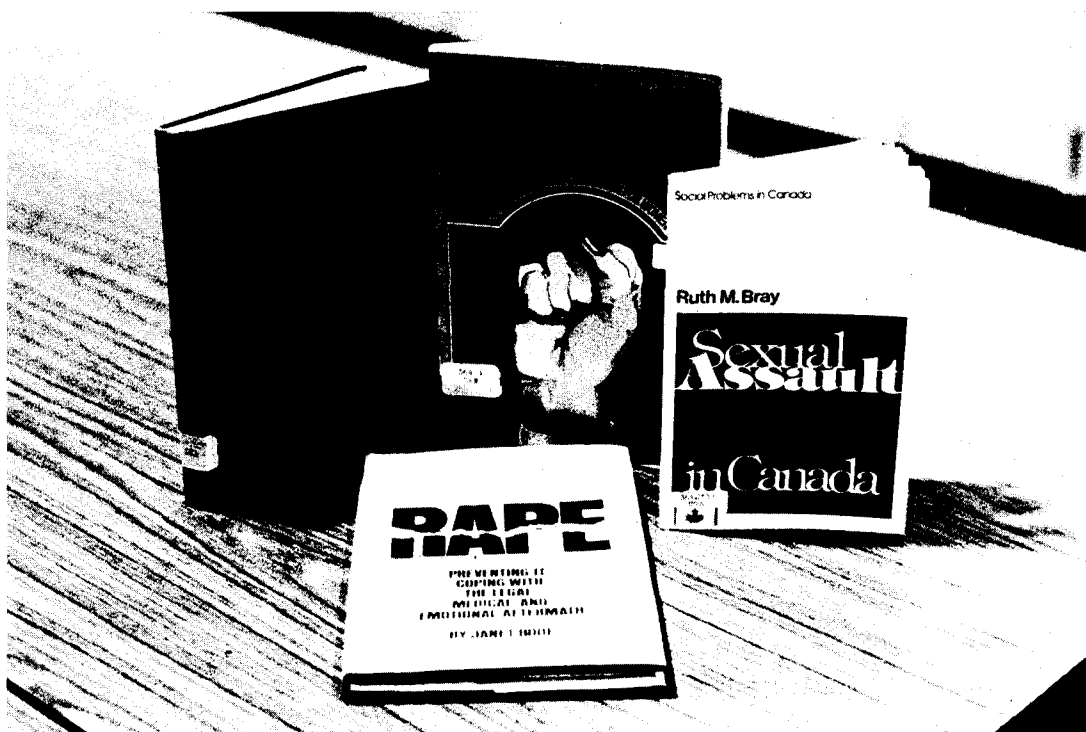


Photo: Cyndy Baskin



# RAPE & RAPE-CRISIS CENTRES: AN INTERVIEW

Cyndy Baskin

*L'auteure, qui fait actuellement des études supérieures en éducation à l'Université de Toronto, a travaillé pendant quelques années dans un centre contre le viol à Edmonton, en Alberta. En tant que bénévole et conseillère, elle s'est occupée de nombreuses victimes de viols. Elle a également participé à un projet d'éducation publique dont l'objectif était de sensibiliser les jeunes des écoles secondaires à ce qu'est le viol. Dans cette entrevue, l'auteure parle de l'éducation que les femmes offrent au public sur ce sujet, de ce qu'elles font pour prévenir ce crime, et de ce qu'il faut faire quand il a été commis.*

*Britt Griffin, now a philosophy of education graduate student at the University of Toronto, worked for a few years at a rape-crisis centre in Edmonton, Alberta. As a crisis-line volunteer and counsellor, Ms. Griffin dealt extensively with rape victims. She also participated in a public-edu-*

*cation program designed to teach high-school students about rape.*

**CYNDY BASKIN:** Ms. Griffin, since rape-crisis centres are a relatively new phenomenon, could you explain their role in dealing with rape victims?

**BRITT GRIFFIN:** Rape-crisis centres provide anonymous support for rape victims. Immediately after the rape occurs, a counsellor will accompany the victim to the hospital and to the police (should she want to do this). If she decides to take her case to court, a counsellor will also accompany her there. Counsellors also provide follow-up counselling and are able to refer rape victims to experienced psychiatrists or social workers. They also give non-judgmental support by way of talking to the family or boyfriend of the victim.

**C.B.:** Do you believe rape-crisis centres really help rape victims?

**B.G.:** Yes, the centres are effective in two ways. First, they are beneficial on a personal level because

they provide support to women who may not have anyone they can talk to about what has happened to them. Also, some of the counsellors have been raped themselves; so they truly understand what a victim is going through. Secondly, the centres have been instrumental in increasing general public awareness about rape and explaining why it happens.

**C.B.:** What has the Women's Movement done to increase public awareness about rape?

**B.G.:** The Women's Movement has broken the silence. Before, rape was taboo, not to be talked about. Now it is "out of the closet." Because we can talk about rape openly, we are able to help change people's attitudes about it, to get them to recognize the old myths about rape. When I spoke with the high-school students back in Edmonton, I discovered that they were aware that all sorts of women ran the risk of being raped, not just the young, good-looking ones or the ones who dressed a certain



Photo: Cyndy Baskin

way. Moreover, through talking about rape, we help people understand what rape is. We have demystified it. Finally, we realize now that rape victims *do* survive and get through the after-effects of rape as long as they have support.

*C.B.:* You believe then that attitudes must be worked on. How, in your opinion, can we further educate the public about rape?

*B.G.:* We should work with children as young as those in elementary school. We must teach co-operation rather than competition. Children should be taught what it feels like to be of the opposite sex. Also, female children should be taught assertiveness, but not aggressiveness. Moreover, sex education should include the teaching of moral issues and values rather than just facts, because children become confused when they are merely given the facts. I see such a movement in the educational system beginning now, for children are being taught to challenge what they see and be critical of the roles played by different people.

*C.B.:* We've been hearing a lot about rape prevention, such as

self-defence. What do you believe effective rape prevention to be?

*B.G.:* Self-defence for women is good in that it helps women to be confident and assertive. However, it shortens our sights somehow, for it teaches us how to help make ourselves safe rather than to make the world safe. Furthermore, I'm not sure how effective self-defence is if an attacker has a weapon. There are other types of rape prevention, though. For instance, the buddy system is good not only because it is practical, but because it shows women how to care for one another. Something as simple as walking another woman to her car is reassuring because it means you are looking out for her. Moreover, a woman can often stop a situation before it occurs by being aware and assertive. A woman may be able to prevent a date rape, for example, by getting the terms clear beforehand. If a woman is asked out to dinner by a man, she should find out what, if anything, is required from her in return. Many men, taking it for granted that women are more promiscuous today, often expect to sleep with a

woman on the first date. If a woman does not want to, she must let the man know ahead of time — not very romantic, but then neither is rape!

*C.B.:* What about protecting ourselves by, say, never going out alone at night?

*B.G.:* Since half of the women raped are raped in their own homes, this is not necessarily the answer. Believing that we are completely safe in the home gives us a false sense of security. Remaining at home all the time means never really living. It does take courage to take chances of some sort at times, to show people that women will not be kept prisoners in their own homes and live constantly in fear. For a woman there is always risk. Yet to live in fear is not really to live at all.

---

*Cyndy Baskin has a degree in English from the University of Toronto and has written articles for Toronto Native Times, Ontario Indian, Sweet Grass, and Canadian Woman Studies.*