

# Norma and Doris, Gal Pals

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Norma Scarborough and Doris Anderson.

*Norma Scarborough, une mère de cinq enfants et grand-mères de plusieurs, une véritable image de respectabilité, a été la voix pour l'Action canadienne pour les droits à l'avortement (CARAL) pendant les luttes juridiques et politiques des années 70 et 80. Norma a été une des amies les plus fidèles de Doris durant les dernières années de sa vie. Les deux femmes partageaient les attributs de leur génération, la droiture, le pragmatisme et une dévotion sans faille à la cause des femmes.*

Norma Scarborough became a familiar face—a handsome woman with snow white hair, a mother of five and grandmother of many, the very picture of mainstream

respectability—as the voice of CARAL, the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, during the legal and political battles of the 1970s and 1980s.

Her first direct memory of Doris Anderson was an article about abortion in *Chatelaine* in the late 1960s that was clear, forthright, and shocking to Norma, who was then a school secretary in suburban Scarborough and utterly unaware of the struggle for reproductive rights. (*Chatelaine's* first tough article on abortion came immediately after Doris became editor in 1959.)

That article jolted Norma into activism; she shyly attended a meeting at the Royal York Hotel where Laura

Sabia called for a march on Ottawa, and shortly after that journeyed to Ottawa to the founding meeting of CARAL, where she was elected to the executive.

Norma was one of Doris's most intimate friends in the last years of her life, a bond that Norma attributed to their starkly different circumstances and personalities. "Doris moved in circles I could never dream of, and in some ways I think it was a relief for her to talk with someone who didn't hang out with big shots," said Norma, age 81, when I interviewed her in her modest senior's apartment. That both women shared a generational attribute of forthrightness, pragmatism, and unquestioned devotion to the women's cause is another obvious link.

Their friendship had been forged in the late '70s when Norma, already on the executive of CARAL, was elected to the executive of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women at the same time Doris assumed the chair of NAC. "I sat beside her at meetings and she approved of my economical method of taking meeting notes. After most of our meetings, Doris would host us all at dinner at her place."

During all the years of her abortion rights activism, Norma could count on Doris to write letters, offer support, join a lobby group—but never join in frontline marches or demonstrations. "The left-wing of our movement held that against her, but to my mind, she never once let me down." Doris made sure that both the "pro" and "con" sides of reproductive freedom were always represented in *Chatelaine's* articles, though her own pro-choice stance was clear. By protecting her position as editor, she was able to play an influential role in other arenas. "She had access to governments and to information that was very useful to us," Norma said.

"Doris hated the disorganization of the more activist and left-wing parts of the women's movement. I was torn between the two; I admired Doris so much and at the same time, I was drawn to the activist left in CARAL. I once even went out and bought work boots and a knapsack to be more like them—can you imagine, a woman like me with all those kids!"

Norma and Doris ate lunch together at least once every two weeks during the last four years of Doris's life. "She loved to talk about her youth, her mother. She was shocked that I didn't bother knowing about my family history. We talked about our children, our feelings. We were so easy together. We ate at the Astoria on the Danforth where all the waiters knew us, and later, when she couldn't get around as well, at the Hothouse Restaurant downstairs from her condo. She knew my circumstances, and always quietly paid for my meal.

"And we went to movies together. We always fell asleep—I sat stoically upright, snoring lightly, and Doris nodded until she jerked awake. Then we'd go for coffee, talk about the movie and make the whole thing up."

"I marveled at her. Whenever I re-read *Rebel Daughter*, I'm just amazed by her whole life and all her accom-

plishments. And her character! She told me that she was determined never to marry until her career was well established—I was so impressed! When my boyfriend came home from the war, I married him just because that's what everyone did.

"It was funny about Doris; she didn't use the jargon of the movement, but she lived her feminism every day.

"We talked freely about our love affairs. She loved sex and had many, many relationships—and she was always in charge. One of her former lovers with whom she lived in her 20s was still in touch with her now and then, right up to the last.

"When Doris learned that her condition was very serious and that she was going to die, she went crazy for a couple of days. It was sorrow. She couldn't bear to lose all that she had and loved. And then she gathered herself together and determined not to be a pain in the ass to anyone, and to die with dignity.

"We talked a lot about the afterlife. I'm not sure that she would have called herself an atheist, exactly—maybe an agnostic, but she was very clear that she wanted to be buried in Alberta, next to her family.

"I saw her the day before she died. She was sitting on her couch, leaning back in her dressing gown. I brought her some chicken and I knew she wasn't hungry but she made herself eat it.

"We were both unsentimental. But I'm glad that as I left, I kissed her on the forehead.

"My God, I miss her so much."



From left to right, Joy Carroll speaking to Norma Scarborough, Doris Anderson and Sylva Fraser.

*Laurell Ritchie is a national representative with the Canadian Auto Workers and has worked in the labour movement since 1972. Laurell has also been active in the women's movement since 1970. She was a long-time board member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and for many years the co-chair of NAC's "Women and the Economy" and "Women and Work" committees.*