

They were questioning people, but nobody spoke. Nobody. We were so much together at that time. We all stuck together, through it. Eventually we looked at piecework and decided to try and take it out of the collective agreement. We're all hourly paid now. People are less stressed-out now, they feel better. The pay for most of the people, because of the overtime they put in, has actually gone up. That was the biggest, biggest victory we ever had in Coats Patons' history.

### **The next generation**

This generation that is being hired by the company is a younger set. I make it a point to go and introduce myself. Let them know where I can be found if they have a problem, who their shop steward is. And they feel good about it. Some of them will be threatened by management. People tell them "Don't go to Helen." I try and get rid of that fear with them. And some of them are quite militant. They're militant because some of the shop stewards that are there let them know, "listen there's a union here. If you have a problem don't listen to management, we'll go to Helen and she'll represent you."

### **Challenging harassment**

People are definitely more prepared to challenge harassment now. They are more equipped because they know there's a union here. They know there are laws to protect them and they are very much aware of that. And it's now coming to the surface. So you don't find there is too much harassment. Of course you're going to have supervisors who do do it. You can't get out of that. But they're very few. Very, very few. And when we get a hold of it we deal with it.

### **Women in the labour movement**

At the big labour bodies, such as the OFL and the CLC<sup>3</sup> it's harder to be heard as a woman. I've heard it myself... when people are talking about sexual harassment and minority issues, and women in the workplace, the [leadership] don't seem to really listen or participate too much. And that's a shame because we're all working people and we're all supposed to support one another. It has improved but we still have a long way to go. It has improved overall.

### **Goals for the future**

Our main goals now must be unity and solidarity. Because if we have unity we can overcome any obstacle. I would like to see more involvement at the top level [of the union] with the membership.... When you know that the leadership is behind you, and your membership is behind you, it builds up your strength. Emotionally, it really makes a difference.

<sup>1</sup>A "skein" is a continuous strand of yarn or cord in the form of a collapsed coil.

<sup>2</sup>"Piecework" is an incentive pay system, whereby workers receive a variable amount of pay depending on their individual output.

<sup>3</sup>UNITE Local 836 is affiliated with both the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

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## **JOAN BOND**

### **Cottage Country**

The door opens, she searches  
my face as through fog,  
nonetheless, invites me  
into her room of mismatched chairs and memories.

Repeating news of her husband's death  
just three days ago (in reality, twenty years),  
she locks my hands like a vice,  
"Why didn't he tell me about his heart!"

Her eyes narrow, she investigates  
(as if divining my bra and shoe sizes)  
how I know the people across the back lane,  
then squeals when I recite the names of neighbours.

Our lips soft, we fumble over which holiday  
the whole street gathered for hot dogs  
and Mr. Zencowski's fireworks, every face  
upturned  
toward celestial illusion.

She takes me for a saleslady of magazines  
(more on her floor than I could read in a year)  
shouting, "No thank you dear, I have my favourites."

Like a dervish, my mind twirls out of the  
present  
into the past, my voice an octave lower,  
"Magazines are so nice at the cottage."

Another squeal  
(arms fluttering like fledgling wings),  
she parades the status of hoi polloi  
who visited their guest cabins,  
who swam in their lake,  
her eyes as bright  
as the child she is.

*Joan Bond's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*