

establishing Native religious rights in Canada's prisons. He has twice been awarded honorary doctorates from Canadian universities, is a member of the International World Council of Churches Steering Committee, and a central figure in the International Prison Abolition movement.

4. Penal exchange columns were featured in most penal publications throughout the 1950s and 1960s. They served as a means of recognition, camaraderie and censorship, and as a way to carry on internal debates and to maintain contact.

5. See for example Vladimir Nekrassoff, "About Penitentiaries: A Review of Trends and Ideas," in *Pen-O-Rama* October 1961, Ste. Vincent de Paul Penitentiary.

6. Blackstock, Hjalmarson and Reid have published commercial books on prison and their lives, while Frank Guiney has written the best historical pieces on prison life and its subculture that I have encountered in the pages of the penal press. He has also been the recipient of numerous awards for his poetry.

7. See for example, E.S. Gardner's articles in his column "The Court of Last Resort" in *Argosy* magazine throughout the 1950s. His pieces such as "The Importance of the Penal Press" were reprinted by many of the Canadian penal press publications.

8. Note that institutional financial support, large paid subscribers lists, and advertisers allowed publications to be distributed free to many media outlets and professionals working within the criminal-justice system.

9. For a current commentary on Kingston Prison for Women, see J. Mayhew (1988).

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DON WEITZ

Phoenix Rising

Its Birth And Death

Phoenix Rising was a unique magazine, not simply because it was the only anti-psychiatry magazine in Canada, but also because it was published by former psychiatric inmates. *Phoenix* began publishing in March of 1980 only to die in July, 1990 due to lack of funding. During its decade of publishing, the magazine was a supporter of the international psychiatric inmates' liberation movement. Thirty-two issues were produced, including three double issues, exposing psychiatric abuses and challenging the tyranny of psychiatry over people's lives. We focused on a wide variety of social, political and human rights issues faced by psychiatric inmates and survivors: homelessness, electroshock (ECT), forced drugging, and the abuse of the rights of women, children and elderly prisoners. We did our best to draw attention to the myth of "schizophrenia," to the deaths caused by psychiatric treatment, and to the psychiatric victimization of gays and lesbians. It is doubtful that another magazine will replace *Phoenix* in its fearless exposure of psychiatric abuses.

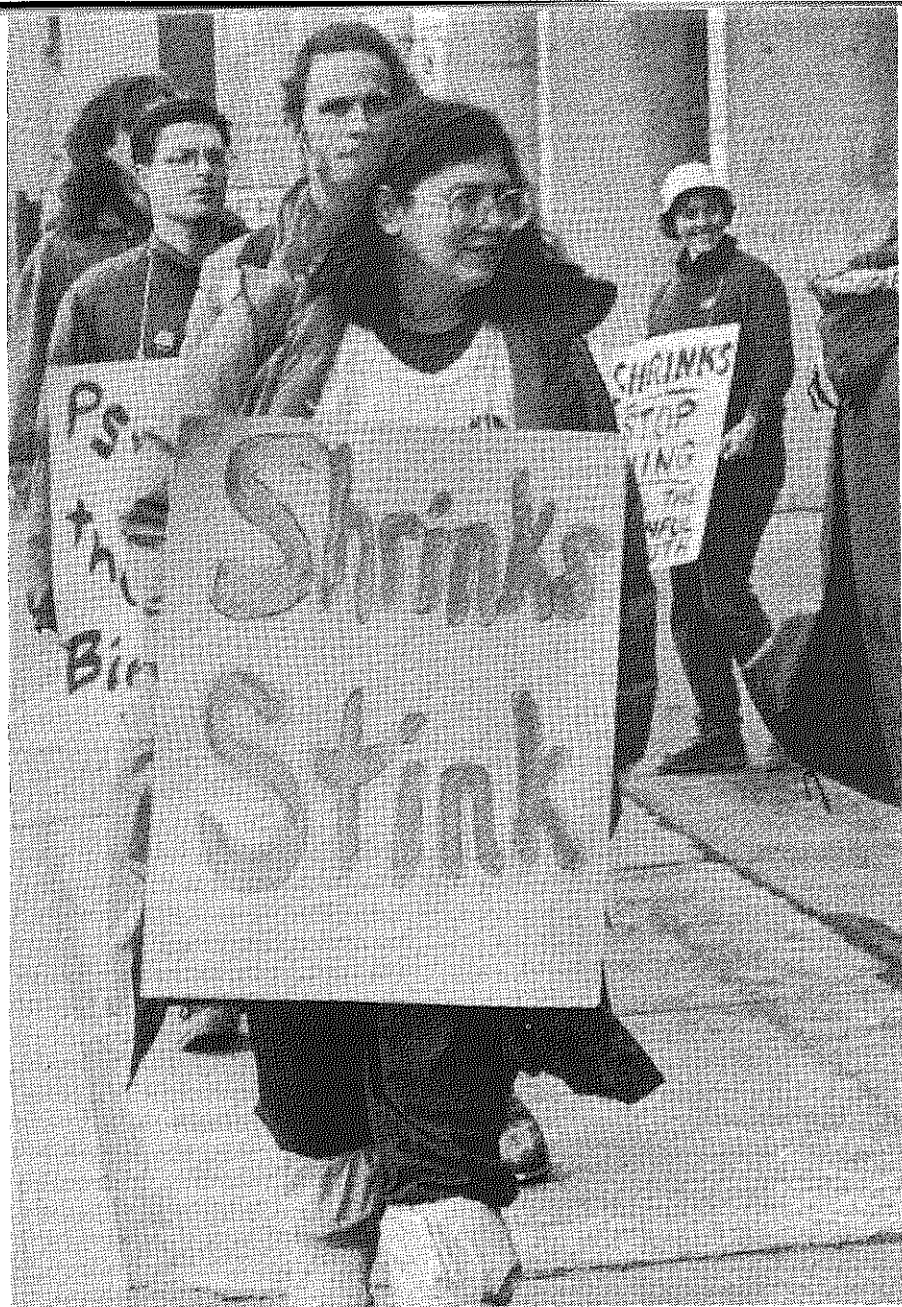
I founded *Phoenix Rising* with Carla McKague in 1979. We were both psychiatric survivors. We had read and been inspired by *Madness Network News*, the first inmates' liberation and anti-psychiatry magazine in the U.S., *In a Nutshell*, a newsletter of the Mental Patient Association in Vancouver, *The Cuckoo's Nest*, a now-defunct Toronto newsletter, and the outspoken critical writings of dissident psychiatrists such as Thomas Szasz, Peter Bregging and R.D. Laing. Unfortunately there are still very few dissident mental health professionals in Canada.

Inspired by these other publications, we believed that a magazine published by psychiatric survivors like ourselves could become a credible and powerful voice for psychiatric inmates and ex-inmates living in Canada and throughout the world. It could help to empower our brothers and sisters by publishing their personal stories, poems and artwork, by encouraging them to keep writing and speaking out, and by allowing them to establish contact with other groups and individuals. When *Phoenix* finally emerged, it became a creative outlet for many people who had been damaged and rendered voiceless by institutional psychiatry.

The first four issues were published in one year out of a two-bedroom apartment on Spadina Road in Toronto. A small, committed editorial collective gradually formed. The first collective consisted of Carla, Cathy McPherson, Mike Yale, Joanne Yale and myself. We held frequent meetings in the apartment, and one bedroom became the office where we did all the typing, editing and layout. At the time we had no word-processor or computer. We began with very little funding, receiving a \$5,400 grant from PLURA, a multi-denominational Canadian church group which gives start-up grants to grassroots groups.

Our first issue came out in March 1980. The front cover featured an illustration of the mythic phoenix rising from its ashes, a symbol of the psychiatric survivor reborn after a kind of death by fire. In our first editorial we outlined our goals and philosophy and coined the term "psychiatric inmate" to replace "mental patient." A few excerpts from this editorial are worth quoting:

We'd like *Phoenix Rising* to serve as a rallying point for inmates and ex-inmates who want to bring about changes in the "mental health" system



Phoenix Rising was probably the first Canadian periodical to point out the close links between the psychiatric inmate and the regular prisoner

confined in a hospital, prison, etc." The "etc." includes "mental hospitals" and other involuntarily entered institutions in which people's daily lives are totally controlled by the authorities.

◀ Resistance Against Psychiatry (RAP) members picket Ontario Psychiatric Association conference / photo: Konnie Reich

People in prison and psychiatric inmates are deprived of many of the same civil and human rights. These include freedom of movement; the right to vote; the right to communicate openly with anyone; ...the right to privacy and confidentiality; the right to wear one's own clothes; the right to refuse any treatment or program; the right to be treated with dignity and respect; and the right to appeal any abuse or violation of these and other rights while locked up.

...In addition, people judged to be suffering from a "mental illness" and about to be involuntarily committed to a psychiatric institution are automatically denied the right to *due process*... They're denied the right to legal counsel before and during commitment procedures. Due process is the legal right to a trial or public hearing *before* loss of freedom. People accused of criminal acts are routinely given their day in court before imprisonment. However, people who have committed no crime but have been judged "insane," "psychotic," "suicidal" or "dangerous" by one or two psychiatrists are routinely denied the right to defend their sanity in court before being committed.

Prisoners are traditionally given a fixed, definite sentence; they know when they will be released. Involuntarily committed inmates generally do not know this...



that is all too often damaging rather than helpful, and oppressive rather than liberating. ...We want to educate the public about the shortcomings and injustices of the present system..., and challenge the myths and stereotypes attached to "mental illness".... We've chosen to use the term "psychiatric inmate" rather than the conventional one of "mental patient." We were there ... against our will. We lost such basic rights as the right to choose our own therapist, the right to refuse treatment, the right to leave the institution – even the right to make phone calls or have visitors. These are all rights which *medical patients* take for granted. In short, *we lost control over our lives*, in the same way that inmates in prison do. The fact that what happened to us was called "therapy" rather than "punishment" does not obscure this basic fact. ...Our hope is that by providing medical and legal information, and bringing into the open the problems of stigmatization and community rejection, by encouraging inmates and ex-inmates who have something to say to say it in *Phoenix Rising*, by pointing out abuses and injustices in the "mental health" system, and above all by offering real and constructive alternatives, we can hasten the day when the terms "mental patient" and "psychiatric inmate" are things of the past.

With these principles in mind we began several columns. One was called "Phoenix Pharmacy," in which we warned our readers of the numerous damaging and often deadly – not "side" – effects of many psychiatric drugs, effects like brain damage, tardive dyskinesia (a grotesque and permanent neurological disorder), and death. At first we focused on the "minor tranquilizers" such as Valium, but we soon explored the damage of antidepressants, lithium, and powerful neuroleptics – euphemistically called "major tranquilizers" or "anti-psychotics." We started a "Profile" column which highlighted psychiatric survivors and self-help groups doing outstanding advocacy, organizational or political work in the community. We also had a "Rights and Wrongs" section where we reported some key legal decisions directly affecting survivors.

Phoenix was probably the first Canadian periodical to point out the close links between the psychiatric inmate and the regular prisoner. In an effort to establish a common understanding of our oppression, as well as a basis for future solidarity, we used our second issue's editorial to bring attention to the shared experiences of inmates and prisoners: sensory deprivation, forced treatment, and solitary confinement. The following are excerpts from that first editorial on psychiatric inmates and prisoners:

An inmate ... is "a person who is

Statements from *Phoenix Rising* contributors:

Carla McKague, co-founder of *Phoenix Rising*, a lawyer with Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped, and the co-author, with Harvey Savage, of *Mental Health Law in Canada* (Butterworth's, 1988):

I feel as if a child has died. It is one of the great glories of my life that I helped start *Phoenix Rising*. Don and Cathy and I began it as an infant. It grew up exactly the way you would want your child to grow up, and I was unbelievably proud of it. I can't express the grief I feel over the fact that *Phoenix* is not going to be published again. But it survived for ten years, and in that ten years its accomplishments were enormous.

Maggie Tallman, Business-Circulation Manager of *Phoenix Rising*, 1985-1989:

I'm so proud of *Phoenix*; I wasn't there at the first or last, but I was part of it. Everyone who was there never really left.

I particularly remember the letters. Every letter I opened and answered added to the urgency and assured me it was right and worthwhile – letters from Mulroney on the drug bill, letters from "name withheld so I'll not be fired," from psychiatric nurses, LGWs, APSWs, advocates, psychiatrists, relatives, inmates, prisoners, foreign officials asking for direction, but most of all, letters that started "I just found your magazine, thinking I was the only one to have gone through this experience—thank God I've discovered you!"

Tears! I remember tears – God knows mine included. Crying with an Adult Protective Service Worker (APSW) over the permanent effects of Tardive dyskinesia in a 15-year-old client, and for an 80-year-old mom who had ground her teeth to the gum from jaw spasms, and who couldn't read my letters because of the "side effect of the side effect" – benign ectoplepharospasm which painfully spasmed her eyes shut for hours on end.

The joys were endless. Seeing changes in legislation, in people's thoughts and attitudes, in treatments and in treaters. Seeing people come off the "lifetime" meds, get their shit together, get a *real* job, get on with living. But there was also the sadness of seeing dreams go down the drain because the hope was lost and they were too damned tired to try – and we had no "secret" pill to give them to ease the road.

It ripped my heart out to see Don attending inquests and visiting prisons. There were the out-of-the-closets (David Reville), the dedicated (Carla McKague), the informed Public Relations experts (June Callwood), the take-charge-and-speak-outers (Chris and Irit), the old fighters through thick and thin (Alf). But most of all those who remained anonymous in their letters, but gave us love and thoughts, and a reason to be. The bottom line is we were right!

For me, *Phoenix Rising* was an inspiration, a dedication and an accomplishment, and I sure do miss it.

Irit Shimrat, an editor, writer and researcher for *Phoenix Rising*, 1986-1990, and the Coordinator for the Ontario Psychiatric Survivors Alliance:

Phoenix Rising is one of the best things that ever happened to me. I came out of two tortuous years in the "care" of mental health professionals knowing that I had been abused and debilitated, but feeling very isolated in my condemnation of the psychiatric system. When I found out, quite by accident, about

Both prisoners and psychiatric inmates are victimized by forced "treatment." Unlike medical patients, inmates have no right to refuse *any* psychiatric treatments, many of which are dangerous and damaging.... Refusal can easily be overridden by an appeal [by a psychiatrist] to a review board; it is often interpreted as just another symptom of the patient's "mental illness."

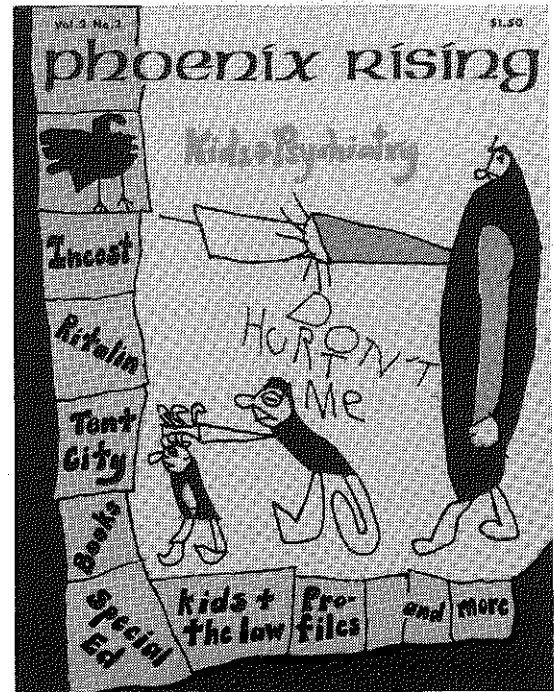
...Regular prisoners are often placed in "behaviour modification" programs.... Sometimes prisoners, especially those judged to be rebellious, ringleaders, or trouble-makers, are used as guinea pigs in dangerous and even life-threatening psychiatric experiments utilizing... drugs such as scopolamine and anectine, or "aversive conditioning."

...The inmate who is probably the most abused and discriminated against is the person who is committed to a psychiatric institution through the criminal process, either as "unfit to stand trial" or as "not guilty by reason of insanity" under a lieutenant-governor's warrant. They share with the civilly committed psychiatric inmate the uncertainty about when, if ever, they'll be released, and with the regular prisoner the lack of protection against the routine use of damaging experimental psychiatric treatments.

To call people "patients" when they are locked up and treated against their will is not only insulting, but a lie. Euphemisms such as "mental patient," "mental hospital" and "mental illness" obscure the facts: that "mental hospitals" are in fact psychiatric prisons; that the institutional psychiatrist is actually a judge-jury-warden; that "psychiatric treatment" is a form of *social control* over unco-operative or non-conforming people whose lifestyles (usually working-class) are too different from or threatening to that of the upper class white psychiatrists; that terms such as "diagnosis" and "treatment" are fraudulently applied to non-existent "mental illness"; and that psychiatric "treatment" is frequently experienced as punishment.

We are not "patients." We share with our brothers and sisters in prison the experience of being an inmate: loss of freedom, loss of civil and human rights, loss of control over our own bodies and minds, and stigmatization for life.

In the early 80s we published our first women's issue, "Women and Psychiatry," in which we ran an interview with Phyllis



Chesler, a prominent feminist psychologist, and the author of *Women and Madness* (1972), an examination of the abuses and sexism of traditional, male-dominated psychiatry. In our second women's issue we continued to highlight psychiatric sexism with the article "Mental Health and Violence Against Women," a powerful feminist statement written by seven women psychiatric survivor-activists. A feature article on psychiatric malpractice by Greta Hofmann Nemiroff described a woman's frustrating struggle to sue the psychiatrist who sexually abused her. In this issue we also reprinted a compelling piece on women and shock treatment written by radical social worker Paula Fine which documents psychiatry's excessive use of electroshock on women and condemns it as psychiatric rape.

The most powerful statement on electroshock in Canada was published by *Phoenix Rising* in April of 1984. This issue was part of an ongoing critique of electroshock aimed at the abolition of this barbaric procedure, with its effects of permanent memory loss, difficulty in reading and concentration, and brain damage. Shock doctors and other physicians still try to sanitize this procedure by calling it "electroconvulsive therapy" or simply, "ECT."

In our Fall 1980 issue we ran a feature story on the tragic drug death of 19-year-old Aldo Alviani. Although there was an inquest into Alviani's death, the case simply served to whitewash a psychiatric crime. The Coroner's Jury decided the cause of Alviani's death was "therapeutic misadventure"—in other words, just a medical accident—after Alviani was forcibly subjected to roughly ten times the usual dose of Haldol in less than 24 hours. *Phoenix Rising* published a press release covering Alviani's death as well as a report on the demonstration sparked by the news of his demise. This was Toronto's first public protest against psychiatric drugging and institutional deaths.

Because legal rights have been central to our cause, over the years we took

We believed that a magazine published by psychiatric survivors like ourselves could become a credible and powerful voice for psychiatric inmates and ex-inmates living in Canada and throughout the world

◀ Kids and Psychiatry issue / cover: Michael Steven

particular interest in the legal implications of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and "The Charter of Rights and Freedoms vs. the Psychiatric System" was the title of a double issue published in August 1985. We were awarded a grant from the federal Justice Department to produce this issue which was largely written by supportive civil rights lawyers. The Charter spells out many of our fundamental civil, legal and human rights. Section 15, the crucial equality section, is particularly relevant to psychiatric survivors since it legally prohibits discrimination against people with a "physical or mental disability." Section 7 of the Charter is of even more importance because it affirms "the right to life, liberty and security of the person..." These rights are violated every day in virtually every psychiatric institution or ward in Canada. Furthermore, Section 12 of the Charter affirms "the right not to be subjected to cruel and unusual treatment or punishment." In our view, cruel punishment includes such things as forced drugging, electroshock, and chemical or mechanical restraints such as four-point restraints, which, we argued, should be declared unconstitutional. Lawyer Harvey Savage wrote an excellent piece on the Lieutenant Governor's Warrant (LGW) legislation, which authorizes indefinite detention for those declared "unfit to stand trial" or "not guilty by reason of insanity." He criticizes the LGW as unjust and unconstitutional, and cites the case of Emerson Bonnar, who was incarcerated for 17 years as unfit to stand trial for attempted purse-snatching. Our "Charter" issue featured a reprint of the antipsychiatry movement's historic "Declaration of Principles," probably the

most concise and powerful antipsychiatry/liberation statement produced so far. We also reprinted "The People's Charter," a down-to-earth translation of the Charter's legalese which was first published in *Just Cause* (a now-defunct disability rights journal).

In September 1988, the board of directors of On Our Own, the original publisher of *Phoenix*, tried to evict us. The board claimed that the magazine rarely paid any rent, which was untrue. We first moved to a warehouse, then a year later to new office space at Euclid and College. By incorporating ourselves as "Voice of the Psychiatrized of Ontario, Inc." we separated the magazine from On Our Own. Despite the odds, we brought out two more issues which rank among our very best.

Our May 1989 issue focused on the psychiatric atrocities suffered by prisoners. It scrutinized solitary confinement, forced drugging and the dangerous behaviour modification "programs" which still exist in Oak Ridge, the notorious behaviour modification wing of Penetang. In it, we established a Prisoner Network which prisoners and ex-prisoners could use for advocacy, legal advice, or support, and we identified over eighty prisoners' rights groups, newsletters and journals in the United States, Canada, and other countries, including thirty-seven in Canada. We made a special effort to reach out to more prisoners, to let them know that we care deeply about their issues and the injustices they, like us, have experienced. ♦



Don Weitz is a psychiatric survivor, a freelance writer, a researcher and an outspoken critic of the psychiatric system. He is the co-editor, with Bonnie Burstow, of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1988). He wishes to thank Sarah Evans, Susan Folkins, Joe Galbo and Sally Lee for their editorial suggestions, and to acknowledge financial assistance from the Ontario Arts Council for the writing of "Phoenix Rising: Its Birth and Death."

▲ Will Pritchard drawing from 1990 Lesbian and Gay supplement

the existence of an anti-psychiatry magazine, I realized that other people felt the same way I did. I was not alone after all.

Being the editor of *Phoenix Rising* for four years was a wonderful experience. I got to find out a lot more about how psychiatry works. And helping disseminate this kind of information was extremely good for my mental health. At last, I had a sense of getting revenge on the people who had come so close to ruining my life – psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychiatric social workers. At last, I got to say publicly, "Look you hurt me. And you hurt a lot of other people too."

I felt very connected to the people writing and working for the magazine, and I think that connection helped all of us begin to heal the wounds inflicted on us by the psychiatric industry.

Bonnie Burstow, a radical feminist therapist and writer, and the co-editor, with Don Weitz, of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1988):

As its subtitle announces, *Phoenix Rising* was a "Voice of the Psychiatrized" – and oh, what a strong, relentless voice it was! For hundreds of years the frightening knowledge of the psychiatric inmate had been silenced by the medical jailers who labelled, controlled and invalidated. In issue after issue of *Phoenix*, inmates spoke out against the labellers, and every time the survivors spoke, the tyranny and the lies of psychiatry became clearer and clearer.

Like its sister, *Madness Network News*, *Phoenix Rising* allowed us to place anti-psychiatry out there so firmly it became something which stuck and would not go away. It was empowering for the survivors who read it, for it expressed loudly and clearly what many knew and still more suspected. It said, "Yes, the drugs are poisoning you. Yes, drugs and shock are making it harder to think." It said, "No, no, you are not alone; it happened to me too." It said, "No you are not crazy for thinking it; they really are stealing your life." It helped people have the courage of their convictions and break out of the system. It helped people reclaim their Selves.

For me personally, *Phoenix* was an act of solidarity with our sisters and our brothers who are being and have been labelled, drugged, shocked, stigmatized, incarcerated, and lied to. It was a joining-with. It was education. It was love. It was also a hell of a lot of work. Year after year, I found myself writing articles, helping plan issues, speaking with funds and writing some more. There were a number of times when I was concerned with the amount of time being spent, and when I withdrew temporarily to address other issues and other parts of my life. Invariably, however, after a very short retreat, I would think of the psychiatric holocaust, and I would think of Don blasting the system with every breath he drew and every word he spoke; and I would pick up my pen again. It was hard and demanding work all right. But it was also a great thing – a *mitzvah*. It is always a *mitzvah* to participate in a genuine awakening. I am proud to have been a part of *Phoenix*. And I know that whether it is being published or not, *Phoenix* remains a part of me.