

**This article was originally written for Elizabeth McKenna and the website for Canadian Survivors Network.**

**Assertive Wisdom: Staying Out of the Rabbit-Hole of Passive-Aggressive Behaviour  
By Linda MacDonald and Jeanne Sarson**

Standing and demanding that one's violent and abusive perpetrator(s) be held accountable for their crimes takes not only a driven conviction for justice by breaking the silence, it also takes strength not to dive face-first into the passive-aggressive rabbit-hole! That's where emotional flip-flopping between rage at and pity for one's perpetrator(s) occurs; where a need to behaviourally strike out at one's perpetrator(s) or at one's Self festers. Understanding how power, control, and oppression (domination and subordination) are organized within society's structures (institutions) and how "professional" perpetrators like priests or mental health workers use both positional and institutional power, control, and oppression can help prevent passive-aggressive flip-flops. Understanding can help a victimized person digest oppressive attacks and build assertive defences. Assertive defences can prevent feeling emotionally shattered and Self-blaming. Assertive defences place responsibility where it ought to be, out-of-Self and fully onto the perpetrator(s) and unto the social structures that act to protect the structure versus care for the victimized person.

The Catholic Church is a social structure, an institution, with mandates and accountabilities to our society, to keep persons within their care safe. However, what we have found is that all social structures—educational, health, legal, political, financial, military, family, and yes, religious structures—act to first protect their structural power rather than protect the persons they serve. We see this behaviour over and over again. Examples in the news are many, such as Enron, the friendly fire incident with Canadian soldiers, Health Canada's cover-up of dangerous drugs, Red Cross with tainted blood, the FBI's cover-up of having previous knowledge of the potential for 911, the Catholic Church's cover-up of pedophilic violence within the US and Canada, and professional associations that negate victimized persons who speak out about their abuse/torture/ritual abuse-torture by "professional" caregivers.

We have experienced structural oppression by our professional nursing association. This oppression occurred when trying to support persons whose rights were being violated—who's charts were released from a health care institution (and used maliciously) without their knowledge or their required consent—and secondly, when we tried to disclose alleged RAT perpetrators within our own nursing profession. The goal of institutions to maintain their power at all cost means that those who have the courage to stand and speak are targeted as "CRAZY, TROUBLE MAKERS, TRAITORS, OF BEING UNETHICAL, INSUBORDINATE, or EVIL". The name-calling and shunning list goes on and on.

Maintaining structural power at all costs means destroy the victim or whistle-blower quickly or get them tired, confused, and off track. Many times structures succeed in this goal of destruction, but every now and then a brave ethical person or persons withstand these oppressive attacks and succeeds in getting their voice out: the Canadian Native residential school and Mount Cashel victims, Linda MacDonald and other victims of destructive mind-control experimentation at the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal, Enron, victims of the Red Cross infected by tainted blood products, the victims of “priestly” pedophilic violence within the Catholic Church in the US, and every victim that has gotten or is attempting to get justice in a court of law that exposes another pedophile or abuser of an vulnerable adult—the victim of Father O’Dell, the alleged victims of Father Hugh Vincent MacDonald, formerly of Cape Breton, and Elizabeth McKenna, who speaks openly of her victimization by Father Reed and psychiatrist Ray Leibl and other survivors of clergy abuse, like Yvonne Maes, E. Jane Mundy, Shirley Armstrong, John Caruso, John Swales and family and David Gagnon, to name a few.

We are living in a transformative time when, as never before, individual global citizens can make a huge difference for the masses. In tribal and feudal times the masses were more severely oppressed and died the moment they spoke out. Now we have structures—albeit oppressive—such as the legal, with a legal process—albeit abusive—where the ordinary citizen can stay the course—albeit enduring horrendous oppression—to expose societal atrocity without dying for their belief. The suffering and death of others who came before us, who brought us to this point in social transformation is immeasurable. And yet we are here and right before our eyes the world is becoming a better place because of the courage of all determined persons who will not be silenced. We say hooray to us all!!!!

We would love to gather a whole group of us in one room to celebrate our courage and strength but we are too busy standing in places all over the world. There is no such thing as a little stand either. Each person standing for their rights is just as important a struggle as a whole country such as South Africa being forced by world pressures to dismantle political Apartheid, followed by the internal Truth and Reconciliation process because, in the end, structures—structural polices and behaviours—are transformed forever by states or by one person at a time.

Now we would never be so naive as to say that standing is easy or without great peril. Many still do lose their life standing in this century—the Prime Minister of Serbia, Zoran Djindjic—and many die slowly as their spirits just can not bear the forces of pedophilic violence and oppression. Such as David Martin who committed suicide, leaving behind a note alleging two years of pedophilic victimization, as a young altar boy, by priest Hugh Vincent MacDonald.

People, when trying to tell their stories of abuse, have told us over and over that the violations inflicted against them by the structures who failed to care was almost more painful than the original abuse itself. This experience of being harmed by acts of structural oppression rings true for us also, when, with naivety or with hope, we thought that when we approached our professional nursing association to ask them to help a

victim who was alleging being abused by other professionals, including nurses, that their response would be openness and concern to hear from the victim and concern to do the right thing. How wrong we were! And, at the same time, when we spoke out at an annual nursing meeting against the proposed nursing Act because it was fraught with harmful and unjust sections for the public, our speaking brought acts of rejection and shunning from peers. It felt that they—all 500 who were in attendance at the meeting—rose up to ostracize us. Although our peers voted the Act in we lobbied politicians and interested lawyers who voiced their concerns to the Law Amendments Committee—the Act was amended. Harmful sections were removed. We had won! The Act was not the Act that our peers and our professional association had originally voted in. That was eight long years ago.

We expose our experiences for all to see how the proverbial loyalty of the masses to the structure—in this case nurses' unquestioning loyalty to their association—became part of the oppressive forces exerted to silence us—the truth-sayers. Silencing us protected the association's structural social power and kept secret our concerns of professional wrongdoing. For Linda, this experience was the most difficult experience of her life—more difficult than the abuse she endured from her father. For Jeanne, it was confirmation of what she already understood and had experienced since childhood—a confirmation of the universality of the many faces of oppression. This structural oppression changed Linda's world-view forever. Linda learned she had to clearly entrench within her-Self her evolutionary perspective—that transforming society is an evolutionary process—in order to be able to spiritually continue to work for justice and human rights for victims of violence. “I had to know that how my nursing peers treated me was not personal...it was not because I was Linda...it was because I was a person threatening the nursing association's structural power. I had to know they would treat anyone who threatened their power in this same way.”

Will we ever be able to feel embraced by nursing or our professional association again? Not that we can foresee because our trust has been so violated. Isolation occurred. Loss and grief experienced. All are normal responses to group oppression—to structural oppression. The risks are, however, that the person(s) being oppressed will feel emotionally shamed or manipulated into thinking something must be wrong with them-Self, with their thinking, with their perceptions. This can send a vulnerable person down the rabbit-hole where they struggle with feeling emotionally shattered—with Self-blaming. Understanding oppression and how oppressors use oppression allows one to realize that one is not to Self-blame, rather one can learn to put a lid on the rabbit-hole, to turn and look one's oppressors in the eye—as frightening as this can feel or is—and tell one's Self, repeatedly, “it is my right to stand—it is my responsibility to my-Self and to others.” And eventually, assertive Self-talk builds into an ever-growing assertive wisdom. Of course, having healthy support is of tremendous help.

It is important to realize that, at this time in socio-cultural evolution, structural and group oppression is a predominant norm. Oppression represents status quo behaviour. It has been so throughout human evolution, however it can be and continues to be transformed. Standing against oppression means accepting this knowledge about oppression as a fact

and pressing on with activism work because it does make a difference! Accepting the fact about status quo group and structural oppression means acknowledging we, as will other activists, might or would be attacked for speaking the truth. We also had to accept another fact proven thru human evolution and that is—truth does set you and me, and society free. Free to know that there have been and are atrocities occurring within the walls of our healthcare facilities, churches, homes, schools, clubs, cottages, and courtrooms—wherever people gather there are atrocities occurring against the vulnerable that need to be stopped. And we had to accept another fact—we can help make a difference—individuals make a difference in how our society will evolve out of violence into a humanity of caring.

By knowing all the above and keeping these perspectives in mind one can prevent feeling or being confused by powerful people, uncaring bystanders, oppressed victims, and all the nay-sayers who try to silence assertive voices. Keeping our goal of moving forward we know a final fact—we are two of the many good persons in this world who are succeeding in making this world community a better place for our children and other children, for vulnerable adults, and for persons yet unborn who will inhabit this earth. This final fact is foremost in our conversations with each other and with all these facts tucked within each of our-Selves we keep out of the rabbit-hole of passive-aggressive responses—we are able to hold onto our assertiveness, our hope, and our belief in a better world for all.

We do not know if this paper will help any of you who are in a period of confusion and/or with struggles or suffering. However, we offer our wisdom to you with respect.

About the authors: Linda MacDonald and Jeanne Sarson have been standing against relational violence since their violent childhood ordeals, experiential knowledge that they carried into and that transformed their professional practices into a never-ending responsibility to educate others that violence within relationships is a human rights violation, not a mental illness. Supporting children to be educated about violence within adult-child or child-child relationships, providing education to their peers and other professionals, and seeking out global structures and communities to become informed and responsive in ending inter-personal violence continues to be their focus.

Persons against ritual abuse-torture (RAT)  
& other non-political tortures: child/spousal torture

Jeanne Sarson RN, BScN, MEd

Linda MacDonald RN, BN, MEd

361 Prince St. Truro

Nova Scotia, Canada B2N 1E4

Phone: 902-895-6659

Fax: 902-895-2255

[flight@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:flight@ns.sympatico.ca)

<http://www.ritualabusetorture.org>

“We are speaking the unspeakable;  
because, without reality there is no truth,  
and without truth how can there be healing?”

