

# Voices

Newsletter of the Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto

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© Graeme Bacque 2004

Geoffrey Reaume leads a tour of the wall surrounding the Queen St. Mental Health Centre. The wall was erected a century ago by unpaid psychiatric patients.

## We're mad about history!

ERICK FABRIS AND EUGENIA TSAO

**T**he Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto (PSAT) is delighted to present the inaugural issue of our newsletter. The visions of Mad people have been with us throughout time. The struggle of writers, artists, and others dismissed as mentally ill is now a rich history that we wish to share. In January 2001, a small group of psychiatric survivors collaborated to bring together a diversity of texts, images, and other materials for safe-keeping. This historic move has resulted in the formation of an international archive. PSAT was organized and incorporated to find space to preserve the life and times of people who have been psychiatricized.

Our intent is to carry their message through the walls of institutionalization, real and imagined, in the hope of mutual acceptance. We bring together these rich resources, which the sanestream has dismissed, to bring together people of great feeling and vision. We welcome you to have a closer look at our exhibits, to learn and understand, and share in our history.

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# Why words on the wall?

GEOFFREY REAUME

In 1860, seven years before the Confederation of Canada and the year that Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States, inmates at 999 Queen Street West, Toronto, toiled for no pay to build the very walls behind which they were confined. Now, 150 years later, efforts are nearly complete to install permanent plaques on the remaining boundary walls to remember the men and women who lived, worked and died behind the walls of the former Provincial Lunatic Asylum, as it was originally called when these walls were first built.

Of the four original sides, only the south boundary wall remains from 1860, while the east and west walls date from 1888-89 when they were rebuilt, also with unpaid patient labour, as property was sold and the grounds were reduced to the size it is today at 1001 Queen St. West.

Since 1998, the psychiatric survivor community in Toronto has been publicizing the history of the patient built boundary walls, first with a play by Friendly Spike Theatre Band, and then with tours, public information meetings, exhibits, writings and memorials to remember people whose lives had been previously forgotten. Since its founding in 2001, the Psychiatric Survivor Archives, Toronto (PSAT), has advocated the preservation of these walls and public commemoration of the history of the people who lived and worked behind them, including the installation of permanent plaques. This goal has been achieved with the support of the psychiatric survivor/consumer community and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Archives, Administration and Empowerment Council to ensure that the patient-built walls, once used to exclude people, are now used to include our past and to challenge discrimination that still exists today. By preserving these walls and putting words on them in this way, these old bricks speak to the skills of the people who built them by giving asylum patients the permanent public credit they have long deserved for their unjustly devalued abilities.

A series of nine wall plaques, written by PSAT with editorial and design collaboration from CAMH, have been approved for permanent installation, tentatively planned for July 14, 2010—the start of Mad Pride Week. Since 2008, PSAT has raised over \$5,000 to fund this effort. The Words on the Wall event at the Gladstone Hotel on April 21, 2010, proposed and organized by PSAT Board Member, Andrea White, is intended to help raise as much of the remaining \$3,000–4,000 as possible. It is also a way for the wider community to help put words on the wall by collectively reclaiming our past and honouring the memory of those who have gone before us in mad people's history. Only by making more people aware of this history and the contributions made by patients past, can we hope to challenge and change the sort of discrimination which allowed such a wall to be built by unpaid asylum inmates in the first place.

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**Geoffrey Reaume** is Associate Professor of Critical Disability Studies at York University. His doctoral thesis explored patient life at the Toronto Hospital for the Insane, Ontario's oldest psychiatric hospital, and was published as a book in 2000 (*Remembrance of Patients Past*, University of Toronto Press). **For an audio history tour of the patient-built wall please call: 416-535-8501, ext. 1530.**

For a sample of what the words on the wall will actually say, please see the below text, which will appear on a plaque near the corner of Queen and Shaw Streets:

## MEMORIAL WALL DEDICATED TO PATIENT LABOURERS

These patient-built walls are a testament to the abilities of the people whose unpaid labour was central to the operation of asylums in the province of Ontario during the 19th and 20th centuries. The asylum on Queen Street first opened in 1850 and was overcrowded within a few years. The initial idea of work as therapy gave way to the reality of work intended to save the provincial government money through unpaid patient labour. Men worked outdoors on construction, maintenance and farm work, including building and repairing many of the structures behind which they were confined, including the still existing boundary walls on the south side of this property, built in 1860 and the east and west boundary walls built in 1888-89. Women worked primarily inside, doing the sewing, knitting and laundry for the asylum, while also working as domestic servants in both the nurses' and doctors' residences not far from this spot. Both men and women also worked in their own sex-segregated wards doing domestic chores such as cleaning, washing and scrubbing floors. Patients also worked in the male (west side) and female (east side) infirmaries, where they helped to care for their fellow patients who were sick and dying.

The walls which still stand today are historical monuments to the exploited labour of all psychiatric patients who lived, worked and died on these grounds since 1850.

# Words on the Wall...



# Many thanks to all of our artists and contributors!

**T**he Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto wishes to extend its gratitude to the following individuals and organizations for their invaluable contributions to our “Words on the Wall” fundraising event, which was held at the Gladstone Hotel on April 21st:

**Marc Glassman** and **Chris Reed** of *This Is Not A Reading Series*; **Andrea-Jo Wilson** of the University of Toronto Press; **Eliza Chandler**; **Megan Davies**; **Lucy Costa** of the Empowerment Council; **John Court**, CAMH archivist; **Kama Lee Jackson**, CAMH Manager of Redevelopment Communications; **Susan Pigott**, CAMH Vice-President of Communication and Community Engagement; and the Gladstone Hotel.

PSAT is pleased to announce that Heritage Toronto has granted us charitable tax status for any donations made to us for the purposes of funding the plaques that we’re arranging for the patient-built walls at 1001 Queen Street. We thank Heritage Toronto for recognizing the historical and ethical importance of this initiative!

Please turn to the back page to learn more.

In addition, we wish to thank all of the following artists who generously donated their time, talents, energy, and artistic vision to produce “brick art” for our silent auction:

**Annalise, Rick Barnsley, Susan Beniston, Celeste Billing-Meyer, Ardis Breeze, Jill-Marie Burke, Elizabeth Carvalho, Mab Coates-Davies, Brenda Coombs, Megan Davies, Erick Fabris, Anna Felaxos, Fran Freeman, Sarah Griffin, Nancy Halifax, Jakub Jasinski, William Kenworth, Steve Khan, Janna Gorham, Caitlin Leonard, Eva Lewarne, Liz Maclean, Barb Mann, Claire Mercer, Susan Morais, Aefa Mulholland, Honey Novick, Robert, John Seppa, Tina Shapiro, Robin Styba, Teresa Sunga, Serena Sui, Dave Tennant, *What Next!* Peer Support Group, North Toronto; and Willie Willis.**

Finally, we would like to convey deepest thanks and appreciations to PSAT Board Member **Andrea White** for originating and organizing this event with her trademark wisdom, patience, and unflinching good cheer.

# Notes from a Psychiatric Survivor Archivist

## Reflections on the history of history

MEL STARKMAN

Ten years ago, a group of historically conscious psychiatric survivors founded the Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto (PSAT) to preserve the heritage of a significant culture which was sweeping the world. Such survivors had been denigrated and marginalized by mainstream writers and historians. The resources of those incarcerated in asylums and other facilities were used to underpin the medical model, and victims of psychiatrization were not allowed to speak in their real voices.

As part of the culture wars that originated after World War II and grew in the 1960s, the anti-psychiatry movement played a significant role along with the civil rights, feminism, gay liberation and anti-colonial movements. A broad range of psychiatric survivors, however they chose to self-identify, began to produce records of their growth and development in all media. Pioneers such as Allen Markman saw the need to collect these and did so through the Association for the Preservation of Anti-psychiatry Artifacts. We at PSAT are very proud to now house his collection along with other significant collections of material from both local and international sources.

We would like to thank Don Weitz, David Oaks of MindFreedom, Erick Fabris, Lilith Finkler and others who have generously donated historical records to PSAT. Also we would like to thank those who have generously given time and money to our cause of maintaining our heritage. We are a grassroots organization that has come a long way without funding except by altruistic patrons including many psychiatric survivors in amounts commensurate with their budgetary demands. Also we would like to thank The Gerstein Centre and Sound Times Support Services, which have given us space and support at no cost.

PSAT has been instrumental in raising the consciousness of psychiatric survivors and the public vis-à-vis several important issues. We fought for the preservation of the remains of the old asylum wall at 999 Queen Street, which was built by patient labour as in what passed as therapy but was part of government's cost-cutting. The purpose of this preservation is to remind us of the capabilities of survivors, which were denigrated then as now.

PSAT, along with the Toronto Region Architectural Conservancy and CAMH Archives, put on an exhibit at the Market Gallery in the St. Lawrence Market entitled "The Provincial Asylums in Toronto and Mimico: Reflections on Architectural and Social History." This exhibit won the City of Toronto Heritage Award. Another endeavour was the work to clean up, identify and refurbish 1511 gravesites of survivors from Lakeshore Hospital in Etobicoke under the auspices of the Lakeshore Asylum Cemetery Project.

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**Mel Starkman** is an archivist, activist, and psychiatric survivor.

### PSAT's Mission Statement

The Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto is dedicated to ensuring that the rich history of people who have experienced the psychiatric system is preserved for our community and the wider community as a resource from which everyone can share and learn

PSAT began meeting regularly beginning in January 2001. We are a group of volunteers working together to preserve the rich history of people who have experienced the psychiatric system.

PSAT is a grassroots organization that is run for and by psychiatric survivors to preserve all aspects of our history. The Archives seeks to reflect the broad diversity of views that are expressed by all people with a psychiatric history however they choose to self-identify.

The emphasis of our archives will be on a critical perspective including anti-psychiatry that is primarily produced by psychiatric survivors whether institutionalized or in the community. First-person expression in all media formats on this topic are particularly welcome. The need for these archives has grown out of a recognition that our history has too often been ignored or trivialized by main stream historians, researchers and medical professionals.

PSAT is constantly evolving as we develop, so please watch for future developments in the months and years ahead.



The logo of *Phoenix Rising* in the 1980s.

# Phoenix Rising

## Out of the ashes on fire

DON WEITZ

One of the proudest and empowering moments in my life was my association with *Phoenix Rising*, the only anti-psychiatry magazine in Canada. Unfortunately, *Phoenix* stopped rising in the summer of 1990 after ten consecutive years of publishing; there has never been a similar publication in Canada before or since that time. Its founding was largely inspired by the brilliant, empowering and survivor-controlled *Madness Network News* in San Francisco (1972-1986). *Phoenix Rising* was not only an excellent source for personal stories by and about survivors, but also a valuable organizing tool and political weapon to use in the continuing struggle against psychiatric oppression and for human rights. I am extremely appreciative to my close friend, outstanding advocate, and co-founder Carla McKague for her constant and strong support, amazing editorial skills, intellectual honesty and courage. Much more literate than me, Carla named the magazine after the mythic Phoenix bird—particularly its rising-from-the-ashes phase. Although the Phoenix is dead, its spirit continues to live, to inspire other psychiatric survivors, antipsychiatry and social justice activists to speak out and rise up.

*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 Rising* began publishing in 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 liberation movement. Thirty-two issues were produced, including three double issues exposing 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.

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 church group which gives start-up grants to grassroots groups.

We made a special effort to reach more prisoners, to let them know that we care deeply about their issues and the injustices they, like us, have experienced. For me and I'd like to believe many thousands of other survivors and activists struggling against psychiatric torture and fighting for freedom and other human rights, the spirit of *Phoenix* still rises, still lives.

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**Don Weitz** is a Canadian antipsychiatry activist, co-editor of *Shrink Resistant: The Struggle Against Psychiatry in Canada* (1988), host-producer of "Antipsychiatry Radio" on CKLN Radio, board member of the Psychiatric Survivor Archives of Toronto (PSAT), and co-founder of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault (CAPA).

This article is excerpted from an article that Don wrote for the Fall 1990 issue of *Borderlines* (19: 14-17), which was entitled "Phoenix Rising: Its Birth and Death."

# INTERESTED IN DONATING TO THE PATIENT-BUILT HISTORICAL WALL PLAQUE PROJECT?

A SERIES OF NINE COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUES ARE PLANNED TO BE INSTALLED BY SUMMER 2010, THE 150<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE SOUTH WALL, IN A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN THE CENTRE FOR ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH (CAMH) AND THE PSYCHIATRIC SURVIVOR ARCHIVES, TORONTO (PSAT). THESE PLAQUES WILL REMEMBER THE PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS WHO BUILT THE WALL AND WHO LIVED, WORKED AND DIED BEHIND IT.

**THE COST FOR THE PLAQUES WILL BE APPROXIMATELY \$8000 - \$9,000.  
SO FAR, OVER \$5000 HAS BEEN RAISED BY PSAT.**

This project involves the creation and installation of nine Alumicolor plaques of dimensions 18" by 16" to the Asylum Wall. Eight of the plaques will carry a large historical image (black and white) and a brief text relating this image to history near where each plaque is to be located along different parts of the wall. The text will invite the viewer to call a phone number (maintained by CAMH) where they can hear a recorded story to accompany the image about the wall's history. Plaque 9 will contain more text to introduce the history of the Wall and patient labour in general. The mixed media approach of images, recordings and text will create a thought-provoking visual and audio tour about the unique history of the wall and unpaid, exploited patient labour at Ontario's oldest mental health facility. These 9 plaques will make the history of the south wall, built in 1860, and the east and west walls, re-built in 1888-89, accessible for all.

For an audio history tour of the patient built wall please call: 416-535-8501, ext. 1530.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THIS PROJECT PLEASE DONATE TO:**



**"HERITAGE TORONTO -  
PSAT WALL PLAQUES"**

Please mail in your gift to:

**Heritage Toronto  
Historic St. Lawrence Hall  
157 King Street East, 3rd Fl  
Toronto, ON M5C 1G9**

*Heritage Toronto, a registered charitable organization that works with the citizens of Toronto to advocate for, preserve and promote a greater appreciation for our city's heritage, has accepted our submission for the Patient Built Wall Plaques Project (CAMH).*

*Psychiatric Survivor Archives, Toronto is now committed to raising funds for the project and a tax receipt will be administered by Heritage Toronto on our behalf for your contribution of \$10 or more.*

*You may contact Heritage Toronto's development office at 416.338.0682 if you have any questions about your donation and tax receipting. **Heritage Toronto Charitable Number: 119266609RR0001***

**For more information about Heritage Toronto,  
please go to [www.heritagetoronto.org](http://www.heritagetoronto.org)**