
Professor Focus

By Edward Fobes

Professor Vaughn Jelliffe is a feminist educator and writer concerned with making the world a caring and cooperative place. With knowledge and candour, she espouses equal rights for women.

Jelliffe felt angry living under a political system containing barriers to her freedom and equality. After graduating from Carleton University, in Ottawa, with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, she helped organize a conference called Women and the Constitution. The equality clause in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms resulted directly from the political activity of over fifteen hundred women who participated in this conference.

A desire for more knowledge about women's issues drew her back to Carleton University. Obtaining her graduate degree, she became a member of Canada's first class in women's studies at a Master's level.

Calling herself an original thinker, Jelliffe believes in alternatives to present social institutions; alternatives that include women and men as equals. Her women's studies course entitled "The Family of Women" identifies women's experience in an historical/social/political context and critiques social institutions which affect the experience of women and children. The majority of institutions follow a patriarchal model; a model that excludes women and children from positions of power.

Having a father in the military meant frequent moves for the young Jelliffe. She felt a kinship to the Island because her grandparents lived here. As an adult living in Ottawa, she tried to visit the Island every summer.

In a small community like Prince Edward Island, Jelliffe enjoys the opportunity to espouse her beliefs to individuals. She lobbied extensively against the Meech Lake accord because of what she felt were

deliberate obscurities in a document that failed to protect women's constitutional equality. Although the majority of Islanders hesitate to embrace the women's movement, an active community concerned with women's issues exists. Jelliffe wants to make more people aware of what women experience when faced with social institutions that exclude them from full participation.

Central to Jelliffe are her five children. Through personal experiences, as a mother, she gains much of what goes into her beliefs and ideas.

Women's studies are more than Jelliffe's course of study or area of expertise. They span her personal life. Asked to give a reason for her dedication to this field she replied, "Because I'm a woman." Later in the interview, she felt my questions concerning her hobbies reflected the tendencies of patriarchal institutions to compartmentalize life. Because she is a woman, the issues she teaches at the university and lobbies for in the community confront her continually.

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