

THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF JEANNE ROWLES



*A conversation with Jeanne Rowles and Jeanne Moffat
On the occasion of the celebration of Jeanne Rowles 90th birthday
November 25, 2016 (prior to her "real birthday" December 6)*

Notes prepared by Jeanne Moffat and edited by Jeanne Rowles



JEANNE ROWLES' LINEAGE

Jeanne's parents were Lydia Louisa Rivers (1894-1986) and Thomas Rowles (1896-1974).

- **Lydia Louisa Rivers' family** had been in/near Sarnia, Ontario for several generations. Lydia was born in 1894 and when she grew up, she trained to be a church worker at a school at Bloor and Avenue Road. Her first placement was in The Ward, a section of Toronto, where she worked with young mothers in poverty. She moved to Winnipeg and worked in the Stella Mission in the north end of Winnipeg where J.S. Woodsworth was the Chair of the Board. At the time of the uprising in 1919 in Winnipeg, a number of people were jailed, and Lydia remembered that J.S. Woodsworth was looking for the biggest Bible he could find to go to the court to get them released! Lydia worked, as it was considered important for girls to be able to support themselves.

Although she had wanted to be a missionary to China, she realized that that was not going to happen. When her mother had a stroke, Lydia went back to Saskatchewan where the family had moved and looked after her mother for three years. After that time, Lydia's younger brother, Will, told her, "Lydia, you have done enough. Go and live your life. We will look after Mother now."

During those three years of caring for her mother, Lydia had met Thomas Rowles and they had agreed to marry. However, because it was considered important for women to be trained in some way

to support themselves, Lydia enrolled in Normal School to train to be a teacher. She spent one year in training, followed by two years of teaching, allowing her to get a permanent teaching certificate. Lydia and Thomas waited for those three years and then got married!

- **Thomas Rowles' family** emigrated from England to Canada in the late 1800s. Thomas was born in 1896 in Manitoba where the family had settled. When Thomas' parents had had several children, they moved to Saskatchewan, because they needed more "land for the boys". Jeanne always remembered that there was no mention of the girls when she was told about her grandparents' decision to move to Saskatchewan! There they ordered their house and barn from the Eaton's catalogue. Jeanne remembered that her grandfather on her father's side was a very dominant male and a Liberal. Thomas graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon where he had studied Agriculture and Physics. By this time he had met Lydia Louisa Rivers.

In 1925 Lydia Louisa Rivers and Thomas Rowles were married in Saskatchewan. She was 31 and Thomas was 29 years old. They settled on land in the southwestern corner of the province near the border with Alberta.

JEANNE'S EARLY YEARS

Jeanne was born on December 6, 1926 in Empress, Alberta, which lies just across the border with Saskatchewan, where her family had a farm. On her birth certificate, she was named Marguerite Jean. Her parents' intention had been that the name should be spelled "Jeanne", so when Jeanne began school, her mother sent a note to the teachers to ensure that they would spell her name correctly--"Jeanne"!

Her sisters, Beth and Dorothy, were born within the next three years of her birth. Jeanne thinks that her mother must have felt very isolated since the next farm was three miles away, and wonders how she managed with three very small children there.

In 1929 Jeanne's parents lost their farm. They continued farming as tenant farmers and after a few years, they said that was enough. Thomas was able to get a job with the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture in Saskatoon which he held for a number of years. Following his time there, the family moved to Prince Albert, and later retired to White Rock, B.C, as did many people from Saskatchewan. Jeanne's two sisters still live in British Columbia.

Jeanne proudly states: "My people were CCF. One of the first elections I remember was when Tommy Douglas was running for office. I remember hearing the election results coming in on the radio and the votes for Tommy Douglas being counted. In my family, the social justice stuff was always there."

EDUCATION AND HER FIRST LARGE CHALLENGE

Jeanne graduated from the University of Saskatchewan in 1947 on the 25th anniversary of her father's graduation! He was very happy to be in attendance. There were no jobs available in Saskatchewan. However,

during her time at university, she had met Agnes Roy, the head of the Toronto YWCA, when she travelled to Saskatoon to recruit young women to work in the YWCA. Jeanne had indicated her interest, so when she was contacted to work in a YWCA Camp in the Niagara Peninsula in the summer following her graduation, she went. This had been established as a wartime program.

Jeanne's first real job was to be with the Department of Public Health in Dauphin, Manitoba. She travelled there on Thanksgiving Weekend 1947 and stayed in a hotel for the weekend before moving into her own accommodations. She immediately fell sick, and when the chambermaid came into her room on the next morning, Jeanne told her, "I think I have polio". She could not get out of bed. The chambermaid fled immediately and never returned, nor did she tell anyone! Jeanne was having trouble breathing and thought that was the end of her life. By Tuesday morning, when Jeanne did not show up for work, the officials from the Department came to find her and discovered how ill she was. Jeanne's family was notified and they arranged that she would be moved in a couple of weeks to a hospital in Saskatoon where there was a polio clinic. It was an Epidemic Year for polio and there were 50-60 people in that hospital. The Saskatoon Hospital practiced the Kenny Method of polio treatment.

There were a number of young people in the polio unit. During her long recuperation Jeanne enjoyed her time mixing with her roommates and the people on her floor. She remained in hospital until Mother's Day 1948. She remembers the car trip to Prince Albert after her release to join her family there. Jeanne never took up the job in Dauphin because of this illness.

YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YWCA)

Ontario

Jeanne's cousin in Kingston, Ontario notified her about a job at the YWCA in her city. Jeanne sent in her application and was hired as its Program Director in 1948 (at the young age of 22). Among the programs and clubs were children's and teenage programs and a War Brides Club. One of the war brides who had worked previously as a hostess and communications director served as the hostess for the annual YWCA Fundraising Event. There was always a dance, and it was not hard to get young men from the Royal Military College in Kingston to come to dance!

Jeanne worked at the Kingston YWCA for two years (1948-50) and then applied to the Toronto School of Social Work, where she studied for two years (1950-52) to get her Masters of Social Work degree. She was able to do this because the YWCA provided her with a loan for her second year of study.

In 1952 Jeanne began working at the YWCA of Toronto, serving initially as the Director of the Weston YWCA, then of the West Toronto YWCA, and then as Assistant Director of the Metropolitan Toronto YWCA, working with the Director, Jean Palmer. Altogether she spent ten years in the Toronto YWCA.

Jeanne drove an Austin Mini at the time and remembers thinking that "the next car I'll get will be automatic". Almost immediately she thought, "That's terrible. There are places where people don't have enough to eat; why should I be thinking of a new car?"

Pakistan

So Jeanne began to think about going overseas and working with women in poverty. She indicated her interest in that to the YWCA, and was told later that they had arranged an overseas assignment for her in Karachi, Pakistan. She was surprised that it was to be Karachi, but decided to go. She arrived in summer of 1962 and worked on a Karachi salary.

Because of the bloodshed created by the war, the YWCA staff had fled, and the Karachi YWCA had become reliant on foreign staff. Jeanne's assignment was to "find local leadership and train them and then get out". The Karachi YWCA had health centres in the surrounding desert to which they took a doctor every day to look after the people and to dispense the drugs required to treat their illnesses. The people looking after the dispensing of these drugs were the spouses of the foreign diplomats stationed in Karachi. There were also cottage industries where the YWCA taught women to sew and to make clothing. These industries provided women with some money for their families.

Jeanne's mother felt this assignment was so far away and asked her to come home once during her three-year assignment, which Jeanne did at her own expense.

After three years (1962-65), she had accomplished the work of finding and training local leadership and returned to Canada in the summer of 1965. She worked in the Sudbury YWCA for about 8 months while she was waiting for her next assignment.

Tanzania

Jeanne nor the YWCA had any money for another international assignment for her, so the YWCA applied for funding from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) to support Jeanne to go to Tanzania. The grant came through, making this assignment financially easier for her, as she was then put on a CIDA salary. She arrived there in 1966 with the same assignment as she had been given before going to Karachi, i.e. “find local leadership and train them and then get out”. However, this time that assignment was harder, as there were very few women available who had training to do the work that had to be done.

She was fortunately able to recruit Helena Fliakos, who was ½ Greek and ½ African. Helen had been trained by the Girl Guides and was very capable. During the four years (1966-70) that Jeanne was there, she was happy to begin taking less leadership as Helen assumed more. They worked to help the women set up cottage industries and oversaw the construction of two large buildings which contained a hostel, public café, and a school. In the cottage industries, the women learned how to run their businesses, and sold the products they produced, whether food or crafts or art. The proceeds were divided and given to each woman in a pay envelope. The women decided to take a little out of their envelopes each week and put it into a pot. This pot was then given to one woman among themselves, enabling her to make a larger investment in her work (e.g., one woman set up a business with laying chickens and sold the eggs) and to have money for her family. Each woman had her turn at receiving the pot of money.

Jeanne had one return trip to Canada during her four year Pakistan stay. Again Jeanne had completed her assignment of finding and training local leadership, so was ready to return to Canada. Helena stayed on as Director of the YWCA of Tanzania until she retired and she and Jeanne remain in touch with one another!

CENTRAL NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE, TORONTO

When Jeanne returned to Canada in 1970, she received four job offers, three from the YWCA and one from Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto. She decided to take the CNH job, partly because she had worked at the University Settlement House during her Social Work studies and felt that would be a good change from the years of representing and defending the YWCA in the merger talks between the YMCA and YWCA (in cases where that merger went ahead, women were relegated to service roles). She became the CNH Director for seven years (1970-77). One of the things the CNH encouraged her to do was to go to a church in the area surrounding her work. She became a member of the Metropolitan United Church, where Cliff Elliott was the minister.

Jeanne remembers the CNH job as a difficult assignment. She had been away from Canada during the upheaval of the 60s. A lot of things had changed about how people perceived the society and its institutions, and there were lots of challenges to the Director. She decided after seven years that she was ready to leave, and began looking for places where more social justice work was being carried out. She was very inspired by the work of the Primate of the Anglican Church, Ted Scott, and so she submitted an application to the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC) for a job there.

Meanwhile, in her personal life, leaving the Central Neighbourhood House meant that she was free to go to whatever church she wanted to. After “church-shopping” for a congregation with more of a social justice ministry, she joined Trinity St. Paul’s United Church in 1978 when Bill Phipps and Patricia Lissom were ministers.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA (ACC)

Jeanne's first and second applications to the national Anglican Church did not yield any offers, but on her third try, she was hired in 1977 as Director of Women's Concerns. Marjorie Powles was immediately a strong support and helper to Jeanne. In Jeanne's words, "Marjorie knew much better than I did what a struggle it would be to head the Women's Concerns Desk in the Anglican Church."

Jeanne was pleased with the leadership of the Anglican Church of Canada, in particular Ted Scott as Primate, Clarke Raymond as Director of Programs, and several aboriginal people. She not only enjoyed them, but learned a lot from them during her time there. She found it personally and professionally "really valuable to have aboriginal peers and bosses for the first time in my life". In addition, two of the leaders of the Women's Unit in British Columbia were aboriginal women, from whom Jeanne learned a lot. It was with them that she learned first about the "talking stick".

By 1979 Jeanne thinks that the ACC leaders were looking to have more women on the Management Unit, and in that year she was appointed as Director of Social Justice Ministries (Aboriginal Relations, Prisons, Housing, and Poverty). Within her unit were approximately 5-6 staff, with whom she really enjoyed working. As a part of her job description, she joined the Management Unit which Clarke Raymond chaired. She remembers Doug Tindal as the Communications Director and Anita Bundy as the Assistant to the Management team.

In her role as Director of Social Justice Ministries, she travelled a lot around Canada, meeting and collaborating with people involved in many facets of the church's social justice ministries. She recalls working with women to plan and lead a Conference in Newfoundland. During a dinner to which they had invited her, they told her that they

were still very angry that Joey Smallwood had sold them out by leading Newfoundland to join Canada.

Her travel took her occasionally abroad. One meeting she attended in Westminster Abbey had to do with the ordination of women. One of the projects that required some travel was a program with women in Pakistan which the ACC supported for a number of years. Bette Moore was the staff member with this program and Jeanne travelled twice with her to Pakistan to visit the program and to advise the women what items would be good for sale in Canada. The Anglican Church Women obtained an import license for their goods into Canada.

Another key piece of work was “The Transformation of the Church” Group which she and other women set up following a comment from one Bishop that “It’s the women who will transform the ACC”. They made a video and study materials and travelled across Canada to talk with women about the “Transformation of the Church”. They set up an annual award honouring Marjorie Watson Powles at Trinity College for women studying theology from a feminist perspective. Their group was able to meet with the woman who was the annual awardee of this scholarship.

This group included the following women who continue to meet to this day as the informally named “Marjorie Group”: Sandra Brown, Pat Clark, AJ Finlay, Kate Merriman, and Jeanne Rowles. They recently mourned Marjorie’s death in a Memorial service in October 2016, at which Jeanne spoke.

RETIREMENT – SHORT-LIVED

Jeanne served as Director of Social Justice Ministries of the ACC for twelve years from 1977-89. Toward the end of those years, she recalls that she was working a lot of overtime, having just completed nine weeks without a day off! She began thinking that if she continued to work at this pace, she would not be alive to enjoy her retirement, so she determined that she would retire two years early at the age of 63. She is grateful for the very good pension plan at the ACC and the health plan that staff were able to take with them into retirement. However, she realized she would have to sell her house on Gormley Avenue and “trade down” to provide her with enough cash to get through those two years before her pension became effective. She did this in 1989.

UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

Almost immediately on leaving the Anglican Church, the United Church of Canada asked her to work on contracts on several issues over a number of years. Jeanne found this work very satisfying, enabling her to control her work hours while having a good income for several more years. She did not have to use the money from the sale of her house to cover her income for the two years before retirement, which enabled her to later decide to move into Christie Gardens.

One of the things Jeanne most enjoyed about her work in both the Anglican and United Churches was getting to know more about the ecumenical coalitions, as she found the work they were doing so important. During the early 90s she served as a representative of the United Church on the Board of one of these coalitions, the Inter-Church Committee on World Development Education, which sponsored the “Ten Days for World Development program”. Jeanne Moffat was its National Coordinator and Jeanne R. organized the farewell party for Jeanne M. when she left that position in early 1993.

VOLUNTEER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Trinity St. Paul's United Church

Enter the next chapter of her life. We remember that Jeanne had become a member of Trinity St. Paul's United Church in 1978. After Bill Phipps and Pat Lissom, the ministers, left TSP, she was a part of a group who wanted more than just listening to someone "preaching the Word". So they met informally on Sunday nights for several years to talk about the church and its justice work.

During her time at TSP, she has served on the TSP Re-missioning Committee and as the Chair of the Board from March 1997-March 1999 with Jim Lewis¹ as her Vice-Chair. She was active on the Homelessness Action Group (HAG) that arose out of the Out of the Cold Program. This group worked hard on developing a proposal for housing for the homeless, but were disappointed that the church leadership at that time "were not interested in proceeding with this". She continues to meet individually and as a group with friends with whom she worked on housing issues: Mo Srivastava, Tracy Kett, and Judy Vellend.

Jeanne volunteered for a number of years on the Offering Counting Team. Most recently she has been part of the TSP Climate Justice Group that actively engaged the congregation and then the national church on the need to divest their funds from the top 200 fossil fuels as a necessary action to remove the social license from the companies who continue to search for more fuels which the planet cannot sustain.

Older Women's Network

Jeanne was recruited by an acquaintance from her days at Central Neighbourhood to join the Older Women's Network (OWN) before she retired from full-time work. This Network had been founded in 1986 and while she was not there at the very beginning, by the fourth year of

¹ Jim Lewis' letter regarding the various contributions of Jeanne Rowles to the life of TSP is in the footnotes.

its existence she became one of its three co-Chairs. Although its initial style of leadership had been that the leader was the “top of the pack”, it was through the commitment of those three women to a different style of leadership that Jeanne first learned the importance of a shared leadership model.

Jeanne is so proud of the work of the OWN in constructing a 140 unit affordable housing co-op for women and children on the Esplanade in Toronto. It was opened in 1997. This was made possible as a result of government funding to construct affordable housing.

In an article Jeanne wrote in the TSP Times in March 1997, as OWN (which was a tenant in the TSP building) was on the cusp of opening this co-op after nine long years of struggle, she concludes: *"These are surely exciting times for OWN. Memories of the long struggle are eased in anticipation of the completion of the housing co-op."*

Jeanne also picked up the responsibility for the OWN newsletter for 17 years. This was an 8-12 page newsletter produced every three months. There were 4-6 people on the Editorial Group, again sharing the leadership. While Jeanne no longer puts out the newsletter, she continues her connections with this network of women dedicated to seeking affordable housing for those needing it.

Toronto YWCA

Upon retirement Jeanne has continued to support the Toronto YWCA by offering her services weekly to the YWCA's International Boutique in Toronto. The proceeds of that shop go to the YWCA's international projects and is entirely staffed by volunteers. In addition to sales work, for many years she counted, recorded, and banked the receipts for the Boutique. She continues to prepare the inventory reports on a weekly basis.

Jeanne's lifelong membership in the Toronto YWCA means that she has found another way of supporting affordable housing for women. Attending the Annual General Meetings, she has followed and supported the YWCA's efforts to realize a dream of providing affordable housing for aboriginal women and women with addiction and mental health problems. While the YWCA as a Christian organization was unable to access government funding for affordable housing, St. Michael's Hospital, the Indigenous Women's Network, and the Jean Tweed Centre for Women and Their Families (which provides a safe and supportive environment for women with substance use, mental health, and/or gambling use) successfully received funds which they invested in this project, which opened in 2012. Jeanne was proud to be at the Opening and to financially support this dream.

JEANNE'S PASSIONS

There have been several passions which have run as themes through Jeanne's life work—social justice, empowerment of women to build their lives, feminist thinking about the role of women in the church, shared leadership, and affordable housing, particularly for at-risk women and their children. Jeanne has lived out these passions with consistency and urgency, always inviting and welcoming others to join her! However, beyond the institutional expressions of these, she was able to pursue most of these passions in her personal life as well, while also pursuing other passions.

Gardening – Jeanne always had a beautiful and expanding garden full of perennial flowers at both of her Toronto homes on Gormley Avenue (1970-1989) and Wolverton Avenue (1989-2008). These required a lot of planning and work, which she enjoyed for many years. Her preference for pink and purple showed its face in her stunning gardens!

Sharing her house – Jeanne worked throughout her life in the area of affordable housing, whether that was in the YWCA, Older Women’s Network, or Trinity St. Paul’s United Church, and she brought that passion into her own home ownership . Her approach was to share her home at affordable rents with others requiring housing. When Mitsue Nishio from Japan came to rent a room in her Gormley Avenue home, Jeanne had no idea that Mitsue would become her housemate for 35 years in both the Gormley and Wolverton homes. It was only when Jeanne moved into Christie Gardens that they parted ways as housemates, but they remain staunch friends.

Over the years of home ownership, Jeanne has offered housing to people from around the globe—refugees from various countries, international visitors from Chile and South Korea, and people in times of distress in their personal lives. Many remember her thoughtful and accepting hospitality carried out with a quiet grace and welcoming spirit. I was one of those fortunate to walk through her Open Door during a difficult period in my life to join Mitsue and another woman from Somalia. It was a rich experience of intentional and international living. Jeanne recalls the time when the Somali woman came home one night and said that “I think I just got married!” In fact, the meeting that she and her fiancé had attended with the Imam, which she had thought was to discuss the marriage did indeed turn out to be the marriage! Jeanne never skipped a beat and a few weeks later after the more formal marriage ceremony, Mitsui and I assisted her in hosting a beautiful wedding party in her lovely flower garden to celebrate the event.

In 2008 Jeanne moved to Christie Gardens where she enjoys living. Just two years into her residency there, she was asked by one of the residents if she could type. “No but I have a computer,” she responded. And with that comment she was elected Secretary of the Christie

Gardens Club (a club for all residents) and served in that capacity for two years.

Again she felt the urge to volunteer and indicated that to the Club. She was then asked if she would call the Bingo games for the long-term residents. “Oh, no,” she thought, but just as quickly she was aware that she should not “turn up my nose” at what was needed. So she did just that for quite a while.

More recently she has expanded her Climate Justice activism to being on the Green Team at Christie Gardens. She is also a part of the group working on the project “Milk bags into Mattresses” and regularly assists the cutting of the bags for mattresses to go to Haiti.

On her 90th birthday celebration, we celebrate her full life in living out her strong commitments. We who are here today feel privileged to be her friends. Jim Lewis has reminded us that “Jeanne’s eye is always on the future”. May her life and our friendships continue for years to come! Happy Birthday, Jeanne!

Footnotes: 1 [Jim Lewis <tspjimlewis@gmail.com>](mailto:tspjimlewis@gmail.com) To [Jeanne Moffat](#)

Nov 19 2016 at 10:03 PM

Hi Jeanne - your question about Jeanne's time as Official Board Chair drove me to our basement. It is an easy enough question to answer but the basement is also where my cache of old church newsletters and assorted documents is stored. I broke open the files and got lost reading about TSP in the 1990s and early 2000s. No better way, I say, to spend a cold, rainy mid-November Saturday afternoon.

Combing through the documents I was reminded just how much Jeanne was involved in and enabled so many aspects of our congregational life. The TSP Remissioning Committee (1991-1992) was where I first met Jeanne as we and others sought to discern who God was calling us to be. I believe Jeanne has the answer to that question. You may wish to ask her. Jeanne was also a guiding spirit in the visioning on Bloor Street initiatives of the time which moved, and challenged, us to think about new ways of working in partnership with United Church congregations on Bloor Street. Jeanne's eye is always on the future.

When Jeanne was through as Official Board Chair she was actively engaged in other groups such as the Homelessness Action Group. The acronym was "HAG". I remember Jeanne quietly laughing the first time she pointed that out to me.

Others know far better than I do about Jeanne's vision and enabling presence beyond TSP. I caught a glimpse of this in an article Jeanne wrote in the TSP Times March 1997 issue about the Older Women's Network (OWN). I am sending along a copy with this email.

Then, OWN was on the cusp of opening a co-op after nine long years of struggle. Jeanne shines through in this article. She describes OWN as having "a feminist membership" advocating "for the concerns of older women" such as home care, pensions, environment and drug patent laws. The membership was broad reflecting Jeanne's own interests, experience and concerns. On the eve of the co-op opening Jeanne wrote: "These are surely exciting times for OWN. Memories of the long struggle are eased in anticipation of the completion of the housing co-op."

Jeanne has been and remains a mentor for me. I learned much from her and always valued her time and advice. "What would Jeanne do" has guided my thinking when confronted with a challenge in my church and professional life. There is no better example of why than this.

In March 1998, mid-way through her term as TSP Board chair, Jeanne reported in the Times on TSP's annual meeting. Jeanne's leadership was critical at the time. There was unease in the congregation about stewardship. Some were worried about the ability to keep up with requests for time, talent and money. In her quiet thoughtful way Jeanne showed us the path forward. She wrote "We must find a way to talk with each other about our values and how they direct our decisions about the use of our resources. Talking has already begun but it needs a process and careful direction or it will not be constructive, community building and ultimately satisfying." Herein is wisdom.

So Jeanne, to answer your question, I can report that Jeanne Rowles was Official Board Chair from March 1997 to March 1999.

My thanks to you, Lynne and all who are organizing this celebration of Jeanne.

In faith, Jim