

When Women Talk

EMPOWERING EACH OTHER
ONE STORY AT A TIME



When Women Talk

EMPOWERING EACH OTHER
ONE STORY AT A TIME



COMPILED BY
BRIGITTE LESSARD-DEYELL

Published By



WOMEN TALK

Women Sharing Stories

Copyright © 2017 Women Talk

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any mechanical, photographic, or electronic process or in the form of phonographic recording; nor may it be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or otherwise copied for public or private use without the prior written permission of the Publisher.

Women Talk

208 Covepark Rise NE Calgary AB T3K 6G3

info@womentalk.ca

Christine Bode and Dawn James, editors

Debra Bernier, cover sculptor

David Moratto, cover and interior book designer

Second print run.

Printed in Canada.

ISBN 978-0-9958337-0-8 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9958337-2-2 (ePDF)

ISBN 978-0-9958337-1-5 (ePUB)

Note to the reader: This book is not intended to dispense psychological or therapeutic advice. The information is provided for educational and inspirational purposes only. In the event, you use any of the information in this book for yourself, which is your constitutional right, the author and publisher assumes no responsibility for your actions. In some chapters, names and locations have been changed to protect privacy.

*To all the women who hold a safe space for us
to share our stories and allow us to
talk for those who are silenced.*

*To my wife and my daughter,
may these stories inspire you.
To my son and any man who knows,
loves, and lives with women.*



Contents



<i>The Power of Feminine Energy</i>	1
BY BRIGITTE LESSARD-DEYELL	
<i>Ruby Slippers</i>	7
BY SHARON RENNECKE	
<i>I Am Finally Free</i>	13
BY BRENDA HAMMON	
<i>Be the Best Version of You!</i>	19
BY DR. MYLÈNE HOPF	
<i>Home Is In Your Heart</i>	25
BY COLETTE SMITHERS	
<i>From Breakdown, Comes Breakthrough!</i>	31
BY BRENDA FRAME	
<i>One Step at a Time</i>	37
BY HEIDI CABAY	
<i>Get Busy at Living</i>	43
BY BONNIE EARL	
<i>What's in A Name?</i>	49
BY REHANA MALIK-MBANGA	
<i>The Universe Has Plans For You!</i>	55
BY SUE DEYELL	

<i>Who Am I?</i>	61
BY EILEEN HEAD	
<i>From People-Pleaser to Me-Pleaser</i>	67
BY DARLIS-KEILY IRELAND	
<i>Talk About It: Be Prepared, Not Scared</i>	73
BY LORNA SELIG	
<i>Never Give Up: My Journey with Sonny</i>	79
BY KELLY KAY	
<i>From Tragic to Magic</i>	85
BY HARRIET TINKA, BBA, CPA, CMA, CCF	
<i>Life on the Edge</i>	91
BY BRYNDA ROCHE	
<i>Hay Sister! What Will You Become?</i>	97
BY ALLISON HAY	
<i>It's A Man's World—Or Is It?</i>	101
BY JENNA WOOD	
<i>Amelia</i>	107
BY BERNADETTE GERONAZZO	
<i>Downstage: When Words Ignite</i>	113
BY VICKI GOODFELLOW-DUKE	
<i>We Don't Know What We Don't Know</i>	119
BY CAROLE KUYPERS	
<i>Imperfection Is Not Your Reflection</i>	123
BY HEATHER COLBERG	

<i>Just One Ride</i>	129
BY HAZEL-JANE KALYN	
<i>Saved by an Angel Again and Again</i>	135
BY DAWN JAMES	
<i>How to Plan for Your Extraordinary Life</i>	141
BY PAULA COOK	
<i>To Be or Not to Be (A Nun)</i>	147
BY SUZAN MORGAN	
<i>Wake Up and Take Your Leap!</i>	153
BY SUSANNE HEATON	
<i>Where My Psychic and Spiritual Experiences Have Taken Me</i>	159
BY DR. BETH HEDVA	
<i>The Journey Home</i>	165
BY BEV JANISCH	
<i>Stories That Stain and Stories That Serve</i>	171
BY TAMMY PLUNKETT	
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	177
<i>About The Cover Art & Artist</i>	179
<i>Connect with Women Talk</i>	181

The Power of Feminine Energy

BY BRIGITTE LESSARD-DEYELL



Women Talk was a vision that woke me up at 2 am one morning, and despite not fully understanding what it meant at the time, it was crystal clear to me that I needed to act on this train of thought immediately. I knew that Women Talk was important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brigitte', located to the right of the testimonial text.

WOMEN TALK EVENTS are held across Alberta and BC where women get together in a space filled with feminine power and energy, where they are allowed to freely share their stories with each other. Women can be shy, timid, and careful when sharing emotional experiences. They must be surrounded with feminine energy and love to feel safe. At Women Talk, we hold such a space for each other. This sisterhood offers a sacred platform that is noticeably empowering to every female in the room. The power of the Divine Feminine is palpable at every Women Talk event in every location. It is beautiful, soft, patient, intuitive, and receptive. Women share emotional, personal stories, often for the first time. No one is superior to anyone else. Everyone's uniqueness is celebrated.

I believe we need more Feminine Energy in the world and the world needs more Women Talk.

In the first 40 years of my life I mostly lived in my masculine energy. I was a tomboy, always gravitating to "boy stuff." I loved all the physical experiences of competitive sports and loved the dominant energy. Although surrounded by women at work, at play, and at home, I was living in my masculine energy. And it served me well.

Then at the age of 41, I became a mother. Motherhood is the most powerful, beautiful energy one can experience. Absolute pure love

blossomed in my chest and I can only describe it as the Divine Feminine. However, I started feeling unbalanced. Being a stay-at-home mom doing “mom stuff” was forcing me to live in my feminine energy. Little did I know that an epic internal battle was about to occur.

In its own right Women Talk propelled me into a journey of spiritual awakening. While my head, the masculine side of me, tried to fight back all of the “woo woo stuff” that surrounded me at the Women Talk monthly events, I secretly knew what energy would win that battle. Now that I was a mom, and that part of me was fully awakened, my heart was crying for more. I needed to live my life from a deeper place, a heart-centred place. Surrounded by women who live in that world, my journey began. Meditation, Sisterhood, Sacred Gifts, Angels and so much more. It was, and still is at times, a completely new, strange world.

My Sacred Gifts teacher told me that I would become a “bridge.” At the time, I had no idea what that meant, but now I see it. A bridge from a place of common sense to one of spirituality, from our heads to our hearts. I soon came to embrace the fact that my gift is to bridge the gap between the masculine and the feminine.

Once during a guided meditation, I fully experienced the two energies at war. Looking for inspiration to write one of my talks, I decided to meditate. As I sat quietly by my fireplace, feeling warm, relaxed and alone, I picked a guided meditation. The guide asked me to listen to my heart. What was it saying? My marriage immediately came to mind. I could feel its intense love and then I heard my head arguing with my heart. It started listing all that was wrong in my relationship. Then right at that moment the guide softly said, “Don’t be surprised if your head is giving you a completely opposite message.” I was shocked! How did she know? She knew because we are all composed of masculine and feminine energy and we all choose which side we will listen to and live in.

Gender is an illusion. Masculine and feminine are opposite: left brain vs right brain, straight vs curvy, hierarchical vs cooperative. We are all composed of both, despite the body parts we are born with. Women usually have a higher feminine energy and men usually have a higher masculine energy. Both are necessary to be balanced. The world also needs both for function and beauty.

Many people feel that humanity is in dire need of a return to feminine energy, an energy that has been suppressed for centuries and has been made to feel like the weaker of the two energies. Feminine energy is extremely powerful and is more accepting, inclusive, and peaceful. It is time for women to stand strong and once again speak from their power!

Women living in their feminine energy have been made to feel inferior to men. Over time, women have believed that in order to be successful, they must live in their masculine energy. Today, however, women are rebelling against this long-held misconception as they realize that thinking and living in masculine energy does not work for them. Women are feeling, nurturing creatures meant to experience life in a heart-centered way, with compassion and love.

That balance is also needed in men. Men have been taught to suppress their feminine energy. A man possessing a dominant female energy is ridiculed, treated as weak and un-manly. But when men are forced to live solely in their masculine energy, to the point where they end up “hyper-masculine,” violence is often the outcome, in their relationships and in the world.

At a very young age, I was at the receiving end of this “hyper-masculinity” and know how terrifying it can be.

Aboriginal cultures throughout history were matriarchal societies and their peoples understood the significance of living in a more heart-centered, gentle place. They also respected those who had the ability, or gift, of being able to flow from the masculine to the feminine and back again. Gay people in aboriginal cultures were considered to be “Two-Spirited” and were celebrated and respected. Two-Spirited individuals, it was believed, understood and could move fluidly between both the masculine and feminine energies, and were often revered as healers or spiritual leaders.

The Masculine Energy is about power, logic, competitiveness, assertiveness, and rigidity. The Feminine Energy is vulnerable, cooperative, creative, nurturing, receptive, and fluid. I love both and can flow from one to the other depending on the circumstances. I use my masculine energy to attack my goals and achieve desired outcomes. But I love, and more often choose, to live in my feminine energy. Being able to move

effortlessly between both energies has truly been a gift for me, and it has helped me understand both powers.

I am just as comfortable playing hockey as I am cooking in the kitchen. I am a fierce, physical competitor and a soft, nurturing mother. I enjoy living with both energies. It is not about balance as much as it is about being able to flow from one energy to the other. I am free to choose which energy I live in, and when. I can fully experience, feel, and live in both energies as I please, but the Divine Feminine Energy is the one I admire now most and the one I prefer to be surrounded by.

Understanding and living in both energies, accompanied by my visionary gift, has prepared me for an extraordinary path. I intend to help my community to raise and celebrate feminine energy. This is my legacy, my small contribution to the world, my life's passion. I want to raise feminine energy in order to make people appreciate all its qualities and Women Talk is my vehicle. It is a beautiful, harmonious place where you can feel the unconditional love of the powerful feminine energy. Together, we help women reach their full potential. Together, we celebrate their uniqueness.

We acknowledge each other's issues and weaknesses and provide healing for our dysfunction. You can feel the honouring of each woman's story. That honour is palpable. As a group, and as individuals, we see each other from our heart-centered space and feel our interconnectedness. At Women Talk you are simply part of the *tribe*. In our collective state, we can heal each other and our communities. We might be a very small pebble in a very large pond, but our ripples are far reaching.

It is my personal belief that by sharing our lessons and teachings, we can create symbiotic energy together that will benefit both men and women and society as a whole. We will share the message of feminine energy that art, music, aesthetics, and love are as important as economics. Together we can raise feminine energy in our cities, our countries and around the world. In the future, perhaps, we can leave war and aggression behind and become a more peaceful society consumed with making the world a better place.

My philosophy behind Women Talk is just that — by sharing their stories, women will make their communities stronger.

ABOUT BRIGITTE LESSARD-DEYELL



Married, mother of two, entrepreneur, and visionary, Brigitte has spent most of her life supporting and empowering women through numerous female-based businesses.

Born a self-confident extrovert, Brigitte learned that sharing her energy to empower other women was something she adored doing. The first part of her life was all about sports, where she learned many of her leadership skills and how to motivate other women to push past their limiting beliefs. That's also where she learned that together we are stronger.

Her insatiable curiosity has led her on the path of a serial entrepreneur. Over the years, she has owned multiple female-based businesses including a women's sports store, a women's gym, a physiotherapy clinic, and a women's trade show, just to name a few! She presently owns Sportsbras.ca and Women Talk and is a professional public speaker. Brigitte is also a Certified Sacred Gifts Guide and has studied and practiced the Law of Attraction's principles for almost 20 years.

Whether it's at the microphone or on camera, you will instantly be moved by Brigitte's larger than life energy. Her "joie de vivre" is contagious. As a motivational speaker, Brigitte inspires women to celebrate their feminine energy, to speak their truth, and stand fully in their power.

Passionate about women having the opportunity to share their stories in a positive, uplifting, safe environment, Brigitte became a story activist

and created Women Talk — a monthly event which is spreading to many cities across Canada. Using her Gift of Cultural Integration, she brings together women from all social classes, religions, sexual orientations, and races, and encourages them to respect and celebrate their differences. Women Talk is ordinary women sharing their extraordinary stories.

Brigitte firmly believes that “By Sharing Their Story, Women Make Their Communities Stronger.”

www.womentalk.ca

www.sportsbras.ca

www.facebook.com/BrigitteKLessardDeyell

www.linkedin.com/in/brigittelessard-deyell



Home Is In Your Heart

BY COLETTE SMITHERS



This beautiful, strong Irish woman is not the face I would envision when I think of homelessness. However, Colette not only conquered her situation, she tapped into her life lessons and became a strong, empathetic leader. The road to her castle had many bumps and curves, but she is now a Queen who rules with understanding and compassion.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Colette".

BETWEEN 2006 AND 2009, I divorced, became estranged from my daughter, bought a house and lost it in foreclosure. My business was in my home, so that disappeared along with the house. I got rid of everything I owned, and at 49 years old, I moved in with my parents in Calgary.

I quickly jumped at the opportunity to work at the BC Winter Games. It was my chance to run away and escape from the past three years. I purposely cut myself off from everyone, including my siblings. They had not seen or heard from me in months.

When I returned to Calgary, I had planned to work with a girlfriend, revamping her business and renting one of her properties. That plan did not work out as I had envisioned. On May 10, 2010, I had the rug pulled out from under me when two of my sisters arrived to inform me that my girlfriend had contacted them to remove me from her house or she would have the police evict me!

I left with my sisters and went to one of their homes, and by early evening, all five of my siblings arrived. It appeared I was the subject of an intervention! Their 'talk' went something like this:

Colette, you're homeless, you're squatting, you have no job and no income. You have screwed up your life for the past few years and it's time to fix it. You must promise to sign up with a temporary agency tomorrow and

get a job. You also have to have a complete mental assessment. They designated a sister-in-law to take me for that assessment.

The following morning I saw a psychologist at the Sundance Health Centre. I invited my sister-in-law to sit in because I had nothing to hide and I knew she would have to report back to *the posse*. After I talked for about 45 minutes, the psychologist excused herself, then returned to the room 15 minutes later. She moved her chair in front of me, put her hands on my knees, and said:

Colette, I have been working with our emergency housing team, looking for a bed for you. You cannot return to your sister's. It is not safe for you there. Another rug was pulled out from under me! My sister-in-law drove me back to my sister's house where I collected my things, and then she dropped me off at respite housing. That was the last time I saw or spoke with any of my siblings for the next two years.

After a brief stay in respite housing, I got a bed at the YWCA Mary Dover House where I lived for the next five months. The first three weeks were challenging. At that time, new residents had to spend 21 days in the dorm, a 12 x 20 room with three sets of bunk beds end-to-end down one wall and six locked dressers down the opposite wall. Curfew was 10:30 pm, at which time two YWCA staffers did a head count and turned the lights out. On my first night in the dorm, only the top bunks were available. I climbed the ladder to a bunk, fully dressed, laid down facing the wall and cried myself to sleep.

The next day, there was a 'post-it' on the dorm door directing me to meet with a caseworker for my 'intake'. The caseworker was 12 years old! This young girl, with pen in hand, bangs covering her face, and a stack of forms piled in front of her, was charged with getting *my life* back on track. How could she possibly relate to my circumstances? I left that meeting feeling utterly exposed, vulnerable, small and weak, like an inmate. My facial expression must have spoken volumes because when I returned to the dorm, two of the women, Carole and Maggie, told me not to worry. They promised to take me to social services to sign up for assistance. The next day, I signed up for welfare.

After three weeks in the dorm, I moved into a shared room. I spent the next few months trying to regain a sense of normalcy in my life. I stayed

fit by walking around a nearby river while listening to my praise and worship music or pastor's messages on my iPod. I cooked and baked every day in the community kitchen and babysat for the young moms. I got to know the women — the glorious, caring, giving, brave, courageous, creative, funny, strong, tenacious, and beautiful women — my sisters at the YWCA.

I was surprised to discover that only one of about 80 women I encountered at the YWCA, was battling issues of alcohol and drugs. The majority of women were dealing with mental health, physical health, divorce, fleeing violence and abuse, immigration, lack of employment and lack of affordable housing issues. However, the one experience we had in common, our 'crime' so to speak, was poverty.

Here are just a few of the memories I have from the women I met at the YWCA:

Carole, 53, a university graduate and fierce feminist, was from New Brunswick. After her 20-year marriage failed, she left the small-town life and restaurant she had run with her husband, and moved to start over in Calgary. She worked in housekeeping in several hotels and shortly after leaving the YWCA, she became resident manager at one of the YWCA apartment buildings. Once a week, Carole and I enjoyed lively conversations over a glass of wine at the Marriott.

Maggie, a young native woman, was so quiet and tried desperately to be invisible. A photo of her daughter, who had been apprehended by Child Services, was taped on the bedpost to inspire her to keep fighting against drinking and taking drugs so that she could bring her baby girl home.

Jaylene, a tall, skinny, 'motor mouth,' chain smoker with a contagious laugh, made a movie star entrance into the dorm one night at 10:45 pm. YWCA had given her permission to break curfew so she could attend her daughter's grade 12 graduation. Jaylene had been released from hospital the day before, where she was recovering from an assault by her partner that left her with serious injuries, including the puncture of her left breast implant with a hammer. Three months later, Jaylene invited me to her graduation for completing a computer course she had taken at the Drop-In Centre. The Centre held a picnic at Prince's Island Park where diplomas were presented and a class picture was taken for the Drop-In Centre wall. I gave Jaylene a packet of cigarettes as a graduation gift.

On another evening, Jaylene told me Aziz was concerned because her grey hair was showing, and asked if we could colour her hair. Aziz was about 41 and from Pakistan. She had immigrated to Calgary with her husband and two teenage sons. She didn't speak English. The first time I met her, I said 'hello.' She immediately took a photograph from under her sari, held it out to me and spoke in Pakistani. Crying, she hugged the picture to her heart and finally collapsed into my arms, sobbing. I learned that her husband had thrown her out and she couldn't see her sons. Immigration was trying to help her get support from her husband and access to her children.

At the drug store, Jaylene and I enjoyed a good laugh, pretending we didn't understand what Aziz wanted and we bought platinum blonde hair coloring. We sneaked some jet black colour into the bag and had great fun in the washroom colouring Aziz's hair. Aziz was a good sport and gifted me the most beautiful pair of sandals.

Ibeth, a 22-year-old Middle Eastern woman and devout Muslim, left her family in Calgary because her father refused to let her attend university. She attended the University of Calgary full-time, and spent the rest of her time studying or in prayer. She was afraid that her father might discover where she was and feared for her life.

Sharon was in her fifties and struggled with depression and anxiety. She was a genuine hippy flower child, who found peace and solace writing songs and playing her guitar. Sharon didn't like any of us 'bitches.' She liked to be alone, but her beautiful voice — sometimes fiercely angry, sometimes heartbreakingly sad — echoed through the fourth floor halls as she poured out her soul in her songs.

I had been at the YWCA about four months when Gail and Val from the housing department asked to meet with me. Two things struck me about this meeting; first that Gail and Val were around my age, and second, it was just the three of us in the room. There were no computers, no forms, no desk, no phones; just a couple of coffee mugs on the table and three comfortable chairs. When I sat down, Gail said, "So Colette, how are you?" That simple question completely broke me. Suddenly, all the hurt, loss, betrayal, pain, and heartache of the past few years came pouring out in convulsive waves of grief. For so long, I had

been a problem to be fixed, a case to be managed, an embarrassment to my family. I was alone and lonely. I told my story without blame or judgment, and left it all behind me in that room. I don't know how long we were in that room, but I do know that I was a different person when I came out. From that day on, I began to rise from the ashes of my life.

On the one Christmas I spent at the YWCA, a friend gave me a little embroidered picture and the words in the picture ring so true for me now. It says, '*Home is in your heart.*'

ABOUT COLETTE SMITHERS



Colette Smithers was born in Ireland and immigrated to Canada at age 16. She became a typical middle class Canadian woman: a wife and mother with a successful career.

At age 50, following a difficult divorce and the failure of her business venture, Colette found herself homeless, broke and alone. That experience, particularly her time spent with the women of the Calgary YWCA Mary Dover House, completely transformed her perception of faith, family, and home. She believes now in living life on her own terms,

with empathy, gratitude, and joy.

Colette is passionate about the issue of homelessness for women and shares her story to encourage all of us to see each other as human beings, deserving of respect and dignity.

Colette is an avid foodie, amateur photographer, a novice trader, and budding writer. She is also the Director of Women Talk in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

www.facebook.com/colette.smithers

www.linkedin.com/in/colette-smithers-60638780



Acknowledgments



THIS BOOK WOULD not have been possible without the generous and vulnerable sharing of the stories by my 29 co-authors. I would also like to thank Tammy Plunkett and the Big Sky Author Services team who taught me to believe in myself, and that I can write. Tammy encouraged and inspired me to use my storytelling skills and translate them onto paper. She was amazing and I love her for everything she did on this project. Huge thanks to David Moratto's artistic vision for the book cover and interior design. He took an idea in my mind and made it real. For the production magic and editing giftedness, I am very grateful for Dawn James and Christine Bode.

I would love to thank Monique MacDonald for sparking my journey into spirituality and connecting with other women on a different level. She was instrumental in showing me my Sacred Gifts and how to use them to help others be all they can be. For their eternal support and adoration, Sue, Alexandra and Luke. My mom always told me as a child that impossible doesn't exist and what we want to do we can do. Merci, Maman!

Connect with Women Talk



*Women Talk is ordinary women
sharing their extraordinary stories.
By sharing their stories, women make
their communities stronger.*



HOW TO CONNECT WITH WOMEN TALK

Go to womentalk.ca today for a listing
of all our locations across the country.

SIGN-UP TO:

- *Be a Guest*
- *Be a TALKer (in person or virtually)*
- *Be a Sponsor*
- *Be a Volunteer*
- *Be a Chapter Director*



*For more information about booking Brigitte Lessard-Deyell
as a motivational speaker, contact:
brigitte@womentalk.ca*