

# Small Seeds of Change

By Sue Starr

In 1998, I wrote a couple of stories that envisioned a government system where central decision-making was done by a council of grandmothers. These stories were written when I was living in Yellowknife, and was part of a writers' group there, and when the Territories were dividing—birthing Nunavut. I was inspired by some of the songs we sing and the powerful mystery we create together, by my Quaker community, by songs I've sung with women over the last dozen years, by wise women I've known.

One of the other members of this writing group later became an 'advisor' of the present government in Yellowknife. He had been describing the stories to Cabinet Members and they'd expressed an interest in reading them. He wrote to ask my permission, which I gave with great delight. The following was a news release in Yellowknife in May, 2002:

*YELLOWKNIFE (May 28) — Minister of Health and Social Services, Jane Groenwegen, has established a Council of Grandmothers to provide advice on promoting healthy individuals and communities, and address health and social issues. The council held its first meeting on May 23rd in Yellowknife.*

*The Council of Grandmothers is composed of fifteen matriarchs from across the NWT. Each member brings years of personal and/or professional experience in social issues, and all share a commitment to making the NWT a better place for everybody. The ongoing input of the grandmothers will also help guide the development of a social agenda for the NWT.*

*"The experience of the members and their commitment to improving social conditions is very impressive," Mrs. Groenwegen said, "I am fortunate to be able to bring such a knowledgeable, innovative and respected group of women together."*

*The council considered a number of key issues in their first meeting, including the impact of addictions on families and communities, the importance of family bonds and good parenting skills, the value of education and how to ensure NWT communities are prepared to benefit from resource development. The Council of Grandmothers will come together at the Social Agenda Conference, June 18–20 on the Hay River Reserve.*

A Yellowknife friend wrote this from a different perspective:

*Hi Sue,*

*I wanted to take a few minutes to tell you about the reaction to the Council of Grandmothers.*

*I have been hearing from various potential "Grandmothers" who have been approached about it, and the reaction all seems to be the same—a sort of hesitation, as if they're not sure people really want their wisdom and value their knowledge, and then a lot of excitement when they realize that's indeed what government is doing. I think they have been so used to "doing" for so long that the idea that someone wants them for "being" rather than "doing" is a new idea.*

*Thank you so much for having this vision, and for sharing it. We truly do create the world as we see it. The Grandmothers Council is going to be a powerful force in the North, I know. I can feel the strength of the idea growing, like an animal that has been asleep for a long time and is only now stretching and flexing its muscles again. It's a restoring of an older way of doing things, a natural order.*

*Hope all is well with you. □*

*Sue Starr is a member of Prairie Monthly Meeting, who resides in Yellowknife, NWT.*

