

# **GASP Backstory**

*Carole Holmes and Lorraine Green - June 2020*

Our history shapes who we are today. In the summer of 2020, GASP supported **Black Lives Matter** and the **Defund Police** movement. Is this not a bit of a stretch from our work on the Climate Crisis? No, it is essential to our work on Climate Justice!

## **2016 - 2018 Recognizing Systemic Injustice**

On November 8, 2016, Donald Trump was elected president of the United States. The analysis came out that the tipping point for Trump's success was the votes of white, educated, middle class women. "That's us!" said Helen Brown as she asked a group of life-long feminist activists: "How could this happen?"

Thus began our journey of education about systemic discrimination. We were forced to acknowledge our own white privilege, and own up to our complicity in upholding this inequitable system. A very necessary and uncomfortable journey for us well intentioned compassionate white women!

For three years we met monthly. We read books & articles, listened to Ted Talks, viewed documentaries, listened to speakers and had many discussions with the intent of finding ways that we could use our privilege to build a more equitable society. We even practiced ways that we could engage our 'un woke' friends and relatives.

As feminists focusing on patriarchy, misogyny and systemic discrimination based on gender, we, white activists were often blinded by our privilege. We did not root out the racism and homophobia within ourselves and in the women's movement. We saw ourselves as 'not racist'; however, we came to understand that we needed to be Anti-Racist! We still have a long way to go! We, hypothetically, asked our sisters who were multiply oppressed by gender, colour, and sexual orientation to wait, just a little longer, until we (white women) won the fight for gender equality. As part of the 'Me Too' movement, we were still fighting gender inequality, but as allies, using our privilege for inclusion of all our sisters.

## **Social Justice Issues**

Initially we focused on the USA and its cruel legacy of slavery and current systemic discrimination against black people. However Canada's shameful past re:our Indigenous people led us to focus at home. Unfortunately we never did the deep study on Canada's history of racism toward brown and black people. It was so much easier for us Canadians to compare ourselves, favourably to Americans.

## **We have more work to do!**

As we acknowledged our own white privilege, classism, and racism, we came to understand colonialism and its present-day impact on Indigenous people. Yes, we had previously had 'red dress' campaigns, and held vigils for our missing and murdered

indigenous sisters but we never acknowledged how complicit we, white middle class women, were in a system that benefitted us immensely just because of the colour of our skin. We were in polite compliance in a system that reinforced and devalued people of colour, the poor and the vulnerable. This was our time to become 'Anti-Racist'.

We were proud of our advocacy in having an Indigenous flag raised over the city of Oakville. We, "Settler" grandmothers participated in a retreat hosted by Indigenous grandmothers, the 'Wisdom Carriers'. They told us "You have more work to do. Join us in our fight for clean water. Join us in our fight against the degradation of our earth." We wanted to be allies. We understood that it is our duty to use our privilege for good and to speak out against injustice. We took opportunities to stand with our Indigenous sisters for Social Justice.

## Voices of our Grandchildren

Last year, we began hearing the voices of our grandchildren (Greta Thunberg) speak out about the climate crisis. We pledged to work with them to mitigate the Climate Crisis and to advocate for Climate Justice..

Exactly one year ago, we feminists, mostly grandmothers, made a serious decision to do what we could to ensure we leave our grandchildren a **healthy planet and a livable, equitable society**. Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet (GASP) was born on the principles of Climate Justice and Social Justice.

How appropriate is this quote today!

*"We can't have a green and peaceful future without racial justice, equity, civil rights, and empowered communities. We believe the systems of power and privilege that destroy the environment also strip vulnerable communities of their humanity — and too often, their lives.*

2016 Blog by Annie Leonard, Executive Director, Greenpeace USA

To conclude, GASP supports Emmay Mah of the Toronto Environmental Alliance as she declares "We are part of a growing movement that recognizes the interconnected nature of environment, economic, and racial justice work."

