

Chenier points out that there is a tremendous resistance to confronting workers' health issues. Employers cite the enormous cost of research and workplace redesign. Yet, Workers' Compensation Acts fail to adequately address reproductive health issues and legislative and policy directs are a 'jurisdictional jungle.' Scientific research has been slow and cautious in supporting worker-generated observations and industry-financed experts have been shown to be incompetent, careless and even dishonest. Much of the progress that has been achieved has been won by workers, particularly unionized workers, who directly confront health hazards as well as discriminatory protective policies.

While justifiably critical of present conditions, Chenier acknowledges recent accomplishments. The 1978 establishment of the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety signalled national recognition of health and safety concerns. However, clearly much remains to be done. While pregnant women are offered life-style counselling (don't smoke, etc.), their daily working conditions are ignored. More research and information are needed and that information—medical tests, environmental testing, government research, inspection reports, etc.—needs to be widely disseminated. Workers need the right to refuse work 'without fear of penalty and without extensive legal or medical advice prior to action.' More generally, Chenier argues that our society must commit itself to safe working conditions for all workers and must work to achieve this not by molding the worker to the job (for example, the exclusion of 'fertile' women workers) but by molding the job to the worker (for example, mechanical redesign). Chenier's book will clearly be a valuable resource in this struggle.

Both *A Working Majority* and *Reproductive Hazards at Work* are important contributions to understanding and improving women's experience in the paid labour force. Rooted in issues that directly impinge on women's lives as paid

workers, they provide information on overall patterns as well as concrete suggestions for action. While much remains to be learned and much is yet to be done, each of these books will serve as a valuable reference to researchers and to women workers.

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**Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age.**  
Joanna Rogers Macy. *Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1983. Pp. 178.*

Uneasiness about nuclear war has been a part of my life for more than three decades. In school in the United States, we had duck-and-cover drills. In Japan in 1960, at a United States airbase where my then-husband worked at an illegal intelligence installation, they briefed us: when the missiles come, run to the steam tunnel chambers. Don't go back for your kids, you won't make it. Next I lived in Nebraska near SAC headquarters, then San Francisco. From one prime target to another. An American experience, I thought. When I immigrated to the safety of Canada, I left it behind.

But there is no safe place. We are all affected by that knowledge. And so we should be. As Helen Caldicott points out in "*If You Love This Planet*", if we don't feel horror and grief at the imminent destruction of all we know and love, we are insane and need help. Most times, we bury our feelings because we feel impotent to avert nuclear holocaust and can't bear the fear of it. What Joanna Macy's work offers us is a way to transform our paralysis and powerlessness.

Empowerment workshops such as those described by Macy help us to acknowledge our despair and helplessness in the face of the destruction of all life on our planet. Through accepting and experiencing our despair, we can free ourselves from it. Alone we are impotent. Sharing

with others our terror and grief through guided exercises, bodywork, meditations, rituals and talk, we become released and empowered. Together we find the physical, psychological and spiritual resources to act. In acting, we feel hope and joy. When we face “mass annihilation ...consciously and openly together, we rediscover in our shared humanity the wellsprings of our caring and our courage. And that caring and courage begin to reach into every part of our lives.”

Joanna Macy has a PhD and teaches in the field of religious studies. She has three grown children and lives with her husband in San Francisco where she is involved with a network called Interhelp, working on peace issues. She has put on hundreds of workshops in the United States, Europe and Asia. Her colleagues have held hundreds more. This book is a product of the experiences of thousands of people all over the world. It is based on a diversity of intellectual, political and religious traditions, all of which presume that our individual existence and meaning are embedded in a web of life in which all creatures are inextricably connected. In this connection lies our humanity, our power and our survival.

The book is organized into three major sections, followed by appendices. The first section, consisting of two chapters, deals with the perils we face and our reactions to them. Commonly, we deny the perils because we feel helpless to avert these horrors and cannot tolerate the pain of our powerlessness. Macy describes the origins and development of despair and empowerment work, which she and others drew together out of their experiences at conferences on planetary survival issues: ecology, pollution, war preparations, etc. Conscious of her own despair and pain, she encouraged others to speak of how these issues touched their lives. “Despairwork” (the title of an earlier pamphlet by the same publisher) was born.

In the second chapter, Macy outlines five principles on which despair and empowerment work is based: 1) Feeling pain and grief in the face of our destruction is a sign of health and humanity. 2) This pain becomes dysfunctional only when repressed. 3) Acquiring more information does not help us to deal with our feelings about our destruction. 4) When we accept and unlock our pain we can use it positively. 5) Confronting our pain helps connect us to the web of life in our world, to each other, to wonder, joy and peaceful strength.

Empowerment workshops are based on five stages. They begin by acknowledging, validating and experiencing our pain for the world. We move through our pain to awareness of its source: our caring for all of life. The source of our pain is also the source of our strength, for it is by feeling our power as interconnected beings that we are able to act.

The second section of the book (chapters 3 and 4) presents positive and strengthening ways to talk about our imminent destruction, with children and adults, individuals and groups. There are guidelines for facilitators, for participants, for health professionals, for laypeople. Exercises are described step by step, and, for a wonder, the originators are credited by name.

The third section (chapters 5, 6, 7, 8) provides specific activities and methods to move through the despair and empowerment process. The final chapter describes spiritual exercises (partly rooted in Buddhist tradition) to help us appreciate our ties to each other in the face of apocalypse. Material in this section is of particular benefit to activists, to help us prevent burnout; we can renew our energies by renewing our awareness of beauty, joy and love in closeness to people around us. Of course, this material is directly useful for peacework; it is a how-to-do-it manual. The exercises are also a starting place, for each workshop or exploration will create new material.

The brief appendices are practical, although not exhaustive. They include samples of agendas, announcements and descriptions for short or extended workshops, lists of organizational, written and audiovisual resources (all U.S.). The final appendix is a 10-point list entitled "Helping people to deal with terrifying films."

I participated in a despair and empowerment workshop in Winnipeg in October, 1982, facilitated by At The Foot Of The Mountain, a feminist theatre group from Minneapolis (some of their work is available on videotape—write to them). It has made a real difference in my life. I still find this a truly dreadful topic to work on. Each time I begin a project (such as writing this review), I go through my own scenarios of nuclear holocaust. I replay and embellish a scene from a fire in which my neighbour was badly burned. We all stood on the lawn, while the fire fighters worked; the paramedics came, and gently and expertly cared for my friend. I stayed at the hospital until I knew she would not die; she stayed there for 3 months. But suppose we all were burned, the flames were all along the street, there were no fire fighters, no paramedics, no hospitals, no water. I see myself (unscathed, of course) helplessly watching friends and neighbours with blistered skin and melted hair (as hers were) and eyes. I can do nothing. What I feel then is black cold despair. But since the workshop, I can crawl out of this pit by reaching out to friends and recalling our shared love and strength. I am left with hope and the ability to try. Although I feel like an inadequate vehicle, I no longer feel as if I am acting alone. We all can do what we must. Only by working through this process am I free to write, to act.

A direct benefit of despair and empowerment work is that it helps us to appreciate life and each other in ways that we cannot when we are trying to avoid thinking about the awful ways we and our near and dear are likely to die. As Macy comments, this work "increases our awareness not only of the perils that face us, but also of the

promise inherent in the human heart....Whether our efforts to heal our world succeed or fail, we live then in so vivid a consciousness of our community that the most obvious and accurate word for it is love. And that seems, in and of itself, a fulfillment."

This book is a real lifesaver. I recommend it for anyone who teaches, and for anyone who knows how to read, loves anybody, and wants to live.

**Reweaving the Web of Life. Feminism and Nonviolence.** Pam McAllister (ed), *Philadelphia: New Society Publishers 1982*, Pp. 440.

Put into the feminist perspective, nonviolence is the merging of our uncompromising rage at the patriarchy's brutal destructiveness with a refusal to give in to despair or hate or to let men off the hook by making them the "Other" as they have made those they fear "Others."

— Pam McAllister

*Reweaving* is a collection of essays, interviews, stories, plays, poems, songs, artwork and photographs by 54 American and one Canadian women and two men. All are activists working for peaceful social change and a feminist society. A number are professional academics, writers, artists; some work as organisers, mothers, and other kinds of radicals. Some have explicit religious connections: I noticed Quakers, Catholics, various unspecified Christians, Jews, and born-again pagans (as Brigitte in my group — Cronies — describes herself). Some want equality and integration, others believe this impossible. Some work in men-free environments, others work in mixed groups. Some see women as biologically or spiritually more peaceful than men, others look to training and interests as explanations. Some would use physical force for self-defence, most would not. Nearly all would agree that feminism and nonviolence are fundamentally