

Breaking the silence

Nine years after retiring from the RCMP, Queen's grad Jane Hall has written an "unvarnished" memoir that chronicles her experiences as one of the first women to serve in the Scarlet Force.

BY KAREN RICHARDSON

Jane Hall, Artsci'76, Ed'77, one of the first women to join the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the 1970s, still recalls her first arrest. It happened in North Vancouver when she stopped an impaired driver. The man was surprised to see that the officer approaching his car was a young woman. Before he knew what had hit him, Jane had slapped a pair of handcuffs on him and he was in the back seat of her patrol car. It was only later that Jane discovered she'd arrested one of the nastiest criminals on the North Shore.

In her new book *The RED Wall: A Woman in the RCMP* (General Store Publishing, \$19.95), Jane tells an engaging story of Canadian history and social justice. Written with verve, humour, and wit, she doesn't romanticize her RCMP experiences, nor does she give them a political spin. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," she says – borrowing a phrase from Charles Dickens, whose youngest son, Francis, was a member of the North West Mounted Police in the 1880s.

Because she wanted to tell the complete and unvarnished story of her police career, Jane remained silent for nine years after her 1998 retirement. She feared if she didn't tell her full story the abbreviated version would be misinterpreted as an attack on the RCMP.

The RED Wall isn't that. Overall, it's a very positive book about "a great country and a great organization." Says Jane, "The red wall isn't to be confused with the glass ceiling. The RCMP wall is – you'll see when you read the book – a foundation,

something to protect."

Jane, who was born and raised on Wolfe Island, near Kingston, now lives in Langley, B.C. As a girl, she was torn between a career in journalism or police work. French was a prerequisite for entrance into the journalism program at Carleton, but Jane's "second language" was Latin, and so her choice was made for her. At the same time, she met the height requirements – 5'4" for females – and the 20-20 vision that was required to join the RCMP. The RCMP had begun recruiting female

officers in 1974. When Jane joined, there were just 150 women among the thousands of Mounties in all of Canada.

Being a small-framed young woman, she didn't fit the stereotype of the "typical Mountie." Jane remembers how when she went on her first routine police call, the woman who came to the door called to her husband, "Dear, the Girl Guides are here!"

Despite public perceptions, the first female Mounties tended to want to prove they could be as strong as their male colleagues without copying them. "If we females could do one of the toughest, traditionally male jobs, on our own terms, then we could do any job," Jane recalls.

She became known for policing in an old-fashioned, polite, traditional way,



Jane Hall waited nine years to write the story of her RCMP career.

using her wits and intelligence. She was adept at obtaining confessions and information from suspects. Female victims and children often preferred to talk to a female officer, and Jane's statements were never challenged in court by people who argued she'd threatened or intimidated them. She also used her gender to advantage while working as an undercover officer; many male suspects

were not expecting to encounter a female RCMP officer.

Beyond being a story about the battle for gender equality, *The RED Wall* is about broader issues in Canadian society – the divide between the East and West, and how issues such as homelessness, spousal abuse, and the public's view of the RCMP ("the embodiment of the Canadian national identity") were redefined. "The force has always been underfunded and understaffed. Nowadays, with what's portrayed in the media, the Canadian public generally doesn't always support the force as it does in the West."

Jane hopes her book will contribute to our knowledge and understanding of Canada. "Most of all I want people to

think and to talk and to break the silence on how far we've come on a lot of important issues. We're so busy, we're not talking enough – we are conforming too much and that's dangerous." □



The red wall isn't to be confused with the glass ceiling.

With respect to my request that you support the International Campaigns for Human Rights that I direct, of course I appreciate that in some sense I am intruding on your privacy. But it is a realistic fact that famous persons enjoy popular respect and Nobel Laureates are surely among the most respected persons. By speaking out against torture and oppression you strengthen enormously the action of thousands, perhaps millions, of your fellow persons. The International Campaigns have this characteristic: they are separated away from partisan political action; they pursue doggedly one issue at a time, and, the Campaign sticks with the issue until the Campaign is successful. There are 94 Nobel Laureates who support the present Campaign for all victims in Chile ... If your name is not on the list, it would be welcomed.

Yours sincerely,

Israel Halperin

A segment of a 1987 letter Israel Halperin wrote to various Nobel Prize winners seeking their support for his campaign to promote international human rights.

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mathematicians from around the world. "It had nothing to do with weapons or spying or anything. It's an international scientific community, and we have always had contact," says Stephen Halperin. "He consorted with mathematicians of all political stripes and that really didn't matter to him. He was a mathematician dealing with his professional colleagues."

Also, by this time, he had tenure. And to an academic, tenure can make a world of difference.

"You feel very differently once you've got tenure," says Bill Halperin. "You're established in the community. Academics feel very differently about themselves and their confidence is very different. I think that [my father] may well have had the same concerns at that time as he did in the early years, but you feel desperate when you don't have recourse."

In other words, tenure may have helped give Halperin the freedom to move within a network of academic excellence, free from the constraints – the black mark – that suspicion had brought against him in 1946.

Of course, Halperin also had earned accolades by then. He had been elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1953 and won the Henry Marshall Tory Medal in 1967. By the time of his 1976 retirement, he'd authored more than 100 academic papers.

Halperin's contributions to mathematics and math education are difficult to overestimate. "He was a sort of an icon," says Peter Taylor, the last graduate student Halperin supervised at Queen's before taking up a position at the U of T. "He was like a platonic form in his approach (to teaching math), in the nature of his demands and the quality of his demands. A type of perfection that one should aspire to."

For Taylor, the appeal of mathematics lies in its independence. "The thing that drew me to mathematics was its purity, the self-

contained nature of the mathematical world. You don't need anything else. If you understand the mathematics, if you think clearly about things, then you are in total control." And Halperin's later work seems to model that independence.

In the 1980s, Halperin created the International Campaigns for Human Rights, which he operated single-handedly. Working on one case at a time, Halperin began a series of letter-writing campaigns. His initial efforts sought the release of scientists imprisoned by repressive governments, the first being mathematician Jose Luis Massera in Uruguay. The scope of Halperin's activities later expanded, and a 1987 campaign sought an end to all torture, abduction, and oppression under the Pinochet regime in Chile. To ensure the letters carried political clout, Halperin asked some of the world's greatest minds to co-sign them. Thus, he independently brought thousands from around the world behind the cause. They included academics, authors, religious leaders, university leaders, actors, politicians, and many Nobel Prize winners. Ninety-eight Nobel Laureates supported the campaign to release Drs. Anatoly Shcharansky and Yuri Orlov in the U.S.S.R.

Halperin's work helped win the release from prison of Massera, Orlov, and Shcharansky, and Burmese Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as assisting many political prisoners held in Chile. His work earned him the Order of Canada, and he was honoured by the same university that once questioned whether – and ultimately decided – that, yes, he was "the type of individual who should be teaching in a Canadian university." Halperin accepted an honorary LLD from Queen's in 1989 in recognition of his humanitarian efforts.

"He was a brilliant man. He was always thinking several steps ahead" said Halperin's grandson, David Eaves. "His mind operated as if in a perpetual game of chess."

But in the Gouzenko affair, it seems Halperin was unable to anticipate an awaiting check, and narrowly avoided a checkmate. It simply wasn't logical. Or humane.

While mathematics could not explain human nature, it combined with principles – both Halperin's and those of the people who supported him – created an extraordinary legacy. And an extraordinary piece of Queen's history. ■



Israel Halperin, circa 1965

PHOTO COURTESY OF BILL HALPERIN

DID ISRAEL HALPERIN SUPPORT COMMUNISM?

Was Israel Halperin a communist? Was he just an academic who was intellectually curious about leftist politics? Or was he perhaps an innocent who was duped by Soviet agents? Sara Beck delves into this question and profiles Israel Halperin, a man of contradictory and infinite complexities, in the new issue of *Review Plus*, the *Alumni Review's* digital supplement. Read her report at <http://alumnireview.queensu.ca/>.