

# Something to sing about

The Raging Grannies use silliness and songs as they try to set the world right.

BY SHANNON-LEE MANNION, ARTSCI'88

I've been found out. There are photos on the Internet of me festooned in necklaces, wearing a dowdy dress, and pantaloons, and sporting a hat with so many political buttons and flowers on it that the brim sags.

The getup was one of the ensembles I wear as a member of the Ottawa Raging Grannies, *a.k.a.* "the Parliament Hill Mob". I joined two years ago after I volunteered to hand out anti-Afghan war information. I like how this activist group gets involved in issues as they arise, and I believe singing is an effective way to get across our message of social justice.

There are some 60 Raging Grannies groups in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Europe. The first one started 20 years ago in Victoria, B.C., when some women activists took a stand against violence, pollution, and greed.

Raging Grannies are women who came of age prior to the end of the Vietnam War (1959-1975). I have vivid memories of being a frozen teenager huddled with others at the Eternal Flame in front of the Peace Tower singing *We Shall Overcome*.

My poncho and go-go boots have given way to flamboyant hats and shawls as I sing satirical songs put to popular tunes. The Raging Grannies disarm people with folksy charm while our message sneaks through.

*We are the Raging Grannies,  
We look in all the crannies,  
And we sing about the things we've found.  
We detest injustice, and those guys who say,  
'Just trust us'  
'Cause we make the truth resound.*  
Tune: *Put on Your Old Queen's Sweater*

We dress in flashy skirts, knotted shawls, and showy hats that each of us has fashioned into an individual statement. In my own case, glue holds feathers, beads, brooches, and political buttons on a straw hat I picked up at the Dollar Store.

Typically, we don't spend big on this stuff. We have to be prepared to lose it if we're at a demonstration and we have to cut and run, as happened in August '07 at the Anti-Security and Prosperity Partnership rally in Montebello, Quebec. When the riot police arrive and tear gas canisters get lobbed into the crowd, we tend to abandon anything that might slow us down. Although, given the work that goes into some of our hats, I dunno ...

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A demonstration in Ottawa last summer saw us in a supporting role with a local anarchist group as it disputed the influence of Thomas d'Aquino, chief executive of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives.

*We are the corporations and we want to rule the earth  
We know the dollars and the cents that everything is worth  
And life means only money from the moment of its birth ...*  
Tune: *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*

When some shoving erupted, we absented ourselves by simply slipping out of our skirts and stuffing them and our hats into our knapsacks and blending into the throng of Saturday shoppers. In another instance, we were doing our annual shopping mall Christmas leaflet blitz to encourage parents to buy peace-friendly toys

and DVDs. To grab people's attention, we sang a few unconventional and Christmas songs in the food court area.

*We're the Raging Grannies  
And we're asking you today,  
PLEASE don't buy destructive toys  
For the kids on Christmas day.*  
Tune: *Frosty the Snowman*

Mall security were on us like fleas on a beagle. They insisted we leave; we dawdled. They threatened to call the police. We dawdled some more, sauntering along, passing out fliers. Security grew antsy, plucked flyers from the hands of shoppers and panted in their Kevlar vests. Time to call it quits and shed our glad-rags. Security left, and dressed in street clothes, we continued handing out leaflets as we strolled through the mall.

My favourite action was March 13, 2008, when we joined 50 peaceniks and infiltrated the public gallery in the House of Commons intending to disrupt the vote on extending Canada's involvement in the Afghan war. As the vote was taken, we leapt to our feet, fists pummeling the air and shouting, END IT, DON'T EXTEND IT! Absolutely exhilarating!

As an Ottawa Raging Granny, I'm gratified by our community's support. This October in recognition for our work done to promote peace, justice and planetary care, we'll receive a Peace Award at the sixth annual Peace Prayer Day to be held at Ottawa City Hall. ■



That's Shannon-Lee (front row, left, in pink shawl) and a gaggle of grannies, between rages.

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