

EMMA's Jambrosia
Reflections of a Collective Member & Worker
By Joe Hetherington

My journey with EMMA started in Jan. 1982, needing to find work and out of boredom from cabin fever. I was motivated to attend a meeting at the women's centre in Nelson. At the time I was living in Winlaw with my partner, Garth. We heard that there was a possibility of grant money to start a women's business.

By April 1983, I found myself with a job -as the coordinator of EMMA'S JAMBROSIA. We had picked the Jam Factory idea over the other two ideas: developing ethol alcohol out of Jerusalem artichokes [a noteworthy and sustainable tuber] and developing children's wooden toys. My job was twofold - to build the interior physical structure of the jam factory and to buy and set up equipment needed to make jam. We did start out in Nelson in a building on Front Street (the old Reo's location) but found it inadequate We moved on to Ray Kosiancic's land in Crescent Valley, where EMMA's Collective member and construction carpenter Marcia Braundy, Ray, and Ken Lins and his son from Castlegar had

built our own building which is now the home of Mountain Sky Soap. I must say it's wonderful to have the structure still standing and operating as a factory....every time I pass by on the highway the memories live on for me.

Two other women were hired to work with me. Karen White was hired to administrate and Eleanor was hired to find and buy the ingredients for the jam. We were accountable to the collective and had many meetings during the setup phase (April 83 - Oct 83) So on the whole I felt fully supported by the group. Our direction on how to set up a jam factory was a feasibility report written by Heather Gibson and Garth Greatheart during the first phase (feasibility study) of the project. As I said my job was to co-ordinate the building of the interior physical structure and the buying and setting up of the jam making equipment. So that meant I was the person who got on the phone and engaged with the business world and brought the words of the feasibility study into physical manifestation. Scary stuff!

I suffer from phone anxiety ...so this was a huge challenge. I would have a list of people to phone each day and found myself pacing around each phone call...conjuring up courage...making the

phone call and then marvelling at...did I really do that. Over the waves I came through that I knew what I was doing. I got my strength from knowing the collective was behind me and on those days when I felt completely alone and overwhelmed, Ray would come in and ask...Hey Jo...want to go for a ride?

Ray Kosiancic (our landlord) and I became fast friends. As I remember, he visited me every other day and at times when I must have looked bug eyed ...he would take me for a walk around the farm or for a ride on his quad into the mountains. Thank you Ray!

Co-ordinating the construction of the interior was the easier task because it felt familiar and seemed to have a life of its own. Carpenters, plumbers, electricians were easy to find, and Marcia had a big hand in it too.

Co-ordinating the setup of the factory was a lot harder. I had to buy a piston filler, boiler, stand up freezer and a steam-jacketed kettle. The piston filler, machine that splurts jam into jars, was my biggest challenge because it cost \$10,000 and it was sold by a company somewhere in Minnesota. It was quite the phone call. Then there was the boiler saga. Because we needed a lot of pressure for the steam-jacketed kettle to boil jam in 8 minute batches, the boiler

needed to produce a lot of pressure. So much pressure...that one day a very worried building inspector from Nelson visited me to check if we women really knew what we were doing having a boiler that could blow up Crescent Valley. Obviously, we passed inspection.

I felt I came into the job with a lot of confidence having been a physical education teacher in Vancouver for six years. Because I was a team player in my sporting life, I knew how to connect with EMMA and gain strength from her. Also, having been a successful long distance runner, I knew how to be with myself and so on those days when Ray, Karen or Eleanor were not around and I was drowning in overwhelmness....I just ran it out. It's interesting that I connect my success in a feminist collective to any athletic experiences. I come by my feminism organically...it is not a mental construct for me.

At the end of Oct 83...EMMA'S JAMBROSIA was ready to produce jam and my co-ordinating job was over. We formed two working collectives, one production and the other administration. I worked on and off in the working collective until we called it quits in the summer of 85. The production collective made the jam, the

administrative collective ran the business. It felt satisfying for me to work in a system that I helped to create. Also I didn't have to make any phone calls, I was busy with preparing fruit and holding jars under a splurting piston filler. Our production co-ordinator was Maggie Gold and her crew consisted of me, Sophia Dricos, Mickey Mitchell, Lyndon Mitchell, Deane (can someone remember her last name?) and Lyn Taylor. The administrative coordinator was Heather Gibson and her crew consisted of Georgette Gagne, Karen White and Susan White.

We produced a very popular and delicious raspberry, strawberry, peach, plum and blueberry jam. EMMA'S JAMBROSIA was sold through the organic co-operative food stores in Canada and even made it into the mainstream stores such as Super Value. In the summer of '84, we found ourselves working day and night keeping up with orders. In the spring of '85 we received a huge order from an American organic distributor for 10,000 jars of jam. Obviously we were becoming very successful...but it was all too fast. The stress of running a business by navigating through the collective process with 12 women had its toll. We were infighting and I believe we suffered from an earlier decision to close the group to new members. During

this time a fresh perspective would have been nice. We were imploding and pushing ourselves to keep up with orders. By taking on the American order and then having it cancelled on their end was the last straw. In order to keep our straining friendships intact, we ended the business.

What I remember of my production room experience are ones of great comradery. We played and worked hard together. We believed in our product...it was the best jam we had ever tasted. In fact, to this day I haven't tasted store bought jam like it. It must have been those 8 minute high pressure cooks that kept the natural sweetness of the fruits in the jam. I can still see Sophia up on her jam making platform pouring a freshly made batch of jam from the kettle into the piston filler; and Heather (the administrative staff did take turns in the production room) making sure she had each individual jar under the splurt of the piston filler. Then passing it along to Maggie who capped the jars and then passing it to me who labelled the jars and set them to cool. It was so much fun.

EMMA was one of the best teams I played on. I feel very fortunate to happen into a feminist movement that believed in women's ability to locally create their own jobs. We were

successful for over 3 years. If we kept small, we might have lasted longer, however, we got caught up on the perceived treadmill of success and grew too fast. Realizing our group was imploding, we made the humane decision to stop.