

From WT:

*Women Together*, or WT as the group was known, was Karinn's brainchild. It began as a feminist extension of the BlackLivesMatter movement, as a voice for Black women. Initially, it was conceived as a single day event for the summer of 2022, including a citizens' rally with invited guest speakers and a brass-band-accompanied march, which would begin at the Forks, lead down Main Street to Portage Avenue and then circle back to the provincial legislature along Broadway. Karinn thought she would need two or three other women to form an organizing and planning committee. Her first choice was Sharleen Royce, who was known to her from the 2020 BlackLivesMatter march in Winnipeg. Sharleen and her husband Marcus had been major contributors to that march, figuring prominently in local media coverage of the event.

After Sharleen signed on, assuming the lead role in fund-raising and promotion, two more women were added to the organizing committee. Karinn enlisted Shirley Fraser, a 31 year-old former graduate student of hers, who was working in labour relations for the provincial government. Sharleen brought in her friend Desiree Smith, who was currently out of work because of the pandemic. As more and more ideas were introduced, the scope of the project quickly expanded, to include all women of colour, and not just Black women. But in a march for women's rights, a march against racism, excluding only white women was untenable. And so the project became a universal march for women's rights. Seven more women would be added to the organizing committee.

'Jewish women. Maybe that's not a good fit for this group.'

'Why would you say that? Because of Sadira? Because she's pro-Palestinian? I mean, come on Sharleen. Of course she's pro-Palestinian. That has no connection with what we're doing here!'

'You don't see a deeper problem? We're marching for oppressed women. For oppressed groups. Look at the Jewish community. To begin with, it's an all-white community. Nobody's disadvantaged or oppressed. I mean, give me a break, Karinn. They're all doctors and dentists and lawyers. The women are treated pretty damn well as far as I can see. It's hardly an oppressed group. And they *are* associated with *dealing out* oppression, against the Palestinians. So all I'm saying is, maybe it's not the best fit for us. Maybe Sadira's right.'

'Sharleen, listen to yourself. You left out the fact that they control the banking system. What's in your head, girl? All Jewish people are wealthy? They're all doctors and lawyers? Look at *me*. I'm well off. I'm a university professor. I'm not apologizing for that. Does that mean I can't speak out for women's rights or about racism against Black people? Jewish women get the heavy hand of men too. Especially in the religious communities. They have to tow the line, follow the rules. Live their lives like women are supposed to live. The way men tell them to. The way men allow them to live. It's the same issues, Sharleen. Not to mention gay men and lesbian women, who have a very hard time in religious Jewish communities. And what about anti-Semitism? It's like any other religious discrimination. It's about people's human rights. You know and I know that the Israeli-Palestinian issue has nothing to do with what we represent in this group. Sadira's a dedicated Muslim, from that part of the world. Of course she supports the Palestinians. I respect her for that. I don't necessarily agree with her, but I respect her. I think we can leave it right there.'

Sharleen was incensed by Karinn's superior air, her preachy tone, her dismissiveness. She responded in an angry, sarcastic tone. 'Well thanks for the lecture, Professor. How stupid of me not to know that I needed a real good lecture.'

Karinn expected some attitude from Sharleen. She'd learned that the best way to manage Sharleen's outbursts was to dilute them, by broadening the context, by expanding the target. 'Put it this way' she said. 'If we were to exclude a woman just because somebody else has a fundamental difference with her, in what she thinks or what she believes? There would be nobody left.'

Karinn's ploy seemed to work, at least for the moment, taking Sharleen's temperature down a notch as she digested the new, more generalized assertion. But it was only temporary. Sharleen quickly returned to the same tack, just as determined as before.

'Ramina feels much the same way' said Sharleen. 'We can't just ignore them. We have to get along here. We're going to have women at each other's throats.'

As if they weren't already at each other's throats, Karinn thought. 'Sarah is a very impressive woman' she said. 'I think you're going to like her. Let's just keep our heads on what we're trying to do. She's a teacher. And we need a good contact in the school system.'

Sharleen was thoroughly piqued by Karinn's sermonizing, and she was definitely not ready to let it go. Her intense, dark eyes were still laser-focused on Karinn, who judiciously opted to break eye contact altogether, pouring each of them a cup of coffee. As they took their first sips of coffee, the two women fell into an uneasy silence. A blast of icy February air saved the day, as Melody Lockhart walked in through the frosted-up glass door.

'How did you find the roads?' said Karinn, greeting Melody, relieved to have escaped her exchange with Sharleen. 'I just about skidded through a red light on Academy tonight.'

'It's brutal out there' answered Melody, stamping her snow-clad boots on the mat at the front-door entrance.