

## Author details shadow side of RCMP culture

The country reacted with shock and dismay when the CBC aired an interview in late 2011 with career RCMP officer Cpl. Catherine Galliford, who alleged she had suffered years of gross and manipulative sexual harassment by her male colleagues.

Galliford's public allegations were followed by a few, then dozens and ultimately hundreds of former and current female RCMP officers, who joined a class action lawsuit while recounting years of abuse—everything from a pervasive locker-room mentality to ongoing sexual coercion by male supervisors.

A hidden shadow side of our storied national police force had come to light, prompting promises from the RCMP hierarchy and the federal cabinet that there would be zero tolerance for such behaviour.

But it was not the first time female officers had levelled allegations of rampant sexism, and not the first time the top brass had vowed to put a stop to the abuse.

As author Bonnie Reilly Schmidt reminds us in her book, "Silenced: The untold story of the fight for equality in the RCMP," overt male chauvinism has been a characteristic of the force from its inception. Women weren't even allowed to become RCMP officers until 40 years ago, and official reports about harassment and mistreatment within the force would start making headlines just a few years later.

Schmidt, a 10-year veteran of the RCMP who earned a PhD after her retirement from the force, will be on hand to talk about her book at the Gibsons and District Public Library next week.

Published by Caitlin Press of Halfmoon Bay, Schmidt's book digs back to the beginning of the force in 1873 to attempt to explain the entrenched attitudes of male superiority. Mounties were, "an ideal representation of Canadian manhood," she writes. "As a representative of the state, the Mountie symbolized the dominance of white men over civilized society."

"Silenced" is the thorough and fully footnoted work of a professional historian. The facts might be assembled to back Schmidt's thesis, but they clearly are facts. It is also not an anti-RCMP screed, nor a tell-all memoir.

"I felt very strongly that there was a need to tell a complete story of women in the RCMP rather than just my own story," Schmidt, who now lives in Langley, told the Local in an interview.

Why, after all these years and all the reports and promises, does the male-dominant culture persist?

"It's extremely complex," Schmidt said. "You're talking about a huge police force of 19,000 members across a huge country with a huge mandate to police in different ways."

Also, hierarchical structures like the RCMP—and many other organizations—can be inherently intimidating.

"Some men might witness harassment by a superior officer and if they complain or point it out they also are going to be subject to abuse or their performance evaluation will be judged accordingly," said Schmidt. "So there's not a lot of



Bonnie Reilly Schmidt, author and former RCMP officer, will discuss her book about women in the RCMP Sept. 23 at the Gibsons Public Library. Mark Kinskofer photo

incentive for anybody to stand up and say, 'This isn't right.'"

Bonnie Reilly Schmidt will appear at the Gibsons Library Wednesday Sept. 23, from 6 to 7:30 pm.

*Rik Jespersen*