

The Squatters

A friend called and told me about some young people who were squatting in some vacant houses on Frances Street in the east end. The houses had been sold for development but demolition hadn't started. I decided to go and look for the squatters. I don't know too much about squatting, but it sure sounds better than sleeping on the street.

I knocked on the door where the windows had no drapes. The door was nailed up. Obviously I wasn't going to get an answer, so I went around to the back. Still nothing.

A young man came out of the garage; it looked like he had been sleeping there. I said "Hi, I'm looking for the squatters."

"There's nobody here," he said, not trusting me. Why should he? I was someone he didn't know. I told him about my book and who I was, and that I wanted to interview the people who were squatting. He went over to the back of the next house. I sat on the stone steps leading to the basement of the first house. A couple of young men and a woman came out. I explained again who I was and what I wanted to do, desperately wanting them to know I wasn't an enemy.

I was lucky. Another young man came over from the third house. He said he had heard me read poetry on Co-op Radio. The others were reluctant, but agreed to talk on my little tape deck. Other people came and went. I introduced myself to them as they arrived. Some had been homeless, living on the street. Others had been evicted. Some had been staying with friends. There were people of colour, white people, all different ages, different backgrounds. They were organized, articulate, polite, and had a great sense of community. They had pulled down the fences that separated the homes so they could share. The yards had

discarded toys, left by the children of former tenants who had had to leave. Last year's flowers and this year's weeds grew together. The people's identities and their shadows were still there; I wonder where they went, these tenants that had had to move because the marketplace was so greedy.

I was pleased that these young people were organizing and fighting back against developers, and a government that is not protecting its people.

"There are four houses that are definitely squatted, and we've had help from two of the tenanted houses which are also slated for demolition. It's a row of six houses which are going to become condominiums.

"I found out about some of the former tenants. My house was empty for five months before I got here. It's in excellent condition. Two houses down, the tenants were a family living there for eight years. Their landlord was very unscrupulous, didn't tell them at all until he had completed the deal with Ning Yee the developer. All of a sudden they had two months notice to get out. The next door neighbour had been living there for twelve years and all along the landowner had been saying, 'I'm never planning to sell. I'm never planning to sell,' and the tenants put a lot of money into renovation. All of a sudden they got two months notice to vacate.

"I got here two months ago. The houses filled up very quickly after that. There's about fifteen people over four houses."

"One of the houses on the block, there was a gentleman living in the house for twenty years by himself, then they gave him notice and he's got two months only to move and find a place. It disrupted his life, I bet, without compensation of any type.

"We got a week's notice from the landlord to get out; a threat that if we were not out in one week he would call the police. We responded by first designing and posting posters—about homelessness and gentrification, and about emergency procedures, what to do—inviting people who lack housing to move into surplus housing that's not being used, and issuing press statements."

"There's been a lot of media coverage splashed all over the place; the way it has been presented is this very desperate response,

because of displacement and gentrification. That's the angle it's gone, but... but they missed the positive side of squatting. In many ways, it's preferable to renting. For me, this is the first time I've ever felt part of a community, not just a scene. There's a lot of solidarity because you're all in it together, and a lot more need for co-operation, and because you're so close you obviously get to know each other a lot better. People tore down all the fences—that was one of the first things that happened. It was very small but very symbolic.

"I don't think there's the same sort of hopelessness with us as in the downtown eastside. A lot of people that are squatting here have come from fairly desperate conditions. Some people had been selling their food because they couldn't afford rents and stuff like that. I don't get the same feeling; I think there's a difference between the downtown eastside and the squatting in the east side, if you know what I mean. We all came in here and all of us wanted to live here and to make a political statement. We were all, right from the start, organizing around that.

"People are getting the impression that we are only students here, young, youth, single, what have you. It's not the case. There's a woman that has two children and she's pregnant. She needs a place to live and it's very difficult for her to find a place. She's on fixed income. We've got houses with electricity and other utilities. There's no reason why we should give this up to sleep in an alley.

"I see squatting as a much more viable response than lobbying the government. People are doing it themselves and they're not depending on the benevolence of someone who has power to help them. They're empowering themselves."

"It should really be noted the amount of positive community support we've been getting. Everyone has their own eviction story or their rent being raised, so there's been a lot of support for these squats. Gentrification is at the level where people can't just keep moving further east."

"Gentrification is like what's happening in New York, U.S., Europe, inner cities, where you have a concentration of poor people and quite often they're visible minorities. The governments leave these places to be derelict. As far as crime is concerned, they turn a blind eye. Then landlords don't repair, like slumlords.

Then you get evictions, and they put in hotels, high-priced playgrounds for the rich, adult-oriented housing.

"The people from wealthier neighbourhoods are being affected too, and they are moving east. They're being evicted and they're moving east, and that in turn is moving the people from the east into the downtown eastside which is in turn pushing up the rents in the hotels. Gentrification is low-cost housing being torn down and being replaced with condominiums which poor people can't afford. It's upgrading. Displacing the people who lived there before, pushing them out and squeezing them right out, changing the neighbourhood and making it too expensive."

"For people on fixed income, like myself, not having to pay rent frees up my life incredibly. Working and having to pay rent, getting welfare money or UI, means spending 50 percent, sometimes two-thirds, on rent. It isn't right. You have to put all that energy into working, just to pay rent. By squatting, you free yourself of so much misery. There's a lot more you can do to the place that you move into to make it comfortable for yourself. Before history everyone squatted."

"I think squatting fits into anti-consumerist philosophy and into environmental issues. All these wasted buildings. One of the reasons squatting isn't seen as a positive thing by some rich people is because it doesn't fit into the consumer thing, which is part of what is keeping them rich."

"It's the developers that are really calling the shots on this one it seems. The reasons the condominiums are getting built is because of the logic of the marketplace—the only way right now developers can make money is by building high-priced condos. There's no money to be gained from low-rental housing. You're going to make the most money out of condos.

"Actually it goes further than the logic of the marketplace. It goes into the logic of capitalism, which sees housing—which is such a basic right or necessity—as a commodity that can be used purely for profit. These developers are playing games; it has nothing to do with people.

"But we don't feel helpless even though we're homeless. There are groups to help the poor like charities. The charities need to help somebody to make the charities feel good. But the effect they

have on the people is often patronizing. The Salvation Army, they want you to sit through this religious service to save you, but actually to imprison you in this misery of poverty. I have been homeless many times, sleeping outside. Then I discovered lawn furniture."

"Some of the people here are staying until it's demolished. There's no reason it should be left empty or made uninhabitable before an actual demolition permit is issued."

As I was saying goodbye when we had finished taping, two women came by. I told them I would like to hear what the women have to say. I had only found men at that point who were ready to talk. The women didn't trust me either. We sat down on an old discarded picnic bench and had a conversation where we discussed who we knew mutually. I was accepted and these women told me about their women's only squat house.

"I'm squatting because I need a home. It's scary. There's a certain amount of vulnerability going to bed at night, wondering if the cops are going to be knocking on your door and kicking you out of your home. There's a lot of struggle and fear in deciding what you are going to say to the developer if he shows up. How you're going to work out staying for a month and a half, which isn't a long period of time, because otherwise the building might just be vacant. Trying to present it like he *should* let us stay here. It's hard to get that kind of courage. That's part of the reason why I'm staying in an all women's squat."

"It's really empowering living with these particular women. We have a policy where men are allowed in our house on Wednesdays only."

"The women in our squat are probably some of the more politically activist in this group. And our house is the messiest!"

"The squatters have got together a group called SAVE—the Squatters Alliance of Vancouver East—and we are organizing around that in the squats because there are four of these on this block. We've been working as a group and we are the only women's squat. A lot of them have mostly men. There's a lot of men and we've been dealing with the sexism, the male domi-

nance, and we've been putting our foot down, saying shape up or you'll lose our support, and if you lose our support, you're sunk."

"Like my friend said, it's really empowering to be with women. We've had this bond of communication: if one of us is feeling emotional pull from our personal lives, regardless of the vulnerability and stress we are under about the squat, we're there for each other and we are open to communication and trying to help one another regain our empowerment. I think it's been really good for all three of us. Women are conditioned to believe that we can only get our support, our provision, our information, from men. Women are very conditioned to believe that, so a lot of women, especially on the street, who see that and hear that all the time, they feel that, they live that. For us, I think we've taken an active step and we've said no, that's not true—we are strong women, and we will take control of our own lives, and we are not going to depend on men, and we *can* do it ourselves.

"Also, the three of us have talked about it a bit, because we are scared of losing one another. In between stages, when we're not sure where we are going to live, where we're having to depend on friends to put us up, we are going to keep in contact and still try to find another place, be it a squat or what."

"I don't like being homeless, but there isn't a lot of options right now. When I first came to Vancouver I was 16 and I was homeless and lived on Crab Beach. There was a lot of harassment down there and brutality. I moved into a drug house, lived there for a few months, and then moved into the basement of a downtown bar for a few months. Not having proper affordable housing really sucks. The streets are ugly. Squatting is the most viable alternative that I see for people in my income bracket, which is zero to four hundred a month."

"With cities in general, I've had experience in different parts of Canada. You have politicians, developers, business people, and they have a tendency to not care about the poor, lower income families. A lot of times it revolves around racism as well, where the government wants to control large sections of people who are different, whether they be poor people, women, people of colour. They target a certain area that they think may be able to

bring a higher price, and they ghettoize the people that live in those neighbourhoods so they're easier to control. It's a form of control, and a horrendous case of oppression. They just don't care about poor people or lower-income or people of colour or women at all."

"The city has the power to say what buildings will or won't be demolished—they're not using any of that power to protect the housing. They want this place to look like Chicago or Toronto or Los Angeles or New York City—just a conglomerate of high-rise brick buildings—and it's not going to have any grass, any trees, and it's really disgusting. Ask the city what they have the power to do and why they are not doing it. Ask the province, since they have the power to do it, why they won't. The province won't put any regulations on rent increases. They say that it's marketing. That just won't do for the working poor or unemployed."

Do you have a message you would like to give women who are homeless in transition houses or shelters, or who are facing problems of being evicted?

"Listen to what we are saying, hear the empowerment we have. They should check out the women in their lives and get together to regain that power, because they have that power. We have that power. We all have it. We don't need to sell ourselves. Everyone has a right to housing and we shouldn't have to raise our skirts and say, 'I'll have sex with you if you'll put a roof over my head for a night.' I think it's a sad alternative. If street women got together as a group, they could recognize their own power and they could take control."

This interview took place in the yard behind the houses. We sat on an old abandoned picnic table. The sun was shining, it was so comfortable sitting, talking with these women. It was good to hear them say *This is wrong*; women shouldn't have to give their body for a place to sleep. Affordable housing is a right. The developers have no moral right to run us, the poor, out of our communities.

I walked back up Commercial Drive. I had lived there for quite a few years. How I missed the community, the coffee shops, La Quena, the graffiti on the walls, the posters, the mixture of people. I had been living in an attic suite that I heated with a gas

stove. I was constantly sick with asthma and bronchitis. The rent was much more than my shelter allowance from welfare. I had to use my food money towards the rent. When I eventually, after a long wait, got into social housing, it was clean, warm, cheap. My bronchitis cleared up and so did the asthma. It was out of my community, though, and it was very difficult to adjust. I really feel the Commercial Drive area is my home. I know it's going to change, that developers are taking over.

What does the word developer mean? To develop should mean to improve. Instead they often create treeless, cement, pastel-shaded jungles.

Press Statement from Squatters Alliance of Vancouver East

We are some of many squatters in Vancouver who are occupying several of the hundreds of habitable houses left vacant by developers. These houses have been slated for demolition and gentrification.

Gentrification means the construction of high-price condominiums or other dwellings and the destruction of affordable housing accompanied by the displacement of previous residents.

We feel that the displacement of longtime residents is totally unacceptable and that the new developments are intentionally beyond the price range of working poor and unemployed people in Vancouver and, in a lot of cases, beyond the means or extremely financially straining on the middle class.

In the face of unregulated rent increases, and out of necessity, we have chosen to squat as one of many viable means of protesting this atrocity.

These houses being habitable and unoccupied, in a time of an extreme housing crisis in Vancouver, is criminal. Housing is not a luxury, it is a right, and these houses are available NOW.

Habitable houses should not be left unoccupied while developers await approval of demolition permits, which sometimes takes many months. Since developers are making nothing from these unoccupied houses, it is obvious that it is not the money they are concerned about. Therefore, these houses should be available

free of charge to those willing to maintain the premises and thereby preventing these houses from becoming criminal havens, shooting galleries, or drug houses.

Demolition of houses should only proceed with the guarantee that construction will begin within 30 days. This prevents the current situation of vacant lots being left undeveloped for several months where habitable housing used to stand.

New developments must be kept within an affordable price range for all peoples presently affected by the housing crisis.

People in a neighbourhood slated for re-zoning, gentrification or development should be part of the decision-making group that approves or disapproves such construction. People did not move into these areas to be neighbours with a high rise condominium but to be a part of a community.

We are currently organizing various neighbourhood-inclusive community events and activities (i.e. potluck barbecues, daycare facilities, community gardening and recycling projects) in an effort to open up communication between squatters and paying tenants and homeowners.

We intend to defend these houses and hope to keep them standing indefinitely as a way of preserving our neighbourhoods.

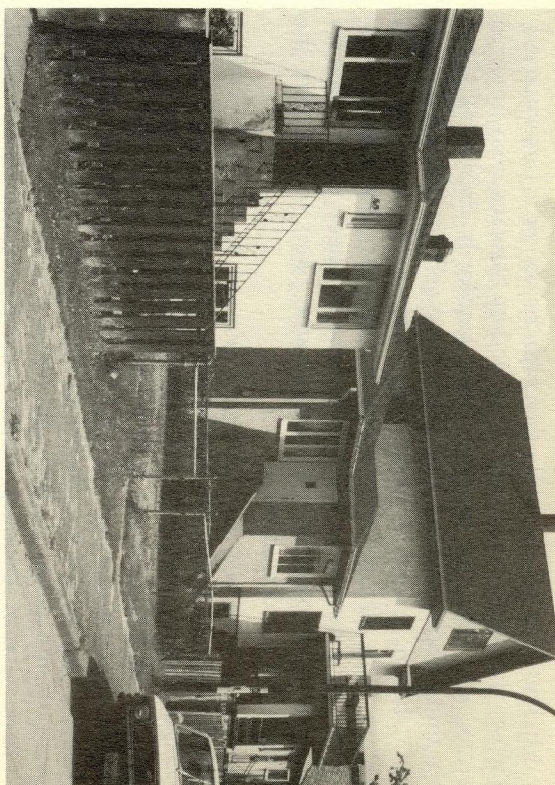
We have been forced to go public at this time because we are in danger of losing our homes. The owner/developer of our houses is demanding that we pay rent but will not allow us tenant status. We feel this is an outrage. We are not opposed to paying rent, but only accompanied by tenant's rights.

The Frances Street Squats

by *Keith Chu*

Word spread quickly about the four empty houses on Frances Street and, building by building, all of them were squatted within three weeks.

It was the end of February when I moved in and the insecurity of it all was what hit me the most at first. We were living in a limbo of not knowing what rights we had or what legal procedures were necessary to evict us. Our response bordered on paranoia. (This paranoia was fueled by stories of other squats in Vancouver



Three of the houses squatted on Frances Street in 1990

where, for instance, things had been quiet for two months and then the squatters had come home to find workers chucking all their possessions into dump trucks.) For all we knew, the landlord could show up with sheriffs or police to evict us at any time of the day or night. And so we only entered in the backway through the alley, we changed locks on doors, some of us had secret knocks for a week or two, we were ready to pack up on five minutes notice, and we all prepped ourselves for a lightning eviction. We put blankets over top the curtains to keep light from getting out at night. (It was argued back and forth about whether it would be openness or secrecy that would get us into trouble.) A cop car parked outside the houses for a few minutes (as happened two or three times) was enough to call an emergency meeting.

Still, my room—spacious with hardwood floors and broad windows which the sun rose through—and of course the rentlessness of it all made it worthwhile. All the houses were in solid condition (one of them could be called beautiful), and had a healthy number of years left in them. We got our Hydro hooked up, some of us had telephones, and of course water, stove, fridge, etc.

My house stood empty for five months before it was squatted. Two of the houses had been tenanted by families, one for eight years, the other for twelve. Their landlords didn't tell them anything about the fact that they were selling the houses and then, boom, out of nowhere, they were given two months to vacate. Now all four houses plus two others in the same row are owned by a developer, Ning Yee (who has been responsible for several developments in the area), who plans to demolish the houses for condominiums.

The fences separating the houses were the first to go. A donated washer and dryer were installed in one of the squats to serve as a communal laundromat. A free store ("Take what you need. Leave what you can") was started in one of the garages and began thriving by word of mouth. Squatting posters became commonplace up and down Commercial Drive.

To survive as squatters, working closely together is necessary. Meetings were frequent and long. When we should declare ourselves publicly was a matter of intense discussion. Plans of action were formulated. Information on the legalities of squatting helped (some of) the paranoia to subside, and gave us a sketchy idea of what to expect.

I realized early on that this was the first time I had really lived in what could be called a "community." The original communities were forced out of the necessity of mutual aid for survival. Now there's no reason to talk to each other anymore—we can go to work at our alienated job working for a boss we don't like, buy all the things we need from a supermarket or shopping mall, enjoy our freedom allotments (i.e. vacation) two weeks a year, and then retreat to our homes and maybe families and barricade ourselves in and let it all fall apart around us. When you're squatting there's so much more need to co-operate, to depend on each other for basic needs (i.e. repairs, food, etc.), to support each other morally and organize ourselves politically. And there's a solidarity that comes along with having to do that. Backyard barbecues were common, we were always visiting just to hang out, and many of us talked excitedly about creating community. (That we had to consciously talk about creating something as innately natural as human community says something about how isolating this society is.) When was the last time you knew your neighbours? And liked them? Working and living so closely together with support-

tive people who are affirming what you're doing, everyday life is so different from the (relative) isolation that is business-as-usual. Being in a community doesn't of course mean that you suddenly exist in a hazy utopian state of squishy, hippy harmony. The dynamic of so many people is more complicated than we've been taught to handle. We definitely had our share of internal tensions and problems with group process, but trying to overcome them is all part of learning the skills of communal living.

Around the end of March, a month into our stay, Ning Yee discovered us, much to his discomobulation. (Finding a dozen and a half organized, ornery squatters living an illegal existence in his buildings was not one of the best things that could happen to him as a landlord.) His first response was a Get-out-tomorrow-or-I'm-having-the-Hydro-cut-off. Instead, we arranged to meet him, to negotiate, to at least buy ourselves some time. He ranted on about free rides and respect for private property and then, finally, listed his demands. He wanted rent paid daily, a security deposit for the Hydro, and an agreement to leave on 24 hours notice (signed by us, but not by him). We held yet another meeting among ourselves. (At this point, we were averaging one a day.) We agreed to his terms and offered him the token sum of one dollar per squatter per day (hoping that if he accepted this sum, it would constitute tenancy under the Residential Tenancy Act, and he would be legally bound to give us at least two months notice to vacate, negating the 24-hour agreement). Ning Yee literally laughed at the offer and then set Easter Monday as the deadline to get out before he brought in the cops.

And so we went public. On Easter Monday, April 16, we held a community event, a Squatters' Jamboree, in the backyards of the houses. It was all at once an open house to spread information, a show of support, and a festive celebration. About 200 people from around the neighbourhood showed up throughout the day to hang out, eat the free food, talk and listen, and dance to the live music of Ngoma.

The media onslaught started the next day. The Vancouver Sun, the front page of the *Globe and Mail*, CBC-TV, CBC-Radio, BCTV, CKVU—most of the coverage was relatively sensitive to the issues at hand. Part of the reason the coverage was so positive was, I think, because we were presented as the "helpless homeless," driven to desperate acts by the housing crisis. We were

very much "victims," and therefore acceptable. That we squat also out of choice, that squatting is a powerful action, that we are trying to create something better and to empower, all that was ignored, and if stressed would have turned us into "radicals" (i.e. bad) rather than "helpless homeless" (i.e. acceptable). Despite all this, the media definitely changed everything. Since then we haven't heard from Ning Yee and we are moving happily into our fifth month. The next day, everybody on Commercial Drive seemed to be talking about the squats. Our position was clear and the neither-here-nor-there-ness of the past was dissolved.

The moral support we received from the community was resounding. The Grandview-Woodland Area Council unannouncedly passed a motion supporting the Frances Street squats and the concept of utilizing empty housing in general. SAVE (Squatters Alliance of Vancouver East) began receiving mail and telephone messages from people leaving addresses of empty houses they were aware of (as well as one person who gave us a key to go along with the addresses).

The most recent developments on Frances Street: Ning Yee has said to the Vancouver *Sun* that he won't be demolishing due to high interest rates. A fifth house, a big four-storey dream house, was squatted. The sixth house has tenants who were supposed to move out at the end of May; they haven't, and so they now fall into the squat category. A very successful Squat Hop was held at the Pitt Gallery, and squat gatherings will continue in the future. Summer has seen an influx of people looking for shelter, and with the growing number the chances of them spilling over into establishing new squats for themselves increases.

One thing I've found is that while there is a lot of support for squatters, there are considerably less people willing to do it. The insecurity is too much of a risk. Because there is a housing crisis, people are afraid to let go of their places, lest they get kicked out of a squat and be left with nowhere or having to pay an even higher rent somewhere else. For this reason most of the squatters are in their early or mid-twenties, are single, and don't have dependents—they are people who can afford the semi-transience of squatting. (There are several notable exceptions to this rule.) However, once that element of transience is accepted, things get a lot easier. I feel comfortable, knowing that, because I have a

supportive community around me, if we do eventually get evicted, we can move to other squats just as easily.

While the bottom line for squatting is that we just plain needed housing and couldn't bear the percentage of our income that rent sucked up, all of us, I think, could have arranged some sort of alternative shelter in an emergency, probably something as simple as crashing with friends. It should be noted that there are silent multitudes of street people who squat in minimal conditions, a sleeping bag on the floor and not much else, who have been squatting since before we knew what the word meant.

The first response of most visitors is a sympathetic, "What a shame about these houses" (partly, I think, because they came expecting burned-out husks falling apart and were surprised by the solidness of the houses), and a wistful what-is-this-world-coming-to shake of the head. Then they share their own stories of evictions or rent hikes or demolished houses replaced by condominiums. They realize that the fate of these squats is part of the greater process of gentrification and yuppiefication, that it's not just six houses being demolished, but a whole community being destroyed. Their sad response is an acceptance of the "inevitable." If we could teach anything by squatting, it would be to show the possibility of fighting back, of taking action for ourselves, of refusing the role of victims.

Vancouver's future is New York. Some New York squatters came to visit us a few weeks ago. In the Lower East Side of N.Y., there are over 500 squatters and the area is undergoing intense gentrification. Next to the squatted apartment building they lived in was an empty lot where street people had built a shantytown consisting of a few shacks. The anaesthesia of heroin and crack was prevalent in that neighbourhood and at night you can hear screams. Gunshots are not uncommon. Still, many families squat because of unaffordable rents. In the midst of this the squatters are building hope.

We see ourselves as utilizing resources that capitalism is leaving wasted. It is one of the irrationalities of the marketplace that houses stand empty, kept vacant by laws that protect private property, while there are people that need housing. By squatting, the whole notion of accumulated property and of paying rent to landlords is challenged. Everybody in this society is becoming

faced with an either/or choice—support the rights of property or support the rights of people who need housing.

I remember reading in the newspapers about Jack Poole and the Vancouver Land Corporation, about how they were going to build several hundred units of housing for moderate income earners, about their operating capital of \$25 million, funded by union pensions and the city of Vancouver. Poole was quoted as saying they were going to try extra hard so that some of the one bedroom apartments might be as low as \$600. It turns out that this year they'll be building less than 50 units of housing. Meanwhile, on Frances Street, twenty-five people have provided housing for themselves, with no operating capital, no bureaucracy and no rent. Imagine if \$25 million was given to people to squat the several hundred buildings and apartment units left empty for months by real estate speculators, and to do their own repairs. More housing would be "created" than Jack Poole could ever dream of. The consequences for developers and speculative real estate deals would be devastating.



At one of the Frances Street Squatters' jambores

Instead, in other cities, developers and city councils have responded to squatters by vandalising empty houses. Electrical wiring is ripped out, toilets are plugged with cement, windows are smashed. Many developers use arson as a shortcut to meeting all the requirements for a demolition permit; some of these houses have squatters in them. In Toronto, some developers aren't just boarding up their houses, they're ripping up the floorboards. It's amazing to what lengths some will go to keep others homeless.

In the midst of all this, squatters are creating an ethically based alternative within a society that venerates hyper-materialism while class disparities widen and ecological destruction threatens basic survival. While quite a number of us work, many of us are opting out of the 9 to 5 that rent necessitates in order to do something more creative, build something more useful.

We are inspired by squatting movements elsewhere, where squats have been the home base for alternative movements to develop. In West Germany, squatters have become a political force to be reckoned with—at its height, demonstrations to support squatters could bring 50,000 people out into the streets. In the early eighties, the Kreuzberg district of West Berlin was home to several kindergartens, an alternative school, cafés, galleries, a cinema, a pirate radio station, and music and theatre groups—all operating out of squats. Empty lots blossomed into guerrilla gardens, and a three-acre piece of land was reclaimed for a children's farm in the middle of the grey city. The scene was big enough to support a weekly squatters' magazine with a circulation of 5000 and no ads.

In Denmark, 54 acres of an abandoned naval barracks in the city of Copenhagen were squatted in 1971, and for the last 19 years have been a self-governed community of over a thousand squatters in the largest self-contained squat in the western world. In England, national squatting services give support and information to the over 50,000 squatters in that country (over 30,000 in London alone).

Squatting in Vancouver is in an embryonic stage. Right now, although housing is tight for many, there is still some room to move, but it will get tighter until finally it will be too constricting to ignore. In being forced into militancy, in utilizing the houses capitalism leaves empty, in realizing there is little government can do for us, in realizing that, in any case, we'd rather do it our-

selves, in realizing all this we start a process. This process sees us reasserting control over one of the basic issues of our lives, reclaiming a free space that is our own, recreating the community that has been eroded by today's culture of atomization. This process is the birth of an alternative that can provide empowerment and hope in the face of displacement and homelessness.

We do all this every day in how we live.

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Stats

In 1980, 65,000 families in B.C. were living in poverty.

By 1984, 120,000 families and 150,000 single people lived in poverty—about 27 percent of the population of the province.

Between 1980 and 1985, the number of people receiving GAIN increased from 125,000 to 230,000. . . .

In 1986 there were 20,000 housing starts in B.C.

- less than 200 were private, rental, non-subsidized starts
- under 2000 were rental housing starts

from "Housing and Homelessness" by David Hulchanski in A Place to Call Home

In 1987, federal and provincial governments will fund the construction and rehabilitation of 20,000 housing units for a total of 425,000 social housing units in Canada.

from "Shelter or Homes" by H. Peter Oberlander and Arthur L. Fallick