

NEWS FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS

By Anne Burke, Chair

Gloria Alvernaz Mulcahy is editing a companion volume to the chapbook *Sisters in Spirit*, with responses to the panel papers. She is associated with the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women and Children, at the University of Western Ontario, a collaborative venture of the University of Western Ontario, the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse, and Fanshawe College. You can check out their web site at www.crvawc.ca. There is an annual conference and newsletter. On August 15, 2008, Ontario committed 1\$.5 million to support victims of domestic abuse and prevention programmes, with an additional \$700,000 for special projects for “Neighbours, Friends, and Families”, a public education campaign to raise awareness.

On another front, this is just in from the executive, responding to a motion by the general membership, at the annual general meeting in St. John’s:

“The League of Canadian Poets is eager to offer in principle support for the scholarly database Women’s Writing in Canada. While the LCP speaks specifically on behalf of our membership, it is also in our interest to support the project on behalf of all writers. We know from historical experience that women’s writings have been lost and undervalued. This project can address historical gaps, as well as identify contemporary authors who languish unknown to many of us.

We offer our support in principle since there are issues that are of concern to us around privacy and copyright in particular. We recognize that you are also aware of these. At the moment, we understand that the project is collecting factual biographical and bibliographical information and publications that are already in the public domain in journals, etc.”

Ronnie Brown, a League member, may be organizing a Reading in Ottawa to honour Pat Lowther. Toby Brooks sent me the information with her report, which follows:

**COMMEMORATION OF WHAT
WOULD HAVE BEEN PAT
LOWTHER’S 73RD BIRTHDAY:
“Earth, Air, Stone and Pat Lowther”
Mother Tongue Bookstore
30 July 2008
Ottawa**

Write-up by Toby Brooks, author of *Pat Lowther’s Continent: Her Life and Work*

I organized the eighth birthday tribute to the late Pat Lowther, “Earth, Air, Stone and Pat Lowther,” on July 30, 2008, at Mother Tongue Books in Ottawa. Had she been allowed to live out her life in the usual way, Pat would have celebrated her 73rd birthday on July 29.

Six Ottawa poets paid tribute to Pat by reading their work and hers while emphasizing a green theme. Participating poets were: Ronnie Brown, Michelle Desbarats, Colin Morton, Susan McMaster, Susan Robertson and E. Russell Smith. The bookstore was filled to overflowing with standing room only available by the end. The Programme was as follows:

Ronnie Brown

Pat's poems: "The Dig," "May Chant"

Ronnie's poems: "April's Fools," "Fall 1942," "Dream Catcher," "Border Notations"

Michelle Desbarats

Pat's poems: "Song," "Coast Range"

Michelle's poems: "Dish," "Lessons in Invisibility," "What Visited"

Susan McMaster

Pat's poem: "Notes from Furry Creek"

Susan's poems: "Asking Only," "Old Cedar," "Lately She Remembers: January Sleet"

Colin Morton

Pat's poems: "Anemone", "Octopus", "Hermit Crabs," "Craneflies in Their Season"

Colin's will read poem sequences from "The Local Cluster" and "Boundary Issues"

Susan Robertson and Toby Brooks

reading together part of

Pat's poem: "In the Continent Behind My Eyes"

Susan's poems: "Landscape", "Eight Day Pickles," "Roxa Counts Her Eggs"

E. Russell Smith

Pat's poems: "Riding Past," "Moving South" "Early Winters"

Russell's poems: "Black Ice," "Why We Stand Facing South," "Winter Reigns"

Open Mike

Betty Warrington-Kearsley

Gillian Wallace

Because I consider "In the Continent Behind My Eyes" Pat's hallmark poem, Susan Robertson and I read part of that long poem together. In this poem, Pat guides us along

the workings of her mind, considers both the natural and urban landscape, and struggles to project her mind into what it would have been like to live as the Ice Age approached. She mentions her "great brother." Although she does not name him, readers of her work will recognize that it is Pablo Neruda, the late Chilean poet. The poem also had childhood recollections and some surprising puns such as, asking the wind to hone her "into a blade of grass" giving pause to Walt Whitman lovers.

Background

As you probably know, Pat Lowther was just becoming recognized as a poet, when she was murdered by her husband, Roy Lowther. He was an aspiring poet and there is reason to believe that he was jealous of her growing success. While her first two books had been published by small press, in 1985, at the time of her death, Pat was negotiating with Oxford University Press for publication of her third book, *A Stone Diary*. The book was released in 1977.

It took several years for Pat's friends in the poetry community to recover from their distress. When the grief had cleared a little, in 1981, The League of Canadian Poets (TLCP) created the Pat Lowther Award for the best book of poetry written by a woman that year. The award is announced at TLCP's Annual Meeting.

History Of The Tributes

In 1995, with the help of Blaine Marchand, I organized the first Pat Lowther Tribute, held at the League AGM. That was a strong experience for me as I met Pat's youngest daughter, Christine Lowther. I came away from the experience knowing that I had to write Pat's biography. It was published by Gynergy Books in 2000. The next two birthday tributes were held in private gardens in Toronto. The year 2004, saw

Mother Tongue Books hosting the event. Then in 2005, we organized Coast-to-Coast Birthday Readings to celebrate her 70th birthday. The readings took place in St. John's, Newfoundland, organized by Michelle Butler Hallett; Ottawa, organized by Susan Robertson; Edmonton, organized by Alice Major; and a big one at The Vancouver Public Library, with many of Pat's relatives attending. It is my intention that these readings build toward a major tribute to Pat in 2010, the year that she would have turned 75. The Feminist Caucus of The League of Canadian Poets is exploring the idea of sponsoring the reading in 2010.

These tributes serve to enhance the memory of a silenced Canadian poet who is like the character in her poem, "Woman On/Against Snow"

She says stubbornly nothing
but poems come from her hands:

Thank you to Toby for that report. I have been reading *Mothers On The Fast Track: How a New Generation Can Balance Family and Careers*, by Mary Ann Mason and Eve Mason Ekman (Oxford University Press, 2007) Cloth \$24.95, indexed. The author and co-author are mother and daughter. This is a follow-up to *The Equality Trap*, (1988). Their research spans two generations of adult women, The First Wave of Career Women, 1965, to the present. Although written for the average mass-market reader, the statistical graphs and data about Ph.D. candidates, "post-doc" students and tenure-track professionals are of particular interest, since some writers also have academic credentials. The

"Introduction" asks, "Do Babies Matter? Mothers on the Fast Track." Other chapters are devoted to subjects, such as :1) "The Mother Problem: Up, Out, or Sidelined?"; 2) "The Student Years: Eighteen to Thirty-Two"; 3) "The Make-or-Break Years: Thirty to Forty"; 4) "Mothers' Choices: Staying the Course, Opting Out, or Dropping Down"; 5) "The Second Tier"; 6) "Beyond the Glass Ceiling: Forty to Sixty-Five and Beyond"; and 7) "Second Chances for Mothers on the Fast Track." There are graphs of: Women as a Percentage of Professional and Doctoral Recipients in the U.S., 1966-2000; Postdocs Who Say They Are Leaving Science; Leaks in the Science Pipeline for Women; Baby Lag for Women Faculty; Percentage of Fast Track Women/Men, Ages 35 to 50, with Children under 18 in the Household, by Weekly Work Hours; Women Fast-Track Professionals with Babies, by Age; Everybody Is Very Busy: Professional Work/Housework/Caregiving Women/Men With/Without Children; Who Gets Tenure: Women/Men (with "early babies", two or more children entering the household prior to 5 years post-Ph.D.) when Ph.Ds are from 1978-1984 and Women/Men working in academia 12 to 14 years after the Ph.D.

As I write this, we are all looking forward to the Edmonton Poetry Festival (September 11, 12, 13, 2008) www.edmontonpoetryfestival.com and to the Small Press Fair (Sunday, September 21, 2008) when Joe Blades (Fredericton, New Brunswick), Jenna Butler (Edmonton, Alberta), Vivian Demuth (New York), and Karen Bass (Hythe, Alberta) will be reading at Rabbit Hole Bookstore, in Grande Prairie, Alberta.