

NEWS FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS

By Anne Burke, Chair

With the November 1 deadline fast approaching for submissions to The Pat Lowther Award (see League web site for submission requirements), it might be good to keep in mind the list of Previous Winners, from 1981 to 2008 (also posted). One suggestion was to match these with a list of how many also (independently) won the Governor General's Award. Lowther was not only a poet who died relatively young (she was brutally murdered), but she was a League President, the first woman, perhaps, in the early years of this organization, an important observation. Some of us believe that the Lowther is an illustrious award that deserves wider publicity. There could be a third prize, a mid-career prize for a poet with two or three books, someone who is established but not widely known outside the poetic community. Such an award would allow more League members to be considered. As writers, it's her work we wish to celebrate, but it is impossible to forget (and we should remember) the issues of abuse involved. In that context, I offer the following:

Review of *Women Speak Out About Violence And Abuse: Standing Together*, edited by Linda Goyette (Victoria, B.C.: Brindle & Glass, 2007) 230 pp. paper \$24.95.

This is a self-identified "hopeful book." Submissions were collected on the occasion of the province of Alberta's centennial, in 2005. The result is a collection of true-to-life short stories and poems. Some authors used a pen name or are anonymous, "due to a threat to their safety." The opening poem "Dedication", by Lorie Miser, author of *the blue not seen* (Rowan Books, 1997) and *A Promise of Salt* (Coteau

Books, 2002), suggests: "This is for them, all of them/And for the woman who will not read this poem."

The first section is entitled "I Am Someone You Know". Dolly Dennis, in "A Father Knows Best Kind of Life," a short story, describes six scenes. Dennis has other stories in *Other Voices* and *A Room of One's Own*. She won a CBC Alberta Anthology writing competition. Colleen Klein, wife of the former Premier, a board member and patron of the Awo Taan Native Women's Shelter, in Calgary, contributed "I Never Look Back", a contemplation on bullying. Ardith Trudzik contributed "To Match His Eyes", part of her memoir. Naomi Manuel wants to share her son's life story. Edmonton named a community park after Sheila Bowker. Olga Rojas contributed "The Stalker". Amy Willans wrote "I Take Every Silence and Scream", a poem.

The second section is "Why I Didn't Leave." Angela Leshner answers "The Tormenting Question" in her poem of that title. Teri Rago offers "I Can Hear You Calling to Me." Mitze Wakefield explains, "I Didn't Know Anything Else" and her story continues in a chapter on "Starting Over." Jacqueline Pirnak Marchak, who spent time in the Hope Haven Women's Shelter, wrote: "I Stayed Because I Loved Him, Not His Actions."

In the third section "The Turning Point", Yuriko Kitamura, a painter best known for her technique of dye painting on rice paper, wrote a poem "Buddha's Mercy." Hannah Neshner, in "The Whole Thing Was a Miracle", disputes that "turning the other cheek" is the proper way of dealing with abuse. Dawn Hodgins, author of "The Last Day", a story, worked at the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton. Sherie Venner, author of "Rain on Highway 2", a poem, wrote: "Calgary/Home of the Stampede/I am quiet now, sunk low, low...." She home-schools her children. Tamara Charles proves: "I Choose Me." Kathleen Yearwood,

who wrote “Sleeping Beauty”, a story, has published short stories and a novel. She lives near Vilna, Alberta. Leslie Ann Fahr works with young offenders and sex trade workers. The poet Linda Dumont edited the Boyle-McCauley News and published the *Edmonton Street News*, contributed a story “Reclaiming My Soul.” Andrea Fikkert hopes to find a publisher for the children’s novel she co-wrote with her eldest son.

The fourth section “Starting Over” begins with “First Time” a poem by L. Parker, who is writing a novel. Anne Martens of Edson, Alberta, contributed “Seven Boxes”, a story. Inge Genee, who contributed “The Girl on Route 8”, a story, teaches at the University of Alberta. Alvena Laboucane Strasberg, who wrote a story, “Nothing is Impossible”, is a Métis elder. Catherine Carson, a journalist, wrote “Runaway”, a story. Marina Phillips penned “facing Goliath”, a story, and she benefited from the Phoenix Safe House in Medicine Hat. Kathy Smith, in “Never Give Up”, a short story, works as a graphic artist. Marilyn Wolfe dedicated her story “I Just Never Felt Sorry for Myself” to the Sonshine Centre.

For the fifth section “Daughters, Sisters, Mothers, and Grandmothers”, Robyn Lee Homell wrote “My Imaginary Chinese Mother” about her experiences in Calgary. Georgina Durand wrote a poem “My Sister and I” for her foster sister. There is an excerpt entitled “My Daughter Saved My Life” of Juanita Murphy’s longer story, about turning to prostitution and drug addiction. She volunteers at the Prostitution Awareness and Action Foundation of Edmonton. Pamela Klein, of Red Deer, offers her poem “A Tribute to My Sister” and has published two suspense novels and a resource book for parents of newly-diagnosed deaf children. Diana Bliss, a Calgary writer, reports that the protagonist of “My Mother’s Fight” prefers to remain anonymous. Eleanor Laboucan, author of “My Mother’s Lesson: Learn To Love Yourself”, a story, worked as an

overnight worker at a Women’s Emergency Shelter, in Edmonton. Joanna (“Jo”) Foster wrote a tribute to her mother, in a poem “Most of All”. Amanda Jean Lovig wrote “My Grandmother’s Recipe For Success”, a story, and she works in her grandmother’s business. Joey Hamelin, a senior policy adviser, wrote “Sisters of Sorrow”, a story. Carmyn Block, an adult literary coordinator in High River, wrote “Joyce”, a short story.

For the sixth section “How We Help One Another”, Jo-Ann Joyce Bellrose, a former counselor of the Driftpile First Nation, wrote “Words of Comfort”, a story. Marsha Ellen Meidow works as a youth counselor at the YWCA’s Safe haven in Calgary. She offers a poem “Gratitude.” Sue Johnstone, an Edmonton writer wrote “A Morning With A Friend”, a story. Edmonton poet ky perraun has spent time in a women’s shelter, which inspired her poem. Colette Mandin wrote a tribute in “Sandy”, a story, to her friend. Theresa Jebeaux, a poet, produced “Rest in Peace”, dedicated to Hilda Harper and Nisha Prokash, for the ones who did not survive. Lynn Herbach Christini and Corrine Mudie find their hope in God. Penney Quwek LeBlanc, of Lloyminster, found a “leg-up” women who as her “safe place”, in “Thank You, Edna.” Kim Gostkeeper expresses “The Comfort of My Culture.” Tammy Day celebrates “The Friend Behind Me.” Cindy Toker reveals “I Remember the Power of a Few Words.” Marjorie Bruno-Whalen, mother a five, writes “To Somebody.”

For the seventh section “How I Help Myself”, Mary Anne Lehman, of Calgary, contributed “Start Building a Home.” Liz Lister offers “Find Peace and Comfort in Nature.” She was staying at the Women’s Emergency Accommodation Centre in Edmonton when she began writing for the “Standing Together” project. CherieTrahan offers an excerpt from a longer poem “Never Lose Faith in Yourself.” She says, “I felt like I

could write forever about not letting go of your spirit, to not give into the darkness....” Cristina Hillier reminds, “Remember, You Are Worth It.” Ellie McGaughey advises “Write Away the Hurt” and an excerpt from her poem “And Then There was Peace” appears in the next chapter.

For the eighth section “Where I Am Now”, ky perrau lends a poem “Renewed Life” from a longer piece “Shattered Looking Glass.” Kate Denis contributes an excerpt from a series of poems, “Running” in this section and “Empty” in the second chapter. Irene Haire, a pharmacist, wrote “Giving Back.” Elsie Garstad-Lambert, author of *Oilpatch Recollections: The Way Things Were* to commemorate the oil discovery in Leduc, offers “Life Changes.” Marilee Leskiw explores her Blackfoot ancestry in “A Flower Blooms.” Joan White Calf, author of “Crazyhorse Girl”, says to “get out!” Olga Costopoulos has published a collection of poems *Muskox and Goat Songs*, in 1996, contributes “Tar Pits.”

Kay Long reveals “I Graduated at Sixty-Five”, a story. Naomi Deutekom, author of “Winter Sunrise”, coordinates the Family and Community Support Services for the town of Sexsmith, in northern Alberta. Cecily Mills, a full-time volunteer, wrote “Looking Back, Looking Forward.” Anne Harrington, author of “Gifts to Me”, is a former volunteer for the Family Centre in Edmonton. Anna Branch-Wagner, author of “Bad Can Be Turned into Good”, founded a women’s shelter in Ontario, before moving to Alberta in 1991. Dolores Therien, of “I Have Recovered, says she is a “strong Métis woman.”

Heather Plazier submitted a cycle of poems to the Standing Together Project and her poem “Of Tapestries and Grief” was published here. She was raised on a farm in Peace River Country. Irene Konev wrote her poem “Talking to the Abuser” after leaving a violent relationship. Heather King, who wrote “Prayer to a Lost Love”, works with Child and Family Services in Grande Prairie.

The editor, co-author of *Edmonton in Our Own Words*, *Kidmonton: True Stories of River City Kids*, and *Second Opinion*, won the Grant MacEwan Author’s Award for 2005.

The project was prompted by Iris Evans, then Alberta’s first Minister of Children’s Services, to raise awareness and funds for abuse prevention. The collection is “In Memoriam” for Lois Hole, the former Lieutenant General of Alberta. According to Jan Reimer, the former mayor of Edmonton and Provincial Coordinator of the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, who contributed “An Afterword”, in Alberta alone, “5,930 women and their children sought refuge in shelters last year. There were more than 34,000 crisis calls.”

This book is recommended for those in abusive relationships and for counselors of these “at risk” individuals. The collection is also compelling for the average reader, because of its authenticity, the blood-and-guts of sexual abuse, violence in its many manifestations. It serves to celebrate the indomitable human spirit.

Anne Burke