

NEWS FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS

By Anne Burke, Chair

In examining the Policy and Procedures Booklet posted on the League Web Site I made a remarkable discovery. The description of The Feminist Caucus” is out of date. The Mission Statement of the Feminist Caucus as revised in 1991 reads: “In agreement with the LCP Constitution, the Feminist Caucus declares its abhorrence of all forms of discrimination, intolerance, and inequality, and hereby expresses its intention to take action against any manifestation of sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, lesbophobia, ageism, and ableism within our own organization and in the larger community.” This was crafted by Susan McMaster, approved at the agm of the Caucus, read into the minutes of the annual general meeting of the League, and then voted on by the entire League membership. Yet, it does not appear on the web site.

From the League Bylaws, (also posted on the League Web Site) The Feminist Caucus is a Standing Policy Committee of the Whole which reports on its activities and projects to the general members on *at least* an annual basis and is composed of those *who share the goals and objectives* (see: above), in part by participating in agm events, such as the Business Meeting and/or The Open Reading. The Caucus Chair has “voice” (on National Council) but no “vote” (on Council.) Its governance model is that of a collective. There is no hierarchy and everybody is welcome. Frequently, new members come to us because it can be a daunting first-time experience and there are mentorship opportunities. At one time there was a full complement of Treasurer, Series Coordinator, Recording Secretary, and Book Production Manager. More recently, due to a number of factors, the Chair has overseen the layout of the chapbooks, but each year the group suggests topics, ranks them, and then prioritizes them, which are then conveyed to the general members (at the Sunday morning Business Meeting) and VOTED ON.

If volunteers identify themselves as able to edit, organize, and/or contribute to next year’s panel, the names are entered into the minutes of the whole. Since Cathy Ford and Kathy Mac volunteered to organize panels, we have relied on a **General Call For Abstracts and Proposals**. This is an OPEN CALL, through the e-newsletter, and in the regular reports to members by the Chair or Panel Organizer. There are minutes taken, elections held, and accountability to the League, in every respect. The cumulative revenues and expenses are kept and appear as a line item in the audited financial statements and annual forthcoming budget, approved by the general members. The Chair is elected (or acclaimed) and then the general members are asked to ratify the selection.

Unlike literary publishers which receive Block Funding *and* Special Project Funding of thousands of dollars, The Living Archives is a League publication which is entirely self-supporting. At one time, a collection was taken, enough to fund the next publication. More recently, the panel proceedings with additional materials are funded as a donation in kind, with the proceeds garnered from sales at University and Public Libraries. The volunteer authors and editors are *not paid* from League proceeds. They may choose to contact the Public Lending Right Commission and register at their discretion.

Some of the Living Archives Patrons/Matrons are: Gay Allison, Winona Baker, Douglas Barbour, Joe Blades, Anne Burke, Cathy Ford, Katerina Fretwell, Neile Graham, Sheila Hyland, Maria Jacobs, Sarah Klassen, Bernice Lever, Blaine Marchand, Susan McMaster, Colin Morton, Brenda Niskala, Betsy Struthers, Dr. Lynn Van Luven, Patience Wheatley, and Carolyn Zonailo. Anybody can become a supporter at any time.

Men have participated on panels, at Open Readings, in Business Meetings; as Jurors (and Chair) for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award; as “angel” publishers, and at the two Pat Lowther Memorial Readings I have attended.

These annual proceedings, with additional materials, since 1982, were launched quietly at the Panel and Caucus Business Meeting. *Selected Readings: Poets on Women, Violence and Silence* (Quarry Press) was published perfect bound, in 1998. *Imprints and Casualties: poets on women*

and language, reinventing memory was published perfect bound by Broken Jaw Press, in 2000. A third volume on Eros is expected. These titles have been reviewed in academic journals, as well as literary journals. They also form the basis for study by scholars and literary historians.

The venue for the Book Launch changed when anthologies were produced. There was excitement and enthusiasm enough to pay a book launch fee (again donated) to the League for a League publication. This began at the 2005 Gala and has continued until 2008. More money for the League.

Katerina Fretwell reports: "Upon hearing the outstandingly memorable poetry read at the 2000 Feminist Caucus Open Reading (Hart House), I envisioned a permanent home for all of the FC poetry: a chapbook. After all, the smaller Feminist Caucus is my 'Family' within the larger organization writ large. Since inclusiveness encapsulated the mandate of the Feminist Caucus, this homestead requires many rooms, one poem per person from males and females, associate and full members, from any actual or imagined readings at a Feminist Caucus Reading. 43 marvelous poets responded to my call." Two anthologies were produced: "*Arms Like Ladders*", on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary; the anthology honours all the poems written by men as well as women, and *no one knows the blood we share*" Poems from the Feminist Caucus Open Readings.

The Pat Lowther Memorial Award is given annually to the best book written by a woman that year. There were 78 books entered this year, with entry fees for each paid for by publishers who receive Canada Council Block Funding. These funds are for the League's exclusive use and nominated jurors elected at the agm, are unpaid. Eric Folsom has chaired the Lowther Award Committee, so, yes, men are welcome! .

Did you know there was a Feminist Party of Canada? I learned this from *Resources For Feminist Research/Documentation Sur La Recherche Féministe*, Vol. 32, Nos.1/1.

"As founding members of the Party, we both marveled at and welcomed the broad involvement of women from all walks of life, all levels of education, ages, orientations and political

experience." ("Jeri Wine And The Feminist Party Of Canada", by Angela Miles, Department of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education).

I was privileged to attend and participate in the 2009 LCP Poetry Festival and Conference, in Vancouver. Thank you to the panelists on the "Eco Poetry" Panel and to the forty attendees. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. There was a slight delay while the public address system was installed. Certainly, the panelists have impeccable professional credentials, as well as being awesome poets in their own right. Cathy Ford has a B.F.A. and a M.F.A. from the University of British Columbia. She is also a member of the Federation of British Columbia Writers and PEN. Andrea Nicki has completed a Ph.D. in feminist philosophy and has a recent book of poetry published by Inanna Press. Catherine Owen has a Masters in English. As for myself, I hold an Honours English Magna Cum Laude; a B.Ed. with diplomas in Elementary and Secondary English; a Masters Degree in English, as well as Ph. D. Studies in Contemporary Literature and Canadian Literature. We know whereof we speak!

The publications by the panelists are too numerous to mention here, but do check out their bios on the League Membership Web Site. Their lengthy and well-documented papers, with additional material, will soon be published in full. I am pleased to report that our modestly-produced fundraising project The Living Archives Series (published at no cost to the League) has raised literally thousands of dollars since its inception. We are honoured to have the first accession of Caucus-focused papers deposited at the National Library and Archives in Ottawa, for use by future scholars of literary and cultural history. For those who may be unfamiliar with the Caucus, we operate as a loosely-based collective, without hierarchy. There is *no* Emperor.

Speaking as a publisher, for a moment, few of us will publish writing that is sexist, racist, homophobic, or in any way discriminatory. However, in private, that does not mean that individuals adhere to these standards. It is still commonplace, in some circles, to demean and diminish others, for imagined shortcomings, based solely on these personal characteristics.

It is important to acknowledge here, as does *Canadian Woman Studies* 25, Nos.3, 4

Some believe that Canadian feminism is irrelevant in the early 21st century---that Canadian women have achieved equality and there is no need for feminist activism. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* Canadian feminists are a resilient bunch---always ready to come together to advocate for what is right....

In the world beyond the League, but not poetry, is the new foundation which honours the memory of a murder victim. Headlines and news stories rarely tell the entire story. Amber Bowerman, my friend and writing colleague, was brutally stabbed to death in a murder suicide in a rented basement apartment. The owner of the house also killed his 35-year-old wife, Alison, and two of their daughters, Kristen, 5, and Rochelle, 3. He stabbed himself. His body was found in the same room where his one-year-old daughter Anna, lay in her crib, unharmed.

Emergency personnel who were the first responders and even uniformed officers were offered grief counseling, because of what they saw in that house. I attended a community meeting during which residents and neighbours were invited to express their feelings. I left with a small polished stone in my pocket. On the stone was one word: COURAGE. Donations to the foundation are being accepted online at amberbowerman.ca. This happened on May 27, 2008, but I have been unable to speak or write about the manner of her death, until now. *That changed when I was asked to respond to a letter to National Council which came via email.* I wanted to remember how she lived her life, full of wonder, promise, and hope, until it was taken, shortly after her 30th birthday. Now I realize that empathy is engendered by human suffering, in that the abused decides not to transfer that pain to another living being. Violence occurs in words, with fists, against the body and the spirit. It is ultimately cowardly, hidden in the shadows, until the tiny stuffed toy bears, left by neighbourhood children, blanket the front lawn. One small boy told the story: "Something very bad was here."

A "bully", by definition is: 1) a person who hurts, frightens, or tyrannizes over those who are smaller

or weaker; 2) a pimp (archaic); 3) a hired cutthroat or thug. To hurt, frighten or tyrannize over, as a bully does; browbeat, blustering. Tolerance has to do with the capacity to endure pain, or hardship: endurance, fortitude, stamina; a sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own: the act of allowing something: toleration; the capacity of the body to endure or become less responsive to a substance or a physiological insult with repeated use or exposure. The relative capacity of an organism to grow or thrive when subjected to an unfavourable environmental factor.

In "Women, Knowledge And Change: Gender Is Not Enough", by Kinda Christiansen-Ruffman, at the International Development Studies/Women's Studies, Saint Mary's University, (*Resources For Feminist Research/Documentation Sur La Recherche Féministe*)

An explicit "political orientation to change" is still necessary because patriarchal assumptions still dominate scholarship, cultures and societies. It will continue to be required as long as the social organization of the world and its cultures are designed in patriarchal ways which centre around values of *control, violence, greed, and hatred*. A feminist "change orientation" is needed to end the discrimination against women which persists in every institution of society in almost every society in the world. It is needed to redesign the social organization of communities---locally, regionally, and globally---so that cultures and social institutions are oriented to caring, fully, and equally, for the lives of *women and men of all ages as well as the planet..*" (pp 114-5)