

NEWS FROM THE FEMINIST CAUCUS

By Anne Burke, Chair

Thank you to our President Dennis Reid, Chair of the 2010 National Poetry Festival, our Vice President Joe Blades, the National Council, and, in particular, the 2010 AGM Organizing Committee chaired by Elizabeth Greene, for their support in collaborating on readings by recipients of the Pat Lowther Memorial Award. Of course, the Feminist Caucus Panel “Celebrating What Would Have Been Pat Lowther’s 75th Birthday” is also taking shape. While we are spatially challenged in this vast country, due to geography and financial constraints, we are also doing our best to honour these women, in Pat’s name. Members have already stepped forward to embody the spirit and imbue the poetics of those recipients who have passed: Rona Murray, Bronwen Wallace, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Diana Brebner.

Women and Environments International Magazine: Call For Poetry Deadline: February 15

Women and Environments International Magazine is looking for poetry submissions for its upcoming issue on women and water. This issue will critically examine women’s relationship to water, including access to and consumption of water. The aim is to gather content from both the North and the South, which embraces all women’s experiences. Submissions can be in the form of essays, book or film reviews, poetry, photography, and/or visual art. Please email your up to three poems totaling no more than 75 lines to sonja.greckol@rogers.com. Please use “Women and Water” as your subject heading and include a short bio (50 words) along with your mailing address.

Call for Submissions: on the Lived Experiences of Mental Health in Feminist Communities, from persons of *either gender* who identify with feminism and have lived experiences of a psychiatric diagnosis. **Submission deadline is June 1, 2010.** Comments, concerns, questions and submissions should be directed to:

fmhsubmissions@gmail.com.

Both coordinators of the project self-identify as feminist and are interested in critical perspectives of health and live in Toronto. Jenna MacKay is a psychiatric survivor and community activist, who is particularly interested in violence and mental health. Alicia Merchant is a freelance writer and contributing editor for various magazines, and has been published in *CR Magazine*, *thirdspace* and the *Globe & Mail*.

An upcoming anthology, with the working title of *Feminists Navigate Mental Health*, will explore the complexities of navigating mental health and how a feminist identity may (or may not) shape these experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Submissions are welcomed in the form of personal short stories and will shape the outcome of the book. This project aims to be transparent and include contributors in decision-making. The final manuscript will be submitted to relevant and independent publishers. This project is not affiliated with any institution or organization.

Possible themes may include (but are not limited to): Coping-what works and what doesn’t; any positive aspects of mental health that are commonly considered deficits; treatment preferences and past experiences; medication; personal/lived understandings of your diagnosis (acceptance or rejection); stigma/tension around mental health issues in the feminist community; feminism and well-being/strength; empowerment; feminism and distress.

Guidelines: Remember to take care of yourself while writing about topics that may be distressing. Good writing skills are great, but not mandatory. We will work with you to edit your piece. Submissions must be saved in doc or rtf, size 12 font, Arial or Times New Roman, and double-spaced, 500 to 4000 words in length. Include contact information and a brief biography. Only email submissions will be accepted.

On another front, illicit drug use among criminalized aboriginal women is a serious health concern in Canada. Not enough is understood about how women’s healing is impacted by their views of themselves as (and the stigma associated



with being) drug users involved in crime and as aboriginal women in Canadian society.

A community-based participatory research project was conducted by the University of Saskatchewan, National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation (NNAPF), and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. Interviews were conducted with other 100 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women in treatment for illicit drug use. The research starts with an understanding of women's drug use as a form of self-harm, which is, a coping and survival technique from emotional pain and distress rooted in abuse, violence, and trauma in their lives.

The study also examines how treatment workers view their roles in the women's construction and reconstruction of their identities, and its impact on their healing. The goal is to contribute original knowledge in the treatment field that can assist in improving the burden of ill health experienced by aboriginal women in Canada.

A music video *From Stilettos to Moccasins* was released at the national conference of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse in Halifax, during a workshop "Hear Me Heal: A Research Project About First Nations Women, Drug Abuse, and the Healing Journeys."

The song was created at a workshop at Cedar Lodge on Blackstrap Lake, Saskatchewan, with the professional collaboration of singer/songwriter Violet Naylor, a Woodland Cree from Prince Albert. She and others who composed the song perform in the music video, which was presented at the national conference "Issues of Substance" during National Addictions Awareness Week (November 15-21, 2009).

Rita Notarandrea, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the CCSA Abuse, says, "As a way of informing treatment practice, capturing the unique experiences of aboriginal women who have received treatment from their addictions in song is most inspiring."

Carol Hopkins, Executive Director of NNAPF, says, "We are merging these messages with academic literature and sharing this research with others, in the hope of achieving a greater impact on

policy and practice of addictions treatment in Saskatchewan and across Canada."

Review of *Child Poverty in Canada*, by Patrizia Albanese (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2010) Issues In Canada.

As we are all no doubt aware, there are Homeless Children and Families. across Canada. Children, in grades four and five, were asked, "What is Poverty?" One response was: "*Sometimes it's hard because my mom gets scared and she cries.*" Children living in female-headed, single-parent families, remain among the most economically vulnerable, with about 47 percent living in poverty. (p. 20) Some other categories (which, admittedly, may overlap) are: children in Aboriginal families; recent immigrant families; accompanied with problems in big cities, as well as hidden poverty in rural and semi-rural communities. Interestingly enough, in studies of recent immigrant or newcomer children of relatively low income households, it has been found that some of the social pathologies associated with poverty among children are less common.

There has been a shift in discourse, from the feminization of poverty" to "child poverty", a de-gendering approach. This title was published in a compact format, similarly to *Women, Power, Politics: The Hidden Story of Canada's Unfinished Democracy*, (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 2009) which I reviewed here in January. "The United Nations warns that Canada falls surprisingly far behind in areas such as human rights and poverty." ("Introduction", *Child Poverty in Canada*, p. xii) This is in spite of a 1989 All-Party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada, by the year 2000. Ironically enough, child poverty rates "grew to a record high", according to the first *Child Poverty in Canada Report*, 1 in 5 children lived in poverty---an increase of 402,000 children since 1989! There are Tables of Food Bank use, which demonstrate a higher concentration of need in Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador. Yet, British Columbia was ranked last for the sixth year in a row. ("B.C.'s Child Poverty Shame".) There are also provincial variations in low-income rates, with different costs of home heating and food across Canada.