News from the Feminist Caucus, by Anne Burke

This month, a call for submissions from the Feminist History Society, in the third year of operation, with their publishing mandate and mission statement, "open to the many feminists who make up our extraordinarily rich movement". Update from the Living Archives Project (Mount Allison University), News from Bernice Lever, Katerina Fretwell, and Magie Dominic; also Reviews of *sinuous*, by Lydia Kwa, and *Engagement Calendar*, poems by Mary Aird Rutherford.

Living Archives Project

(Original request) Dear Anne Burke,

I am a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University. I am currently researching the LCP Feminist Caucus Living Archives Series in the context of a larger project on Canadian feminist literary collectives.

Lesley at the League of Canadian Poets suggested that I might contact you to ask about locating archival material related to the Living Archives series. I have been accessing all of the chapbooks via inter-library loans and the Feminist Caucus newsletters available on-line have also been helpful. But I'm wondering about additional material.

The 2008 Inspiratrices chapbook mentions a potential collaboration with the National Archives: did that actually work out? Are there materials housed anywhere else? I'm thinking particularly of extra information about the founding of the Feminist Caucus, recordings of panel proceedings, photos, information about editing the Living Archives, older newsletters... anything, really!

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,
Andrea Beverley

(My reply Sep 17)

Thank you for your interest in the Feminist Caucus. We collect archival materials on all the chapbook titles and panels. The League deposit is at the National Archives in Ottawa (with National Library). We also have made deposits for the Feminist Caucus. They contain the materials you mention. I'm not sure if they produced a finding aid or not. I am attaching some of the correspondence which initiated this interesting project. Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to assist you in your research. You don't say when you began the work but my reports are archived annually and I have access to most of them.
Dear Anne,

Thank you very much for your prompt and helpful reply! I will certainly contact the National Archives; (truth be told, I actually had sent them an inquiry but when I didn't hear back, I became impatient and contacted the League directly.)

I am just beginning this particular part of the research project and am really enjoying reading through the chapbooks chronologically. I am interested in the founding and self-definition of the Feminist Caucus and in the concept behind the Living Archives series. I am also interested in how the chapbooks remember the panels they grew out of, and the trajectory of these conversations over the past 30+ years. Fascinating!

Anyhow, thanks again for the information.

Andrea

Dear Anne:

Just read Nov. news from LCP... and no mention of [my] interview. (THE PRAIRIE JOURNAL, ISSUE 60 Has it gone astray? Bad me-- I did not send in 'writer' LCP news for Oct. or Nov. ((Great to see the academic interest in our valuable Feminist papers..))

=== Behind in posting what I am doing..off to Bellingham, Wa., for WorldPeacePoetry.com -- Nov. 9 and staying over with 'new' poet buddies for Sunday am -- chats.

WorldPoetry.ca has a giant, international site dedicated to peace poems --welcoming any one in any language to add their positive views of world that gives up violence. They have signed in with Guinness book of records for the longest poetry reading around the world and some of our poems and children's tree of peace poems are being put in PEACE Tower in Ottawa.

Any day now I expect to see your Fall issue of Prairie Journal. Dec. 3 or 4 , I will see Jennifer in Toronto, as on my way to Ottawa for Dec. 7 meeting of PLR. This is my last year---8th -- with PLR--usually only 4 yrs. on Commission but too many old hands were leaving so CC people asked me to stay on. Last meeting for me is early June--then CAA has to elect another person.

Has been a busy Fall for me with my family -- but both daughters now seem to be on positive paths-- younger one recovering well ...Have asked Marty Gervais about a next book--- and awaiting an answer..

Hope all is well with you and yours---Bernice
Katerina Fretwell's seventh poetry collection (including her art) was published by Inanna Publications and Education Inc in September, 2013 and is listed in the online 49th Shelf in Kerry Clare's article: "Most anticipated Books of Fall 2013: Poetry." Her poems have recently appeared in two Welsh magazines, *Scintilla* and *The Seventh Quarry*, as well as *Canadian Woman Studies* "Women Writing 4 Remembrance" and the anthology, "Jack Layton: Art in Action", edited by Penn Kemp.

"Six of a new series of poems 'The Cancer Letters' will appear in *Prairie Journal* No. 61 from a manuscript of poems which address my husband's journey through cancer with Cancer as my primary protagonist."

Nov 1
Hi Anne,

I'm happy to report that I just signed and completed a contract with Wilfrid Laurier University Press in Canada for my second book, *Street Angel*. It's a sequel of sorts to *The Queen of Peace Room*. The very first excerpts from both books appeared in *Prairie Journal*! The publication release date is summer 2014. I can send a short bit of information if you like for the next Feminist Caucus newsletter.

I was in Toronto last week, overnight, to visit my friend in the nursing home. More fuel for our 2014 panel. It’s a sobering world.

Hope all things are good with you.

Sending much love.

Magie

Oct 27

Hi, It's one of those evenings when I'm researching a number of things. I came across this link for Feminist Caucus chapbooks in NL university. They say Eco Poetry is checked out. That's rewarding to see. Interesting to see what they have in their collection. Should we send them other copies? Not sure how that works. They have a budget. [http://info.library.mun.ca/uhtbin/cgisirs/x/0/0/5?user_id=REMOTEWEB&searchdata1=](http://info.library.mun.ca/uhtbin/cgisirs/x/0/0/5?user_id=REMOTEWEB&searchdata1=) Hope the link works.

Can't believe it's almost November.
Hope all things are good!
Sending love,

Magie

Oct 27
Anne, That link won't work, but I researched it another way, and the page shows that they have the entire Caucus collection, and several chapbooks are checked out. Yeah!
Hi Anne, I received *The Prairie Journal* today. It's beautiful, you really are the wind beneath my wings! I'm so happy to see the work in print! I love the cover. And the cheque made my month. It helps pay for an entire month at the Writer's Room, where I'm working on the manuscript every day that I can. I'm so glad the AGM is in Toronto, 2013. I'll definitely be there.

*Sending love,*

Magie

Magie Dominic Writing and Art
Magie Dominic at Lincoln Center Archives

**The youngest** Writers Room (NY) **member is 14 years old and writing her second novel. The eldest Writers Room member is 84 years old and writing his 40th play.**

Writers really produce here. In 2012, members published thirty – fiction and non-fiction books and many magazine articles, plays & screenplays. Members have written more than 1,000 books since the doors of *The Writers Room* opened in 1978.

Founded in 1978 by writers for writers, in this professional workspace creativity flourishes in an atmosphere of mutual support


**Feminist History Society**

[First volume in the FHS Series](#)

of Feminist Journeys/Voies féministes, a compelling collection, beautifully bound, of personal stories written by more than 90 women across Canada about what drew them to feminism.
Help Keep the Movement Alive

Our mission is to publish books about the women's movement in Canada between 1960 and 2010, books written by the very participants in the movement. The content of the books will reflect the diversity and dynamism, strength and spirit of the movement.

Feminist History Society

Constance Backhouse is a Founding Co-Editor of the Feminist History Society. Created in 2010, the Feminist History Society intends to publish a multi-volume collection of books showcasing and documenting feminist activity in Canada and Quebec between 1960 and 2010. For details about how to sign up as a member, purchase our books, or write for us, see:

www.FeministHistories.ca


CHALLENGING TIMES offers a provocative and detailed overview of feminist movements in Canada and the United States. Through a series of essays that offer innovative interpretations and careful, original scholarship, the contributing authors compare and contrast the emergence and advancement of feminism in the two countries, taking care to explore both Francophone and Anglophone communities.

Constance Backhouse holds the positions of Distinguished University Professor and University Research Chair at the Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa. She is internationally known for her feminist research and publications on sex discrimination and the legal history of gender and race in Canada. A legal scholar who uses a narrative style of writing, her most recent books and articles profile the fascinating ways in which women and racialized communities have struggled to obtain justice within the legal system.

Macmillan, 208 pages, $12.95 This book, published in 1979, was the first book about sexual harassment to be published in Canada, and the second in North America. If you thought women have finally become more accepted as real people with readier access to the conclaves of corporate power, read this book - you'll think again. Using statistical studies, interviews with executives and personnel
managers, case studies, historical records, and court cases, Constance Backhouse and Leah Cohen show how pervasive sexual harassment is in the workplace.

The authors provide us with a balanced and incisive understanding of what goes on. They also recommend ways to combat sexual harassment. Since this subject has till now been unexplored, avoided, and rife with myths and misinformation, this book is all the more important to our society.

Carnal Crimes: Sexual Assault Law in Canada, 1900-1975
Toronto: Osgood Society, 2008) is an engaging and powerful book about sexual assault crimes in Canadian history by one of Canada’s foremost legal historians. Using a case-study approach, Constance Backhouse explores nine sexual assault trials from across the country throughout the twentieth century. We move from small towns to large cities, from the Maritimes to the Northwest Territories, from the suffrage era to the period of the women’s liberation movement. Each of these richly-textured vignettes offers insight into the failure of the criminal justice system to protect women from sexual assault, and each is highly readable and provocative. The most moving chapters document the law’s refusal to accommodate a woman who could only give evidence in sign language, and the heartbreaking of a child rape trial. Backhouse deals sensitively and deftly with these difficult stories.

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Feminism à la Québécoise
Micheline Dumont

Micheline Dumont is a brilliant historian who is an authority on the history of women in Québec. As a member of the Clio collective, she has co-authored previous path-breaking books about feminism in Québec. In 2009 she was inspired to write a book for young women, who may not have been aware of the history of the Québec feminist movement. Her goal was to produce a very accessible book rather than an academic one and she choose the format of a grandmother telling the stories to her granddaughter, Camille. In a book review for *érudit*, Marie-Andrée Bergeron of Lavalle University said that the tone of the book gives the impression that the author is speaking directly to her readers and that the personal narrative makes the story alive and vibrant.

Micheline Dumont

The original book is a wonderful gift to young francophone women and the members of the Feminist History Society thought that an English version would provide an opportunity for all of us to understand the Québec experience better. Rewritten to make the book accessible to an audience outside of Québec, this version sparkles in English as the original did in French. The book has an abundance of photos, many of which were not available for the first version. Read this and marvel at the remarkable exploits of Québec feminists.

[http://feministhistories.ca/books/feminism-a-la-quebecoise/](http://feministhistories.ca/books/feminism-a-la-quebecoise/)

Write
This is the third year of operation for the Feminist History Society. In 2010 we published Feminist Journeys/Voies féministes followed in 2011 by Writing the Revolution. This year’s book is Feminism à la Québécoise, which will be ready to distribute in the summer of 2012.

Our first objective is to publish books about second-wave Canadian feminism. We are always looking for a diverse array of topics, to cover our wide-ranging campaigns for social, economic, civil, political, legal, and cultural change. We will make every effort to be inclusive of gender, race, class, geography, culture, dis/ability, sexual identity, and age. We are open to a variety of formats, including autobiographies, biographies, single- and multi-themed volumes, edited collections, pictorial histories, plays, and novels. Above all, we seek writing with easily-readable styles, open to the many feminists who make up our extraordinarily rich movement.

Don’t be discouraged if you don’t have a book-length piece of writing yet. If you have a shorter piece, think about collaborating with others so that the work can be compiled into book-length format. We will be happy to serve as a nexus for connecting authors. And we hope to explore ways to post shorter works on our website soon.

Please feel free to contact us at info@FeministHistories.ca at any time. We would be pleased to speak with you further about your writing interests and plans.

Beth Atcheson and Constance Backhouse, co-editors of the Feminist History Society

- Recent Articles
  - ProMOTION Plus celebrates Playing It Forward
  - Restore Our Anthem
  - Now Available – Playing It Forward: 50 Years of Women and Sport in Canada
  - A Compelling History
  - Coming in 2013

- Contact Us
  - info@feministhistories.ca

The cover image appears to be a slinky, a child’s toy which climbs stairs, or else a skeletal spinal design. The collection is dedicated to In Memory of Manuela Dias, who was editor of Turnstone Press in 2001.

A working title “Road Book: Suite of Hands” (with allusions to “on the road”, vagabonded) deals with mapping terrain on a journey, in navigation, charting shifting psychological landscape. Some of these poems are based on her experiential spaces of Canada, Japan, Singapore, and elsewhere. She is a psychologist and cognizant of dreams, thoughts, feelings.

At the outset, we are encouraged to explore the dictionary definitions of “sinuous”: as, of a serpentine or wavy form; winding, marked by strong lithe movement, intricate, complex. All of these qualifiers apply to the present collection, with a helpful preface (1997-2011), and proffered descriptors are as poems and lyrical narrative segments.

One of these extensive segments opens the collection with nostalgia, situated at Cabbagetown, time and place, “inside my body that uneasy/ wandering phantom”; preoccupation with “phantom” as an adjective and as a noun, as family ghosts, a “phantom kernel”.

She explicates the role of hands, with bruises and without them, only arms or wrists, still-life bowl of fruit evokes emotion, grief, tenderness, a semaphore of nuances and (un)intended meanings. The poet was journalizing her study of Psychology 100, a psychoanalysis elective at Victoria College (Toronto) now University of Toronto (Robarts Library). The persona questions multiculturalism policy, as a newcomer, her use of quotes is not only by their sources and contexts but personified in dreams. The arms raised (by desire) preempt open arc of a body which pushes past boundaries. The scene shifts and is subsequently set in “dystopian un-paradise” and mythology, by which she admires and desires “the unreachable woman”, located literally on the floor above and symbolically. Their communication by letter, occurs in a vision, “feminine man”; ultimately, “she’s gone/ they’re gone”, and the persona is dreaming in fiction, sleep, memory, “twinned towers” (9/11).

Kwa relies on interstices, that is: to stand still in the middle, to come to a stand; a space which intervenes, intervals, one between closely spaced things; aperture. Hence, dream is memory in disguise. We come across returning rats, the centre sealed off, your core
“Rats penetrate you” imbedded in the foundations and/or basement. The hand represents sucking, desire, satiation. There are: territorial limits “(mine versus yours) and include Christ and some of his apostles, transformed as homeless, beggars, dumpsters, and social housing with development plans. This is a sunken world, of prostitution, a woman terrified, unvoiced/underworld (amniotic and embryonic).

In “unspoken” lack of feeling an imaginary mother from a hospital bed appears in various stages of grief, denial, anger, resignation; based on memory of traumatic experiences, sunken truth, asylum, buried embers. The unspoken meanings arise from an architect of the soul: the mind as brain matter, transcends suffering language, insistent on a dream’s escape route. How these social scripts determine human behaviour, with audience participation in theatre, will be examined or suggested. Her mother as domestic engineer with cleaning rituals exhibits perfectionist impulses and exacts control over cleanliness.

In addition, the Japanese occupation reveals a genetic curse of insanity and straight-jacketed constriction. The cheap hotel houses the Dalai Lama in “gargantuan glyphs of concrete”; gargoyles are derived from a colonizing God, while she relearned religion with her education and unlike a housekeeper, she is enroute.

In “sojourn” as spectator and tourist, she appears Japanese, but cannot speak the language of those soaked-paper prayers of pilgrims, but has the backdrop of background research about 8th century art and architecture. The wallpapered French Vogue magazine, Osaka Expo in 1970, were added to her own experiences during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. The poetry is as much about itinerary as it is inventory. As a goddess “She protects us in our dreaming”, this Mother figure, a waking dream. The setting is transit by train, station, for both gods and demons; herein gendered male voices adjoining the women’s bathrooms. The inner-outer scene is exposed by anxiety, warring darkness, art, and photos, of these images holiness, brutality, sacred to defiled. The erotic danger of even a homeopathic remedy.

In the title narrative segment “sinuous”, we meet heterosexual couples, who interpret signs for aikido classes of movements reduced to “if not predator, then prey”. The poet grapples with meditations and mediations of the physical world, the body defensive, for weapons, by force, “pain/ doubles me over”, unto panic, breathing,

phantom returned home

sinuous overturning

stone wound

In the narrative, “base”, as a noun, was “past boundaries and borders”, for example, Immigration Board women at Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women discloses Mermaid “Her body quakes” and the Fujian women.
The transitive verb “tolerate” is parsed, along with the history of the Chinese Head Tax, the Exclusion Act, atrocities such as internment, detention, and other abuses. The poem blends Race Theory, with Carl Jung, and sanctuary. The heart surgery betrays an heir, as noun, and the bad daughter syndrome. As a result, one must abandon, as dismantle, demolish, enclaves, ethnic markets on Main Street through the ubiquitous Chinatown, branding the Stanley Cup, Hello Kitty, and urban culture of the Skytrain. In this alternative, there are medicine infused with herbs; in a mosaic not a melting pot, of natural and unnatural disasters: earthquake, tsunami, nuclear, starvation, mass suicide.

All other mothers and daughters are an obvious paradigm, composed of “phantom” adjective and noun, “hand” as noun and “hand” as transitive verb.

The collection contains extensive notes, about epigraphs, quotations, sources; a poetic glossary of sorts, permutations and combinations, citations, signifiers, topical and ancient references.

The collection affirms the right to privacy by individuals, having amassed data which remains anonymous.

Kwa is the author of three novels, as well as a previous collection of poetry, *The Colour of Heroines*.

Note: What comes to mind is Poetry as proverb, language as a signifying system, on the model of linguistic theory. phonemic and morphemic; paradigmatic and syntagmatic; syntax. We have a system of literary conventions and rules of combination, unconsciously. The tacit grammar contains a system of rules and codes, which governs literary work products. In addition, we find a poetics which stands to literature as linguistic to language. Ronald Barthes was tactician and practitioner of mimetic, expressive, communication between author and reader. For a science of literature, see humanism. A *Glossary of Literary terms*, by M. H. Abrams, 7th edition, (p. 301)

**Review of Engagement Calendar, poems by Mary Aird Rutherford (Toronto: Inanna, 2013) 100 pp. paper.**

This is a grieving collection which displays some of the stages of denial and resignation. Anticipatory grief occurs with the uncertainty of “maybe, maybe not”, instead of “good night”, because of the homily, “I pray my soul to take”, if one does not awaken in the morning. Grief is misplaced (“White Freesia”), a ritual of repetition (“The Anniversary”). The black-and-white images are from artwork by the poet’s mother, a watercolour “Separated” accompanies “A Dream”, a poem which situates the mother in her studio at an easel, together with handmade dolls; with a mood of senselessness, underpinning the epigrammatic themes of “Insensibility” (Wilfred Owen) and death (“Death, Etc” by Maxine Kumin). There is also a charcoal drawing of the poet as a child, four or five years of age, in 1943, an ekphrasis as poem “Lines of Love”, “looking at you looking at yourself.” There are no memories of immortality; rather “Cancerland” is composed of a
mammogram which initially discovered no malignancy. From that moment, all else follows.

In the title poem, a cedar waxwing outside the window is juxtaposed with “yellow-crowned herons” on her mother’s calendar cover. Robins are emblems of father and daughter, “He is her nest, she is his fledgling” (“Yearning”); but poised to strike, with his lure (“My Binoculars Catch a Smart Green Heron”). There are the chickadee (“Bird Song and Red Dogs”). A “scrabbled wordjam” is transformed or “unstuck” because language possesses “the wingspan of some great bird” (“An Ideal Conversation”). There are: hummingbird (“Hurry, Hurry, Hurry”), shorebirds (“The Beach”), ghostbird (“The Piping Plover”); “feathered spirits” (“Primum Vivere”), the red tailed hawk (“Learning to be His Ears”), the cardinal (“Blood”), and the truth-telling of palliative care (“Soaping”); a seagull (“The Pump”), her husband faltering, the sparrow (“Blind Spot”); the swan (“The Dive”), a loon calls (“The Wildest Song”), cranes (“Inside the Music”); ekphrasis “Rothko’s Red”, the bird feeder (“The Odds”), sandpipers (“Calico Scallop”), kingfisher (“Eels Creek”); shorebird (“Whimbrel”), and rare Lisa bird, Birdtalk (“Birdtalk”), the “crow’s nest your kingdom” (“yearning”).

In “Her Engagement Calendar”, she takes a mental inventory of her mother’s fulsome notations which are compared unfavourably with her father’s “stingy scribble, line-barbed and cramped” marking down of her mother’s death. This overwhelming emotional identification with her mother is developed with the agapé of “Nearness”, even imagining she can “be her child again.” This represents the chora, a pre-Oedipal state, an unsystematized, signifying process centred on the mother. The troubled relationship between her parents comes to an end in a driving accident, for which her father should bear responsibility. (“What is important”). The poet is praising her mother’s unorthodox housekeeping (“Childhood”) and she recalls “Her lullaby of perfection”, (“Annual”).

At the office, business represents a mock family (“Re-Engineering the Staff”); she imagines her own obituary, and ageing women (“Erased”), as “your first corpse” (“Rattus Norvegicus”); requiring “The Escape Ladder”, from “This dry cruelty”. She is sleepless, contemplating middle age, or at the grave of “The Runner”; the stroke (“Addressing Possessions”), her rehearsing for death (“Dressing for the Beach”); the gelid eye (“My Father’s Eyes”), palliative care (“Mourning Glory”); a cousin (“The White Casket”), an aunt (“Mary Jane, Weeping”), and the gravestone (“Threshold”).

Some of the abstractions in these poems tend to sound dated, prefaced by Wilfred Owen’s “Chance”. The sentimental poem “Wild Rose is about a family heirloom, a watercolour painted by the poet’s mother and reproduced in black-and-white on page 88 opposite the poem. There is an extended contrast between nature’s heraldry and family honour, in this still-life tableau, “hanging sterile in our vestibule”.

Rutherford produced research for CBC, as well as The Little Immigrants and The Leafs, then the Imperial Oil Review. After retiring, her poetry was shortlisted in the CBC Literary Awards, in 2005.