

# Looking After Women

## The Doris Anderson Scholarships

MEG LUXTON

*Doris Anderson a joué un rôle important à l'Université York. Elle a siégé pendant neuf ans au Bureau des gouverneurs, pendant ces années, on avait développé les premiers cours du premier cycle des études de la femme et York a été une des premières universités à engager des professeures et à faire la promotion des femmes à tous les niveaux incluant les études de la femme. En novembre 1997, quand le premier doctorat en Études de la femme au Canada fut décerné, on accorda à Doris un doctorat honoris causa en reconnaissance de sa contribution aux luttes des femmes. Lors de son 80e anniversaire en 2001, un comité enthousiaste a décidé d'honorer Doris et de continuer dans sa voie, en encourageant à la fois la recherche sur les femmes et à les aider à pourvoir à leurs besoins. Elles ont décidé de recueillir des fonds pour créer une bourse d'études au nom de Doris Anderson qui serait accordée à une étudiante diplômée du programme en Études de la femme de l'Université York.*

In her autobiography, *Rebel Daughter*, Doris Anderson wrote: "what I wanted more than anything was to be able to look after myself and to make sure that every other woman in the world could do the same." Throughout her life, Doris fought for women's rights and worked to improve women's opportunities in all endeavours. In particular, she fostered women's efforts to research and write about, as well as act on, social and political issues. She was renowned as someone who supported and mentored other women, especially women writers. So when some of those women decided to celebrate Doris Anderson's 80th birthday in 2001, they determined to honour her by continuing her traditions, both of encouraging research on women's issues and of supporting women so they could look after themselves, and help others to do so as well. Led by Michele Landsberg, an enthusiastic committee agreed to raise money for a scholarship in Doris Anderson's name for a Women's Studies graduate student at York University.

The Graduate Women's Studies Programme at York was fitting in several ways. Like many women of her generation, ethnicity, and class, Doris graduated from teachers' college

when she was 19 and taught in rural Alberta. However, unlike many women, she used her earnings and went to university, graduating in 1945. Doris understood how valuable a university education could be and knew that it is rarely easy for women to get the money for their studies.

Over the years, Doris played an important role at York. For nine years, from February 1971 to May 1979, Doris served on its Board of Governors. During those years, the first undergraduate courses in Women's Studies were developed and feminist governors, faculty, staff, and students encouraged the administration to take the status of women at the university seriously. As a result, York became one of the leading universities in hiring and promoting women at all levels, and in the field of Women's Studies. In November 1997, when the first Ph.D. in Women's Studies in Canada graduated from the programme, York gave Doris an honorary Doctorate in recognition of her contribution to women's struggles. The citation made when the degree was conferred concluded:

On what more appropriate occasion could we have with us an Honorary Graduated who has displayed a lifetime of willingness to take risks and make sacrifices for causes in which she believes, a woman of letters of great integrity and compassion, commitment and concern, a woman who has been described as "without question the most visible public force for women's equality in Canada in our time."

While the committee recognized how fitting a Women's Studies scholarship would be, they also assumed that raising the funds necessary to endow it would be a challenge. Fundraising in Canada is always difficult as there are only a few people with the resources to be able to make major donations. Raising money for women is often even harder. A few generous donors gave substantial amounts but most of the money was raised by small donations from hundreds of women and men eager to show their respect and love

for Doris. The committee raised \$150,606.00, enough to actually fund three annual awards: the Doris Anderson Graduate Scholarship, the Doris Anderson Research Fellowship, and the Doris Anderson Canadian Bursary! The criteria for these awards reflect Doris's thoughtful support for women students. While the scholarship rewards academic achievement, the fellowship is offered to a student for presenting "a feminist research paper in appropriate forums, either in Canada or abroad." The Canadian Bursary reflects Doris's recognition that much of the funding available to students in Ontario universities is only available to students whose permanent address is in Ontario. The Doris Anderson Canadian Bursary is offered to a student "whose permanent address is outside Ontario."

To date, 12 students have received Doris Anderson awards. Their projects give a sense of the issues students are currently tackling:

- A study of the experimental writer and diarist Anais Nin, particularly her personification as a radical sex figure as it sheds light on the boundaries faced by western women in accessing the erotic;
- how young women condominium owners experience condominium tenure and lifestyles in Toronto as a way of exploring the implications of home tenure for young women in the changing political economy of Toronto;
- a study of the social and psychical conditions under which cosmetic surgery is sought and obtained as a way of exploring the dialectic of beauty and disgust informing women's lives;
- woman and sexuality in Muslim societies with a specific focus on women living as lesbians;
- the ways in which gender equity informs and is promoted by the new South African constitution;
- media representations of pregnant white women celebrities;
- how Muslim women are represented in contemporary literature.

I think Doris would be interested and pleased. And each time the programme makes an award, another student learns about Doris Anderson. The most recent recipient wrote:

I am delighted! I am very honoured to be chosen to receive this award, especially in the year of Doris Anderson's sad passing. As a bit of a strange coincidence, someone was talking about her at the School of Women's Studies reception for the new space in the spring, which led me to pick up her autobiography, *Rebel Daughter*, to read this summer! I haven't started yet, but this seems a good reason to do so.

So, the award is doing what it should—keeping Doris's memory vibrant for new students. Her inspiration continues.

*Meg Luxton is a Professor of Women's Studies and the Director of the Graduate Programme in Women's Studies at York University. She worked with Doris Anderson at NAC and has written on the women's movement in Canada and Quebec.*

## HONEY NOVICK

### For Doris, A Song

It was the kind of day so out of focus  
That you didn't know if outside was  
cold, hot,  
Blue, grey or yellow.  
Inside was different. A community  
and building  
called OWN, the Older Women's Network,  
dedicated to the dignity of women older  
and not,  
was buzzing with an exciting warmth.

There, inside own, sitting serenely was the  
guiding light  
the protagonist leading the story that made  
All of Canada look at women. Period.  
Serendipitously, coincidentally, fortuitously,  
I was placed next to Doris Anderson. At that  
time, although  
She walked with a cane, her mind was clear  
and her spirit  
Determined as the vee point of a chevron.

We were strangers. She, famous. I, a reader  
and fan, anonymous.  
Her seasoned grace allowed her to be  
approachable and welcoming.  
I didn't know what to say but felt as  
if I should say something to her  
And so I blubbered out, "I'd like to sing for  
you at Christmas."  
Maybe she was embarrassed,  
Maybe she thought I was nuts but harmless.  
Regardless...

I didn't sing for her at Christmas, but I did  
sing for her...  
"...Go in beauty, peace be with you.  
May your path always be clear.  
May your strength ignite the crackling fire  
That makes the spirit of hope endurable.  
We have been honoured by your life.  
May your brilliance shine and be shared  
By those willing to receive these gifts.  
Go in beauty ... peace be with you  
"Till we meet again in the light."

*Honey Novick is a singer/songwriter/voice teacher/poet who lives in Toronto, Ontario.*